

Briefings

Expert advice and short case studies



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Engaging with youth to choose the right CR initiative

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Within the role of CR professionals, two points require careful consideration: selecting the right initiative from a wide pool of possibilities, and foreseeing how the selected initiative will be perceived by various stakeholders. In today's CR agenda, these two factors – stakeholder engagement and issue selection – are most important. A matrix of only these two variables would result in an infinite number of possibilities leading to, at least, an equal amount of potential initiatives. Stakeholders range from employees at all company levels and geographical locations, through consumers and governmental agencies, all the way to indigenous groups in remote regions. There is a similarly wide array of issues involved, from international labor practices, accountability and ethical behavior to environmental impacts.

A successful initiative is one that is effective in its action – that is, addressing an important issue while targeting the right audience, leading to concrete results – and is additionally well perceived by other external stakeholder groups. An uncommon but “ideal” starting point is to look at external groups with a specific interest in sustainable development – for example, youth networks.

The following are some ideas from the project “World YES Forum – Students Shaping the Future,” an ETHsustainability program in which members of the Youth Encounter on Sustainability (YES) Forum have developed a list of CR initiatives in the context of climate change.

Idea selection and perception

The Youth Encounter on Sustainability (YES) is an innovative educational program set up by the

Alliance for Global Sustainability (AGS), an international research and educational partnership. The AGS is comprised of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT, USA), the University of Tokyo (Japan), Chalmers University of Technology (Sweden) and the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETH, Switzerland). Members of the YES Forum are young academics and professionals with an interest in applying sustainable development in their respective areas of expertise. The members of this focus group are future decision-makers (e.g. clients, employees, and business partners). Many are already involved and deal with issues of sustainability as part of their career studies and business and community engagement. Many have already launched concrete projects in their home countries.

Proactive and forward-looking businesses in search of new ideas and synergic partnerships should be attentive to the opinions of these young leaders. They are a cost-effective source of innovative ideas that will help to tackle the future perception of CR initiatives. Furthermore, such engagement is a way to tap into an elite pool of human resources.

In short, engaging with the future should mean involving tomorrow's stakeholders and progressive corporations as today's solution-seekers.

CR initiatives

The following CR initiatives table is the outcome of the project report *Corporate Social Responsibility and Climate Change* (information on stages and current development can be found on the World YES Forum's website at www.wyf.ethz.ch, under “Working Themes”). These recommendations

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address the corporate sector, its role and importance for sustainable development, and its energy-intensive processes. Although the cement sector was taken as case study, the ideas presented here have the potential to be applied to other sectors.

The following initiatives not only add to the holistic concept of CR and directly reflect the generally accepted definition of sustainable

development of future generations, but also present the company as an active member of society looking for concrete solutions for today and tomorrow's world issues. The nine most important ideas are shown in the table, below.

www.wyf.ethz.ch

A. Education and awareness	Reason/benefits	Monitoring and evaluation process	Business reason
1. Sponsor/support youth and education projects on climate change	Engagement with future creative problem-solvers; use of projects and initiatives as starting points for new internal changes; open door for potential quality recruitment; project image as a proactive company; get a valuable product; exposure and publicity	Problem-solving contests; number of entries received; number of students involved; relevance of class project for company; amount of funding allocated	- Increase candidates' recruiting pool - Cost-effective means for idea development - Publicity and exposure
2. Joint campaigns with NGOs	Support NGO initiatives aligned with company's mission; promote awareness-raising; serve as basic knowledge transfer; get public attention on issues like energy and material consumption; be known as an active positive participant; improve relationship with NGO	Carry out impact surveys on awareness-raising campaign; measure media attention; public impact (telephone survey)	- Corporate partnerships are usually tax deductible - Strengthen image - Employee motivation through voluntary program (productivity)
3. Employee engagement in energy reduction	Promote green offices (raise awareness among employees); introduce efficient energy-saving technologies; engage employees with concrete activities	Direct money saving by reducing energy consumption; number of involved staff; measure energy reduction and direct CO ₂ savings	- Employee motivation - Reduce costs from energy and material consumption
B. Stakeholder engagement and communication	Reason/benefits	Monitoring and evaluation process	Business reason
4. Community Advisory Panels	Start a dialogue and partnership with various relevant society actors; define priorities for activities between company and stakeholders; create sense of action towards activities; increase transparency in communication; elaborate new ideas for CSR activities; expand non-financial but long-term benefits; recognize different stakeholder views; "feel the pulse of society"	Audit the process by external party; develop a global stakeholder map and see extent of involvement; number of community actors involved and actively engaged	- Increase influential networking possibilities - Increase market share
5. Join/create national and international alliances in the sector	Be at the forefront of the cement sector; scientific exchange in latest technical implementation and upcoming technologies; promote action at regional and international levels; consolidation of best practices and promotion of sustainable technology transfer; increase credibility of the cement sector through collaboration; influence the sector on SD issues; special engagement for MNs and SMEs to have a say; bring prestige and good publicity to involved companies; project image as a company worth investing in	Sector setting common targets for emission reduction; use platform to share best practices; publish implementation status (milestones accomplished) and discussion	- Strengthen international presence and image on pressing issues - Alliances for business partnerships - Participate in and influence policy development
6. Promote socially responsible investment standards	Stronger loyalty from investors; reach new investor groups; show long-term commitment to core activities linked to world issues; emphasize proactivity of the company; jump on SRI as part of mainstream investment	Evaluate in terms of percentage of SRI; external ratings by companies (SD indexes)	- Capture new investment; social venture capital - Increase shareholder value - Decrease ethics, values and principles risk profile
7. Two-way discussion platforms (customers, suppliers, etc.)	Invite specific target groups (customers, suppliers, etc.); closer dialogue with stakeholders; incite discussions and let actors know what is being done about the issue; potential setting for future recruitment; improve relationship with customers, suppliers and others; share values and principles with suppliers and customers to avoid possible circumstances for projects that have the potential for major adverse social or environmental impacts/risks	Architects, constructors, promoters and company improve their communication processes; feedback from visits and discussions; frequency of these meetings	- Possibility of increase in market share - Build competitive advantage - Human and intellectual capital - Brand value and reputation
C. Best practices	Reason/benefits	Monitoring and evaluation process	Business reason
8. Emission reduction	CO ₂ reduction	Information on best and most cost-effective technology; report yearly efficiency improvement; savings on electricity costs; report yearly CO ₂ emissions (net and percentage); report fuel mix for process	- Improve efficiency of processes - Save on fuel costs - Candidate for CO ₂ emissions trading - Less dependent on volatile energy prices
9. Energy efficiency	Use of cost-effective technologies available; promote competitiveness and application of best practices; compliance with international energy and emission treaties; show proactivity in setting and meeting targets before they become mandatory; decrease dependency on oil sector; image improvement; optimize production line; reduce operating costs of electricity		