Leadership in the Context of Corporate and Employee Social Responsibility in a Czech Company

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Abstract: Nowadays CSR research concentrates mainly on the macro-level analysis of the phenomena connected to CSR. However, differences exist among the members of stakeholder groups concerned with CSR, which can cause different results in implementing CSR strategies, it is crucial to study CSR also on the individual (micro) level. The article aims to analyse the Czech brewery's corporate and employee social responsibility in the context of leadership. Several studies reveal how important ethical leadership is because it can affect not only organizational culture, which fosters employee commitment to corporate values but also the range of CSR activities, individuals' engagement and participation. The authors of these studies stress the importance of ethical leadership, managers' encouragement, and supervisors' attitude toward the topic. The method chosen for the research is the micro-level analysis of employee perceptions, reactions, and attitudes towards the company's CSR together with their determinants. The model of psychological micro-foundations and the ESR-CSR congruence model are used. We opted for semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth and detailed inside into the thinking and perceiving of 13 administrative employees of the company. The coding and content analysis of the respondents' testimonies was conducted in the program MAXQDA. We found amongst our respondents, who represent the group of administrative employees of the Czech brewery, that the most important determinant of their CSR engagement was corporate socialization. Many of the respondents engaged in CSR activities that were related to their job. Therefore, we found room for improvement in the extra-role CSR participation of administrative employees, but also in the encouragement from the part of their supervisors. The chosen group of employees framed their CSR perceptions by trying to look at the issue from the point of view of different stakeholders. They saw the sense of doing CSR in the need for sustainability, and a positive for the company is that these employees regarded its CSR as authentic. We found mainly positive CSR reactions on the side of respondents, such as job satisfaction, organizational pride, or job pursuit intention.

Keywords: Employee social responsibility, Corporate social responsibility, Leadership, Model, Czech company

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a term that is being defined very diversely. The European Commission (Corporate Social Responsibility & Responsible Business Conduct, 2020) defines CSR only as of the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society. This definition points to another problem connected with the confusion about the term CSR. The concept is sometimes perceived as a synonym, sometimes told to be linked to or even called an umbrella term for other terms like corporate responsibility, corporate responsiveness, corporate citizenship, sustainability, sustainable development, triple bottom line management, or corporate social performance (CSP) (Ruschak, 2008). Further on, the Commission states that companies can become socially responsible by integrating social, environmental, ethical, consumer, and human rights concerns into their business strategy and operations while following the law. This definition corresponds with the view of many authors (e.g. Trynchuk et al., 2019; Tetrevova and Patak, 2019) and embraces all the three types of CSR models (economic, social and environmental).

Based on the literature research, we concluded that CSR can be defined as the social, economic and environmental issues that a company voluntarily decides to take responsibility for and consider in its decision-making while trying to take into account all the possibly contradicting requirements of its stakeholders. In this work, we will analyze the overall level of the company's CSR, employee perceptions of all the CSR activities of the chosen company and as the voluntariness plays a significant role in the employee CSR perceptions and affects subsequent employee CSR engagement (Heijas et al., 2019), all the five dimensions of the Dalshrud's definition will be taken into account.

The CSR research until today concentrated mainly on the macro-level analysis of the phenomena connected to CSR. However, as there exist differences among the members of stakeholder groups concerned with CSR, which can cause different results in implementing CSR strategies, it is crucial to study CSR also on the individual level. Nevertheless, the micro-level analysis has been neglected for a long time and today there are raising calls for micro-level research and theory development in this field. Most importantly, it is the group of employees whose perceptions of CSR should be measured because they can explain these perceptions' outcomes like employee engagement or disengagement. It is the employees who implement CSR and the consequent positive results depend on their willingness to do so. For these reasons and to be able to meet the limits of a diploma thesis, we decided to narrow our focus and concentrate on the employee CSR perceptions in the selected company. For these reasons, the article aims to analyse the Czech brewery's corporate and employee social responsibility in the context of leadership.

2. Theoretical Background

Proponents of CSR emphasize that even though CSR comes with certain costs, these costs cannot be viewed as an illegitimate waste of money as they bring benefits that, in the end, might outweigh the costs. This notion solves the problem of justification of expenditures on CSR as it shows that they have not only moral but also economic reasons (Schreck, 2009). Moreover, according to Idowu et al. (2015), embracing CSR in the everyday functioning of a firm is about solving the problem with the sustainability of our era by binding together growth, profit and innovation and sustaining them in the long run at the same time.

Anderson (1989) cites Kenneth Dayton's statement that profit is just the company's recompense for serving society well. He explains that if the company did not do so, society would tolerate neither its profit nor its existence.

Czech Business Leaders Forum sees the primary positive outcome of engaging in CSR as the long-term competitive advantage for the companies. Among other benefits not mentioned before is differentiation from the competition, building a good reputation, loyal employees, lower risk management costs, direct financial savings connected to ecological measurements, and, therefore also increase in company turnover (Steinerová, 2008). Ruschak (2008) adds the argument of strengthening the market position of the company. Santos (2011) also mentions that it has been empirically proven that through socially and environmentally responsible practices, companies can gain operational efficiencies, economies and more effective processes.

On the other hand, Blaha and Dytrt (2003) explain what a narrow approach to CSR is, by defining it as responsibility only towards the company shareholders. They recall the ideas of Milton Friedman, which are, until today, the most recalled CSR criticism. Friedman's argument against CSR activities was founded on the presumption that it is the owners of an organization that should receive the profit and that any attempt to redistribute this profit leads to ineffectiveness. From his point of view, redistribution is the task of the state, which has developed apparatus for it and the private sector should not try to substitute for it. Moreover, he argued that corporate managers are self-interested and would make un-reliable and inefficient social responsibility agents (Zu, 2009). Ruschak (2008) calls this phenomenon the contribution to the general inequality. However, Friedman did not refuse the concept of CSR as such, but he saw its essence only in legal and responsible entrepreneurship (Blaha and Dytrt, 2003).

Whether we agree with one or another side, the question today is not anymore if an enterprise should engage in CSR but to what extent it should do so. Furthermore, managerial ethics, business ethics and legality are already taken for granted in business, and companies only consider their capabilities to pursue other dimensions of CSR. Ruschak (2008) answers the question of social efficiency and effectiveness by saying that CSR activities can improve social efficiency, but the impact on social effectiveness remains unanswered. He also calls for a designated obligation of the CSR level of companies as he assumes that it cannot be based solely on their voluntariness. We doubt this is necessary as it may hamper the company's creativity and ruin its image creation process through voluntariness. Ignoring all the criticism of Friedman, a rather radical proposition of Bommier and Renouard (2018) inspired by the teaching of Elinor Ostrom is that to make a company a common (common-pool resource), we have to bring to the fore the social and ecological issues and subordinate to them the creation of shareholder's value.

The CSR research on the institutional level frequently turns back to stakeholder theory and the task to comply with possibly conflicting stakeholder demands (Heijas et al., 2019). The organizational level of research examines how CSR affects the organization and tries to understand the instrumental and financial benefits of CSR (Heijas et al., 2019). Said differently, macro-level research of CSR concentrates on the business case for CSR. These studies reveal how important ethical leadership is because it can affect not only organizational culture, which fosters employee commitment to corporate values but also the range of CSR activities, individuals' engagement and participation (Heijas et al., 2019).

3. Methodology and Data

To achieve the goal of the article, we conducted a case study research, defined by Ridder (2017) as a scientific investigation of a real-life case in-depth and within its context. He sees the advantages of case study research in detailed description and analysis, which brings a better understanding of the studied phenomenon (Ridder, 2017). We chose a Czech brewery company, one of the most transparent companies in the Czech market when it comes to CSR reporting (Kasparova and Kunz, 2013) and its CSR activities are very diverse, which makes it interesting enterprise to study.

We analyzed, namely, the CSR of the Czech brewery company through its CSR report and the interviews with the administrative employees. According to the classification of Mares (2015), we conducted a partly descriptive, partly explorative case study within the limits given by this diploma thesis. He defines the descriptive case study as a case study that is being used for a complex and comprehensive description of a real phenomenon within its context. Furthermore, we should use the explorative case study when we search for answers to real-life causal relations that are too complex to be studied through questionnaires or experiments (Mares, 2015). We opted for semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth and detailed inside into the thinking and perceiving of the administrative employees of the company.

As Ridder (2017) states, it is typical for case study researchers to use non-random sampling that does not represent the larger population. We aimed to drive conclusions for a specific group of administrative employees and possibly generalize them for administrative employees as such. The validity when conducting qualitative research is assured, according to Saunders et al. (2009), with more thorough data collection than through the size of the sample. However, Saunders et al. (2009) argue that using data saturation (the moment when new interviews do not bring any new information) may be helpful but also may not determine the needed number of participants. In general, they admit that in non-probability sampling, there exist no rules when deciding on the accurate sample size. Taking into account the limited time and frame of this research (to have the similar period of time for all the respondents), we decided to narrow the research sample frame and omit manufacturing employees to be able to drive credible conclusions. We supposed, based on our internal observation of the company's functioning, that the results for the manufacturing and administrative workers would differ significantly and we found this observation to be supported by the findings. We analyzed a homogenous group and got valid results after conducting 13 interviews when already after ten interviews, we could talk about data saturation in the fundamental areas of interest. It must be admitted that certain answers would always differ depending on the concrete CSR project in which the participant was involved (such as the CSR activity that they knew the most about) or depending on his/her characteristics (such as personal values). These variables are also discussed in the results part. Nevertheless, our aim was also to distinguish individual differences.

To gain respondents for interviews, we used the technique of volunteer sampling, more precisely self-selection sampling, where individuals volunteer to take part in the research in reaction to an advertisement. Saunders et al. (2009) suggest publicizing the need for the cases through appropriate media and subsequent collection of data from the individuals that respond to the advertisement. Thanks to our membership in the company aking into account the limited time and frame of this research," , we were able to send a bulk e-mail through our team leader to all the administrative employees of the company working in the central office in Prague. Thirty-two employees responded positively to this e-mail and 13 were interviewed regarding the limited time frame but also their time constraints and function in the organization. The interviews were conducted between 15/10/2020 and 13/11/2020 via teleconferences due to the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19 during the time of the collection of data. All the interviews were transcribed and qualitatively analysed with the help of MAXQDA software. We interviewed nine departmental specialists, two departmental directors, one trainee, and one member of the Executive Committee from six different departments. There were eight women and five men participating. We asked these questions and the area can be read in parentheses:

1. What are the company values of the company according to you? What is important for the company, according to you? (values alignment)
2. How would you describe the CSR of the company in general? (company CSR awareness)
    1. Where do you source the information about the company's CSR? (communication channels)

   2. Did you know something about company's CSR also before joining the company? (employee attraction)
   3. Did it influence your decision to join the company? (employee attraction)
3. Can you name some concrete company's activities in the field of CSR? (company CSR awareness)
   1. Do you participate in some of these activities? In which activities concretely do you participate, and how? (reaction to CSR, ESR behaviour)
   2. If yes, why did you decide to participate? If not, what impedes you from participating? (determinants)
   3. How did you get the information about these activities? Do you perceive it as enough? (communication channels and their perceived sufficiency)
   4. How do your managers react to your participation/not participation? Do you feel some kind of encouragement from their side? Do you talk about these CSR activities? (ethical leadership)
4. What do you think about the company's CSR program? What is your opinion on it? (evaluations)
5. How can you participate (if you can) in the creation of the company's CSR strategy or activities? Do you feel that you are involved? (evaluations)
6. Do you have some suggestions for the company concerning its CSR? (evaluations)
7. How did the company's CSR and its values influence you personally if they did? (ESR identity, reactions)
8. What are your personal values in life (at least 3)? (values alignment, ESR identity)
9. Do you perceive yourself as socially responsible? Why yes/no? (ESR identity)
10. Do you feel happy and satisfied in the company? Why yes/no? (reactions)

4. Results and Discussion

The Sustainable Development strategy of the selected Czech brewery stems from the corporate strategy of Asahi breweries and is adapted to the local needs and requirements. However, the main areas of interest and the general goals for these areas stay the same. CSR of the company is internally managed by the Public Affairs and Sustainable Development manager and his team. The company has a long history in CSR reporting and the sustainability report 2019 is already its fourteenth CSR report. In this report, the company stresses the fact that the report is not being printed as they believe it to be another way to save paper and be more sustainable. The goals of the company are in alignment with the priorities identified by the United Nations, and the program is complex enough to cover all three possible impacts (social, environmental and economic) of the company's activities. The company states that their goals of publicizing an SD report are to share their experience but also to highlight the areas in which they could improve.

The most important part of the report for this article talks about the company's care for its employees as we assume that they should be most aware of these activities, which concern them directly. The company presents care for the welfare and well-being of its employees through activities such as collective agreement negotiations with fair remuneration and wage growth assured in this document. Further, the company offers its employees many benefits. These include, for example, additional pension insurance, five weeks of leave allowance, flexible working hours, home office, learning and development schemes, days off on wedding day or their child's first day at school, free beer for employees, Family day, Health day, blood donation compensation and many more. Employees can collect points and claim various gifts and benefits through the company benefit shop. Recently, the company also introduced a new employee assistance program, which provides employees with free psychological, financial, health, and legal counselling.

Secondly, the company sets a goal in occupational safety to zero injuries in the company and makes efforts to attain it through preventive measures. Also, the company declares fostering diversity and creating an inclusive environment mainly through the promotion of women in the company management and the support for families and mums. Lastly, the company provides its employees with an ethical line where they can whistle-blow unethical behaviour spotted in the company.

In our previous paper (Cincalova and Toporova, 2021) we answered the questions about the assessment of the CSR of the company with the help of the Haski-Leventhal et al. (2017) congruence model (ESR-CSR). Furthermore, the level of socially responsible identity and behaviour levels were identified to find the company's position in the social responsibility matrix. This positioning was compared with the positioning of the interviewed employees to determine the type of ESR-CSR congruence of the company and its administrative employees with the connected outcomes and challenges discussed at the end of the chapter. In Figure 1 our work with the coding of interviews in MAXQDA could be seen. The codes are dedicated to the number of the respondent and the number of the question.

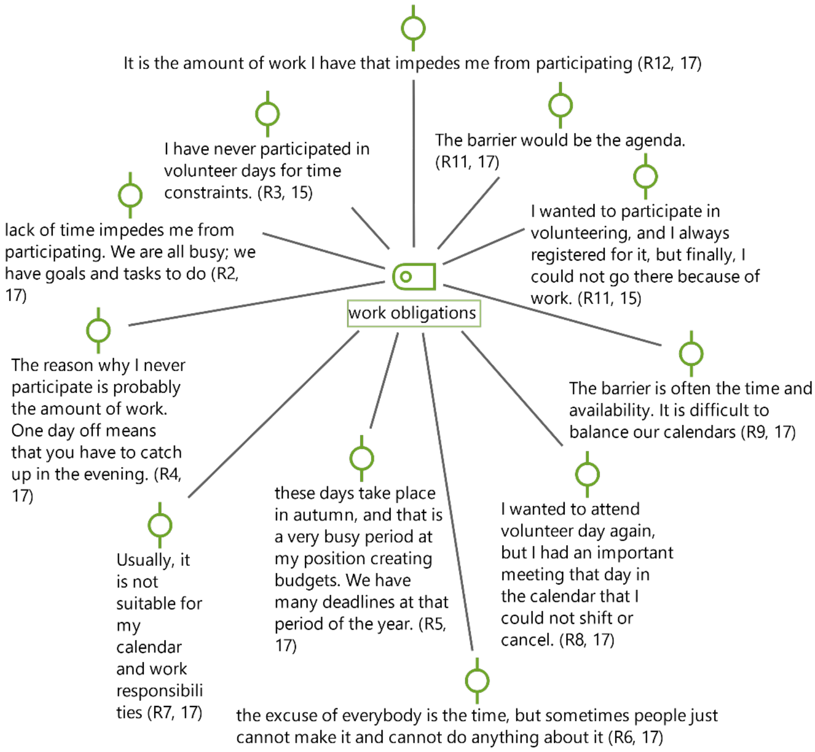

Figure 1: Segments with the work obligations code

One of the parts of the interviews was dedicated to the model of psychological micro-foundations of CSR as developed by Gond et al. (2017). Nevertheless, the part concerned with CSR engagement individual determinants was enriched by the determinants of Haski-Leventhal et al. (2017), such as the relational determinants considering the relationship between the company and the employee or the whole category of external determinants. Furthermore, the perceived CSR involvement (Pavlík and Bělčík, 2010) and the role of ethical leadership (Heijas et al., 2019) were added to the analysis. The answers of our respondents were analyzed by searching for direct but also the indirect pronunciation of CSR employee engagement determinants, company CSR evaluations, and employee reactions to the company CSR. The results showed the most important determinants, the most common evaluations and reactions amongst the respondents on which we based our recommendations for the company.

We identified a spread understanding among the administrative employees of the company as being a leader in the Czech market and the reasoning of CSR as the mission of the leader. The administrative employees think that the company should be the first one to take brave steps in the field of CSR and inspire other companies. The company could take advantage of this perception and incorporate it into its internal communication in the form of a motto. This motto could be an official motto used when communicating anything connected to the company's CSR. This way, the company

could foster organizational identification as the employees would recognize their thoughts in the motto. Another advantage would be the unification of the CSR connected communication that was also suggested by the respondents. We would propose, for instance: "(Together) we inspire/lead a better future."

We could see that the respondents perceived the internal communication connected to CSR, which went mainly through mail distributors, intranet portal, and conversations with colleagues, as enough. On the other hand, Men (2014) suggested deriving more from using the internal social networks, and we see possible advancements in this area also. Sedlacek et al. (2012) also describe the advantages and disadvantages of internal communication. The internal social network Yammer could be taken advantage of to drive more attention to the CSR program and opportunities for participation. Just like with traditional social networks, a series published regularly could be used to introduce some interesting facts about social responsibility, environmental protection, etc., while always being linked to company activities. We suggest also using more videos than text and using more informal wording as we want the employees to feel like on any other social network and not perceive it as a part of their job to use it. The goal is that they enjoy using it, and consequently, it can become an effective internal communication channel.

Four of our respondents said that they would appreciate clearer communication about CSR as, for now, it seems messed up to them. Some information goes through the portal, some through e-mail, another through Yammer, and some information go through all of these and other channels. As a result, the employees do not know where to find which type of information. One respondent had an interesting suggestion: "I would welcome a portal page with all the information about CSR and the possibilities to participate in one place. Moreover, I think that it would be fine to provide employees with complete information about where and in what they can take part because I think that many of us do not know what the options are." (R12, HR specialist) We see a big potential in such an internal portal page accessible to everyone within the organization with all the possibilities to take part individually or as a team, with CSR activities listed there. Haski-Leventhal et al. (2017) also recommend publishing an internal CSR report, which could also be part of the CSR portal page, including all the information about what is being done and what the plans and the future projects are. Consequently, everybody in the company interested in the company's CSR could find anything connected to this field in one place. This page could also include quizzes, external links, and tips for a sustainable lifestyle to make it more attractive and useful for the employees.

During our interviews, we asked explicitly about the attitude of the respondents' team leaders towards the respondents participating in CSR activities. Even though a slight majority described their team leader as encouraging, there was still a large notion of "we do not talk about this". However, many authors cited in our literature research stress the importance of ethical leadership, managers' encouragement, and supervisors' attitude toward the topic. It is an important factor, which determines the participation rate of employees in extra-role CSR activities. Therefore, we would suggest the company introduce ethical leadership training for the supervisors in the company. During this training, they would be explained the causal chain starting from their encouragement and proper communication through increased employee CSR engagement leading to all the benefits for their team and also the company. They must be explained what behaviour in this field is expected from them and how it can contribute to the company's success. We believe that gradually, the rate of employee participation in the extra-role CSR activities would increase, and the subsequent positive results would be delivered.

We think that the company does very well in the field of CSR and its communication. Nevertheless, our research showed where the spaces for improvement still exist. Therefore, we provided various measures that can be taken to fulfil these spaces and become even better in this field. The table below summarizes our suggestions for the company described before with their estimated costs and benefits. A measure is always assigned to the department under which competence it comes, then the possible costs and benefits of taking this measure. The costs are considered to be added as all the proposed measures become new projects of the already existing departments and added to the agenda of already hired employees. However, as we also discussed the workload of the employees, we provide another alternative to taking on this extra agenda. We consider hiring two interns – one for the Corporate Affairs team (CA), who would manage the internal social network Yammer and shoot the videos about CSR projects, and the second for the Public Affairs team (PA), who would help with the creation of the CSR portal page and the creation of CSR workshops for newcomers.

In Table 1, we can see that all the measures can be taken by the already existing departments and their employees without employing any additional budgets. However, if the company wanted to spread the workload, it could hire one or two interns for these CSR and communication projects. According to the information from the company, the costs of one student intern employed based on a performance agreement are approximately €6.240,00 per year. Therefore, two interns would generate a cost of approximately €12.480,00 if the internships lasted 12 months. Even if the company wanted to hire a professional graphic studio for the filming of the videos about CSR projects, it would cost approximately €7.200,00 per year (12 videos, one video per month) according to the price lists of graphic studios available on the internet. However, these costs should not threaten in no way the liquidity or rentability of a company with revenue accounting for €680 millions in 2019. Contrarily, these negligible costs would generate or foster long-term benefits that are hard to quantify and that are listed in the last column. Therefore, we think that nothing stands in the way of adopting at least some of the presented recommendations.

Table 1: Summary of proposed measures with their estimated costs and benefits

Measure	Department	Additional costs	Benefits
leader motto	CA (IC)	0	unified CSR communication, corporate identification
Yammer management	CA (IC/intern)	0/€6.240,00	enhanced effectivity of this communication channel
CSR portal page	CA (IC) + PA/intern	0/€6.240,00	clear and gathered information about CSR, higher participation in CSR activities, bigger CSR involvement
more external communication of CSR	CA (EC)+PR agency	0	organizational pride and prestige, attraction of job candidates, enhanced corporate image
video about CSR projects	CA/intern/graphic studio	0/€6.240,00/ €7.200,00	enhanced corporate image, organizational identification, higher CSR awareness
ethical leadership training	PA+HR	0	higher CSR participation, job satisfaction, employee retention
CSR workshops for newcomers	PA+HR/intern	0/€6.240,00	higher CSR awareness, the proper understanding of CSR, organizational identification, job satisfaction, employee engagement

5. Conclusions

To the conclusions, we found amongst our respondents, who represent the group of administrative employees of the selected company, that the most important determinant of their CSR engagement was corporate socialization. The relational determinants as meeting new colleagues and socialization with others seemed to influence the most whether the employee engages in the CSR activities of the company or not. Many of the respondents engaged in CSR activities that were related to their job. Therefore, we found room for improvement in the extra-role CSR participation of administrative employees, but also in the encouragement from the part of their supervisors. The chosen group of employees framed their CSR perceptions by trying to look at the issue from the point of view of different stakeholders. They saw the sense of doing CSR in the need for sustainability, and a positive for the company is that these employees regarded its CSR as authentic. We found mainly positive CSR reactions on the side of respondents, such as job satisfaction, organizational pride, or job pursuit intention. Consequently, we provide recommendations on how to take advantage of these findings. However, the respondents engaged again almost solely in the job-related CSR activities, and we were surprised by the poor effect of the company's CSR on their decision to join the company. With regard to the recent studies confirming the effect of CSR on job candidates' attraction, we provided suggestions to improve in this field.

We used the program MAXQDA for the coding of the transcripts and subsequent analysis. Based on the presented findings and the ability to provide a substantial amount of recommendations to the company, we consider the aim of the article to be achieved. We found the congruence model of Haski-Leventhal et al. (2017) and the model of psychological micro foundations of Gond et al. (2017) to be very useful in guiding the research. Even though these models had to be combined in the part that explores the CSR engagement determinants and they had to be enriched by the corporate communication factor, they proved to be helpful in the attempt to contribute to the micro-level qualitative CSR research development.

We see the limits of this research in its limited time and frame. It was impossible within the time and word limits of this paper to interview more employees or to include more groups of employees to drive more complex results. Therefore, we suggest studying also the perceptions of the manufacturing employees to see the differences in perceiving CSR. Another limit of this research may have been the interviewees' answers biased by them knowing our position within the company, as we were a part of the Corporate Affairs department at the time of the interviews' conduction. The interviewees, therefore, could have weighted their words regarding our role in the company.

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