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CONTRIBUTIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT TO SOCIAL
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APORTES DE LA GESTIÓN AMBIENTAL A LA RESPONSABILIDAD SOCIAL Y LA COMPETITIVIDAD EMPRESARIAL

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ABSTRACT

The practices related to environmental management applied by companies contribute to reducing the negative environmental impacts that are generated by their activities and operations, therefore providing a contribution to business sustainability. The integration of environmental management contributes to compliance with social responsibility, and directly to increasing in the competitiveness of companies. The objective was to study the contribution of environmental management to social responsibility and in their competitiveness of companies. Methodologically the research was approached using a qualitative, documentary type approach, with the application of the inductive method and the technique used were content analysis. The results show that environmental management and corporate social responsibility are interrelated and mutually reinforcing concepts, since companies that integrate environmental management into their policies and practices are demonstrating a commitment to sustainability and contributing to building a brighter future balanced and responsible from the social and environmental point of view. Similarly, environmental management and business competitiveness are closely related and can influence each other, because it is now increasingly recognized that effective environmental management can provide significant competitive advantages to companies.

Keywords:

Competitiveness, company, environmental management, social responsibility, sustainability.

RESUMEN

Las prácticas relacionadas con la gestión ambiental aplicadas por las empresas contribuyen a disminuir los impactos ambientales negativos que se generan por sus actividades y operaciones, por lo tanto se brinda un aporte a la sostenibilidad empresarial. La integración de la gestión ambiental contribuye al cumplimiento de la responsabilidad social, y de manera directa al incremento de la competitividad de las empresas. El objetivo fue estudiar el aporte de la gestión ambiental en la responsabilidad social y en la competitividad de las empresas. Metodológicamente la investigación fue abordada utilizando un enfoque cualitativo, de tipo documental, con la aplicación del método inductivo y la técnica utilizada fue el análisis de contenido. Los resultados evidencian que la gestión ambiental y la responsabilidad social empresarial son conceptos interrelacionados y se refuerzan mutuamente, ya que las empresas que integran la gestión ambiental en sus políticas y prácticas están demostrando un compromiso con la sostenibilidad y contribuyen a la construcción de un futuro más equilibrado y responsable desde el punto de vista social y ambiental. Igualmente, la gestión ambiental y la competitividad empresarial están estrechamente relacionadas y pueden influirse mutuamente, debido a que en la actualidad se reconoce cada vez más que una gestión ambiental efectiva puede brindar ventajas competitivas significativas a las empresas.

Palabras clave:

Competitividad, empresa, gestión ambiental, responsabilidad social, sostenibilidad.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental management refers to the set of actions and strategies applied by companies, aimed at managing and preserving natural resources and the environment in a sustainable manner. It is implemented in order to protect ecosystems, biodiversity and people's quality of life and thus achieve a balance between economic and social development and the conservation of the natural environment.

For its part, environmental management in companies is a strategic approach that seeks to minimize the environmental impact of their operations, activities or projects and promote sustainability. Its implementation can encompass the use of practices such as the efficient use of water, waste management, the use of renewable energy, the use of sustainable transport fleets, environmental certifications, environmental education and awareness, and preference towards sustainable suppliers, among others. .

Corporate social responsibility refers to the commitment of companies to meet the expectations of society in terms of sustainable development, business ethics, respect for human rights and preservation of the environment. At the same time, environmental management is an integral part of corporate social responsibility, since it implies that companies adopt practices and policies that minimize negative impacts on the natural environment and promote environmental sustainability. That is why, by integrating environmental management into their operations, companies can contribute significantly to the protection of the environment and the conservation of natural resources. The aforementioned indicates that environmental management and corporate social responsibility are closely related and complement each other.

In the same way, corporate social responsibility goes beyond environmental management and encompasses economic, social and ethical aspects, that is, it includes actions such as respect for labor rights, promotion of gender equality, investment in local community, transparency in corporate communication, ethics in business practices, among others. This is how environmental management is considered an essential component of corporate social responsibility because companies have a significant impact on the environment through their activities and decisions. By adopting responsible environmental management practices, companies not only fulfill their duty to protect the environment, but they can also obtain economic benefits and improve their relationship with stakeholders, generating fewer negative impacts on the environment, differentiating themselves from other companies and thus contributing to sustainable development with which competitive advantages are developed (González, 2022a).

Likewise, environmental management generates an important contribution to the competitiveness of companies,

by integrating sustainability into their business strategy, which allows them to position themselves as leaders in a market that is increasingly aware and demanding in terms of environmental responsibility. By addressing environmental challenges and adopting sustainable practices, companies can position themselves as leaders in their industry, attract customers, and respond to society's changing expectations. What has been stated above indicates the existence of a close and mutual relationship between environmental management and business competitiveness. In this regard, Anderson et al. (2022), suggest that companies with a clear sustainability strategy can produce a greater competitive advantage and have greater long-term viability than companies that operate with a business-as-usual logic and exclusively prioritize profit.

In this sense, authors such as Aldeanueva & Cervantes (2019); Hernandez et al. (2020); and Salaiza et al. (2020), emphasize that social responsibility is a business policy that contributes to the transformation of management, generating greater competitiveness and productivity and consequently propose its implementation in order to increase the competitive performance of companies.

For all of the above, this research was developed with the objective of studying the contribution generated by the incorporation of environmental management in social responsibility and in the competitiveness of companies. This research is part of the results achieved in the Research Project: Proposals for improvements for the internal business competitiveness of MSMEs in the province of El Oro.

METHODOLOGY

The research was approached using a qualitative approach, of a documentary type, with the application of the inductive method. The technique used was content analysis, which made it possible to identify theoretical similarities and contrasts between the documents consulted and from there to carry out the theoretical construction. The reviewed articles were obtained from the Elsevier, Scopus, Scielo, DOAJ and Redalyc databases, Google Scholar, the keywords used were corporate social responsibility, competitiveness and environmental management, and for the search a filtering of the articles was carried out. last five years in different languages (Spanish, English and Portuguese).

DEVELOPMENT

Corporate social responsibility can be defined as the set of procedures and practices that the company incorporates into its operational management, which are part of its competitive strategy and are applied in all the processes that are developed in it, benefiting both internally and externally. in the economic, social and environmental spheres, thus satisfying the needs and requirements of its internal and external clients, all focused on sustainability and sustainability.

Integrating corporate social responsibility in companies implies adopting practices and policies that promote positive social and environmental impact, in addition to generating economic benefits. Its implementation requires the commitment of senior management, the definition of objectives and must be an integral part of the corporate culture to achieve a significant and sustainable impact.

In this sense, environmental management and corporate social responsibility are interrelated concepts and mutually reinforce and complement each other. Companies that integrate environmental management into their policies and practices are demonstrating a commitment to sustainability and contributing to the construction of a more balanced and responsible future from the social and environmental point of view.

This relationship is demonstrated by establishing that corporate social responsibility is a business approach that involves assuming responsibility for the social, economic, and environmental impacts of a company's operations, while environmental management is an integral part of corporate social responsibility and focuses specifically on the environmental aspects of business practices. At the same time, environmental management is considered one of the key dimensions of corporate social responsibility, since it implies the adoption of policies, practices and actions to minimize the negative impact of a company on the environment and promote sustainability.

In this sense, Murillo (2018), expresses "that environmental management within the actions of corporate social responsibility involves the commitment to improvements in environmental quality and the control of the flow of inputs and outputs through the management of impacts. on the environment and the life cycle of the products" (p. 10). This implies the development of a series of activities or measures aimed at promoting the prevention and control of environmental impacts that may be generated in the phase of obtaining a product or service, or at the end of its useful life.

The aforementioned means that the environmental dimension of corporate social responsibility implies the company's commitment to the care and protection of the environment, that is, the conservation of the environment and the minimization of unfavorable impacts of its activity (Borrás & Revollo, 2020). Likewise, its application contributes to prevent the negative environmental impacts that are generated by the processes, activities or projects that are developed in the companies, through the application of environmental practices that are part of the implementation of an environmental management system (González, 2022a). . This dimension, as reported by Hernández et al. (2020), it is assumed from the internal point of view for the management of environmental impact and natural resources and from the external point of view for the management and response to environmental problems worldwide to achieve sustainable development.

In this sense, the implementation of the corporate social responsibility model implies the environmental responsibility of companies in their production processes, adopting a preventive approach to situations or environmental impacts that may be generated, this requires the commitment of companies and the development of initiatives that promote environmental responsibility, through the development and application of practices and measures that respect the environment that improve the inefficiencies of the productive system and that avoid the degradation of the different components of the environment (González, 2022b).

In this regard, Borrás & Revollo (2020), emphasize the company's commitment to the care and protection of the environment, which is observed in the conservation of the environment, the minimization of unfavorable impacts, as well as the production of environmentally responsible products. For the authors, it implies that companies must avoid any unfavorable impact of their activity on the environment, taking into account the impact from the acquisition and consumption of materials to the sale and subsequent consumption of their products.

The impact of corporate social responsibility on organizations is diverse and includes numerous benefits for them. Among the issues that stand out are sustainability, work motivation, innovation, organizational performance and the improvement of the public image (Jaimes et al., 2021). Likewise, the authors highlight among other benefits the improvement of organizational commitment by reducing absenteeism, which improves the efficiency of the company; improves customer satisfaction and corporate reputation, which contributes to building a stronger relationship between the company and its customers and increases competitive performance through stakeholder management (Jaimes et al., 2021).

For their part, Gallardo-Vázquez et al. (2013); and Sánchez & Yáñez (2021), argue that companies that are oriented towards achieving high levels of corporate social responsibility will achieve competitive success by obtaining competitive advantages, considering that this relationship is mediated by increases in their levels of innovation and in their yields, and therefore in performance. Additionally, Sin Wong (2013); and Ur et al. (2022), point out that corporate social responsibility allows companies to develop environmental capabilities that lead to a competitive advantage.

From all of the above, it is shown that environmental management in companies provides various benefits and contributes to the social responsibility of companies in important aspects such as compliance with environmental laws, conservation of natural resources such as water, energy and materials, the reduction of environmental impacts, improves the corporate reputation for its commitment to sustainability and care for the environment, promotes innovation and competitive advantage by proposing cleaner

and more sustainable solutions and technologies, better relations with interested parties (employees, local communities, suppliers and customers) fostering trust and transparency in company operations and contributing to sustainable development by aligning with the principles of sustainable development.

Business competitiveness refers to a company's ability to maintain and improve its market position relative to its competitors. It is considered to be the ability of an organization to generate value efficiently, differentiate itself from its competitors and be able to satisfy the needs and expectations of customers effectively.

Environmental management and business competitiveness are closely related and can influence each other. Although environmental practices have traditionally been viewed as an additional cost to companies, it is now increasingly recognized that effective environmental management can provide significant competitive advantages. Some of the ways in which environmental management can boost business competitiveness is through efficiency and resource savings, innovation and differentiation, compliance with laws, access to new markets and the attraction of customers who value sustainability, reputation and corporate responsibility, among other aspects that help companies to increase their competitiveness.

This is why the relationship between environmental management and business competitiveness is increasingly close. As awareness of environmental issues and sustainability has increased, companies have realized that adopting effective environmental management practices can have a significant impact on their ability to compete in the marketplace.

By implementing environmental management practices in companies as part of social responsibility, their competitiveness increases. In this regard, Villafán & Ayala (2014), express that social responsibility has become an essential factor for competitiveness because it is a differentiation strategy for the company that involves social and environmental aspects, both in it and in the various interest groups. . The aforementioned authors highlight within the benefits of CSR, better working conditions for workers and closer and more harmonious relationships with the different interest groups; thereby contributing to reduce costs and improve the productivity of the company; A positive impact is generated on the image and reputation of the company among the different interest groups, and transparency in the use of resources and decision-making is improved, which increases the trust that comes from being accountable to each one of them. interest groups.

All these aspects translate into differentiation factors and become a source of competitiveness for companies, increasing the productivity of the labor factor and improving the competitive environment, which in turn increases the demand for the company's products. and that a greater

number of potential workers demand to work in it; In the same way, greater transparency favors the promotion of productive and financial investment (Villafán & Ayala, 2014). The same results are shown by López-Gamero et al. (2022), who point out that environmental management positively influences the competitive advantages of costs and differentiation in companies.

At the same time, the authors Judge & Douglas (1998) state that companies can obtain competitive advantages in the market when they integrate environmental management concerns into the strategic planning process, and better financial and environmental performance when they are concerned with the environmental problems, and when they formulate, develop and implement environmental practices in their organizational operations, since they reduce negative impacts on the environment and generate better results for companies as there is a synergistic relationship between sustainability and performance (Pereira-Moliner, et al., 2021). Among the results obtained by applying environmental practices, the attraction of new customers, customer loyalty and a better reputation of the company can be highlighted (Mishra & Yadav, 2021).

That is why many companies to incorporate the sustainability component have used practices related to water consumption, energy consumption, solid waste management, chemical waste management, noise pollution management, air quality management, use of environmental campaigns, use of inputs and supplies that are friendly to the environment and care for the environment, in such a way that small and medium-sized companies direct their activities towards sustainability, through innovations focused on the environment, which allows entrepreneurs to develop new ideas , new products and processes (Velázquez-Sánchez, et al., 2018). In this sense, Saavedra et al. (2023), mention that the application of environmental practices such as the consumption of energy, water and raw materials and the waste treatment policy is carried out by those entrepreneurs who have greater knowledge of the operation of their company and the requirements from the market.

Such business actions coincide with what was indicated by Keat et al. (2023), who emphasize the crucial role played by social capital, process innovation and digital innovation to improve the environmental performance of a small company. Regarding innovation, Pan et al. (2021), mention that corporate social responsibility has a positive impact on the eco-innovation practices of the companies that implement them, improving their environmental aspects.

In this sense, an eco-innovative organization can be understood as one that has a sustainable approach in each of its operations, knowing that eco-innovations are innovations capable of helping to reduce the environmental impacts of production processes (Sampaio de Jesus et al., 2021), so there is a relationship between eco-innovation

and corporate social responsibility (Salazar & Pinzón, 2023). As emphasized by Maldonado et al. (2020), corporate social responsibility has significant positive effects on eco-innovation, and eco-innovation has significant positive effects on the sustainable performance of companies, such as manufacturing companies in the automotive industry. Likewise, it is pointed out that eco-innovation contributes both to sustainable development and product innovation and to the social responsibility of companies (Severo et al., 2018).

Finally, it is important to mention that the significant contributions of environmental management to business competitiveness include aspects such as operational efficiency by reducing energy and water consumption, which leads to lower production costs and improved profitability; access to new markets and meeting the demand of environmentally conscious consumers; compliance with environmental regulations having less risk of facing legal sanctions or interruptions in their operations, which provides a competitive advantage; developing more sustainable products and services can attract environmentally conscious customers and create a competitive advantage in the marketplace; enhances brand reputation as it can build trust among consumers, investors and other stakeholders, which can drive competitiveness and long-term success, and contributes to risk management by identifying and mitigating associated environmental risks with business operations.

CONCLUSIONS

The incorporation of environmental management in companies can generate a series of significant benefits both for the natural environment and for the organization itself. It is a comprehensive approach that promotes sustainability and a balance between economic growth and the conservation of the natural environment. Among those benefits can be highlighted; compliance with environmental laws, a better corporate image and reputation, efficiency and cost savings, innovation and competitive advantage, reduction of environmental impact, access to new markets and customers, better risk management.

Environmental stewardship not only has direct benefits for the environment, but also plays a crucial role in corporate social responsibility by promoting sustainable practices, regulatory compliance, corporate reputation, innovation and sustainable development. Likewise, environmental management can improve business competitiveness by reducing costs, accessing new markets, complying with regulations, fostering innovation, strengthening reputation, and managing environmental risks. By effectively addressing environmental challenges, companies can position themselves favorably in an increasingly environmentally conscious marketplace.

Finally, environmental stewardship is important to companies because it promotes long-term sustainability, ensures

regulatory compliance, improves operational efficiency, strengthens corporate reputation, drives innovation and competitive advantage, and fosters positive relationships with stakeholders. By integrating environmental management into business strategy, companies can obtain lasting economic, social and environmental benefits that contribute to developing corporate social responsibility and improving the competitiveness of companies.

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