ENVY AS A DETERRENT TO SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: A CHALLENGE TO BE ADDRESSED BY MULTICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: The present paper focuses on the inner workings of organizations related to their leaders' understanding of what the expression "social responsibility" means, and the extent to which envy among its members is understood as a potential deterrent both to fair conducts and to social responsibility. It argues that multicultural organizations can be central to mitigate organizational situations in which envy could potentially flourish, therefore contributing to fostering organizational conduct that leads to social responsibility. In order to develop the argument, it firstly outlines the theoretical framework that informs the concept of multicultural organizations and links it to a view that social responsibility is enhanced when leaders proactively and successfully tackle envy. It then delves into two institutional leaders' discourses – one from a higher education institution (HEI) and one from an enterprise, gleaning their meaning of social responsibility and their perceptions of their role in challenging envy as part of that social responsibility agenda in those organizations.

Keywords: envy, social responsibility, multicultural organizations, codes of conduct, culture.

ZAVIST KOT MOTNJA ZA DRUŽBENO ODGOVORNOST: IZZIV, KI GA MORAJO OBRAVNAVATI VEČKULTURNE ORGANIZACIJE

Povzetek: Ta prispevek se osredotoča na notranje delovanje organizacij in zlasti na to, kako vodje razumejo, kaj pomeni izraz 'družbena odgovornost', in na to, v koliki meri razumejo zavist med sodelavci kot možno motnjo zoper pošteno ravnanje in družbeno odgovornost. Avtorja trdita, da imajo organizacije z več kulturami osrednjo vlogo pri razreševanju položajev v organizaciji, v katerih bi zavist morda mogla uspevati, in bi torej prispevale k pospeševanju ravnanja v organizacijah, katero vodi k družbeni odgovornosti. Da bi razvila svoje dokaze, avtorja najprej povzameta teoretični okvir, ki pojasni koncept mnogo-kulturne organizacije in ga poveže z mnenjem, da se družbena odgovornost pospešuje, kadar se vodje proaktivno in uspešno lotijo zavisti. Potem se avtorja poglobita v razpravo dveh vodij institucij, od katerih je eden iz visokega šolstva in drugi iz podjetja; spoznavata, kaj sogovornikom pomeni družbena odgovornost, in to, kako pojmujeta njuno vlogo, ko se spopadata z zavistjo v okviru svojega delovnega programa glede družbene odgovornosti v teh organizacijah.

Ključne besede: zavist, družbena odgovornost, mnogo-kulturne organizacije, zakoniki ravnanje, kultura

1. Introduction

Organizations are increasingly faced with challenges in order to be competitive and, at the same time, ensure they are able to develop an institutional climate in which diversity is valued and fair conducts are ensured, so that social responsibility can underlie its day to day activities. Even though dimensions of social responsibility such as environmental concerns and corporate accountability have been discussed, the present paper argues that two interrelated aspects still seem to beg for further research, namely: the inner workings of organizations related to their leaders' understanding of what "social responsibility" means; and the extent to which envy among its members is understood as a potential deterrent to social responsibility.

In fact, as expressed by ISO/FDIS 26000 (2010), " the perception and reality of an organization's performance on social responsibility can influence, among other things …its ability to attract and retain workers or members…[as well as] the maintenance of employees' morale, commitment, and productivity" (p. vii). Inasmuch as envy prevents values inherent to social responsibility such as cooperation, respect for the other, and the valuing of cultural differences, it erodes the organization climate and is therefore a liability for the success of the organization's efforts towards improving its social responsibility.

Based on those considerations, the present paper argues that multicultural leaders can be central to mitigate organizational situations in which envy could potentially flourish, therefore contributing to social responsibility. In order

to develop the argument, it firstly outlines the theoretical framework that informs the concept of multiculturalism in organizations and links it to a view that social responsibility is enhanced when multicultural leaders proactively and successfully tackle envy. It then delves into two institutional leaders' discourses – one from a higher education institution (HEI) and another from an enterprise, both in Brazil – gleaning their meaning of social responsibility and their perceptions of their role in challenging envy as part of ensuring fair conducts leading to the success of a social responsibility agenda.

The paper is relevant comparatively in that it shows aspects to be addressed for the success of social responsibility in international contexts, providing illustrations of the challenges of tackling what Jones *et al*. (2009) call as the tensions between "corporate irresponsibility and corporate social responsibility".

2. Envy as a Conduct Against Social Responsibility

In a globalized scenario, there has been an increased awareness that organizational socially responsible behavior can add not only to its competitive advantage but also to its contribution to a more sustainable world. In fact, a greater ease of mobility and a worldwide responsibility for keeping peace and combating injustices has meant that a growing interdependence is the main idea that underlies the need for social responsibility (SR) worldwide. Authors such as Bozicnik & Mulej (2010) contend that social responsibility should be viewed as a holistic way of thinking, and it should be embedded in an interdisciplinary international creative cooperation dimension. Among the views by which SR has been viewed, those that call for an honest organizational corporate behavior towards co-workers, other stake holders, wider society and humans' natural environment, as well as "a way from human onesidedness to requisite holism, ourselves included" (p.24) seem to be crucial from the referred authors' perspective. Belayeva & Canen (2011) study on social responsibility in the BRICs countries also support the interdependence approach, by arguing that a socially responsible model should go beyond the limits of philanthropy, calling for effective interaction practices, a planning of joint actions, the development of joint projects and the challenging of "double standards in estimation methods of social responsibility" (p.568).

As a core document that guides and supports social responsibility, ISO/FDIS 26000 (2010)- defines social responsibility as "willingness of an organization to incorporate social and environmental considerations in its decision making." (p.6). In fact, it highlights that "the ongoing regular daily activities of the organization constitute the most important behaviour to be addressed" (p.7). It also emphasizes that such a concept is applicable to all organizations, not just business ones, which leads to the understanding of HEIs as crucial sites for the development of that dimension as well.

We argue that much has been starting to be told about social responsibility in broader terms, geared towards more general principles. However, more has to be researched in terms of the organization viewed not as a homogenized, unified or essencialized concept, but rather as an alive, culturally diverse institution in which envy emerges as a serious obstacle to the success of organizational moves towards social responsibility. That way, we contend that a homogenized approach to organizations should be avoided, so that organizations should review their activities and decisions in the light of the real human beings that are part of it, by gleaning the extent to which processes that are against social responsibility operate in its everyday actions. Among such processes, we argue that envy is a central one, which undermines the efforts towards social responsibility.

In fact, as explained by Canen & Canen (2012), envy saps peoples' energy and provokes inner conflicts that may prevent institutional flourishing. It therefore is against the spirit and the success of social responsibility. It is therefore relevant for institutions to focus more on ways by which envy can manifest itself so as to avoid it becoming a destructive force. In a similar vein, Samier & Atkins (2010) suggest that preventing and combating administrative narcissism should be paramount in professional programs. They call the attention to the fact that narcissists will exploit organizational positions in which they are empowered so as to show off their hard working compulsive drives and putting other people down whom they envy for the apparent superior qualities shown in the organization. In contrast to respecting institutional rules, narcissists substitute those for "their own idiosyncratic interpretations which furthers their own agenda, finally at the expense of others" (p. 590), which certainly is against a social responsibility perspective.

Menon & Thompson (2010) suggest that enviers have difficulty in learning from and collaborating with other people. They point out that an institution in which those people have the upper hand may value strangers to the detriment of internal peers, so as not to praise colleagues whom they envy. Canen & Canen (2008, 2012) discuss how a negative institutional climate may deteriorate institutional evaluation results. In fact, as also suggested by Canen & Canen (2012), it seems that envy is likely to be generated when people act in a way that tends to break the *status quo*.

Therefore, tackling it seems to be crucial for innovation, creative thinking, and the ensuing flourishing of the organization and in it social responsibility success.

3. Multicultural Organizations against Envy

We contend that in order for organizations to more successfully develop social responsibility, they should view themselves as "multicultural organizations" (Canen & Canen, 2005), namely those that value fair conducts, cultural diversity, effectively respond to it and build on it for the success of social responsibility. In order to do so, multicultural leaders (Canen & Canen, 2008) are crucial elements in that they promote a nurturing environment in which bullying is firmly challenged, conflicts are competently tackled and all feel valued. Above all, multicultural leaders promote a sense of trust, which results in the fostering of fair conducts and a more robust organizational climate, which arguably reflects in a more socially responsible organization. Differences between multicultural and monocultural leaders have been presented by Canen & Canen (2008), showing the damaging effects brought about by a monocultural leader.

The linkage between multicultural organizations and the success of social responsibility can be viewed in the analysis of ISO/FDIS 26000 (2010), albeit in an indirect rather than direct form. In fact, concerning the valuing of organizational diversity, the referred document is eloquent in highlighting a human rights' principle among the seven ones that are deemed central for social responsibility. In that principle, it explicitly states that "an organization should take care to ensure that it does not discriminate against employees, partners and others" (p.28). Organizational auditing is also addressed in the referred document in terms of suggestions of checklists for self-assessments or reviews that compare performance across social responsibility core principles and subjects, including those related to ethical and humans rights perspectives.

The emphasis on communication between the organizational management and employees, as well as the necessary dialogue throughout the organization and the need for organization's governance, systems and procedures to adopt a social responsibility perspective in all its levels (as emphasized by ISO/FDIS 26000) can lead to the need for a multicultural framework (Canen & Canen, 2012) to embed organizational climate so as to provide management with strategies that not only mitigate but mainly avoid the effects of envy in the workplace, contributing to enhance management competence, and, we could add, social responsibility. The referred authors point out that a crucial component of such a framework should be the presence of a multicultural leader that builds on trust (Canen & Canen, 2004, 2008), and who could enhance the collective construction of mission statements and of an ongoing process of cultural training and cultural auditing (Canen & Canen, 2010), in a nurturing and trustworthy atmosphere. Such an auditing should monitor and assess the extent to which a multicultural perspective embeds the audited organization, beyond the more economically driven indicators normally addressed in more conventional auditing processes. In fact, Belayeva & Canen (2011) propose a model so as to increase social responsibility which comprises partnerships, organizational culture, the creation of uniform standards for organizational monitoring and estimation of social responsibility, also including what they call the development of social auditing processes.

It should be pointed out that the European Commission (2011) document about corporate social responsibility, even though with a somewhat more economically driven tone, also stresses the idea that such a responsibility has to do with respect for gender equity, human rights, integration of disabled persons in its agenda and, last but not least – in trust. In fact, as argued by Zenko & Mulej (2011), "social responsibility demands a great evolutional step in human mentality, understanding, reasoning and decision making"(p.1266).

We contend such a view could move those organizations the farthest away from what Jones *et al*. (2009) call "corporate irresponsibility" towards a "corporate social responsibility" approach. In that sense, as defended by Samier & Atkins (2010), professional higher education programs should be attentive to prevent and combat administrative narcissism. In order to achieve that, they suggest that a proactive and stronger foundational curriculum should be in place that could better prepare administrators to distinguish problems and adequately cope with them in the organizational behaviour. Likewise, Canen & Canen (2012) study reinforced the role of HEIs in rethinking their curriculum in management education and other related areas so as "to prepare leaders to competently deal with envy; avoid its effects in the organization; and turn it into a multicultural one" (p. 205).

4. Leaders' approach to social responsibility and the challenge of envy

The methodological approach of the present study was qualitative in nature, based on oral histories of people linked to top managerial positions either in enterprises or in higher education institutions in Brazil. The present paper specifically

draws on data from two leaders that were representative of high echelons respectively in an enterprise (interviewee 1) and in a higher education institution (interviewee 2).

When asked about the meaning attributed to the expression "social responsibility", the following excerpts illustrate the interviewees' views:

> Social responsibility means taking care of individuals, of their religious and ethnic differences, by promoting the decreasing of differences in terms of access to education and to health. It is also linked to the environment, doing our part in the way of preserving natural resources…all of this at the personal level. In terms of the organizational level, it means to take care of the differences, and promote those accesses to education and health through partnerships and sponsorships. (from interviewee 1, December 2012)

> In our HEI, our social responsibility is twofold: firstly, it is geared towards the quality of teaching and researching. It has to do with promoting and increasing knowledge. That is the first and paramount aspect, it is what society expects from us, it is our mission. Secondly, there are aspects linked to extension, so that the HEI does not become an ivory tower, and embraces society's afflicting questions. For example, when the HEI promotes training, when it broadens the range of those to be benefited by education, or when a faculty member and their team are called to assess the impacts and the viability of a government undertaken … this is a very important extension role, because the HEI has to have a political distance and be able to be impartial in its assessment of projects, and that is its big contribution ((from interviewee 2, December 2012).

As can be noted, issues related to differences, as well as to respect to diversity have been mentioned by the interviewee 1. However, a closer look seems to point to a more abstract way of talking about those differences, generally perceived as outside the institutional environment, namely as inherent to those to whom the enterprise projects are geared for. Concerning interviewee 2, HEI social responsibility was understood as both undertaking its role in increasing knowledge and in developing its extension to society, therefore also seeming to focus on the effects of the HEI actions towards its students, future professionals and researchers and to the broader public outside it. Even though those aspects are present in documents and literature dealing with social responsibilitiy (ISO/FDIS 26000, 2010), and undoubtedly represent a crucial dimension in social responsibility, nevertheless they still do not perceive inner multicultural organizational aspects (Canen & Canen, 2005) as relevant to social responsibility.

Although the referred aspects pinpointed in the aforementioned excerpts seemed to give an idea of both the enterprise and the HEI as essencialised, homogenized entites, rather than multicultural ones, it is important to note that those discourses seemed to be nuanced when the interviewees were asked whether they had any perception concerning envy and its impact in the organization search for social responsibility, as well as to how they understood the role of leaders in promoting that idea and challenging envy. The following excerpts illustrate the point:

> I don´t feel there is envy here…But there has not been always the respect for differences in this enterprise…there was a time in which there was a differentiated managerial culture…those that had been here for a long time started to get relegated, devalued, and others that came from the company A literally "invaded" it…The feeling we had at that time was not properly of envy, but rather of having suffered a tremendous injustice…The leader at that time was issued from that company A, and that leader was not really concerned in valuing differences… (from interviewee 1, December 2012)

> Yes, there is envy. It is very common to note peers undermining their colleagues' reputation due to envy. Maybe it has to do with a cultural formation of our people, in which competition is not well viewed as opposed to some international societies in which the competition moves people even to become better people, because they even compete against their own selves in terms of getting to be better and better. The competition there fosters work, quality and positive values! (…) Here there apparently is no competition, but there is envy, it certainly permeates the HEI… There also is narcissism …which has everything to do with envy…The moment someone says they are better than the others, and they try to

> topple the others down, they are undermining their peers…It also has to do with our culture, because whilst in other international contexts the critiques are well accepted, here they tend to be taken as personal offense, people get angry, particularly narcissist ones…Undoubtedly, envy can damage social responsibility, because if, say, someone is doing a work that may have positive impact, the envious person can make up something and denigrate both the person and the work being done, not at all moved by a sincere will to critique, but rather by sheer envy… (from interviewee 2, December 2012)

As can be gleaned from the above, interviewees 1 and 2 had different discourses concerning the presence of envy in their organizations. It should be noted that even though assuring that there is no envy in the enterprise, nevertheless interviewee 1 has indirectly touched on issues of discrimination against workforce, as opposed to a social responsibility perspective (ISO/FDIS 26000, 2010), as well as on the deleterious role of monocultural leaders as opposed to multicultural ones. The leader mentioned by the interviewee 1 seemed to be a monocultural one (Canen & Canen, 2008), likely imbued by ideological and narcissist predispositions (Samier & Atkins, 2010). Interviewee 2, on the other hand, clearly assumed envy was a component of everyday life of the HEI. He seemed to perceive the deleterious role of envy for an institutional road towards social responsibility, as well as that of the presence of narcissism (Samier & Atkins, 2010). Both discourses, however different in content, clearly seemed to indicate that the enterprise as well as the HEI are likely far from approaching social responsibility as a holistic, interdependent oriented organizational thinking (Bozicnik & Mulej, 2010; Belayeva & Canen, 2011). Also, they seem to be far from perceiving their roles in nurturing an open and multiculturally oriented approach to management that potentially could minimize envy and discrimination at the work place (Canen & Canen, 2012).

As a way forward, the interviewees presented some aspects that were deemed efficient to deter envy and optimize fair conducts and social responsibility, as can be noted below:

> The company does not foster incentives and differences. It is a fair enterprise, in terms of social ascension, salaries and so forth. All the positions are published, the promotions are based on the recommendations of organizational committees, the actions are all transparent (…). There is a Code of Ethics, approved by the Administrative Board, with established rules for human relations (from the interviewee 1, December 2012)

> Today there is not an enhanced collective spirit…there is a high rate of individualism and the quantitative indicators of performance only make it worse….It is important to face those challenges, to leave our comfort zone, to start and carry out other kinds of audits so that we can rebuild a collective department identity, which is an efficient way of promoting a collective spirit that is good to minimize envy (from the interviewee 2, December 2012).

As can be noted, interviewee 1 stressed that making promotions and human relations more transparent and instill a trustworthy environment was a crucial aspect undertaken by the enterprise which was perceived as a potential deterrent to envy and narcissism. Interviewee 2 suggested that creating a collective identity and fostering assessment criteria and mechanisms that could enhance cooperation in the place of individualism could likely improve institutional climate, as suggested by authors such as Canen & Canen (2012), and Samier & Atkins (2010).

Both interviewees further elaborated on the relevance of a positive leadership (Canen & Canen, 2008) and of a nurturing organizational climate towards mitigating discrimination, envy, and promoting social responsibilitiy and fair conducts. In fact, interviewee 1 called the attention to a time when there was a CEO of the company that managed to instill an organizational mission in which competition and envy were meted in favour of values of cooperation. Even though the change in leadership for some years ahead rather undermined that vision, by promoting a negative institutional climate as mentioned earlier, the interviewee 1 conceded that those values seemed to linger at the present time, that turbulence having been apparently taken control of.

Likewise, interviewee 2 also talked about the need for organizations to control what he called “the cultural trait of envy, which is corrosive and endemic to our culture”. Even though not explicitly mentioning the presence of a multicultural leader, rather attributing a positive institutional climate to the department smaller size at a certain time in the past, it seems that such a leadership had some important weight in the construction of the department “collective identity”. In fact, according to the interviewee 2, such an identity had been carefully built through seminars, everyday encounters and other initiatives at that time. In that sense, interviewee 2 also brought to mind an expression that

permeated institutional climate at that time, namely "Department X man/woman". According to interviewee 2, such an expression revealed an identity of those that worked there, and likely represented a deterrent to envy "since all felt valued and identified under that expression...indeed there was a' body spirit' that united all, people interacted and identified as one collective body" (from the interviewee 2, December 2012).

In that sense, it is worth noting at this point that both interviewees pointed to the importance of instituted organizational mechanisms that could foster a collective identity that could potentially work towards promoting fair conducts and the success of social responsibility (ISO/FDIS 26000, 2010; Bozicnik & Mulej, 2010; and Belayeva & Canen, 2011). Their discourses indicated the relevance of institutional mechanisms that could lead organizations from negative to positive ones, so as to avoid those aspects such as envy that are a liability to fair conducts and social responsibility. Those mechanisms are arguably deemed relevant so that the organizations should move from corporate irresponsibility to corporate responsibility (Jones *et al*. (2009)), and become multicultural organizations (Canen & Canen, 2005), equipped to positively face diversity and promote fair conducts and social responsibility.

5. Conclusions

The present paper has focused on the inner workings of organizations related to their leaders' understanding of what the expression "social responsibility" means, and the extent to which envy among their members is understood as a potential deterrent both to fair conducts and to social responsibility. Its main argument was that multicultural organizations can be central to mitigate organizational situations in which envy could potentially flourish.

By analysing the discourses of two organizational leaders, respectively acting in an enterprise (interviewee 1) and in a HEI (interviewee 2) located in Brazil, some reflections can be drawn. Firstly, even though some elements of social responsibility mainly geared towards environment and local communities were predominant in their understanding of the meaning of social responsibility, at the other hand there seemed to be an implicit (rather than explicit) concern with social responsibility in terms of the organizational institutional approach, particularly perceived when situations involving envy, narcissism and discrimination were felt by them. A positive multicultural leader and, most of all, a collective identity engendered by that leadership that could involve all in a clear, trustworthy atmosphere and provide a common sense of direction were some of the ways ahead suggested by them in order to challenge envy and promote fair conducts and social responsibility.

In that sense, we claim that organizations need to be better equipped in order to face organizational turbulences detrimental to the social responsibility success, by focusing on human rights and retention of good workforce as part of their social responsibility remit. That way, such a dimension should arguably be more explicitly taken into account in the organizational statements and cultures, so that they could develop into real multicultural organizations well equipped to foster fair conducts and social responsibility.

The present paper represents part of the authors' research interests. It is intended as a call so as to raise future collaboration for further research and discussions related to meanings attributed to social responsibility. It is expected that future joint works and partnerships could facilitate the incorporation of multiculturally oriented policies and practices that contribute to mitigate envy, value cultural diversity, and therefore promote an ever increasing worldwide successful social responsibility.

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