

# STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE AREA OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY WITH AN EXAMPLE OF POLISH ENTERPRISES

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**Abstract** - This paper discusses the types and the role of key business stakeholders in activities related to corporate social responsibility. A particular focus was on improving social relations while presenting the tools for managing and improving these relations. Identification of stakeholders in Polish enterprises were also performed in the study. Tools for involving stakeholders in the enterprise activities were indicated, with four major forms of the involvement being communication, consultation, partnership, and dialogue. A case study method was employed to describe the Polish examples of activities and good practices of corporate social responsibility that help involve selected stakeholder groups and the examples of stakeholder relationship management.

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**Keywords** - Communication, Consultation, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Dialogue, Partnership, Stakeholders.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Stakeholders represent a concept which is of key importance at the stage of design and implementation of activities in the area of corporate social responsibility (CSR). The concept of stakeholders is critical from the standpoint of corporate social responsibility as it emphasizes both individual interests of the owners and a more comprehensive public interest that contributes to the sustainable development of the organization. Stakeholders can be categorized using various criteria (for example, degree of relationships with the enterprise, strength of influence, nature of relationships). This group includes employees, suppliers, consumers, competitors, media, non-governmental organizations, communities, institutions or offices. They can influence the enterprise while simultaneously being affected by its activities. Stakeholders constitute part of the business environment and maintain direct or indirect relations with the enterprise. The policy of corporate social responsibility developed based on partnership relations with stakeholders should be a key practice in activities of various organizations.

To meet the demands of responsible business, the enterprise, which is responsible to stakeholders for the results of its activities, strives for taking an active role in finding solutions and responding to the issues related to these activities. This is possible through social dialogue and building relationships. Involvement in dialogue with stakeholders contributes to more effective achievement of the goals set in the social responsibility strategy.

Therefore, the aim of this paper was to present the role of key stakeholders in Polish enterprises and to attract attention to proper management of effective stakeholder relationships. The study also emphasizes the principles of correct and effective dialogue with stakeholders and the respective benefits.

## II. THE TYPES AND THE ROLE OF KEY BUSINESS STAKEHOLDERS IN POLISH ENTERPRISES IN ACTIVITIES RELATED TO CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Social changes related to the progressing technological development force organizations to change their attitudes. Increasing the amount of information acquired compared to the speed of its transmission increases the need for two-way communication. Business stakeholders expect broad dialogue. Enterprises and organizations have to face a major challenge of meeting society expectations for proper communication with stakeholders as an expression of corporate social responsibility. Effective communication also determines the position and role of the enterprise in society, and its chances for development in the information society.

Identification and in-depth analysis of stakeholders are fundamental to building a social responsibility strategy and thus a business strategy. As a result of the changes and the modern approach to management, stakeholders are increasingly involved in management processes in enterprises and in the functioning of the enterprise at all stages of its activity, whereas managers more and more often take into account the stakeholders' expectations in the management process. At the stage of building a strategy, enterprises analyse the environment, including performing the stakeholder research since internal and external factors impact on the actions taken by the enterprises. An in-depth analysis of the environment provides enterprises with knowledge about the expectations of individual stakeholder groups and may represent the basis for developing innovative solutions. Therefore, the common feature of comprehensive social responsibility strategies adopted by enterprises is identification of stakeholders and taking into account their needs and expectations in the process of strategic

planning. [4] The concept of stakeholders, formulated in 1984 by R.E. Freeman, refers to individuals or groups that may have an effect on the activities of the organization or are affected by such activities [9]. This means that companies operating in the market are connected through many different relations with other market participants [2].

The main stakeholders in enterprises are presented in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1. The main stakeholders in enterprises**  
 Source: author's own study based on [3].

According to the stakeholder classification proposed by R.E. Freeman, stakeholders include internal stakeholders who are members of the organization and therefore can participate in the projects implemented by the enterprise and have a direct contribution to its success, and external stakeholders, who are not members of the organization and their impact on the company is more representative than direct [2], [6].

### III. PROCESS OF DIALOGUE WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND ITS BENEFITS

An effective dialogue is a precondition for the implementation of activities of social responsibility. There is a global trend towards increasing the need for information on enterprise activities, particularly in the area of corporate social responsibility. Stakeholders monitor activities and analyse their impact on the environment. Enterprises have to develop effective communication channels that improve organizational efficiency and ensure proper communication in relations with the environment. It is also a way to provide information for the environment about the set of values of the organization and its transparency. The fast development of the media is conducive to the intensification of the dialogue with stakeholders. Furthermore, the dynamic development of the Internet and new technologies has caused huge changes in the processes of communication with the environment, since this form of communication promotes

development of relations. Modern communication with stakeholders may take place through newsletters addressed to registered customers or other entities, representing a form of an official information distribution channel. With the dynamic development of social media, more and more enterprises decide to use the enormous power of transmission of such websites as Facebook or Twitter. Social media provide many platforms for exchanging views and places for discussion and they have brought fundamental changes in the shaping of the business environment and enterprise stakeholders. They allow for interaction with stakeholders at many levels. However, it should be emphasized that such dialogue does not represent the opinions of all stakeholders but only an active part of them. Many companies establish their own communication channels, especially with customers, using them as an additional source of inspiration to create new, improved products or services.

Therefore, stakeholders can have a particularly strong effect on the direction of change and the prospects for business development. This development is related to the continuous improvement of products and services and their adaptation to the changing needs of external stakeholders. Therefore, key stakeholder groups should cooperate with each other and exploit the potential of new technologies for further development of knowledge. Entrepreneurs should act as initiators of social dialogue, encourage the exchange of views and experiences among their internal and external stakeholders, attract interest in their activities, and persuade the environment to cooperate and implement specific activities in the context of cooperation and social development.

Social engagement and responsibility in the market produces benefits to both society and the enterprise [14]. Implementation of the CSR concept that is consistent with the expectations of stakeholders of the enterprise brings many positive consequences. From the standpoint of the enterprise, the increase in value is beneficial if it results from [2]:

- benefits for the enterprise, i.e. contracts concluded with stakeholders (e.g. attractive contracts with employees, philanthropic activity);
- long-term relations with stakeholders, combined with an increase in the strength of reputation and brand, based on strategic social marketing;
- strategic and operational knowledge about stakeholders, used to build competitive advantage;
- process, product, technological and organizational innovations implemented through the use of contacts between business stakeholders, state and local government administration bodies, and as feedback from employees.

The benefits significant from the standpoint of employees include [2]:

- increase in general satisfaction and satisfaction with work;
- increase in favour shown by other employees;
- participation in the decision-making process, which leads to improved quality of work and work performance;
- awareness of the opportunities for achieving financial benefits in the future, resulting from the reduction of production and operating costs in the company.

#### IV. MANAGING AND IMPROVING STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS

Relations with stakeholders should also be considered from the perspective of customer satisfaction as an indispensable element of customer retention. Trust is essential in relations with the organization. Trust represents the basis for making transactions and payments for specific goods or services. Therefore, it is important that all information on how the enterprise operates is made available, since fairness and reliability is a fundamental principle of functioning in the market in relations between enterprises and stakeholders [12].

Relationships, their development, creation and fostering play a significant role, while managing them represents a major challenge for entrepreneurs. Therefore, modern enterprises place great emphasis on the development of their relations with stakeholders as they see the obvious benefits resulting from proper management of these relations [5], [13]. Stakeholder relations require a strategic approach. Effective management of such relations, proposed by Adamczyk [1], involves the following six stages [4]:

- stakeholder relationship mapping, based on the identification of all entities the enterprise may have any relationship with,
- stakeholder agreement mapping, which means mapping of the affiliation of individual stakeholders to interest groups,
- identification of stakeholder expectations,
- determination of the type of power of the stakeholders, i.e. their ability and potential to enforce the outcomes they expect,
- construction of the priority matrix: it allows for reflecting the degree of involvement of individual stakeholders in specific issues,
- monitoring stakeholders and updating the developed tools (e.g. priority matrices).

An important activity in the strategy of every enterprise should be to pursue continuous improvement in their relations with the environment. This requires not only initiating, but also maintaining a constant dialogue with stakeholders. This allows for building mutual trust in the long term, leading to mutual benefits which are consistent with the

expectations of both the enterprise and its environment.

#### V. FORMS OF STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IN ENTERPRISE ACTIVITIES: COMMUNICATION, CONSULTATION, PARTNERSHIP, DIALOGUE

The enterprise and its stakeholders form a strategic reality in which they act together by integrating markets, resources and organizational culture [8]. Identification of key stakeholders is essential to effectively engage them in the enterprise's activities.

There are four main forms of stakeholder engagement:

- communication,
- consultations,
- partnership,
- dialogue.

Communication with stakeholders is relatively the simplest and most popular tool for engaging stakeholders. It is possible to provide information about the functioning of the company or its initiatives to both internal and external stakeholders. Tools used for internal communication include: employee training, meetings, reports, newsletters and Intranet websites. External communication may occur through thematic conferences, websites, open meetings, press releases, and marketing communication. Obviously, it is important that the language of communication is each time adjusted to the specific group of recipients of the message [7].

Consultation with stakeholders is aimed at learning about their views on the problems being consulted. This can be a new product launched on the market, an advertising message or an assessment of the enterprise's philanthropic activity. The tools used for consultation include surveys, focus groups, meetings with stakeholders, and on-line feedback [7]. Partnership is a form of creating relations with stakeholders that requires the greatest commitment from them.

It is usually a long-term and labour-intensive relationship. Examples of forms of partnerships are: joint projects for sustainable development, joint initiatives with different stakeholder groups, associations and strategic cooperation [16]. Dialogue can be completely informal if the company does not have big opportunities and the groups of key stakeholders are easily accessible. However, in the case of larger organizations, whose list of stakeholders is not limited to a few items, the dialogue can be structured to ensure that all key stakeholder groups are reached and have equal opportunities to participate in the process.

The tools that can be used in this area include: advisory panels, stakeholder forums, summary meetings with key stakeholders, virtual involvement in the Internet [7].

## **VI. POLISH EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES IN THE FIELD OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ENGAGING SELECTED STAKEHOLDER GROUPS**

The role and mechanisms of CSR functioning differ depending on stakeholder groups [15]. Over the last few years, there has been a huge increase in the number of good practices in Poland implemented not only by large enterprises, but more and more often by small and medium-sized enterprises, whose corporate social responsibility has become a permanent part of activities. Some examples of good practices in this field in the context of internal and external stakeholders are described below.

### **CITI HANDLOWY: Employee Volunteering**

The Employee Volunteering Program at Citi Handlowy represents a motivator for personal development and the development of interpersonal skills. Bank employees also find room for action in the area of youth financial education within the framework of nationwide partnership programmes implemented jointly with large social partners, e.g. the National Bank of Poland (Narodowy Bank Polski), the Polish Financial Supervision Authority (Komisja Nadzoru Finansowego) or the Youth Entrepreneurship Foundation (Fundacja Młodzieżowej Przedsiębiorczości). Employees are the key target group of the Employee Volunteering Programme. Their role depends on their place in the corporate structure. Apart from the participation in individual and group projects organized by the Kronenberg Foundation and its partners, rank-and-file employees also play a significant role in building a network of volunteer leaders - people who engage their colleagues, family and friends in social activities. The bank believes that without cooperation with local social organisations, the Employee Volunteering Program would not have been possible. These organisations expect support from volunteers and organise workplaces for those in need. The range of institutions that benefit from volunteer support also includes health care centres, animal shelters and community centres. In the case of group volunteering projects, the role and responsibility of local institutions is bigger due to the need to plan activities, budget and logistics. In many cases, local NGOs cooperate with local media to promote projects implemented in cooperation with volunteers from Citi Handlowy. Benefits include improved internal communication between employees within the company, the acquisition of new organizational skills

by employees and the integration of employee teams participating in projects. An important element is the improvement of relations with the local community - in many places it is possible to establish long-term relations which could not be achieved only through financial support. Local partners, through cooperation with volunteers from the business community, adopt a different perspective on the social engagement of enterprises [10].

### **HENKEL: Building ecological activity of stakeholders**

The "Henkel: Green Grants" educational program was created to offer the enterprise an additional opportunity for communication with consumers in the field of ecology and environmental protection in order to strengthen its reputation as an environmentally and socially responsible enterprise. This program partly assumes the implementation of the principles of responsible business, because it engages local communities in solving environmental problems, offers a tool for building co-responsibility for the natural environment of producer and consumers. The aim of the program is also to build ecological awareness of children and youth, who are future consumers. Another benefit is the establishment of relations with a non-governmental organization dealing with ecological issues (Our Earth Foundation), which, as a social partner, developed the formal assumptions for the program. It does not act as a supervisory body but as a partner, which increases credibility of the company's CSR activities. All participants of the contest learned how to acquire additional funds for the implementation of ecological projects [10].

A small PR agency Toolbox Creative Communications (TCC) provides free PR services to a non-governmental organization working for the benefit of Polish-Jewish dialogue by promotion of cultural diversity and learning tolerance through education. These include such activities as: contacts with the media, organization of press conferences, development of websites, and cooperation with journalists. The enterprise has established new contacts and acquired new customers. Furthermore, several press releases on CSR activities were published on industry websites (PR & Marketing) [11].

The Kaczor Klimczyk Pucher Wypiór Adwokaci (KKPW) is a law office established by attorneys who, after many years of successful cooperation, decided to combine various professional experiences into one project. This allowed for creation of the team whose standards and quality of services are always set by honesty and respect for the client, faithfulness to tradition, professional ethics, and openness and ability to respond to the needs of contemporary world. Pro bono projects are of particular importance for the employees of the KKPW. All the employees are

engaged in non-profit activities that allow them to practice law and, first and foremost, to help those in need and people experiencing hardship. The office has been supporting the Polish Youth Association (Stowarzyszenie Polska Młodych), Emaus Community (Wspólnota Emaus) and the Social and Educational Association "Kuźnia" (Stowarzyszenie Społeczno-Edukacyjne „Kuźnia”) from Balice, which deals with providing equal educational opportunities for children and youth, helping children in difficult situations, organizing winter and summer holidays and maintaining national traditions and developing civil society [11].

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

Developing stakeholder relationships is a complex process, especially when the stakeholders are heterogeneous or dispersed. However, partnership relations with stakeholders are fundamental to the CSR policies. Corporate social responsibility built on the foundation of positive relations with various interest groups represents value added. Harmonious stakeholder relationships are one of the keys to competitiveness of the organization, building reputation and corporate image, and instilling attitudes of loyalty in various interest groups. One should always remember about the needs of all groups of key stakeholders and choose such forms of engagement that allow for their effective involvement in the enterprise's activities. Positive relations with various stakeholders improve their commitment, interest and understanding based on dialogue and effective communication. Therefore, it is worth identifying and starting communication with key stakeholders to maximize the potential benefits, not only for the enterprise but also for its social environment.

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