Social Responsibility Standards in the
Context of European Integration

Paraschiv Mihaela Oana

University of Bucharest, Faculty of Journalism and Communication,
onica_mihaela@yahoo.com

Abstract: Contemporary society faces nowadays major changes in perceptions, values and rules. In the '80's, many companies and corporations implemented new concepts – sustainability, responsibility and accountability. Ten years later, Social Accountability International and other similar organizations conceived and promoted the responsibility and accountability standards – SA8000 and AA1000. These standards help the corporations and the companies to implement better communication campaigns with their stakeholders. This paper wants to disclose the contain of these standards and how they are implemented in the Romanian corporations, in the context of the Romanian European Integration.

Key words: social responsibility campaign, accountability, standard, stakeholder, corporation

1.   Introduction

Society today is faced with major changes of representation, values, norms and implicitly, the alignment of political, economical and social environment to the new principles. The'80s have brought a new rule for the functioning of society and organizations - approach sustainable development which implies a daily and active involvement of organizations and public personalities in life and society issues. So, it was that today companies and public personalities to assess their rate of image depending on how socially responsible they are.

Social responsibility defines the image, changes it, consolidates it, or neutralize it. Under the new principles that are guidelines, people will no longer have to do with institutions that aren't responsible, with organizations that do not prove worthy to buy their products, with personalities that turn their back or ignore the problems and needs of individuals.

Social responsibility engages in all sectors of activity and influence the evolution of society on different directions – economical, political, and environmental. For example, trends and needs in the UK have led the establishment of a new ministry - Ministry of Social Responsibility. Also, in political area, are numerous - especially in the United States - charitable organizations supported by politicians or their wives, which promotes various social activities.

Organizations involved in community life and implementing social responsibility programs are much more appreciated by people, benefits being realized in three directions, namely: "features improved of corporate brands, more goodwill and loyalty of clients" [1] and even from investors or other groups of interest and "increased moral and commitment of labor " [2].

Joe Marconi[3] believes that social responsibility appears when an organization is involving in promoting a cause, when is dedicated to an issue or a cause, with the intention of doing something good. "To support a cause important to the organization's customers is not a free action, but is an

---

[1] Davis Anthony, *Everything You Should Know About Public Relations*, Publica Publisher, 2008, p. 177

[2] Idem

[3] Marconi Joe, *Public Relations. The Complete Guide,* Polirom Publisher, 2007, p. 214

expression of willingness to provide support to those communities which have in turn supported the company" [4].

In his volume *Everything You Should Know About Public Relations*, Anthony Davis believes that CSR offers a real benefit for organizations by providing feedback, identifying and clarifying issues. Thus, people agree to adopt a company, regardless of its field of activity, provided that the company adopts the local community. Also, studies have revealed that individuals prefer to engage in a company that develops CSR programs.

A MORI survey shows that in the 90s "the vast majority of people preferred employers which they perceive to be supporters of the community." Also, organizations that had the highest percentage of retention of employees had the highest percentage of retention of customers [5].

United Nations, European Union and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development are the three most important institutions that were involved in developing a framework to define social responsibility and to establish indicators by which a company can be assessed in a transparent manner. The following scheme reveals this framework:
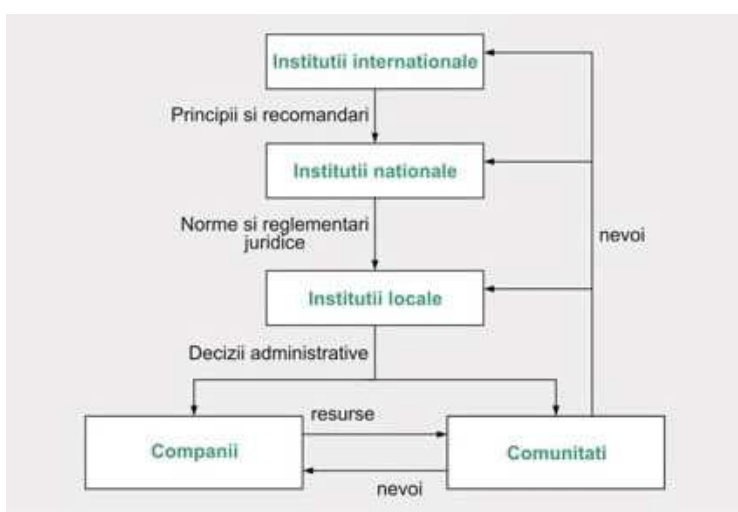

Fig. 1. CSR framework
(taken from the www.responsabilitatesociala.ro/ce-este-**csr**.html**)**

2.   Social Responsibility – Definitions

According to Business Dictionary[6], social responsibility - and accountability - assumes the measure that an organization is watchful to the visible concerns and priorities of internal and external stakeholders (community, employees, governmental or non-governmental organizations, management and owners / shareholders). This is reflected in the organization's commitment to certain factors (which may be or may not be directly linked to its processes), such as establishing an agreement with employees, health and hygiene, safety and environmental laws, respect for human rights and progress of the community and the working environment.

The concept of accountability has emerged as a result of the need for organizational transparency, a pressure increasingly being placed on companies for them to be more responsible in their actions with the environment and society, with the aim of sustainable development. Regarding the difference

---

[4] Idem

[5] Davis Anthony, *Everything You Should Know About Public Relations*, Publica Publisher, 2008, p. 179

[6] www.businessdictionary.com

between accountability and organizational transparency, it refers only to that accountability enables the transmission of negative feedback after taken a decision or after an action, while transparency enables negative feedback both before and during the making or implementation of a decision or action. Of course accountability involves waiting and taking a responsible behavior.

Accountability has emerged as a concept in 1956, in the article written by J.L. Austin, "A Pretext for an Apology", in which is using apologies for an example of speech. In UK, accountability or social responsibility has been identified by the Government in 1995 as one of the "Seven principles of public life". Recently, social responsibility has become an important point in discussions of the legitimacy of international / multinational / transnational organizations. Were established several non-governmental organizations that promote social responsibility - in the humanitarian sector may be exemplified HAPI (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International - and Alps (Accountability, Learning and Planning System of ActionAid).

Regarding the elaboration of principles that guides organizations to be accountable, they were formulated by the United Nations - Global Compact - the EU - UNI Europe Commerce engagement - ILO Declaration - International Labor Organization and the OECD Guide for Multinational Enterprises[7]. Some principles are identical to those of corporate social responsibility, but accountability is based on some other principles such as: support and protection of international human rights, corporation not to take part of abuses on individuals, freedom of association in trade unions (Global Compact and OECD Guidelines), removal of children exploitation, elimination of forced labor, the eradication of discrimination (Global Compact and UNI Commerce agreements), the prohibition of torture and ensure the dignity and the right to life, equality, solidarity, the right to health of employees (UNI).

Assuming by organizations of a responsible behavior, has as a first consequence, improving the image both inside and outside. Compliance with these rules - listed above - it causes employees to change their representation towards membership organization and identify interests, needs and commitments with the company.

3. Social Responsibility Standards

3.1. SA8000 Standard

To create a framework for conducting and tracking progress of social responsibility programs, have been created standards which address particularly to CSR and accountability. Thus, for corporate social responsibility were created Accountability standards AA1000, based on the 3BL principle (Triple Bottom Line), the guide Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Verite Guide for Monitoring, Social Accountability SA8000, environmental management standard ISO 14000 and ISO 14001 .

SA8000 Standard is a standard of social responsibility (in work practices area) - accountability - initiated by the organization Social Accountability International (SAI), which supports the elaboration by organizations of decent working conditions for its employees. This standard was created in 1997 with the primary aim of increasing public concern about inhumane working conditions of the developed countries. After a year of development by the management committee, composed of 25 experts, SA8000 was first put into practice, that in the end of 2007 to be accredited with this standard organizations in 65 countries and 67 industrial sectors. Currently, over 100 companies around the world are certified SA8000. Also, is told about the SA8000 that is a standard of performance and, indeed, the performance of a company reflects not only in the quality of their products offered to consumers, but also in the quality of services offered to internal people. This is because the internal people are the organization mirror, reflecting outside the image of company. In our country, unfortunately, the concept came much later, so in 10 years from the appearance of standard only three multinational companies are certified - one of which is a founding member of SAI (is the courier

---

[7] http://www.union-network.org/unisite/sectors/commerce/index.htm

company , TNT). Should be stated that this standard does not apply exclusively to large companies or multinational companies, but also to small and medium companies.

SA8000 standard is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN, on Child Rights Convention and several provisions of the International Labor Organization (ILO). Thus, SA8000 pursues implementation within organizations - regardless of their nature - the following areas of responsibility: work of minor persons, forced labor, health and safety, freedom of association, discrimination, disciplinary practices, working hours, wages and management systems:

- *Work of minor persons*: companies are not alloud to employ children under the age of 15 years, rehabilitation of children who are found working and remedy of this situation by companies;

- *Forced labour* : is not accepted slavery or forced labor, including in prisons, is not permitted detention of identity papers or money by employers or by recruitment firms;

- *Health and safety*: ensuring a safe and hygienic working environment; measures to prevent damage, regular training of employees regarding safety and hygienic norms, implementation of a system for detecting threats to health and safety of employees, access to water and toilets;

- *Freedom of association and organization in labor union*: respect the right to form and join working associations or labor union, where law prohibits these freedoms, it shall facilitate some parallel ways for association and union;

- *Discrimination*: is not allowed discrimination based on race, ethnicity, origin, religion, gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, political affiliation or age, also is not allowed sexual harassment;

- *Disciplinary practices*: are not permitted physical punishment, mental or physical constraint or verbal abuse;

- *Working hours*: organizations are in agreement with law enforcement, but are not allowed more than 48 hours per week and a day of rest per week, additional voluntary work is paid, but should not exceed 12 hours per week, additional work can be obligatory if is stated in the collective working contract;

- *Remuneration*: salaries should be aligned with laws and industry standards and be sufficient to meet the basic needs of workers and their families, are not allowed disciplinary deductions;

- *Management system for human resources*:   standard should be integrated into the system and practice of human resource management.

- According to company certification AllCert[8] , SA8000 standard applies to any company that is considering:

- Investigating and solving problems of employees or interested parties, and taking action to correct them;

- To elaborate a health and safety management system of in order to eliminate or minimize the risk for employees or other interested parties who might be exposed to risks regarding health and safety related to performed activities;

- To implement, maintain and permanently improve a management system of social responsibility;

- To ensure compliance with policy on social responsibility area;

- To prove this compliance to others;

- To seek certification / record management system of social responsibility by an external body

---

[8] http://www.allcert.ro/sa18001-2001.php

The SA8000 standardization program offers two separate manners for companies wishing to implement social responsibility. The first way is for retail companies, which may be members of the standard, and involves a commitment for doing business only with responsible suppliers. The second way, certification, is addressed to manufacturing companies and suppliers. The method for a company to obtain certification is quite complex and rigorous. First, the company must contact and request an audit from an accredited company, and then, during the preparation of audit report, must demonstrate that the organization has aligned its activities with standard SA8000, and finally it is obtained the certificate „Aplicant SA8000".

Benefits that implementation of this standard offers to companies are many: increasing of brand image and reputation, positioning against competitors, attracting and gaining the confidence of new customers, increase productivity and morale of employees, opening new markets, attract investments, demonstration of organizational transparency, and improving relationships with contractors and investors.

Of course, there are criticisms to the standard too. A first criticism, came from LARIC, is that employees are regarded and treated as simple objects of study and implementation of SA8000 is actually a simple profitable business[9]. LARIC members are of the opinion that during audit and even after obtaining the quality certificate SA8000, employees do not play an active role. Also, the question is that, during the audit, the employees are refusing to sustain their negative opinions related to management or related to working conditions, for the fear of reprisals. It is quite difficult to determine whether these criticisms are in fact true or not. SA8000 still faces implementation problems - some companies such as Chiquita, had problems with the implementation of certain chapters and, in addition, have found new chapters that could be adapted and adjusted for company profile.

3.2. AA1000 Standard

AA1000 is a standard of social responsibility developed by ISEA (Institute for Social Responsibility and Ethics - Institute for Social and Ethical Accountability), which supports and encourages ethical behavior within organizations and the business environment. The implementation of these ethical standards are of real benefit in the process of identifying stakeholder (interested groups). Such as assessing Bogdan Diaconu in a signed article in 22 Magazine[10], "AA1000 standard (…) is an effective way to verify extent to which companies take into account the expectations of interested groups". The author gives the example of Deutsche Telekom, which organizes an annual conference for the sustainability for its employees and stakeholder in order to create awareness towards social issues and to integrate in company activities the main concerns of social groups.

Unlike standard SA8000, AA1000 is divided into three subclasses standards namely: AA1000 Framework, AA1000 Assurance Standard (AA1000 AS) and the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (AA1000SES). This standard was created in 1999 and is currently implemented in more than 150 companies worldwide. In our country, no company has certification for AA1000 or one of its subclasses. To better understand the specifics of this standard AA1000, we will present in short, every assigned substandard.

AA1000 Framework: was developed to help organizations build their strategies of accountability and social responsibility through quality of responsibility, audit and social and ethical issues. This substandard is aiming companies wishing to integrate commitments towards stakeholders in their current activities. AA1000 Framework provides guidance to users on how to establish a systematic commitment towards interested groups, generating indicators, targets and a reporting system to ensure greater transparency, real responsibility towards stakeholders and increasing of organizational performance.

AA1000 Assurance Standard: covers the full range of transparency and organizational performance. To apply SA1000AS, Insurance Provider evaluates the credibility of sustainability report, sets the

---

[9] http://www.cleanclothes.org/codes/01- 08-codupdate.htm

[10] http://www.revista22.ro/html/index.php?art=3990&nr=2007-08-31

minimum systems and processes which provide relevant information and support organization's performance.

AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (AA1000SES): promotes the rights of interested groups to be heard, and also organizations obligation to respond to issues that are raised. This standard provides a sound basis for shaping, implementation, evaluation and provision of quality commitments towards stakeholders.

According to the most recent studies[11], the most used standard in this category is AA1000SA whose characteristics are:

- Covers the full range of organizational performance;

- Concentrates on material issue towards interested groups;

- Examines the complete understanding of organizations, their performance, the impact and the point of view of stakeholders

- Ensures a future that shows if the organization is able to fulfill its objectives and proposed targets and if it's able to meet other standards and expectations;

- Determines the basis for public declarations of insurance, which builds credibility of sustainability public reports;

- Supports and integrates access to insurance, using multiple suppliers and standards, including compatibility with GRI Guide.

- It applies to organizations of different types and sizes from various geographical areas, cultural and social;

- Requires bringing to the attention of Assurance Providers the skills and relationships with Reporting Organization. One example is the social responsibility report released by Vodafone[12]. According to the report (which is a requirement for certified companies with respectively standard), Vodafone has met the standard AA1000 on following principles:

- *Accomplishment*: precise identification of stakeholders and understanding their concerns and visions;

- *Materiality*: establishing importance of each objective which determines the content of social responsibility report;

- *Responsibility*: responsibility for the challenges and concerns.

Conclusions

Currently in our country are only three companies certified to these standards - SA8000 and AA1000 and implement them successfully in social campaigns. Although both standards have a great connection with certain acts and laws in relation to health and safety, human rights or labor code, can not say yet that they can be applied in any type of institution. That's why SAI, in collaboration with competent institutions and organizations that are already certified, are still working on finalizing requirements of these standards. A start is still felt in our country - the growing number of social campaigns, which may result in encouraging and guiding managers to adopt standards addressed not only to companies but also for society as a whole.

---

[11] http://www.sa-intl.org/

[12] http://www.vodafone.com/start/responsibility/our_approach/assurance/aa1000_assurance_standard.html

References

Dahlsrud, Alexander. (2006). *How Corporate Social Responsibility is Defined: an Analysis of 37 Definitions*, în *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, nr. 132

Davis, Anthony. (2008). *Everything You Should Know About Public Relations.* Bucureşti: Publica Publisher

Frigioiu, Nicolae. (2004). *The Image of Leaders and Political Organisations.* Bucureşti: comunicare.ro Publisher

Katasoulakos, P; Katasoulakos, Y. (2006). *A Multi-dimensional View of Corporate Responsibility*, in The 4CR approach to corporate responsaibility

Marconi, Joe. (2007). *Public Relations. The Complete Guide*. Iaşi: Polirom Publisher

Van Marrevijk, M. (2003). *Concepts and Definitions of CSR and Corporate Sustainability: Between Agency and Communion*, în *Journal of Business Ethics*, nr. 44

Online sources:
http://www.accountability21.net/a21form.aspx?ekfrm=1928
http://www.allcert.ro/sa18001-2001.php
www.businessdictionary.com
http://www.cleanclothes.org/codes/01-08-codupdate.htm
http://www.commdev.org/content/document/detail/669/
http://www.csrwire.com/page.cgi/about.html
www.prwave.ro
www.responsabilitatesociala.ro/ce-este-**csr**.html
http://www.revista22.ro/html/index.php?art=3990&nr=2007-08-31
http://www.sa-intl.org/
http://www.union-network.org/unisite/sectors/commerce/index.htm
http://www.vodafone.com/start/responsibility/our_approach/assurance/aa1000_assurance_standard.html
www.wikipedia.com
www.willey.interscience.com