

Corporate Social Justice – campaigning for your values

In Ireland, migration, housing, climate change, socio-economic and political upheaval impact our consumers, employees, friends and family, and wider society. Business has a key role to play in how beneficial change comes about, and can improve how we all live, now, and into the future.

Corporate Social Justice is not about just about giving back to society, or having a social licence to trade. It is about transforming society because the urgent pursuit of economic and social justice – be it the eradication of income inequality, to mass migration issues, to LGBTQ+ rights and other areas – is the responsibility of us all.

This socially charged world is requiring companies to re-examine their CSR policy. Not only do consumers demand it, but employees do, too.

- 74% of customers believe that ethical corporate practices and values are an important reason to choose a brand.
- 65% believe organizations should be responsible for leaving their people “net better off” through work.¹

It’s evolved from corporate social responsibility to corporate social justice, a vital reframing which hones in on the lived experience of people who live on its margins².

Corporate Social Justice is far more than just “giving back” to the community; it’s about taking a stand and bettering the society in which organisations operate.

At the heart lies a profound commitment to understanding and responding to the lived experiences of marginalised and disadvantaged groups. It asks that businesses not only acknowledge their societal impact but actively strive to mitigate harm and promote equity. By fostering inclusive workplace cultures, supporting marginalised communities, and advocating for meaningful change, companies can become catalysts for social progress.

Companies are not islands with a siloed existence but by dint of operating in a place, their actions cause ripples throughout their communities. It is not just about painting charities walls or making donations or winning awards, as in traditional CSR.

It is about a companywide, leader led, holistic approach, committing to positive change in their communities and society in general – from the front door to the top floor.

It goes behind charity work and philanthropy to focus on the experiences of groups disadvantaged by, or worse, harmed by society. It is a way of working with the goal of explicitly doing good by all.

¹ Accenture, 2021. Shaping the Sustainable Organization How responsible leaders create lasting value and equitable impact for all stakeholders In collaboration with the World Economic Forum
<https://www.accenture.com/content/dam/accenture/final/a-com-migration/custom/acnmedia/thought-leadership-assets/pdf-5/Accenture-Shaping-the-Sustainable-Organization-Report.pdf>

² Harvard Business Review, 2020

Business is Changing and there are indicators of that change -

- CONSCIOUS Capitalism, B Corp, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, all lead to purpose led companies
- People expect their CEO to lead on social issues
 - The 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer Ireland findings reveal that CEOs are expected to act on major societal challenges, with a significant majority of Irish respondents calling for them to take a stand on climate change (84%), the wealth gap (77%), immigration (76%), discrimination (81%) and the treatment of employees (90%).³
- Business has the capacity to drive Diversity, Equality and Integration initiatives where society has lagged
- Some leadership has failed us – political, financial, religious – there is a lacuna that needs to be filled

All stakeholders need to be catered for in the way we do our business. It needs to be more human centred. It is essential to your bottom line, employee attraction and retention, creative and lateral thinking and to making your company and community better places.

We know that consumers pay close attention to a brand's social justice efforts before purchasing a product. They want to know what the brands they support are actually doing to address social issues⁴.

And this is rising.

It is also beneficial for existing employees who thrive in a diverse work environment. Many coming into the workplace now expect their companies to mirror their values and will be attracted to those who do this work for societal good.

A company's purpose and work in these areas needs to be measured and goals set to produce clear outcomes and built on, year on year. It needs to be CEO led and encompass the whole of the business and not just the DEI space or Marketing or HR.

What is the Ask?

What legacy do companies to leave?

Employees, consumers, suppliers and the wider community will remember those who walked away from social issues and those who remained true. This requires long term commitment, not just a trinket for awards and then to be put back on the shelf, or worse, cut for short term budget reasons. It is a long term approach.

Companies with authentic values will intensify this work when it is most needed and embed it in their every fibre. It will guide all decision making. It's about taking a stand on issues and putting your all behind it. Being brave in every aspect of your company from marketing to recruitment to driving change which everyone will benefit from.

³ 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer, Ireland Finding

⁴ 2019 survey conducted by Markstein and Certus Insights, US

It also means getting informed on issues; the understanding of all underlying factors that have come forth such as housing, our own migration history, racism and the rise of the far right.

At the Open Doors Initiative, we want Corporate Social Justice to be the benchmark for all companies we work with and their activities.

We want political and business leadership in this area both in Ireland and beyond.

ENDS -