



## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND MANAGING WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

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**Abstract.** The idea of corporate social responsibility has growing significance in facing the difficulties of the disadvantaged groups of people with entering the labour market and with keeping their jobs. The article indicates the significance of corporate social responsibility in overcoming multidimensional social problems such as unemployment. The author raises issues related to managing human resources with regard to the idea of corporate social responsibility.

### SPOŁECZNA ODPOWIEDZIALNOŚĆ PRZEDSIĘBIORSTW A ZARZĄDZANIE RÓŻNORODNOŚCIĄ ZESPOŁÓW PRACOWNICZYCH

**Słowa kluczowe:** idea społecznej odpowiedzialności biznesu, różnorodność, zarządzanie różnorodnością, rynek pracy, niepełnosprawność

**Streszczenie.** Idea społecznej odpowiedzialności przedsiębiorstw nabiera szczególnego znaczenia wobec trudności grup defaworyzowanych z wejściem na rynek pracy oraz utrzymaniem zatrudnienia. Artykuł wskazuje na znaczenie społecznej odpowiedzialności biznesu w przewyciężaniu wielowymiarowych problemów społecznych, związanych z bezrobociem i biernością zawodową. Autorka podejmuje problematykę związaną z polityką personalną przedsiębiorstwa w odniesieniu do idei społecznej odpowiedzialności biznesu.

## Introduction

The diversity of modern societies, not only by gender, age, and health status but also by origin, nationality or religion, is an indisputable fact that is increasingly recognized by employers. Changes in the social and economic environment motivate entrepreneurs not only to anticipate the consequences of their actions in economic terms. They also motivate them to implement systemic solutions that give them a chance to gain a competitive advantage in the market, including in the aspect of the applied personnel policy. Companies that apply a responsible approach to social and ethical issues have a chance to gain the trust of stakeholders, that is individuals and groups interested in the organization's activities, i.e. the local community, consumers, employees and investors.

The role of modern enterprises in society goes beyond the provision of services, production and distribution of products. Socio-cultural changes, advances in technology, modern forms of communication and the performance of professional work have altered social expectations of organizations, both from the social environment, recipients of services and products, and job candidates and employees.

The idea of corporate social responsibility assumes particular importance in view of the problems of finding and maintaining employment by the people belonging to disadvantaged groups in the labour market, including those with various disabilities. The application of either the supported employment model or the transitional employment model requires the involvement of the employer, awareness not only of the limitations but, above all, of the vocational opportunities and work potential of people with disabilities (cf. Kurkus-Rozowska 1997, 1998). The purpose of this article is to analyze the theoretical and practical basis for implementing the idea of corporate social responsibility in relation to managing the diversity of employee teams, with particular emphasis on disability as a differentiating characteristic of employee teams. The subject of analysis is theoretical aspects and models of practical solutions. The literature concerning corporate social responsibility and managing the diversity of employee teams was critically analysed.

## The idea of corporate social responsibility

Corporate social responsibility is becoming one of the key categories in management theory and practice today, especially in relation to growing social problems on a global scale. Today, the activities of organizations go beyond meeting basic economic and legal standards. It is becoming increasingly important to take moral, ethically sound actions, out of concern for employees, the social environment and the natural environment. *Corporate social responsibility (CSR)* refers to the responsibility of companies for the impact of their decisions and actions on society and the environment. It is moving beyond the paradigm of an organization primarily serving its owners to a socially engaged organization. It is the management of a company in such a way that business outcomes are consistent with social values and expectations (Rok 2004, p. 18). CSR concerns many aspects of the functioning of an organization, and the term corporate social responsibility itself combines issues from many fields of science, including economics, management, law, ecology, psychology, pedagogy, philosophy or sociology. In the literature, one also encounters the terms corporate social responsibility, socially engaged business or business in society. Each of these terms indicates the importance of businesses in solving social problems (cf. Bartkowiak 2011; Buczkowski et al. 2016; Jasiocki 2004; Kowalczyk 2009). Responsible business is an approach to doing business in a strategic and long-term manner, based on social dialogue, cooperation and finding solutions that benefit the organization, employees and the external environment.

The idea of corporate social responsibility manifests itself in the transparent and ethical conduct of companies that:

- contribute to sustainable development, including improving the well-being and health of society;
- take into account the expectations of internal and external stakeholders;
- operate in accordance with applicable laws and apply policies consistent with international rules of conduct;
- choose conduct integrated with the organization's strategy and practised in intra-organizational relations and in relations with the company's environment (cf. Standard PN-ISO 26 000 ).

The practical rationale for implementing the idea of corporate social responsibility is not only a change in expectations and perceptions of companies by society and external stakeholders. It is also a series of internal processes related

to the company's image, and organizational culture, raising employee morale and increasing customer loyalty. Thus, the strategy of a committed, socially responsible enterprise brings tangible business profit (cf. Millie, Jacobson 2001, p. 6). The implementation of corporate social responsibility can be considered in two aspects, in relation to the company's environment and in relation to the company's internal environment. The internal dimension includes the following aspects of the company's operation:

- workplace safety;
- human resource management;
- managing the raw materials consumed by the company and the environmental impact of its operations.

The external dimension, on the other hand, includes:

- impact on local communities;
- relations with business partners, shareholders, suppliers, customers, and public institutions;
- respect for human rights;
- concern for the environment (Bartkowiak 2011).

The successful implementation of corporate social responsibility depends on two main factors: organizational culture and human resources (Jeruszka, Wolan-Nowakowska 2020). Organizational culture creates conditions for the formation of organizational identity and sets values, norms and rules of conduct. Employees' competence, experience, commitment, and attitudes influence the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization.

## **The idea of corporate social responsibility and managing the diversity of employee teams**

The diversity of employee teams is defined as the diversity of human resources, which results from a number of variables that determine the identity of a person, including, among others, gender, age, origin, nationality, culture, family status, religion or health status. The idea of corporate social responsibility indicates the importance of the relationship between the employer and employees, particularly with regard to the creation of appropriate standards related to personnel management, including in the aspect of managing employee diversity (Klimkiewicz 2010, Kolodziejczyk-Olczak 2013, Kwiatek 2014).

Managing the diversity of the workforce requires the use of appropriate forms and methods of management, including diverse forms of employment

of employees, their motivation, remuneration, professional development and promotion, as well as cooperation and exchange of experience between representatives of different business ecosystems operating within a given organization and in different segments of the labour market (cf. Bartkowiak 2011; Jeruszka, Wolan-Nowakowska 2020). The diversity of work teams also refers to the differences that occur in the personal and social competencies characteristic of individual employees. Thus, these are both visible characteristics i.e. gender, and age, but also invisible ones such as personality traits, attitudes, beliefs or culture.

The implementation of the idea of corporate social responsibility and the management of the diversity of employee teams takes on the particular importance of social problems related to unemployment and professional inactivity of people belonging to disadvantaged groups in the labour market, including those who have difficulties in finding and maintaining employment on their own.

The inferior position in the labour market is mainly due to the individual characteristics of people, such as low education level, lack of appropriate professional qualifications or health difficulties. Among those who belong to disadvantaged groups in the labour market, the following groups are distinguished:

- people with various types of disabilities;
- individuals over 55 years of age;
- adolescents coming from neglected, dysfunctional environments (often adolescents displaying social maladjustment);
- addicts and those recovering from addiction;
- individuals leaving prisons;
- emigrants.

Unemployment and inactivity are social and economic problems. Economically inactive people accounted for 43.5% of the total population aged 15 and over in the fourth quarter of 2020 (Economic Activity of the Population of Poland Q4 2020). Subjective unemployment is the problem of people affected by unemployment and their families. Economic activity and work have primarily an income function, but also are a source of self-realization and development and lifestyle, and realized values, determine the fate of a person and their family. By contrast, in object terms, it is the loss of social potential and the unrealized supply of labour, as a result of the imbalance between the supply of labour and the demand for labour (Mlonek 1999, p. 8).

Due to the peculiarities of the functioning of people experiencing difficulties in permanently finding a place in the labour market, intersectoral partnerships are crucial. The initiators of measures for the professional activation of groups

excluded from the labour market are most often public employment services and non-governmental organizations, which operate at the local, national or even supranational level.

For any cross-sector partnership, cooperation with employers is a priority in addressing unemployment and the inactivity of specific groups. The idea of corporate social responsibility and the strategy of managing the diversity of work teams point to the importance of links between businesses and the social environment, and the role of employers in shaping social and economic sustainability, including, first and foremost, with regard to labour market accessibility.

### **Socially responsible human resource management in the face of employee disabilities**

The involvement of employers at the stage of searching for an appropriate professional environment and workplace, as well as conditions related to managing a diverse workforce, significantly increases the chances of sustained entry into the labour market of people who are excluded or at risk of exclusion from the labour market, including, in a special way, people with disabilities (cf. Wolan-Nowakowska 2021). Employing people with disabilities requires going beyond the pattern of limitations that result from disability toward retained resources, and opportunities – discovering professional potential. In line with the idea of corporate social responsibility, the recruitment and selection process should be planned and carried out in a way that ensures the principle of equality and non-discrimination. People with disabilities are full members of society. They have full rights, including the right to take and maintain paid work that is consistent with their abilities, education, and qualifications, and when their disability and health condition requires it – also in conditions adapted to their needs (Article 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities)<sup>1</sup>.

Both job candidates and employees should be treated equally regardless of gender, age, disability, religion, nationality, ethnicity or political beliefs. Corporate social responsibility in the personnel selection process refers to the responsibility to potential job candidates and responsibility to those already employed (Kowalczyk 2009, pp. 151–160). Of particular importance is the implementation of appropriate methods of recruitment and management of diverse workforces,

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<sup>1</sup> On September 6, 2012, it was ratified by the President of Poland.

so as to create working conditions that allow the social and professional adaptation of the employee to the requirements of effective performance of professional duties. In the case of hiring people with diverse identities due to disabilities, among other things, the process of socio-professional adaptation concerns the newly hired employee. However, the adaptation of the work environment also concerns social processes and the preparation of hired employees to cooperate with a person with a disability (Kociejko 2015).

Corporate social responsibility to employees is not only related to the provision of jobs and wages but is primarily manifested in the creation of working conditions that respect the health and dignity of the employee (Mikolajewicz 2012, Makin, Cooper, Cox 2000). This principle is of particular importance in the occupational functioning of people with disabilities since the type and scope of work tasks must be adapted to the limitations and possibilities resulting from their limited abilities. Above all, work should not adversely affect the health of employees.

Organizational culture, workplace climate, and professed values play a key role in the process of implementing the idea of corporate social responsibility; however, an important aspect is also the knowledge of co-workers about the specific functioning of people with a certain type of disability, with regard to limitations and professional opportunities, and the necessary adjustments to the professional environment and, in particular, the workplace. The avoidance of discriminatory practices does not only apply to the recruitment and selection process, but it also includes procedures related to the professional development of employees, remuneration, the communication process and informing employees about the situation of the company, creating conditions for reconciling professional and personal life.

## **Supported employment as a form of vocational activation for people with disabilities**

Disadvantaged people in the labour market are those who are excluded or at risk of being excluded from the labour market, who are at a disadvantage in the labour market due to employment opportunities and conditions of employment (e.g., salary for work, opportunities for professional development). People who belong to disadvantaged groups in the labour market are more likely to be at risk of unemployment (multiple unemployment) and being unemployed for a longer time (long-term unemployment). Special support in vocational

activation is required for people experiencing difficulties in seeking and finding employment on their own, which includes people with disabilities (Trochimiak, Wolan-Nowakowska 2017).

The extent of independence in navigating the labour market, and attitudes toward one's own labour force participation are strongly related to the type and extent of disability. Supported employment is a form of employment dedicated to people who have difficulty finding and maintaining employment on their own, these include people with intellectual disabilities, holistic developmental disorders (e.g. autism spectrum) and people with mental health problems (cf. Zakrzewska 2017). A diagnosis of a nozological, specific type of disability is not an indication for the use of supported employment in the vocational rehabilitation process. Of key importance in the process of vocational activation of people with disabilities is a functional diagnosis, which allows for determining the degree of independence of a person with limited abilities, including the ability to perform professional work and the necessary adjustments in terms of working conditions.

The supported employment model primarily involves the assistance of a job coach, whose support is directed to both the person with a disability and the employer. The job coach undertakes activities related to job placement and the adaptation of the work environment to the needs of a person with a disability, and in this respect is a support to the employer. Supported employment was developed from the individual „training through work” method originally aimed at people with intellectual disabilities. American therapist Mark Gold developed a teaching strategy that was based primarily on „learning to work on the job.” The basis of this model was systematic training in natural settings, at the workplace. An extension of this approach is the concept of *job coaching*, in which the traditional „train-place” model of job activation was replaced with a „place-train-hold” model (cf. Cytowska, Wolowicz-Ruszkowska 2012, p. 23).

Supported employment is paid work performed by people with disabilities in the open labour market. Critical to the success of efforts aimed at activating people with disabilities is the involvement of employers in the process of supported employment. The implementation of a corporate social responsibility strategy fosters a positive attitude among both management and employees toward the diversity of work teams, including hiring and working with people with disabilities.



## Conclusions

One of the basic tenets of both the idea of corporate social responsibility and managing the diversity of work teams is the principle of social inclusion and equal treatment of employees. Social inclusion in a broader sense means the inclusion of individuals and social groups, especially marginalized people in the general stream of social life, including education and employment. In the case of people with disabilities, the goal of the comprehensive rehabilitation process is the normalization of life, that is, the ability to perform social roles in accordance with one's limitations and capabilities, including taking up employment. Inclusion in the general stream of life involves respecting the principle of normalization.

The creation of appropriate conditions, including the adaptation of the environment and workplace to the needs of people with disabilities is the basis for the implementation of the principle of inclusion and a condition for equalizing opportunities. Implementing the idea of corporate social responsibility and introducing procedures related to managing the diversity of work teams is a real opportunity to increase the professional activation of people belonging to disadvantaged groups in the labour market, including people with disabilities. An inclusive work environment is one that reflects as much as possible the social environment, which is, after all, diverse in the many dimensions that characterize individuals. The process of social inclusion is based on changing attitudes, transcending stereotypical perceptions of people representing different social groups and building mutual respect, equal treatment and acceptance of diversity.

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