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Katherine Trebeck

***HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT – WHY AND HOW DO
COMPANIES GET INVOLVED?***

INTRODUCTION

This working paper considers human resource development activities undertaken by the private sector to understand why and how businesses become involved. Understanding the parameters and nature of company motivations will enable any corporate contribution to be better leveraged to enhance the human resources of particular communities. The following discussion utilises theories of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to examine corporate initiatives that contribute to human resource development (HRD). It considers the imperatives, activities and impact of several companies making relatively considerable contributions to the HRD of some of their perceived stakeholders, whether these are current or future employees or other external constituents. Focusing on HRD strategies of selected companies and the drivers behind them enables a better understanding of the implications of CSR for HRD more generally. The paper concludes by highlighting the opportunities and risks of corporate involvement in HRD.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT – WHY COMPANIES NEED TO DELIVER IT

Williams and Windebank (Williams and Windebank, 2000) observe an acceptance that many social needs are not being met by the welfare state. For example, there seems to be a recognition that the range of problems surrounding social exclusion and economic development of particular areas are too complex to be solved by a narrow approach, but require multifaceted solutions involving a range of entities (Carter, 2000: 44). Simultaneously, participation by business in areas such as HRD stems, *inter alia*, from weakened institutions of government and its capacity to deliver. As Boehm (Boehm, 2005) highlights, ‘state budgets (for education, health, welfare, and economic development) have been cut’. Edwards (Edwards, 1997) similarly observes that multi-sector involvement is necessary because of ‘the diminution of the role of the local authorities as service providers’. Business is accordingly increasingly expected to take a role in areas traditionally considered the domain of the public sector, such as education (see Curran et al., 2000 and Glass et al., 2001).

In the UK companies have therefore been spurred to act on social problems, such as insufficient investment in HRD, because government have taken a relatively passive role (Van Den Berg et al., 2003: 87; see also Newell, 2005 and Garvey and Newell, 2005). Specifically, the UK performs worse than other OECD countries in adult literacy and numeracy (Institute of Directors ‘Developing Skills, Delivering Success’, (2004), cited in Business in the Community, 2005b). Approximately 3.5 million British employees lack the literacy and numeracy expected of an eleven year-old (DFES Basic Skills, ‘Skills for Life Strategy to 2007, (2003), cited in Business in the Community, 2005b). While this has important consequences for social exclusion because the risk of being in poverty is greater for people with few qualifications (Kenway and Palmer, 2006), it also has implications for

each individual's employment. There are many young people 'for whom education has not equipped them for work' (Kenway and Palmer, 2006). More than 74000 employers in England surveyed in 2006 revealed significant skill shortages amongst recruits (BBC News, 2005). For example, one employer complains that many school leavers do not have basic communication skills to perform junior roles (cited in Bryant, 2007). The Confederation of British Industry reports one repercussion of the lack of delivery by government: over a third of businesses send their employees to remedial classes because they leave school unable to read, write or conduct arithmetic (CBI cited in Cassidy, 2006). Businesses are clearly acting on the need for skilled and educated employees and the governments' apparent failure to deliver sufficiently in this respect.

Porter and Kramer (Porter and Kramer, 2006) highlight how 'the ability to recruit appropriate human resources, for example, may depend on a number of social factors that companies can influence, such as the local educational system'. They classify such social factors as:

- generic social issues (those that are not significantly affected by a company's operations, nor affecting the company)
- value chain social impacts (significantly affected by the company's activities in the ordinary course of business)
- social dimensions of the business's competitive context (factors in the external environment where the company operates that significantly affect the underlying drivers of competitiveness) (Porter and Kramer, 2006).

In addressing these social factors in relation to education, companies might offer activities ranging from work experience for school children and company staff helping students with reading, maths and languages, to sharing of the company's management experience with

head teachers and delivery of employer-based vocational courses. The case studies explore examples of such activities by setting out various activities taken to advance HRD. To contextualise these case studies the following section firstly explores in abstract the various motivations that spur companies to proactively advance the HRD of their employees and that of external groups.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT – WHY DO COMPANIES GET INVOLVED?

Health of Communities

Many companies increasingly appreciate that a relationship exists between corporate performance and the ‘health’ of communities in which they seek to do business. Of relevance to HRD, if a local community is ‘healthy’, companies operating there can access skilled local employees. Business in the Community (Business in the Community, 2002) describes lower recruitment and training expenses as one of the ‘most appealing’ elements of the business case for involvement in activities to regenerate local communities (see also Cleverdon, Julie in Business in the Community; World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2004; Van Den Berg et al., 2003: 1 and Besser et al., 2006). Local communities are a source of employees, and therefore companies will seek to ensure their potential workforce is sufficiently skilled if and when, as seen earlier, other actors such as government are not meeting this need. Accordingly, it seems employers are becoming involved in education projects to improve recruitment and workforce skills, and therefore productivity (Plimmer, 2006).

Reputation

Of great pertinence to many companies with vulnerable reputations amongst key audiences is how certain influential groups perceive the company. Maintaining a reputation as

socially responsible reduces wider transactions costs that might arise in relations with clients, employees, communities and government (Moon, 2002; see also Martin and Hetrick, 2006). For example, with a positive reputation, companies obtain from employees the promise of commitment; from customers the promise of loyalty; from regulators the promise of favourable regulation; from the community the promise of legitimacy; and from the media the promise of favourable coverage (Fombrun et al., 2000).

In seeking to improve their reputation then, companies are likely to engage in those activities that reflect the priorities of key audiences with some influence over the company. CSR emerges as an important factor in how many influential audiences view a company. For example, half of those questioned in a recent survey stated that they would be less likely to work for a company without a CSR programme (Independent survey for Oracle (2003) cited in McNeills and Hanley, 2005). Moreover, Mori research (MORI CSR Research Project (2002), cited in Business in the Community, 2003) found that 84% of Members of Parliament consider a company's CSR as important in their judgement of that company. Further still, some 86% of customers hold a more positive impression of a company that is actively trying to improve the world (Business in the Community, 2004). Undertaking social investment activities can consequently improve a company's reputation amongst neighbours, customers, current or future employees, regulators and so on.

More specifically, many of these key audiences value not only CSR generally, but in particular they appreciate a company's investment in human resource development. Employees, for example, prioritise education as a focus for corporate contribution (mentioned by 59% of those surveyed); compared to environmental protection (56%) or

unemployment and re-training schemes (55%) (Dawkins, 2005). The general public prioritised the same areas respectively as 55%, 48%, and 51% (Dawkins, 2005). This 'relative importance of concern for social issues, particularly education' is, as might be expected, mirrored in the allocation of CSR efforts (Brammer and Millington, 2003). Education is the most preferred theme of corporate community involvement amongst UK firms considered by Brammer and Millington (74%), whereas only 40% of firms undertake involvement relating to the arts, children or youth, or disability, and only a third of firms deploy involvement in environmental issues or economic regeneration (Brammer and Millington, 2003; also Plimmer, 2006).

Employee Skills and Recruitment

As mentioned above and seen further in the case studies, education is a means to enhance the skills of prospective employees. In addition, employee participation in a company's community involvement not only utilises *their* manpower and existing skills, but also often seeks to enhance the skills of the employees involved. For example, by partaking in various CSR activities employees can gain communication and relationship skills; organisational, budgeting and time management skills; and assessment and reporting skills (Conference Board research cited in Business in the Community, 2003). By enhancing the HRD of their employees via employee involvement in CSR activities, companies hope to increase their employees' productivity and, in turn, their contribution to profitability.

Employees themselves seem to value being able to become involved in community issues via their workplace. Companies that facilitate employee participation in such activities are becoming more than workplaces, but a place through which employees are able to 'access...much more – giving back to the community – [and] accessing challenging

projects that increase their life skills' (Rennie, Gavin (Managing Partner, Accenture) quoted in *Business in the Community*, 2005d: 6). Many individuals place importance on their employer facilitating development of their own HRD in this manner. Four-fifths of employees worldwide view their employer favourably if there is a commitment to employee engagement (ENGAGE Research, International Business Leaders Forum, October 2002 cited in *Business in the Community*, 2003; see also Tuffrey, 2003). For example, employees who know about and participate in CSR activities are more likely to speak well of their employer (Grant-Vest, 2004). There are thus also flow-on reputation benefits from a company's CSR activities that enhance the skills of employees involved in CSR delivery.

EMPIRICAL EXAMPLES OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT – WHY AND HOW DO COMPANIES GET INVOLVED?

Jaguar – Education Business Partnership Centre

There are a number of different motivations behind Jaguar's involvement in the Education Business Partnership Centre (EBPC) at Coventry that aims to give primary and secondary students 'an out-of-school experience in a work-related environment with non-teachers' to demonstrate the relevance of what they learn at school (Snell, 2006). It is hoped students' aspirations, achievements and employability will be raised through offering activities related to the world of work, 'by providing relevance and realism to a range of curriculum areas...[and through] hands-on activities and access to equipment' (CSR Partnership, 2006: 33 and *Business in the Community*, 2006).

The Centre supports curriculum enhancing activities in those subject areas that teachers struggle to deliver without assistance. There are sessions for young apprentices and for gifted and talented students, and programmes focusing on the needs of people disaffected at

school and facing risk of exclusion. Modules support attainment of GCSEs, National Vocational Qualifications and Business and Technology Education Council qualifications (Btecs), and are adapted as needed according to student needs. The tasks students undertake are identified by teachers as areas where students would benefit from additional work – such as maths, geography or computer skills. For example:

- using Jaguar’s computer programs to design and produce stickers and cars made from wood veneer, students learn design and technology, maths and ICT
- by tracking where Jaguar’s components are sourced, students gain geography skills
- primary students learn about science, design and technology by looking at the materials that make a car and how heat is used to shape plastics (see Coventry City Council, 2006b and Coventry City Council, 2006a).

Jaguar employees provide input, supporting students and offering practical examples from their work. For example, a company designer might assist students use Jaguar’s computer programmes.

While Jaguar seeks to be considered trustworthy and a valued part of the community, its principal motivation for involvement in the Education Centre surrounds skill enhancement amongst the local workforce (Ratcliffe, 2006). Jaguar identifies the EBPC as helping to address a (national) shortfall of engineers (Jaguar, 2005). By supporting the Centre Jaguar considers itself as developing a workforce for the future (Business in the Community and Paschali, 2006). In particular, while Jaguar has not experienced significant difficulty in recruiting graduates itself, many of its suppliers have – and in this way Jaguar is impacted in skill and education issues faced directly by its supply chain (Ratcliffe, 2006). Jaguar’s position as an industry leader, and its relative size in the region, constitutes an opportunity for the company to take a leadership role in improving local education attainment, both through its own efforts and also by encouraging others to undertake similar initiatives.

While upskilling local people as potential employees is arguably the primary driver for Jaguar's involvement in the Centre, how Jaguar is perceived amongst future employees is also important. The EBPC represents a tool to attract 'the right people' into Jaguar's industry (Business in the Community, 2006). As Jaguar's Head of Community Relations observes (Ratcliffe, 2006), this is necessary in a context in which many parents and grandparents who worked in car manufacturing are warning their children and grandchildren about its insecurity and constant threat of lay-off (also CSR Partnership, 2006: 33). One of the functions of the Centre, then, is to improve perceptions of manufacturing and engineering through use of cutting-edge technology and facilities (Business in the Community, 2006 and CSR Partnership, 2006: 33). This in turn raises 'the profile of a career in engineering for young people and [overcoming] some of the negative stereotypes...[to] help to address the shortage of engineers in the UK' (Business in the Community, 2006). More directly, visits to the EBPC also inspire students to seek work with Jaguar specifically (Ratcliffe, 2006). The entrance to the EBPC is deliberately designed to impress students as they arrive – featuring the trademark silver 'Leaper' Jaguar. Via its focus on the HRD of local students, the Centre therefore helps position Jaguar as an employer of choice amongst young people in the Coventry area.

BP - Education in Falkirk

One significant component of BP's community investment programme, both globally and in the Falkirk area of Scotland, is its education efforts. BP's education activities demonstrate how the company seeks to align its skills and experience with delivery of its community investment, but also how BP's community investment corresponds to the company's needs and priorities. For example, BP, like Jaguar, is experiencing a lack of

apprentices and skill shortages, therefore its education initiatives seek to bring benefit to the company by increasing the skill level of potential future employees and widening interest in subjects related to BP's skill needs: science, technology and engineering (BP, 2006 (?) and Palmer, 2006).

BP's education programmes are deployed through strategic partnerships and seek to involve BP employees. Activities undertaken include work placements, work shadowing and running interview workshops for local students. BP employees also support head teachers. For example, the BP Schools Link programme supports employees working with local schools in planning and implementing activities with a focus on science, engineering, leadership, energy and the environment. In Scotland, sixty-seven primary and secondary schools have joined the programme and approximately 130 BP employees, from all levels, volunteer as Link Co-ordinators (BP, 2006). BP will match employee time through its Employee Matching Fund and offers training to its employee-volunteers as needed. As seen above, there are benefits to employees from such involvement including motivation and skill enhancement, professional development, and understanding of young people (BP, 2006 (?)).

Glasgow Fort - Glasgow Fort Partnership

Glasgow Fort is a £140 million retail complex near Greater Easterhouse, one of Glasgow's most deprived areas with high unemployment and low levels of economic activity. Of 16 to 19 year-olds, 30% do not participate in employment, education or training (Training and Employment Research Unit University of Glasgow, 2005: 1) and over half of the working age population lack formal qualifications (Greater Easterhouse Development Company, 2006).

In order to connect local residents to opportunities at the Fort, the Glasgow Fort Partnership was established by the Greater Easterhouse Development Company (GEDC), supported by the Fort's developers. The developers became involved, in part, as a means to ensure support for the development and enhance the developers' local reputation. The eighteen-member Partnership involves the developers, GEDC, the Fort's management agents and marketing managers, and all relevant local partners (such as education providers, transport companies and childcare organisations). The Partnership focuses on nine areas: recruitment; environment; childcare; training; education; health; transport; communications; and the social economy.

Clearly, training was needed to enable local people to take up employment at the Fort. The Glasgow Fort Partnership responded to the need to increase the HRD of local residents in several ways. For example, the Training for Work 'Retail Therapy' course, conducted by the GEDC's PAD team, deliberately targets long-term unemployed and people living in deprived areas close to the labour market, but lacking presentation, interview and application skills. Moreover, the Glasgow Fort Retail Programme is an eight-week course encompassing vocational training in retail and core skills, alongside money advice, health awareness, childcare advice, and email accounts and access to Greater Easterhouse's Learning Centres (Training and Employment Research Unit University of Glasgow, 2005: 15). This course is followed by opportunities for a work placement. The Fort's builders, Laing O'Rourke, also committed to employing local residents once they completed an intensive eight-week training course in construction skills and plant operations. Two further training programmes have been implemented to reduce barriers to employment from

skill shortages, and John Wheatley College delivers courses in health and safety, food hygiene, first aid and customer services to increase the employability of local residents.

In the first phase of development, 1400 jobs were created (Training and Employment Research Unit University of Glasgow, 2005: i). During construction Laing O'Rourke employed 49 local people, including 23 local unemployed people who completed the requisite training course (Training and Employment Research Unit University of Glasgow, 2005: 5). As at November 2005 767 people had been placed in a job at Glasgow Fort by the Employment Partnership, of whom 388 were resident in the Greater Easterhouse Social Inclusion Partnership area, and 541 (71%) lived in the East End of Glasgow (Training and Employment Research Unit University of Glasgow, 2005: 19).

Of those recruits that came from Greater Easterhouse, however, only 10% were previously jobless, and only 10% of these had been out of work for more than six months prior to taking up employment at Glasgow Fort – the majority were already employed, or in education or not claiming benefits (45% and 42% respectively) (Training and Employment Research Unit University of Glasgow, 2005: 20). This limitation in the extent of benefit and for whom the private sector's activities present an opportunity will be returned to in the conclusion.

CONCLUSION AND CAVEATS

These case studies reveal junctures where sufficient commercial rationale for action spurs the private sector to offer activities and resources that do develop human resources. Jaguar's Education Business Partnership Centre, for example, demonstrates that learning within the workplace enables students to appreciate the relevance of their schoolwork,

which leads to ‘more intentional classroom learning’ and also highlights that academic success is not the only requirement for career achievement (see also Orrell 2001, p. 3 cited in Crebert et al., 2004). BP brings ‘hands on’ time and management expertise and the Glasgow Fort Partnership delivers dedicated training to move people into employment at the Fort.

It is important, however, to recognise some caveats to the suggestion that companies might enhance HRD. These reflect limits to any action companies will take; the realities of corporate motivations in undertaking activities to advance the HR of their employees or other groups; and the nature of various HRD activities.

Firstly, investment in HRD will only take place where companies operate and have sufficient resources to deliver HRD activities. This inevitably excludes involvement of those businesses without sufficient overheads to undertake HRD investment, even if they recognise that a commercial advantage might be obtained from such investment. Similarly, an economic downturn forcing companies to focus on short-term survival may lead to companies reducing their HRD expenditure if they consider that these efforts bring only longer-term benefit. Companies therefore cannot be relied upon for HRD.

Secondly, only those areas linked somehow to the business will be supported. This highlights that each company’s *raison d’être* does not encompass social goals for their own sake. Social goals such as HRD can at best be only a means to secure shareholder value, regardless of how clear the business case or how effectively a specific company’s HRD initiatives may be executed. As Bakan explains, a company ‘can do good only to help itself

do well, a profound limit on just how much good it can do' (Bakan, 2004: 50). Therefore, as long as profit is the primary objective, corporate responsiveness to community demands and social needs will remain merely a means by which profit is attained.

Companies therefore must prioritise often mutually exclusive community needs, which invariably follows corporate requirements and corporate perspective of potential company benefit. Only those causes perceived as 'worthy' or deserving in the eyes of key customers or employees, or strategic in another sense, will gain corporate attention. Businesses will consider that some social issues and social causes are more appealing than others (Glass et al., 2001: 32). For this reason, corporate contributions to social causes are sometimes criticised as 'charity predicated not on [community] need, but on market appeal (Hertz, 2001).¹ In contrast, those concerns, issues and causes that companies consider as unmarketable, and those demands made by groups with no leverage over operations, will be neglected. An example of the primacy of the business case is seen in the link to local context: the less a company depends on the local community for employees, the less the need for skilled local employees, which undermines any imperative for these companies to invest in the HRD of local people (see Van Den Berg et al., 2003: 16).

Even once companies decide to undertake HRD activities, they may struggle to deliver them for a number of more practical reasons. For example, rivalry between company departments; poor coordination, insufficient capacity and resources; or line managers deeming HRD investment as irrelevant to short-term priorities, may all undermine delivery. Moreover, there are difficulties in engaging people furthest from the labour market in

¹ This has been the warning of Eliason, 1998, *The Australian Financial Review*, 1998.; Hertz, 2002; Thomas,

training and employment. As demonstrated by those most likely to benefit from Glasgow Fort's training and employment initiatives, specific effort and investment of resources needs to be made to bring those furthest from the labour market – the most excluded – into training and eventually employment.

Thirdly, resource imbalances can mean that corporate community engagement is characterised by corporate management of, rather than accountability to, communities (McLaren, 2002). If HRD investment is undertaken solely because profit attainment necessitates such behaviour, community activities are valued specifically for their contribution to profit making (for further discussion: Cohen, 2002; Paine 2000 quoted in Wheeler et al., 2002: 298; and Hendry, 2001). This business imperative further reveals that any investment in HRD is linked, even if only implicitly, to corporate benefit, rather than investment in HRD for its own sake. As Bendell asks has 'the market mentality become so omnipotent that we must now conceive of public goods in terms of marketing?' (Bendell et al., 2006: 65).

At an extreme, as partnerships between HRD organisations and business proliferate and boundaries become blurred with corporate provision of services demanded by communities, it worth asking which sector of society will have sufficient independence to restrain potential abuse of this broadening corporate role? Growing expectations that companies will respond to social demands of certain communities creates a potentially dangerous situation where corporations, through their CSR programs, assume some citizenship obligations traditionally accorded to the state, such as education, while remaining beyond

2000; Jennings & Entine, 1999; and Doogue, 2000. For example, beneficiaries are likely to be issues and causes such as medical research, children's health and community arts [Dalton, 2000].

formal democratic processes (for example, Phillips, 1999 and Moon et al., 2003). One element of this is increased dependence: as communities come to depend on businesses for HRD delivery, there are risks of ‘patronage and, more broadly, other forms of dependency’ (Moon, 2002). For example, groups in receipt of corporate assistance struggle to act counter to the company’s wishes due to the risk of losing funding if corporate interests change (Tracey et al., 2005). If companies bring needed investment in facilities and services, such as education, can communities still make demands that could threaten the company’s ‘goodwill’ or even presence?

Finally, business influence in education is also problematic if it jeopardises the state role, or promotes business requirements to the exclusion of broader education or options. Alternatively, however, it was seen in the case studies that there must be worthwhile – that is, commercially advantageous – reasons for the company to devote resources to enhancing HRD in various ways. This will only be the case in certain circumstances, and therefore the private sector’s inability to achieve all-encompassing HRD necessitates state action for systemic solutions. As Moon (Moon, 2002) highlights, ‘no single firm currently has the coverage and integrating capacity which government, warts and all, enjoys’.² The state alone has the ability and mandate to co-ordinate, regulate, administer and deliver on a scale sufficiently large.

These caveats reveal that much caution needs to be exercised in engaging with companies to elicit their investment in HRD, and that doing so requires an understanding of their motivations and objectives if the most possible benefit is to be obtained.

² Moon also points out, however, and as the case studies show, governments are hardly effective in delivering equality in social services such as health or education [Moon, 2002].

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