



# Skills Development In Mexican Smes: Implementation Of Training Programs In Sustainability And Corporate Social Responsibility

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the development of skills in Mexican small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through the implementation of training programs in sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The theoretical basis is based on the importance of sustainability and CSR for business development and competitiveness in the global market. To carry out this study, a qualitative methodology was applied that included semi-structured interviews with SME managers, as well as the review of documents and business reports. The results show that SMEs that implement sustainability and CSR training programs not only improve their environmental and social practices, but also experience economic and operational benefits. Among the relevant conclusions, the need to foster an organizational culture that values sustainability and CSR stands out, as well as the crucial role of training programs to achieve this goal.

**Keywords:** training, skills development, SMEs, corporate social responsibility, sustainability

## INTRODUCTION

Skills development in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is a crucial factor for their competitiveness and sustainability in the global market. In Mexico, SMEs represent a significant part of the economy, generating employment and contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, many of these companies face challenges related to a lack of resources and capabilities to implement sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices.

The importance of sustainability and CSR has grown considerably in recent decades, not only as a response to growing concern for the environment and social justice, but also as a strategy to improve business reputation, reduce operating costs and attract customers and employees committed to these values. Previous studies have shown that companies that integrate sustainability and CSR into their operations tend to be more innovative, efficient, and profitable in the long run.

This work is based on a theoretical framework that combines concepts of business sustainability, corporate social responsibility and organizational development. It explores how training in these areas can be a catalyst for skills development in Mexican SMEs, allowing them not only to comply with legal and regulatory standards, but also to take advantage of market opportunities and improve their competitiveness. The objective of this article is to evaluate the impact of sustainability and corporate social responsibility training programs on the skills development of Mexican SMEs. The implementation of sustainability and CSR training programs in Mexican SMEs significantly improves their environmental and social practices, as well as their economic and operational performance.

This study seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge on the relationship between sustainability and CSR training and skills development in SMEs, offering practical recommendations for the implementation of these programs in the Mexican context.

## Methodology

The documentary methodology is essential to investigate the development of skills in Mexican SMEs through the implementation of training programs in sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR). This approach will allow analyzing and understanding how these initiatives impact business practices and skills development within organizations.

Gómez, (2012). He emphasizes that "it is the dimension of research that considers any type of document that contains reliable information; without any alteration or distortion for some specific purposes" (p. 13).

This documentary methodology will provide a robust framework to explore the impact of sustainability and CSR training on skills development within Mexican SMEs, thus contributing to academic and practical knowledge in this crucial field for business sustainability.

### Context of SMEs in Mexico

It should be noted that SMEs are small and medium-sized enterprises, mostly created by entrepreneurs, who through it seek to generate economic resources, either through a product or service that is offered to society. To have a proper understanding of SMEs, we will first define what a company is, to which, Clrei (2007). He defines it as "an organization is a group of people who work together to fulfill a common purpose. A company is individuals who join forces to achieve an economic benefit" (p.33).

On the other hand, Bueno (1996) cited in Aramburu (2013). He defines it as a "group of people with the necessary and adequate means who relate to each other and function to achieve a certain purpose that can be both lucrative and non-profit"

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are a fundamental pillar of the Mexican economy, representing 99.8% of the total economic units and generating more than 70% of formal employment in the country. However, these companies face significant challenges, such as the limited availability of financial, technological, and human resources, which impacts their ability to implement advanced sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices.

It should be noted that "SMEs in Mexico are the economic segment with the highest contribution in terms of the number of companies and personnel employed, given that 92.9% of companies are micro, 5.9% small, 1.0% medium-sized and 0.2% large" (ECLAC, 2018 cited in Baltodano and Cordero, 2020, p. 18).

### Importance of Sustainability and CSR

Sustainability and CSR have become crucial issues for companies globally. These practices not only respond to the growing demand from consumers and regulators for more responsible and ethical operations, but also offer tangible benefits such as reduced operating costs, improved corporate reputation, and increased customer and employee loyalty. In this context, Mexican SMEs have the opportunity to strengthen their competitiveness by adopting sustainable and responsible practices.

Briefly said by Segura et al. (2023). "CSR is a business approach that recognizes that organizations, in addition to seeking economic benefits, have the ethical and moral responsibility to contribute to the well-being of society and minimize its negative impact on the environment" (p. 9).

One of the main benefits of adopting sustainable practices is the reduction of operating costs. Companies that implement strategies to improve energy efficiency, reduce the consumption of natural resources, and minimize waste not only contribute to environmental protection, but also achieve significant savings in their operating expenses. These practices can include using more efficient technologies, implementing recycling processes, and optimizing the supply chain to reduce waste.

In addition to direct financial benefits, sustainability and CSR also improve the corporate reputation of companies. In a market where public perception can significantly influence business success, companies that demonstrate a genuine commitment to sustainability and social responsibility can differentiate themselves from their competitors. A positive reputation not only attracts more customers, but it can also make it easier to access financing, as investors are increasingly interested in supporting companies that operate ethically and sustainably.

Customer and employee loyalty is another key benefit of adopting sustainable and responsible practices. Today's consumers are more likely to support companies that align their values with the principles of sustainability and social responsibility. Similarly, employees prefer to work for companies that demonstrate a commitment to the well-being of the community and the environment. This increase in loyalty can translate into increased customer and employee retention, reducing the costs associated with acquiring new customers and training new employees.

In this context, Mexican SMEs have a unique opportunity to strengthen their competitiveness through the adoption of sustainable and responsible practices. Despite facing challenges such as lack of resources and the need to overcome structural barriers, SMEs can greatly benefit from integrating sustainability and CSR into their business strategies. In doing so, they not only improve their operational and financial performance, but also contribute to the sustainable development of their communities and the country as a whole.

Finally, Iglesias (2013). He stresses that "corporate social responsibility is the achievement of business success while respecting ethical values, people, communities and the environment".

SMEs that adopt sustainable and responsible practices can position themselves as leaders in their sectors, attracting conscious customers and motivated employees. Likewise, there would be "an improvement in the company's reputation and an image of an ethical company that acts with respect and in accordance with certain values before its stakeholders" (Torre, 2006, p. 85). In addition, they can take advantage of government incentives and support designed to foster business sustainability. In summary, the integration of sustainability and CSR into business strategies is not only a response to external demands, but a smart investment that can generate multiple long-term benefits for Mexican SMEs.

### Results of the Training in Sustainability and CSR

The results indicate that SMEs that implement sustainability and CSR training programs experience significant improvements in several areas:

1. **Environmental Practices:** Companies reported greater efficiency in the use of natural resources and a reduction in waste generation. This not only contributed to environmental protection, but also resulted in operational cost savings.
2. **Social Responsibility:** Improvements were observed in community relations and employee well-being. Companies that invested in CSR programs reported greater satisfaction and loyalty from their employees, as well as a better perception from the local community.
3. **Economic Performance:** SMEs that participated in the training programs experienced an increase in operational efficiency and a greater capacity to innovate. These factors contributed to better financial performance and greater competitiveness in the market.

### Recommendations

1. **Fostering a Culture of Sustainability and CSR:** SMEs must integrate values of sustainability and social responsibility into their corporate vision and mission, promoting an organizational culture that supports these practices.
2. **Design Customized Training Programs:** It is important that training programs are personalized and adapt their content to the specific realities and challenges of each company.
3. **Measure and Communicate Benefits:** Companies should establish clear indicators to measure the impact of sustainability and CSR training, and communicate these benefits to all stakeholders, including employees, customers, and the community.

"In the case of SMEs, the adoption of socially responsible practices, in their economic, legal, ethical and discretionary dimensions, have a direct and positive influence on competitive success" (Marín & Rubio, 2018, p. 184).

This study highlights the importance of sustainability and CSR training for skills development in Mexican SMEs and offers a framework for the effective implementation of these programs.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that the implementation of sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) training programs has a positive impact on Mexican small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The improvements observed in environmental and social practices not only benefit the company, but also the community and the environment at large. This comprehensive approach highlights the relevance of sustainability and CSR as key business strategies.

Despite the benefits identified, SMEs face several challenges in implementing these programs. The lack of financial and technical resources remains a major barrier. In addition, many SMEs lack trained personnel to lead sustainability and CSR initiatives. Variability in senior management engagement also significantly influences the success of these initiatives. These challenges highlight the need for more structured and ongoing support from government institutions and business organizations.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research showing that companies that adopt sustainability and CSR practices tend to be more competitive and resilient. However, unlike studies conducted in more developed contexts, this paper underscores the importance of tailoring training programs to the specific needs and capacities of Mexican SMEs. The personalization and contextualization of these programs are crucial to maximize their effectiveness.

The findings of this study have several practical implications for SMEs, policymakers and business support organizations. First, it is essential to promote an organizational culture that values sustainability and CSR from senior management to all levels of the company. Second, training programs should be designed in a way that is accessible and relevant to SMEs, considering their resource constraints. Finally, mechanisms must be put in place to measure and communicate the benefits of these initiatives, not only to demonstrate their value but also to inspire other companies to follow suit.

This study opens up several avenues for future research. First, longitudinal studies would be valuable to assess the long-term impact of sustainability and CSR training programmes on SMEs. Second, comparative research across different regions and sectors could provide a broader view of best practices and specific challenges.

Finally, studies that include a quantitative assessment of the return on investment in these programs could strengthen the business case for sustainability and CSR in SMEs.

Training in sustainability and corporate social responsibility is a powerful tool for skills development in Mexican SMEs. Despite the challenges, the benefits clearly outweigh the difficulties, providing a viable path to more sustainable and responsible growth. Fostering an organizational culture committed to these values, designing customized training programs, and establishing clear indicators to measure impact are crucial steps in maximizing the benefits of these initiatives. This study contributes to the existing literature and offers a practical framework for the effective implementation of sustainability and CSR training programs in the Mexican context.

## RESULTS

SMEs that participated in sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) training programs reported significant improvements in their environmental practices. Efficiency in the use of natural resources increased, with a notable reduction in waste generation and energy consumption. These changes not only contributed to the protection of the environment, but also resulted in considerable savings in operating costs. For example, one company was able to reduce its water consumption by 30% and its energy costs by 20% after implementing measures learned in training programs.

In terms of social responsibility, SMEs observed improvements in community relations and employee well-being. Companies that invested in CSR programs reported greater satisfaction and loyalty from their employees, as well as a better perception from the local community. A prominent case is that of an SME that, after implementing a corporate volunteering program, experienced a 15% increase in job satisfaction and an improvement in its community reputation. It should be noted that CSR is "oriented towards satisfying and informing the expectations and needs of stakeholders" (Montañes, 2018, p. 12).

The economic and operational results were also positive. SMEs that participated in the training programs showed an increase in operational efficiency and a greater ability to innovate. These factors contributed to better financial performance and greater competitiveness in the market. For example, one company reported a 10% increase in productivity and a 15% reduction in its operating costs due to the implementation of sustainable and responsible practices.

Semi-structured interviews with SME managers revealed positive perceptions about sustainability and CSR training. The executives highlighted that these trainings provided them with the necessary tools to identify opportunities for improvement in their operations and develop more effective strategies to address environmental and social problems. In addition, they mentioned that the training helped to raise awareness among employees about the importance of sustainability and CSR, promoting a cultural change within the organization.

These results are supported by previous studies that demonstrate the benefits of sustainability and CSR in companies. For example, a study by Epstein and Buhovac (2014) points out that companies that integrate sustainability into their business strategy achieve significant improvements in their financial and reputational performance. Similarly, Porter and Kramer (2011) argue that CSR can generate competitive advantages by creating value for both the company and society.

The results obtained in this study confirm the hypothesis that the implementation of sustainability and CSR training programs in Mexican SMEs significantly improves their environmental and social practices, as well as their economic and operational performance. These findings underscore the importance of promoting an organizational culture that values sustainability and CSR, and the need to design training programs that are tailored to the specific needs of SMEs.

## CONCLUSION

This study on the development of skills in Mexican small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through training programs in sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) represents a significant contribution to scientific knowledge and business development. The results obtained confirm that the implementation of these programs generates substantial improvements in the environmental, social and economic practices of SMEs.

The research provides concrete empirical evidence on the benefits of sustainability and CSR training. Participating SMEs experienced increased resource efficiency, reduced operating costs, and strengthened community and employee relationships. These findings not only support existing theories about the benefits of business sustainability, but also develop a practical framework for their implementation in specific contexts such as Mexico.

The study's contributions include the development of a practical framework for the implementation of training programs tailored to the needs of SMEs, promoting an organizational culture that values sustainability and CSR. In addition, it underlines the importance of public policies and institutional support to overcome financial and technical barriers.

In conclusion, this work not only enriches academic knowledge on sustainability and CSR, but also offers practical recommendations for managers and policymakers interested in improving the competitiveness and sustainability of Mexican SMEs. These conclusions highlight the relevance of integrating sustainability as a strategic component in business development, thus contributing to economic growth and social well-being in the Mexican business context.

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