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EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AS PART OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY STRATEGY IN LOGISTICS

Abstract

The idea of *corporate social responsibility* (CSR) becomes a popular base to form a long-term competitive strategy in logistics. Global logistic market demands high efficiency, complying with global quality standards and offering services at unified prices worldwide. Therefore logistic companies very often aim to raise their competitive potential by forming a strategy that allows for a long-term stable growth, based not only on reaching economic goals, but also on friendly coexistence of the company and its environment (CSR approach). The paper shows that educational programmes can be applied in relation to various issues of social responsibility chosen by an individual company. They can become an efficient tool to fulfill CSR goals in a strategy of a global logistic provider, as well as it can support the strategy of a much smaller logistic company. The benefits of a well-designed and implemented educational programmes are presented.

Keywords: CSR, strategy, education, educational programmes, CSR in logistics, CSR goals

Introduction

Logistics is often considered to be an extremely expansive industry, especially in relation to the harmful effects of transportation on the natural environment, the trade development and the natural resources exploitation. As a result, logistic companies aim to reduce the negative impact of their activity on their surroundings and spread the environmental awareness. Therefore, contemporary logistic distribution chains are often based on a certain level of CSR implemented by each and every partner in the logistic chain. CSR policy may be one of the criteria while tendering business partners in logistics. However, CSR tolls can also support goals

in a single corporate strategy. The CSR is often defined around issues such as: *trust, harmony, friendly cooperation* and *communication*. Educational programmes can be an effective tool in each of these issues, especially due to the fact that they can be implemented to reach each of the CSR goals officially defined by the United Nations. The goal of the article is to analyze the components of a well-designed educational programme and the way it can become a low-cost and efficient tool to support CSR goals in logistic activity.

1. CSR in corporate strategy

The idea of CSR is often misunderstood and some single marketing activities such as sponsoring, educational events, environment protection projects etc., tend to be seen as CSR. Companies find it difficult to place CSR within existing strategy and to identify goals and tools that might be useful. Thus, the first step to implement the idea of CSR to logistics, as well as to any other form of economic activity, is to start by defining what it really means for a company to be socially responsible. Popular definitions explain that CSR “is an innovative, voluntary management strategy that combines reaching economic goals with social, ethical and ecological aspects, on the field of both business operations and interactions with stakeholders”. In this type of strategy, economic goals remain in relation with social goals and care for natural environment. Effective communication with stakeholders (i.e.: employees, customers, shareholders, business partners, local community) allows for raising competitiveness and creating favorable conditions for social and economic development within company’s surroundings. The other important benefits of implementing CSR are:

- creating a reliable, strong brand, by building trust and better relations between the company, its customers, business partners and local community;
- possibility to add a unique value to standard products and services, resulting in increasing competitive potential;
- enhancing employee and customer loyalty, by acting along fair play, transparent procedures; taking into account employees’ and customers’ views, needs and preferences when forming a strategy;
- better access to financing, as social awareness and transparent business procedures are considered to be the features of well-managed projects and companies;
- possibilities to enter new markets, on which high CSR standards are required;
- establishing corporate culture, based on understanding and cooperation between employees (Encyklopedia CSR, 2017).

It is important to perceive CSR as a base and integral part of the complex management strategy. When properly integrated with economic vision and operation procedures, the CSR will allow for acquiring benefits mentioned above. CSR aspects are then present in the most important parts of the strategy (technology, financing and marketing). In the field of technology, CSR approach would ensure environmentally and socially responsible logistic services and manufacturing processes. In relation to financing, the focus is on socially responsible projects,

both inside the company (i.e.: supporting employees' involvement and creativity in introducing improvements to the strategy) and outside (i.e.: customers education on energy-saving solutions in transportation and smart packaging). Marketing, as part of the general competitiveness strategy, should provide measures to support and promote social and environmental activities, with a focus on the ethical and responsible way in which the company reaches economic goals.

2. Building CSR in logistics

The first step to build a strategy based on CSR approach is to identify groups of stakeholders of the company. Stakeholders are all those people, institutions, groups of interest and communities that exist in company's surroundings and are by some means affected by results of the company's presence and operations. Logistic operations usually allow to distinguish stakeholders as:

- actual and potential customers – considered to be the most significant group, particularly sensitive to the factors determining logistics brands;
- actual and potential business partners and shareholders – this group of stakeholders pay special attention to the value of the brand to the overall shape of competitive strategy, i.e.: banks, insurance companies;
- suppliers – carriers, warehouse suppliers, IT services;
- communities - on national, local and international level, depending on the range of operations and number and localization of branches of the logistic company;
- local governments and institutions;
- competitors – other companies offering logistic services to the same groups of potential customers;
- academic surroundings – providing human resources, technology, know-how, evaluation of market processes;
- media – creating opinions, providing means of social communication;
- natural environment – ecosystems and organizations influencing the way a logistic company may develop its operations.

Precise identification of stakeholders allows to shape CSR goals in relation to each group and its expectations and to choose the right tools of communication. *Effective communication* is the base that enables mutual understanding and building positive relations with each group. CSR strategy should be based on sustainable growth of business operations, considering interests, preferences and opinions of all stakeholders, and integrating the needs of the social and environmental surroundings with logistic activity and gaining revenues. Due to the fact that CSR requires a constant exchange of information between logistic company and its stakeholders, establishing effective channels of communication becomes a priority issue. There are three major fields of communication: inside the company – between managers and employees; between the company as a whole and the logistic services market and between the company and local/national community. In each case a constant exchange of information in both directions should be established.

According to the identified groups of stakeholders, range of operations and CSR goals, a logistic company may choose to use different tools, among which the most popular are:

- in relation to employees: voluntary projects in which employees are encouraged to actively support ecological or social initiatives, campaigns to build corporate culture on the base of employees' ideas to improve the company, helping employees to develop their individual passions and sharing them with the others or local community, supporting working mothers;
- in relation to customers: building easily accessible channels of communication (i.e.: call-centers, free info-lines) to encourage customers to express their needs, doubts, problems according to logistic issues, offering advice on issues such as how to prepare goods for transportation, fill in necessary documents, etc.;
- in relation to local community: projects offering education, raising quality of life, integrating social groups (i.e.: children, disabled people, senior citizens) around certain activities (i.e.: sport, art, community service), campaigns giving local community a chance to express their expectations according logistic operator's activity;
- in relation to natural surroundings: projects supporting environment protection and research, initiatives raising environmental awareness and supporting education.

CSR is therefore a vision and strategy that may be shaped individually by different logistic companies. Although it offers many significant benefits both to the company and its surroundings, it is not common for logistic companies in Poland to build a competitive strategy with CSR approach. Global logistic operators, operating with ISO standards were the first to introduce CSR into their management. However smaller operators often tend to avoid such strategies, due to the lack of knowledge as to what the true meaning of CSR is and also due to the need to avoid additional costs. There are also other reasons for not very common use of CSR in logistics, such as the lack of feedback from local community or clients or other practices (not compatible with such approach) that have already been implemented.

3. CSR Educational programmes

Education is an essential part of CSR policy and therefore it is an important tool for responsible companies to make an impact on their environment. Companies are willing to share their knowledge and build social awareness of various problems. They take responsibility for the kind of knowledge they want to transfer and they make an effort to reach certain groups of people, for example their employees, clients, local communities, students. etc. Educational programme planning consists of the following elements:

1. educational goal,
2. target group definition,
3. range of knowledge,
4. encouragement,

5. duration of the programme,
6. other partners involved,
7. ways of presentation,
8. form of completion of the programme.

Chosen forms of education depend on the social goals of CSR policy and the nature of knowledge that is to be shared, for example some companies decide to cooperate with schools, universities or institutions of non-educational nature to initiate or support an existing course, others decide to launch a course on their own, meeting people outside the company or inviting them in to share knowledge. Educational programmes may include general issues such as (Albińska, 2017):

- environment,
- health,
- safety and security,
- cooperation with suppliers,
- career paths and labor market,
- consumption models,
- lifestyle,
- culture,
- technology,
- personal development.

Most of the programmes are designed as a part of long-term educational strategy, and as in other types of strategic activity, it is important that the company gets feedback from society about popularity of the program and reaction of local population or other addressed groups. The feedback allows to identify the fields of knowledge that are most appreciated and as a result to design and implement more socially approved programs.

In 2016, human rights and climate change remain the highest priorities for corporate sustainability (BSR: The State of Sustainable Business, 2016). As educational programmes are essential in both fields, companies around the world can use them to address their CSR goals. According to the Rapport on CSR in Poland in 2016 (Albińska, 2017) there have been numerous CSR activities implemented by companies in Poland in relation to education. Over 300 educational initiatives were submitted to the Rapport in 2016.

Under the guidelines of The United Nations Organization, Sustainable Development Goals were established in 2015. There are 17 main targets to be reached until 2030. They have become an outline for companies to set their own selective set of CSR goals and tasks that comply with the sustainable development rules. The named goals are (UN, 2016):

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

Each of the goals sets a field for a variety of educational programmes and activities which can be developed within a corporate CSR strategy. For example, according to the Goal 1, poverty is more than the lack of income and resources to ensure a sustainable livelihood. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion as well as the lack of participation in decision-making (UN, 2016), thus educational programmes addressing the goal may be evolve around these complex issues. Companies select their individual activities to suit their management strategy and support education according to issues that are important for local community and environment. To develop an interesting educational programme, a company needs to identify key social issues important in their local communities to address:

- geo-political issues (for example: campaigns against war, understanding the nature and consequences of migrations);
- environmental problems (for example: initiatives to clear the oceans and beaches, supporting endangered species of animals);
- economic issues (for example: enhancing sustainable economic growth, change of the global food and agriculture system to nourish the hungry, supporting humanitarian action amid rising malnutrition, thirst and disease);
- safety and security (for example: various health awareness initiatives, promoting safe behaviour patterns).

The addressed problems need to be intelligible and up to date for the local community. The company is to show it takes a burden to give help through education

and support. To identify the most important social issues the company needs to be aware of the social structure of their geographical and economic surroundings and observe the problems that appear in various aspects local community life. To achieve this goal, companies often decide to meet their stakeholders. For example in 2016 DB Schenker invited its stakeholders to its Białystok branch. The meeting was held within the framework of the project 'DB Schenker – the preferred Neighbor'. Representatives of State and local institutions, community organizations, local universities and the business environment, including customers of DB Schenker took part in the meeting. Participants discussed activities of the company and the expectations of the local community. Similar CSR initiative was launched by Raben Group, it consisted of a project of dialog sessions called the "Common Way". Stakeholders from 3 main company locations: Gądki near Poznań, Straszyn near Gdansk and Grodzisk Mazowiecki were invited to join the meetings. The aim of the project was to get to know the needs and expectations of the representatives of the local communities, suppliers and immediate neighbours. As a result, the company collected 183 demands and suggestions from the stakeholders.

In turn, in 2016, Polish State Railway (PKP) carried out an inclusive design workshop, that allowed for involvement of society and local government units in the planning process of functional utility of infrastructure. The involvement of stakeholders takes place at the earliest stage of the preparation of projects involving the reconstruction or construction of railway stations. The aim is to significantly improve the quality of life of users and availability of infrastructure of railway transport (Albińska, 2017).

4. CSR educational programmes in logistics

Logistic activity influences various groups of stakeholders. Among them are employees, clients, cooperating companies and institutions, local communities, but also groups affected by environmental consequences of the development of transport and logistic systems. Therefore logistic companies set their CSR goals usually among those concerning environmental, health and safety issues and direct them towards the main stakeholders' groups. However all 17 CSR goals may be an inspiration for an innovative programme. Still, the more unique the CSR tools, the bigger the impact on company's competitive advantage (Rok, 2013). Thus educational programmes are tools that usually require an innovative approach and staff involvement rather than big budget. The following examples describe different types of CSR educational programmes launched by logistic companies of various characteristics and size. They bring benefits both to the companies and the participants involved.

International or global logistic operators often present a high level of CSR awareness and launch many initiatives adapted to the specific needs of local communities. In 2016 DB Schenker has developed an educational program on ethics and compliance. "Fair Play" game increases the awareness of employees in relation to compliance with law, fighting corruption, business gift reception,

situations of conflict of interest, asset protection, the rules of dealing with competition. In 2016, the game was played by 97% of DB Schenker employees. Safety and care for the natural resources are addressed in the strategy of DB Cargo Poland. The company organised Security Health-event for customers, employees and civil service, which were accompanied by lectures, training and demonstrations to simulate dangerous event.

Another global logistic operator Kuehne + Nagel launched a security awareness programme for their employees. The goal of "Security good for you, good for families, good for the company" is to increase the awareness of health, safety and environmental protection in the logistic workplace. The company runs conferences and workshops where employees share good practices.

However, smaller logistic operators may also benefit from developing CSR educational programmes. They operate on local basis and it's easier for them to both identify and meet the expectations of their shareholders. In 2012, a middle-sized Polish logistic operator UniLogistics together with the University of Gdańsk launched an educational programme for Transport and Logistics Department students, called The Orange Academy of UniLogistics. The aim of the project was to give the students an opportunity to meet logistic professionals in their workplace surroundings and learn from them. Another goal was to show the students the diversity of activities within logistic processes and help them to choose their future career path that suits their professional preferences. The practical knowledge together with a chance to actively cooperate with logistic partners in various parts of supply chains gave the students a strong advantage in their career-building process on the logistic labour market. During meetings and workshops, the emphasis was placed also on safety and security procedures in logistics. The programme lasts for 6 months and it ends with a ceremony during which the students are awarded with certificates of competence of The Orange Academy of UniLogistics. When the students entered the labour market a year later, most of them were employed by UniLogistics and its partners in the supply chain. The first edition of the programme was honoured by The Responsible Business Forum and was described in the *Responsible Business in Poland Report in 2010*.

Micro companies in logistic sector can also successfully deploy CSR goals through educational programmes. Such companies usually have a much smaller financial budget, but with an innovative approach they can benefit from a CSR campaign even more than the global players. It is often difficult for micro companies to build a trusted brand visible on the market and a CSR educational programme may become also a low cost marketing tool.

A micro company SSiL Research and Consulting is a Polish company working in the field of logistic consulting, safety and security in logistic chains and logistic business development. In 2014, in cooperation with 3 universities, a programme called "Young Experts Group (YEG)" was started. YEG is an international project set up to promote the involvement of students in issues related to transportation, logistics, environmental protection in logistics and marketing. YEG promotes ideas and commitment. The programme allows students to pick logistic issues they consider interesting and important for the future of logistics and natural environment,

consult them with international experts and then publish a paper presenting their findings. The papers were published on SSiL's official website and were open for discussion for both academic and business partners of the programme. The goal was to enhance the involvement and activity of students on a logistic market and to give them a chance to discuss the problems that they found important with international professionals. Another goal was to present students' professional passions and interests on a logistic global market so that to give the cooperating companies a chance to find the best young employees. It has become a unique support with recruitment processes for numerous companies.

Conclusions

Educational programmes in logistic can be designed to support most of the main CSR goals and thus they are suitable for each corporate strategy. They can be planned as a series of events as well as single meeting or workshop. They can be designed to work with any group of stakeholders including children, students, employees, clients or local communities. Educational programmes usually do not require a high budget, it's the staff involvement that it the main factor of success. The basic rule is that educational programmes, as well as other CSR tools, are meant to make a change, popularise knowledge, influence behaviour and therefore should never be designed just for marketing purposes. The main advantages of educational programmes for business are:

- they enhance commitment and integration inside the company team,
- they develop market recognition of the company or brand,
- they create positive image of the company,
- they allow the company to be in touch with their stakeholders,
- they enhance employees' satisfaction as being a part of a friendly and responsible business,
- they allow to establish new levels of communication with business partners and national and local institutions.

There are also numerous advantages for the groups addressed by the programmes and local communities as a whole, such as:

- they offer free, unique education and professional support;
- they allow local communities to better understand how the business works and communicate their expectations regarding issues of a local or even global importance;
- they allow stakeholders to influence company's management goals;
- they allow the participants to integrate around responsible purposes, and achieve environmental or social goals.

In 2016, a complex research according to the consumers' perception of corporate CSR and communication activities was conducted on a representative sample of 1039 Poles aged 18–55 years (Barometr CSR, 2016). The results of the research prove that Polish consumers positively assess observed corporate CSR activities, as shown on Figure 1.

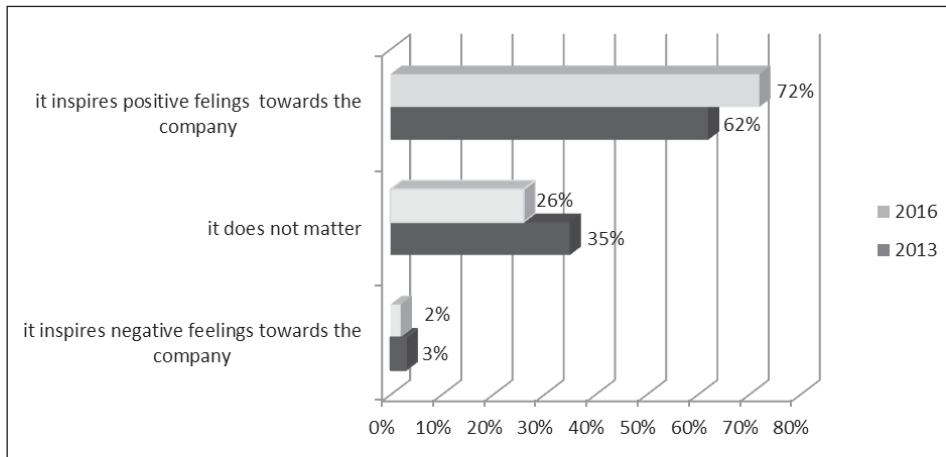


Figure 1. The attitude changes in the Polish consumers' perception of CSR activities in 2016 compared to 2013

Source: (Barometr CSR, 2016)

Up to 72% of respondents declare that such actions raise positive feelings in relation to the company. In 2013 the share of respondents amounted to 62%. In comparison with the previous edition of the survey, the share of consumers who declared that it did not matter to them whether the company engaged in activities for the community or environment protection, decreased by 9%.

34% of customers declare that they understand CSR as an innovative way of business development, which benefits both society and the company itself (Albińska, 2017).

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