

Hierarchy of Social Compliance Programs: A Conceptual Model

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A fashion brand company's responsible sourcing, production, and purchasing practices are assured and communicated through the company's social compliance program. The social compliance program typically starts with implementation of a code of conduct or standards of compliance and auditing programs. However, a number of fashion brands are going "beyond auditing" in their social compliance programs towards the ideal situation of self-directed continuing improvement. This paper introduced, explained, and provided industry examples of a new conceptual model, the hierarchy of social compliance programs (Burns, 2019). This conceptual model serves as a representation of the evolution of social compliance programs including:

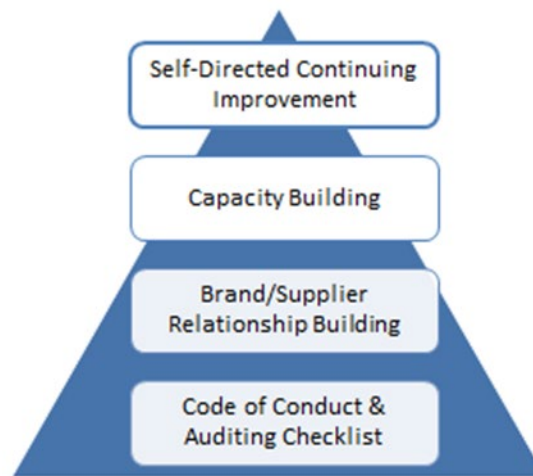
- *Code of Conduct and Supplier Auditing Checklist* – at the first level a fashion brand company implements a code of conduct or standards of compliance and relies on 1st, 2nd, or 3rd party audits for risk management assessment associated with sourcing.
- *Building a Relationship with the Supplier/Factory Management* – at this next level, relationships are built between the fashion brand company and supplier/factory management. This partnership results in increased communications and capabilities for mutual problem-solving. At this level, social compliance programs are considered to be more than a risk management assessment strategy for the fashion brand company.
- *Capacity Building* – at this next level, workers are brought into the process through increased worker education and worker-management communications. The fashion brand company becomes involved with the community and strives to improve conditions outside the walls of the factory. The use of mobile technologies for worker feedback is often incorporated.
- *Self-Directed Continuing Improvement* – at the highest level, suppliers/factories engage in self-directed continuing improvement strategies to the point where audits would no longer be needed. In addition, 360-degree feedback processes allow suppliers/factories to rate and provide feedback on fashion brand companies just as fashion brand companies rate and provide feedback on suppliers/factories.

In many cases, aspects of several levels are being implemented at once. Indeed, even at the highest level, a fashion brand company may not eliminate audits but utilize them for new factories and/or suppliers. To move "beyond auditing" requires accurate data from multiple sources, strong relationships with suppliers, and an understanding of suppliers beyond tier one (Russell, 2017). Using this conceptual model, scholars and industry decision makers can assess

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and predict necessary components for effective social compliance programs for fashion brand companies.

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References:

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