RESEARCH ARTICLE:

PR Practitioners' Conceptualisation of the Role of Stakeholder Engagement in Corporate Social Responsibility Planning and Implementation

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Abstract

Over the years, practitioners and stakeholders have regarded the practice of stakeholder engagement as a non-essential part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The only standard corporate practice was to invest in developing CSR and sustainability programmes with minimal involvement of those they materially affect, also known as their stakeholders. However, engaging with stakeholders is no longer optional. In theory, the reflective public relations paradigm emphasises the need for organisations to meet stakeholder and societal expectations, values, norms, and standards by conducting themselves in a socially responsible manner in their communities. Against this background, this study evaluated PR practitioners' conceptualisation of the role of stakeholder engagement in Corporate Social Responsibility planning and implementation using the Public Relations reflective paradigm conceptualised by Susanne Holmström. The study also adopted the stakeholder approach to CSR formulated by Freeman. The study followed an exploratory qualitative research approach, involving six PR practitioners involved in CSR within their organisations in Cape Town. The researchers selected participants through the purposive sampling technique. The findings of this study revealed that stakeholder inclusivity and engagement vary for each organisation. However, in many organisations' corporate social responsibility strategies, the most common goal is to engage and put all their stakeholders at the forefront.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility; stakeholders; PR practitioners; triple bottom line

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a self-regulatory mechanism whereby organisations actively undertake environmental scanning to uncover global trends, ethical principles, and legal standards for compliance (Saylor, 2021). According to Taghian, D'Souza and Polonsky (2015), CSR is a voluntary action an organisation takes and communicates to its stakeholders to benefit social and environmental causes. Grunig (2001) states that CSR, often referred to as a corporate social investment, reflects excellent public relations. Golob and Bartlett (2007) posit that organisations adopt CSR to be perceived as socially responsible and gain investor and other stakeholder support. CSR has, over the years, become a focal area of debate amongst businesses and academic scholars. This concept has been in existence since the early 1950s. However, it has gained increasing prominence due to increased stakeholder demands and government and civil society limitations in addressing complex societal issues. CSR shifted its focus from shareholders to stakeholders by acknowledging the crucial stakeholder roles in every organisation. This shift has resulted in stakeholder engagement being an integral part of CSR. Greenwood (2007) argues that stakeholder engagement gives the impression of corporate responsibility. She further states that if an organisation shows commitment through policy and practice to stakeholder involvement, it acts responsibly towards its stakeholders.

In support of the above argument, Freeman (2017) posits that the main similarity between stakeholder engagement theory and CSR is that they emphasise incorporating societal interests into organisational operations. According to Holmström's (1996, 1997) reflective paradigm of Public

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Relations, CSR is the core of corporate communication practice. The goal of the reflective paradigm is to ensure that stakeholders' values, norms, and standards are considered by PR practitioners when designing PR interventions. Holmström (2002) posits that the prominence of the reflective paradigm in CSR is the ability to carry an outside inward approach instead of an inside outward approach. It implies that an organisation must find its specific identity and act independently. On the other hand, it figures out how to comprehend itself in its larger societal setting and creates limitations and planning instruments in its cycles to perceive the relationship between social systems.

The reflective paradigm enables organisations to balance their interests with their stakeholders to develop and maintain balanced relationships with all their stakeholders and society. Despite acknowledging the criticality of the reflective paradigm in CSR, academic research that examines whether CSR interventions have evolved to an approach that involves stakeholder planning and implementation from a public relations perspective remains scarce (Ansu-Mensah *et al.* (2021). Furthermore, the paucity of academic research that explores the relationship between stakeholder engagement and CSR from a public relations perspective has led to a situation where stakeholder engagement has been slightly disjointed from CSR despite the two being inevitably bound together (Carroll and Brown, 2018; Harjoto and Laksmana, 2018). Against this background, this study utilises CSR and public relations theories to gain insights into how PR practitioners in South Africa conceptualise the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR planning and implementation.

Numerous studies have established the relationship between CSR and stakeholder engagement (Freeman and Dmytriyev, 2017; Nikolova and Arsić, 2017; Greenwood, 2007 and Clark, 2000). However, what remains unclear and under-theorised is whether South African organisations engage with their stakeholders during CSR planning and implementation as recommended in academic literature and the reflective paradigm of Public Relations. It has become clear that any failure to engage with stakeholders will undermine the legitimacy intent of the organisation. However, there is a lack of academic research exploring the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR from a South African public relations perspective. This study, therefore, sought to understand PR practitioners' conceptualisation of the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR practices within a South African context.

Dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility

According to Jain and Jamali (2015), CSR can be conceptualised in the form of a pyramid. This is one of the most classical typologies in the field of CSR, which includes economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary aspects in that order. Carroll's CSR pyramid formulated in 1991 is famous in academia and the business world because of its pragmatic nature. According to Carroll (2016), the motivation behind the pyramid was to highlight CSR's definitional angle and outline the structure of the four-part framework. The pyramid was chosen as a mathematical plan since it is essential, natural, and worked to withstand the trial of time.
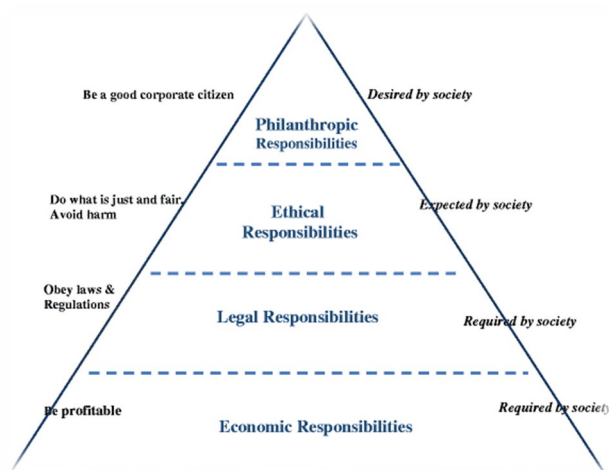

Figure 1: Pyramid of corporate social responsibility dimensions (Carroll, 2016)

Nochai and Nochai (2014) argue that the economic responsibilities are the fundamental tier of Carroll's CSR pyramid; this involves being profitable. Economic responsibilities coexist with legal obligations and are the free enterprise system (Nochai and Nochai, 2014). According to Carroll (2016), organisations should comply with society's minimal ground rules and "codified ethics". According to Nochai and Nochai (2014), ethical responsibilities include exercises and practices expected by the public and done by organisations intentionally concerning decency, equity, and respect for or protecting stakeholders' ethical rights. Charitable responsibilities are not necessarily ethical or moral. They are located at the most voluntary and discretionary dimension of corporate responsibility and are not linked necessarily to profits or the ethical culture of the organisations (Nochai and Nochai, 2014).

CSR, the Stakeholder Theory, and the Stakeholder Engagement Process

A stakeholder engagement process should be reiterative, allowing engagement to benefit from diligent planning, thorough reporting, and learning due to appropriate evaluation and monitoring. It emphasises the importance of ensuring that organisations formulate and use the planned stakeholder engagement process. It is to assist in enforcing a successful two-way communication process. Jeffery (2014) expanded on Sequeira and Warner's (2007) stakeholder engagement handbook by articulating the seven steps for successful stakeholder engagement. Figure 2 below indicates the model of a '*meaningful*' stakeholder engagement process as conceptualised by Jeffery (2014). This model suggests a proactive two-way communication process between an organisation and its stakeholders. Communication, opinions, and suggestions flow in both directions with this process. Thus, an effective stakeholder engagement strategy is vastly significant as it assists organisations develop and maintaining meaningful relationships.
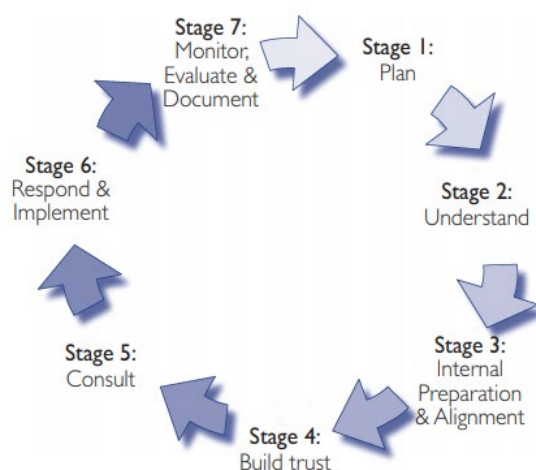

Figure 2: Stakeholder Engagement process (Jeffery, 2014)

According to Jeffery (2014), Stage 1 involves classifying the primary objectives an organisation wants to attain, the issues they wish to discuss, and the stakeholders it would like to highlight in the engagement process. It is an overall plan of how an organisation seeks to engage with its stakeholders. For Jeffery (2009), the second stage, an organisation should try to understand its stakeholders, from understanding their needs, objectives, issues, and interests to understanding the impact they have on the organisation. Organisations start profiling their stakeholders to get a holistic overview of who they are and their contributions to the organisation. The third stage is the process where an organisation starts preparing the engagement process internally. Stakeholder engagement teams are identified as well as stakeholder representatives. Jeffery (2009) further states that building up an internal stakeholder management team to take on focal management and backing local units on issues relevant to them will assist with making a more organised methodology. This stage also helps in dedicating appropriate time and resources to identify possible commonalities between the organisation and its stakeholders.

At Stage 4, building trust is an integral part of the stakeholder engagement process, an organisation needs to trust its stakeholders, and the stakeholders also need to trust the organisation. At this stage, the organisation identifies the different levels of trust and willingness to trust. Building trust enables information to be shared both ways and breaks barriers. When trust is present between an organisation and its stakeholders, both parties can respect each other's opinions. At the consultation stage, an organisation can use a wide range of platforms to consult with its stakeholders; a consultation can happen through personal interviews, workshops, focus groups, public or private meetings, surveys, stakeholder panels etc. Therefore, it is an organisation to identify representatives who will participate in the consultation process—these need to be the people who are by the organisation's activities. At the sixth stage, the organisation decides on a plan of action for each issue agreed upon. After that, they formulate proposals for action in the light of the possible response from stakeholders to each submission. The response proposal will then assist the organisation in providing fair reactions to each of the issues addressed. Finally, at Stage 7, the organisation monitors and documents all the information shared through the engagement process. In addition, it assists the organisation in CSR reporting. It is also the phase to gather a broad scope of perspectives to survey the achievement and learning points of the engagement process, particularly to comprehend cost-benefit, including benefits such as reputation, risk management and new plans of action.

Stakeholder engagement is a vital part of social responsibility and the quest for the corporate triple bottom line. Freeman and Dmytriyev (2017) aver that CSR and stakeholder engagement are inseparable as both emphasise the importance of considering societal interests when formulating business operations and strategies. Furthermore, by engaging effectively with stakeholders, organisations can determine the social and environmental issues bedevilling communities and, thus, provide CSR activities that present assistance. Freeman and Dmytriyev (2017) further argue that the main similarity between the two concepts is that CSR and stakeholder theory highlights the importance of including societal interests in business operations; as much as there are similarities between the concepts, Freeman and Dmytriyev (2017) state that the two concepts differ. The stakeholder theory suggests the key and overall business responsibilities, such as corporate responsibilities. On the other hand, CSR prioritises one aspect of the business: its positioning towards society, such as its social orientation and other business responsibilities.
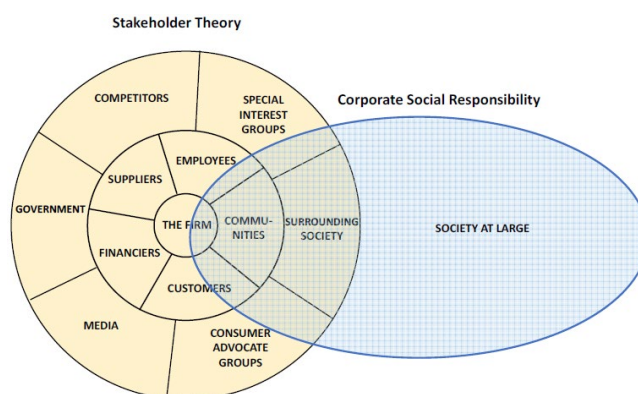

Figure 3: The relation between Stakeholder Theory and CSR (Freeman and Dmytriyev, 2017)

As stated earlier, CSR and stakeholder theory underline the importance of company responsibility toward communities and society. The above illustration (Figure 2) by Freeman and Dmytriyev (2017) suggests that stakeholder theory tends to centre its attention within a reasonable reach of a company's activities. Thus, it focuses on the company's local communities, the inner circle that stands for primary stakeholders and surrounding society; the outer ring stands for secondary stakeholders. According to Freeman and Dmytriyev (2017), CSR mainly focuses on ethical labour practices and environmental efforts. The stakeholder theory attempts to embrace company responsibilities toward its stakeholders and its duties towards the company. Freeman and Dmytriyev (2017) further argue that the stakeholder theory also discourses organisation responsibility toward lenders and suppliers. CSR doesn't stress these stakeholder groups and sees responsibility.

The King Report in South Africa (2009) provides organisations that practice CSR with the codes of governance that highlight the responsibilities of stakeholders, the process of risk management and incorporation, what constitutes organisational integrity, sustainability, and the factors that determine the establishment of corporate governance. The King Report's importance in South Africa's CSR milieu became apparent with the authoritative growth in Company Act No. 1 of 2008. The Act provides guidelines for dealing with corporate governance issues in South Africa. For example, regarding the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), the Act proposes a voluntary foundation for governance that empowers organisations recorded in the Exchange. In addition, the Act requires such organisations to implement voluntary CSR practices (Visser et al., 2010). In South Africa, CSR is no longer just a mere aspect of a business that an organisation needs to have. It is one of the business requirements recorded in law and regulations to the *Companies Act No. 71 of 2008*. Therefore, it should be at the forefront of every stakeholder's mind.

According to Kabir, Mukuddem-Petersen, and Petersen (2015), in South Africa, CSR became an essential issue to the economy and the public at large as one of the measures put in place to address the country's socio-economic challenges that surfaced before the country gained its democracy in 1994 (The CSI Handbook, 2008). Therefore, the contribution of businesses, government, regulatory bodies, and other organisations to society is vital to a greater degree for addressing the country's socio-economic problems. Johannes (2016) states that the South African approach toward CSR consists of policies, the King IV report, the BBBEE scorecard and sector-related guidelines. It emphasises leadership, business ethics, sustainable development, reporting and communication. The South African Companies Act does not force companies to engage in CSR activities. However, the King II, III, and King IV report openly address organisations' need and relevance to acknowledge stakeholders and adopt a 'triple-bottom-line' approach (Dekker and Esser, 2008).

Conceptual Framework

The reflective paradigm conceptualised by Susan Holmström (1996) characterises insightful marvels like the TBL (People, Planet, and Profit), multi-stakeholder discourse, symmetrical communication, moral records, and poly-values orientation. This theory/paradigm is a fundamental theory to support this study as it views an organisation from an 'outside' perspective showing concern for broader societal issues, including stakeholder engagement. However, there is little knowledge about the PR practitioners' conceptualisation of the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR in South Africa. Thus, the reflective paradigm of PR guided the researchers in employing the strategic component of stakeholder engagement. The stakeholder approach to CSR is a theory Edward R. Freeman developed in his book "*Strategic Management: A stakeholder approach*" (1984). This approach encourages organisations to build stakeholder engagement strategies by conducting an environmental scanning to identify and invest in all the relationships to ensure their long-term success. Therefore, this study used this theory to evaluate and understand how PR practitioners used by South African organisations to incorporate stakeholder engagement in their CSR planning and implementation from a PR practitioner's point of view. In addition, the theory serves as a foundation for understanding the relationship between CSR and stakeholder engagement and the importance of incorporating stakeholders into CSR planning and implementation.

Also, the study employed the Tripe Bottom Line (TBL) theory. The TBL is a framework formulated by John Elkington (1994) to gauge sustainability during the mid-1990s by incorporating another structure to quantify execution in corporate America. The TBL went past the customary benefits, return on investment, and shareholder value, including environmental and social dimensions. By concentrating on detailed investment results concerning execution and the interrelated components of profits, people, and the planet. The TBL approach can now be utilised as an essential tool to support sustainability goals (Slaper and Hall, 2011). The researchers deemed the theory appropriate to support this study as it suggests that multiple stakeholders other than the financial stakeholders should benefit from an organisation's operations. It aids the researcher in understanding the importance of stakeholder inclusivity and how that comes to life in South African organisations. This theory assists the researcher in uncovering how PR practitioners engage with their stakeholders for

CSR purposes and what plans and techniques are being put in place to ensure transparency during the planning and implementation of stakeholder engagement.

Method

This study employed an exploratory qualitative research approach to fulfil its objectives. According to Dawson (2002), a qualitative research methodology explores attitudes, behaviour, and experiences through interviews, focus groups discussion, etc. Ritchie et al. (2013) describe qualitative research as a research methodology that is interpretative and naturalistic. It involves studying a social phenomenon by taking the viewpoints and records of participants as a starting point. This methodology allowed the researcher to gather an extensive understanding of PR practitioners' conceptualisation of the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR planning and implementation within South African organisations. The researcher conducted interviews with six PR practitioners involved in CSR. The researcher selected the participants through the purposive sampling technique. Participants were chosen because they have extensive knowledge of their organisations' CSR planning and implementation. The selection criteria of the organisations were based on the past and present CSR projects which have and are still contributing to a communities' social growth.

Findings

Stakeholder engagement has consistently been vital for public relations but has gotten more consideration because of the presentation of real-time media and new hybrid forms of marketing, advertising, public relations, and CSR (Luoma-aho, 2015). The findings of this study revealed that stakeholder engagement had gained more relevance within the context of CSR compared to the past. As a result, PR practitioners undertaking CSR activities for their organisations now consider stakeholder engagement an essential part of CSR and a considerable part of their business strategy. The findings also show that PR practitioners are more inclined to transparency and effective communication with their stakeholders. At the same time, they continuously improve their CSR strategies by ensuring that their stakeholder engagement approach aligns with their overall business strategy. In practice, they provide that their stakeholder engagement plan enforces transparency and two-way communication. The findings also revealed that organisations/PR practitioners now consider all their stakeholders a critical part of CSR. Practitioners who were part of this study highlighted that their consideration and consultation of the reflective paradigm and TBL approach had assisted them in developing internal CSR plans which were not part of their stakeholder engagement plans. Their main concern was the communities in which they operate and the environment in the past. Still, with the TBL approach emphasising people, planet, and profit, they had to relook their strategy to ensure that all three components are at the forefront of their stakeholder approach to CSR.

According to Amoako (2017), engaging with stakeholders during the planning and implementation of CSR activities could result in the organisation being actively involved in initiatives that positively impact the community. The findings revealed that as much as it is essential to be transparent to your stakeholders, it is also necessary for the organisation to identify the initiatives that involve specific stakeholders. Including all the stakeholders in all activities often doesn't work as some stakeholders may not necessarily be interested in everything being communicated. Still, when an organisation identifies what to communicate to which stakeholder, it is easier for the message to get across to the right stakeholders and use the suitable medium that the stakeholder understands. On the other hand, the findings show that communicating with all the stakeholders could assist in carrying out the activities as some stakeholders have specialised capabilities to assist in carrying out the work. They may not necessarily be involved in CSR activities. Still, their expertise could assist in ensuring that the organisation contributes to its host communities positively. The findings are like those of Adongo, Kim, and Elliot (2019), which state that the participation of stakeholders in CSR planning ought to be seen as a customarily useful and community-oriented plan appearing as a 'moral partnership of equals

According to Greenwood (2007), stakeholder engagement gives the impression of CSR. It can be understood as practices that the organisation assumes to positively include stakeholders in

organisational activities. The findings revealed that engaging with stakeholders during CSR activities demonstrates the organisation as doing good and positively giving back to its host communities. This allows the organisation to understand better the needs of the communities in which they operate. Stakeholder engagement also allows the organisation to assess where and how it can assist its stakeholders; it can also help the organisation identify whether its CSR activities are aligned with the business objectives and corporate strategy. Greenwood (2001) supports these findings by stating that stakeholder involvement acts responsibly towards these stakeholders if an organisation shows commitment through policy and practice. Furthermore, the more an organisation engages with its stakeholders, the more accountable and responsible it is to these stakeholders. Thus, stakeholder engagement plays a crucial role in CSR initiatives. When it is correctly implemented, it assists organisations in understanding their stakeholder needs and the stakeholders to understand the organisation's objectives and corporate strategy.

The findings also revealed that two-way communication plays a significant role in ensuring a successful stakeholder engagement between an organisation and its stakeholders. For an organisation to be regarded as socially responsible, it needs to meet with its stakeholders on equal terms and discuss and develop mutually beneficial outcomes regardless of its background or business knowledge. Chen and Zhang (2009) supported these findings when they highlighted that when an organisation implements a two-way communication strategy as part of its CRS planning and implementation, it has a great chance of having successful CSR initiatives and a good relationship with its stakeholders.

Approaches to Effectively Engage with Stakeholders during CSR Planning

According to Greyson and Hodges (2004), stakeholder engagement is equally important as all the other business functions. Greyson and Hodges (2004) further states that "Stakeholder engagement should be managed as one would manage any other business function". Jeffery (2009) further states that as more organisations have set up specific divisions to deal with their CSR activities, stakeholder language has gotten all-inclusive all through organisational marketing and public relations materials, attendant with the developing conviction that stakeholders can be fundamental to business performance. The findings revealed that with the growth of CSR in organisations, it has also become imperative for organisations to formulate a stakeholder plan that ensures their CSR activities and success. The findings have also shown that a socially responsible organisation requires an engagement plan as part of its communication strategy. Stakeholder engagement requires planned two-way communication, which aligns the organisation's objectives and the needs of its stakeholder, particularly its host communities.

The research findings also revealed that a few organisations have stakeholder engagement plans. Even though they differ from organisation to organisation, they must have an engagement plan aligned with their CSR objectives. From the findings, some organisations have specialised departments that focus mainly on stakeholder engagement to enforce their stakeholder engagement plan. Due to the importance of stakeholder engagement, new roles have emerged, such as "*stakeholder engagement specialist*" for a large organisation. This role is often carried out by PR practitioners who specialise in formulating stakeholder engagement plans and are responsible for disseminating information to the investor stakeholders. Organisations need to be perceived as good neighbours, and good corporate citizens, not just businesses, so many organisations introduce the CSR function to ensure that they do good for their stakeholders and their host communities. For example, in South Africa, the King Report on corporate governance guide organisation to become ethical and responsible citizens. The research findings highlighted organisational efforts to become socially responsible. Most organisations have different approaches, and each approach has its purpose. These organisations identify what they stand for and seek to align their values with their host communities to be socially responsible. The findings also revealed that PR practitioners understand the role of CSR for an organisation, and the responsibility lies within them to ensure that the organisation is engaging with all its stakeholders and is doing well for its surrounding communities. The research findings also uncovered that for an organisation to be socially responsible, it needs to ensure that it has a stakeholder engagement plan in

place, which will assist in identifying the stakeholder needs and providing that those align with the objectives and overall business strategy.

Being a good corporate citizen takes more than just donating money, food, clothes etc., under the assumption that the host communities need those. Stephenson (2016) states that strong moral and ethical standards guide an excellent corporate citizen in everyday interactions with clients, investors, and employees. That includes cautiously balancing investors' necessities with those of the community and continually thinking about the ecological effect of the business tasks. The findings also revealed that being socially responsible means knowing and understanding all stakeholders and considering the planet. It was also discovered that many South African corporations are progressively working with stakeholders to comprehend their perspectives and concerns on various ecological, social, corporate governance and financial issues to join and address those perspectives and problems in the organisational strategic decision-making processes. The research finding also highlighted that PR practitioners use the reflective paradigm of PR in their CSR planning and implementation to ensure that their CSR strategies align with the TBL approach.

To sum up, the findings revealed that PR practitioners share a common understanding of the strategic role of CSR. It was mentioned that CSR is now used as a strategic tool to attract investors, and when its well-executed, the higher the chances for an organisation to be viewed as socially responsible. Being a good corporate citizen is no longer a "nice to have." To remain a reliable, competitive, and profitable company, it's a "must-have" and CSR's strategic role. The research findings revealed that CSR is a significant business activity that organisations should include in their corporate strategy. Porter and Kramer (2002) state that "*Most companies feel compelled to give to charity. Few have figured out how to do it well*". Strategic CSR is not about handouts. It's about engaging with stakeholders to understand their needs better and ensuring that those are in line with the organisation's objectives. Many organisations have become more "socially responsible"; however, they all have their different approaches and end-goal. For example, some organisations are socially responsible for organisational benefits such as brand image, financial performance, and public relations. While some do it for ethical reasons (because it's the right thing to do), they understand that giving back is not just about giving money. It's about ensuring that the money makes a positive difference. Werther and Chandler (2006) state that "Strategic CSR is the incorporation of a holistic CSR perspective within a firm's strategic planning and core operations so that the firm is managed in the interest of a broad set of stakeholders to achieve maximum economic and social value over the medium to long term". The findings also revealed that when CSR is an integral part of an organisation's corporate strategy, it is also a way of maintaining the legitimacy of its host communities' actions by bringing stakeholders' concerns to the foreground.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Stakeholder engagement can be understood as practices that the organisation assumes to involve stakeholders positively in organisational activities such as CSR, PR, Marketing etc. This research reveals that stakeholder engagement is an organisational process that should be included in CSR planning and implementation and overall business activities. As part of CSR, stakeholder engagement can contribute to the business negatively and positively. The stakeholder engagement process is built on two-way communication aspects. When the stakeholder engagement plan is not well-executed, the engagement may have adverse outcomes as the communicated messages get distorted or misinterpreted. CSR requires proactive planning and management so that the organisation may operate well and effectively and fulfil and exceed the expectations of stakeholders and shareholders. He points out that CSR requires proactive planning and management so that the organisation may operate well and effectively and fulfil and exceed the expectations of stakeholders and shareholders. CSR requires proactive planning and management so that the organisation may operate well and effectively and not only fulfils but also exceeds expectations of stake and shareholders. He points out that CSR requires proactive planning and management so that the organisation may operate well and effectively and fulfil and exceed the expectations of stakeholders and shareholders. CSR requires

proactive planning and management so that the organisation may operate well and effectively and not only fulfils but also exceeds shareholders' expectations.

For stakeholder engagement to be successful in CSR, it needs to be well-executed and aligned with the organisation's objectives. Heath (2006) states that CSR requires proactive preparation and administration to work well and adequately and satisfy and surpass expectations for stakeholders and investors. The findings reveal that in South Africa, stakeholder engagement has become a vital force for encouraging CSR. Inside CSR, stakeholder engagement plays a crucial role in ensuring that its stakeholders have long-lasting mutual relationships. The research findings showed that engaging with stakeholders during CSR planning is a good business practice. An organisation needs to identify the planning phase to engage with stakeholders and identify which stakeholders to engage with for a particular project (Jeffery, 2009). Hamid, Haron and Amran (2017) argue that organisations are likely to confront a circumstance where a disparity of needs between authoritative choices and stakeholder anticipations will happen without drawing in stakeholders or taking their interest in CSR evaluations.

The research findings highlighted stakeholder inclusivity, another important aspect of CSR planning. This research revealed that PR practitioners recognise the role of stakeholders in CSR planning; they highlighted that it is essential that they include their stakeholders during the planning and implementation of CSR to ensure that they address the real stakeholder needs. It was also mentioned that stakeholders also play a role in contributing knowledge that drives the organisation's success. Stakeholders are the ones that make CSR possible for most organisations, starting from internal employees who research, plan, and execute CSR initiatives to communities who receive these initiatives and support the organisation's objective. Stakeholders play a crucial role in ensuring that the CSR plan is well managed and that communication about CSR initiatives is communicated to all the other stakeholders. The research findings revealed that not every organisation would have the same strategy for integrating stakeholder engagement into their CSR planning and implementation. However, the PR practitioners who were part of this study highlighted a few pointers which can be used as a starting point to incorporate stakeholders. The first stage is to align the stakeholder engagement strategy to the organisation's objectives by:

- Identifying a team within the organisation to specialise in all CSR activities
- Formulating a clear strategy
- Opening internal and external communication channels
- Defining stakeholders broadly and strategically
- Building CSR partnerships

PR professionals involved in this study did not tap into whether organisations use two-way communications as a communication stream for stakeholder engagement. As a result, it remains unclear whether stakeholders engage with organisations regarding their CRS activities or needs. The study recommends that PR/CSR practitioners open communication platforms that stakeholders can use to address their needs and suggest CSR initiatives. PR practitioners should ensure that both parties (organisation and stakeholders) effectively use the two-way communication stream to succeed in CSR activities. The current research doesn't reveal how stakeholders communicate with the organisations. It indicates that CSR planning and implementation communication is one-way, even though the stakeholder engagement process suggests that two-way communication be applied. The two-way symmetrical communication enables regular interaction between an organisation and its stakeholders. Therefore, PR practitioners need to open lines of communication for stakeholders to address their needs. They also need to regularly communicate with stakeholders to conduct CSR activities and check in on their stakeholders to build long-term mutual relationships.

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