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THE RESPONSIBLE TALENT REVOLUTION

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Introduction

Few would disagree that CSR is spelled with a T for Talent. Corporate Social Responsibility has gone from being an accessory to being part of a company's fundamental purpose. Brands should aspire to create better societies—and that is something today's consumer takes as a universal truth. If we take this as an axiom, then it is an easy extension to see that the company's fundamental purpose must be in line with the desires of the professionals—talent—comprising it.

On a global level, companies find themselves at an inflexion point. The fourth industrial revolution is, perhaps, the biggest revolution of all when it comes to the professional world. Technological development and the emergence of new business models are bringing about, and will continue to bring about, changes of such a magnitude that they have forced us to rethink the relationship between companies and society from an ethical point of view. This new era has great emancipatory power, **but only if we can find the right language and policies for everyone.**

Although the general belief is that the industrial revolution will mean **diminishing importance of people in favor of automation** and robotization, an analysis that looks to the past,

present and future clarifies two things: that work is one of the essential pillars of our lives, and **that people, a.k.a. talent, play a fundamental role in organizations.**¹

However the future turns out, people will be necessary, and however robots might feel about it, the only way to attract and retain human talent will be through a strong social and human side of companies.

What does this entail? It means that without a doubt, and for reasons we will explore later in this article, the companies that will thrive in the future will be those whose fundamental purpose responds to social demands and connects employee expectations to achieving a greater goal.

“The only way of attracting and ensuring this talent will be a consolidated social and human side of companies”

¹ Brad Keywell Co-founder and CEO, Uptake (WEF)



Don't lose perspective

A quick glance at history reminds us that the first “companies” emerged 12,000 years ago, when humans transitioned to a settled agricultural lifestyle. Capable of producing assets to satisfy our needs for food, shelter and protection, it became necessary to allocate roles for producing, conserving and processing these elements. Professions emerged alongside the exchange of goods and services; a single person could no longer provide all their own needs.

In Greece and Rome, work was a heavy load reserved for slaves, something that changed during the Middle Ages, when people took responsibility for key production activities. The Renaissance, with its artists, introduced an interesting idea that is very more in vogue than ever: Work can be a form of personal fulfillment.

Adam Smith, the steam engine, Karl Marx and Henry Ford's factories are some of the key puzzle pieces that have created our current work environment, framing it as a way of life through which a person is

fulfilled, and one that contributes some elements to society and consumes others.

In short, what we cannot forget is that companies must make sense even while providing a solution to human needs, regardless of their evolution along Maslow's pyramid and added levels to the base. This is precisely why it would be strange for them to carry out their activities while turning their backs on society or relegating their human and responsible facets to a small department flavored as an NGO.

“The current vision of work: a way of life through which a person is fulfilled, contributes some elements to society and receives others”



Diversity and transparency as a responsible business strategy

We live in times where standardizing what was previously viewed as a bold decision is not the norm. Let's take transparency, for example. There was a time when companies that dared openly communicate aspects that traditionally remained behind closed doors were innovators and pioneers, viewed as exceptionally trustworthy. Today, it would not be acceptable—or could even be **illegal**²—for a company to be anything less than fully transparent regarding its most crucial affairs. The same things that might lead a person to send in their CV, or not, can also lead a consumer to buy or boycott, or lead an investor to invest or divest.

This same process is being repeated with another fundamental pillar of CSR: diversity. Today, diversity is a **badge of honor** for companies that have concerned themselves with reflecting the world around them,³ without using filters or quotas. However, this initial pioneer effort will ensure that, like those that bet on transparency, diversity will become the norm, and anything less will soon become deplorable.

The process companies are undergoing regarding diversity reflects **the paradigm shift** taking place in Corporate Social Responsibility

(including a revision of its name) and its undeniable impact on all critical aspects of business life and health, with a special emphasis on talent. CSR has ceased being a simple initialism, instead becoming part of the fundamental purpose at the very heart of organizations. In recent years, we have seen it go from being a department with NGO-like airs, often with barely one professional, to a fundamental part of business strategy and stakeholder relations. This will only increase with time.

“The future is the dream of those who invent it”⁴

Today, we see an encouraging phenomenon in which CSR is undergoing a transformation similar to that of transparency, moving from “accessory” to “essential.” It has gone from being a single department to being part of an organization's purpose, occupying a position **at the core of its activity**. This is business sustainability by its broadest definition and at its maximum expression. But CSR also defines a fundamental purpose, encompassing how a company acts, communicates, employs, develops, competes and offers rewards. It is reflected by interest group perceptions and irretrievably affects all decisions.

² 600 empresas españolas, pendientes de la nueva Directiva de transparencia europea” (Expansión, 2017)

³ Apple Diversity Report <https://www.apple.com/diversity/>

⁴ Salvador del Rey, Professor of Labour Law.



The talent perspective

With respect to employees, corporate social responsibility is one of the decisive factors when it comes to communicating company values, mission and vision. Sharing this fundamental purpose makes it easier for employees to feel fulfilled in their day-to-day work, helping them understand how their work makes the world a better place.⁵

A total of 84 percent of young people say they would not work for a company whose values they did not share.⁶ Since millennials will represent 75 percent of the labor force by 2025, it is evident that the intangible aspect of companies is crucial when it comes to attracting the necessary talent to survive.

It is impossible to know what percentage or generation will adhere to these results in this near future, but everything currently indicates that top talent will search for a professional experience that supports their personal values.

The barrier that has separated professional and personal life for decades is being eroded at an accelerating pace. **“When a person is completely committed to their work, the line between these two aspects of their life is much thinner.”**⁷ Work has increasingly become a defining part of our personal decisions and, therefore, our personalities. Given this, company values must be on the same level as an employee’s.

This technological revolution has broken the thin line separating our two selves, which is precisely why companies must offer ways for **people to bring their whole selves to work**⁸ and leave entirely satisfied with their experiences.

This implies that people should not put aside their passions, interests, tastes and feelings when they walk through the front door; On the contrary, they should be able to channel all their humanity in the workplace. Ultimately, bringing your whole self to work truly implies bringing all our passions, interests, ideals and thoughts to the table—everything that definitively makes us human.

It is here where CSR can play a fundamental role in articulating its values and what it expects from employees. This certainly represents a change, allowing professionals to bring their passions to work. However, this is true only when a company’s CSR policy is linked to its mission and fundamental purpose. It cannot be simply a “do good” spirit or greenwashing strategy, or something based on advertising.

⁵ Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee Engagement: Enabling Employees to Employ More of Their Whole Selves at Work (Ante Glavas)

⁶ KPMG, 2017.

⁷ Montse Ventosa, President of Truthmark

⁸ Bring your whole self to work | Mike Robbins | TEDxBerkeley



Purpose and engagement

Today's professionals, and especially young professionals, **need something more than a paycheck at the end of the month**. They need to feel proud of what they are doing and know their efforts contribute meaningfully to a company whose values they share.

This contribution to the greater good makes professionals feel better about themselves, improving self-image and leading to greater identification with the organization, with all the resultant benefits in terms of talent engagement.

With this in mind, it is not particularly surprising to hear that 80 percent of people ages 13 to 25 want to work for a company concerned about its impact on and contribution to society.⁹ This data does, however, constitute an alarm bell for companies who still see CSR as a simple resource, or even a necessary evil. The best talent, capable of committing to leading a

company and achieving great things, requires its efforts serve a purpose greater than business objectives—a nonfinancial purpose.

CSR is now the vehicle that makes it possible for talent to contribute everything that makes them human, working with the authenticity and loyalty inherent to their own convictions. It gives them greater meaning, going beyond what is found in the daily work itself to feed their perceptions of contributing to a greater good.

“CSR becomes the vehicle that makes it possible for talent to contribute everything that makes them human”

⁹ Cone Millennial Cause Group



How to integrate csr into your company

As we have discussed throughout the text, in a future with increased digitalization and robotization, it is the human side of talent that will make the difference. Companies will have to work to attract and retain committed talent that, increasingly, seek positions where employees can bring their whole selves to work. In this context, CSR must be integrated into the very heart of the company. Without attempting to provide a magic formula, we would like to mention some key aspects of this process.

1. Defining company purpose

Integrating CSR into company strategy and purpose must begin with an honest analysis of corporate impact. Ask yourself, **“What is my role as a company in the social structure?”** All businesses generate goods and services that impact the environments and people around them, generating changes in how we relate to the world.

Dove, for example, was able to see how access to its products has a major impact, going beyond greenwashing, aesthetic or environmental questions to launch a daring campaign seeking to [improve the self-esteem of women around the world](#).

2. Building a narrative

It is fundamental to build a powerful narrative around the proposal, one that permeates company discourse with all interest groups. CSR should be integrated into this narrative as one of the pillars for building confidence, reputation and employee engagement.

CSR communications must, therefore, form part of the corporate narrative, with a special

emphasis on addressing both existing and prospective talent. It must also be part of the company’s expansion strategy.

3. A new leadership model

To bring CSR to your company’s strategic center, it is key to be able to rely on the support and drive of senior management. Leadership style is evolving away from authoritarian to a transformative, collaborative one oriented toward generating excellence and talent. CSR is weighted increasingly high in this model, as seen in the 2015 Harvard Business Review, which included ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) criteria for the first time in its [“Best-Performing CEOs in the World” ranking](#).

To drive a sense of responsibility in an organization, the leader must make use of their leadership skills, understood as their capacity to influence others to reach an objective or complete a shared project.¹⁰

4. Involving talent in the transformation.

The role talent must play allows staff to articulate their personal passions and expectations through their work. As such, it is important to develop a CSR strategy that offers employees opportunities to feel company values directly.

Traditionally, companies have responded to this need through voluntary corporate activities with little or nothing to do with employees’ day-to-day work. But today, the trend is to integrate responsibility and purpose into the routine, creating a culture and business organization in which employees “feel inspired to make

¹⁰ Chemers, 1997



responsible decisions, share knowledge and act in accordance with social values and collective company interest.”¹¹

5. Transforming the organization

Organizational transformation can contribute to facilitating responsible behavior models and linking talent to corporate purpose. Mechanisms such as codes of ethics and regular evaluation, promotion and remuneration in a framework that includes CSR criteria have proven to be efficient in this goal. In Spain, 82 percent of companies already link variable

remuneration to these principles for senior-level management.¹²

“Today, the trend is to integrate responsibility and purpose in the routine, generating a culture and a business organization ”

¹¹ Bong et al, 2015

¹² 3ª edición del Observatorio de la ISR, que ha sido elaborado por el Club de Excelencia en Sostenibilidad, Geogeson y Endesa.



Bringing talent closer to the heart of the company

In the Corporate Register, there are currently over 89,000 CSR reports from over 14,000 companies. Although necessary, this shows the importance of exploring new ways to communicate sustainability. Companies are increasingly generating dialogue around their activities, taking advantage of new platforms, such as social media, for example.

Deeper employee relationships open the door to creating a transparent, emotional and participatory dynamic that generates debate and conversation. In this scenario, [crowdsourcing](#) can become a fundamental tool for innovation.

To give an example of empowered professionals who actively participate in their company's CSR, it is worth looking at [AMD's "green teams."](#) These groups of professionals have volunteered to participate in a program designed to identify and foster new, environmentally sustainable practices in their day-to-day work. Among these teams, 96 percent of the members state that contributing to a cause at work substantially improves their commitment to the company and workplace engagement.

Companies must make an effort to properly communicate their sustainable goals to talent, as well as attempt to involve employees in CSR efforts as much as possible. They must make it clear that CSR reflects essential and profoundly held beliefs rather than a specific attitude on a specific social matter.

"Involve" is, perhaps, the key word here. However, it is understood primarily in the spirit of co-creation. CSR must be part of the purpose, and it is essential for an organization's professionals to be able to influence it. This stops it from depending too much on them, an attitude that often leads to abuse of corporate volunteering, but also allows employees to bring their personal cause to work, combining it with corporate purpose. It is this dual purpose that should be articulated in the Corporate Social Responsibility strategy.

CSR is not a fad or a trend. It is the way companies choose to perform, and the best talent is committed to it. Attracting and retaining it largely depends on whether they can share in it, so companies must step up.

Green teams' volunteers of AMD



Source: <http://www.amd.com/en-us/who-we-are/corporate-responsibility/community/volunteerism/day-of-service>

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