NATIONAL SCHOOL OF POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STUDIES

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SUMMARY

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

AND

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Content

Chapter 7. Results and Analysis of Interviews Regarding CSR Practices and the Role of Leadership in CSR Implementation and Motivation of CSR Managers

This paper aims to investigate the implementation of corporate social responsibility practices by CSR managers in Romania and to identify the role of transformational leadership of executive leaders in generating increased normative commitment from CSR managers. We focus on exploring strategic approaches to CSR practices and examining the possibility that one of the four pillars of transformational leadership (idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration) may be an important predictor that can be taken into aOCBunt by executive leaders (CEOs) in their professional relationship with CSR managers.

In carrying out the research, we had two objectives in mind. The first one is to analyze the dimensions of transformational leadership of leaders (CEOs, managing directors) in high turnover companies on organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) of CSR managers. We also propose to examine the relationships between transformational leadership, OCB subscales, organizational turnover, and demographics to determine whether statistically significant correlations exist. The second objective aims at analyzing the social responsibility strategies, approaches and tactics adopted in various fields of activity, in order to develop an integrative framework for the implementation of current CSR practices in Romanian companies, while highlighting the importance of motivation and involvement in CSR for achieving the social performance of the organization. We have opted for a strategic approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices in order to explore not only the actions of organizations, but also the motives and the way they are integrated into the overall strategy, culture and operations. This perspective will allow us to better discern the coherent and sustainable structuring of CSR activities by analyzing the factors influencing their successful implementation. Compared to other studies focusing on the relationship between CSR and organizational image, CSR and financial performance, CSR and employee motivation, or other aspects of CSR strategy and practices, our research has a strong exploratory character. By analyzing in detail the CSR practices, both internally and externally, the ways of communication, the measurement criteria, the reasons for involvement in CSR actions, the needs for maximum performance and the influence of leadership on these aspects, we intend to make a contribution to the understanding of the complexity and dynamics of corporate social responsibility in Romanian organizations. Thus, we are oriented towards exploring and understanding in depth the CSR practices and the factors that influence them, in a specific context of Romanian organizations.

The research methodology focuses on quantitative research and qualitative research. We conducted data collection between March 14 and May 18, 2022. In both quantitative and qualitative research, 30 people participated, CSR managers, working mainly in multinational companies, but also in Romanian public and private companies, companies that are part of the "Top 100 Most Valuable Companies" realized by Ziarul Financiar in 2021. The low number of respondents was determined by the specific nature of the positions, which involve expertise and direct involvement in corporate social responsibility strategies and practices. The survey participation rate was 30%, with 30 respondents out of 100 invited. The low participation rate can be explained by the selective nature of the batch of participants, as managers are a difficult category to recruit for interviews, because of their busy schedules and multiple responsibilities. In addition, not all companies have a dedicated CSR team and this responsibility may be assigned to HR, legal or communication departments. In order to collect data for the quantitative study, we administered a questionnaire which included the Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ - Transformational Leadership Questionnaire), developed by Rafferty and Griffin (2004), translated and adapted for our country by Dragoș Iliescu and Coralia Șulea. The TLQ scale contains fifteen items structured in five dimensions: vision, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, encouraging leadership and personal recognition. The results following the application of this measurement instrument were correlated with variables related to age, gender, position, managerial experience, seniority in the company, the field in which the company operates, and the size of the company in terms of number of employees and turnover. As for the qualitative research we opted for the interview consisting of 7 questions, using the interview guide as a research tool. The interview guide was created based on the literature review and our research objectives, and the questions were formulated aOCBrding to the integrative framework for CSR implementation proposed by Maon et al. (2010), which includes nine stages: raising awareness of CSR within the organization, identifying stakeholders, establishing a CSR vision, assessing the current state of CSR, developing a strategic plan, implementing it, communicating the results, evaluating and institutionalizing CSR. We chose the interview as a research tool because it facilitates getting an answer to all the questions, allows the collection of spontaneous answers and facilitates the discovery of other valences and adjacent directions, as well as the approach of more complex issues (Chelcea, 2001, p. 271).

In the first four chapters we have presented studies from the literature for the topic on the influence of social responsibility and leadership on a wide range of issues beyond the economic sphere, such as creating a responsibility-focused organizational culture, enhancing corporate reputation, fostering innovation and creativity, building trusting relationships with stakeholders and solving common problems, integrating sustainability principles into operational practices. Studies on CSR at both national and international levels have focused on the influence of social responsibility on intangible aspects of organizations such as reputation (Bianchi et al., 2019), financial performance (Bastic, Mulej and Zore, 2020), strategy, organizational climate, organizational citizenship behavior (Du et al., 2010; Alhouti and D'Souza, 2018), value added (Chandler, 2016), but no analysis has been conducted at the individual, decision-making role level, in our case at the level of the social responsibility manager. Also, the relevance of mid-level managers (midlle manager) was an area of research interest for Kiehne et al. (2017), who examined the significance of involvement in implementing strategic projects. The authors found that the majority of research approached this issue from a descriptive perspective, while only a few studies investigated the role of management from a normative perspective.

While numerous studies have focused on the aforementioned areas, there is a significant lack of empirical research dedicated to the detailed investigation of the importance of a specific dimension of transformational leadership in the context of the professional relationship between the hierarchical leader and the CSR manager, with a focus on the motivation and support provided to the latter. This gap is even more evident in the lack of research approaches adapted to the specificities of certain countries. For this reason, I have chosen to investigate which components of transformational leadership have the strongest impact on motivating CSR managers in Romania and to carry out a detailed analysis of the way in which companies in our country implement CSR practices, with a focus on the role of hierarchical leaders in supporting and facilitating these practices.

In the context of the current economic crisis, Chumarina and Abulkhanova (2021, p. 276) observed that the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in business development not only persists, but becomes more pronounced. Regarding the theoretical aspects of CSR, we addressed, on the one hand, the benefits of social responsibility and the reconsideration of stakeholder relationships, and on the other hand, the importance of CSR in reputation management

and the way in which social responsibility is communicated both inside and outside the organization.

Understanding the CEO's motivations is an important component of developing a complete picture of executive leaders' involvement in CSR and identifying optimal strategies for promoting responsible practices. Given the decision-making power and significant responsibility of executive leaders (CEOs) in allocating financial resources, it is important to analyze their impact on companies' actions and results. This is all the more important as executive leaders can manifest either a pro-CSR bias or an aversion to it, leading to a significant diversity of corporate social responsibility profiles, both at the inter-company level and in the internal evolution of companies over time (Wernicke et al., 2022, p. 38). Analyzing the relationship between executive leaders' transformational leadership and top management team performance, Suliman et al. (2019) found that internal support for innovation plays a significant role in moderating the relationship between transformational leadership, performance stimulation, and organizational success. The research of Bakker et al. (2023, p. 8) demonstrates that leadership plays an important role in influencing organizational performance and corporate citizenship behavior (OCB) of employees. They found that transformational leaders contribute to generating performance and inducing positive change when they identify the strengths of their followers, encouraging them to show involvement and initiative in achieving a common vision, which becomes a guide and reference point for all their actions. Kang and Hwang (2023, p. 34) are of the opinion that employees can optimize their organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) when leaders recognize their ability to engage in productive actions and provide additional support to their colleagues. As a result, citizenship behavior is well worth promoting and encouraging as it boosts morale and performance within organizations.

In the following, I will briefly present the results obtained from the research associated with the doctoral thesis.

In Chapter 6, I present the first research - The impact of transformational leadership of hierarchical leaders on the corporate citizenship behavior of CSR managers - in which I analyze the importance of the transformational leadership dimensions of executive leaders (CEOs, general managers) from large-turnover companies on the organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) of CSR managers, as prosocial actions are considered fundamental to workplace behavior. CSR managers evaluated the dimensions of transformational leadership (LT), including vision,

intellectual stimulation, encouraging leadership, inspirational communication, and personal recognition, with respect to their hierarchical leaders. The scores obtained on the LT measurement scale were then correlated with the scores obtained on the OCB measurement scale.

The results of the analysis did not show statistically significant relationships between the two scales. Also, no statistically significant correlations were confirmed between the LT subscales and the OCB subscales. However, a detailed analysis of the means at the participant group level revealed that LT and LT subscale scores differ depending on the frequency with which respondents reported engaging in certain OCB-type behaviors. This finding suggests that it is possible that certain dimensions of LT may be more relevant to certain aspects of OCB or to specific contexts.

Considering the limitations of the batch of the participants, I decided to investigate the relationship between the study variables (transformational leadership and organizational citizenship behavior) at the level of the existing sample of participants. The results obtained suggest that the relationship between LT and OCB may be more complex than a simple linear correlation. It is possible that certain subscales of LT may be more strongly associated with certain categories of OCB than others. Further research would be needed to explore these differences in means in detail and to identify possible explanations for them. For example, other variables that could modulate the relationship between LT and OCB could be considered, such as the individual characteristics of CSR managers or the specific organizational context. Respondents who exhibit organization-directed organizational citizenship behavior (Organizational OCB) estimate a higher average transformational leadership (LT) score than those who do not exhibit such behavior. This finding suggests a positive association between LT and Organizational OCB at the individual level, even if no statistically significant difference is observed at the organizational level. The analysis of the LT subscales provides a nuanced perspective on this relationship. Higher average scores on the LT Vision and LT Inspirational Communication subscales are found among those who exhibit Organizational OCB, while lower average scores on the LT Encouraging Leadership and Personal Recognition subscales are observed among those who do not exhibit such behavior.

These findings suggest that transformational leadership styles that emphasize vision, inspirational communication, and intrinsic motivation may be more effective in promoting Organizational OCB. On the other hand, leadership styles that rely more heavily on extrinsic rewards may have a reduced effect.

Respondents who exhibit person-directed organizational citizenship behavior (OCB Personal) are more likely to perceive their executive leader as an inspirational communicator, perceive that their leader motivates and inspires them to put in extra effort and dedicate themselves to the organization, and are more likely to admire and respect their leader. However, it is possible that these respondents may not perceive their executive leader as being as effective in other aspects of transformational leadership, such as setting direction, individualizing consideration, or supporting innovation. This discrepancy suggests a differentiated relationship between OCB Personal and LT. OCB Personal may be influenced by a specific component of LT (Inspirational Communication), but not by all aspects of transformational leadership.

The ANOVA analysis conducted to assess the significant differences in Transformational Leadership (LT) score based on demographic variable categories did not identify statistically significant differences at the level of the tested sample of participants. However, a detailed examination of LT score means based on demographic variables reveals the following interesting trends at the sample level: Transformational Leadership appears to be more frequently manifested in organizations led by executive leaders under the age of 50, leaders who come from more favored economic or social backgrounds may have a higher LT score, and those who have been in their current position for between 6 and 15 years may have a more developed LT score, compared to those with less than 6 years or more than 15 years of experience.

I found significant differences in the mean of the Transformational Leadership (LT) score based on the type of organization at the level of the tested sample of participants, both for the total LT scale and for its subscales. The results of the analysis indicate a significant influence of the size of the organization on the Transformational Leadership (LT) score. Thus, CSR managers in large organizations evaluate the transformational leadership of their hierarchical leaders with higher scores on average than CSR managers who work in organizations with a turnover of less than 50 million euros. There are several possible explanations for this relationship. Large organizations generally have ample resources, including human and financial resources, which can be dedicated to the development and implementation of transformational leadership practices. In addition, large organizations may have a complex hierarchical structure and a detailed division of labor, which can create a favorable context for transformational leadership styles that emphasize vision, inspirational communication, and intrinsic motivation.

Analysis of the second study - CSR practices and the role of leadership in CSR implementation and CSR manager motivation - revealed a number of relevant aspects related to how participating companies approach CSR. When asked "How does the company approach CSR?", the predominant "Think global, act local" strategy allows companies to implement effective CSR actions that are adapted to local needs. Some organizations confuse CSR with sustainability, limiting themselves to environmental aspects. Companies focus on priority areas such as education, health and the environment, and strategically choose their initiatives, partners and implementation tactics to achieve their CSR goals. This is also facilitated by conducting a materiality analysis, which allows for the determination of stakeholder priorities and an effective focus of resources. A significant stimulus is also the integration of ESG (Environment, Social, Governance) criteria. Although non-financial reporting is not always considered a priority, effective collaboration with local and internal partners is important for the successful implementation of CSR programs.

In response to the question "How are internal stakeholders made aware of the organization's CSR initiatives?", according to the findings, companies use a variety of methods to inform their employees, including traditional channels such as email and intranet, as well as modern social media platforms and interactive simulations. Gamification strategies (board games, competitions) are implemented and dedicated teams are formed to stimulate employee participation and awareness. Communication channels are carefully selected to match the internal target audience, using training, internal broadcasts, podcasts, and innovation platforms. Education and training programs promote the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate CSR practices into employees' daily work, stimulating innovation and sustainable solutions.

In response to the question "How do companies communicate and measure the results of CSR initiatives?", companies integrate CSR into their mission statement, company values, and codes of conduct, using international standards for evaluation. CSR performance is evaluated by quantifying the social impact, beneficiaries, and partnerships, using specific indicators (organizational health index, educational metrics, questionnaires). Dedicated CSR committees and teams are common in the banking and retail sectors, demonstrating adaptability to changes in society. External communication tools include reports, websites, press releases, events, brochures, social media, and social impact studies, with the aim of changing the perception of opinion leaders and modifying the audience's behavior.

In response to the question "What is the difference between a strategic CSR approach and a random one, and why do organizations get involved in CSR?", the strategic approach highlights the existence of a long-term vision, social impact, and objectives aligned with the company's mission, contributing to overall performance. The random approach is characterized by a lack of vision and resources. Dialogue with communities, building lasting relationships, and obtaining valuable information about stakeholder needs generate significant benefits for companies, helping to identify new business opportunities. Image and reputation capital, building a positive company image, and improving reputation among stakeholders are the motivations for involvement in CSR.

In response to the question "How does leadership support the organization's CSR strategy and how does the CEO influence the organization's CSR strategy?", more than half of respondents mentioned that the CEO's direct involvement and leadership style are critical to the success of the CSR strategy, as they have a significant influence on the implementation and results of CSR programs. Concrete support is manifested through ongoing dialogue, resource allocation, streamlining approvals, and training CSR managers. The challenges faced by respondents include frequent turnover of executive leaders, which can make it difficult to implement long-term CSR strategies, a lack of openness from management, and resistance to change from the executive board, which can be a major obstacle. A personalized and motivating approach by executive leaders is essential to encourage CSR managers to develop and implement successful CSR programs.

Finally, in response to the question "What matters most in practicing a responsible business: CEO leadership or the existence of CSR?", a significant aspect highlighted by the study is the respondents' majority consensus on the importance of CEO leadership in practicing a responsible business. The success of CSR strategies depends on the active involvement of the CEO, not just on the existence of CSR programs.

While the lack of a statistically significant correlation between the transformational leadership (LT) scale and the organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) scale may seem like a disappointing result at first glance, it is important to look deeper to truly assess the usefulness of the research. The research can still provide valuable information about data trends and distributions. This information can be helpful in generating future hypotheses and guiding further research projects. Even though the quantitative study did not identify significant differences, the qualitative study captures the complexity of individual experiences and provides a nuanced

perspective on the relationship between the studied variables, contributing to a better understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Contribution and originality of the work

Given the consequences of the commitment of managers, taking into account the perspective of the top management in motivating CSR managers and supporting the implementation of responsible business practices, this research represents a contribution to the institutional analysis of social responsibility.

The originality of our work lies in the fact that it opens a dialogue on the importance and long-term affective and normative commitment of CSR managers in achieving organizational performance, as well as the forms of involvement of hierarchical leaders in promoting and implementing social responsibility. The research also extends the field of studies conducted on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Romania, by identifying the needs of CSR managers to effectively fulfill their duties.

The specialized literature in Romania does not present research with a current perspective on CSR practices, according to the integrative framework of Maon, Lindgreen & Swaen (2009, p. 11), which would cover the stages of the CSR design and implementation process, taking into account the impact of technological development and the crisis situation generated by COVID-19. We have highlighted as a novelty, the detailing of the process of integration into the organizational culture and business strategy, throughout the stages of awareness, adoption and continuous integration of CSR, through concrete examples of strategic direction programs suitable for the company's field of activity, types of internal CSR awareness programs, external and internal implementations of CSR projects, ways in which the CEO and leadership of hierarchical leaders influence and support the CSR strategy, external and internal communication channels, tools and indicators for measuring results. Such detailing is important, on the one hand, because it represents an exhaustive approach and, on the other hand, it provides examples of best practices from companies with different fields of activity, which allows companies to improve their CSR approaches.

In addition, we have identified and highlighted various emerging trends in the field of CSR, such as the importance of sustainability, stakeholder dialogue, promoting diversity, equity and inclusion, and the use of technology to drive progress on CSR issues. These trends become evident

from the analysis and observation of business practices in different economic sectors, in response to the demands of contemporary society concerned with social and environmental issues. Thus, we have provided updated information on trends and practices in the field of transformational leadership and CSR in Romania, which can be useful for researchers studying these topics. Last but not least, the paper presents how a culture of responsibility and sustainability can be created within the company and how CSR can be formalized and integrated into the business strategy.

The uniqueness of this study lies in the fact that the study respondents are corporate social responsibility managers and in the level of detail of the CSR approaches tailored to different types of industries, thus providing an integrated framework for implementing social responsibility.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Regarding the state of integration of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Romania, we observe differences in the way it is understood and implemented. Even though the study respondents have a considerable level of experience, there are still variations in the integration of social responsibility. These variations are influenced by both the type of corporate entity (international or national, state-owned or private) and the level of understanding of the benefits associated with adopting CSR in the company's operations by hierarchical leaders or company owners. The research results are in line with the investigation of Arraiano and Hațegan (2019), which examined the evolution of corporate social responsibility in the member states of the European Union in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), including Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Romania, concluding that CSR is still in its early stages in these countries.

Based on our data, we make the following recommendations aimed at amplifying the role of transformational leadership in improving CSR practices: replicate the study in diverse contexts (small and medium-sized enterprises, specific industries) to obtain a comprehensive perspective; increase and diversify the sample to confirm or refute the conclusions; collect data in a stable socio-political context to reduce the influence of external factors; analyze educational games as tools for communicating CSR.

Limitations of the Research

The limitations of the research are determined by the size of the sample group and the specific context. The small sample size of 30 participants limits the statistical power of the study, significantly affecting the generalization of the conclusions to a broader population of CSR managers. Accessing top-level managers is difficult, and the challenging context generated by major events such as the COVID 19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine has exacerbated this problem. The involvement of CSR managers in relief efforts specific to this crisis context has reduced their availability to participate in the study, significantly influencing the size and composition of the sample group. In addition, stress and uncertainty factors during that period could have influenced how CSR managers perceive and evaluate the leadership of their hierarchical leader (CEO) and organizational citizenship behavior. There are also limitations in data collection. The lack of a longitudinal approach to data collection does not allow for the reproduction of results over time. Thus, this research can be considered rather exploratory. Another important aspect to mention is the confidentiality imposed by the organizations on the respondents in providing data. This could have made respondents hesitant to share accurate information, due to a defensive attitude.

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