



BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT

DOCTORAL THESIS
Summary

EMPLOYEES' BOARD-LEVEL PARTICIPATION -
AS MEANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IMPLEMENTATION

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Keywords

Social Responsibility, SR, Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, Sustainability, employees' board level participation (BLP)

Introduction

How can employees participate in the process of SR implementation in their organizations? This is a question seldom asked. The reason for that is simple: not so many organizations implement SR, and those who do - do not bother with the role of their employees in it.

Social Responsibility (SR) is a widely familiar subject, although just a few years ago it interested only few. The reality of economic scandals and ethical crises has awoken many to realize that there is a fundamental flaw in the way organizations are run. As globalization's implications touch almost everyone, a crisis in one place can harm many other parties, who could not see it coming.

In such a reality, it becomes growingly clear that management cannot settle for financial results alone, and some other indicators have to be introduced to the equation. Thus, SR approach became the center of much attention, with some scholars even determining that this is a "mega-trend", just like the invention of combustion engine, internet, IT and quality revolution that had the capacity to change the world.

This thesis suggests a model of a board of directors that is responsible for the implementation of SR approach and practices in organization, while engaging employees in the process as equal directors with equal rights to those of independent (or "external") directors. This thesis is the first to introduce the connection between employees' board-level participation (BLP) and SR implementation.

Although fashionable and attractive, SR remains somewhat elusive to most scholars and practitioners. It has many names and definitions and everyone chooses to emphasize the issues that are close to his heart. In 1999 Carroll discussed over 25 different ways in which SR is defined in academic literature. In 2006, Donaldson identified 37 definitions of SR (in Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Another set of 37 definitions was analyzed by Dahlsrud (2008), who concludes that the confusion surrounding SR comes from an abundance of biased definitions.

Despite this lack of consensus, SR became a central issue in the works of many international organizations and NGOs, such as ISO, the UN, OECD, GRI, World Bank and many others. They were all looking for some tools that will enable organization to improve the way they do business. Thus, there is a multitude of norms, standards, indicators, pacts, agreements, regulations, legislations and other instruments, all meaning to help the organization in implementing SR.

In this thesis SR is defined as follows: a doctrine or systematic management approach that integrates environmental, economic and social considerations in decision-making and management.

Structure of the thesis

Table 1. Structure of the thesis

Part Introduction 1:	<u>Chapter 1:</u> Conceptual framework	
Part Literature review 2:	<u>Chapter 2:</u> Basic concepts of SR, historical evolution and current status	<u>Chapter 3:</u> Changing status of organizations and employees; ways of employees' participation; BLP
Part Methodology and analysis 3:	<u>Chapter 4:</u> Methodology considerations of the research (qualitative case study)	<u>Chapter 5:</u> Findings from analysis of qualitative and quantitative data
Part Discussion and Conclusions 4:	<u>Chapter 6:</u> Personal and theoretical contribution and managerial implications of the research	

The thesis contains six chapters, covering the theoretic, methodological and practical aspects of its subject.

Chapter 1, "Introduction", introduces the conceptual framework of the thesis and provides the setting for the relevant literature review and methodological direction.

Chapter 2, "Social Responsibility: background literature", examines the literature background concerning the concept of Social Responsibility (SR), its historic and conceptual development and the various meaning and management tools that were developed around it over the years. It describes the three SR domains (environmental, social and economic) and its five core principles (transparency, accountability, stakeholder engagement, beyond compliance and high ethical norms). It also argues that environmental and economic issues gain more practical and academic attention, while the social domain is less explored, and especially so - the potential ways in which employees participate in implementation and management of SR in their organizations.

Chapter 3, "Employee Participation: background literature", discusses the concept of employees' participation and describe some ways in which this is done - e.g. unionization and collective bargaining, quality circles, work councils and so on. It concludes with the model of employees' participation in boards of directors and suggests exploring how such participation can be related to SR implementation.

Chapter 4, "Research Methodology and Process", describes the methodological considerations in designing the research under qualitative-interpretivist approach, which enables the investigation of perceptions, attitudes, norms and values of respondents, and analyzing their behaviour. Case study method was evaluated as the most appropriate one, as it is best fit when "how" or "why" questions are asked, when the researcher has little or no control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon, within a real-life context. The case selected for this research is that of an Israeli Government Company, where two employee representatives are directors in the company's board and the company declares that it implements SR in its conduct and management.

Table 2 summarizes the research questions, as well as data sources, research tools and methods of analysis. Issues of trustworthiness, reliability and validity were properly addressed, as well as ethical considerations and attention to the role of the researcher.

Analysis was based mainly on qualitative information, although some quantitative data was collected through the use of Likert-scale questions, in order to explore the intensity of replies by informants and potential differences between groups of informants.

Table 2. Relations between research questions and methods

Research question	Methods and data sources	Justification
<p><u>Overall research question:</u></p> <p>How does BLP influence SR implementation in organizations?</p> <p><u>Specific research questions:</u></p> <p>1. What do informants know about SR?</p> <p>2. How do informants perceive board's roles?</p> <p>3. How do they see BLP's contribution to the organization in general and to SR implementation in particular?</p>	<p><u>Interviews+questionnaires with informants:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • directors that are employee representatives • other directors • top executives <p><u>Interviews with:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experts on Israeli governmental companies and on board management <p>-----</p> <p><u>Likert-scale questions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explores what informants know about SR • what they think of board's roles • what they think of BLP <p>-----</p> <p><u>Analysis of documents:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comments and open ended items in questionnaires • board protocols • research diary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interviews with informants from the organization will provide their accounts, feelings and reported experiences both on the way the board operates and on how SR issues are being presented, handled and implemented • interviews with external experts will provide background information about the way decision are made in Israeli boards in general and in governmental companies in particular. This information will enable better construction of the research within the Government Company <p>-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • documentary analysis on informants' comments and answers in the questionnaires as well as analysis of protocols and other sources can reveal what informants know about SR and how BLP influences SR issue in the board and the general management of the organization
	<p>Multiple data sources and methods of analysis</p>	<p>Using triangulation secures validity and reliability of the research</p>

Findings

Chapter 5, "Findings and discussions", presents the findings of the research and shows the complexities of understanding the core general subjects that underlie it. Findings are presented in relation to the source from which they were gathered. First the quantitative findings from the questionnaires are presented, then the qualitative findings from questionnaires. Next are findings from interviews followed by findings from protocols of board meetings. Last are findings from the researcher's diary. At the end of the chapter, findings are presented according to research questions.

It was found that informants have very limited knowledge and understanding about the essence of SR. At most, they *know* that "green" is important and they declare commitment to environmental issues.

Findings also showed that directors and managers do not fully understand board's roles and they do not share a similar view on the contribution and potential influence of the board. Furthermore, it was found that directors are not a homogenous group, but rather two distinct groups - that of external directors, as opposed to the employee-directors, who work in that company and are elected by their colleagues to be their representatives on the board.

Differences were found as well in relation to attitudes towards employees' participation in the board. External directors do not support it, but nevertheless most informants think that employee-directors can be instrumental in advancing SR issues in the board and in the company.

Chapter 6, "Discussion and conclusions", examines researcher's contribution to the research, theoretical contribution of the research, its managerial implications as well as practical implications deriving from the research for SR implementation.

Theoretical and practical contribution

Main theoretical and practical contributions of the research are summarized as follows:

Contribution to knowledge on SR state of knowledge:

- Added structured and showed that managers and directors lack systematic knowledge about the three domains of SR (environmental, social and economic).

- Added knowledge about SR in an Israeli Governmental Company - a kind of company that is rarely explored in academic research.

*Contribution of this research to knowledge about **board's functions and BLP:***

- Revealed lack of knowledge about the formal roles of the board and differences of understanding concerning the board's potential contributions.
- Revealed differences between directors and managers in the way they evaluate the board's roles and conduct.
- Revealed differences between directors and managers in the way they see employees participation at board-level in particular.
- Revealed the existence of two distinct groups of directors - external directors versus employee-directors - with distinctly different opinions about most of the issues in this research.

*Contribution of this research concerning the **BLP and SR:***

- Revealing significant differences between directors and managers in relation to SR implementation issues.
- Revealing significant differences between sub-groups of directors ("external directors" versus "employee-directors") in relation to SR implementation issues.

Research limitations

- Every research encounters its limitations, especially so with qualitative research, that might be considered less objective than positivistic quantitative one. Nevertheless, this methodology was found to be the most appropriate for a research on complex social issues, attempting to provide information that will serve to develop a theoretical model.
- Working with a single case study limits the information but at the same time it provided data and information that supported the theoretical model of BLP as means for SR implementation and outlined potential directions for further research.
- Another limitation stems from the fact that the case was that of a Governmental Company and not a private corporation or publically traded one. Nevertheless, Governmental Companies are in fact the most appropriate ones to evaluate new management methods, such as SR, and the information from this research can be of use to the company itself and to the relevant authorities.

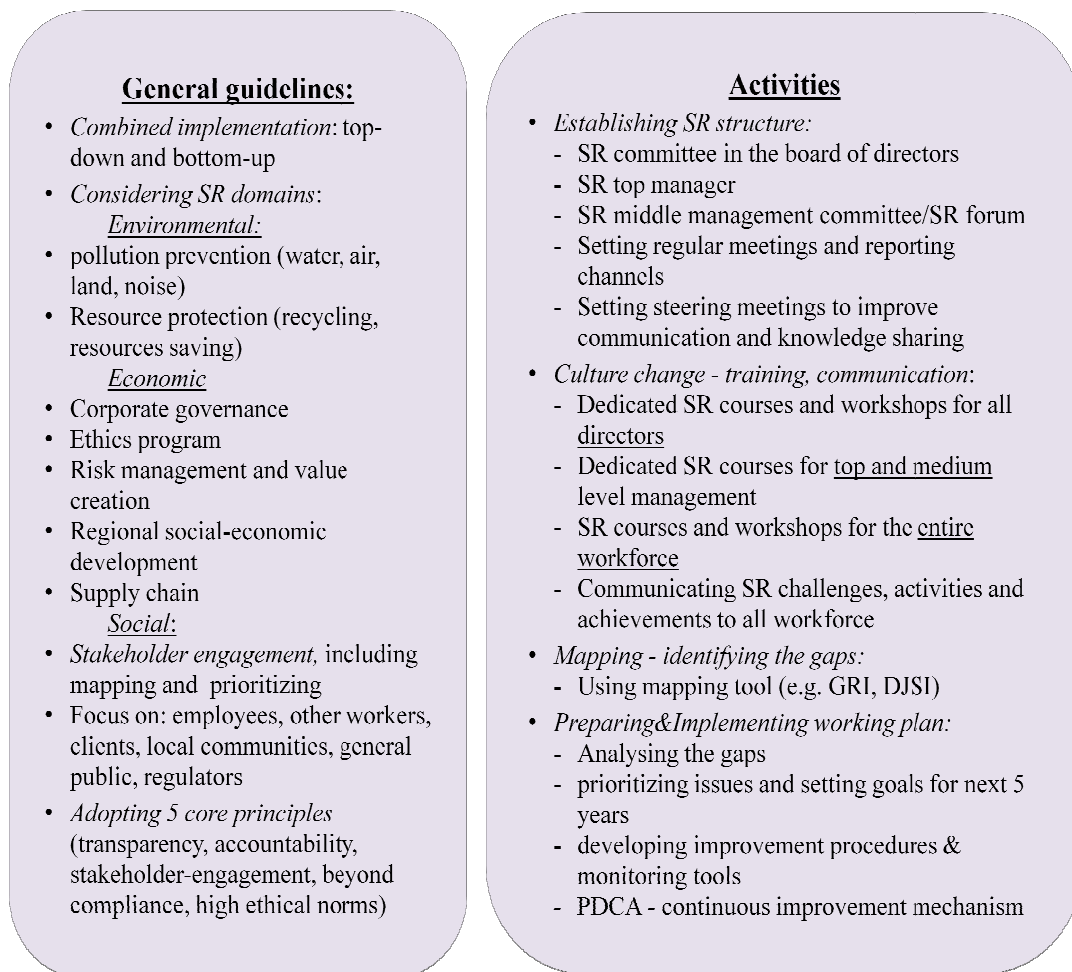
- The lack of agreed-upon SR measuring method might encourage critics to claim that other SR measures might have been more appropriate in this research than those that were examined.
- Further research can mitigate these limitations and provide more information to further substantiate the theoretical model of employees' BLP as means for SR implementation.

Practical implications for SR implementation

Figure 1 (page 15) presents a suggested SR implementation model, highlighting some of its main stages and describing their essence in general terms. It should be noted, that this is a general model and should not be regarded as a practical and operational guideline. Nevertheless, it covers SR core subjects, core principles and good practices for the beginning of its implementation in the organization.

Since this is a preliminary suggested model, it relates to the role of the board in SR implementation but does not elaborate on employees' BLP as a central issue. This should be developed in the future.

Figure 1. Suggested model for SR implementation



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