

# **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CAREER EDUCATION: AN INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDY**

**C. Costa-Lobo<sup>1</sup>, M. Formosinho<sup>1</sup>, P. Morais<sup>1</sup>, C. Gomes<sup>1</sup>, J. Menezes<sup>2</sup>, N. Jesus-Silva<sup>1</sup>, A. Campina<sup>1</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Universidade Portucalense (PORTUGAL)*

*<sup>2</sup>UNIFACS & Faculdade Social da Bahia (BRAZIL)*

## **Abstract**

Corporate Social Responsibility and career education emerge in a context of a society where the importance of the ability to anticipate change, adapt to new circumstances, and invent new business practices is explicit. Career education has been presented as an effective response to the requirements of adaptability, flexibility, and continuing education. This paper is a report on the findings of a study conducted at an international leading food group. Documentary analysis and discourse analysis techniques were used to examine how corporate social responsibility and career education are valued by this international group. The sample of this investigation is composed by the Director of the development area, by the Coordinator and two Social Assistants of the Social Emergency Fund. The success and effectiveness of this international group are marked by ambition, ability to resist difficulties, sharing of values, spirit of unity and team sense. In addition to internal training, it directs investments for external training by promoting actions such as participation in seminars and congresses worldwide and the creation of partnerships in various areas of management with prestigious teaching entities. Findings indicate the creation of a training school, with initiatives for internal and external training, in partnerships with prestigious teaching entities. Of particular note is the Management Trainees Program, developed for more than 25 years, characterized by building a career by obtaining knowledge and skills acquired in the combination of on-the-job experience and a training program.

Keywords: Career Education, Corporate Social Responsibility, training school, management trainees program.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Social Responsibility and career education emerge in a context of a changing, globalized, technological and ever changing society.

These evolutions and transformations directly affect economic demands in the sense that in such an unstable and dynamic economy, the main source of competitive advantage is people themselves, in particular their ability to anticipate change, adapt to new circumstances, and invent new business practices, as well as those of the world of work, increasingly marked by competitiveness, rapidly changing markets, uninterrupted technological evolution and organizational innovations (Bandura, 1991; Ferreira, Gonçalves, & Coimbra, 2008; Guedes, 2014; Rebelo, 2014; Rego, Cunha, Costa, Gonçalves, Cabral-Cardoso, 2006; Schwartz & Carroll, 2008; Zenone, 2006).

Thus, "the knowledge revolution has brought organizations and people new ways of building their career paths and their professional and vocational identities" (Costa-Lobo, & Ferreira, 2012, p.201). Career education thus emerges as an effective response to the new demands of professional contexts such as adaptability, flexibility, continuing education and multi-facetedness.

Social Responsibility can be understood as a set of voluntary actions carried out by organizations in order to create opportunities that safeguard and develop the societies in which they are inserted. "This means that agreeing with the social responsibility of organizations implies the development of actions of interest to society even if they do not contribute directly to the company's profit" (Teixeira, 2013, p.369). According to the same author, the main constituent areas of social responsibility performance are consumers, employees, the environment and society in general. As for consumers, "the issues raised in this area relate above all to the safety of the products that companies put on the market, design and fair prices" (p.371). With regard to employees' issues such as job security, fair wage payment, indiscrimination based on gender, race or religion, training, education and development of workers, assistance to employees with problems, are in the order of day (p.373).

Concerning the environment, "hygiene concerns, alongside safety, in particular in the workplace, but not only protection against pollution, increased use of biodegradable and recyclable packaging, treatment of dangerous society, such as nuclear waste (p.373).

Thus, social responsibility imposes a series of social objectives on organizations "which must include pollution control, improvement of working conditions, minority employment policy, community development, philanthropic contributions and consumer-related aspects (p.375).

In turn, career education can be understood as a systematic intervention modality that covers all moments of the individual's life and aims to equip them with competencies so that they can autonomously make appropriate decisions regarding the process of career building. In this context of social responsibility and career management it is evident the need to address adult education and lifelong learning that have been studied since the 1960s despite the evident changes in the terms and concepts that constitute them.

According to Costa-Lobo and Ferreira (2012), "the knowledge revolution has brought organizations and people new ways to build their career paths and their professional and vocational identities" (p.201), that is, social, political and economic consequences of globalization have brought new demands to the professional world, thus influencing the decisions to be taken in the course of career building.

The socio-cognitive theory in the career domain "focuses on the self-regulatory capacity to learn and develop adaptive strategies to deal with personal and situational contingencies" (Costa-Lobo & Ferreira, 2012, p.202).

The socio-cognitive model of vocational choices, analyzing the process of career selection as a process of unfolding, points us to the importance of signaling multiple influences and multiple points of choice. According to this theory, when individuals experience weak barriers and strong environmental support, the greater the likelihood that their career interests will turn into goals and turn them into actions. In other words, "the variables support and contextual barriers can moderate the process of transforming objectives, that is, the relations between interests and objectives and the relations between objectives and actions are expected stronger when there are favorable environmental conditions" (Costa-Lobo & Ferreira, 2012, p.204). Decision-making processes are explained through decision theories and models that are divided into three approaches. The first approach considers the vocational decision as a developmental process that goes through several phases, and in turn, this set of decisions arising throughout the life, constitute the construction of the career. The second approach focuses essentially on how individuals make vocational choices by dividing themselves into prescriptive and descriptive models of decision-making. The prescriptive models analyze the decisions while the descriptive ones try to analyze the processes of making these decisions. The third approach highlights the individual variables of decision makers such as personality traits, decision-making styles, difficulties in the decision-making process, and vocational indecision.

Regarding the implementation of the choice as a phase of the decision process, developmental, cognitive and socio-cognitive models stand out. In the developmental models, vocational decision-making is considered an integral part of a dynamic process of vocational development and is "initiated by the experience of a vocational problem and by the recognition of the need to make a decision" (Carvalho & Taveira, 2012, p.2). In this perspective, the vocational decision is developed in planning and execution cycles, that is, initially the individual anticipates and explores alternatives and solutions to the vocational problem, and then applies these solutions and adjusts to the new context.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

This point of the work is constituted by the presentation of the methodology of the study carried out in the business group under study. The objectives of the study, the methodology used, the description of the data collection instruments, the characterization of the sample and the context are presented. This study intends to obtain information about the chosen corporate group regarding the perspective and concretization of social responsibility as well as about its formation.

Thus, it is intended to understand the context and the way the social emergency fund works, to obtain information about the pillars, principles and values of the group in its socially responsible performance,

to understand objectives and forms of action of the social emergency fund, and the role of social workers in the social emergency fund.

This research was materialized with a case study, using documentary analysis and interviews and content analysis with the Bardin method. The pre-analytical, exploratory and treatment and qualitative interpretation of responses were performed. The pre-analytical phase involved the observation of the exhaustiveness rules (selection of all the material susceptible to use), representativeness (the data were obtained by means of identical technique and performed with similar individuals), homogeneity (the retained documents obeyed precise criteria choice) and relevance (the retained documents were appropriate to the purpose of the analysis). After the organization of the materials and systematization of the initial ideas, a systematic reading of the answers was carried out. In the exploration phase of the material, the raw data were transformed in order to reach the core of the text comprehension. Classification and aggregation of the response material was performed in order to achieve a representation of its content. In the last phase of qualitative treatment and interpretation were analyzed all the answers and taken all the units of analysis that made possible the later categorization. As an enumeration rule, the frequency was used, represented by the number of times a given category was referenced in the response to the item being analyzed. From the systematization of the categories of analysis, their respective themes or nuclei of meaning emerged, based on a review of the literature that guided and preceded the data collection.

In the sense of guaranteeing some freedom and adaptability in the questions and the answers, we chose semi-structured interviews. In order to obtain information on the perspective and achievement of social responsibility and training in the target group of the study, we used the Survey on Corporate Social Responsibility and Education for the career, made via Skype to the director of the group's development area in question. The Survey on Corporate Social Responsibility and Education for the career lasted approximately 60 minutes and consists of 17 open-format questions divided essentially into two parts, the first six related to CSR and the last 11 related to Education for the career.

In order to better understand the context and manner of action of the social emergency fund, the Social Emergency Fund Survey was carried out on the coordinator of the social emergency fund. Its implementation was in person, lasted approximately 60 minutes, and its objective was to obtain information about the pillars, principles and values of the group in its socially responsible performance as well as to understand the objectives and forms of action of the social emergency fund. It consists of 19 open-ended issues divided essentially into two parts, the first nine related to corporate social responsibility and the last 10 on the social emergency fund.

In order to understand the role and status of social workers in the social emergency fund, the Social Welfare Survey was used in the Social Emergency Fund. This interview survey was carried out in person, with a duration of approximately 30 minutes, to three of the social workers of the social emergency fund of the business group under study. Its main objective was to understand the contribution of social workers in this area as well as to understand the status they hold. It consists of five open-format questions.

The sample of this investigation is a convenience sample and consists of five elements. Thus, it is composed of the director of the development area, the coordinator and three social workers from the social emergency fund of the company under study. Their collaboration was the provision of information in the form of an interview where they explored the two main axes of this study: social responsibility and career education. In order to better contextualize the case under study, a brief description of the target group of this study is presented below.

This group operates in the food, distribution, industry and services sectors and has more than 3500 stores distributed in Portugal and in the other two countries where it operates. With regard to business strategy, the group sees the hiring of professionals as a way to provide quick and effective answers to the challenges they face, expecting them to be involved and have a passion for the business, a sense of responsibility and commitment, a permanent willingness to learn, group culture, team spirit, resilience.

In order to ensure that each employee does his or her best, the group invests in its training and development because it believes that only in this way it will obtain a sustainable competitive advantage. The group believes that this investment must be a priority and full time and for it to be effective it implies the recognition of the needs of the employees as well as their setting in the evolution of the business.

### 3 RESULTS

At this point of the work the results obtained in this study are presented as well as their analysis and discussion.

For this company, the management of careers of employees is highly valued and is transversal to everyone, from the positions most related to the operations to the positions of leadership.

Training is seen as a powerful tool for the personal and professional development of these people. Thus, this business group invests heavily in its training both in the stage of reception and integration in the company, and in the intermediate stage of the career that may be of transition or enrichment of the function.

The signaling and diagnosis of training needs are strategically defined, that is, they are defined according to the annual objectives of the company and the business strategy. Host training means that employees, when they are part of the company, are prepared and have the knowledge necessary to perform a particular function. In turn, transition training and / or enrichment of the function is intended for employees who will transition from function or to employees who have been for some time in a certain function and need some enrichment or refreshment. In this context, for example, training programs are developed for store managers and section heads and partnerships with universities. In addition to the host and transition training or enrichment of the function, other related to social responsibility are also developed: one directed to employees that deal with the domestic economy management, and another one directed to ambassadors of the social emergency fund. In this way it can be seen that in the view of this business group, the training of its employees is not a measure of social responsibility. This group understands that training is a measure that will contribute strongly to the best and most effective performance of employees' functions and that should be defined according to the objectives and strategies of the business. Social responsibility, in turn, implies all measures that do not directly contribute to the employee's professional performance, but which help and contribute to his or her well-being. In this way, this area is not geared to business objectives, but rather to the help and support of its group members.

In terms of social responsibility, the group defined three pillars according to the needs evidenced by its employees, which guide their intervention, such as education, health and family well-being. In education there is a transversal measure and measures aimed at more specific groups. The award of the return voucher is the example of the transversal measure of the education pillar because it is addressed to all employees. In turn, the assignment of the school kit is only intended for employees with children starting the first school year.

Measures related to scholarships, integration into the school system and school textbooks are mainly intended for staff members in families facing financial problems and therefore their allocation / implementation depends on an evaluation and response to certain criteria. In the field of health, and again according to the needs evidenced by employees, support is provided to allow access to specialized healthcare by employees and in some cases also their families. Oncology support programs are intended not only for the employee but also for his / her family. Support for dental consultations is one of the measures initially intended for employees and later extended to cover their children as well. There are also protocols with health entities that allow access to specialty queries for a more affordable price. With regard to rare diseases, support also covers the whole family, for example by paying a caregiver for a specific situation. Lastly, and only on a timely basis, we have the payment of medicines that are destined to very specific cases of families with financial difficulties to ensure the regular purchase of a certain medication or a certain diet. In the context of family welfare, five main measures can be identified, namely food card support, legal support, financial support, baby kit and social security. The food card, limited to essential goods, is the measure where the group has the largest investment. Sometimes this measure is triggered so that the employee can channel the money that would be destined to the food, for the resolution of a certain problem like for example the payment of a debt. Legal aid mainly involves cases of divorce with other associated problems, the regulation of parental responsibility and the resolution of problems related to debts, through the appointment of a lawyer or the provision of financial advice. In turn, the financial support is about specific issues that could be the payment of a monthly transport title, payment of the non-subsidized part of the social security of a funeral or even the advance of the Christmas subsidy and / or vacation. The baby kit is also a measure of the size of family well-being and is intended for all employees who have newborn children.

The social emergency fund articulates with social security for example with issues related to the payment of pensions. The problems presented by collaborators are sometimes of a certain area, but the solutions found to fill them are related to other areas, that is, financial matters can be resolved with legal support

or legal issues can be resolved with financial support. In relation to its work in the scope of internal social responsibility, one can conclude that there are several efforts to meet the needs of its employees. As such, diagnostic and reassessment surveys were carried out in 2008 and 2014, where the three pillars of action were defined and revised, new needs were raised, and support processes and measures were adapted.

## **4 CONCLUSIONS**

For the company under study, social responsibility presupposes the satisfaction of the needs and protection of its members, thus evidencing their concern in terms of human development. Measures are also evident in the area of corporate citizenship as well as a strong organizational culture seized over time. In this entity citizenship, sustainability, stakeholder management and ethics are evident in social responsibility practices. In this company social responsibility is not confused with social marketing being effectively a differentiating strategy and to reinforce its image.

With the analysis of interviews by interview, instrument used for data collection, it can be concluded that the model Value, Balance, Accountability is assured. It is evident the concern and existence of the balance between the generation of value and the balance between human values and the function of the company as well as the existence of a socially responsible relationship with society. In particular the results obtained through the Survey on Corporate Social Responsibility and Education for the career allowed the signalization of the approach that this company attributes to the adaptation to the social transformations.

In this study there is also evidence of the value of training as an effective learning opportunity that is organized, structured, time-based, previously constructed and with specific objectives where the trainee assumes the role of receiver of information and knowledge.

The collaborative work was particularly evidenced in the scope of the Survey on the Social Emergency Fund and the Social Welfare Survey in the Social Emergency Fund.

It was possible to measure the implementation of initiatives that promote effective collaboration between the different agents, even though they do not work leadership. In particular the collaborative work is valued and stimulated in the figure of the ambassador and the social worker. These collaborators assume a plural set of tasks that contribute to a certain common purpose, but which do not take into account individual goals.

The results of this research point to the relevance of collaboration that presupposes joint decision-making, information sharing, communication, where the various participants, without hierarchical relation, work together to achieve the same objectives and that has the advantages of enriching professional work; enhance efficiency; promoting coordination and sharing of responsibility; strengthen self-efficacy and confidence; develop the capacity for reflection. By conducting the interviews by interview it was possible to respond to all the objectives listed. Information was obtained on the perspective and forms of action of this business group with regard to social responsibility perceiving their training and their management of careers.

As for the social emergency fund, we were able to perceive its history, its context, its way of acting and its agents through the understanding of its principles, values and pillars of socially responsible attitude.

In short, this study makes it possible to show that professional development is a complex process oriented towards the change of concepts and personal and social development, results from the recognition of the professional's need to deepen and acquire knowledge throughout the career, using instruments such as reflection, and collaborative work.

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