SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: APPLICATION CASE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract
Universities represent a vital body part of any societies. Universities nowadays are faced with new environment and challenges that necessitate the need to be independent from governmental and state support. The changing environment in which universities function and the challenges that higher education has been facing were identified as: mass expansion of higher education; decrease of state expenditure and support for universities; diversification of financial resources; internationalization; commercialization; changes brought by IC&T development, the adaptation of curricula to accommodate and capitalize on labour market requirements. These changes and challenges will have their impact on the quality of education, university autonomy, academic freedom, its changing focus and responsibilities towards society. This highlight that universities are moving toward corporatization which calls for them to be a good corporate citizen and the best approach for universities to achieve that is by adapting the concept of Social Responsibility. This paper aims to discuss how universities could achieve development, sustainability, and competitiveness through applying University social Responsibility USR concepts. Also this paper will present the case of The Hashemite University as a socially responsible university. In conclusion applying social responsibility to universities will help them facing the rapidly changing environment and challenges. University social responsibility can be used effectively by universities as presented in the case of Hashemite University to ensure development and sustainability for the university and society.

Keywords: University, social, responsibility, higher education.

Introduction

Universities today face a new environment and challenges that necessitate independence from governmental and state support. The changing environment in which universities function and the challenges that higher education has been facing were identified by Barblan, Daxner, and Ivosevic (2007), Felt (2003), and Eckstein (2003), and are as follows: mass expansion; decrease of governmental/public expenditure and support for universities; diversification of financial resources; internationalization; commercialization and an increase in the entrepreneurial character of institutions; changes brought by information and communication technology (ICT) development; and the adaptation of curricula to accommodate and capitalize on labor market requirements (cited by Vukasovic, 2008). These issues will impact the quality of education, university autonomy, academic freedom, the changing focus of academics, and a university's responsibilities towards society (Felt 2003; Vasilescu, et al., 2010). These studies highlight that universities are moving toward corporatization, which calls for them to be good corporate citizens (Nagy and Robb, 2008). The best approach for universities to become good corporate citizens for their stakeholders, communities, and societies is by adapting the concept of social responsibility. This paper aims to discuss how universities can develop further and achieve sustainability and competitiveness by applying social responsibility concepts.

Social Responsibility (SR) has become an increasingly important concept globally, and it has become part of the debate about competitiveness and sustainability in the context of globalization (Vasilescu et al., 2010). A widely used definition of SR is from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and states the following: "*Corporate social responsibility is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large.*" (CSR: Meeting Changing Expectations, 1999).

Based on many definitions and discussions of SR, Vasilescu and colleagues explained the concept of SR as follows: stakeholders are increasingly requiring that business should function in a responsible way (Vasilescu et al., 2010). While pressures to make profits are higher, stakeholders expect ever increasing standards of accountability and transparency. Business responsibility, including its relationship to the community in which it operates and seeks to serve, is more important than ever. SR includes the ways an entrepreneur can add value to his business by taking a closer look at some of the social and environmental aspects of the operation. One of the major aspects of SR is to create winning situations for an organization and for society at large. This aspect can help make

universities more competitive. Currently, SR is recognized as conducting good business practices and determining how these practices impact and contribute to an organization's reputation and performance. Information about an organization's activities impacts key stakeholders and is recognized as a key determinant of SR, making it an important commercial issue for any business.

University Social Responsibility (USR) encompasses many different areas including the following: the need to strengthen civil commitment and active citizenship; to provide services to the community through community engagement and outreach; to promote economic and national development; to promote ethical approaches to issues; to develop a sense of civil citizenship by encouraging the students and the academic and administrative staff to provide social services to their local community; to promote ecological or environmental commitment for local and global sustainable development; to develop local and global human resources; to expand human knowledge through quality research and education for the nation and for humanity (Vasilescu et al., 2010; Shawyun, 2011). Reiser (2008) defines the USR concept as "*a policy of ethical quality of the performance of the university community (students, faculty, and administrative employees) via the responsible management of the educational, cognitive, labor and environmental impacts produced by the university, in an interactive dialogue with society to promote a sustainable human development.*" According to Mendez (2012), USR provides an approach to science, technology, and research in which contributions to the economically disadvantaged are given value and attention.

How to Practice USR

USR can be put into practice when university leaders emphasize responsibility to the public, ethical behavior, and the need to practice good citizenship. University leaders should be role models on ethics and the protection of community health, safety, and the environment. Practicing SR refers to support of issues that are important to the public but that are within the limits and resources of the university. Examples of such issues include improving education in the community, pursuing environmental excellence, practicing resource conservation, promoting and improving the health of the community, performing community service, conducting research to generate socio-economic development, and providing guidelines for the development and sustainability of society. Universities can also influence other organizations and institutes, whether private or public, to form partnerships for addressing these issues and concerns. In this paper, we will focus on implementing USR to achieve internationalization and research-based

actions for the development and sustainability of universities and societies in general.

It is the norm to identify universities as research organizations. Therefore, universities may ensure USR by guaranteeing that their research activities benefit stakeholders, communities, and society. Universities should play the leading role in promoting USR because USR provides an approach for contributing to the development and sustainability of science, technology, and research. Universities can tailor their research missions to produce research that benefits the public, the local economy, and society (Turk-Bicakci & Brint, 2005). This can be accomplished through the joint efforts of governments and universities.

Governmental efforts can facilitate a university's efforts to achieve this goal. For example, governments should develop, enforce, and pass laws and policies that help universities establish action plans for training students in technology, the sciences, agriculture, and the mechanical arts to meet the needs of the marketplace, industry, and agricultural technology(Mendez, 2012; Vasilescu, Barna, Epure, & Baicu, 2010; Leitao & Silva, 2007). Thus, this design which was proposed by academicians and researchers (Mendez, 2012; Vasilescu, Barna, Epure, & Baicu, 2010) will influence universities to follow a more active and research-intensive role. Universities should operate using the model of scientific research, which is based on rational inquiry and experimentation. Adapting this model will encourage universities to conduct research and train students to meet industrial needs and public interest. This model will require universities to focus on broader practical education and research. This also emphasizes the view that universities could be a major generator for socio-economic development (Shapira & Youtie, 2008; Powell & Rhoten, 2010).

Under the mission of broadening practical education and research, universities will need to solicit for and increase research funding. Government and industry should play major roles contributing to or increasing their funding for university research, which will lead to expanding universities' roles in basic science, socio-economic, and applied technology development. This idea was successfully demonstrated by the Triple Helix model, which was reported by (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff 2000). Under this model, universities, local industry, and the government are partners with common and interconnected sets of social, cultural, and economic goals and resources. These partnerships require all parties to develop human assets. In addition, university-based research will stimulate regional development, innovation, and growth (Etzhowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Shapira & Youtie, 2008). This model also promotes tri-lateral initiatives for knowledge-based economic development by forming strategic alliances among institutions (Etzhowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Powell & Grodal, 2005). Therefore, a

university's role can be described as providing guidance and applied research for society. Universities have the vital role of communicating what is most needed for society based on their research. Universities should also actively form relationships with industry at the same rate that they seek to engage students in society.

Internationalization is another aspect of research that can be used to achieve sustainability and development for universities and society. To achieve internationalization of research and education, universities should implement USR. Dr. Gajaseni has formulated several action points for implementing USR to achieve internationalization in research and education:

1. Universities should work on reforming their curricula by integrating USR and linking it with Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)/Education for All (EFA) in order to serve society.
2. Universities should move towards informal learning and social entrepreneurship to eradicate poverty, hunger, and other MDGs. This can be accomplished by providing the community with more distant learning strategies and encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit in the students, staff, and community through programs and investments.
3. Universities should enhance research directions to serve the global markets as well as the local markets of a particular society to respond to MDGs/EFA. Research conducted at a university should be performed in close collaboration with the community and industry.
4. Universities should promote the role of USR and ensure effective communication and information exchanges among all stakeholders.
5. Universities should consider not only cooperation within their countries, but should extend it to other countries and regions in the world.

The Hashemite University as a SRU

Hashemite University (HU) is a state-supported university located in the Zarqa governorate of Jordan. HU has a comprehensive urban campus. The university includes departments for the Arts, Sciences, Educational Sciences, Medicine, Allied Health Sciences, Nursing, Engineering, Information Technology, Business Administration, Natural Resources and Environment, Tourism and National Heritage, and Childhood. It is located in the vicinity of Zarqa on a strategic site that is parallel to the international highway that links Amman with Mafraq and at the crossroad that connects Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iraq. HU is a motivated community of scholars and scientists with a shared dedication to the quest of knowledge, the value of community service, and the importance of dialogue to a stable and flourishing society. HU has assumed leadership roles in collaborations

intended to ensure the health, development, environmental excellence, and sustainability of the community and to boost economic development.

HU is among the most recognized national universities in Jordan and the region. In this position, it is committed to advancing higher education by utilizing USR in partnership with the faculty, students, community, and industry in the area. This can be achieved via the following actions and objectives:

1. HU's social involvement – HU is committed to providing access to all social programs, irrespective of material resources, by providing student grants, parallel program certificates, and vocational program certificates (e.g., nursing aid, medical assistant aid, etc.). This objective is in response to the mass expansion of higher education. The current number of HU students (~28,000 full-time and part-time students) demonstrates that this objective is validated by the society.

2. Delocalization of the education process by distance learning centers – HU is using this method to ensure that educational resources are delivered online, through printed materials, or broadcast through special supplies (e.g., 5,000 computers are provided for students to use free of charge). The HU faculty of the Educational Sciences and *e*Learning center are collaborating with Saudi Universities to provide distance learning via satellite connections and online courses. Additionally, HU is encouraging faculty members to use distant learning teaching methods that are supported by modern ICT to ensure constant growth of the student age range in universities and to provide access to individuals with jobs. These methods allow people with jobs to engage in various forms of lifelong learning programs without leaving their homes or jobs. In a sense, the university comes to their home, workplace, or town.

3. University and industry collaboration – HU has signed multiple agreements with Zarqa Duty Free City, industrial areas, and local factories to collaborate on research programs, educational and industrial development, and environmental excellence. Currently, HU is in the process of launching the *Healthy Work Environment & Social Responsibility* initiative with a major industrial company in Jordan. Through this initiative, the two organizations will become recognized leaders in sustainability and the integration of health, safety, environmental, and social considerations into business.

4. Institutional management – HU practices USR by promoting sustainable development procedures for the management of the campus. HU enforces energy-saving measures and promotes the use of renewable energy sources on campus by installing solar energy production units on campus. HU encourages reduction in the use of

paper by going paperless for internal communications and by recycling waste products. In addition, to celebrate International Tree Day, HU planted 7,500 trees during the years of 2012 and 2013, which reflects HU's commitment to environmental excellence. HU strives to create a pleasant, healthy, and safe campus environment for the students and staff.

5. Community engagement – from the day it was founded HU has participated in the betterment of the local and national community through a number of activities and initiatives. Open Medical Days is a major HU program that ensures community development and growth. The students and faculty members of the Medical, Nursing, and Allied Health departments provide free medical services to poor people living in the Zarqa and Mafraq governorates. Having the students and faculty members provide this service promotes a sense of civic responsibility and enables the students to become socially responsible citizens.

HU also practices USR through successful implementation of the service learning concept. HU is the lead university in an international collaboration on a community service – educational instruction project and has a Service Learning Center that aims to encourage civic engagement through student course work. This project is conducted based on community needs in collaboration with Lebanese, Irish, British, and Jordanian universities. HU also participates in civic engagement by adopting public schools that are located in remote, underserved areas in the Zarqa Governorate. HU provides these schools with educational, health, and prevention programs that are delivered by the Medical, Nursing, and Allied Health departments. Faculty members who specialize in community health have developed an outreach program to provide health services to families, elementary and secondary schools, and other members of the local community. Over the last three years, HU has established the Community Rehabilitation Center, which provides community services to families and other community members with special needs in the Zarqa and Mafraq governorates.

Conclusion

Universities can be important milieu in applying USR through the use of research and other services. Through the use of USR universities can also actively network with other universities and the industry to enhance students' engagement in society. Similar to the general principles of social responsibility USR can be used to achieve sustainability in societies.

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