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**A BUSINESS TAKING THE SOCIAL INITIATIVE:
THE CARTER HOLT HARVEY TASMAN CASE**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the workplace of a sustainable award-winning company in a small New Zealand town. Its special focus is on investigating how employees perceive the firm's exercising of social responsibility in relation to its various communities and, in particular, its support of social initiatives.

Qualitative methods were used and multiple sources of evidence drawn on, in order to allow a broad range of historical, attitudinal and behavioural issues to be analysed in this single case study. The results demonstrated that employees tended not to view their employer's social initiatives in isolation, but to adopt a much broader focus that took into account other aspects of organisational life. Consequently, some employees were critical of the extent of support given the external community, while others (particularly those involved in social initiatives) saw room for expansion of the firm's support. Key factors found to be influencing the way in which employees' perceived the firm's support of social initiatives were the employer's workplace performance, the strong family-oriented workplace culture, and individuals' concerns for the local community. Business outcomes perceived to arise from employees' involvement in the firm's environmental and community initiatives included more satisfied and professionally-skilled employees with a higher personal profile, and a significantly enhanced reputation for the firm. The employer was thought to be mostly concerned with the latter outcome, and to be largely unaware of the potential for human resource benefits to simultaneously be accrued as employees engaged in social initiatives.

Areas identified for future research include how the skills and attributes acquired during the participation experience may impact on individual performance and affect team productivity; how employee forums established to promote management-employee collaboration on social initiatives may contribute towards the simultaneous development of more trusting and fruitful relationships, and improved interpersonal skills; and how both the separation and sharing of social and cultural values may influence the evolution of business-community relationships, and the nature of social initiatives supported by firms as they interact with their local communities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Tables and Figures	vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Purpose of study	2
1.3 Research questions.....	3
1.4 Research objectives.....	3
1.5 Justification for the study.....	4
1.6 Outline of the thesis.....	5
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
2.1 Introduction.....	6
2.2 Recent trends and their impact on the NZ workplace	6
2.3 Evolution of the concept of corporate social responsibility	13
2.4 Theories, concepts and tensions emerging in the CSR debate	17
2.4.1 Stakeholder-firm interactions	18
2.4.2 Building the ‘business case’ for engaging in social initiatives.....	21
2.4.3 How firms are exercising their social responsibilities	23
2.5 Perceptions of corporate social responsibility	25
2.5.1 Corporate reputation and employer attractiveness.....	29
2.6 Summary.....	33
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN	34
3.1 Introduction.....	34
3.2 Selection of case study organisation	34
3.2.1 Introduction to CHH Tasman	35
3.2.2 The local community	37
3.2.3 Corporate-stakeholder relationships	38
3.3 Selection of research method.....	39
3.4 Theoretical perspective.....	40
3.4.1 Critical realism	41
3.5 Selection of a single case study.....	46
3.6 Case study procedures	47
3.6.1 The development, testing and refinement of prior theory	47
3.7 Data collection	49
3.7.1 Sample population.....	50
3.7.2 Interviews.....	51
3.7.3 Case study protocol	52
3.7.4 Case study database and chain of evidence.....	54
3.8 Case study analysis procedres.....	54

3.9	Limitations of case study research.....	55
3.10	Ethical considerations.....	56
3.11	Conclusion	58
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA.....		59
4.1	Introduction.....	59
4.2	Objectives of the analysis.....	59
4.3	Case study participants	60
4.4	Key factors influencing the workplace	62
4.4.1	A highly dynamic environment of change.....	62
4.4.2	CHH Tasman and local employment.....	64
4.4.3	Corporate culture and the “Tasman Whanau”	66
4.5	Significance of employer’s social performance for new employees	68
4.6	Employees’ awareness of social policies and initiatives	72
4.7	Communication and consultation processes in place.....	75
4.7.1	Methods used to inform employees of social initiatives supported	75
4.7.2	Employer-employee consultation on social initiatives and other issues.....	76
4.7.3	Company-community consultation on social issues.....	79
4.8	Employee involvement in community initiatives.....	80
4.8.1	Recruitment of employee volunteers	80
4.8.2	Perceived barriers to involvement	83
4.8.3	Recognised outcomes of involvement for employees	84
4.9	Perceived purpose and outcomes of the company’s investment in social initiatives.....	88
4.9.1	Company’s performance versus its competitors.....	88
4.9.2	Perceived purpose of investment in social initiatives	90
4.9.3	Perceived outcomes of investment in social initiatives	92
4.9.4	Social initiatives and their influence on employees	93
4.10	Issues perceived as needing to be addressed.....	96
4.11	Conclusion	96
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....		98
5.1	Introduction.....	98
5.2	Key contextual factors	99
5.2.1	The employer-employee relationship.....	100
5.2.2	The workplace culture	104
5.2.3	Employees’ concerns for the community.....	106
5.3	Awareness of and attitudes towards the employer’s social initiatives	108
5.3.1	The perspective of prospective employees.....	108
5.3.2	The perspective of current employees	109
5.3.3	Attitudes towards the promotion of social initiatives/performance	110
5.4	Communication and consultation on social policies and initiatives.....	112
5.4.1	External and internal communication	112
5.4.2	Internal consultation on social initiatives	113
5.4.3	External consultation on social initiatives	115
5.4.4	Recruitment of employee volunteers and barriers to involvement	118
5.5	Outcomes of the participation experience for employees	119
5.6	Perceived purpose and outcomes of investment in social initiatives for the employer.....	121
5.6.1	Perceived purpose of investment in social initiatives	121

5.6.2	Perceived outcomes of investment in social initiatives for the employer	123
5.7	Conclusion	124

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS..... 125

6.1	Introduction.....	125
6.2	Conclusions in relation to the research objectives	125
	6.2.1 Awareness of and attitudes towards the employer’s social initiatives	125
	6.2.2 Communication and consultation on social policies and initiatives	127
	6.2.3 Outcomes of participation for employees/barriers to involvement	128
	6.2.4 Perceived purpose and outcomes of the firm’s support of social initiatives	130
6.3	Limitations of the case study	131
6.4	Implications of the study for research and practice.....	132
6.5	Areas for future research	133
6.6	Recommendations	134
6.7	In Conclusion.....	135

REFERENCES..... 136

APPENDICES

I	Interview Schedule.....	147
II	Conceptual Framework.....	149
III	Information Sheet	150
IV	Consent Form	152

TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLES

4.1	Participants by Duration of Employment, Gender and Role.....	61
4.2	Social initiatives supported by the Tasman Pulp and Paper Company	69
4.3	Corporate social initiatives as identified by participants	73
4.4	Participants involved in initiatives by gender and role.....	82
4.5	Outcomes associated with the participation experience	84

FIGURES

2.1	Carroll's Pyramid of Global Corporate Society Responsibility and Performance	14
3.1	The Kawerau site shared by Carter Holt Harvey Tasman and Norske Skog Tasman	36
3.2	Map of the Bay of Plenty region showing the location of Kawerau.....	37
3.3	A critical realist view of causation.....	44
5.1	Key factors influencing employees' perceptions of their employer's social initiatives from a realist perspective.....	100
5.2	Proposed structure for managing the flow of information and the process of information and the process of consultation between internal and external stakeholders	117