

# Employees' Vocational Training and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): beyond "Primary Responsibilities"

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**Abstract**—This article aims at looking at ethical issues in vocational training. It widely explores the specific role of vocational training among the set of "responsibilities" that a company could have, not only towards its stakeholders, but also towards its own workforce. Underlying the multiple unfair sources of employees' vocational training- the unequal access to training is one of them - we try to examine the possible combinations between CSR and this human resource practice. Through a critical outlook on CSR, we analyze different levels of CSR and insist on "ethical responsibilities" – a form of responsibility that aims at recognizing the employees as ethical subjects.

**Key words:** *Employees' vocational training, corporate social responsibility, access inequalities, ethical responsibility, ethical decision making*

## I. INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the State has taken the initiative for the employees' vocational training. In France, this practice was required by law which put an end to the "disengagement" of the company vis-a-vis employees' vocational training. Indeed, employers are now obliged to finance and develop a plan for employees' training within the company. Since this law, similar evolutions have been developing in most industrialized countries. In 2000, the Lisbon European Council set a strategic goal of lifelong learning to its member States. This theme is based on three principles: the autonomy of individual in their learning, equal opportunities in accessing to the training and the quality of the training program [1]. This program also opens to employees of small and medium-size enterprises and provides a "second chance" to one who was excluded from school. Therefore, the participation of companies in vocational training is necessary not only in terms of financing but also in terms of social policy and human resource policies. Because the public and individual efforts are often insufficient to achieve the goal of lifelong learning, the companies should encourage employees to go to the training and

liberate employees who want to form during the working time. Certainly, employers take an important role to carry out the vocational training. They have the power to decide the training plan, implement (or refuse) social dialogue in the construction of the training policy. In addition, the companies affected by the economic crisis may reduce the budget for training and use training as a tool for economic development rather than personal development of their employees.

In spite of all the improvements on training policy, the access of the European employees remains inequality. According to the French studies, "the most formed are most graduate" [2]. In Belgium, executives are luckier to reach the training programs which are less related to the strict execution of tasks and putting forward more general aspects (cultural training, personality development, etc.) than skilled workers and foremen [3].

For many years, the company is called to be responsible in all its economic acts. Corporate Social Responsibility is an emerging concept which assumes that the company's goal is not only to make profit but also to develop the quality of working and living conditions. Therefore, the company must take into account the expectations of various stakeholders. It must reconcile between the economic responsibility (to make profit, to contribute to the national wealth), the legal responsibility (to obey the law, the conventions imposed by the State or the social partners) and the ethical responsibility (or morals which intervene beyond the legal requirements) which leads the company to reflect on what is right and good to make for the employees and the society in general [4]. These responsibilities are embedded in three domains [5]:

- Economic development: the company must contribute to the community property and ensure the transparency of economic information with its shareholders, etc.

- Environmental integrity: the company must take into account the impact of its activities on the environment, on the health of the people, etc.
- Social equity: the company is committed to respect the social policies, employee working conditions, ensure training policies, fair remuneration, etc.

In this work, we would like to draw the articulations between the concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility and employees' vocational training. More specifically, we would like to situate the subject of vocational training to the theme of "responsibilities" that the company may have.

Firstly, we will evoke the most current definitions of the employees' vocational training and the CSR in an attempt to understand the challenge in which their articulation represents;

Secondly, we will seek to define the perimeter of the "responsibilities" that the company can have vis-à-vis employees' vocational training.

This research is about theoretical thought which opens the way for empirical research about the content of CSR. We would like to highlight the ethical issues of CSR and the way to do CSR, not only for economic profit and legal obligation but also for the well-being of the employees.

## II. DEFINITIONS OF EMPLOYEES' VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND CSR

### A. Definition of employees' vocational training

The vocational training policy offers the existing workforce the opportunity to grow professionally, improve their skills and obtain the promotion [3]. In our research, we have interested in the training policy financed by companies for their own employees.

The vocational training has taken a considerable part of the professional life of the individual. It contributes to the cultural and professional development of employees [6]. It is a strategic tool for social promotion of the individual.

### B. Ethical issues of employees' vocational training

1) *Inequality of access to the vocational training according to professional categories, the companies and gender.*

According to De Brier and Meuleman, the most formed were generally the most graduate: the vocational training financed by the company is often limited to the employees, who have a highly responsibility and academic background, i.e. graduated from a university [7]. This may be explained by the criterion of merit in the distribution of vocational training. But the question remains: how to determine the merit of each employee to access the formation while the latter is considered - and legally defined - as a general right?

The literature revealed thus the inequality in access between professional categories. In Belgium, in the early 2000s, the technical training attracts investment from 34% of companies, while 25% of companies are interested in management training. Only 2 to 8% of companies developed general education: languages, security, information technology ... Certainly, companies become more involved in training related to know-how. These companies always expect a return in investment, in terms of productivity or profitability [8]. In almost sectors, the managers are more likely to access to training which is less related to task performance (cultural training, personality development, etc.) while skilled workers are less favorable to this type of training. In France, middle managers are the main beneficiaries of training [9]. Several statistical studies show that the more the company uses manual labor, the more it favors internal training .

However, it should be noticed that these statistics take on the explicit formations, i.e. given in the form of course or seminars. There is an implicit training like learning "on the job" and learning on the working place. These types of training are intended for non-skilled workers. Further, in many textile companies, the formation on the working place is privileged, especially in the case of the workers' training [10]. Moreover, in this sector, training of English language is primarily dedicated on employees in the sales department. This training is organized outside the company and apart of working time.

It must be noted that there are significant differences in investment in training by firm size. In 2005, the companies which have a training program, in Belgium, have more than 250 workers while half of those companies which have under 20 workforce, did not investigate in training. The sector of business also influences the involvement in vocational training. The IT sector is dominant with 6% financial participation [11]. The employees' training is strongly supported in the branches that have a significant level of new technology and research and development (R&D). In contrast, there has been little participation of the low-tech company, i.e.

footwear and textile and clothing firm. The training effort in this branch is below average.

We observed the other source of inequality of training access: there has been a privilege for the men. For example, women are preferred for the sector of agriculture and men for the real estate [7]. Similarly, in their research on organizational commitment, the authors showed that training has less impact on organizational commitment for women than for men, because they have more opportunities to access the formation than women [12]. These elements join other observations on the persistence of the gender division of labor in today's economy, particularly because of the reproduction of gender stereotypes in service activities [13] or increasing porosity between the discrimination experienced in the family and those observed in the sphere of work [14]. Let us add that, according to the survey Continuous Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) III, companies prefer to train employees from 25 to 54 years. The under 25 and over 55 are significantly discriminated against in the field of vocational training.

2) *Other ethical problems of employees' training*

It is important to recall that the ethical issues attached to the vocational training are not limited to the problem of inequality of access. We put our attention on three directions. A first direction is provided by the quality of the training content. From this point of view, the question is not only of who is "responsible" for the quality of training actions, from the design phase to the application. The question is also, whether the formation mobilizes the participation of employees and gets by on what they already know. Here the ethical question arises: which ethical statute of the people's word does it have under the training acts?

A second perspective relates to the theme of work organization or, more specifically, to the relationship between training and work organization. Several questions arise here. That to know whether the organization of work is favorable to the creation of a freedom space allowing the employees take a desirable formation and could benefit a sufficient time for the required training. That also to know if the organization is likely to support trainings articulated with the reality of work or if, on the contrary, it tends to maintain the employees in a state of dependence with regard to their hierarchy, cancelling any work of self-recreation. Furthermore, the manager should convert the working place into the place of collective learning, in the sense that it would give employees the opportunities for a collective dynamic exchange and self-regulation. In any

case, we would like to highlight the question of free disposition of people to participate in training [15].

A final perspective is finally provided by the "social usage" of the training. In clear, we interrogate the way companies took the advantage of the offered training to develop the skills of their employees, build with them the professional development scenarios and contribute to their socio-professional development. The company creates the discussion-space for their human resource in order to build their training policy, promote the involvement of employees in managerial decisions. Thus, the managers should encourage the viewpoints of employees on human resources management practices. This implies, on the one hand, innovation in human resources management [16] and, on the other hand, the perception of "procedural justice" of employees [17].

C. *Corporate social responsibility- Four groups of responsibilities.*

Concepts of corporate social responsibility have been evolving for decades [18]. Our research is referred to the work of Carroll who categorized the social responsibilities into the four groups [4].

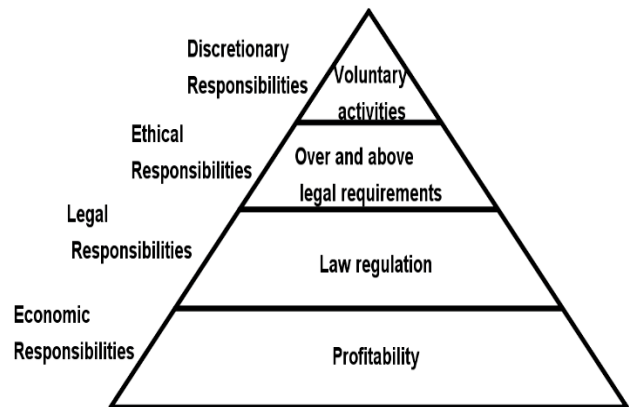


Figure 1: Social Responsibility Categories (Carroll, 1979)

1) *Economic Responsibilities* It is the first social responsibility of business. The firms have a responsibility to produce goods and services for society. They contribute to national wealth.

2) *Legal Responsibilities* The firms are expected to fulfill their economic mission within the framework of legal requirements.

3) *Ethical Responsibilities* Above legal requirements, the firms can contribute to develop the well-being of employees and society. Over the law established in the host country, society' members expect

the firm to do more about the human rights, labor rights and environmental behaviors.

4) *Discretionary Responsibilities* The last responsibility depend on the firm's voluntary. If the firm doesn't participate in the discretionary activities, we don't consider it as unethical. We argue that these activities are privileged by the firms because they positively influence to business.

In our paper, we discuss the link between these groups of social responsibilities and employees' vocational training. We will argue that for the moment, most business have developed employees' training at the threshold of legal responsibility. But to be responsible vis-à-vis the stakeholders, the firm must think about "ethical responsibilities", especially in the practice of vocational training.

### III. THE "RESPONSIBILITIES" OF THE COMPANY IN EMPLOYEES' VOCATIONAL TRAINING MATTER: BEYOND PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

According to Etchegoyen, the ethical issue of responsibility arises as soon as one escapes the law of profit conceived as a natural principle of survival [19]. Beyond the "managerial technical responsibilities", the ethical responsibilities lead the organizations to search the meaning of their activities. We put our attention on the work of Bauman, particularly in his book "*Modernité et Holocauste*" [20]. He argued that the genocide committed by the Nazi administration was mainly possible because each of the servants had the feeling "does his job very well" and act "responsibly". But the responsibility which he was involved was a *technical* responsibility and not a *moral* responsibility. More exactly, the division of the labor which underlay the "rationality of the evil" substituted the technical responsibility for the moral responsibility.

Around the traditional definition of the responsibility as capacity to answer of its acts in front of others, two characteristics thus seem to emerge: the report in the future and the progressiveness of the forms of responsibility. These two criteria provide normative elements to better appreciate the scale of corporate responsibility towards their employees, especially in training. It is indeed about a commitment turned towards the future, i.e. towards the promise of an offer of quality training – opening or not on "careers" –; it is also a gradation of responsibility, to the extent that this promise is indexed on utilitarian goals of increased productivity

and overall efficiency, but where it also provides the possibilities for the professional construction. It engages a form of responsibility which involves the employee as ethical subject.

So we can now propose to analyze the company's behavior in terms of vocational training according to four types of responsibilities of Carroll: the "economic responsibility", the "legal responsibility", the "ethical responsibility" and the "discretionary responsibility" (or philanthropic responsibilities). We argue that the first two responsibilities are supposed to be naturally covered by business; the two last refer to the "promise" of better well-being or better living conditions. The "ethical responsibilities" and "discretionary responsibilities" therefore assume a reflection in terms of social justice, joining the reflections of Capron and Quairel-Lanoizelée who applied ethics in the business world [5]. They have interested in the problem of equity (fairness) and justice (justice) with which employees are treated. Let us examine the link between the responsibilities and employees' vocational training in more detail.

#### A. "*Economic Responsibilities*" and vocational training

This group of responsibility registered the choice of vocational training in a utilitarian perspective. Here, the company invests in "profitable" training, that is to say that the return on investment is tangible in the short or medium term. At first glance, the company adopting this responsibility does not concern the nature of "social" objectives of the training. Do the training for employees would be a "technical" responsibility that managers engage in compliance with the company's economic objective. We can observe these forms of responsibility in young companies (or companies in crisis) which requires the profitability to survive. The least expensive training and "just in time" in order to adapt the work would be priority. The notion of "Human Capital" takes place within the firm for the economic development strategic [21]. In fact, if the company adopts this category of responsibility, there will appear the inequality in investment in training between enterprises and inequality access between professional categories.

#### B. "*Legal Responsibilities*" and vocational training

To ensure the participation of all the companies in training, the intervention of the State and the social partners is necessary: it is called "legal responsibility" of the company. In this case, the company does training in a coercive manner. It scrupulously respects the legal and regulatory requirements, but still does not favor the social issues: even though under legal compulsion, utilitarian interest will remain on top, especially in the

content and strategic choices of employees' vocational training. These first two approaches do not succeed in opening a space to intentionality or moral deliberation. According to Carroll, moral dimension can be articulated with the "business" only on condition that leaving a restrictive approach of the responsibility centered on the predominance of utility [22].

#### C. "Ethical Responsibilities" and vocational training

Certainly, the legal obligations can push companies to annually invest some percentage of payrolls on employee training. The fact remains that, in this perspective, the exerted responsibility is confined to what Bauman appoint a "technical" level: it does not involve the actors of training - especially leading actors - in a "moral evaluation" of the consequences of the choices. It therefore does not treat the employee as an ethical subject, at least beyond are required by the legal or regulatory obligations. Strictly speaking, we should add that the "economic responsibilities" and "legal responsibilities" constitute a rudimentary ethical approach, which focuses on what we choose to call here the "primary responsibilities". They are necessary for the establishment of an employment relationship which based on mutual respect and recognition of the partner as a moral issue, but they do not form sufficient conditions. Furthermore, according to Schwartz and Carroll, they aren't enough to make social responsibility of business [22]. While being limited to the compliance with general rules, they do not engage the actors in an analysis of existing ethical dilemmas. Thus, the problems of inequality of access to training may not be the subject of a specific diagnosis within the firms. In a general way, these responsibilities do not permit them to know if the choices or the mode of organization are just or justified. The ethical issues of vocational training ask the firm to go further than their "primary responsibilities" and to think about ethical issues of social responsibilities.

#### D. "Discretionary Responsibilities" and vocational training

Paradoxically, economic agents can provide a "budget" to help all or part of the human community with which they work; even it concerns people in completely foreign to the field of activity of the company. For example, companies mobilize financial resources for patronage and sponsorship activities. These are "philanthropic" responsibilities, in that they show a behavior that does not directly refer to utility computing, although the benefits in terms of image are important [5]. Furthermore, with regard to activities that don't directly concern their business (support for many private foundations operating in the fields of health, assistance

to young people and assistance to people in precarious situations) it is difficult to establish strict sense of utilitarian benefits. Thus, nothing precludes seeing a company invest in vocational training under the banner of philanthropy. We will add that there is good in the matter; a responsibility that goes beyond the technical level, insofar as any constraint (economic) or obligation (legal or regulatory) weighs on company. This evaluation is a moral nature, insofar as it recognizes the members of the community as "rational and autonomous entities with their own finality" [23].

However, this "discretionary responsibilities" vis-à-vis the employees' vocational training is problematic. Actually, the community that addresses philanthropic activity often has no opportunity to influence the attributed funds. There is a considerable asymmetry of decision-making. This asymmetry means that the needs of community members are also denied on the terrain of its ability to act; Sen appoint its "capacity" for individual development [24], [25]. We cannot forget that these are short-term activities and can be removed when the firm is in difficulty for funding. They are not sustainable. In addition, they remain *discretionary*, in that they depend exclusively on the goodwill of the firm. For this reason it is necessary to go further and to wonder on the "ethical responsibility" or about the "moral responsibility" for the company, particularly as regards vocational training. The question is not whether the company has or not a training strategy, but to know the ins and outs of ethical grounds of this practice. The group of "ethical responsibilities" of Corporate Social Responsibilities should provide normative benchmarks for addressing the problem in the field of vocational training.

#### IV. THE MIXTURE OF THREE RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE FIELD OF EMPLOYEES' TRAINING

We refer to model of three domains of Schwartz and Carroll to close our theoretical discussion about the link (that is still under construction) between employees' vocational training and Corporate Social Responsibility [22]. The ethical questions of employee vocational training would be resolved with the integration of "ethical responsibilities" in the responsibilities of the firms. Beyond "primary responsibilities", as the economic responsibility and legal responsibility, the firms need to consider the ethical responsibility in their business.



Figure 2: Model of three domains of CSR (Schwartz and Carroll, 2003)

In this paper, we suggested a theoretical analysis about the approach of “ethical responsibilities” of Corporate Social Responsibility. This thesis was based on the problems of employees’ vocational training practice within the firm. After showing the ethical problems of this practice, especially the inequality of access to the training of different professional categories, we argue the necessity of “ethical responsibilities” of Corporate Social Responsibility. Actually, the “economic responsibilities” and “legal responsibilities” are not enough to do business. The firm must stand out from all others by going further in their social responsibility. We are agree that the firm can make profit and make the world a better place at the same time (Falck and Heblich, 2007).

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