Why should a business respond to modern-day slavery?

Introduction

In this competitive world, successful businesses have also started to become those entities who perform socially responsibly hence they have started to address the ongoing issues. One of the social and ethical issues is modern slavery which has increased significantly due to irresponsible acts of few businesses. According to Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, there are more than 40 million individuals in every region who are victim of this problem (ILO, 2020). This indicates that there are 5.4 victims per 1,000 individuals (Parliament of Australia, 2006). This modern slavery is quite harmful for the whole community hence being responsible entities, businesses should ensure to avoid the modern slavery practices. This essay presents various theoretical perspectives to support why modern slavery is not good for businesses and other stakeholders.

Discussion

Modern slavery is something which is to be reduced in any case by international organisations also. Modern slavery is the exploitation of people for gain at personal and commercial gain. There are millions of children and adults in every world which are victim of slavery (Davidson, 2015). According to sustainable development goals, appropriate and immediate measures have to be taken to eradicate it by 2030. All international organisations like International Labour Organisation, UNICEF and UN Human Rights have started working on it (OHCHR, 2019). Among modern slavery, stolen wages are known to be the most alarming phenomenon which has become problematic for all stakeholders. This stolen wages is referred to the phenomenon where the wages, entitlements, savings and other monies were not provided to them as per their due rights. This phenomenon has become quite dominant among Australian aboriginals (Parliament of Australia, 2006). With the adequate attention provided by laws, standards and international bodies, this phenomenon should be avoided by all businesses because it is neither illegal but also unethical.

There are many ethical perspectives provided by various theories which also tell that any business should not allow any practice of stolen wages. One of the widely quoted cases of stolen wages is of Iris who was aboriginal Australian domestic worker and has reported stolen wages and

she never got her money back (ARC EAA, n.d). These aboriginals are also protected by 'Protection Law' of Australia but strict actions are enforced Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee if such cases are found (Australian Government, 2020). There are strict penalties for businesses found guilty of stolen wages now. Other than the regulatory perspective, the theories like deontology, teleology etc., also highlight that there is a need to have comprehensive, timely and effective measures for managing the stolen wages issues. The examples of unjust practices at Victoria where underpayment and non-payment of wages were observed have shown that this could prove devastating for the whole community (Gunstone, 2012).

One of the most popular theories of ethics is deontology which states that anything remains good or bad. It says that actions should be selected only if these are appropriate as per the rules of ethics. Any action which is not ethical as per rules of duty should be considered unethical. Modern slavery which includes stolen wages is never appropriate and ethical as per rules. This is wholly about the exploitation of workers where there exists workplace abuse and no actions are taken by stakeholders to protect the rights of underprivileged ones. So instead of promoting it, there is already pressure from regulatory bodies like The Fair Work Act 2009 (Fair Work Act) and Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 that this should not exist (Australian Government, 2020). If this will exist, this is not only unethical but also illegal, so as deontology perspective states, businesses should only be involved in ethical practices, hence their legal apprehensions will also be resolved. This is the most relevant theory which highlights that modern slavery is not acceptable and ethical hence should be avoided.

Similarly, another important ethical theory is of teleological ethics which considers 'ends' as the main thing and it differs from previous perspective. This theory of morality says that anything is considered good only if its end is desirable and its consequences are acceptable. If we consider the consequences of modern slavery then these are not good. When anyone's wages are stolen, they have lost time and output where their health is also deteriorated. Their time and efforts go wasted, so the consequences are also poor (ILO Global, 2021). When rights of workers are not entertained well, they can also get involved in such practices which could bring legal implications through Fair Work Act 2009 or Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, so it is better for businesses to not to be involved in any activity which brings poor consequences for them. The stolen wages could bring reputational losses also for the businesses so should be avoided at any cost (Banks, 2008). In a

similar manner, the virtue ethics and indigenous values theories has provided a list of virtues and ethical values which should be considered while doing the business. The examples are honest, humility, justice and tolerance (Lusch, Laczniak & Murphy, 1980) and both of these theories tell that to steal wages is not acceptable ethically.

Using different ethical theories and perspectives was helpful to see that stolen wages is a curse which is not acceptable by any means. It brings much harm to individual society members and businesses (De George, 2011). As per ethical issues identified through various frameworks, the final stance is that if businesses will not consider any solution for stolen wages, this will bring the long term losses as its workers will also be dissatisfied, its reputation will be hampered and it will have legal consequences also. The historic example of aboriginal slavery has shown that how difficult it could become if any business remains involved in the stolen wages (McGrath, 1995). Therefore, it needs to be avoided by the businesses for demonstrating their socially responsible image.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it has been concluded that modern slavery still exists in contemporary workplaces where one of the dominant dilemma is of stolen wages. There are many international organisations and standards and regulations which has prohibited it. Further, the ethical frameworks consisting of deontology and teleology and virtue ethics and indigenous values, these stolen wages are unethical hence should not be promoted. For emerging as a sustainable and socially responsible business, modern slavery should be avoided at any cost.

Citations

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