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Corporate Social Responsibility Revisited

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A few months ago, I wrote an article for CLO magazine’s Executive Briefings newsletter about the role of the learning function in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. In the piece, I talked to Amin Rezaugh-Coulon, who has promoted the idea of using the corporate university as a means to CSR ends in her native Europe and beyond. (You can find that article here.)

In the story, I asked her if there is any substantial benefit to employing the corporate university in the service of social responsibility that goes any further than being a feel-good exercise. She said that pressure from organizational stakeholders (in both Europe and North America) to enhance and expand CSR programs is rising, and these organizations would have to use existing resources in new ways to improve. In this area, Rezaugh-Coulon maintained that one of the best resources for this is the corporate university, which is a powerful lever for affecting change in views and behaviors.

I’m now reading her book on this subject, Corporate Universities: A Lever for Corporate Responsibility, in which she offers a more formal and extensive argument for this approach. Specifically, Rezaugh-Coulon promotes a “3-D” corporate university model, which focuses on connecting the company, team and environment dimensions of an organization (as opposed to a “2-D” model, which connects people and the company).

Within this framework, the corporate university isn’t just an instrument for spreading important knowledge throughout the organization. It’s a tool that can forge the identity of the enterprise. Viewed through this prism, it’s not hard to make the connection to learning’s involvement with CSR. If you want to present your company as a socially responsible institution to your investors, customers and employees, then it stands to reason that you’d marshal the resources of the corporate university to establish that as a priority for the workforce and educate personnel about CSR opportunities.

Of course, CLO readers might have a different perspective on the role of learning in CSR. But Rezaugh-Coulon has definitely given us something interesting to think about. As always, let us know what your thoughts on this topic are in the Comments section below.

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