

CAPACITY BUILDING IN CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THROUGH OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL): A NEED ASSESSMENT STUDY

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Abstract

“Corporate Social Responsibility” emerged in the early nineties as a new buzz in the business world, and since then has developed into a field with substantial and diverse career opportunities. The career opportunities in CSR encompass a diverse arena of fields including public, private and non government organizations. The behavior of companies in social, environmental and ethical contexts has been under spotlight since 1970s with the broadened public and media interest in how companies go about in their business. Consumers have become increasingly conscious about where and how their goods are produced. With improvement in communications, the demand for increased transparency and accountability in the corporate sector has also increased. With the passing of the Company's Act 2013 and the New CSR Rules 2014 which have come into effect since April 2014, India has become the first country to bring legislation on CSR. This has opened a whole gambit of job opportunities in public, corporate and non-profit sector.

The objectives of this needs assessment study were two fold - to assess the demand for the CSR programme in ODL and to identify content to be covered under the programme. Data was collected from 200 respondents. A purposive sampling was done targeting CSR executives of some of the leading Companies undertaking CSR, people working in NGOs and engaged in other development sectors implementing CSR, students of social work and management disciplines, faculty involved in distance education. The findings show that most of the respondents have resonated their opinion about the growing demand for CSR specialists in the job market. English was the medium of study most preferred by the respondents.

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Introduction

The philosophy and practice of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been prevalent in various countries at different points of time. "Corporate Social Responsibility is the continuing commitment by business to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the community and society at large" (WBCSD, 2000). CSR is the study of how businesses can contribute to the societies and environments within which they are located. It is a rapidly growing field of study involving factors such as public opinion and public relations, as well as charitable, environmental, and social justice initiatives. In spite of being one of the largest economies in the world, India inhabits a large number of people living in extreme poverty and an equally large number of undernourished children. Many of the policy initiatives of the country have been driven by the objective of reaching the disadvantaged and the marginalized. The inclusion of the CSR mandate under the Companies Act, 2013 is an attempt to supplement the government's efforts of equitably delivering the benefits of growth and to engage the Corporate World with the country's development agenda. The Companies in India are governed by Clause 135 of the Companies Act 2013 for performing their CSR activities. The companies with an annual turnover of 1,000 crore INR and more, or a net worth of 500 crore INR and more, or a net profit of five crore INR and more are bound by this clause. The CSR rules have been applicable from the fiscal year 2014-15 onwards and require the companies to set up a CSR Committee consisting of their board members. The Act requires the companies to spend at least 2% of their average net profit in the previous three years on CSR activities. The Act lists out a set of activities eligible under CSR. Companies may implement these activities taking into account the local conditions after seeking board approval. The indicative activities which can be undertaken by a company under CSR have been specified under Schedule VII of the Act. The company can implement its CSR activities either directly on its own or through its own non-profit foundation set up so as to facilitate this initiative or through independently registered non-profit organizations that have a record of at least three years in similar such related activities or by collaborating or pooling their resources with other companies.

Review of Literature

India has been active in CSR much before it became a global concern. The Tata Group has been one of the best quoted examples of CSR in India with more than 65percent of Tata Sons being owned by a trust. Corporate companies like ITC have made farmer development a vital part of its business strategy, and made major efforts to improve the livelihood standards of rural communities. Unilever is using micro enterprises to strategically augment the penetration of consumer products in rural markets. IT companies like TCS and Wipro have developed software to help teachers and children in schools across India to further the cause of education (UK Essays, 2013). State owned companies like Bharat Petroleum and Maruti Udyog have been ranked as the best companies in India doing CSR. Though the Indian companies have been involved in CSR activities much before the law came into existence, they have made very little progress in reporting the development projects.

As the CSR clause in the Companies Act 2013 covers companies that have a net profit of 5 crore and above, it is expected that many small and medium enterprises will qualify to take up CSR activities. According to Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs, a minimum of 6,000 Indian companies will be required to undertake CSR projects in order to comply with the provisions of the Companies Act, 2013 with many companies undertaking these initiatives for the first time (CII, 2013). Further, some estimates indicate that CSR commitments from companies can amount to as much as 20,000 crore INR (CII, 2013). CSR in many firms is moving towards full integration with strategic management and corporate governance. This has included firms developing management and organizational mechanisms for reporting and control on business's socially conscious policies and practices (Carroll, 2008). Compulsory corporate social responsibility is likely to increase the demand for professionals in this field by as much as 50 per cent in the coming years and the industry is likely to see at least 50,000 more job opportunities in the CSR sector, experts say (The Economic Times, October 13, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

These statistics show that CSR as a policy would be a new initiative for many of the companies. Underlying these figures is also the fact that there is going to be a need to employ professionals trained in CSR or to upgrade the skills of the existing professionals in this discipline. IGNOU as a premier education institution can help in capacity building and bringing more youngsters in this field by offering courses in this

discipline. CSR Programmes at various levels are being offered by some of the institutes and universities in India. However most of these programmes come at a high cost.

Objectives of the Study

In order to train more professionals, considering the extent of outreach of Open Distance Learning (ODL) to reach all stakeholders in this area, the present need assessment study was undertaken with the following specific objectives.

- ◆ Assess the demand for a programme in Corporate Social Responsibility through ODL and
- ◆ Identify the major content to be covered under the programme through ODL.

Research Methodology

(i) Study Design and Instrument

The study was undertaken following a survey research using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed on survey monkey. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents by sending web links of the questionnaire and sharing the questionnaire with CSR groups on Facebook. The questionnaire dealt with the awareness of the respondents on CSR programmes being offered in different educational institutions; the opinion of the respondents about a Programme in Corporate Social Responsibility in ODL mode; utility of the programme; preferred mode of the programme, medium of instruction of the programme; and suggested broad course content.

ii) Sampling and Data Collection

Data was collected from 200 respondents. A purposive sampling was done targeting CSR executives of some of the leading Companies undertaking CSR, people working in NGOs and engaged in other development sectors implementing CSR, students of social work and management disciplines, faculty involved in distance education etc.

iii) Data Analysis

Data was analysed using MS Excel. Simple means and percentages were calculated for each of the questions. Some of the results are depicted graphically using Bar diagrams and pie charts. The course contents suggested by the respondents were checked for duplication and overlapping suggestions were removed.

Results and Discussion

(i) General Profile of the Respondents/Stakeholders

Out of the total 200 respondents, 30 percent were working with companies involved in CSR. Around 27 percent of the respondents were working with NGOs some of which were involved in taking up CSR projects for companies. Around 27 percent of the respondents were students of either social work or management and 16 percent of the respondents were faculty/staff working in universities (Table 1).

Table 1: Work Profile of the Respondents/stakeholders

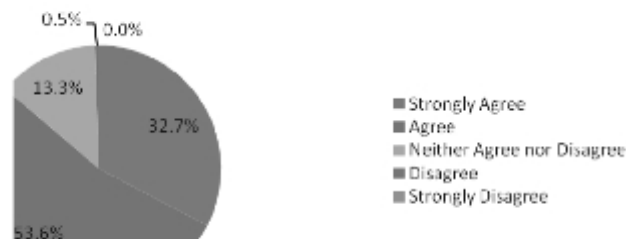
S.No.	Qualification	Percent Respondents
1.	Companies	30.20
2.	NGOs	26.60
3.	Students	27.00
4.	University Faculty and Staff	16.00

Awareness about Existing Programmes on CSR and Need for CSR programmes
Considering the increased attention given to CSR in the recent years, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has also recognized the need to build capacities of private and public business supports and advisory institutions. UNIDO organizes courses as well as on-the-job training for local experts enabling them to support companies in the implementation of socially and environmentally responsible business practices. It has developed a programme called the Responsible Entrepreneurs Achievement Programme (REAP) to train and certify local CSR consultants. It is a practical CSR based management and reporting tool that helps smaller companies to implement CSR concepts, thereby aligning economic, social and environmental aspects of business (also referred to as “Triple Bottom Line Approach”) (UNIDO, 2007). Though CSR programmes and courses are on offer in various institutes and centers across India, only around 44 percent of the total respondents were aware of the existence of such CSR programmes in India. Remaining 56 percent respondents were not aware about any of the institutions offering any programme on CSR. Most of the programmes in offer are designed for senior executives from corporate, public sector and non government organizations who direct CSR programmes or oversee departments such as public affairs, HR, compliance, ethics, philanthropy, sustainability, environmental health and safety, or community affairs. However, with increasing amount of money

being involved in CSR it will no longer remain an additional charge with the HR Divisions of the companies and they will soon be having independent CSR teams to manage the CSR activities.

With more and more companies coming in the gambit of the Companies Act, CSR is now emerging from being a part of the Human Resource and Communication Department to an independent Cell or Unit which requires skilled project managers. In recent years with even the mid-sized companies hunting for talent in this area, the demand for CSR professionals has gone up by 40 to 50 percent across levels (Bhattacharyya and Verma, 2015). The demand for professionals who can identify and articulate proposals, set up projects, attract funds and work out the budget is on a rise. In this study, around 86 percent of the respondents agreed that the demand for professionals having specialization in CSR is growing (Fig. 1) and around 13 percent of the respondents were not aware of the future prospects of this specialization.

Figure 1: Opinion of Respondents about the Growth in Demand for Professionals having Specialization in CSR



Career Prospects in Corporate Social Responsibility

Given that this is a new field, there is no such thing as a typical career path in CSR. While some of the multinationals have specific departments dedicated to CSR, others have incorporated various CSR programmes into their already existing departments (Asongu, 2007). Career opportunities in CSR reflects the diversity of the field as it encompasses the private, public and nonprofit sectors. Career in CSR may vary from designing policies to working with the compliance department of a firm or even going into a niche consulting company providing CSR client services. Entry salaries vary as much as career paths and could range from the lower levels while working for NGOs

implementing CSR activities of the corporate to better remunerated positions like working in the legal department of a corporation. Between these extremes are corporate positions and positions in the international institutions like the World Bank and the UN.

Indian economy post liberalization is witnessing a growing role of Corporate and Business in overall development of country. Corporates with their wider reach, professionalism, innovation and wealth have the ability to influence the pace of growth and development. With changing times there is a growing interest among the companies to be more socially responsible and to share the burden of development. Due to increased civil activism, proactive industry associations, government interventions and international persuasion, CSR practices in India are becoming more formalized, streamlined and publicized (Hasan, 2017). The career options open to a CSR specialist, as perceived by the respondents, are presented in Table 2. Around 16 percent of the respondents felt that a programme of this nature will equip the takers to participate in CSR projects at various levels of implementation. It was felt by around 6 percent of the respondents that the programme will prepare the learners to take up entry level jobs in CSR implementation. Only 4 percent of the respondents felt that the takers of this programme will be equipped to take up jobs at the CSR policy execution level. Majority (74%) of the respondents felt that the programme will help them in all the above mentioned ways.

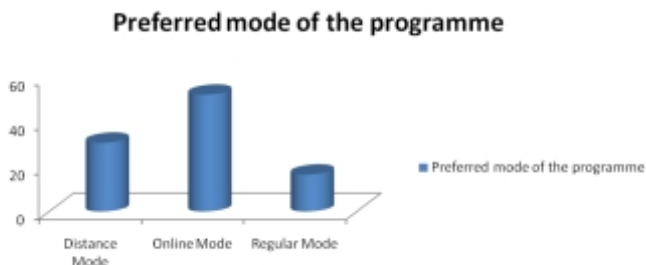
Table 2: Major Career Options as Perceived by the Respondents

S. No.	Career Options	Response Percent
1.	Prepare learners to take up entry level jobs in CSR implementation	6.4%
2.	Prepare the learners to take up jobs at CSR policy execution level	3.7%
3.	Equip the students to participate in CSR projects at various levels of implementation	16.0%
4.	All of the above	73.8%

Preferred Mode, Medium and Duration of Programme

When asked about the preferred mode of the programme, maximum ie 52 percent preferred the programme to be offered in online mode, followed by 31 percent preferring the distance mode and 17 percent preferring the regular mode (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Preferred Mode of Learning



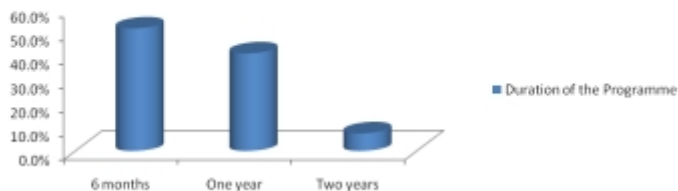
Most (around 66 %) of the respondents preferred English as the language of instruction for the programme whereas around 28 percent of the respondents opined that the programme should be offered in both English and Hindi. Very few respondents favoured Hindi (2%) and Regional Languages (5%) as the medium of instruction (Table 3).

Table 3: Preferred Medium of Instruction

S. No.	Preferred Medium	Response Percent
1.	English	65.6%
2.	Hindi	1.6%
3.	Both English and Hindi	28.0%
4.	Regional Language	4.8%

When asked about the preferred duration of the programme, most of the respondents (51.6%) preferred the programme to be of 6 months duration. Around 41 percent of the respondents suggested the duration to be 1 year and 7 percent suggested 2 years (Figure 3). Considering the IGNOU norms of 6 months duration certificate programmes, 1 year duration Diploma programmes and 2 year duration Masters programmes, it can be inferred that majority of the respondents felt the need for a 6 months duration certificate programme.

Figure 3: Preferred Duration of the Programme



Preferred Content of the Programme

The respondents were also asked to select the courses that they felt should be included in the CSR programme. For this purpose, seven courses were enlisted in the questionnaire with an option of adding any more courses that the respondents felt were essential for the better understanding of CSR. The following table (Table 4) shows the preferences of the respondents on the courses that need to be included in the programme.

Table 4: Courses Preferred by the Respondents

S. No.	Name of the Course	Percent Respondents
1.	Social Impact Assessment and Audit of CSR activities/projects	73.5%
2.	Development and Implementation of Projects and Programmes	69.6%
3.	Monitoring and Evaluation of Projects and Programmes	65.2%
4.	Role of Different Agencies in Implementation of CSR	59.1%
5.	Evolution of CSR at National and International Level	58.0%
6.	Project budgeting accounting and taxation	48.1%
7.	Project Reporting	44.2%

Around 3 percent of the respondents added to the existing list of courses. The additional courses as listed by these respondents are given in the following (Table 5):

Table 5: Additional Courses Suggested by the Respondents

S. No.	Additional Courses Suggested
1	Future role of CSR,
2.	Sensitisation activities on CSR
3.	The Obstacles in the implementation and execution level
4.	Benefits for industry
5.	Funding Mechanism
6.	Identification of location specific projects which transform the livelihood of the local/localized folk group

Finally, the respondents were asked if they could suggest an innovative project/practical component that can be included in the programme so as to provide CSR project experience to the learners. Around 48% of the respondents have offered different suggestions which have been analysed and tabulated in the following (Table 6).

Table 6: Activities Suggested Incorporating Practical Component

S. No.	Activities Suggested
1.	Visit a CSR project site and submit a report
2.	Develop a project proposal under any of the listed CSR activities
3.	Conduct an Impact Assessment Study on any of the ongoing CSR projects
4.	Internships at any of the ongoing programme sites
5.	Internships at CSR Divisions of Corporates
6.	Case Study of successful CSR Projects
7.	Activity Report preparation
8.	Situation Analysis to identify community needs

Findings of the Study

The major findings of the Need Assessment Study are:

1. The growing demand for professionals having specialization in CSR was reported by 86 percent of the respondents.
2. Around 74 percent of the respondents felt that a programme on CSR will help the learners to take up jobs at entry level, policy execution level and various levels of project implementation.
3. Most preferred mode of learning was online and distance learning, 66 percent of the respondents preferred English as the medium of instruction and most of the respondents preferred a 6 months or 1 year programme.
4. The respondents also identified the content that could be included in the programme. These contents were related to history and evolution of CSR, project formulation and management, implementation of CSR, funding of activities etc.

As a result of the findings of the need assessment study, the development of a one year PG Diploma programme on CSR has been initiated by IGNOU.

Conclusion and Implications:

The CSR provisions of the Companies Act 2013 have made it mandatory for the Companies meeting the specified norms to invest at least 2% of the average net profit in the previous three years on CSR activities. The Indian industries have also responded positively to the reform measures undertaken towards ensuring equitable, inclusive and sustainable growth. The practice of CSR is not new to companies in India. However, the

Companies Act 2013 has brought more companies into the fold. Large Indian companies are now transitioning from philanthropy to a rapidly evolving strategic engagement in development issues. The process of establishing and responding to the CSR agenda within an organization will require specialists who have experience in various fields like social work, health, education etc. It is imperative that universities develop new methodologies and frameworks that will facilitate students' understanding of CSR or sustainability in the business environment (Audebrand, 2010). The Need Assessment Study shows that there is a growing demand for professionals and experts in CSR. Against this backdrop and looking at the findings of the Need Assessment Study, it is proposed that the School of Extension and Development Studies develops a programme on Corporate Social Responsibility. The proposed programme will be designed to cater to the needs of the individuals looking to work in the social development field. The programme is expected to find enrollment from professionals wanting to join the CSR wings of MNCs, professionals working or wanting to work with NGOs and other developmental fields.

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