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SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT 2019

Introduction

Benefit Corporations (BC) represent a step forward in the evolution of the company. While traditional companies exist solely to distribute dividends to shareholders, BC are the manifestation of a more advanced corporate concept: beside the profit motive, the business objectives include the goal of making a positive impact on society and the biosphere.

Objectives

In accordance with its benefit purpose statement, LORF (hereafter the Company) aims to carry out actions to raise public awareness about autism in order to foster greater social inclusion of people with the syndrome. As part of the broader issue of autism, the Company intends to draw particular attention to the question of “after us”, i.e. on the death of an autistic child’s parents, how and by whom will today’s autistic children be cared for when they become adults? Given the significant costs to the community posed by this issue in the future, the intention is to promote and support models for assisted autonomy that combine human intervention with the use of new technologies, with the ultimate goal of reducing the burden of these costs on the community. The aforementioned actions can have direct benefits for people with autism, their families and the community at large, and indirect benefits for associations that tackle these problems thanks to the intended provision of support. To that end, and merely as an example, an annual implementation plan of activities for the common good will be drawn up and approved at the end of each fiscal year for the following one; the plan will specify in greater detail what the focus of the Company’s activities for benefit purposes will be. In order to fulfil its stated objectives, in addition to what it already plans to do in pursuit of its profit-making goals the Company may decide at its shareholder meeting to allocate a portion of its own resources in favour of the aforementioned activities for benefit purposes.

Actions Undertaken in 2019

In 2019, a number of activities in different spheres were conducted in order to achieve the objectives mentioned in the preceding paragraphs; details of these activities, including any recognition or awards achieved, are given below.

#RobotFriend Project

The project was moved forward in accordance with the tests conducted and the objectives established during 2018. In particular, in the final part of the year, a Crowdfunding project was launched on the Eppela platform; called #RobotFriend, the project attracted backing from around 140 supporters and raised almost Eu20,000, which is to be used to purchase a humanoid robot. Pharmaceutical firm MSD Italy decided to back the fund-raising campaign and made a contribution of Eu5,000.

The goal is to develop a robotics workshop at which the presence of a humanoid robot will serve as a focus for children, whether differently-abled or not, to learn, develop social skills and have fun through play, while at the same time raising awareness about diversity.

The funds raised have been used to purchase a reconditioned humanoid robot, “Pepper”, (as well as a storage case and software). The robot will be used to provide the game #ColorQuiz and others to be implemented in due course by LORF. The games are intentionally of low to medium difficulty in order to make them easily usable by autistic children but at the same appealing to children without autism, through assignment of the Tutor role.

#ColorQuiz is the first game produced by LORF and springs from the idea of enabling children to discover the world through colours. The team that worked on the creation of the game was composed of Claudia Bordicchia, an expert in the psychopathology of learning, experienced robotics scientist Ewerton Lopes S. de Oliveira, and digital communications expert Michele Berra, who has a long-standing interest in social networks. Children start the game at module one, which introduces them to primary and secondary colours. In module two, children discover colours in the world around them by answering questions posed by the robot with the help of multimedia content. “What’s the colour of love?” is the Robot’s final question to the children, which launches the video of a song whose title in Italian poses the same question: “L’AMORE CHE COLORE HA?” by singer and model Greta Ray, who acted as godmother to the initiative.

#WorldFriend Campaign

The #WorldFriend campaign continued during 2019: the initiative was launched by LORF at the end of 2018 on Instagram with the goal of highlighting the unique nature of real life experiences and the importance of living in the real world. The Instagram campaign involves testimonials from celebrities and ordinary people, and uses photos that aim to celebrate life in the real world and an implicitly intelligent use of social networks.

HomeMate Project

HomeMate is a project created and promoted by LORF that aims to set up a platform to bring together home automation systems and sensors in order to improve the quality of life of people with autism, increasing their independence in line with the stated goal of addressing problems that arise should a person with autism suffer the loss of their parents or guardian. Another objective of no lesser importance is reducing the general cost of caring for adults with autism that the wider community will struggle to support. It is estimated that in the USA alone, the direct and indirect costs of managing autism will reach US\$1tn in 2025, or practically half the public debt. The project envisages technology at the service of people in which the latter are in control, not only as users but also as administrators. The key figure in the project is the Life Mentor: an educator with highly evolved skills able to evaluate the requirements of people with autism and configure HomeMate to optimise their interactions with the real world, especially in regard to the domestic environment.

In order to realise the HomeMate project, LORF has worked with Fabula Onlus and promoted a crowdfunding initiative on Kickstarter that concluded successfully ahead of schedule. The funds raised were used to finance phase 1 of the project, which saw the involvement of educators/psychologists from Fabula Onlus with engineers from technological partner Fifthingenium for the purpose of drawing up the final project to be

implemented in phase 2. Phase 1 closed with the definition of the project and the drafting of a paper summarising the results. The project was put on hold in 2019 due to the departure of certain partners.

2020 Action Plan

It is important at this stage to assess whether it is possible to continue the HomeMate assisted autonomy project with other partners, first of all by carrying out a project review. In view of this, it might make sense to merge HomeMate into the more general #RobotFriend project, where the main objective is now to implement the robotics workshop as described above by selecting the most suitable partners and methodology. The #WorldFriend campaign will continue in 2020 as it did in 2019.