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Exploring the culture of corporate social investment within a multinational corporation: a Gauteng-based case study

Sewram, Komcilla

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ABSTRACT

The South African government impels business to contribute to the country's transformation through corporate social investment (CSI) to accelerate social development. The study focused on the sub-element of CSI as part of the broader corporate social responsibility CSR frame. CSI in South Africa assumes a vastly different dimension from that of global practices, founded predominantly on the country's historical disparities. Post-apartheid legislation makes CSI an obligatory practice. A business's commitment reflects in company policies, operations and organisational culture. The case study of a multinational corporation (MNC) used face-to-face interviews and a semi-structured interview schedule with eleven purposively sampled employees. Via a qualitative, interpretive paradigm, the study examined participant perspectives on the prevailing corporate culture on CSI. Corporate culture by way of the shared values and beliefs of employees as significant stakeholders was analysed and the New Institutional Economics (NIE) framework was applied. Thematic analysis concluded that over time the company made notable progress in its CSI practices. The MNC continues to instil a CSI culture across its operations, so social responsibility embeds as an essential element of its corporate culture. A key outcome of this research is an adapted CSI model. The pivotal role of leadership and the positioning of the CSI department within the MNC are a priority for entrenching a CSI culture. Related themes were the importance of marketing and communication, employee volunteering, policy and sustainability. The commitment of MNCs is fundamental to the dependency discourse articulated by state and civil society that business invest in social development to facilitate access to the economy for vulnerable communities. A strategic social contract between private sector, government and civil society is pivotal for a well-functioning state – a synergy, central to tackle widespread inequality and poverty in South Africa. CSI is a vital conduit to propel social development.