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Defining Public Relations' Role in Corporate Social Responsibility Programs

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Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has increased significantly in academic research and professional practice since the 1970s, expanding from the business realm to the public relations field. Nevertheless, the perceptions of PR professionals and their relationship with CSR programs remain largely unstudied. Through in-depth interviews with 11 communications professionals in nine diverse companies with active corporate responsibility programs, this study examines the role of public relations in successful CSR programs. Overwhelmingly, interviewed professionals expressed positive perceptions of CSR initiatives but adamantly opposed public relations' ownership of the programs. Rather, these practitioners advocated a cross-functional approach with public relations in a supportive or complementary function.

Introduction

Expanding from business management to the public relations field and beyond, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an area of increased interest in academic research and professional practice since the 1960s (Carroll, 1999). In the current competitive and information-driven business environment, corporations are held to a higher standard and expected and encouraged by civil society and governments to act ethically in a manner that benefits shareholders and stakeholders (Benn, Todd & Pendleton, 2010; Haque, 2011; Waddock, 2008).

As an intermediary between corporations and stakeholders, public relations professionals must recognize and address these societal pressures. Despite the rising expectations and the proliferation of academic research on the topic, uncertainty and skepticism continue to shroud public relations' role in corporate social responsibility programs. This article explores the PR-CSR relationship through in-depth interviews with public relations professionals actively involved in successful responsibility programs.

Literature

PR and CSR Similarities

Broadly, corporate social responsibility involves fulfilling obligations to society beyond traditional economic contributions. In 1979, and again in 1999, Carroll proposed a four-part definition of corporate social responsibility: "The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" (Carroll, 1979, p. 500).

Public relations and corporate social responsibility initiatives contribute to similar organizational needs and functions – organizational reputation, stakeholder relationships, crisis management, and ethical actions, among others (Siltaoja, 2006; Yoon, Gurhan-Canli, & Schwarz, 2006; Freeman, 1984; Sohn & Lariscy, 2014). These similarities have often linked the two fields in academic research and professional

application. Kim and Reber's (2008) survey of 313 PR practitioners found that nearly 33% of respondents identified a "significant management role" of public relations to advise and educate clients or encourage business executives to develop CSR programs. Other identified roles included promoting philanthropic actions and relationship-building initiatives, acting as a model of ethical standards, and communicating the organization's CSR programs (Kim & Reber, 2008). These findings indicate an active role for public relations in applied professional practice, but also exemplify the varied approaches to involving public relations in CSR programs.

Clark (2000) explores the relationship between corporate social responsibility and public relations through a comparison of what she views as two separate fields. She concludes that, though the connection between corporate PR and CSR is not fully developed, both disciplines seek to better the quality of the relationship between an organization and key stakeholders. She emphasizes the ability of PR professionals to scan the political, social, and historical environment to contribute to CSR program development. Moreover, both PR and CSR cultivate and foster organization-public relations with relevant community groups and individuals through CSR activities and PR tactics (Clark, 2000).

Echoing Clark's (2000) conclusions, Zurita (2006) questions public relations' role in corporate responsibility programs. In her analysis of framing, Zurita (2006) asserts that, as a corporate management function, public relations has the responsibility to communicate and promote CSR programs, but emphasizes that CSR is not the same as public relations (Zurita, 2006). Rather, corporate responsibility programs should be a collective effort of public relations, management and employees (Zurita, 2006). In this perspective, PR performs environmental scanning functions, monitors potential opportunities or threats to CSR programs, communicates CSR information to the public, and establishes relationships with the community. Many of these functions are similar to those performed in traditional corporate communication efforts.

In its simplest form, public relations is a communication tool. Therefore, in nearly all corporations with CSR programs, PR is tasked with communicating such efforts to the public. Though nearly 80% of the largest 250 global corporations publish a corporate responsibility report, the approach

to communication and level of interactive dialogue differ between companies and industries (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010; Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Research now emphasizes the importance and popularity of disseminating CSR information through corporate websites (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007). Though as many as 70% of analyzed websites included a section devoted to CSR, these platforms were characterized by unidirectional communication and lacked interactivity or dialogue with publics (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007).

Regardless of the communication vehicle, most companies rely on organizational culture and values to determine the level, outlet, presentation, and branding of CSR communication (Snider, Hill & Martin, 2003; Villagra & Lopez, 2013). Ultimately, however, effective CSR communication is moderated by the corporation's prior reputation and brand positioning (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010).

Public relations and corporate responsibility initiatives are inevitably linked through similar functions and communication needs. Both contribute to relationship-building, reputation management, community relations, and risk mitigation efforts of the company. However, the ties between the two concepts elicit controversy and criticism (Frynas, 2005; Banerjee, 2008).

Criticism of a PR-CSR Relationship

Though some scholarship touts the business and reputational benefits of CSR, much also highlights corporate denial of wrongdoings, excessive promotion of successes, and disregard of human rights as proof of the superficiality of responsibility programs (Banerjee, 2008; Frankental, 2001). Giant global brands such as Nike, BP, and Shell have suffered negative publicity for environmental disasters, human rights abuses, or untruthful claims, with regard to their concurrent CSR programs (Banerjee, 2008; Frankental, 2001). Frankental (2001) exposes the intrinsic paradoxes in the concept of corporate social responsibility and contradictions with the competitive advantage and shareholder-centric view of businesses. He concludes that CSR will remain an "invention" and tool of public relations until all stakeholders are acknowledged, overall company governance conforms to CSR principles, a definition is accepted by the majority of scholars, and CSR programs are verified and significantly rewarded by

external publics (Frankental, 2001).

Benn, Todd and Pendleton (2010) identify a similar tension in public relations' leadership in CSR programs. According to their interviews with Australian PR practitioners, many corporate executives continue to view PR professionals solely as a source of positive publicity. CSR is conceptualized as a "collective quality," in which responsibility is distributed and shared among employees (Benn, Todd & Pendleton, 2010). Interviewed PR professionals did not suggest a PR role in shaping CSR policy but focused on external publicity of activities (Benn, Todd & Pendleton, 2010). Though this research did not pursue the criticism evident in other scholarship, it exemplifies a narrow perspective of PR's role in CSR programs.

The contradictory literature promoting active PR involvement in CSR programs and skepticism of CSR programs forms the foundation of the current research study. Much literature closely links public relations and corporate responsibility, drawing on a management perspective of PR in which PR professionals act as a conscience of an organization, and perform boundary-spanning functions, relationship building, and communication efforts. This literature highlights the similarities between the two business functions and praises the PR and business benefits of CSR. However, contrasting literature sharply rebukes significant PR involvement in CSR, emphasizing corporate wrongdoings as evidence of superficial CSR programs. This study seeks to offer an applied, best practices perspective of the appropriate role of public relations in successful corporate social responsibility programs, combining and clarifying the conflicting literature that currently addresses the issue.

Research Questions

This research provides a broad overview of the relationship between corporate social responsibility and the practice of public relations in the United States, highlighting the prevailing trends in the field. The research questions address contradictory research that suggests that public relations professionals control CSR programs but that practitioners alone are not adequately equipped to guide comprehensive corporate social responsibility programs. These questions identify the role of public

relations and place corporate social responsibility within the broader organizational framework.

RQ1: What role should PR play in CSR programs?

RQ2: Are public relations professionals the appropriate group to handle the development and implementation of corporate social responsibility programs?

RQ2.a: If not public relations, what department should control CSR programs?

Methodology and Research Design

In-depth, semi-structured telephone interviews with 11 public relations professionals in nine corporations provided a detailed best practices perspective of PR and CSR opinions and practices. Participating professionals worked in corporations based throughout the United States and across the business spectrum, including consumer goods, industrial manufacturing, technology innovation, and business-to-business. Annual revenues for these organizations range from \$5 billion to nearly \$100 billion.

The 11 professionals were predominately women, with only three male participants. Seven of those interviewed were located in their corporate communications or media relations departments; the remaining four worked in the CSR department or handled only CSR communications. All of these professionals boasted many years of communication and corporate responsibility experience at their current organization, and many spoke of prior experiences at corporations with or without CSR programs. This extensive and diversified experience facilitated comparisons between their current and previous positions.

Professionals were selected from available responsibility rankings due to their expertise and experience in the planning, development and execution of corporate social responsibility programs, both domestically and internationally. The independently-researched corporate responsibility lists used included *Corporate Responsibility Magazine's* 100 Best Corporate Citizens 2010, Boston College Carroll School of Management's Most Socially Responsible Companies 2010, the 2012 Global 100 List, and

Forbes' Companies with the Best CSR Reputation (CR's 100 best; The 2010 corporate; 2012 global 100; Smith, 2012). Though limiting selection to only successful companies prevents broad, definitive generalizations, this population offers best practices of PR's role in CSR programs.

Findings

In contrast to expectations that may suppose that public relations practitioners would cling to CSR leadership, interviewed professionals were adamantly opposed to PR ownership of responsibility initiatives. Rather, each professional highlighted the importance of multiple voices involved in planning and developing corporate responsibility programs. One practitioner, in particular, emphasized the danger of greenwashing when public relations has sole accountability for these initiatives: "Those are aspects of the core business and those are aspects that need to be run by executives... (with) the skills, balances and abilities to do those things... and those (aspects) are all part of a good corporate citizen. You know, communications just comes in helping them tell that story, how you communicate with various stakeholders, why we're doing it or why aren't we doing something" ("Interview 7," 2013). Public relations held a supportive or complementary role for CSR as an advisor and communicator.

Organizational structures and practices vary from business to business but several similarities emerged: (1) corporate responsibility programs are autonomous and embedded in practices throughout the firm, (2) most had a high-level corporate responsibility professional to organize and guide programs, (3) CSR programs were supported by executives and perpetuated by organizational cultures, (4) public relations served as an advisor, communicator, and boundary spanner, and (5) various communication strategies seek to balance informing the public with excessive promotion. The findings are presented according to these broad and related themes.

Embedded CSR and Cross-functional Teams

Interviewed professionals discussed and advocated a cohesive approach in which the communications function served a supporting role to autonomous corporate social responsibility programs. Nearly half of those interviewed specifically used "integrated" or "embedded" to describe the

position of their responsibility team; the remaining professionals described a similar situation using synonymous phrases. Corporate responsibility is “baked into the operations of our company,” “embedded into everything that we do,” and “just a way of life in the company” (“Interview 3,” 2013; “Interview 4,” 2013; “Interview 6,” 2013). Support and participation in CSR activities expands from executive-level managers to part-time employees. The embedding of responsibility efforts translates to daily decisions, operations management, transportation, and communication.

Typically, corporate responsibility is located in a separate department high in the organizational structure. One practitioner mentioned a community involvement team in each corporate facility to guide specific initiatives. In this situation, an upper-level management team in the headquarters broadly directs CSR goals, but programs are localized and implemented by individual community teams in each facility location. In only one of the nine companies did corporate social responsibility report to the Senior Vice President of Marketing and Communications; however, within this department, the CSR function is viewed as a semi-independent function, not controlled by potential press coverage. The practitioner described the relationship: “CSR is not so much a part of marketing or promotional advertising sort of function. It’s complementary.... Corporate responsibility does have autonomy. We don’t do things because of media coverage. And our primary concern is the community” (“Interview 1,” 2013).

Regardless of the particular organizational structure, most of these companies have a designated corporate responsibility professional in a leadership position near the executive level and programs receive significant executive support, often from the CEO. Individuals at the executive level encourage and promote each of these successful responsibility programs and often provide the long-term direction for initiatives, creating a “trickle-down effect” and a “top-to-bottom support” (“Interview 3,” 2013; “Interview 4,” 2013). While recognizing the importance of executive support, one professional highlighted the significance of a CSR culture: “Sometimes I think you see it may or may not be the passion of the CEO but it is still engrained in what the business does and how they conduct the way business is done” (“Interview 8,” 2013). This culture allows CSR to withstand varied levels of dedication from executives, and creates “bottom-up” leadership for programs to balance the “top-down” executive

support.

PR in a Supportive Role

PR practitioners' expertise and skills serve a crucial supportive function as an advisor, a coordinator, and a communicator. These roles echo the functions exercised in support of the company at large.

Public relations offers an external perspective to assist in developing strategy and informing programs, fulfilling the "bridging" function of an intermediary between an organization and its constituents. One professional described this advisory role and suggested many of the questions posed: "We are there to say, 'well have you thought about this? What will this community think if we give this grant here? Are there any stakeholders we've worked with for a long time?' ... We help people understand how programs might be perceived or need to be perceived" ("Interview 5," 2013). Another practitioner juxtaposed financial and reputational considerations: "I think they (PR professionals) should always have a seat at the table. And then be involved in a consulting role: what would the potential impacts of making a decision that would be maybe good financially but reputationally damaging?" ("Interview 7," 2013).

The communications department also plays a coordination role, internally and externally. PR professionals organize cross-functional groups within the company and arrange participation of external partners, including nonprofit organizations and governmental actors, in program implementation ("Interview 4," 2013). Public relations professionals use public affairs, nonprofit, and government relations skills to develop the appropriate partners and teams to most effectively accomplish CSR initiatives. Drawing on their intermediary position, PR professionals represent the interests of the organization and the community to develop, implement, and communicate programs.

Overwhelmingly, the phrases used to describe PR's role in responsibility initiatives were "supportive," ("Interview 2," 2013; "Interview 3," 2013; "Interview 9," 2013) "output," ("Interview 3," 2013) and "aggregator" ("Interview 3," 2013; "Interview 5," 2013; "Interview 6," 2013). These words should not diminish the importance of such a role; one practitioner described it as a "major role... a

critical role” (“Interview 4,” 2013).

The aggregator role may facilitate a CSR culture and tradition in an organization by compiling and publicizing the independent volunteer work done by employees. A significant function of public relations is to “help tell the stories” of aggregated CSR efforts through sustainability reports, media pitching and publicity efforts, and program visibility internally and externally (“Interview 2,” 2013; “Interview 3,” 2013; “Interview 4,” 2013). Professionals aggregate the sustainability information from various departments, facilities and programs to produce and disseminate a comprehensive picture of the company’s entire initiative.

Communicating CSR Programs

Perhaps the most mentioned role of PR was the communication function. Nearly all practitioners mentioned a high significance threshold that responsibility stories must meet before publication. Not all programs or activities are communicated; instead organizations often organically serve the community and only publicize broad data or significant achievements. Several practitioners only promote extreme accomplishments through traditional outlets so as not to boast or brag about programs (“Interview 7,” 2013; “Interview 3,” 2013). However, social media offers an outlet to subtly express brief and current successes. One practitioner explained, “We tend not to beat our chest about those kinds of things because culturally we think it’s bragging; but one area where I know we’ve done a little more is in social media” (“Interview 3,” 2013). Each organization’s communication preferences varied, guided by their organizational values and cultures.

Like the firms’ preference for media outlets, content preferences also differed. Some corporations emphasize the human-interest element of corporate social responsibility, highlighting employee volunteerism, feature stories and testimonials. “We have a lot of metrics and measurements, of course, but to try to capture the essence of that is to really hear from people outside the company, to show that value” (“Interview 5,” 2013). In contrast, other companies stress results and outcomes as a guard against greenwashing: “We only really talk about these programs when we have some results to share. The idea

behind that is not only is this more valuable but beyond a communications standpoint, maybe others can learn from that knowledge sharing and multiply the impact” (“Interview 7,” 2013).

Most companies combine the approaches into what one professional called “balanced reporting” in which the company uses stories and press releases surrounding the results-focused report to expand on successes, innovations, positives and negatives (“Interview 6,” 2013). A practitioner described her strategy for balanced reporting in which she “humanizes” the information but supports it with statistics (“Interview 9,” 2013).

In an extreme effort to avoid superficial and boastful promotion, one organization conducts behind-the-scene support, promoting an employee-supported, independent program, without an association with the corporation. The practitioner described the process: “We won’t necessarily take credit or put our logo on it but we’ll just help make sure it’s successful because if it’s successful in making our environment better then it makes us a strong society and it makes our company stronger” (“Interview 3,” 2013). In this way, the corporation can focus on the program, and constituents can enjoy the benefits without potential skepticism and criticism of a corporate sponsor. Regardless of the broad communication strategy, professionals agreed that the emphasis should be on the positive impact of the programs rather than on pure organizational publicity.

Externally, practitioners use all available communication tactics to reach an audience. Each company published an annual or biennial responsibility report aggregating all efforts and results from across the spectrum of programs. Many follow the standards developed by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) to guide these reports; however, each company reports at varied levels of completeness, balancing GRI reporting standards with sensitive corporate information.

Perhaps the most significant outlet for communicating CSR initiatives is through online and social media channels, contributing to many organizations’ environmental sustainability efforts by reducing paper waste. Typically, the annual or biennial reports are published on the websites along with descriptions of each initiative, goals for each program, and measurements of success. Digital tactics include online press releases, e-postcards to announce new reports, Facebook events, and video services.

The interactivity of social media affords the opportunity to connect with community members, increase awareness, expand programs, and monitor the impact of their programs through social media interactions.

Internally, many practitioners highlight employee's work so that others will "catch the bug" and get involved in programs ("Interview 3," 2013). Professionals use a variety of traditional and digital tactics, including internal websites and news channels, posters and company magazines, town hall meetings, and word-of-mouth communication to spread the programs at the grassroots level. One organization holds town hall meetings in which the leadership discusses sustainability efforts ("Interview 3," 2013; "Interview 6," 2013). Several professionals share successful tactics between organization branches, regionally, domestically and internationally, to leverage knowledge and craft exemplary programs.

Integrating CSR and PR

Interviewees gave public relations the responsibility to spread and embed the culture of sustainability throughout the corporation. This role is an area of growth for both CSR and PR. A strongly-embedded responsibility culture allows corporate responsibility to continue regardless of executive support or transitions within the company. Tasking PR with the spread and cultivation of this culture provides an outlet for public relations to develop a leadership role in the planning and implementation of CSR initiatives.

Several practitioners also noted the increasing incorporation of CSR news into conventional and pre-existing PR communication efforts. This integration of CSR stories into other communications functions further embeds corporate responsibility into the culture and daily operations of the organization. They specifically pointed to the increasing transparency and reporting requirements as an opportunity for future growth in PR's role in corporate social responsibility efforts:

Sustainability reporting, CSR reporting will become integrated because there is so much overlap as to what the stakeholders of those reports are wanting to see now... I think that corporate communications groups are going to be playing a bigger role, and part of that too is embedding

sustainability in all of their communications. Sustainability is really a way of how you do your business. It's not just a one-off separate program. ("Interview 6," 2013)

The integration impacts corporate communications functions, as one professional described the importance of a "bigger understanding" of the company's efforts ("Interview 5," 2013). PR practitioners cannot be experts only in the communications field but also must recognize the integrated nature of responsibility in all facets of the organization and communicate the broader meaning of the company.

In short, public relations professionals have a supportive and advisory role in program development, and a significant output function in communication efforts. One practitioner involved in these roles eloquently summarizes public relations' complementary role: "It's really all interrelated and I can't be just out there doing my product PR thing without having a greater understanding of my company and what its stakeholders expect of it and the issues that are out there in the community.... You're no longer working in a vacuum" ("Interview 5," 2013). PR professionals use their expertise to develop, support, expand and promote active CSR programs, regardless of the publicity potential.

Discussion

The 11 public relations professionals, each involved in their respective corporate responsibility programs, demonstrated a strong consensus regarding the relationship between public relations and corporate social responsibility. The findings offer an applied best practices perspective to the academic scholarship. Interviewed professionals were adamantly opposed to PR ownership of responsibility initiatives, but promoted a cross-functional approach with shared responsibility across the business and public relations in a supportive or complementary role.

According to the interviews, communicators view public relations and corporate social responsibility as interrelated but independent. This paradox exists as corporate responsibility efforts saturate the company and engage multiple departments. With a leadership role in communication and support of CSR programs, PR professionals share responsibility with other sectors for strategy and goal development. One practitioner summarizes public relations' complementary role: "I don't necessarily

equate CSR as an aspect of PR. We aren't doing it for PR purposes but I am applying my PR skills to make sure that people know what we are doing in our community" ("Interview 1," 2013).

Successful corporate social responsibility efforts permeate every aspect of the company, from top management to the public relations department to the new recruits. Public relations professionals' skills and expertise play a crucial role in the successful development, execution, and promotion of these programs, but their role is often no greater than other departments. Instead, thriving corporate responsibility initiatives are characterized by teams in which PR advises and supports the broader business and community goals. The transparent, program-focused, embedded efforts outlined in the interviews defend against criticism and skepticism from PR involvement. Public relations and corporate responsibility are complementary and mutually supportive, both serving the business and community, but not one-in-the-same. Key findings include the following:

- Corporate responsibility requires cross-functional collaboration from all relevant business sectors to develop the most effective programs. The most successful CSR programs are embedded in the organizational structure, autonomous from other departments, and often have a Corporate Responsibility Officer in a leadership position.
- Public relations and corporate responsibility are interrelated but independent. Public relations departments share responsibility with other departments and teams of employees to build comprehensive responsibility programs.
- Professionals should recognize and utilize the importance of their position as a boundary-spanner and aggregator to inform and communicate CSR efforts internally and externally. This communication function includes spreading and promoting an internal culture of corporate responsibility to engage employees in the process.
- Externally, PR practitioners can capitalize on the opportunities provided by social media to more broadly communicate responsibility programs and successes.

These findings support much of the academic literature as interviewees discussed both positive and skeptical perspectives evident in the research. Their statements ultimately reflect the complex nature of the PR-CSR relationship. Like Clark (2000) and Zurita (2006), PR professionals discussed the similarity but separation of public relations and corporate responsibility. Though both are involved in similar tasks and functions, they are often separated in the organizational structure. Moreover, PR professionals draw on the wide variety of communication tactics noted in the literature. In particular,

digital and social media and corporate websites have become significant outlets for CSR reporting and interaction (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007). However, these communication strategies are influenced and moderated by prior reputations and organizational culture (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010; Snider, Hill & Martin, 2003; Villagra & Lopez, 2013). Thus, though similarities emerged, each organization illustrated a different media and content preference for the actual implementation of CSR communication.

This research develops the growing body of literature addressing corporate social responsibility programs, particularly as related to public relations. The results indicate a potential leadership role for public relations and areas for future scholarship, combining the professional application and academic study of public relations. With continuing technological innovations and increasing stakeholder expectations of corporate responsibility programs, PR practitioners will be challenged to define their role to promote corporate initiatives but avoid public skepticism. The best practices approach presents a blueprint for existing public relations and CSR programs to develop an effective, beneficial model to fulfill consumer expectations of CSR communication efforts.

Limitations and Future Research

This project was limited particularly in its small scope and sample size. The scope of this study was confined to the relationship between public relations and corporate responsibility, though many other questions related to CSR have not yet been extensively addressed in research. The sample size was especially limited by the unavailability of many companies to participate in interviews. Future studies should broaden the sample to include additional companies on the CSR lists and perhaps expand to foreign corporations.

Opportunities abound for future study in corporate social responsibility and public relations. A communicator phrased it best when he concluded the interview with, "We don't have all the answers either" ("Interview 7," 2013). Professionals mentioned challenges associated with measuring corporate social responsibility, proving the success of a particular program apart from hidden or unrelated factors, or finding the appropriate direction for a broad CSR program based on the company's competitive

advantage. Future studies should explore the process and criteria by which corporations select their area of focus for responsibility programs and measure the success or effectiveness of initiatives.

Perhaps the most important area of future research is in the process companies follow to develop successful corporate responsibility programs. All of the professionals interviewed in this study work in large organizations praised for their thriving programs. Though suggested in several of the interviews, two of the professionals, in particular, discussed a process by which companies develop programs. One practitioner involved specifically in corporate responsibility admitted that her company continues to develop and improve CSR processes. She suggested that companies might emphasize “tangible” or tactical goals as the responsibility culture spreads throughout the company (“Interview 8,” 2013). Similarly, a communicator in a company with highly successful programs drew on previous experiences and interactions to suggest that in the earliest stages, corporate responsibility may be born out of public affairs departments. In these situations, public relations practitioners identify the responsibility efforts already present in the business, whether with altruistic or profit-maximization motives, recognize the opportunity, and aggregate the disorganized initiatives (“Interview 4,” 2013).

Regardless of the path of future research, this study illustrates that public relations plays a crucial role in corporate social responsibility as an advisor, communicator, aggregator, and boundary-spanner. Public relations professionals offer a unique perspective on the effectiveness of programs, perspective of stakeholders, and impact on the business. However, public relations must remain as a complementary or supportive role to CSR to develop the most successful responsibility programs and counteract the skepticism and criticism often levied against these efforts and evidenced in some of the academic literature. With continued research, corporate responsibility will evolve into a more cohesive, unified field of study informing corporate programs throughout sectors of society.

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