

Attitudes of students towards corporate social and environmental responsibility

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Summary. The results of the survey allow to assess the attitudes of students towards the role of the natural environment in the functioning of the company by the concept of social and environmental responsibility which only 1/5 of the respondents are familiar with. Respondents take into account first of all the level of salary and the prospects of their personal development opportunities within the company while choosing the employer. Unfortunately, criteria like the high level of corporate environmental culture and high eco-innovativeness are not important during choosing the employer.

Key words: attitudes, the environment, corporate social responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

Given the growing importance of the environmental aspect, which is global and affects the diversity of enterprises' strategic choices, it becomes ever more substantial to recognize natural environment issues in business¹. Manufacturers and energy users introduce pro-environmental innovations or seek for such opportunities [6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 17, 19, 27, 33, 34, 36, 38]. Pro-environmental, eco-innovative, or emission-reducing activities, as well as the creation of related databases, are referred to in various publications [11, 15, 16, 21]. The realization of an enterprise's environmental objectives is facilitated by the concept of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) in the framework of the so called corporate environmental responsibility (environmental CSR). Successful and effective implementation of this framework is possible only with the change of attitudes towards the environment of all parties of social and economic activity. The environmental knowledge alone is not enough if it is not

followed by attitudes changes, that can also be shaped during the didactic process in universities [20, 35]. The economy and the society need employees and citizens who create new knowledge and new pro-environmental and eco-innovative solutions [28]. The development of pro-environmental attitudes requires the increase in the level of environmental awareness, which is a concept combined from psychological, social, and economic elements [13, 22, 24, 37].

The purpose of this study was to learn the attitudes and opinions of young respondents on the subject of the implementation and realization of the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility in relation to the environment. The study purposes also included the recognition of the criteria hierarchy, which is used by future employees when choosing the employer, and the interdependencies among those criteria.

STUDY MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey questionnaire was used in the course of the study, and it was distributed directly to the respondents (random survey). The study was conducted in 2011 on a sample of 382 University of Technology² students, representing following faculties: Management – 73%, Civil Engineering – 9%, Electrical Engineering – 9%, and Materials Processing Technology and Applied Physics – 9%. The purposive sampling was used, and the sample was diverse in terms of age and gender (women – 71%, men – 29%). Average age of respondents was 25 years. The vast majority of the sample were employed individuals (89% of the sample).

Obtained statistics were processed with STATISTICA 9.0 application both in terms of quantity and quality. The

¹ The natural environment concept is recognized by the Author as an equivalent of the environment concept in the management sciences.

² The sample is not representative thus the limitations in terms of quantity and sample choice make it impossible to generalize results for all students in Poland. Further studies are planned among students of other Polish universities.

qualitative approach used Mann–Whitney U test and Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient.

In the first area of the study respondents answered to the following questions: 1. Are you familiar with the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (response categories: “yes” or “no”)? 2. Where did you encounter the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility for the first time (response options: university classes, the media, Internet, conferences, trainings, workshops, friends, work)? 3. Do you think there is a place for ethics in business? 4. Is it possible to combine pro-environmental activities of enterprises with their financial interests? 5. Pro-environmental activity of an enterprise results in higher or lower profit? (Answers were coded as follows: 1 – “much higher profit”, 2 – “higher profit”, 3 – “the same profit”, 4 – “lower profit”, 5 – “much lower profit”)? 6. In the future, would you like to run your business, driven by the principle of environmental responsibility? 7. Do you expect enterprises to become more involved in environmental issues. In this part of the study a scale of 1 to 5 was used. In the second part of the first area of the study respondents were asked about the reasons for enterprises undertaking or not undertaking environmental activities (questions 8 and 9) and the activities that an enterprise responsible for the environment should undertake. Those questions 8 to 9 were multiple choice questions. In the second area of the study respondents were asked to rank factors which they took into account when choosing the employer on a scale of 1 to 10³.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study conducted among the students indicates that only 21% of the respondents are familiar with the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility, and the sources of knowledge on this subject are primarily university classes (49%), and media (39%). Only 6% of the respondents chose workplace and Internet as sources for developing knowledge on CSR. 81% of the respondents believe that there is a place for ethics in business. 27% of the respondents strongly agree with the statement that it is possible to combine the pro-environmental activities with financial interest of the enterprise. Over 57% of the respondents answered “probably yes”, about 13% had no opinion, and only 7% declared that it is impossible to combine pro-environmental activities with the stable financial development of the company. According to less than 27% of the respondents pro-environmental activities result in the higher profit for companies. Over 87% of the respondents declared the will to apply the principles of environmental responsibility in business, and only less than 6% had no opinion. More than half of young consumers (52%) expect greater involvement of enterprises in environmental activities in case of their negative impact on the environment, 26% believe that such activities should be undertaken by all entities, regardless of the type of their business. Pro-environmental management is irrelevant for 10% of the respondents. 7.5% of the respondents have no

opinion, and 4.5% do not expect companies to engage in environmental activities at all.

Clearly the most respondents (35% of answers) believe that the main incentive to undertake pro-environmental activities in enterprises is the creation of a positive image and reputation, and is part of the marketing activities (24.6% of answers). The respondents identified the basic factors that determines the lack of pro-environmental activities as: the shortage of financial resources (26% of answers), the desire to make quick and easy profit by companies (22% of answers), the absence of positive role models of shared responsibility for the environment in the society (19% of answers), low environmental culture of companies (16% of answers). The respondents believe that enterprises, which include the principles of sustainable development in their activities (33% of answers) and reduce the acquisition of natural resources (24% of answers) are perceived as entities guided by concern for the natural environment.

In the second area of the study, related to the analysis of the variables affecting the selection of the employer by the respondents, it was found on the basis of the ranking (according to the average rank) that the projected level of proposed salary was the most important criterion (2.47). In second place, the respondents chose the prospects and opportunities for their own development in the company (3.25), and in third – opportunities for promotion (3.83). As another factor the respondents classified the good image of the company in the society (4.94), and following in order: opinions of the company employees about the atmosphere in the company (5.44), prestige (5.51), company size (6.68), and company’s involvement in environmental activities (7.34). The last positions of the ranking included high environmental culture (7.57) and high eco-innovativeness of the enterprise (7.98). As far as the hierarchy of the employer selection criteria went it was observed that for women a good image in the society is somewhat more important than for men (Mann-Whitney U test showed a difference on the border of statistical significance ($p = 0.054$; $\alpha = 0.05$)).

In the second part of this study area correlations between variables were examined (between employer selection factors). Spearman’s rank correlation analysis showed the highest statistically significant positive correlation between the variables 9 and 10 (high eco-innovativeness and environmental culture of the company; $R = 0.38$), which meant that the greater the importance of environmental culture of the company for the respondents, the greater the importance of its high eco-innovativeness. On the other hand the highest statistically significant negative correlation was found for the variables 8 and 5 ($R = -0.40$), 8 and 6 ($R = -0.34$), and 9 and 5 ($R = -0.33$), respectively. The above ratios lead to the following conclusions: the larger the company and its prestige, the less important is the opinion of the company for the respondents; the higher the environmental culture in the company, the less important is its size in terms of the number of employees⁴. Correlation matrix was presented in Table 1.

³ Where: 1 – is the most important criterion, 10 – is the least important criterion.

⁴ The structure of enterprises’ size in Poland: small enterprises – 10-49 employees, medium enterprises – 50-249 employees, large enterprises – over 250 employees.

Table 1. Criteria of selecting the employer – matrix of correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. level of proposed salary	1.00									
2. development opportunities (trainings, workshops)	0.17*	1.00								
3. promotion opportunities	0.20*	0.23*	1.00							
4. company's good image in the society	-0.18*	-0.24*	-0.18*	1.00						
5. company's size	-0.14	-0.17*	-0.11*	-0.07	1.00					
6. company's prestige	-0.02	-0.14	-0.11	-0.15	0.26*	1.00				
7. company's involvement in environmental activities	-0.30*	-0.04	-0.21*	-0.04	0.01	-0.24*	1.00			
8. opinions of employees about the atmosphere in the company	-0.15	-0.13	-0.20*	-0.07	-0.40*	-0.34*	-0.06	1.00		
9. company's high environmental culture	-0.22*	-0.21*	-0.20*	-0.05	-0.33*	-0.17*	0.25*	0.10	1.00	
10. company's high eco-innovativeness	-0.22*	-0.26*	-0.19*	-0.15	-0.26*	-0.17*	0.04	0.16	0.38*	1.00

An asterisk was used to indicate only statistically significant correlation results with the significance level 0.05; *p < 0.05.

Source: own elaboration.

Most decisions on the implementation and priority of environmental objectives belongs to the competency of managers whose environmental values system influences the development of environmental awareness and attitudes of all employees. Environmental awareness of employees is a strong incentive of organizational nature. It determines the number of environmental instruments used by organizations that promote the reduction of their negative impact on the environment [39]. Pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors contribute to making sustainable and responsible business decisions by employees [5, 25,39]. Employees' attitudes stimulate enterprises to improve the level of environmental culture and environmental responsibility, as the readiness of people for actions and behaviour, showing respect for the environment, [1, 9]. Social responsibility is poorly recognized among the Polish society and university students [29]. The main reasons identified by the students, which drive the enterprises implementing CSR are primarily the positive image and reputation of the company, while the cause of limiting the implementation of that idea is the shortage of financial resources in the company. These opinions are consistent with the opinions of entrepreneurs, mainly from the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises [30, 32].

Enterprises employing people who present pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour can expect the reduction of their negative environmental impact and the increase in the employees' involvement in environmental issues in the long term [2]. Reduction of the negative impact on the natural environment results from the tendency in most entities in the developed economies of the world to replace fossil energy resources with renewable energy sources, that grew into importance after the energy crisis [31]. First generation transport biofuels (produced from edible plants) emit large amounts of CO₂. Based on the estimates, it occurs that only bio-ethanol produced from sugarcane complies with the Directive 2009/28/EC on the reduction of CO₂ emissions [4]. These requirements are also met by the biofuels of the second and third generation, produced from inedible plants or waste materials.

Production of energy plants is thus a part of the complex system, namely the national economy. It should be considered in multiple aspects, taking into account the assumptions and stages of realization of the strategy of energy production from renewable sources [14]. In Western Europe, more and more of those who look for work take into account Corporate Social Responsibility and the care for the environment as an important criteria in the search for employer [23]. The review of the literature on the subject indicates that the most important factors in selecting an employer include: salary level, reputation of the company, personal development opportunities, positive relationships with colleagues and their expertise, stability of employment, size of the company and the personality and demographic factors [3, 18, 26]. Above conclusions are consistent with the results of the study, as the level of the proposed salary and growth opportunities in the company are the most important determinants for those looking for work. Unfortunately, companies' concern about the natural environment expressed by a high environmental culture that facilitate high eco-innovativeness in enterprises is hardly taken into account by surveyed young future employees, as these two criteria were classified in the last two places in the ranking. Positive image of the enterprise in the society, as part of the social responsibility idea realization was classified by the respondents only in fourth place. Qualitative analysis of the employer selection criteria by gender showed that women pay more attention to the positive image of the company in the society. This finds confirmation in the literature on the subject, which indicates that men are primarily driven by own development opportunities in the company, and woman by good reputation of the company or its convenient location [3].

Analysis of the correlation coefficients for employers selection attributes demonstrated that respondents perceive the relationship between high eco-innovativeness of companies and their environmental culture. It is interesting that the larger the company in terms of the number of employees, the less important for the respondents is its high eco-innovativeness.

CONCLUSIONS

The foundation to build the corporate responsibility for the natural environment consists of the employees of enterprises and their attitudes towards respect for the environment. This study proved that the surveyed young potential employees poorly recognize the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility, even though the vast majority of them believe that there is place for ethics in business nowadays. The optimistic accent of the study was the fact that the majority of respondents was determined to implement the CSR ideas in their future businesses, and believed that it is possible to combine pro-environmental activities of enterprises with their financial interests. Opinions of respondents also indicate the growing environmental requirements of the young generation in the area of the environmental responsibility of business decisions, as the vast majority expect enterprises to care more about the natural environment. Recruiting and retaining the best employees can determine the success of the business through the ability to receive and interpret signals from the surroundings in times of growing social needs in terms of environmental care. Based on the ranking criteria for employer selection it was found that respondents were primarily driven by the level of the proposed salary. Unfortunately, environmental elements related to the responsibility for the natural environment such as high environmental culture and eco-innovativeness were not chosen as criteria of employer selection. After the correlation analysis for the employer selection criteria due to the role of environmental factors, it should be emphasized that the higher the environmental culture of the company, the greater the importance of its eco-innovativeness among respondents. The larger the enterprise in terms of the number of its employees, the less importance is attached by the respondents to the opinion about that enterprise in the society. An important conclusion can be paying greater attention to eco-innovativeness and ethical aspects of the implementation of pro-environmental solutions to business in the study programs at universities.

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POSTAWY SUDENTÓW WOBEC SPOŁECZNEJ
I EKOLOGICZNEJ ODPOWIEDZIALNOŚCI
PRZEDSIĘBIORSTW

Streszczenie. Badanie stanowi próbę oceny postaw studentów wobec roli jaką pełni środowisko przyrodnicze w funkcjonowaniu przedsiębiorstwa poprzez koncepcję społecznej i ekologicznej odpowiedzialności przedsiębiorstw, która znana jest zaledwie 1/5 respondentów. Badani stanowiący przyszły potencjał pracownicy kierują się przy wyborze pracodawcy przede wszystkim wysokością proponowanego wynagrodzenia oraz perspektywami i możliwościami własnego rozwoju w firmie. Wysoka kultura ekologiczna przedsiębiorstwa oraz jej ekoinnowacyjność nie stanowią żadnego kryterium w poszukiwaniu pracodawcy.
Słowa kluczowe: postawy, środowisko, społeczna odpowiedzialność przedsiębiorstw.

