

# A work in progress

Richard Corriette, Vice President, Corporate Citizenship at DHL, discusses the myriad challenges of corporate citizenship...

**C**orporate citizenship is best regarded as a journey: work in progress. Taking that approach provides the flexibility to change course when necessary, because the territory is constantly shifting as new challenges emerge. Myriad challenges arise as companies move away from philanthropy (eg. donating money to charity) towards becoming good corporate citizens globally and in the local communities where they live and work.

The flexibility that is required also means that corporate citizenship cannot be seen as an 'add on' or an optional business practice. It is a natural progression that entails mapping out and implementing a strategy that puts corporate citizenship at the very heart of a company's way of working. There are also indications that embedding corporate citizenship and company values across an entire organisation attracts new and retains existing talented people: they want to work for a company that has broader aims than making a profit.

Increasingly, customers are asking companies to prove that they are doing more than just talking about corporate citizenship. Companies within the supply chain are expected to meet the same standards as those set by the company that is using their services. As a result, customer surveys are on the increase, as companies seek to provide proof of their commitment to corporate citizenship by ensuring that their supply chain satisfies their requirements.

It is important to recognise your strengths, and it can be helpful to turn to experts to provide input and guidance in areas with which you are not so familiar. Human rights might be an example: few companies at the beginning of their corporate citizenship journey are fully aware of all aspects of this. Other examples are Black Economic Empowerment in Africa, HIV/AIDS, and even diversity – these may influence your business risks and exposure depending on where you and your customers operate.

Competition in the global marketplace is fierce. Corporate citizenship can sharpen a company's competitive edge; however, years of positive branding can be lost – perhaps forever – if a company's reputation becomes damaged.

## Focus on what really matters

Good corporate citizenship is now important to a diverse range of stakeholders – from NGOs to governments, investment analysts and consumers. A good reputation

with stakeholders helps to maintain and enhance brand image, which makes good business sense.

In order to build a good reputation, a company needs to be aware of the issues that need to be tackled. These have been discussed widely, and the websites of the World Economic Forum and the United Nations Global Compact are worth visiting to see how these highly respected organisations help companies to work together with others to address them.

So much needs to be done that companies need to prioritise and to focus their efforts in the areas where they can achieve the most. This is not only with regard to external corporate citizenship matters, but also within the company and with regard to the environment.

Some activities not only help the world at large, but also add value to the operational side. For example, reducing waste, energy, water and fuel consumption not only reduces a company's impact on the environment, but can save costs.

## The synergy of partnership

Philanthropic work is still part of corporate citizenship. The experience of several companies has been that the most effective way of working in this area is in partnership with other organisations, each using their individual core competencies. By combining resources, skills and networks, the overall development impacts that can be achieved will be greater than if each worked alone.

## A never ending journey

One of the most difficult challenges that all companies face is that there is no easy map to guide a company's corporate citizenship journey into the future. New challenges will always arise that need to be tackled. But working together, focusing our efforts and accepting our broader responsibilities to society will help others in their aim of improving the state of our world.

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