

Motives and Mattresses:

Exploring City Furniture's Mattress Donation Program and Perspectives on Sustainability Among Stakeholders

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Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, Sustainability, Stakeholder, Haiti, Case Study

In recent years, a steady demand has been placed on firms from consumers to prioritize social and environmental aspects of commerce as well as profit maximization (Elkington, 1997). This shift has spurred an ever-growing number of corporations to engage in socially responsible behavior as a result (Goswami & Ha-Brookshire, 2015). Although many claims are made regarding labor practices, recycling, and giving back, responsibilities related to monitoring and policy enforcement are generally left to the discretion of companies and not legislation (Andersen & Skjoett-Larsen, 2009). A South-Florida based, private furniture retailer called City Furniture is known for maintaining charitable activities in addition to its regular business functions. Among these activities is a unique program informing customers of an opportunity to donate their old mattress to be processed and sent to Haiti upon receiving delivery of their new mattress. The researcher seeks to explore potential gaps between two stakeholder groups: a) executives, and b) employees regarding their perceived positions on sustainability, as well as their structure for facilitating sustainable goal achievement.

According to Ha-Brookshire (2017), corporations are considered truly sustainable when views on sustainability, goals, and structure for goal achievement are in proper alignment. Regarding views, members within the corporation must see sustainability as value that is pursued at all times, within all parts of operation. Also, firms must have clear goals and structures in place as a means for adhering to these established principles for managing their business effectively. Freeman's (1994) stakeholder theory, which was expanded by Donaldson & Preston (1995) provides a framework for examining participants since the theory defines stakeholders as groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist. Donaldson & Preston also proposes that each stakeholder's interests within a corporation are considered valuable. Therefore, exploring multiple stakeholder's perspectives within the study provides an opportunity to illuminate potential gaps in perspective that affect other areas of performance. The following research questions emerged from these theories:

1. What are the corporation's members perceived positions on sustainability?
2. How does the corporation's structure, if any, facilitate goal achievement?

To best explore these questions, a case study approach was selected because of its reliance on purposive discovery to gain insight or understanding through multi-angular modes of interaction (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). The bounded nature of City Furniture's mattress donation program also makes case study the preferred approach according to Stake (1995, pp. 1-2). Within this case, semi-structured interviews were the primary driver for data collection since the semi-structure

format provides a loose template to guide the exchange, while providing opportunity for new discovery (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Secondly, semi-structured interviews allow for elucidative techniques to gain implicit data (Johnson & Weller, 2002) An IRB (Institutional Review Board) application was created and approved on March 7th, 2018 after levels of risk associated with the research were deemed minimal. The researcher generated an interview protocol and interviewed six willing participants within the corporation due to their bases of knowledge, as well as their integral role in executing sustainability functions. The executive stakeholders included the Owner and President as well as the Vice-President of Sales, while the employee stakeholders included a General Manager, Delivery Technician, and two Sales Associates. Interviews were recorded on a digital device and were transcribed. Afterward, they were prepared for coding and analysis by generating constructs, chromatic indicators, as well as labels to systematically find common themes.

Common themes that emerged from the findings were the consistencies in perspective held among executive and employee stakeholders regarding CSR activity. These consistencies seem to have been facilitated by structures within the company, such as daily updates and various other communicative strategies for employees within City Furniture. Also, all interviewees responded similarly that corporations should indeed behave in a manner that is socially responsible. General findings from executive stakeholders describe sustainability as something worth attaining within normal business parameters. Executive members felt that sustainability should be sought after at all times, regardless of costs imposed or challenges faced. Regarding employee stakeholders, similar perspectives were also shared, and various employees interviewed felt that efforts on behalf of the corporation should be made to exhibit sustainable behavior in addition to normal business proceedings.

We're not perfect but I think we try to do the right thing at all times.

Keith Koenig, President and Owner

Well, the incentive is you know you're doing something good for the community.

Mimi Hernandez, General Manager

Regarding structure, executive stakeholders went into great detail regarding the many systems in place such as SOP's (Standards of Procedure). However, in mentioning the Mattress Donation program in Haiti, details suggested that while there is a structure in place, execution may be left for interpretation to those directly involved. The donation program is helmed by an individual employee with executive support, suggesting themes of employee empowerment as a creative strategy towards enhancing sustainability. The researcher perceived an extended supply chain in which consistency may be difficult to maintain according to MRCS theory. Employees expressed a lack of familiarity with some structures in place within the corporation. The researcher did not perceive executive leadership to maintain clear goals regarding the program.

To conclude, the exploration of City Furniture's Mattress Donation Program yielded findings regarding corporate member's perspectives on sustainability. The researcher interpreted findings by both stakeholder groups to reveal sustainability as a perfect duty, or rather, value worth pursuing at all times while conducting business. When discussing goals however, both stakeholder groups expressed vague parameters regarding metrics for measurement. Since the donation program was managed by a single employee, execution of sustainable values left room for interpretation. Therefore, the researcher perceives City Furniture as not being Truly Sustainable but exhibiting Occasionally Sustainable Behavior.

Limitations include being unable to generalize findings due to the ideographic nature of the study. Opportunities for future research include employee empowerment as an enhancer for sustainable practice, thus dictating further study.

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