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CORPORATE CULTURE AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) IN THE CONTEXT OF TRANSFORMATIONS (CASE OF IKEA)

Nowadays, corporate culture has become one of the success factors in business management, which could support the organisation to grow in the long run. It not only affects the internal staff themselves, the psychological atmosphere and climate, but also the overall competitiveness, market reputation and the ability of strategic human resource recruiting and retaining elite personnel. Basically, it is a multifaceted construct including shared values, norms of behaviour, established traditions, and codified rules that have an influence on the way employees act and make decisions. Thus, building a strong and consistent culture is a pragmatic strategic move towards sustaining success, with implications for stable operations, innovation, and sustainable competitive advantage [2].

In a similar way to the internal culture, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the responsibility of the companies towards the social aspects of their being. It is the adoption of policies and the execution of practices that seek to have a positive impact that stretches far beyond compliance and the maximisation of profits.

A good example of that synergy is IKEA's vision–to make everyday life better for the many people. This vision is more than just a slogan, and it is firmly established in the culture of the organisation through a number of key operational principles [3]:

–Simplicity and Informality: Humble and simple lifestyle are the pillars of the company's image. This is practically manifested in a "full name basis" policy, which breaks down rigid hierarchy and facilitates open conversation [4].

–Teamwork and Belonging: The hiring process is entirely value-driven and relies on specialised cultural fit tests to establish that each new team member genuinely aligns with the long-term vision of the company and the collaborative model.

–Diversity and Inclusion: The company considers gender equality to be a basic human right (pace for leadership towards and frequently beyond 50/50) and a constant support for LGBT+ rights as well as for other minorities [5].

–Frugality: Strongly informed by the philosophy of founder Ingvar Kamprad, all levels of staff are pushed to find more ways to eliminate unnecessary expenses to maintain a global cost-leadership position [4].

–Leadership and Empowerment: Leaders are primarily mentors and coaches, opposed to traditional supervisors within this model, promoting an atmosphere of dialogue and radical transparency. The durability of this model was challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic, with global supply chains under strain but consumer demand rising for home-office solutions and relaxation furniture.

Nevertheless, facing the abrupt challenge of closing its physical stores, IKEA was able to pivot surprisingly quickly by bringing its elaborate kitchen planning services – a high-touch physical service – online in a fully functional format in just seven days [3]. This rapid transformation included a massive scaling of the corporate IT platform to support integrated remote scheduling, digital payments, and automated invoicing. In addition, the entire team of store-based staff members was retrained to become expert online kitchen planners within a matter of days, proving the flexibility of the workforce. It also expanded its remote post-sales support system and digital claims-handling organisation proactively. As such, through this value-led adaptability, not only did IKEA survive, saving the core business model during the crisis and grow COVID retailer conversions, but also grew omnichannel in a sustainable and incremental manner. As a result of far reaching restructures and transformation in-store sales remained stable, but online sales tripled over the three years and accounted for 25% of overall sales, a far cry from less than 5% of pre-pandemic business [4].

The resilience of IKEA's value-driven model is most vividly demonstrated by its operations in Ukraine following the full-scale invasion in February 2022. While the company initially suspended all physical and online operations to ensure the safety of its personnel–consistent with its core value of "Caring for People"–the subsequent strategy became a benchmark for corporate responsibility in a high-risk environment [1]. Unlike many multinational corporations that opted for a complete market exit, IKEA's prolonged "dark store" period in Kyiv was characterized by continued financial support for its Ukrainian workforce, maintaining salaries and benefits for approximately 440 employees despite the total absence of revenue for over 1.5 years [4]. This period underscored the supra-corporate constituents of morality mentioned earlier, where human capital preservation outweighed short-term fiscal losses.

In late 2023, IKEA initiated a phased resumption of its online store in Ukraine, which served as a precursor to the reopening of physical pickup points and the flagship City Store in Kyiv in 2024. This strategic return was not merely a commercial move but a manifestation of CSR, aimed at supporting the local economy and providing functional home solutions to a population facing displaced living conditions. To adapt to the wartime reality, IKEA restructured its logistics to bypass the blockaded maritime routes, shifting to land-based supply chains through Poland[4]. By 2025, the Ukrainian branch had successfully integrated into the broader omnichannel ecosystem, with online sales in the region showing a significant upward trajectory, mirroring the global shift towards digital-first retail observed during the pandemic. This "Ukrainian pivot" demonstrates that a culture rooted in simplicity and willpower can withstand even the most extreme geopolitical shocks, transforming a crisis into a testament of brand loyalty and operational durability.

The IKEA case is a strong indication that in the era of unpredictable global shifts–ranging from a health pandemic to a full-scale regional war–a strong corporate culture and commitment to CSR are what sustain corporate resilience. The company's unprecedented transition of complex physical services into virtual space, alongside its principled stance in the Ukrainian market, signifies that value-based flexibility permits effective scaling in business. Such scaling and strategic endurance can survive even in the worst crisis conditions, proving that when the "software of the mind" is aligned with universal human values, an organization can maintain its competitive advantage while fulfilling its ethical obligations to society[2].

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