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# **The Relationship between CSR and HRM: A Study of Large New Zealand Organisations**

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## Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and human resource management (HRM) are well established research fields. In recent years scholars have evinced greater interest in discussing the interdependence between these constructs. However, there is a dearth of empirical research focusing on the link between CSR and HRM in practice, resulting in limited understanding of how these two notions are linked in complex and dynamic organisational settings. To address this knowledge gap, this exploratory study examines the two-way relationship between CSR and HRM. It is positioned within an interpretive paradigm and employs qualitative research methodology, drawing on data from interviews with 29 CSR and HR professionals from large New Zealand organisations.

The study begins by focusing on the relationship **from CSR to HRM**, examining the relevance of CSR to HRM. From a stakeholder perspective, the empirical results reveal that CSR has some applicability to HRM. The study identifies four HR aspects that are often addressed under the scope of CSR. However, the findings also indicate that such a CSR–HRM interface is contingent upon CSR-related variables, namely the scope of CSR, the stage of CSR development and industry variation in the application of CSR.

Next the relationship **from HRM to CSR** is explored, highlighting the roles of HR in the development and implementation of CSR strategy. The findings, based on Ulrich's HR model, suggest that HR has significant involvement in the implementation of CSR by playing the roles of employee champion, change agent and administrative expert. Contrary to the assumptions outlined in the literature, however, the findings do not support the strategic partner roles of HR in developing CSR strategy. Importantly, these roles cannot be discussed with a 'one size fits all' approach as they are subject to organisational factors, such as CSR structure and roles and the position of HRM.

Finally, the study investigates **CSR–HRM integration** resulting from the two-way relationship. Drawing on the integration theory, the empirical results indicate that collaboration and interaction between CSR and HR professionals develop various levels of CSR–HRM integration, ranging from strong and moderate to weak. This is due to the influence of behavioural factors which emerge against the backdrop of CSR-related and organisational factors. The study concludes that the relationship between CSR and HRM is contextual in nature, and structural variables are more dominant than agency in shaping such a relationship.

Overall, the outcomes of this thesis expound a CSR–HRM relationship framework incorporating contextual factors, and develop a generous understanding of the two-way CSR–HRM link. This may assist scholars of future research and practitioners, both CSR and HR, towards more effective CSR–HRM integration. Hence, the contribution of this study is both theoretical and empirical.

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