

# The State of HR's Role in Corporate Social Responsibility



Improve the brand as well as the bottom line by creating more sustainable and responsible businesses



FEBRUARY 2022

# CONTENTS



3	Executive Summary
7	What Is Corporate Social Responsibility in Today's Organizations?
9	The Adoption of CSR Principles and Practices Today
15	What Role Do HR Professionals Play in CSR?
20	HR's Role in Addressing Global Challenges
26	The Future of HR's Role in CSR
28	How Do CSR Leaders Differ from CSR Laggards?
33	Conclusion
34	Key Takeaways

# Executive Summary

Today's organizations are facing increasing pressure to respond to a wide range of social issues. This pressure is not just coming from activists and governments but from investors. Indeed, Larry Fink, CEO of investment giant Blackrock, recently wrote a letter to shareholders in which he stated that durable long-term returns are dependent on "mutually beneficial relationships between [the company] and the employees, customers, suppliers and communities the company relies on to prosper."<sup>1</sup>

In this report, we investigate the role that human resources professionals are playing in the growing movement toward greater corporate social responsibility. We analyze a variety of key issues such as:

- How involved are HR professionals in their company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs?
- Which CSR practices are most common in today's workplaces?
- Which global issues are seen as most likely to impact today's companies over the next three years?
- What roles do HR professionals play in addressing these issues?
- How do organizations that perform well in the area of CSR tend to differ from those that do not?

## About the Survey

The survey, called "The Future of HR's role in Meeting Global Challenges" ran in the final quarter of 2021. There were usable responses from 217 participants. The study was conducted by HR.com.

For the purposes of the survey, we defined corporate social responsibility as "a business approach that helps organizations to be socially accountable to employees, other stakeholders and the public."

The participants represent a broad cross-section of employers by number of employees, ranging from small businesses with under 50 employees to enterprises with 20,000 or more employees. The majority represent organizations with 250 or more employees.



<sup>1</sup> Fink, L. (2022). Larry Fink's annual 2022 letter to CEOs. *Blackrock*. Retrieved from <https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/investor-relations/larry-fink-ceo-letter>

Following are six major findings from the research:

Major Finding **1**

**In areas of social responsibility, there's a significant gap between where organizations are and where HR professionals would like them to be.**

- While most respondents (74%) say their organization *strives* to be socially responsible to a high or very high extent, only 59% say that their organization actually achieves that aim.
- The majority state that their organization follows core CSR principles, such as ethical behavior (86%) and respect of the rule of law (76%), either formally or informally.
- Far fewer have formal policies or initiatives in place—for example, only about half have a formal policy on corporate accountability (51%) and even fewer in regard to respect for human rights (48%). On the other hand, 80% have created a formal policy or initiative around ethical behavior, and 57% have in regard to respect for the rule of law.

Major Finding **2**

**In the near future, global challenges will impact most organizations and HR professionals believe they can play a role in addressing some of them.**

- Ninety-five percent of HR professionals predict that one or more global issues will negatively affect their corporations in the next three years, with the most common concerns being:
  - ▶ economic difficulties
  - ▶ pandemics
  - ▶ mental health issues
  - ▶ lack of economic opportunity
  - ▶ income inequality
  - ▶ discrimination and bias
- The majority of HR professionals feel they can play a role in addressing the specific issues of discrimination and bias (67%) and mental health issues (63%). A third or more believe they can have an impact on:
  - ▶ income inequality
  - ▶ lack of economic opportunity
  - ▶ inadequate safety and wellbeing
  - ▶ inadequate education
  - ▶ pandemics

Major Finding **3**

**HR professionals typically play a role in CSR in their organizations, but that role varies widely by company and by practice.**

- Fully 91% of respondents say HR plays some role in CSR in their organizations, and nearly a fifth (18%) say that HR actually oversees CSR in their organizations.
- The most commonly cited roles among HR professionals are that “HR works to improve the employer experience and this impacts CSR” (59%) and “HR partners with others around CSR-related issues” (53%).
- Over a third (35%) say HR is responsible for implementing CSR initiatives and 29% say it is responsible for creating CSR initiatives.
- Well over a third (38%) of HR professionals would like to be more involved in their organization’s CSR initiatives.

Major Finding **4**

**Organizations are most likely to be engaged in four key CSR practices:**

- improving diversity, equity and inclusion (64%)
- instituting fair labor/workforce priorities (63%)
- charitable giving (60%)
- community improvements (57%)

Major Finding **5**

**HR professionals believe that much of what they do has a strong impact on corporate social responsibility and business ethics, and these have a positive impact on the overall employee experience.**

- HR professionals believe that most HR functions can have a positive impact on CSR, but the functions most widely cited are:
  - ▶ employee experience and engagement
  - ▶ diversity, equity and inclusion
  - ▶ benefits in general
  - ▶ learning and development
  - ▶ wellness and safety programs
  - ▶ recruitment and selection
- A majority of HR professionals believe that three issues related to CSR positively impact the employee experience to a high or very high extent:
  - ▶ maintaining ethical business practices (86%)
  - ▶ addressing diversity, equity and inclusion (67%)
  - ▶ engaging in corporate social responsibility (60%)

Major  
Finding **6**

**Compared with organizations that do not excel at corporate social responsibility, those that do are:**

- over twice as likely to say they have a formal policy or initiative related to the CSR principle of transparency
- over twice as likely to say they have a formal policy or initiative related to respect for shareholder interests
- over twice as likely to say they have a formal policy or initiative related to respect for international norms of behavior
- about twice as likely to say they have a formal policy or initiative related to respect for human rights
- nearly twice as likely to say their organization engages in community involvement efforts
- nearly twice as likely to say they have corporate policies that benefit the environment
- 83% more likely to say they have practices that benefit the environment
- 57% more likely to say HR is responsible for overseeing CSR policies
- 44% more likely to report that their financial performance is above average when compared to competitors

# What Is Corporate Social Responsibility in Today's Organizations?

Corporate social responsibility, or CSR, has been around for decades, but increased social and consumer awareness has driven a growing commitment to CSR practices in corporations. In 2019, 90% of companies on the S&P 500 index published a CSR report, up from just 20% in 2011.<sup>2</sup>

There is a business case to be made for corporate social responsibility initiatives. Seventy-seven percent of consumers are motivated to purchase from companies “committed to making the world better.”<sup>3</sup> Nearly 70% of employees would only work for a company with a “strong purpose.”<sup>4</sup> And this demand for CSR has increased in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic; 95% of today's employees believe that, now more than ever, businesses “must benefit all stakeholders, not just shareholders alone.”<sup>5</sup>

Many executives share this awareness that a strong sense of social purpose is a key component of long-term business performance. However, there is a clear disparity between intention and results. While most business leaders agree that collective purpose drives employee satisfaction, customer loyalty, and their organization's ability to transform, less than half believe that their company actually has that strong sense of purpose.<sup>6</sup>

In this report, we were keen to investigate the progress that businesses are making to deliver on their ethical and social commitments. In particular, we wanted to understand the role HR professionals are playing in today's CSR initiatives and how HR can help to close the gap between intention and implementation.

---

<sup>2</sup> Harvard Business School. (2021, June 15). *15 eye-opening corporate social responsibility statistics*. Retrieved from <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/corporate-social-responsibility-statistics>

<sup>3</sup> Aflac. (2019). *2019 Aflac CSR Survey*. Retrieved from <https://www.aflac.com/docs/about-aflac/csr-survey-assets/2019-aflac-csr-infographic-and-survey.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Porter Novelli. (2020). *Employee Perspectives on Responsible Leadership During Crisis*. Retrieved from [https://www.porternovelli.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/02\\_Porter-Novelli-Tracker-Wave-X-Employee-Perspectives-on-Responsible-Leadership-During-Crisis.pdf](https://www.porternovelli.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/02_Porter-Novelli-Tracker-Wave-X-Employee-Perspectives-on-Responsible-Leadership-During-Crisis.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Harvard Business Review. (2015). *The Business Case For Purpose*. Retrieved from [https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en\\_gl/topics/digital/ey-the-business-case-for-purpose.pdf](https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_gl/topics/digital/ey-the-business-case-for-purpose.pdf)

## CSR-Related Definitions

Within the context of the survey we fielded on this topic, we provided the following definitions so that participants would answer the questions from a consistent framework.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a business approach that helps organizations be socially accountable to employees, other stakeholders, and the public. Through CSR, organizations can recognize and strive to influence the impact they are having on various aspects of society, including the economic, social and environmental spheres.

The seven subjects of CSR (as defined by the ISO 26000):

1. **Accountability** – Being answerable for decisions and activities to the organization’s governing bodies, legal authorities and stakeholders.
2. **Transparency** – Openness about decisions and activities that affect society, the economy and the environment, and willingness to communicate these in a clear, accurate, timely, honest and complete manner.
3. **Ethical behavior** – Behavior that is in accordance with accepted principles of right or good conduct in the context of a particular situation and is consistent with international norms of behavior.
4. **Respect for stakeholder interests** – Identifying groups of stakeholders and responding to their concerns.
5. **Respect for the rule of law** – Complying with all applicable regulations, even if they are not adequately enforced.
6. **Respect for international norms of behavior** – Complying with all universally or nearly universally recognized international laws and/or intergovernmental agreements.
7. **Respect for human rights** – identifying vulnerable populations within stakeholders and working to ensure their fair treatment.

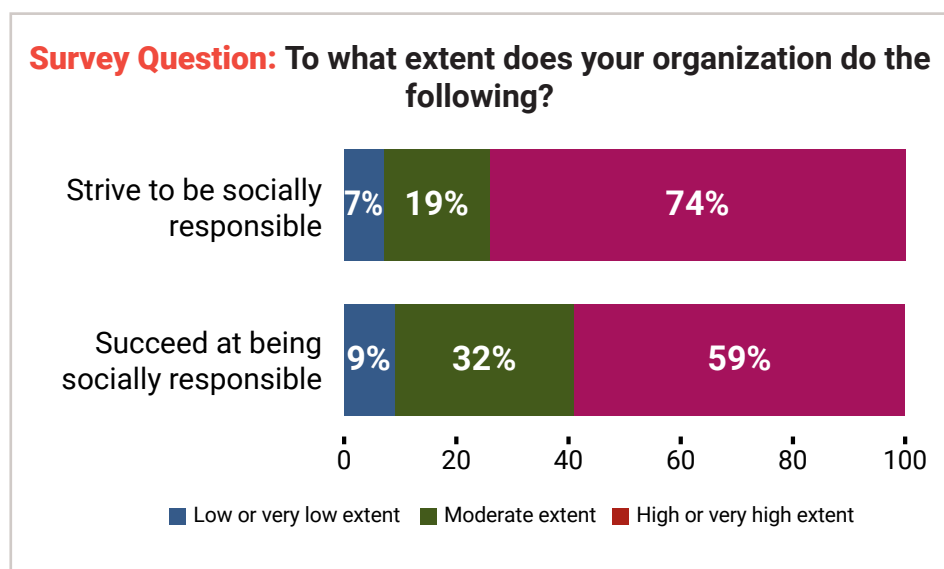


# The Adoption of CSR Principles and Practices Today



## Finding: Most organizations strive to be socially responsible, but fewer actually succeed

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of our respondents say that their organizations are striving to be socially responsible to a high or very high extent, but only 59% feel that they succeed in the endeavor. In other words, while the good intentions are there, many companies are struggling with the effective implementation of their CSR goals.



In this report, we use this data set to define two cohorts for analysis:

**CSR leaders:** This includes respondents who answered that their organization succeeds at being responsible to a high or very high extent.

**CSR laggards:** This includes respondents who answered that their organization succeeds at being socially responsible to a moderate, low or very low extent.

We explore the differences between these two cohorts later in the report (see CSR Best Practices: What CSR Leaders Do Differently).



## Finding: Most organizations follow CSR principles, at least informally, but fewer have created formal CSR policies or initiatives

We provided survey respondents with definitions of the seven key CSR principles, as specified by the ISO26000<sup>7</sup> (see page 8).

Only 5% of respondents say that their organization does not formally or informally follow any of the seven key subjects of CSR. The most common principles that are followed in today's organizations are "ethical behavior" (86%), "accountability" (80%) and "respect for the rule of law" (76%).

Respect for international norms of behavior is less of a priority—only 44% of respondents say that their organization follows this principle, even informally. Perhaps the turbulent market situation triggered by COVID-19 has forced many businesses to turn their focus inwards, or perhaps organizations without a truly global footprint take little notice of such norms.

There is a significant fall-off when it comes to formal policies and initiatives in the CSR sphere. For instance, less than half of organizations have a formal accountability policy, and less than one in three have formal guidelines around corporate transparency.

### About the ISO26000

The International Organization for Standards (ISO) is an international body composed of national standards groups from 160 countries. In 2010, the ISO published the ISO26000, intended to offer guidance and define the core principles involved in corporate social responsibility. While the ISO26000 is not a form of certification, the guidelines are increasingly used as a method for assessing an organization's performance on social and ethical measures.

<sup>7</sup> ISO26000 guidance on social responsibility - Definitions. Retrieved from <https://iso26000.info/definitions/>

**Percent of HR professionals who that say CSR principles are being followed by organizations (formally or informally) versus formal CSR policies and initiatives that actually in place**



Note: This chart is comprised of two different survey questions: “Which of the following CSR principles does your organization follow, either formally or informally?” and “For which of the CSR principles has your organization created a formal policy or initiative?”

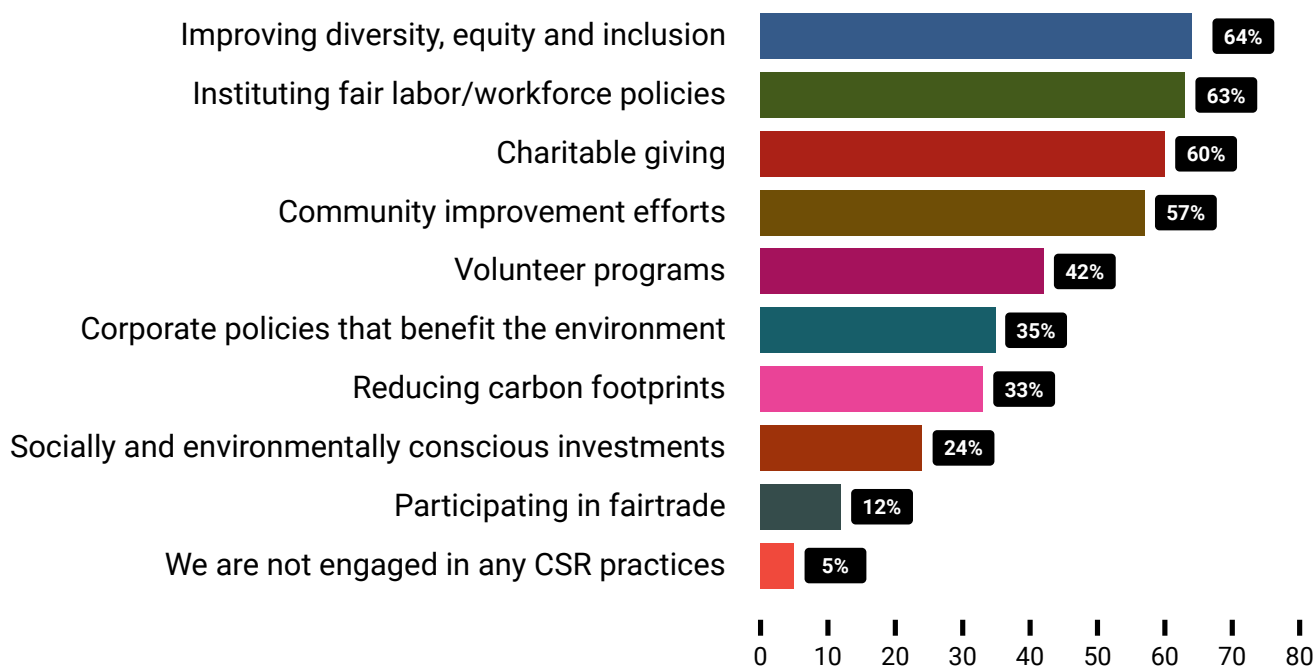


## Finding: Diversity, equity and inclusivity initiatives represent the most commonly adopted CSR practice

As well as asking about the adoption of CSR principles, we also asked our respondents about specific initiatives aimed at improving CSR. More than three-fifths, for example, confirm that their organization is currently engaged in improving diversity, equity and inclusivity. Nearly as many are also instituting fair labor or workforce policies.

However, only 24% practice socially or environmentally conscious investing, and only 12% say they engage in fair trade practices. It seems that priority is currently given to CSR initiatives that directly intersect with HR functions, such as workforce diversity and fair labor policies. Issues like climate change have fewer formal initiatives associated with them—possibly because they don't have clear ownership under a specific business function. It is also possible, that HR professionals are simply not as knowledgeable about such practices.

### Survey Question: In which of the following corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices is your organization engaged?





## Finding: Among organizations that have policies that benefit the environment, recycling is the most common practice while other initiatives are rarer

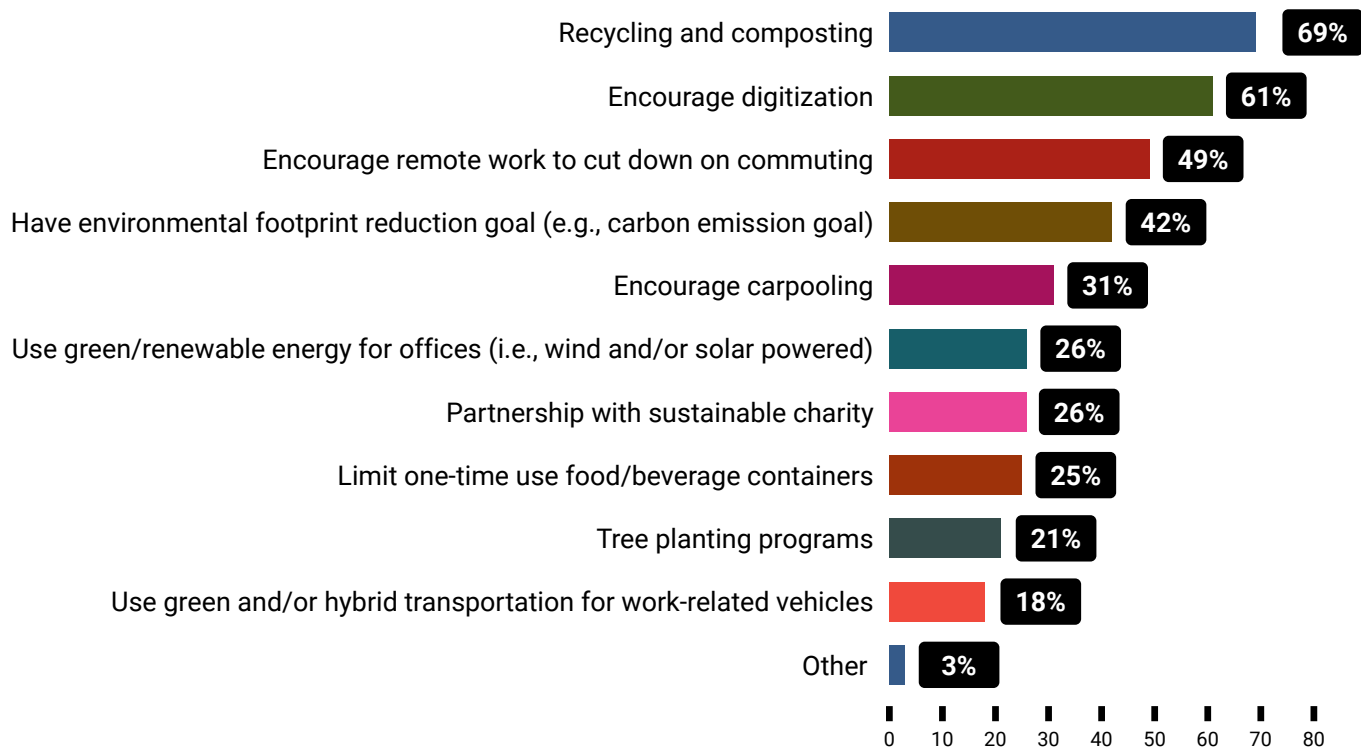
If respondents said their company was engaged in reducing their carbon footprint or other policies that benefited the environment, we then asked them to provide more detail. The picture that emerged suggests that there remains plenty of work to be done when it comes to green and sustainable initiatives. For example, even though transportation is the largest contributor of greenhouse gases in the U.S.,<sup>8</sup> only a third of this group of respondents say that their organization encourages carpooling, and just 18% are using green or sustainable vehicles for work-related transport. The most common initiatives are related to recycling and composting (69%).

It's worth noting, however, that over 60% are encouraging digitization, which can play a key role in CSR by reducing an organization's environmental impact, increasing organizational transparency, and improving operational efficiency.<sup>9</sup> While the drive toward digitization may not be specifically aimed at improving CSR, this is a good example of how certain strategic initiatives can dovetail with social and climate initiatives.

<sup>8</sup> EPA. (2022). *Carbon pollution from transportation*. Retrieved from <https://www.epa.gov/transportation-air-pollution-and-climate-change/carbon-pollution-transportation>

<sup>9</sup> European Council. (2020, December 17). *Digitalisation for the benefit of the Environment*: Council approves conclusions. Retrieved from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/12/17/digitalisation-for-the-benefit-of-the-environment-council-approves-conclusions/>

**Survey Question: Which green/sustainable initiatives does your organization currently have?**



# What Role Do HR Professionals Play in CSR?

Do HR professionals play a significant role in CSR? The answer is that they often do, but turns out to be a surprisingly complex question, and the answer may depend on who is being asked. For example, a survey published by the Chartered Institute of People Development (CIPD) back in 2013 found that over 80% of HR managers saw their contribution to corporate responsibility as vital.<sup>10</sup> However, that survey found that less than half of the managers from outside the HR function agreed—54% did not feel that HR made a valuable contribution to CSR initiatives.

But there are other ways of getting at this question. Our research looks at various issues, from who “owns” CSR initiatives to how HR is engaged in CSR issues. We also ask about the degree to which HR professionals, many of whom already have a full plate, wish to be more closely involved with CSR issues.



## Finding: Although organizational leaders are most typically overseeing CSR policies or initiatives, HR professionals are second on the list of responsible parties

Fifty-six percent of respondents say that the CEO or president is responsible for overseeing one or more of their CSR policies. This suggests that CSR is a significant responsibility for many of today’s business leaders. This is probably linked to the CEO’s role as the driver of the company’s core mission and vision. For 36% of organizations, the Board of Directors is also responsible for overseeing one or more of the CSR initiatives.

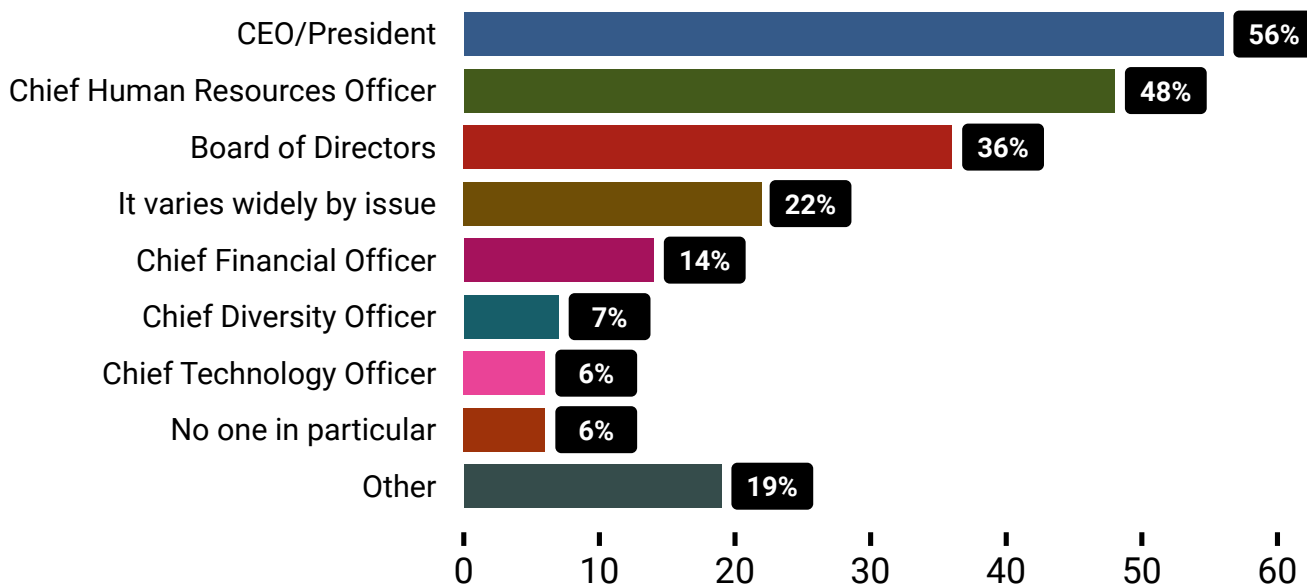
For just 48%, their Chief Human Resources Officer also plays a leadership role in CSR. It seems that many organizations do recognize the close link between human resources functions and corporate

<sup>10</sup> CIPD. (2013). *The role of HR in corporate responsibility - CIPD*. Retrieved from [https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/the-role-of-hr-in-corporate-responsibility\\_2013-sop\\_tcm18-9315.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/the-role-of-hr-in-corporate-responsibility_2013-sop_tcm18-9315.pdf)

social responsibility initiatives, although ownership may be shared with executive management or other departments. However, given the close links identified in this survey and elsewhere between CSR and employee experience, we might expect HR to lead at least one CSR initiative in the majority of organizations.

It's worth noting that nearly 20% of respondents gave "Other" as their response—the roles named include other HR roles (including "HR Manager," "VP of HR" and "Head of Labor Relations"), other leadership roles (such as "Executive Management" and "Executive Committee"), compliance roles ("Compliance Department" and "General Counsel" among others), and specific CSR roles, such as "Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer" and "Ethics Officer." These last roles are on the rise, according to global recruitment agency Robert Walters—their latest report into recruitment trends found that CSR-related job roles have risen 74% since 2020.<sup>11</sup>

**Survey Question: Who is responsible for overseeing one or more of your CSR policies and/or initiatives?**



<sup>11</sup> Robert Walters. (2021). *Environment, social and governance report*. Retrieved from <https://www.robertwalters.co.uk/hiring/campaigns/ESG-report.html>



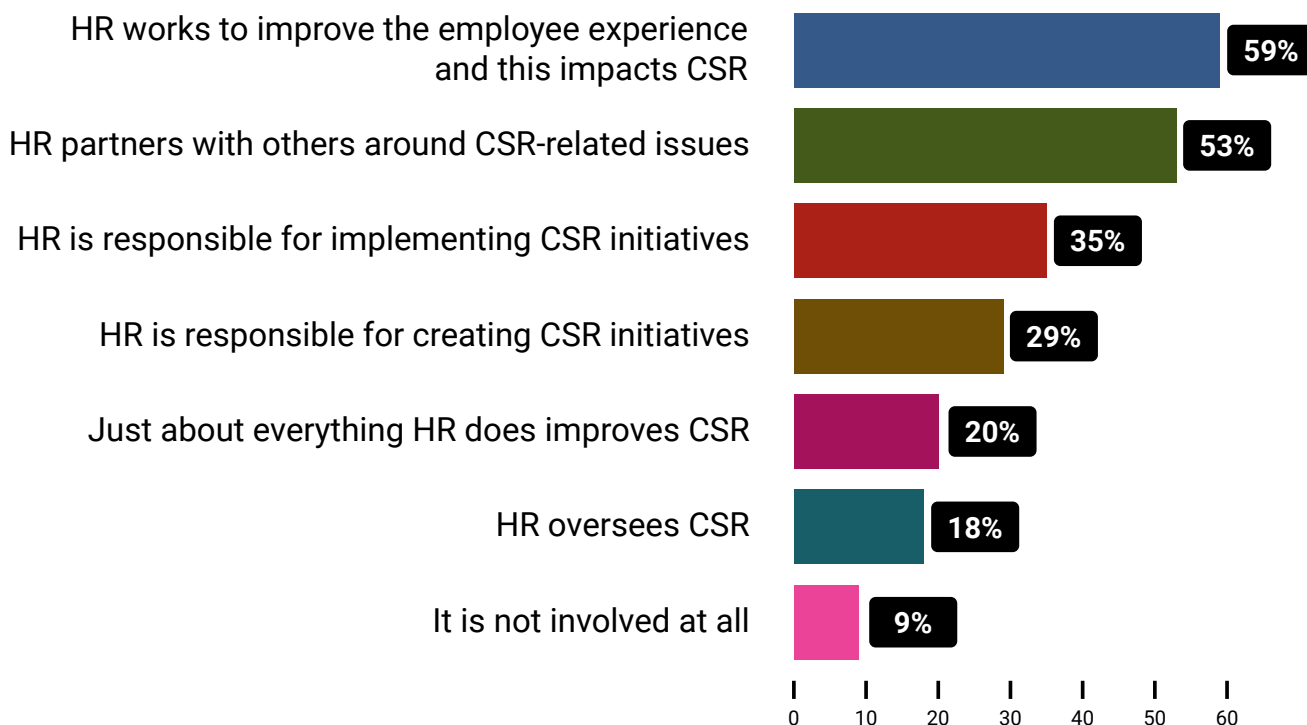


## Finding: HR is more likely to partner with others than to create or oversee CSR-related issues

Fully 91% of respondents indicate that HR is involved with CSR at some level. More than half of respondents answer that HR has partnered with others to work on CSR issues, and 35% say that HR is responsible for implementing CSR initiatives. However, HR oversees CSR in only 18% of organizations, and in 9% it is not involved at all.

Notably, 59% of respondents agree that HR works to improve the employee experience, which in turn impacts CSR issues. In fact, 20% of our respondents believe that “just about everything HR does improves CSR.”

### Survey Question: How is HR involved in CSR in your organization?



# The Impact on the Employee Experience

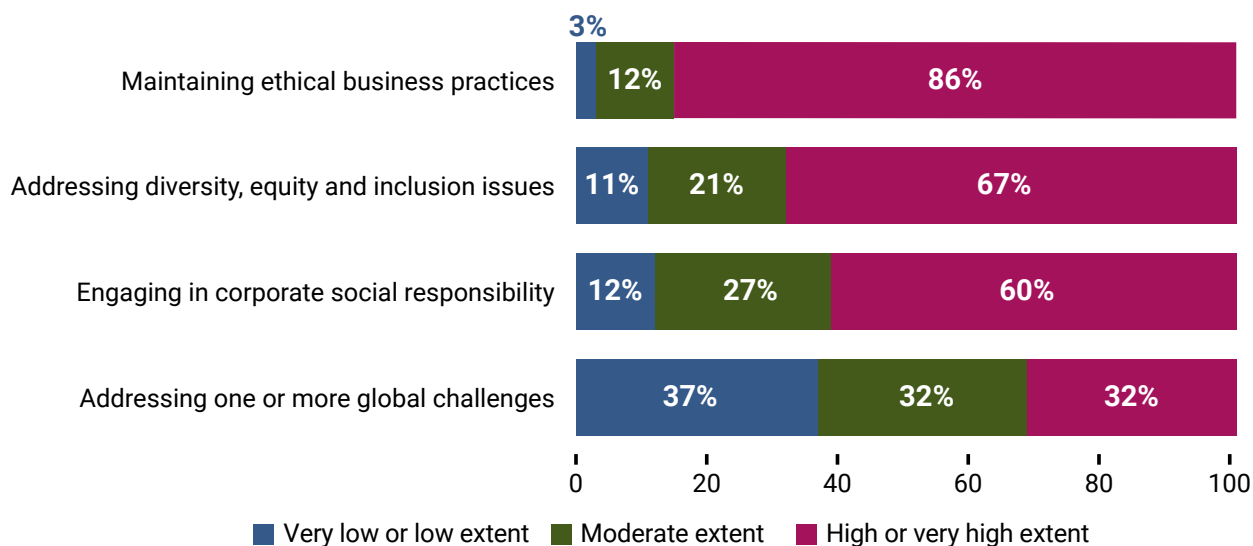


## Finding: Most HR professionals believe that ethical business practices have a positive impact on the employee experience

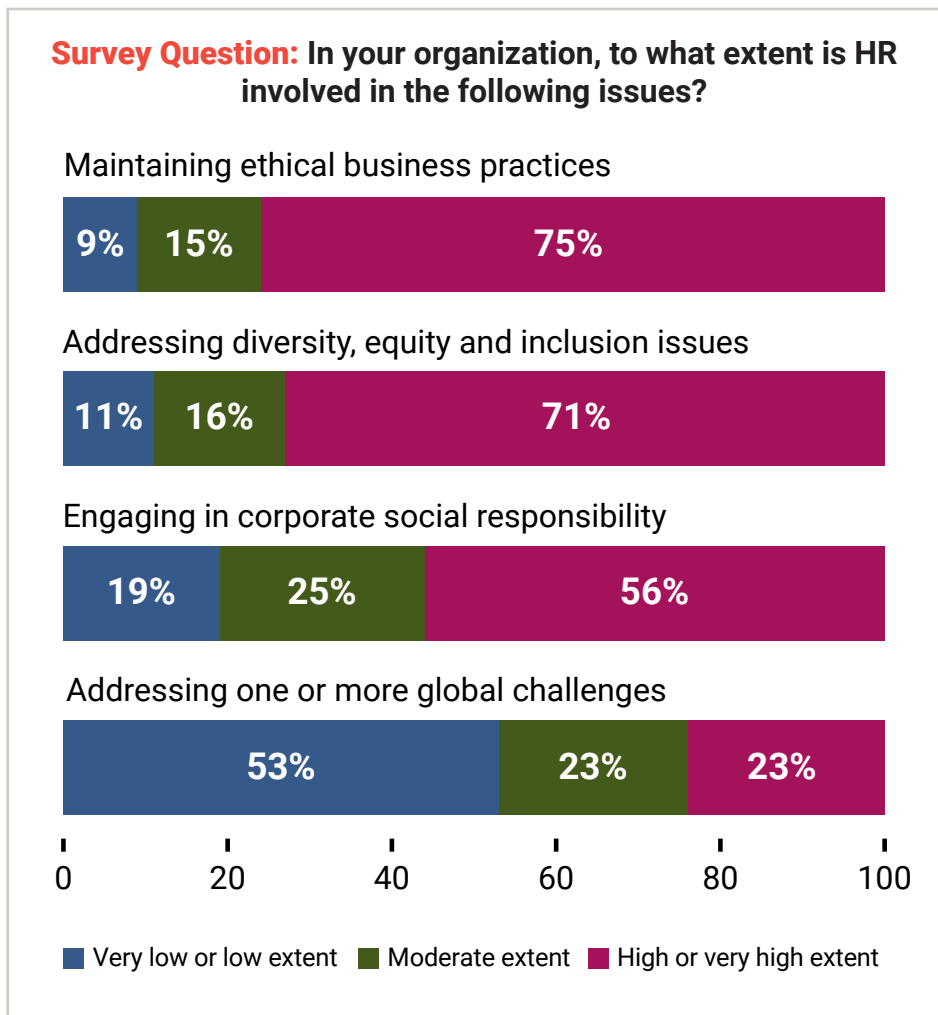
HR may not always have ownership of CSR initiatives, but our respondents clearly see a connection between CSR and one of the core areas of HR responsibility: the employee experience. Fully 86% of the HR professionals we surveyed feel that maintaining ethical business practices has a high or very high positive influence on the employee experience in their organization. Sixty-seven percent also believe that addressing issues of diversity, equity and inclusivity is important to providing a positive experience for their employees.

However, global issues are not seen as adding much to the employee experience; only 32% of respondents feel that addressing global challenges contributes to their workplace environment.

### Survey Question: To what extent do you think these issues positively influence the employee experience in your organization?



As expected, HR's involvement in these issues aligns closely with their perceived impact on the employee experience.



# HR's Role in Addressing Global Challenges

Our respondents are clear that HR has a role to play in addressing some global issues. Our findings also suggest that corporate social responsibility and human resources are closely linked, with multiple HR functions having a positive effect on CSR outcomes.



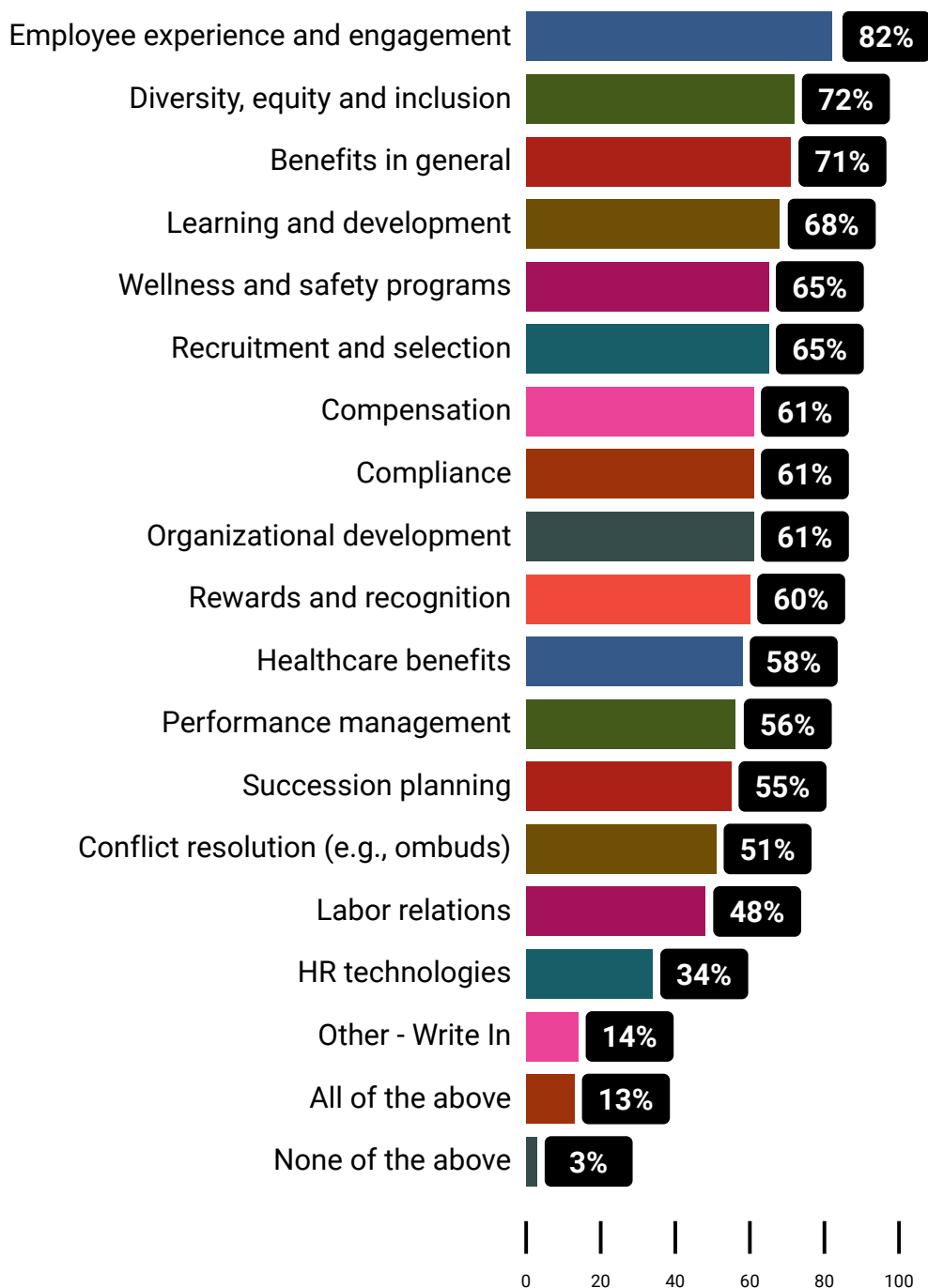
## Finding: Most respondents believe that multiple HR functions have a positive impact on corporate social responsibility

Numerous HR functional areas are seen as having a positive impact on CSR issues, including employee experience (82%), diversity, equity and inclusion (72%), benefits (71%) and learning and development (68%).

Less than half of our respondents, however, consider labor relations as having a positive impact on CSR. Compliance is also unexpectedly low at 61%, even though compliance might be seen as directly impacting transparency, employee wellbeing and safety, and other CSR principles.



**Survey Question:** In your organization, which of the following HR functional areas do you think can have a positive impact on CSR issues?





## Finding: There are three global challenges that the majority of HR professionals believe will have an impact on their organizations within the next three years

Only 5% of our respondents say that no global challenges will affect their organizations in the upcoming years. For the majority (71%), economic difficulties such as a recession are most likely to negatively impact their company. This is closely followed by pandemics (64%) and mental health issues (55%).

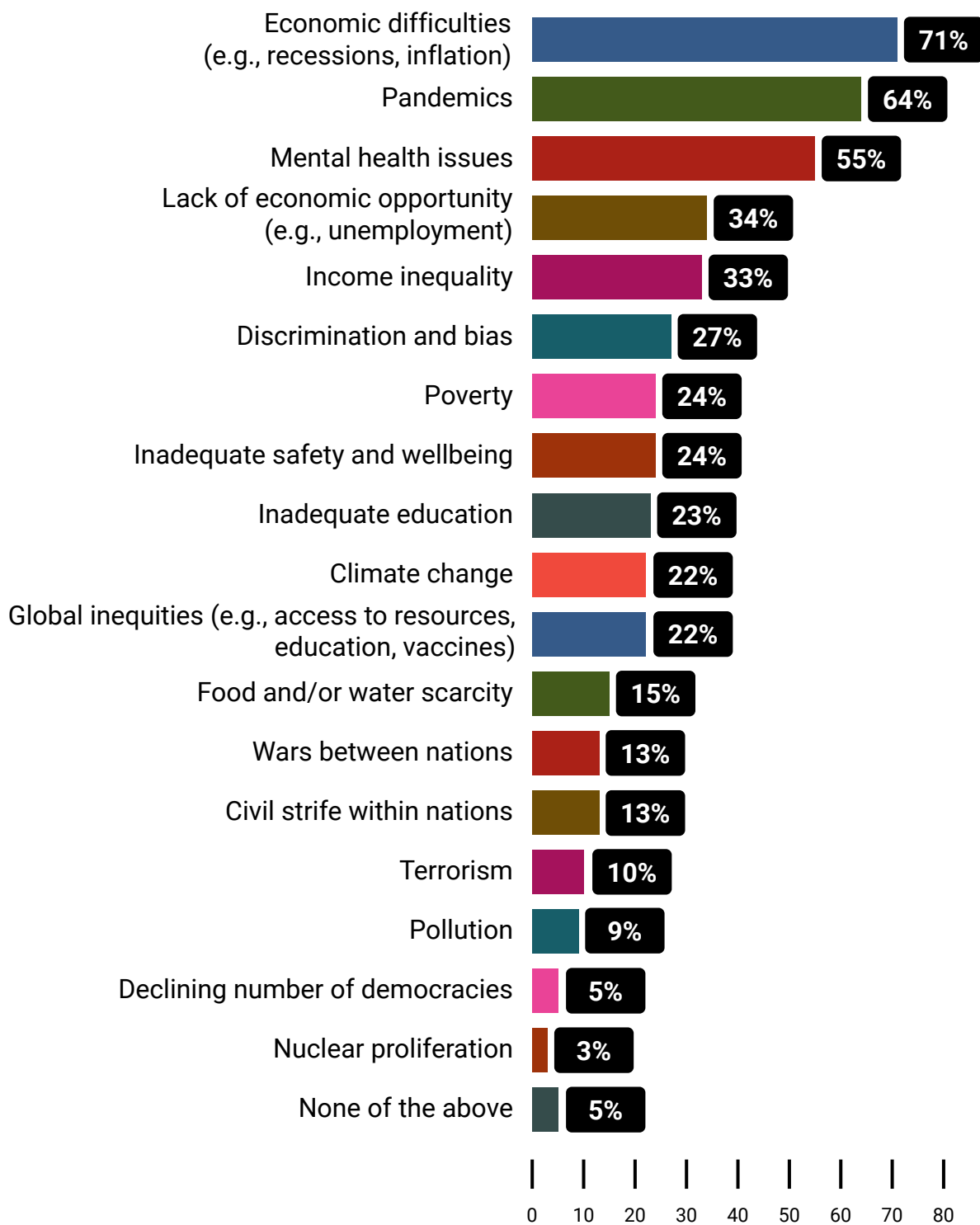
It's likely that these responses have been heavily weighted by recent events—if we'd done this study three years ago, it seems improbable that nearly two-thirds of respondents would have predicted that their organization would be struggling with pandemics.

The focus on mental health issues also points to HR's growing awareness of their role in helping employees deal with workplace stress, anxiety and depression, with more than half of US employees reporting worsened mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak.<sup>12</sup>



<sup>12</sup> Routt, D. (2021, June 16). Council post: Managing mental health in the workforce: A new role for HR professionals. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2021/06/16/managing-mental-health-in-the-workforce-a-new-role-for-hr-professionals/?sh=2adf441f8a>

**Survey Question:** Which of the following issues do you think will have a negative impact on your organization over the next three years?





## Finding: HR professionals believe they have a role to play in addressing multiple global challenges, including discrimination and mental health issues

Sixty-seven percent of our respondents feel that HR can play a role in addressing discrimination and bias, and 63% feel HR can help with mental health issues in their organization. At the other end of the scale, only 12% of those surveyed believe that HR has any role to play in addressing climate change, and even fewer (7%) see a role for HR in tackling pollution.

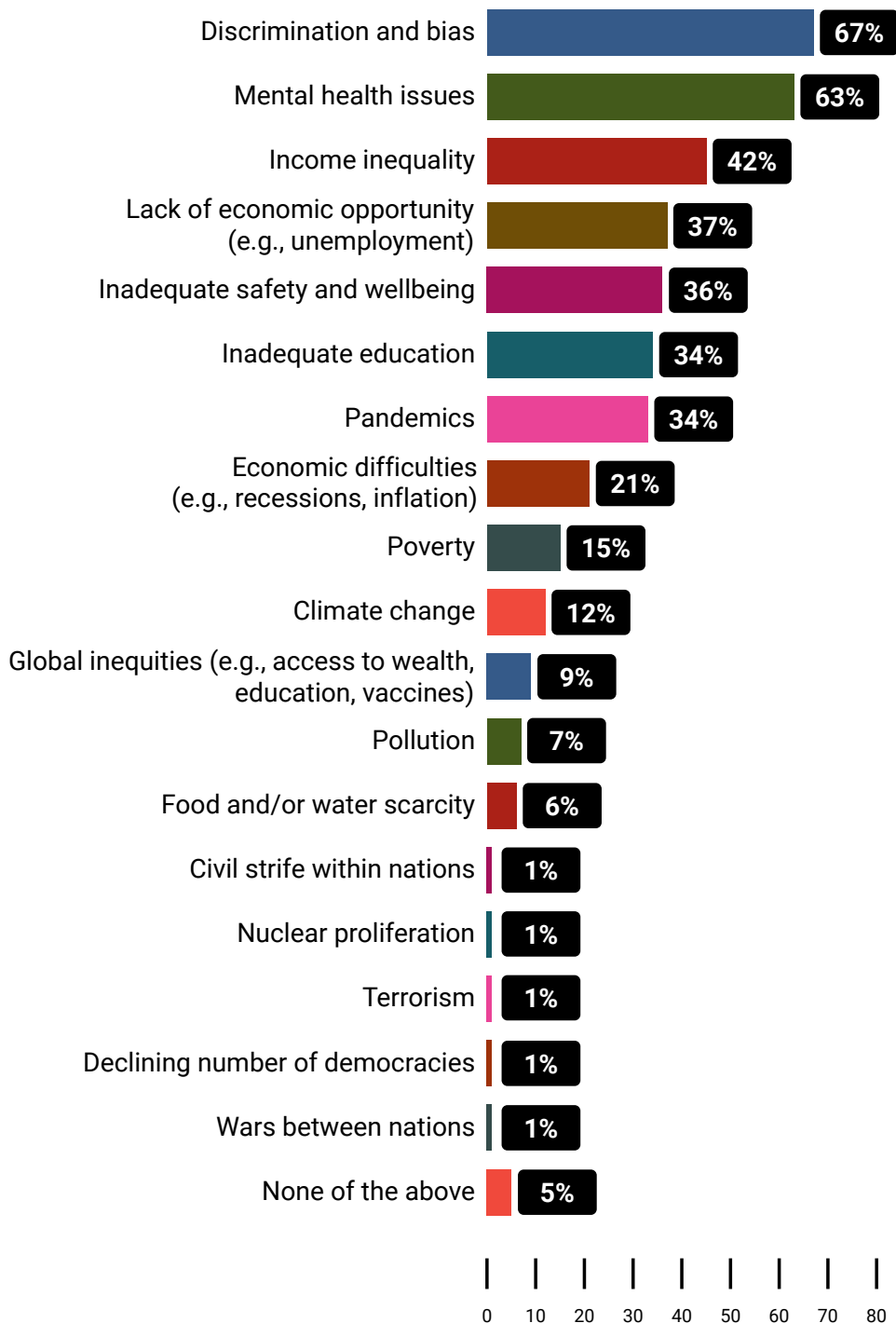
When taken with our earlier finding that only 27% anticipate a negative impact from discrimination in the coming years, we could infer that our respondents feel optimistic that their current efforts toward combating bias in the workplace will be effective.

On the other hand, it seems that HR professionals do not see a place for themselves in working on global issues such as climate change, inadequate safety and wellbeing, or poverty—even though safety and wellbeing policies, adherence with minimum wage guidelines, and more climate friendly workplaces all fall within their remit.





**Survey Question:** For which of the following issues do you think HR in your organization can potentially play some role in addressing them?



# The Future of HR's Role in CSR



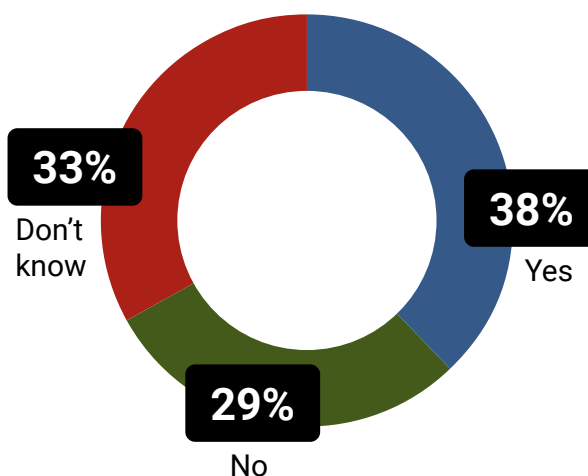
## Finding: Many HR professionals would like to be more involved in CSR than they currently are

Close to two-fifths (38%) of the HR professionals we surveyed would be keen to increase their role in CSR in their organizations. Given the workload of many HR professionals, this was a notably high level of interest, suggesting that many HR personnel are aware of the relationship between CSR initiatives and the overall employee experience they can provide.

Interestingly, a comparable number of respondents (33%) are unsure if they would like to be more involved. Perhaps corporate social responsibility remains an unknown quantity for many HR professionals or perhaps many are leery of putting more on their already full plates.

Those keen to promote greater CSR might start by examining the issues in greater detail and determining where they may play the most important role.

### Survey Question: Would you like to be more involved with CSR than you currently are in your organization?





## Finding: Many HR professionals want to advocate for a greater CSR focus at the executive level

Via an open-ended question, we asked those respondents who say they would like to be more involved in CSR what their involvement would look like. Below are some of the categories into which their responses fall as well as some direct quotes:

- **Become a more informed and active CSR leader, developer or partner:**
  - ▶ “Actually create a plan, and execute it”
  - ▶ “Develop policies on CSR”
  - ▶ “I’d like to create and lead CSR programs”
  - ▶ “Be on the team that addresses CSR and implements CSR to help improve the organization”
  - ▶ “Advocate for CSR in the organization”
- **Become an advocate, communicator and information gatherer:**
  - ▶ “Promoting the company stance to the employee base”
  - ▶ “Outreach to the community”
  - ▶ “A clearer definition of CSR within the organization and how each employee contributes”
  - ▶ “Applying a questionnaire and seeing what the needs are and where we can help”
- **Help convince leadership of CSR’s importance:**
  - ▶ “Develop a stronger commitment to CSR at the C & leadership levels”
  - ▶ “Getting buy in from executives to start new programs, pushing for more financial literacy programs”
- **Become involved at an individual level:**
  - ▶ “As volunteer”
  - ▶ “By taking part directly on some of the community related issues, conflict resolution and volunteering work”

# How Do CSR Leaders Differ from CSR Laggards?

As noted earlier, we broke respondents into two cohorts for analytical purposes: CSR leaders believe they succeed at being socially responsible to a high or very high extent, and CSR laggards feel as if their organizations succeed to a moderate, low or very low extent.

We should note that, while we can draw inferences from the data, correlation is not the same as causation. Therefore, there is no assurance that the specific practices discussed below will result in a more socially responsible organization.



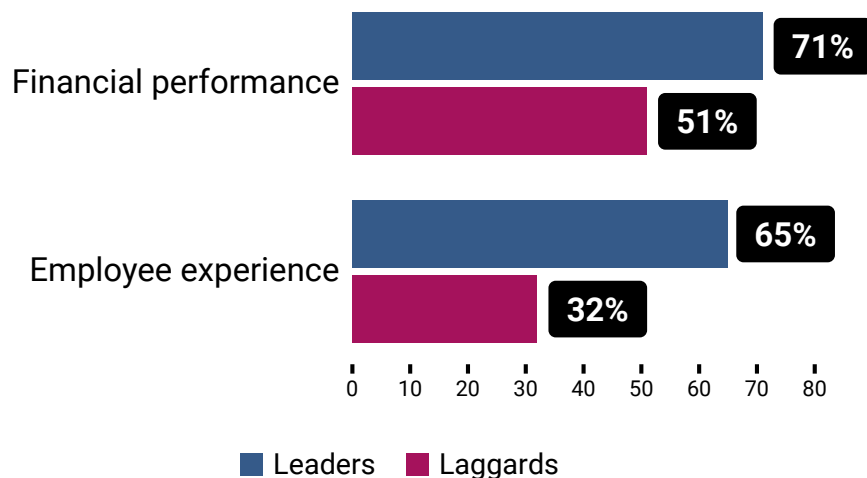
## Finding: CSR leaders tend to realize better financial results and nurture better employee experiences

Some experts have suggested that improved CSR can help drive better business performance “in the most recent fiscal year compared to competitors in your industry.” We discovered that 71% of the CSR leader group say their financial performance is somewhat or far above average. This compares with just 51% among laggards. Of course, there are many factors that determine financial levels of performance, but this data supports the possibility of a positive relationship between these two areas.

The idea that CSR is related to positive employee experiences is also supported but to a stronger degree. Indeed, leaders (65%) are twice as likely as laggards (32%) to rate the employee experiences in their organizations as above average. We should note that these differences are not strongly related to company size, suggesting there are other drivers of these trends.

**Survey Statement:** Please rate your organization's performance in the most recent fiscal year compared to competitors in your industry.

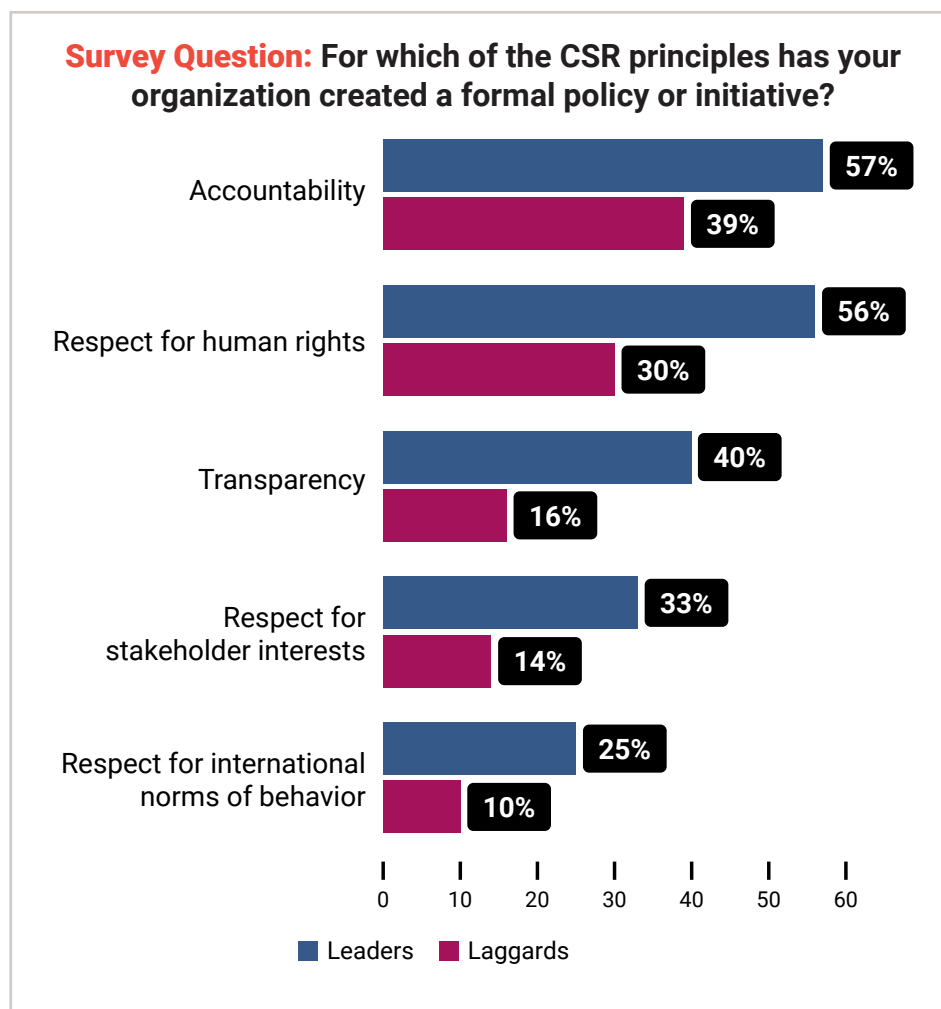
Percent far above average and somewhat above average





## Finding: CSR leaders are considerably more likely to have formal policies or initiatives related to CSR principles

CSR leaders are considerably more likely to have formal policies or initiatives related to five of the seven key principles. They are, for example, over twice as likely to have policies related to transparency, respect for stakeholder interests, and respect for international norms of behavior.

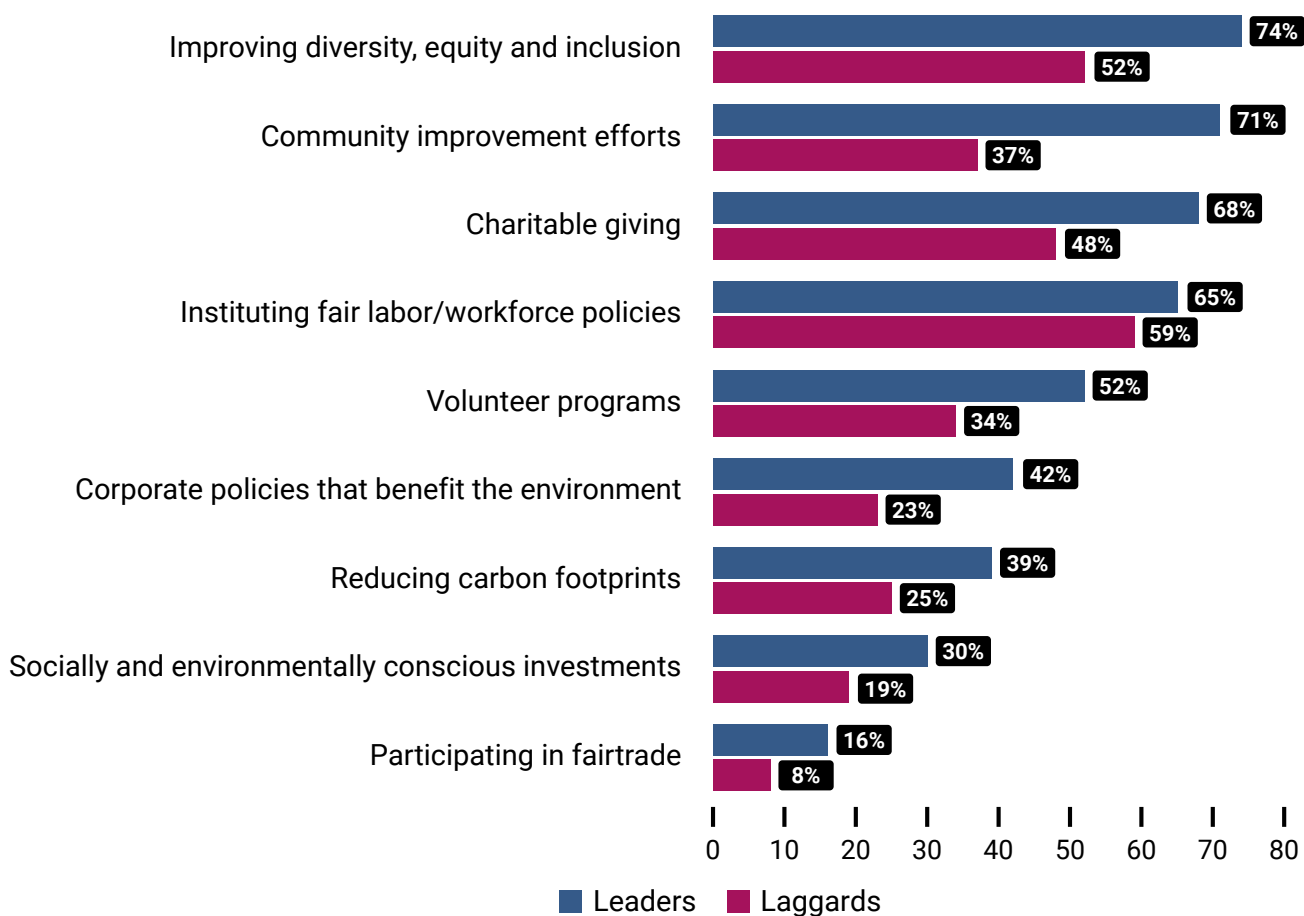




## Finding: CSR leader organizations are more likely to be engaged in specific practices related to CSR as well

In terms of specific practices, the CSR leader cohort is more likely to engage in all the ones listed, but there are especially sizeable differences in areas such as community improvement efforts (71% vs. 37%) and corporate policies that benefit the environment (42% vs. 23%).

### Survey Question: In which of the following corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices is your organization engaged?

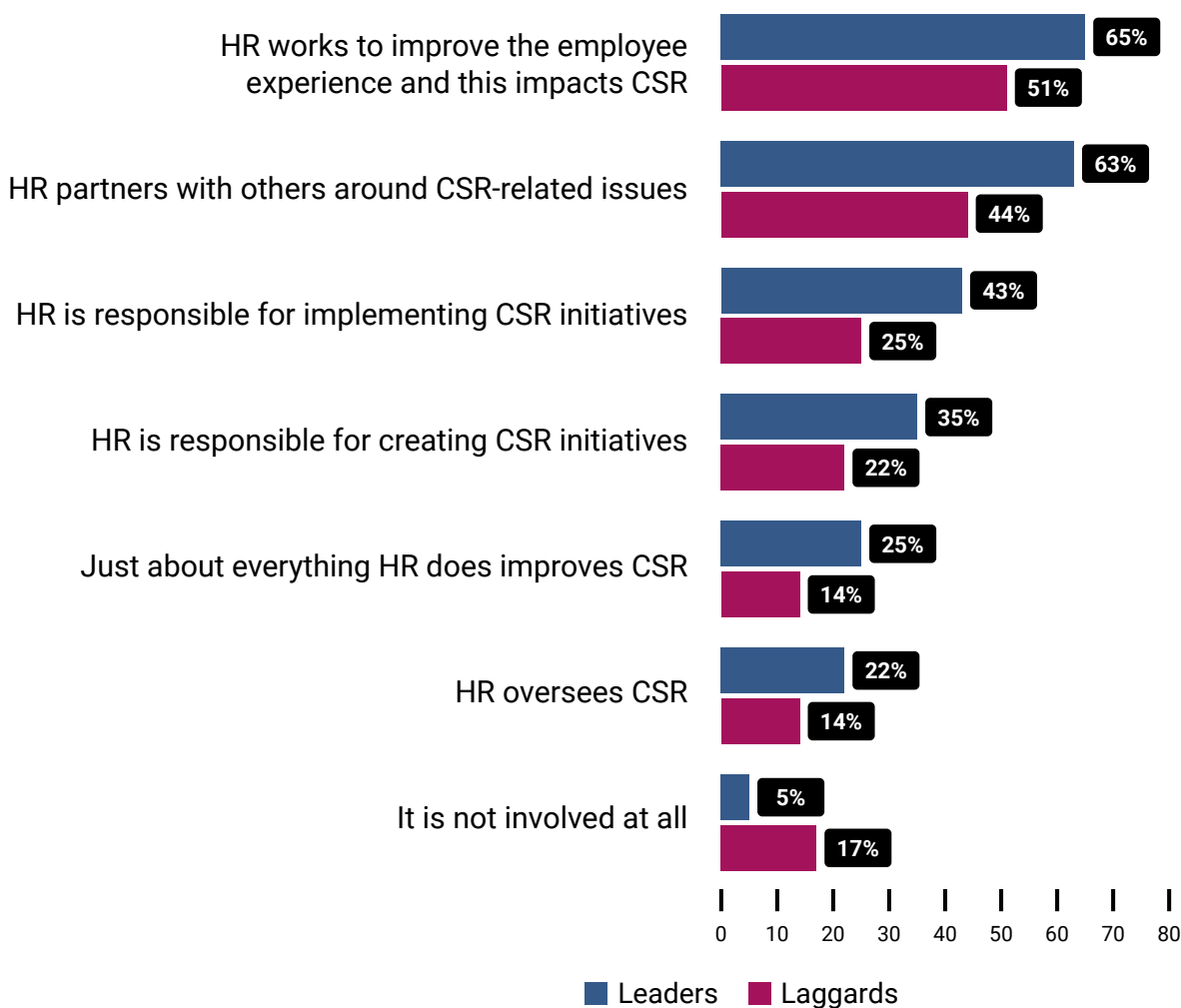




## Finding: HR is more likely to be involved in social and ethical initiatives in CSR leader organizations

HR is considerably more likely to act as a partner on CSR-related issues in the CSR leader cohort (63% vs. 44%), and somewhat more likely to be responsible for creating or implementing CSR initiatives (78% vs. 47%). Of course, this does not prove that HR is effective at driving a CSR agenda, but it seems that the CSR leaders involve HR in CSR more frequently.

### Survey Question: How is HR involved in CSR in your organization?





# Conclusion

Based on the findings in this report, we believe that HR professionals have the opportunity to make a real difference to the realm of corporate social responsibility. Given the close and bidirectional relationship we found between HR functions and CSR objectives, HR teams are often ideally placed to own and/or implement social responsibility initiatives. We also believe that, more often than not, such initiatives can help strengthen the employer brand, enhance the employee experience, and perhaps even play some role in improving overall organizational performance and success.





# Key Takeaways

Given the research findings in this report, below are some key suggestions for how human resources teams might effectively promote the core principles of corporate social responsibility within their organizations.

## Key Takeaway 1

### **Formalize, communicate and measure CSR initiatives and policies.**

While the majority of organizations surveyed seem to be striving toward improved social and ethical outcomes, fewer feel that they succeed in delivering on those goals. This may be in part because, while most of our respondents say that their organization values CSR principles, a smaller percentage have articulated those values as formal policies and procedures. This suggests that organizations might improve their CSR success by creating formal, objectives-based CSR endeavors, and then measuring and optimizing these endeavors over time to ensure that they reach their stated goals.

## Key Takeaway 2

### **Consider increasing the involvement of HR professionals in CSR initiatives.**

This study suggests that the HR function has a close relationship with corporate social responsibility. CSR initiatives may help create a more positive employee experience, and many HR programs can apparently have a positive impact on CSR outcomes. To make the most of this interdependence, companies keen to become CSR leaders could add social objectives to HR program metrics or assign CSR-related KPIs to HR teams.

## Key Takeaway 3

**Improve internal communication around CSR.** Our research suggests that even those with an interest in CSR are sometimes unclear about what corporate social responsibility entails or what the potential benefits are. Improving internal communication about CSR and how employees could help achieve social and ethical objectives may make a significant difference to CSR outcomes.

Key  
Takeaway **4**

---

**Make a business case to top leaders to encourage a focus on corporate social responsibility.** HR professionals who wish to improve their organization's commitment to the social good might start by presenting a solid talent-management and even business case for CSR to senior leadership. HR could, for instance, estimate the potential impact on the employer brand, increased retention, decreased cost to hire, or greater market opportunity among the more socially aware customer segments.

Key  
Takeaway **5**

---

**Gauge the impact of CSR initiatives on employee experience.** HR professionals could reach out to employees via surveys or polls to investigate whether current or proposed CSR initiatives are more or less meaningful to them. This would serve a dual purpose—HR would have a better case for continuing CSR endeavors, and employees would be more aware of their employer's ongoing commitment to CSR.

Key  
Takeaway **6**

---

**Proactively identify win-win opportunities in the CSR space.** Many CSR initiatives can be led by HR both to improve the overall employee experience and to deliver value to the wider group of stakeholders. For instance, limiting one-time food or beverage container use, offering green or at least more sustainable transport options, or involving employees in charitable giving programs can all enrich the employee experience while also promoting the principles of corporate social responsibility.



## About HR.com and the HR Research Institute

The HR Research Institute helps you keep your finger on the pulse of HR! Powered by HR.com, the world's largest community of Human Resources professionals, the HR Research Institute benchmarks best practices and tracks trends in human resources to help more than 1.92 million HR professionals (that many people can't be wrong!). Companies are backing up their strategic decisions with informed and insightful HR.com research references!

Over the past few years, the HR Research Institute has produced over 100 leading edge primary research and state of the industry research reports, along with corresponding infographics, based on surveys of thousands of HR professionals. Each research report highlights current HR trends, benchmarks and industry best practices. HR Research Institute reports and infographics are available online, and always free. Visit [hr.com/hrresearchinstitute](http://hr.com/hrresearchinstitute) to maximize your HR potential. **#hrresearchinstitute**

The HR Research Institute is honored to have this esteemed group of professionals join our State of HR's Role in Corporate Social Responsibility advisory board to help guide HR.com's primary research. The advisory board's goals are to influence the HR industry's thought leadership and best practices and to advance the competencies and skills of HR professionals. Thank you all for your time, effort and passion.

**Gary Bolles**

Chair for the Future of Work, Singularity University

**Kia-lee Bussey**

CEO, Bussey Consulting Group

**Charles Epstein**

President, BackBone Inc.

**Jeffrey Frey**

Vice President of Innovation, Talent Path

**Heidi Hume**

Director of Marketing, CapRelo

**Andrea Lagan**

COO, Betterworks

**Jason Lioy**

Chief People Officer, Dawn Foods

**Sunil Narang**

President & CEO, WDHB

**Weronika Niemczyk**

Chief People Officer, ABBYY

**Rich McClure**

Director, Global Delivery, TAPPIN  
ManpowerGroup Solutions

**Andrew Simmons**

Business Advisor, Harbinger Systems

**Devyani Vaishampayan**

Managing Partner, HR Tech Partnerships

**Andy Valenzuela**

Chief Human Resource Officer, HireVue

**Ben Waber**

President and Co-Founder, Humanyze