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CORPORATE SOCIAL PERFORMANCE AS A INDICATOR OF SUCCESS IN POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP VIEW

Summary: Recently there can be observed the switch in the management sciences towards social and positive phenomena. This is largely due to the notion of Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) that has gained popularity in the last decade. That switch could be also noticed in the considerations of organizational performance: there is a stronger focus on social indicators of performance although financial indicators still dominate. In the paper we present the concept of corporate social performance (CSP) which is the next step of stakeholders relations and corporate social responsibility and is also underlined by Positive Organizational Scholarship. We describe the notion of positive organizational scholarship and its impact on the view of organizational performance and idea of corporate social performance as part of that notion. We also present the future directions of corporate social performance.

Keywords: stakeholders relationships, corporate social responsibility, corporate social performance, Positive Organizational Scholarship.

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1. Introduction

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) which has been present in organizational studies for just a decade seems to provide some fresh air for theoretical and empirical considerations. It attracts much attention with tracks and workshops run at most significant conferences and articles printed in leading journals. POS offers a new look at organization as a “mystery” and a “marvel” to be embraced, and focuses on two main areas: everything that is normatively positive and what is extraordinarily positive. The latter means directing attention not to average and typical, but to perfect and excellent. Being good is simply not good enough for positive scholarship.

Taking positive point of view and looking for excellence we employ a positive perspective to considerations what performance is and finally present the idea of corporate social performance.

2. Positive approach to organization

Positive Organizational Scholarship has its main inspiration in positive psychology [Seligman 2002]. Traditional psychology concentrates on the pathology of different kind, diseases, inabilities, harm and sadness. Positive psychology proposes different perspective, not replacing traditional approach, but attempting to supplement it. It redirects the focus from what is wrong with people toward emphasizing human strengths that allow people to build the best in live, thrive and prosper [Seligman, Peterson 2003]. Happiness in positive psychology view is not the result of genes or luck. It can be reached by identifying and using a range of traits and experiences that people possess, such as optimism, wisdom, kindness or trustworthiness. Positive psychology has three main areas of interest: experiences, individual traits, and institutions. The main goal of positive psychology is to create organized systems that actualize human potential. In this view organizations are the carriers of institutions that enable their members to identify the best in them, allow to utilize it achieving sustainable levels of authentic contentment, gratification, and meaning, and create organizational success measured by excellence, abundance, and human well-being.

The field closest to Positive Organizational Scholarship and mostly contributing to it is organizational development and especially appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry (AI) is the movement within organizational development that seeks the best in people to strengthen the ability of organization to change and develop. It is a practical philosophy that assumes the organization is a “mystery” and a “marvel” to be embraced, not a problem to be solved [Cooperrider, Srivastava 1987, p. 131], which assumption is also applied to Positive Organizational Scholarship. AI argues that organizations have a positive core which unleashed positive power may bring them to thrive.

Similarly to positive psychology and appreciative inquiry, POS focuses on positive traits, experiences, institutions, and outcomes [*The Oxford Handbook...* 2012; Zbierowski 2014]. It takes a broader look focusing not only on these issues concerning individuals (as positive psychology) and organizational change, transformation, and development (as appreciative inquiry), but extends the interest to various organizational phenomena. POS is a kind of new philosophy of organization. POS is not a single theory, more a viewpoint putting emphasis on positive and dynamic social and organizational phenomena, encompassing attention “to the enablers (e.g., processes, capabilities, structures, methods), motivations (e.g., unselfishness, altruism, contribution without regard to self), and outcomes or effects (e.g., vitality, meaningfulness, exhilaration, high-quality relationships) associated with positive phenomena” [Cameron, Dutton, Quinn 2003, p. 4]. The term “positive” may be applied to a wide range of phenomena: states, processes and relationships of individuals, groups and organizations, where positivity has its occurrence, causes and consequences. We claim that another level of analysis, although not purely organizational, may be the level of society.

However, the expression “positive” is not entirely clear and has been a matter of discussion and critique. POS authors understand “positive” as “...affirmative bias and orientation, not a substitute for other more common organizational phenomena”, and state that POS “focuses on phenomena that are displayed not in accordance with the situation broadly constructed, or, in other words, phenomena that are unexpectedly positive” [Cameron, Dutton, Quinn 2003, p. 5]. In this new viewpoint POS is normative in its efforts, it uses not only categories of “effective” and “ineffective”, but also distinguishes “good” from “bad” and decides to focus on what is good in people and organizations. “Positive” here has a different meaning from the one used in traditional organizational studies, where it labels something that works properly – achieves goals, makes profit etc. For POS it means something “good” (opposite to “bad”), and something working unexpectedly well (more than “effective”).

POS scholars claim that the most important advantage of this approach is looking at old phenomena in new ways. Just as looking at object from different viewpoints reveals new details, also positive organizational scholarship allows to see things formerly invisible. A good lesson here may be learned again from positive psychology and Seligman [2002] by using the term “organizational happiness” as an analogy to people happiness. It is not the result of luck, it can be cultivated by using strengths organizations already possess – kindness, originality, humor, optimism, and generosity. Analogically to people, organizations can also develop buffers against misfortune and move to a new, more positive sustainable level of authentic contentment, gratification, and meaning. By identifying the very best in themselves organizations cannot only improve themselves but also the world around them. They may contribute not only to societal welfare, but also to building better world where individuals are able to realize their full potential. Just as for positive psychology, the overall goal here is to create organized institutions that actualize human potential.

3. Organizational performance in positive perspective

Our study focuses on positive traits and high performing SMEs. It is therefore crucial to ask a question what really performance means in a positive perspective. It is useful to adopt dialectical way of thinking here that sets short time performance (including satisfaction of stakeholders) against growth and development in long run. Organizational performance is a complex, multifaceted construct that should be examined with an eye towards complexity, including non-financial, forward-looking and perceptual indicators [Donaldson, Preston 1995]. Organization, as March [1991] argues must trade off gains in average performance through exploration in the long run against the reduction in variance in return gained through exploitation in the short run. More recently many scholars have theorized that modern performance, corporate governance and performance measurement systems attempt to address both profitability and growth, tangible and intangible issues [Kruger, Snyman 2006]. Of particular interests in a positive perspective is the finding “...that renewal requires

the organizations to explore and learn new ways, while concurrently exploiting what they have already learned” [Crossan, Lane, White 1999, p. 522]. Organizations wanting to develop must search for activities using what is currently known (e.g. efficiency, refinement, improvement, execution) and simultaneously those requiring the generation of new knowledge (e.g. experimentation, rebirth, discovery, innovation, flexibility, and renewal [Rothaermel, Deeds 2004]). It should be noted here, that the explorative side is more creative, invention-focused, and growth-oriented. Conversely, the technique and tools of the exploitative side are aimed at making an organization more operationally efficient through incremental improvements of routine set of activities, unified processes focused on survival. This view is consistent with findings suggesting that organizations should be designed to perform seamlessly on a day-to-day basis and to simultaneously transform themselves [Garud, Kumaraswamy, Sambamurthy 2006]. That is, they positively confront demands for survival and growth by reinforcing and dynamically balancing their organizational elements in the emergence of organizational platforms of resources, capabilities, and options. The message here is simple: the organizational effectiveness exists when an integrated organizational infrastructure contains a set of resources, capabilities, competences and enablers that work together in the growth, as well as survival processes within the existing organization. In other words, with regard to the explorative/exploitative distinction, we posit that both are fundamental to positive organizational effectiveness.

Apart from taking into consideration both short and long perspective, a positive way of thinking demands considering the nature of performance, the outcomes of organizational activities. Some scholars e.g. Buchanan [2000] argue that different economic, social, cultural, and political endeavors are aimed not only at achieving material benefits but also contribute to building a new, better world rooted in health, economic wealth, security, knowledge, freedom (choices), justice, quality of (social development potential) activities, and environment protection. Specifically, the central challenge for SME owners and managers is how to arrive at some workable reconciliation between the instrumental and other moral, immaterial criteria. In the circumstances, where nobody knows what exactly organizational effectiveness of SME is, we emphasize value consensus as the fundamental background for promoting and structuring performance understanding.

In positive perspective, there is no objective measure of SME organizational effectiveness. The so-called objective measures (e.g., financial measures) that appear to be precise need careful interpretation. An additional complication is that achieved scores cannot be judged independently of risk required to generate them. It is also worth remembering that what SMEs take as measures of effectiveness or success will not be the same over time. For example, those organizations which have failed to invest in the past may have excellent past performance, but have poor future prospects. Hence, there is an important question about the length of the period that

should be spent to measure effectiveness. Finally, stakeholders and cultural perspectives influence the interpretation of chosen measures in terms of organizational success or failure.

4. Corporate social performance

It should be noticed here that the structure of organization's stakeholders and the organizational context influence the interpretation of selected indicators of success and failure. Some scholars e.g. Lichtarski [1999] and Romanowska [*Efektywny nadzór korporacyjny* 2002] state that realizing how important stakeholders are and maintaining good relationships with them is essential for the success of organization and its high performance. In a positive perspective it is also important to incorporate a wide set of receivers of the activities of organization into the system of performance measurement.

Relationships with stakeholders are closely connected to corporate social responsibility. According to Wang and Verma [2012] close relationships are an important result of activities in this area. Also Werther and Chandler [2011] claim that the essence of CSR is in maintaining right relationships with stakeholders. They also state that "corporate social responsibility is managing relationships that have central meaning for the success of enterprise" [Werther, Chandler 2011, xviii]. The next step in those considerations is corporate social performance (CSP). Chen and Delmas [2011] present three steps in the research of relationships with stakeholders. The first one is the analysis of relationships, the second is corporate social responsibility and the highest step is corporate social performance. Stakeholders demand more and more information about various activities of the organization. Some of that information concerns the results in terms of corporate social performance. This kind of information is used by the growing number of customers in their choices [Vandermerwe, Oliff 1990] and by investors in the process of socially responsible investments [Chaterji, Levine, Toffel 2009]. Similar behaviors may be observed in b2b market where for example practices of socially responsible supply chains are created [Srivastava 2007].

Corporate social performance is defined as "construct that emphasizes a company's responsibilities to multiple stakeholders, such as employees and the community at large, in addition to its traditional responsibilities to economic shareholders [Turban, Greening 1996, p. 658]. The essence of CSP which is rather a concept than an indicator is also underlined by Hirsch and Levin who say that CSP is "broad concept used to loosely encompass and utilize wide set of various phenomena" [1999, p. 200]. CSP is mainly a practical concept created to answer the need to use indicators of activities in terms of relations with stakeholders (including silent stakeholders: natural environment and future generations). That creates certain consequences in terms of the existence of a model, underlying framework or even a definition of CSP which were secondary to the concept itself. CSP had not even

been defined for log time [Wood 1991] despite the fact that research on it had been conducted since 1970. Wood presents an integrated model of CSP which identifies three levels: principles of CSP, processes of social reactions of organization and consequences of organizational behaviors. A contradictory model is presented by Clarkson [1995]. He proposes a framework based on managing the relationships with stakeholders. This kind of approach might be more useful – it focuses on specific social groups that have real problems instead of abstract issues that might not exist.

The measurement of CSP is difficult due to its complexity and multidimensionality. It encompasses the attitude towards stakeholders, environment, ethical norms and many other issues. A typical way to measure CSP is to aggregate many indicators (e.g. [Hillman, Keim 2001]). However, there is a problem of arbitrariness of weights attributed to indicators. No weights means that all indicators are of the same importance, attributing wages on the other hand is an artificial process in which the specifics of organization must be taken into consideration. That problem might be easily solved by letting stakeholders assess the importance of certain issues by themselves. However, Hillman and Keim draw attention to the dynamics and heterogeneity of groups of stakeholders. Another problem of measuring corporate social performance is low availability of robust data. In the measurement of financial performance the data is easily available in financial statements which is not the case of CSP. Moreover, the data here is “soft” and difficult to catch in numbers [Graves, Waddock 1994]. In the measurement of corporate social performance the data comes from various sources: questionnaires, financial statements, annual reports and experts assessments. The most widespread method of measuring CSP is based on assessing strengths and problematic issues in each of the categories of CSR in organization. The biggest database of CSP is Kinder, Lydenberg, and Domini, Inc. (KLD) which gathers the measures of American public companies. The database encompasses categories such as environment, community and society, customers, employee and supply chain and governance (Table 1).

Table 1. Framework of KLD issues (MSCI, 2012)

Scores: environment (E), social (S) and governance (G)	Subscores
Environment (E)	Management of environmental issues; climate change; non-carbon emissions, effluents & waste, resources management & use
Community & society (S)	Philanthropy; impact on community; human rights: civil & political
Customers (S)	Marketing & advertising; product/services quality & safety; anti-competitive practices
Employees & supply chain (S)	Labor-management relations; employee safety; workforce diversity; supply chain labor
Governance (G)	Sustainability reporting & management; governance board & structure; business ethics; political accountability

Source: MSCI, 2012.

The KLD methodology is based on calculating the composite of ESG (E – environment, S – social, G – governance) which is based on 18 operationalized subscores. The team of experts analyses each firm using multiple sources, including meetings with managers, public documents, government information, NGOs reports and press releases. The parts of KLD are also present in Polish literature [Cyfert, Krzakiewicz 2009].

5. Conclusions

In the paper we attempted to present the evolution of defining the success of the enterprise, factors that matter in this process and current trends in terms of corporate social performance. It seems that the factor largely defining the criteria of success is the growing role of more diverse groups of stakeholders and development of modern methods of organizing such a positive management. The implication is the growing importance of social performance. The crucial issue is the use of CSP measures in corporate governance in Polish conditions where systems similar to KLD have not been created yet. It seems that there is a need to propose domestic conditions though the ownership structure favors adapting foreign solutions.

It is important to ask a question about the future development of social measures of success and failure of enterprises. Taking into consideration the current trends it seems that there will be a further switch to social and “soft” indicators defined ethically or even morally. Psychological well-being [Galagher, Lopez, Preacher 2009] and work-life balance [Wang, Verma 2012] will be added to the criteria of assessing the performance. Even today enterprises employ experts of well-being interventions and care about the development of employees outside the workplace. We can expect those trends to strengthen, especially in the sectors of high importance of human capital.

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SPOŁECZNA ODPOWIEDZIALNOŚĆ BIZNESU JAKO WSKAŹNIK SUKCESU W PERSPEKTYWIE POZYTYWNEJ TEORII ORGANIZACJI

Streszczenie: W ostatnim czasie można zaobserwować przekierowanie w naukach o zarządzaniu w kierunku zagadnień społecznych i pozytywnych. Powodem tego w znacznym zakresie jest nurt, który zdobył popularność w ostatniej dekadzie – pozytywna teoria organizacji. Ta zmiana kierunku może być również zaobserwowana w rozważaniach na temat efektywności organizacji: istnieje silniejszy nacisk na wskaźniki społeczne, choć wskaźniki finansowe wciąż dominują. W artykule przedstawiamy koncepcję społecznej efektywności organizacji, która jest następnym krokiem w rozważaniach o relacjach z interesariuszami i społecznej odpowiedzialności biznesu, a także jest podkreślana przez pozytywną teorię organizacji. Opisujemy nurt POS i jego wpływ na obraz efektywności organizacji oraz koncepcję CSP jako jego część.

Słowa kluczowe: relacje z interesariuszami, społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu, społeczna efektywność, pozytywna teoria organizacji.