

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH ECO-EFFICIENCY AND ENERGY MANAGEMENT TRAINING

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In the current scenario towards the environmentally-conscious design of goods and services, the voluntary approach of companies to more rational use of energy and material resources will be a definitive way to increase competitiveness and cost-effectiveness in the long term and, at the same time, comply with the growing demand of society for more sustainable behaviors.

Eco-efficiency should be seen by organizations not only as a means towards environmental commitment, but as a management multi-approach scheme, which leads to constant innovation and therefore better results and outcomes. Eco-efficiency driven policies comprise and influence the environmental, social and economic performance of the companies, which means to say, all three dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Furthermore, the eco-efficiency approach sets a conceptual framework for the development of tools such as life cycle analysis, for example, which permit to assess the real and long term impact of CSR decisions and strategies.

Up to the present time, most companies do not have a clear understanding and/or strategy regarding CSR. In many cases, mostly among SME, the few initiatives considered and presented as CSR by the companies themselves, are actually linked to patronage, sponsoring or social actions. The preliminary conclusions of the European Commission funded project (focused on CSR in SME in Europe) in which the authors are participating, show significant trends in this respect. For example, most companies see CSR as something somehow external to be done, instead of a model of corporate behavior and values towards sustainability. For many, the reasons behind developing CSR policies are linked to marketing purposes well before other possibilities such as stakeholder engagement or sustainability. Furthermore, although a good number of companies expressed their interest to learn more regarding CSR, only few have actually participated in related and accessible trainings.

Lack of training being one of the major challenges, the collaboration of industry and Institutes of Technology in its implementation may become a crucial drive towards sustainable development and CSR policies implementation, especially in an uncertain long-term economic scenario. Previewing future needs and possibilities in the professional field becomes increasingly difficult due to the constant and frequent changes in policies and markets such as those coming from public regulations and new incentives devoted to the sustainable development. Moreover many current vocations would need to understand the role they play in the bigger eco-efficiency picture, and what their individual curricula will need to look like in the future to meet industry needs.

This article shows the results of a study developed by the Institute of Technology CIRCE aimed to identify the training needs of SMEs regarding the implementation of CSR policies in the field of eco-efficiency and energy saving, from a perspective of management tools for sustainability.

The wide experience achieved through applied research projects and close relationship with companies, helped CIRCE to define, in a first approach, the objectives and the content of the most crucial training activities. Since all stages in production of goods and services are subject to revision from a sustainability point of view, the enforcement of multidisciplinary teams is expected, and not only engineers but all sort of professionals from many other disciplines (lawyers, economists, environmentalists, etc.) may be required. Hence, the syllabus has to be flexible enough to establish, reinforce and/or redirect technical-specific and methodological-generic skills depending on the previous knowledge. In this sense, multi-stage and multi-specialization programs could be a key factor.