

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AS A FACTOR INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTING AND ASSESSMENT OF EMPLOYERS

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Abstract The idea of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is based on voluntary responsibility of companies for their operations in economic, social and environmental spheres as well as for ethical behavior. In accounting, it is reflected in the form of social accounting which deals with disclosing information on the organization's achievements in respect of the CSR concept implementation.

During the current economic crisis, company relationships with employees have become the most important of all the issues related to CSR. Additional challenges in this respect are posed by Generation Y comprising the people born after 1980 who enter the labor market. For them, the socially responsible employer is even more important than high earnings.

The main aim of this paper is to present the results of the research carried out at the end of 2010 among a group of external students at Cracow University of Economics. The research was conducted one month before the students obtained their Bachelor's degrees. The survey focused on determining how much knowledge the prospective graduates had about CSR, how important CSR was to them as a criterion for selection of their workplace and how they regarded the inclusion of information on CSR in the framework of the company's accounting system.

JEL Classification: A13, A23, C83, J24, M41

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, social accounting, employees, students, generation Y, financial reporting

Received: 9.05.2012

Accepted: 27.03.2013

INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility is perceived as a voluntary business commitment to the practices which "contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve their quality of life" (Holme & Watts, 2000, p. 9). This idea is based on a dialogue with stakeholders and taking responsibility for operations in economic, social and environmental spheres as well as on ethical behavior. It allows risk to be managed in a more efficient way and builds the "capital of trust", which is what companies particularly need during a slump in the economy (Borkowski, 2008, p. 50-1).

According to Horrigan (2010, p. 3) CSR is one of the most important issues and achievements of the 21st century because the present world faces problems which CSR is able to solve, at least in part.

Financial crises, climate changes and humanitarian disasters have revealed that we live in the economies, populations and ecosystems where the doings of corporations are important for their shareholders, the society and the world at large. What is more, their actions also affect the future world in which next generations will be living.

The importance of CSR is particularly growing nowadays when there is a severe breakdown in worldwide political-economic trends. Such was the case in 2001 after September 11 when consumers suddenly showed increased support for charitable actions by companies worldwide. In times of crisis that have been affecting the global market since 2008, a policy of responsible business will certainly be gaining significance. It is believed that the strategy of CSR implementation will change by giving priority over the environmental aspects to all the projects

targeted at human resources development. The motto: "be responsible for what you are selling and in which environment you operate" will be replaced by: "be responsible for the ones you employ" (Jański, 2010a). As Drucker (2009, p. 145) wrote: "the most precious resources of the companies in the 20th century were own means of production. The most valuable resource of the 21st century organization (...) will be the employee's knowledge and performance". He also noted that (2009):

[w]e are standing before the need to redefine the objectives of the organization as managers and employers, because its purpose is not only to fulfill the needs of its' legal owners, meaning shareholders, but also caring for the interests of (...) knowledge workers. The development of organization (...) and its survival in a competitive market will be increasingly dependent on the performance of employees. And the first and supreme condition of growth of this performance is the ability to attract and retain the best employees of knowledge (p. 170).

The results of a study on the perception of the company as socially responsible indicated that this is largely dependent on its employees' opinions. Trust, upon which business must rely in order to operate effectively, begins just inside the company and it is shaped by its relationship with employees. A sense of safety, decent working conditions, transparent communication, the opportunity to participate, codes of ethics – these are the elements increasingly present in the strategies of enterprises, to a large extent also owing to the development of the CSR concept (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2010).

According to Jański (2010a), CSR in times of crisis is a great challenge both for the Polish labor market and for individual HR and PR departments. It should be noted that the changes involve not only the conditions of doing business but also current and potential employees. People who were born after 1980, the so called "Generation Y", are entering the labor market. Their expectations of potential employers, also in the field of corporate social responsibility, differ from those of their predecessors.

The aim of the paper is to present the approach of one of the stakeholder groups, namely the employees, to the implementation of the CSR concept by companies. The adopted objective influenced the presented issues such as: theoretical considerations of CSR, the results

of the selected research on this problem and the author's own survey. The survey was carried out at the end of 2010 among a group of students ending the first degree of their education at the Cracow University of Economics, Faculty of Finance and Accounting. The purpose of the survey was to determine the degree of the future graduates' familiarity with the concept of CSR and the extent to which they take into account the companies' performance in this respect when deciding on employment.

The questions contained in the survey also concerned the inclusion of information on corporate social responsibility in the accounting system of the company. It should be noted that accounting fulfills an important role in the process of conveying information on the implementation of CSR by companies. It has, indeed, "the best instruments to show the company's responsibility for its economic and social achievements" (Kamela-Sowińska, 2008). Accounting, always considered the language of business, is evolving in response to changes in the surroundings of economic entities and the resulting challenges. One of these challenges has been globalization, which is a pre-requisite for standardizing accounting solutions worldwide. The other is modification of the outlook on the main purpose of the company's activities and the significance of its impact on society. The need to include information about CSR in the accounting system has taken the form of social accounting. In many countries it is the subject of numerous publications while in Poland the term "social accounting" refers to the presentation of economic processes on a macroeconomic scale and calculation of such measures as GDP, GNP and NNP.

CSR CONCEPT AND ITS REFLECTION IN ACCOUNTING

The CSR concept came into existence in the 1960s in the USA because of the need for the "evaluation and justification of the duties of the managing human due to the apparent deficiencies of the "invisible" hand of the market which caused a number of adverse effects, conflicts and threats" (Rybak, 2004, p. 18). In Poland, the idea of CSR appeared in the mid-1990s in the face of growing unemployment which resulted from the restructuring and privatization of state-owned enterprises (Kandfer, 2005, p. 82).

According to McPhail & Walters: "CSR is the process whereby companies account for the impact of their activities not just on shareholders, but on the wider

community of employees, customers, suppliers, local communities and other stakeholders including the environment” (2009, p. 189).

Therefore CSR should be treated as a voluntary choice made by the management of the corporation to undertake such decisions and actions which contribute both to the protection of its interests, which is to make profit, and to the protection and improvement of social prosperity. It is also referred to as the necessity for such actions on the entrepreneur’s part that are the desired objective and value for the society (Jabłoński & Jabłoński, 2008, p. 34).

Implementation of the CSR concept by companies brings measurable benefits both to themselves and society at large. Conducting an economic activity in an ethical and socially responsible way allows corporations to:

- 1) build a good reputation in the eyes of customers, local communities, the media, or employees,
- 2) ensure the loyalty of current customers and prospects of obtaining new ones,
- 3) be more attractive to investors,
- 4) improve governance, increase efficiency and competitiveness,
- 5) use tax credits associated with charity and donation policy,
- 6) acquire reputable staff – particularly those with high competence,
- 7) increase morale, motivation and involvement of employees,
- 8) increase productivity and improve the atmosphere at work.

It is possible for enterprises to achieve the above advantages when they effectively inform a wide range of stakeholders about being socially responsible. The idea of CSR is closely connected with the concept of social accounting and reporting.

Initially, social accounting was the domain of economists and referred to issues related to the national income. This changed with the 1975 publication in Great Britain of The Corporate Report, where the following definition of social accounting was given (Elliott & Elliott, 2008):

the reporting of those costs and benefits, which may not be quantifiable in monetary terms, arising from economic activities and subsequently borne or received by the community at large or

particular groups not holding a direct relationship with the reporting entity (p. 826).

Crowther (2004, p. 148-9) distinguishes two forms of accounting: traditional and socio-environmental. Traditional accounting is a conventional method of accounting which measures the performance and results from the perspective of the organization itself without trying to measure and inform about externalities and the impact of the organization on them. Accounting adopts here the perspective of proprietors – e.g. shareholders or managers.

Social and environmental accounting is based on similar assumptions. Both take into account the fact that the company exists and operates in a broader external environment and thus affects that environment through its activities.

In other words, social accounting concerns the collection, recording and evaluation of information on social and environmental performance of the company. In comparison to financial accounting, this concept is still relatively new and hence there is a lack of coherent terminology. Terms “accounting”, “auditing”, “reporting” are often used interchangeably and in a more flexible way than in relation to financial accounting (Griseri & Seppala, 2010, p. 279).

Gray, Owen and Maunders (1987; as cited in Crowther, 2000) defined social accounting as:

the process of communicating the social and environmental effects of organizations’ economic actions to particular interest groups within society and to society at large, beyond the traditional role of providing a financial account to the owners of capital, in particular, shareholders. Such an extension is predicated upon the assumption that companies do have wider responsibilities than simply to make money for their shareholders (p. 26).

Gurthie and Parker (1990, as cited in Godfrey, Hodgson, Holmes & Tarca, 2006, p. 631) claimed that social accounting can serve three main objectives:

- 1) provide a complete picture of the organization and its resources,
- 2) limit the socially irresponsible behavior of the organization,
- 3) motivate companies to take up socially responsible activities.

Mathews and Perera (1996, p. 364, as cited in Mook, Quarter & Richmond, 2007, p. 41) described social

accounting as “an extension of disclosure into non-traditional areas such as providing information about employees, products, community- service and the prevention or reduction of pollution”.

According to Gray, Owen and Adams (1996, p. 3-11, as cited in Godfrey, et al., 2006, p. 631) social accounting is a combination of:

- 1) accounting for different issues (e.g., other than strictly economic),
- 2) accounting using different means of communication (e.g., other than strictly financial),
- 3) accounting addressed to different entities or groups (e.g., other than the capital providers),
- 4) accounting for other purposes (e.g., not necessarily making successful decisions in financial or cash flow terms).

Initially, corporations were reluctant to introduce social accounting, presumably because additional disclosures proved to be an additional burden. However, with time, they realized how significant economic consequences (both positive and negative) they may have for the company’s reputation. Consequently, they began to include in reporting also the information allowing the company’s reputation to be assessed in a better way.

EMPLOYEES AS STAKEHOLDERS

CSR means not only meeting the requirements of the companies’ capital owners (shareholders) but also those of all stakeholder groups. The concept of stakeholders was introduced by Ansoff and Steward in the 1960s. This term applied to all entities which affect the company’s activities and are also affected by these actions. It is assumed that stakeholders are those entities and groups that (Adamczyk, 2009, p. 46 and 49):

- 1) make various requests of the company,
- 2) have the possibility to enforce these requests,
- 3) want to use their influence on the company’s decision-making process in order to obtain their requests.

Generally, stakeholders can be divided into three groups (Elliott & Elliott, 2008, p. 826):

- 1) external – shareholders, lenders, banks, debtors,
- 2) internal - managers and employees,
- 3) related - society represented by the local and state authorities, as well as organizations with presently growing importance such as Amnesty International or Greenpeace.

It is often emphasized that people are the most precious resource of any organization. The basis for modern personnel management is to define the mutual expectations of employees and organizations that hire them and to create the conditions that ensure their fulfillment (Adamczyk, 2009, p. 56).

Adamczyk (2009, p. 57) points out that social responsibility towards employees should primarily take into account:

- 1) the well-being of workers - medical care, assistance in difficult financial situations, sick leaves, gratuities,
- 2) working conditions - safety at work, ergonomics of the working environment, social benefits, pensions,
- 3) improving workers’ satisfaction and providing them with opportunities for personal fulfillment,
- 4) maintaining the stability of employment - improving the sense of material security of workers.

According to Paliwoda-Metiolańska (2009, p. 122), socially responsible human resources management is one of the three fundamental pillars of the balance between personal and professional life (work-life balance) beside appropriate working conditions, safety at work place (1) and human resources development (2).

The idea of work-life balance was born in the United States in the second half of the 1980s, while in Poland it is only now gaining popularity. Its essence is not, as it might seem, simply to ensure sharing time equally between work and private life by, for example, limiting the number of hours spent at work. It focuses on how an individual works and relaxes, considering the fact that both of these activities are closely interrelated: well done and satisfying work allows one to relax effectively in free time and vice versa (Morgernstern, 2008).

Among all groups interested in the company’s activities in the field of CSR, employees seem to occupy a special place. This view is reflected, for example, in the results of research conducted by Draper (2000, as cited in Deegan & Unerman, 2006, p. 293), entitled Corporate Nirvana. According to them, employees are located in the centre of CSR deliberations. The author discovered that if a company wants to be perceived as a socially responsible organization, the first step in the concept implementation should be the way it treats its own employees. The importance of employees as the users of information about CSR was confirmed by research carried out by Owen, Shaw and Cooper (2005). The study results indicated that employees were the second most important recipients

of sustainability reports published by companies. This opinion was shared by CEOs examined by McKinsey & Company (2007, p. 9), who addressed the workers as a group of stakeholders with the greatest impact on how the company implements the CSR concept. It should be noted that employees are also the group that gives the concept the greatest support (Lloyd, Heinfeld & Wolf, 2008).

Prospective employees-students and graduates were a repeatedly tested group in the 1990s in the context of CSR, including the approach to ethics. An interesting review of some studies concerning business students' attitude towards CSR was provided by Elias (2004, p. 269-70). It contained a brief description of the studies conducted by: Kraft, 1991; Jeffrey, 1993; Kraft & Singhapakdi, 1995; Kumar, 1995; Paul, et al. 1997; Borkowski & Urgas, 1998; Burton & Hegarty, 1999. The results of earlier studies (Kraft, 1991; Kraft & Singhapakdi, 1995) revealed that the students perceived social responsibility as unimportant but later their attitude towards this idea changed. The research carried out by Kumar (1995) indicated that the majority of students showed a strong orientation towards CSR and that it was stronger among graduates than among students.

The authors of other research (Borkowski & Urgas, 1998; Paul, Zalka, Downers, Perry & Friday, 1997; Burton & Hegarty, 1999) analyzed the differences in approach to CSR between women and men. The results of all studies demonstrated that women attach greater importance to social responsibility than men. On the other hand, Jeffrey (1993) took into account the field of study as a factor differentiating the attitude of students to the concept of CSR. The results of his research revealed that students of accounting were aware of the need for ethical behavior to a larger extent than the students of other majors.

After the year 2000, the research that examined students' attitude to prospective employment, indicated that CSR was for young people a problem of vital importance. An undergraduate survey carried out in the year 2003 among the world's 20 largest economies showed that 3 out of 5 students would choose to work in the company that could present its ethical values and a positive impact on the environment. In the UK alone, 80% indicated that they would be more likely to stay in their present job if their employer implemented a socially responsible approach to the work-life balance (Deegan & Unermann 2006, p. 320). Students also recognize

that the implementation of the CSR concept is more important than profitability in the context of the company's long-term success (Elias, 2004).

It should be noted that the requirements of employees in relation to social responsibility are increasing. Into the labor market there enters Generation Y, also called "Millennium generation", "next generation", "flip-flop generation", "net generation" and "I-pod generation" which comprises people born after 1980. In Poland they are referred to as baby boomers. The characteristic motto of Generation Y is "work and live". They value flexible forms of employment and freedom of action that is often more important to them than earnings. They deal excellently with new technologies and use them in business. For Generation Y, information is abundant and they come at it rapidly and relentlessly. They prefer 'virtual trouble shooting' (e.g. by e-mail), to face-to-face meetings or conversations on the phone.

In Poland, they operate in a post-socialist society, which entails many generational and cultural conflicts, when, for example, twenty-year-old Polish entrepreneurs encounter forty-or fifty-year-old officials, who were raised in a totally different reality. Generation Y is also characterized by a different attitude to tangible goods. In the 1980s, possession of a VCR and a car were the determinants of social status. For Generation Y, goods do not have so much importance as for thirty or forty-year-old people. It is "being", not "having" that is beginning to determine the quality of life. Drucker (2003, p. 119) points out that in the past, people saw work primarily as a source of covering the costs of living. For future employees it will be the meaning of life.

The new generation of employees is made up of the people for whom professional development is as important as the balance between work and private life. Employers, in order to adequately address these needs in HR programs, may turn to the CSR concept. The generation of the current 20-year-old workers consists of demanding people – also in relation to the employers, and expects of them high ethical standards and respect for their personal life (Ćwik & Januszewska, 2010, p. 15).

The saying by O. Wilde: "discover what you love to do in life and find someone who will pay you for this" could become the motto of today's graduates. Better salary is not the only factor that forces them to take up employment. The young generation apparently look for sense in their work, and, at the same time,

for socially responsible employers, who provide flexible working time and balance between work and private life (Employer Branding Today by Universum Quarterly, 2010).

This view is supported by the results of research carried out both abroad and in Poland. While choosing a potential employer, young people pay particular attention to the competitiveness of the company's offer. Besides the salary, the most important factor becomes the work-life balance (The Aspen Institute. Center for Business Education, 2008, p.13; CIMA & Institute of Business Ethics, 2008, p. 9; Hill & Knowlton, 2008, p. 4; Universum Student Survey (Germany, UK), 2010; Lyon, Filmer & McDougall, 2010, p. 14).

The possibility of being hired by a company which shares the values important for potential employees is also significant (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007, p.15; Lyon et al., 2010, p. 6). According to the results of the research conducted by McKinsey & Company (2007, p. 9), the young generation is able to reject a job offer, if the employer does not correspond to their lifestyle and the values they share.

Similar results were obtained in studies carried out among students and graduates on the Polish labor market. According to the Polish Student Survey conducted in 2009 the second professional objective after gaining an expert title was to balance their professional and personal lives (Jański, 2010b).

Studies carried out by Deloitte and the Department of Human Capital Development of Warsaw School of Economics (2010) have shown that high remuneration is still an important factor when looking for a first job. A good training offer and interesting projects are also welcome, but a good atmosphere is the most important. The authors of the report observed that young people today tend to put more and more emphasis on the balance between private life and work. Therefore, employers should build such an HR professional development strategy that will increase staff efficiency while reducing the time spent at work. According to this study, graduates would preferably work in companies which are known to the media and have a high prestige (64% of respondents) and for the employers who operate in the field of CSR in addition to business activities. This was mentioned by almost each graduate.

SURVEY RESULTS

THE PURPOSE AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

In view of the above considerations it seemed an interesting research problem to determine the significance of the CSR concept for the graduates of Cracow University of Economics in the context of their current or future employment and to find out if they recognized the need for information on CSR to be included in the accounting system of the company. The survey was carried out at the end of 2010. The respondents were prospective graduates of Cracow University of Economics. They were external students, majoring in Finance and Accounting, specializing in Financial Audit, one month before obtaining the Bachelor's degree.

This research group was chosen because they were likely to have some experience in job-hunting, they represented Generation Y and possessed knowledge of accounting issues.

The survey questions concerned:

- 1) knowledge of the CSR concept and its significance for the company's performance,
- 2) taking into account CSR in the assessment of the company as an employer and familiarity with rankings and competitions concerning implementation by companies of the CSR idea,
- 3) self-evaluation in regard to compliance with the values of social responsibility,
- 4) inclusion of the CSR concept in widely understood corporate reporting.

The responses were analyzed with regard to gender, professional status, year of birth and family situation (with children or not). 128 completed questionnaires were analyzed. 24 men and 104 women participated in the study. Only 10 respondents were born before the year 1980. The majority of people (98) were working at the time the survey was conducted. 12 people did not work at the time of the survey and were not looking for a job. 18 people declared that they were on a job-hunt. 16 respondents had children.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE CSR CONCEPT AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR THE COMPANY'S PERFORMANCE

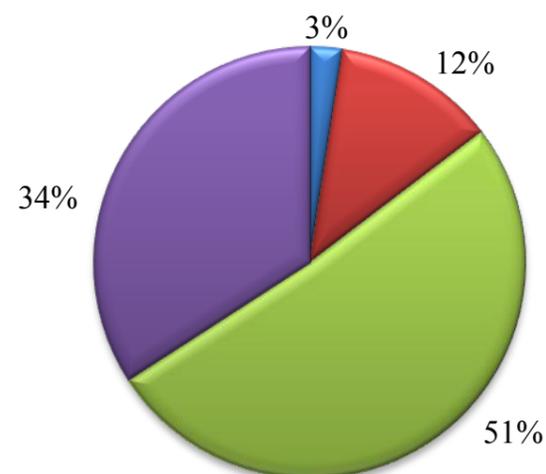
Results of the study indicated that the concept of CSR was more or less known only to 14% of the

respondents (chart 1). The majority of them were working members of Generation Y. 12% of the surveyed men and 14% of the surveyed women replied affirmatively or rather affirmatively.

71 persons (55%) stated that the company's objective is to make profit at any cost. According to 16%, its main goal is maximizing the market value of the company. Only 12% of the respondents indicated as the purpose of economic activity the profit made with taking into account: the needs of workers and the public, protection of the environment and ethics. This

answer was chosen by 12% of the surveyed men and 11% of the surveyed women. The majority of these were in employment.

Chart 1: Respondents' familiarity with the CSR concept



■ Familiar ■ Rather familiar ■ Rather unfamiliar ■ Unfamiliar

Source: Author's own calculations based on the survey

INTEGRATING CSR IN THE ASSESSMENT OF THE COMPANY AS AN EMPLOYER

Further questions included in the survey concerned the areas of CSR that were taken into account in the assessment of the company as a potential or current employer. The questionnaires singled

out four CSR areas: relationship with employees, actions undertaken for the benefit of the society, environmental protection, relationship with partners (clients, contractors, competitors). Each area comprised several items related to the main topic. The ones that were most often marked as important are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: CSR factors taken most often into account by respondents in the assessment of employers

Item	The percentage of positive responses
Prospects of development - training, courses, etc.	91
Amount of the proposed remuneration	91
Prospects of promotion	89
Stability of employment (job security)	87
Creation of working conditions that respect the health and dignity of the employee	86
Honest and ethical conduct of business	76
Observance of the agreement terms	76
Accurate and clear information about the product	73
Sponsorship of cultural, sport, educational events, etc.	46
Cooperation with local authorities and organizations involved in raising the standard of living, health, education, safety	38
Promotion of environmental awareness	42

Source: Author's own calculations based on the survey

The largest percentage of positive responses was observed in the area of relationship with employees and partners. The primary factors taken into account in the assessment of employers by the respondents were the prospects of development - training, courses, etc. (92% of total answers) and the amount of the proposed remuneration (91%). Other responses ranked in order of importance were: prospects of promotion (89%) and stability of employment (job security) (87%). It should be noted that students perceived the creation of working conditions that respect the health and dignity of the employee (86%) to be almost as important as stability of employment. The employees' opinions of the atmosphere prevailing in the company were for respondents relatively unimportant. On the other hand, the majority of respondents with children (87%) mentioned this as an important factor.

In the "relationship with partners" area, respondents often indicated as important information about: honest and ethical conduct of business (76%), the

observance of the agreement terms (76%) and accurate and clear information about the product (73%). By analyzing these areas in a cross-section of gender it can be noted that the amount of earnings, prospects of development and promotion and job security were more important to men. On the other hand, appropriate working conditions, integrity and ethics in business, providing information about products and observance of the terms of contracts were more important to women.

The students were far less interested in information about the impact of business on society and the environment. In the area "action undertaken for the benefit of society" most respondents pointed out the sponsorship of cultural, sport, and educational events, etc. (46%) as well as cooperation with local authorities and organizations involved in raising the standard of living, health, education, safety (38%). However, it should be noted, that almost the same percentage of respondents (33%) did not consider the second of the above mentioned factors as important.

In the area of the company's activities concerning environmental protection, most respondents (42%) indicated the promotion of environmental awareness as important, while for 30% it was an unimportant matter. It should be noted, that among all the questions from this area, there were no significant disparities between the replies of yes, no, and it is hard to say.

Differentiation of the response to the above questions by gender was visible only in respect of cooperation with local authorities and organizations, since this reply was chosen by three times more women than men who participated in the survey. Answers to other questions were similar regardless of the respondents' gender.

SELF-EVALUATION OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE VALUES OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The aim of the next group of survey questions was to assess a respondent's personal attitude to selected issues connected with CSR and related to ethics, protection of the environment, treatment of workers and promoting local entrepreneurship.

31% of the respondents replied that they often focused attention on whether the products they buy are environmentally friendly. 22% do it rarely, while the number of respondents who never do it is the same as the number of those who always do it and equals 6%. 34% of the students sometimes pay attention to the environmental friendliness of the products bought. 59% of the respondents would be more or less willing to boycott the products of a company knowing that it

exploits employees or acts unethically (18% replied to the question yes and 41% rather yes). For up to 33% it was a matter of not much significance and for 7% it was unimportant.

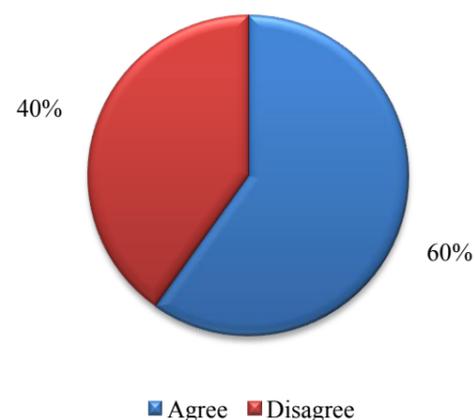
More than half of the respondents (55%) have always (6%) or very often (49%) taken into account the origin of the purchased products and when deciding to purchase them tried (if possible) to support Polish entrepreneurs by choosing national products. 28% of the respondents did it sometimes, while 14% and 2% did it rarely or never, respectively.

While analyzing the replies to the three above questions by gender it can be noted that the approach of men and women to the problem of the exploitation of workers and the ethical behavior in business largely coincided. As regards other questions, a greater percentage of "yes" and "rather yes" replies in all women's responses shows them to be more socially responsible in everyday life.

THE INCLUSION OF THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CONCEPT IN WIDELY UNDERSTOOD CORPORATE REPORTING

Around 60% of the respondents felt that the information on CSR should be included in corporate financial reporting (Chart 2). Most of them (74%) were those working. Up to 72% of the respondents in the group actively seeking employment acknowledged it as appropriate to include in the reporting system the information on the company's relationship with employees and local society, actions in the field of environmental protection, etc.

Chart 2: Respondents' opinions on the inclusion of CSR in corporate financial reporting system



Source: Author's own calculations based on the survey

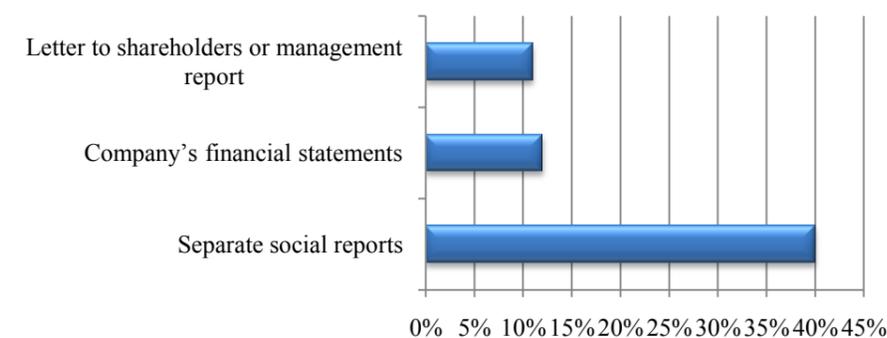
The distribution of responses was approximately the same in the case of persons born before 1980 and after this year, and amounted to 60% (yes) and 40% (no), respectively.

An analysis of the survey results by gender reveals significant differences. While 54% of the surveyed men did not deem it necessary to include the CSR information in the company's reporting system, this opinion was expressed by only 36% of women.

According to 40% of the respondents, this information should be presented in separate social reports (chart

3). 12% felt it necessary to include it in the company's financial statements, and 11% would see it as part of the annual report, in a letter to shareholders or management report. On analyzing the results according to professional status it can be noted that the largest percentage of people who indicated social reports as a way of communicating information about CSR occurred in the group of persons seeking employment (61%).

Chart 3: Respondents' opinions on the ways of communicating information on company's CSR achievements



Source: Author's own calculations based on the survey

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE AIMS

The CSR concept is considered to be a tool for creating company value and achieving a competitive advantage on the market. In Poland, as throughout the world, there is a growing interest in this issue. Polish companies before the year 2000 were characterized by a lack of interest in social responsibility, and even a reluctance to take action in this field. Consecutive years, 2002-2004, were a period of initial criticism followed by a growth of interest in the field of CSR. Since Poland became a member of the EU in 2004, involvement of businesses in the concept of CSR has been increasing. It initially took the form of raising money for charity and sponsorships, treated primarily as marketing actions (Adamczyk, 2009, p. 208). In recent years, CSR has ceased to be perceived as a part of company PR, and has begun to be seen as an idea that has become an inherent part of its long-term strategy. The economic crisis has also influenced

the development of CSR in Poland in a positive way. According to the Ministry of the Economy (2010):

an argument has been used for many years in Poland and other countries in transition, that the economy has not yet matured to include social and environmental issues and that companies must fight for survival on the market. (...) the current economic crisis should lead to reevaluation of the economic model to a more responsible one, aiming at the provision of a sound basis for the rapid reconstruction and future sustainable development. This is an opportunity for business to find new competitive advantages resulting from a better use of resources, including employees, and to build a lasting relationship with key stakeholders in order to strengthen the position on the market.

Interest in CSR can be seen not only among companies but also their stakeholders, including employees. Employees are considered to be the second most

important stakeholder group, after shareholders. This group is subjected to substantial transformations. Generation Y that enters the labor market now differs significantly from its predecessors. It gathers people raised in other conditions, with other vital purposes, that follow other principles – they value not only high salaries, but also personal development and work-life balance, they are ecologically and socially conscious and demanding that an employer share the same values. They constitute a group that comprises individuals who are not only recipients of information disclosed by the companies on CSR, but also those who, as the higher level managers, will influence its shape in the future. Therefore, there is a need to include the concept of CSR in their education, in particular, in the case of students majoring in finance and accounting.

The research results presented in the paper allow the conclusion that few respondents were familiar with the term “Corporate Social Responsibility”, although it can be noted that the principles of the concept are important for them both in the assessment of the employer and in everyday life. However, they do not seem to recognize the favorable influence of social responsibility on financial results of enterprises, regarding pursuit of profit at any cost as the main purpose of their operations. It can be assumed that this is primarily due to the lack of education in this field during studies. It should be noted that a separate subject concerning this matter is not on their curriculum, and social accounting is not a part of accounting courses. In Poland only a negligible percentage of universities proposes individual courses or lectures concerning CSR, neither is it a frequent subject of scientific dissertations (Woźniczka 2007, p. 158).

The Forum of Responsible Business defines CSR as “terra incognita among Polish economics students”, noting that it is still insufficiently present in the business schools curricula (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2009).

It can therefore be assumed that the students’ knowledge on this subject is derived from other sources, such as socially responsible companies which most of them know.

The conducted studies proved that self-development prospects in the form of possible training or courses are the most important for young people in the selection of employers, while the amount of remuneration is less significant. It should be added

that the respondents also noticed other issues falling within the concept of CSR, especially in the areas of the company’s relationship with employees and partners, and to a lesser extent in relations to the environment and society.

According to the survey results, young people strive to be socially responsible in everyday life. What is more, women are more socially responsible and have higher requirements in this respect towards employers. However, it should be noted that the number of men who participated in the survey was much lower than the number of the surveyed women.

The fitting of the CSR concept into the framework of the accounting information system by respondents was recognized as a particularly interesting problem. The results of the research have revealed that the majority of respondents acknowledged the need to inform stakeholders about the company’s activities in the field of social responsibility. An exceptionally high percentage of affirmative replies was noted in the group of people actively seeking employment.

The majority of the respondents indicated separate social reports as a medium for communicating information on CSR. It should be noted that their publishing is not widely practiced in Poland. For example, only 11 companies participated in the annual contest for the best social report, prepared in accordance with the requirements of the GRI, organized by CSR Consulting & Responsible Business Forum & PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2009 (Raporty społeczne, 2010).

Relatively few respondents indicated financial statements or other elements of the annual report as the best means to disclose CSR information. It can be assumed that the reason for this is the respondents’ tendency to separate these two mutually related issues: accounting and CSR.

The survey results showed that, although the concept of CSR is not completely unknown to the respondents, there are some gaps in their knowledge on this topic. The purpose of further research should therefore be to determine the best way to introduce the subject associated with this issue in their curriculum. It is also important to decide, whether it should be a separate course, or whether it ought to be integrated with such courses as accounting, corporate finance, business ethics, marketing, etc., also to sensitize students to the merging of these issues. Declarations of compliance with the values in line with the CSR

idea in respondents’ everyday life allow for an assumption that they will be interested in this issue. The development of social accounting in Poland is equally important. Universities educate future employees and also managers (including CEOs), who will be responsible for companies’ performance and their communication with the stakeholders. In this context, it seems interesting to get answers to the following questions: Do students majoring in accounting seek information on the future/current employer performance in their annual reports? If they do, what kind of information are they interested in? Should, in their opinion, this type of disclosure be referred to in the accounting act or in the Ministry of

Finance regulation? Can their expectations be met with the reports prepared mainly by the companies with the intention to satisfy their shareholders (owners of the capital and future investors)? Finally, are they interested in learning more about CSR during the courses they participate in during studies? Due to the growing interest in CSR issues, both from the perspective of enterprises and their stakeholders (including employees) and, at the same time, still insufficient knowledge of social accounting in Poland, the possibilities for additional research in this field seem to be extensive.

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