

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a Factor of Entrepreneurship Sustainable Development: Research in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: Corporate social responsibility is a voluntary approach based on ethical principles and structured management controls. These principals and controls are based on a variety of activities that an enterprise can choose from according to its orientation and on the requirements of the surroundings. The primary motivation for this approach is to remain sustainable, build a strong company culture and maintain the good name of the enterprise to attain a competitive advantage. These principals are usually fruitful, lead to better stability, attract new employees and open up new business opportunities. This is also proven in the research presented in this paper where CSR managers declare the most common reasons why CSR methodology implemented by a company are to build and maintain corporate values and gain a competitive advantage on the market. The first research phase was conducted using a questionnaire survey from June to September 2019 to map the current level of CSR implementation in large companies in the Czech Republic. A research panel of forty CSR managers completed fifteen open, matrix and scale questions. The purpose of the survey was to verify the research process methodology and identify trends in the area. The conclusions from the first research phase show interesting trends in the field of corporate social responsibility of enterprises in the Czech Republic and the mapping of the current level of CSR implementation in companies in the region. Interesting findings were made based on the research presented in the paper and these will serve as a base for further studies. One of the findings shows that very few companies have a clear methodology or a strategy for deciding the direction of CSR. Companies often act randomly or based on individual preferences so that CSR management in enterprises is not centralised with a clear focus but instead divided across different departments (HR, CEO's office, marketing or sales department).

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, enterprise, corporate values, CSR, company culture

1. Introduction: The current situation in the CSR area

In a market economy awash with social networks, hoax and fake news and a lack of trust, companies face a challenging environment when presenting themselves. Paradoxically, the availability and excess of information coupled with the ease of reaching a company complicate the decision-making process within the framework of social responsibility. The basis of the sustainability of the CSR model is an elaborate integrated system of social responsibility rules, based on the specifics and uniqueness of a company, which is an indivisible part of company culture. Therefore, enterprises focus more on trustworthiness and maintaining their good name through a system of CSR activities. These trends can also be observed in large Czech enterprises.

1.1 The Czech Republic in the SDG Index and Dashboards 2019

There are different ways to compare the level of CSR and I chose this index as a measure because it compares a large number of states based on equal attributes of CSR. Even the Czech Republic, as a post-communist country, reached a very high position. The United Nations began tracking sustainable development goals (SDGs) in 2015 as a guideline to move towards a sustainable and equitable society. In 2019, the Czech Republic ranked seventh out of 162 countries evaluated under the SDG Index, just behind the Scandinavian countries and Germany. It reached a score of 81.9, which is above average worldwide and within a region where the average is 77.7 (Sustainable Development Report 2019). Based on a high SDG index level, the Czech Republic can be a good model as a country and using it as an example, can verify the effectiveness of CSR activities and measure their impact on sustainable business development.

1.2 Sustainable development

Sustainable development is regarded as the base for a CSR branch because the implementation of its principles into an enterprise should lead to sustainable development and maintain a company's value in the long term. In Bruthland's (1987) point of view, sustainable development should meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Hopking (2009) says: "Enough, for all, forever". These simple concepts provide the initial definition for the complexity of sustainable

development and help to frame the global search for solutions to the social, economic, and environmental issues that threaten the planet. Forty-three years ago, Daly (1977) came up with some basic sustainable development principles, which surprisingly, have not dated.

- The consumption of renewable resources should never exceed the speed of renewal.
- Renewable resources should not be consumed faster than the substitution can be developed.
- Pollution intensity must not exceed environmental assimilation capacity.
- Part of the current technology should be invested in decreasing pollution, reducing waste and increasing the efficiency of the resources used.

WILLARD, 2012 describes sustainable strategies as something that gives companies a competitive advantage. Its business benefits are quantifiable and real. I would summarise this quote with the claim that sustainable development is an ongoing process for ensuring progress while preventing the destruction of the resources needed to keep our society productive.

2. Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

The theory of social responsibility dates back to its development since the second half of the 20th century, especially in the United States of America where its principles have existed a lot longer (patronage, philanthropy, etc.). CSR theories have permeated throughout Europe since the 1990s and CSR is considered an excellent tool to achieve sustainable development by offering a mutually beneficial strategy. In principle, CSR can be divided into two parts. The first area of responsibility is determined by law (equal opportunities and rights, occupational safety, protection of the employee, etc.) while the second part provides extensive creativity and opportunities and can lead to increasing an enterprise's value and business sustainability. Lee & Chen (2018) state that CSR enables companies to improve their performance while providing social benefits; Gangi (2020) points out in his study that the higher the CSR engagement then the lower the corporate risk of financial distress; LI, 2019 highlights that the impact of CSR on a firm's value is what gives all corporate stakeholders satisfactory returns under a value-centred approach and the rule of law; McBarnet (2007) refers to CSR as a market-driven complex of interactions between government, business and civil society, private law, state regulation and self-regulation at national and international levels.

In literature, the term CSR is often confronted with the concepts of business ethics. It is widely accepted that social responsibility is an applied set of rules of business ethics. This view is taken, for example, by Professor Dytrt (2017). In his insight study, Bangsa (2019) summarises the relationship between sustainable product attributes and consumer decision-making. The conclusions are not one-sided, although the study confirms some types of products are more likely to be chosen by consumers when they are sustainable. In her studies, Spodarczyk, 2017 and 2019 claims that some enterprises identify social responsibility as a tool to build company image and that social responsibility complements the value system that underlies their business. These are the activities that companies are undertaking to strengthen their reputation, support stability, build a corporate culture and increase employee loyalty.

2.1 Communication with stakeholder groups

Stakeholder groups usually rapidly influence and evaluate CSR activities and are the reason why CSR activities are implemented in an enterprise. In 1983, Freeman declared that in a corporation, a stakeholder is a member of a group without whose support the organisation would cease to exist. CSR must be an essential part of a communication strategy and should fulfil the mission and vision of the company. A high level of internal and external communication is essential. Arvidsson (2010) points out that from a management perspective, communication problems arise when determining how CSR information should be communicated to meet the stakeholders' information requirements. Due to an insufficiently established framework for CSR communication, e.g. Ellerup Nielsen and Thomsen (2007) argue that many companies are not ready for this task. Communication is half the success of CSR – Williams, 2015 invented the term "Truthsparency". Dang (2019) also confirms that pressure from stakeholders (e.g. governments, suppliers, consumers and local communities) has gradually driven business firms towards taking environmentally responsible action. While communicating sustainability, Ottman, 2011 recommends beginning the planning process by considering the challenges.

If stakeholders suffer from a lack of information about CSR project outputs, it is very difficult to defend the budget for these activities, as the benefits may be invisible to others if they have not been directly affected. Each

project must be prepared and planned and have a long-term outlook. Kucharska, Kowalczyk (2019) pointed out that companies with short-term orientation are unlikely to ever implement CSR strategies that are strong enough to affect their reputation and support company performance. Ferro-Soto (2018) claims that stakeholder orientation also focuses on competitor actions, since this stakeholder group is of crucial importance in the marketing strategy design, which is highly relevant to their success in the marketplace. Therefore, the results are only seen in the long term and it greatly depends on the good relations with different stakeholders' groups in the whole process. It is necessary not only to understand what stakeholders want but also why they want it (Ferro-Soto, 2018). Only by identifying their needs and defining a "problem", can the right solution be found that will thus improve the company's reputation and, in the longer term, integrate the CSR principles into the company culture. "CSR has been proven to lead to greater loyalty among customers" (Marin, 2009). By implementing a corporate responsibility system, a company influences customer purchasing behaviour, so CSR activities should be conducted to meet the needs of customers as one of the major stakeholder groups.

2.2 What CSR brings to companies and does it pay off?

In the research presented, I also focus on the motivation of companies to use CSR tools. A key benefit of the CSR system is to assist the work-life balance of employees by improving working conditions, creating benefit systems and increasing employer loyalty. Corey (2016) insists that letting employees actively participate in a CSR project delivers results. While it is not possible for everyone to identify with projects equally, it is possible to reach a wider group of employees in this way. However, theorists and practitioners claim that corporate social responsibility is not just pure philanthropy and that socially responsible interventions should bring benefits to society and businesses. Żychlewicz (2017) comments that it is understandable that companies expect benefits from these activities. I view CSR as a comprehensive strategy that must help and support companies' goals, although it is equally important that it delivers the expected effect on the company.

The sustainable development of modern societies is based, among other things, on their social responsibility. This is due to a competitive environment and a less stable economic environment, where it is necessary to be a highly trustworthy company to maintain the value of the company (Baumann-Pauly, 2013). Company reputations are becoming more important than ever. Customers now push companies towards socially responsible behaviour and are fully aware that they have a choice of companies.

2.3 The CSR decision-making process

Due to the focus of the research, I address the issue of the decision-making process in the field of CSR in literary research. I am interested in the evaluation of projects from the position of the stakeholders, the evaluation of the success of projects and, in particular, I want to thoroughly investigate the basis of the information used for decision-making by the CSR manager responsible for evaluating the suitability of the project for the given business area.

Interesting findings were raised in the research by Toliver (2013), which addressed the measurement of socially responsible behaviour of the company through the company's value chain – e.g. a significant correlation was found between the satisfaction of the company's employees and the socially responsible behaviour of the company. Cheney, 2006 examines the decision-making process in CSR from the perspective of eight key areas of the so-called FPILEPAR (facts, parties – stakeholders, interests, laws, ethics, practicality, alternatives and rationalisation). At the end of the study, he adds: "The broader decision-making model will take more time and will cost some money, but it is very likely to pay off in the long run."

Weber (2008) is engaged in the evaluation of the impact of CSR projects, after implementation, on the performance of the company according to indicators in the study for Philips. The evaluation includes quantitative data, such as the number of employees involved, the number of children supported, rate of increase in subsidies, media outputs and project costs. The author thus provides CSR managers with a suitable evaluation tool for assessing the impact of projects. The study by Rogers (2013) focuses on the decision-making model of one of the stakeholder group of investors evaluating the value of a company, where a strong positive correlation between the value of the company and a correctly implemented CSR system was also found. Rodrigo (2017) also confirms in his study that strategic CSR helps to generate an effectively committed workforce.

A challenge for each CSR manager arises when a company creates a CSR strategy and aims to focus on specific areas. Since budgets are usually precisely defined, companies must have systems to help them decide which direction of support and communication they should take. It is here that I found a research gap, which I would like to explore with my research. The literature deals with the decision-making processes of companies who are thinking about CSR but less often the effectiveness of decision-making from the practical point of view of a manager who is already following the principles, looking for the right areas of support, facing many variants and projects and has the complex task of what to choose to best support the goals and values of the company.

Proven and well-functioning methods of project cooperation within the framework of social responsibility are close cooperation with the non-profit sector and establishing partnerships with non-profit organisations. Non-profit organisations change the lives of disadvantaged people, who the state cannot take full care of, develop talent, fill up free time, help, cure and protect. They are closer to people, know their needs and can help them in better and cheaper ways. Over time, non-profit organisations have come to understand the market and are aware that companies want counter-service for their cooperation and support. This is where the non-profit world can cooperate with commerce in a unique synergy.

I believe, that based on the value chain of a company and NGO projects, a strong connection can be found based on the type of project that supports companies' values. The goal is to confirm this hypothesis in my research. The second aim is to create an evaluation tool that can be easily applied to simplify the decision-making process for supporting specific types of projects.

3. Research design and field of research

3.1 Research design

Based on the literature, interviews with CSR managers and participation in professional conferences, as well as my knowledge of the issue, a target group of respondents was approached regarding CSR decision-making in large companies in the Czech Republic. A pilot pre-survey was prepared, which was verified by ten respondents from the target group. The main reasons for this preparation were to obtain the correct information, verify the correctness of the wording of the questions, avoid any misunderstandings by the respondents and find out the time-consuming difficulties of completing the questionnaire.

The methods of data collection and the wording of some of the questions have been changed. The panel was comprised of four representatives from small or medium-sized companies and six from large companies. Based on the pilot and the subsequent analysis of the completed questionnaires and telephone calls with the respondents, I drew several conclusions.

Only CSR managers in companies could answer the questions correctly – in the case of the wrong person, the data must be removed from the resulting file. Marketers from small companies do not understand all concepts and either do not or only partially carry out activities related to social responsibility. Some questions needed to be reworded, which sometimes turned closed questions into semi-open ones. This was because the approaches to CSR are highly creative. After verifying the correctness of the methodology of the data collection and the modifications resulting from this pilot, an updated survey was launched.

Research project

3.2 Data collection

Data collection took place from June to September 2019 using electronic questionnaires. This form was chosen because of its flexibility and processing options in the managers' free time, for example, via mobile phone.

3.3 Data analysis

At this stage, I found that the statistical quantities express the frequency of the occurrence of the phenomenon of mean values as well as the habits of the individual companies in these areas. The choice of the method of analysis depends on the objective of the research and the method of obtaining data. I used Survio software to process the data, as well as Excel with advanced functions to determine the correlation and filtration of the selected data.

3.4 Processing and presentation of the final report

The results of the research were further sorted. I excluded responses from respondents who were not decision-makers in CSR (13 out of 55 questionnaires) or worked in a smaller than large company (7 out of 55 questionnaires) because the answers could be distorted. I processed data from forty respondents who matched the profile – the CSR manager of a large company. I have drawn preliminary conclusions from each area, which will be refined, and have a growing sample of respondents. The target number is eighty people (respondents) from the sample, which represents approximately half the total sample of CSR managers from large companies in the Czech Republic.

3.5 Techniques for measuring attitudes and obtaining information

The questions in the questionnaire were chosen to obtain the maximum range of information within the segment. In areas where trends in the industry are very much reflected, I have chosen evaluation scales to gain an idea of the industry's customs. The target was not to exceed fifteen minutes to finish the questionnaire.

4. Research – Current situation of CSR in large companies in the Czech Republic

Respondents were filtered by the first two questions focused on the size of the company and the personal responsibility of the respondents to keep the sample as relevant as possible.

The basic information about the companies involved in the research was:

4.1 Type of enterprise

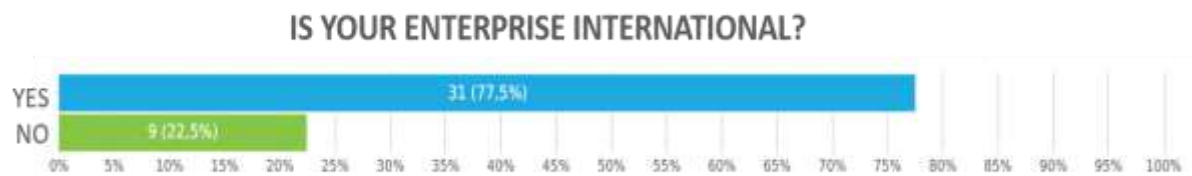


Figure 1: Source: Blažková, 2019, own research

Most large enterprises in the Czech Republic (77.5%) involved in the research were international, which shows that this trend (having a CSR position and principles in the structure) is often set by companies' headquarters abroad.

4.2 CSR budget

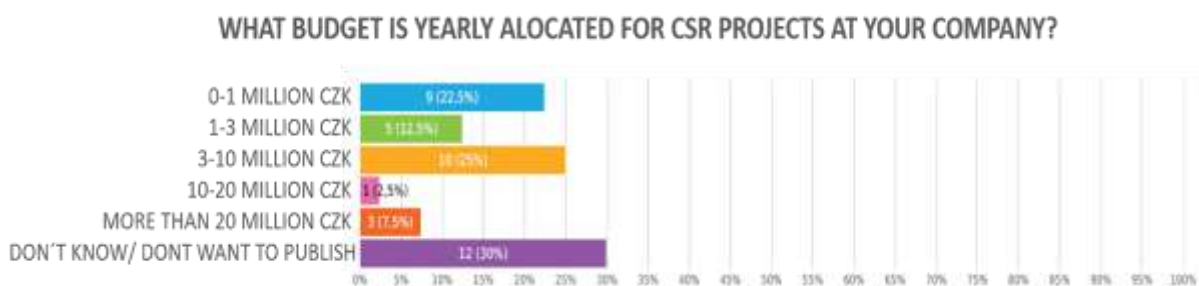


Figure 2: Source: Blažková, 2019, own research

The budget varies a lot although this may be influenced by different approaches to CSR budgeting, such as splitting CSR costs between different departments (HR, marketing, General manager's office etc.), which can influence this chart (Figure 2). Interesting information would also be, for example, to know what methodology the budget created is based on.

4.3 Decision-making process

WHAT IS THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS FOR SUPPORTING CSR PROJECTS?

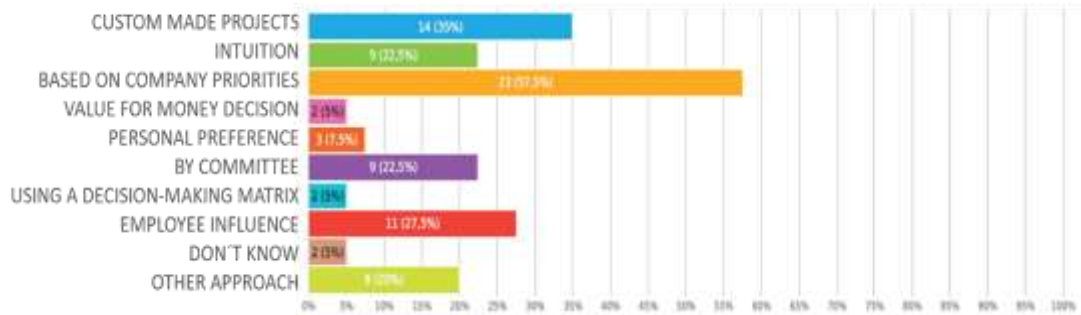


Figure 3: Source: Blažková, 2019, own research

The research significantly focuses on the decision-making process of the managers, which is influenced by different factors and brings many challenges. The chart (Figure 3) shows that most decisions are made based on some kind of strategy, although only 5% of the respondents answered that there is a decision-making matrix to help them decide.

4.4 Departments involved

WHAT DEPARTMENTS ARE THE MOST INVOLVED IN CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AGENDA?

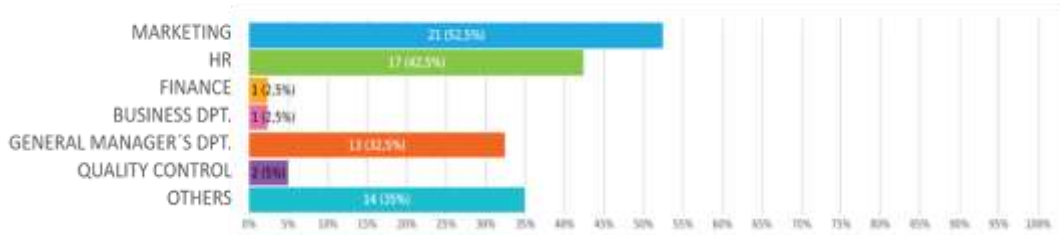


Figure 4: Source: Blažková, 2019, own research

This chart (Figure 4) shows the diversity of CSR structures. Very few companies have a “CSR department”. CSR tasks are split between Marketing, HR and the CEO’s department.

4.5 Supported CSR projects

WHAT CSR PROJECTS DOES YOUR COMPANY SUPPORT?

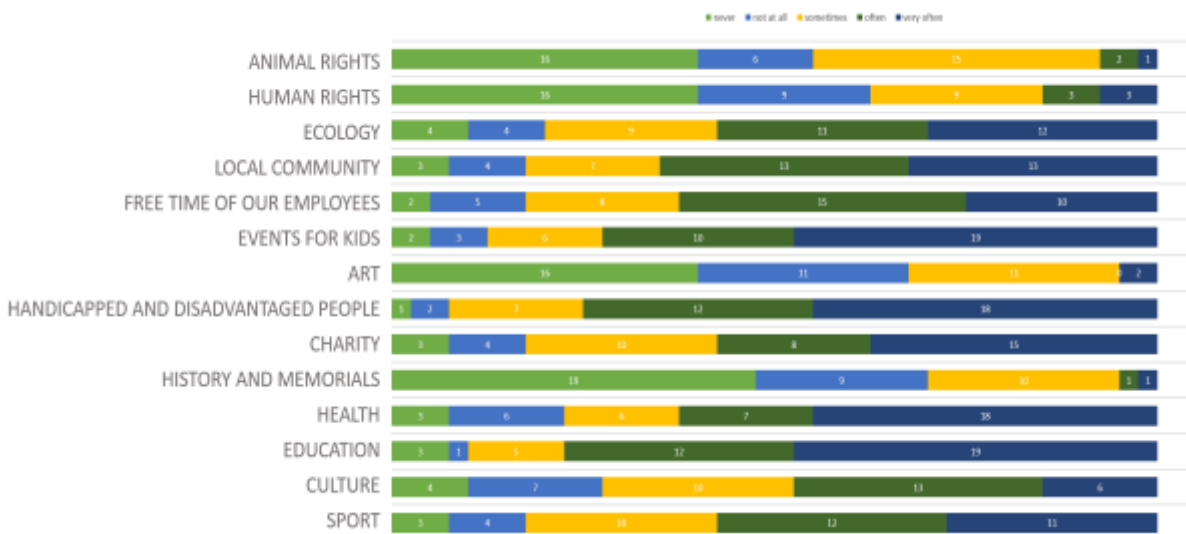


Figure 5: Source: Blažková, 2019, own research

This part of the research shows the most actively supported CSR projects in large companies from the sample. The most likely supported projects are those that help disabled and disadvantaged people, support education, events for children, health and general charity projects. This table (Figure 5) also serves as a base for comparing how supported projects are related to company values (future research).

4.6 Company values importance

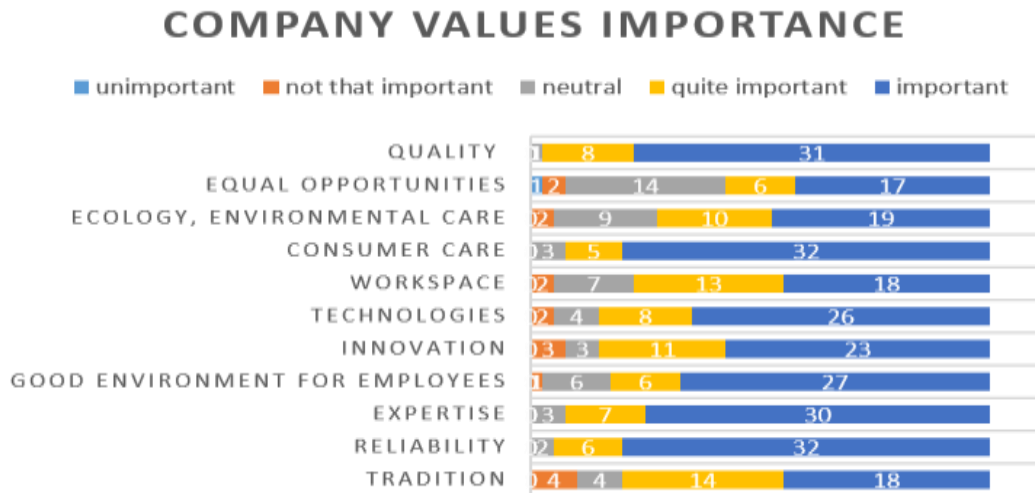


Figure 6: Source: Blažková, 2019, own research

This chart (Figure 6) shows the most important company values (reliability and consumer care stands on highest points followed by quality an expertise). It brings very important data for further research, which will compare the link between company values and supported projects.

4.7 Motivation for CSR activities

This research question was inspired by the Business Leaders Forum research conducted in 2004.

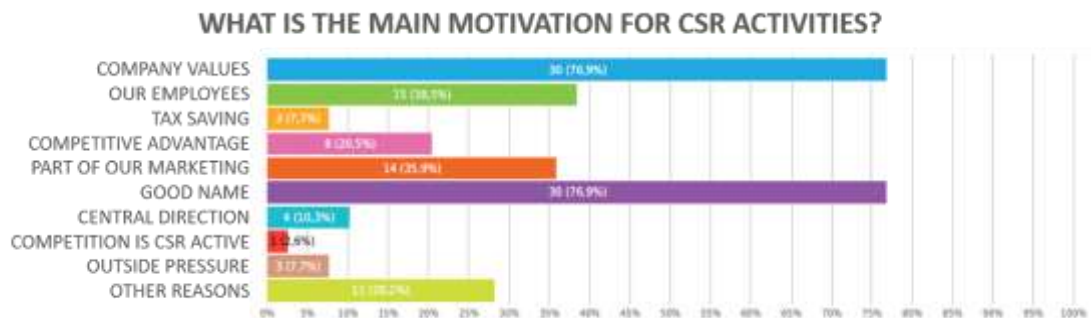


Figure 7: Source: Blažková, 2019, own research

Based on the research, it can be observed that the top CSR priorities are company values (77%) and reputation (good name) (77%). These are followed by support for employees (39%) and marketing activities (36%).

5. Summary and next steps

5.1 Research conclusions

Although the research was based only on a representative sample of a target group (which is not much larger in the framework of the Czech Republic), the respondents were more than capable of describing strong trends in the industry because they are the people who most influence the development of Czech CSR. The research shows that even though there is quite a strong trend for implementing CSR principles in large companies in the Czech Republic, the approach in every firm is still very different and leadership and competence structure is not united. The lack of methodology (different names for CSR positions, competences and departments, different positions

in companies' structures, no decision-making matrix) can also be observed. The following research findings show the increasing importance of CSR, which is caused by trends, the changing and unstable environment and recruitment motivation.

5.2 Most interesting findings

- 1. Most companies do not have a place in the company chart for a CSR manager; it is often designated as a part-time task for the HR Director/Marketing Manager/Managing Director.
- 2. CSR is perceived as an essential part of a company's reputation, its strategy and as a tool for building a good name.
- 3. In questions related to CSR, the respondents mentioned the HR department, marketing department and the CEO office in equal proportion as the departments that were involved.
- 4. Very few enterprises have a clear methodology or strategy for deciding what CSR direction to take. They often act randomly or based on individual preferences or go for "safe projects".
- 5. The most common reasons why CSR methodology is implemented by a company is to build and maintain corporate values and gain a competitive advantage on the market.
- 6. The most frequently supported projects are those that support children's events, education, disabled people, vulnerable and disadvantaged children and general charity projects.

Even the Czech Republic stands very high in SDG index chart, there is still much to improve in approach to CSR. The survey shows that there is a lack of CSR strategy in large Czech firms as this trend is still brand new. This survey will serve as a basis to establish the foundation for building a decision-making model, through which it will be possible to define the main weaknesses in the system.

5.3 Next steps

The first phase of the research showed interesting data, which needs to be analysed, structured and commented. To verify all information, the sample of the respondents needs to be extended. The second phase of research will be focused on enlarging the group of respondents to verify the findings made in the first phase. The last part of the planned research will contain a comparative analysis according to the specific values of the companies and the values linked to different supportive NGO projects. Finally, the conclusions will be specified to build a new decision-making system for CSR managers. In this system, I would like to connect company values to supported CSR projects to recommend the most efficient and useful cooperation to fulfil CSR strategy.

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