CSR EXPECTATIONS AND VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AMONG EMPLOYEES

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Abstract
Our research aims to reveal the expectations of employees towards their organization about CSR initiatives, and also to map out what attitudes characterize them in connection with volunteerism that looks back on old traditions.

With the involvement of more than 300 people in our research - mostly employees of large companies - we mapped the employee attitudes by analysing statistical and spontaneous mentions.

Based on our results, it became clear that the employees consider it important that their employer also carries out socially responsible activities, and that their most important task is to achieve economic efficiency. They are also happy to participate in volunteer activities for a good cause.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the rapidly changing environmental conditions for companies expect constant improvement and development to maintain competitiveness [1]. Companies under serious pressure from their external environment have increasingly become aware that they are (one of) the most influential actors in society. While Kotler and Lee [2] discussed in their CSR book that companies are expected to give something back to their community through charity programs, this research and trends only rarely recognize charity as corporate responsibility. Due to their size, wealth, and diversified expertise, every economic decision of companies has a strong influence on society as well as on their micro-economic, political, or natural environment [3]. This may also be the reason why in Western economic theories, stakeholder management comes to the fore more and more in connection with CSR, and the previously dominant environmental protection regulations and awareness only appear in addition to this. Although social issues (human rights, child labor, consumer protection) have appeared in connection with CSR expectations. Today, in the top 10 CSR trends, as well as in the sustainability goals, the development, development, and well-being of people dominate, giving priority to the company's direct stakeholders. Harvard Business School and Impact Hub Athens (2024) summarized the most important trends in 10 points:

1. Net-zero commitments and climate action; 2. Social justice and equity initiatives; 3. Technological solutions for social impact; 4. Human rights in the supply chain; 5. Focus on mental health and well-being; 6. Circular economy initiatives, 7. Community-centric

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approaches; 8. Enhanced CSR reporting and transparency; 9. Global health initiatives; 10. Regulatory compliance and ESG integration [4].

So CSR is not just a fleeting trend; it's a dynamic force shaping the future of responsible and ethical business practices [4].

In this study, the employees as the internal stakeholders of the company are in the center, because we are looking for the answer to how much responsibility they expect from their organization, what characterizes their needs, and what participation intention characterizes them in connection with social responsibility and volunteering.

1.1. CSR, corporate social responsibility

The subject has occupied researchers, (professional) people, and companies for more than 50 years, although, in the review by Raffay-Danyi and Hajmásy [5], the 1930s were marked as the starting point. In connection with CSR - as with other large, social, and economic topics - there is no uniform definition. According to Csigéné [6], the lack of a uniform definition stems from the fact that corporate social responsibility is a very complex area, which also involves ethical issues and is, therefore, less regulated. In addition to the fact that countries' and cultures', as well as individuals' expectations and interests, cause different values of responsibility prioritization. Also, the previously mentioned historical review revealed that responsible corporate behavior has been interpreted by a continuous change in the field of expectations, rules, and business perception time by the time [5].

Braun [3] writes in his book "Corporate social responsibility is the incorporation of the values and interests of the stakeholders into business operations". According to a slightly more comprehensive definition by Carroll [7:500], "corporate social responsibility includes the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic expectations that society places on organizations at a given time". Carroll [7,8] declared and determined with his CSR pyramid, which is still in use today, that the primary goal of a business enterprise is profitable, economically responsible operation. However, also greatly facilitated that the activities of an altruistic, non-profit organization are not expected in the case of a socially responsible company from an economic body, but an organizational attitude that recognizes its responsibility at all levels. In his theory, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibility is based on economic responsibility. Without basic liquidity, they could not make philanthropic activities. Later, Wood [9] placed the responsibility for sustainability at the top of the CSR pyramid [10], but what can be a problem in his theory is that the concept or goals of sustainability, which is very diverse and includes many responsibilities [11] also affect many areas, which have certain its elements appear even at the responsible legal or ethical level, thereby making the interpretation chaotic.

In summary, CSR tries to deal with many aspects and sub-fields of activity at the same time, however, conscious cooperation with direct stakeholders is becoming more and more important. In this study, we take as a basis the wording found in the Green Book of the European Commission, which states that CSR is "a concept according to which companies voluntarily integrate social and environmental aspects into their business activities and interactions with stakeholders" [13:8]. In other words, the most important step required for corporate social responsibility is to realize that companies have an impact with their activities on owners, employees, consumers, and society, but also on those members who do not necessarily have a direct or conscious relationship with the company.

In addition to the above, it can be said that precisely because of diverse expectations and responsibilities, certain research separates external and internal CSR processes and goals. While the external includes environmental protection, philanthropy, or volunteering, as well as external stakeholder management (from consumers to strategic partners to government actors), the internal includes activities that give a sense of well-being to owners, managers, and employees [14, 5].

1.2. The role of volunteering in CSR

Volunteerism exists in many interpretations, however, Perpék [15] summarized the essence of this activity that benefits others along three characteristics: voluntary, no coercion, and without compensation (possibly reimbursement). As Bifkovics and Malota [16] also formulated, volunteering plays an important role in many organizations in different forms. It typically appears in response to current social needs, for example in connection with healthcare, social care, or helping refugees. However, traditionally, the employees of each organization can provide support in connection with education the operation of educational institutions, or in the activities of sports organizations. Today, there are more than one billion volunteers, according to Teamsage.io [17]. The employee volunteering itself can be done individually or through a non-profit or other type of organization [18, 19]. At the European level, millions of volunteers help in special situations as well as regularly [20]. According to the data of the Central Statistical Office [21], more than 60,000 volunteers performed work worth HUF 83 billion in the examined period (16). This is also a great support for civil or governmental organizations, as they must rely on volunteers due to their financial limitations in some situations [22]. However, not all volunteers could be useful or stay. Due to a lack of motivation or commitment, their work is not adequate help, or they cannot be kept in this role in the long term, so their examination is useful both for the organizations that use the help and for the employing organizations. From the point of view of employers, in addition to their external and internal PR activities, the voluntary activity of their employees also contributes to prestige and workforce satisfaction [16].

Nowadays, among Hungarian companies, corporate activity related to volunteering is not managed by a separate working group but is typically entrusted to the PR and/or communication group of the organizations [23].

2. Material and methodology

During the research, we tried to assess the CSR expectations of employees towards their organization and their willingness to participate in these programs by applying a quantitative questionnaire survey methodology. The research itself began in December 2023 and lasted until mid-January using the convenience sampling method. As the site of the survey, we looked for online platforms where we could primarily reach active employees. From our target group-oriented survey, we excluded all individuals who have not worked in the past year or who do not have an employment relationship longer than six months. Thus, 317 people were included in the sample for the final analysis. The demographic distribution of the respondents is important, as our results can be interpreted along these group characteristics. Women (61.5%) were slightly overrepresented among those filling out the questionnaires, and members of the 16-29 age cluster (46.4%) and graduates (42.9%), those with a good but not excellent financial situation (48.6%) and those living in the county seat (61.5%). In terms of their relationship status, the sample was relatively balanced.

It is important to emphasize what kind of work experience the respondents have and what size company they currently work in, in what position, as this greatly influences their answers (Table 1). Along these background variables, it is important to highlight that those with 1-3 years of work experience were slightly overrepresented, and those working for large companies (49.5%) and white-collar employees (59.6%) were more strongly represented. It was a particular pleasure that the participation was not below 10% in any category.

During the analysis of the data, we performed data cleaning and tabulation in the case of open questions (spontaneous associations), and descriptive statistical cross-tabulation analyses in the case of closed questions. In the results section, only the significant and/or proven reliable results from a methodological point of view are presented.

Table 1. Share of respondents according to workplace characteristics, N=317

Share of respondents according to years spent at the company	Capita	%
For 1 – 3	103	32.5
For 4 – 10	47	14.8
Less than a year	79	24.9
More than a year	88	27.8
Share of respondents according to company size	Capita	%
Small company (< 50)	71	22.4
Medium company (<250)	53	16.7
Micro company (< 10)	36	11.4
Large company (≥ 250)	157	49.5
Share of respondents according to position	Capita	%
Group or office manager	40	12.6
Senior or middle manager	46	14.6
Laborer	42	13.2
White collar workers	189	59.6

Source: Own sources, 2024.

3. Results

3.1. The importance of certain elements of Corporate Social Responsibility

The basis of the first block of results is the set of statements developed by Etheredge [24] and then modified by Turker [25], which measures the attitude of the respondents regarding the importance of CSR on a 5-point Likert scale (Table 2). As we can see, typically 4 and 5 mode values appear, but it is important to highlight that, as Carroll [8] stated, the primary goal of the business is profit, but it also has a social responsibility towards its environment, and our respondents mostly agreed with this. And the least (mean=3.75) is that CSR is critical for long-term survival, but even here mode.

Table 2. Assessment of the importance of CSR among the respondents

Statements	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation
In addition to making a profit, the business also has a social responsibility.	4,18	5	0,981
A company's social responsibility is essential for long-term profitability.	4,03	5	1,003
Being socially responsible is the most important thing a company can do.	3,84	4	1,014
The overall efficiency of a business can be largely determined by the extent of its social responsibility.	3,81	4	1,105
Social responsibility is critical to the survival of a business.	3,75	4	1,084

Source: Own sources, 2024.

In the following, we would like to shed light on how important it is for employees that their employer participates in CSR activities, and which initiatives are most important to them. This is also interesting because there are countless areas of social responsibility and many possibilities. In addition, due to the limited resources devoted to CSR, it is sometimes difficult for companies to decide which area they should focus on. This research may help them in the future.

The respondents had to answer the question of how important it is for them that their employer participates in CSR initiatives. According to 85.8% of respondents, i.e. more than four-fifths, it is "important" or "very important" that their employer participates in CSR activities, while only 14.2% of respondents said that it is not. This is a particularly high value, which also shows that the questionnaire was filled out by very conscious people, for whom their employer must act responsibly about social and other issues in addition to its economic activities.

3.2. Examination of Voluntary Involvement Attitudes

In connection with CSR activities, we considered it necessary to investigate whether the respondents would voluntarily participate in the initiatives organized by their company since many previous studies have proven that the participation of employees in CSR activities can increase the employee's commitment to the organization even when he returns to the workplace [26]. The share of the answers is illustrated in Figure 1. The pie chart shows that almost half of the respondents (47%) would participate in initiatives organized by their workplace, and 40% of the respondents also participate as private individuals in initiatives that serve to help issues affecting society. Overall, this shows that, in line with previous research, employees are happy to participate in CSR activities, even if it is not mandatory for them. Thus, it is worthwhile to examine which areas are considered the most important by the respondents.
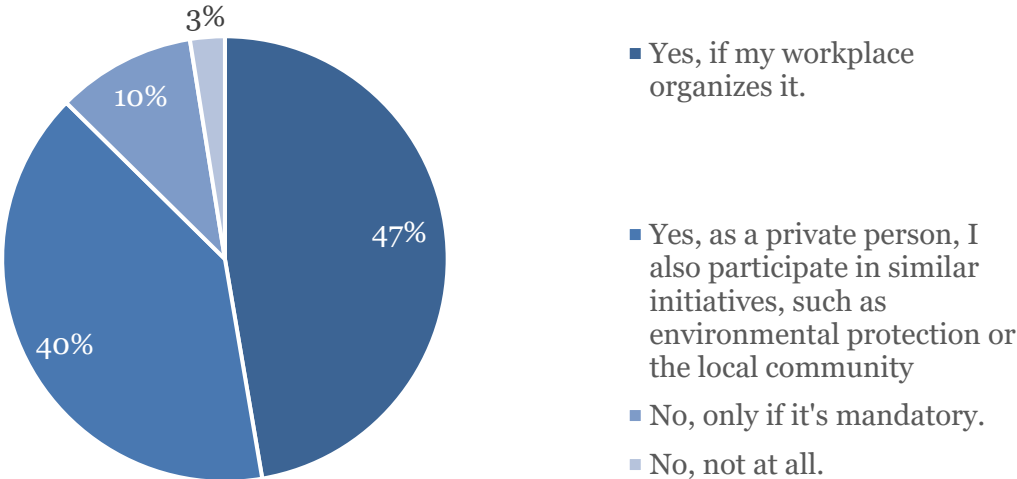

Figure 1. Voluntary participation in CSR initiatives

Source: Own sources, 2024.

Although our preliminary assumption was that certain segments are more open to volunteering, based on cross-tabulation analyses, it can be said that there is no correlation between demographic background variables and participation in volunteer activities for any of the examined variables (p>0.05).

3.3. Evaluation of the importance of CSR categories

Based on the overwhelmingly positive results of the previous questions, it will now be presented which of the main social responsibility categories are the most important according to the respondents. Responses were made using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = "Not important at all" and 5 = "Very important". From Table 3, which is meant to illustrate the importance of the various initiatives, it can be said that all the categories are important for the respondents, as most people rated all the categories as 5, i.e. "Very important". Among these, the best result was given to the "Employee fund welfare programs (opportunity for development, creation of work-life balance)" (mean: 4.30; mode: 5; standard deviation: 1.005). In addition, the second highest rating went to "Ethical business practice (sustainable supply chain management, verified partners, prohibition of child labor)" (mean: 4.25; mode: 5; standard deviation: 1.033). Both categories have a wide portfolio and offer countless opportunities for companies to do their part in social responsibility.

Table 3. Support of CSR initiatives

Initiatives	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation
Employee basic welfare programs (development opportunities, work-life balance)	4.30	5	1.005
Ethical business practice (sustainable supply chain management, verified partners, prohibition of child labor)	4.25	5	1.033
Additional welfare programs for employees (providing health check-ups for employees, sports opportunities, and leisure programs)	4.14	5	1.077
Diversity and inclusion initiatives (ensuring equal opportunities regardless of skin color, gender, race, employing people with changed working conditions and disabilities)	4.14	5	1.114
Environmental sustainability (carbon footprint reduction, recycling, use of renewable energy)	4.13	5	1.031
Community engagement and philanthropy/charity (support for the needy, or/and for the development of education, or/and healthcare)	4.03	5	1.077

Source: Own sources, 2024.

In the topic of initiatives, an open question appeared as "Apart from the initiatives mentioned in the previous point, what initiatives would you recommend to your employer?", to observe whether there are any other initiatives that could not be classified in the previous categories, or perhaps it was of great importance to the participants it that they wanted to emphasize it here as well. Since it was not mandatory to answer this question, a total of 52 people who filled out the questionnaire expressed their opinions. During the analysis (tabulation), the 52 answers into 5 categories were grouped. These 5 categories are as follows: "Leisure and health", "Wage and fringe benefits", "Respect, flexibility", "Continuing training/development opportunities", and "Social and environmental protection measures". Most of the answers (18 people) belonged to the "Respect, flexibility" category, where the respondents mainly spoke about flexible work schedules, helping employees with families, taking into account employee requests/recommendations, valuing the employee and the disabled (e.g. people with reduced mobility) accessibility were mentioned. The second most responses (13 people) came to "Salary and fringe benefits", where the main suggestions were competitive salary, travel support (company car, bus pass), bonus and (unspecified) fringe benefits. The third highest number of comments came in the category "Continuing training/development opportunities". It is clear from this that the respondents also consider

initiatives that directly affect them to be the most important, so they are aimed at the employees.

Conclusion

Many expectations have been set for companies in recent decades, and the special economic and social events occurring today have raised these expectations to a new level [27; 28]. The expected CSR activity goes beyond the implementation of charity or painting a school, and the present research also revealed that it is not limited to external stakeholders but must consciously extend to employees as well.

Voluntary work for a good cause is based on old traditions and is of great help to social organizations, be it for the needy or supporting cultural life.

Based on our results, we can say that conscious and realistically minded respondents took part in our research, who understand that the company's primary goal is profit, and consider it important that their employer demonstrates active responsibility behavior. It also turned out that 40% of them are socially responsible and participate in volunteer activities, and another 47% stated that they would like to participate in volunteer work in the organization of their workplace, and this does not depend on their gender, age, or income status.

Among the CSR initiatives, it is not surprising that programs supporting the welfare of employees are considered the most important, but the other initiatives were also evaluated as having importance above 4.0, and the mode was 5 in all cases.

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