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A BUSINESS TAKING THE SOCIAL INITIATIVE: THE CARTER HOLT HARVEY TASMAN CASE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the workplace of a sustainable award-winning company in a small New Zealand town. Its special focus is on investigating how employees perceive the firm's exercising of social responsibility in relation to its various communities and, in particular, its support of social initiatives.

Qualitative methods were used and multiple sources of evidence drawn on, in order to allow a broad range of historical, attitudinal and behavioural issues to be analysed in this single case study. The results demonstrated that employees tended not to view their employer's social initiatives in isolation, but to adopt a much broader focus that took into account other aspects of organisational life. Consequently, some employees were critical of the extent of support given the external community, while others (particularly those involved in social initiatives) saw room for expansion of the firm's support. Key factors found to be influencing the way in which employees' perceived the firm's support of social initiatives were the employer's workplace performance, the strong family-oriented workplace culture, and individuals' concerns for the local community. Business outcomes perceived to arise from employees' involvement in the firm's environmental and community initiatives included more satisfied and professionally-skilled employees with a higher personal profile, and a significantly enhanced reputation for the firm. The employer was thought to be mostly concerned with the latter outcome, and to be largely unaware of the potential for human resource benefits to simultaneously be accrued as employees engaged in social initiatives.

Areas identified for future research include how the skills and attributes acquired during the participation experience may impact on individual performance and affect team productivity; how employee forums established to promote management-employee collaboration on social initiatives may contribute towards the simultaneous development of more trusting and fruitful relationships, and improved interpersonal skills; and how both the separation and sharing of social and cultural values may influence the evolution of business-community relationships, and the nature of social initiatives supported by firms as they interact with their local communities.

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