

Environmental Sustainability: The Complex Nature of Managerial Activities

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ABSTRACT

The chapter is devoted to analyzing the nature and specifics of the successful implementation of corporate social responsibility and sustainability principles by businesses. The need for a shift in the way of organizing business processes was formed by international organizations, vital global social and economic issues and by the extensive pressure from stakeholders. Consequently, businesses are interested and motivated to integrate corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability principles into their business strategies to account for the needs of stakeholders and to get some financial and non-financial benefits. At the same time, as the result of the content analysis of the existing scientific literature, the theoretical model on the nature of CSR and sustainability activities were developed to prove the multi-dimensional essence of these modern business practices. Furthermore, the negative influence of an unethical political system and corruption on the efficiency and extent of CSR and sustainability principles implementation was shown. Additionally, CSR and sustainability initiatives were studied as efficient tools for minimizing and overcoming negative outcomes of current social and economic problems worldwide.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, sustainability, ethics, social capital, stakeholders.

Introduction

Nowadays the importance and necessity of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability as an orientation for the formation of the business strategy are determined by international institutions, national governments and the expressed needs and expectations presented by stakeholders. It should be mentioned, that CSR practices were seen as needed when the global social and economic issues started to negatively affect the well-being of the local population and at the global level. One of the possible solutions to those mentioned issues was theorized in the form of CSR (Bowen 1953). Furthermore, the vital need for implementing sustainability principles was formed by the United Nations General Assembly, which developed The Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, including 17 social, humanitarian and economic global goals as No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reduced Inequality, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life Below Water, Life On Land, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, Partnerships for the Goals (The Sustainable Development Goals 2015).

Accordingly, businesses were advised to adopt practices that can minimize the global social, economic and environmental issues, besides that, stakeholders were also demanding an active role of businesses in social and environmental problem-solving processes, by adopting those activities businesses were able to keep the gained market share, loyal consumers and obtain new competitive advantages, etc.

Previously mentioned keeps the attention of an ever-enlarging number of scientists, policymakers and representatives of businesses focused on the variety of issues associated with the process of implementation of CSR and sustainability principles. Scientists are interested in studying the main factors that determine the efficiency of CSR and sustainability practices, policymakers are trying to find a way how those mutually efficient businesses practices can be motivated and encouraged by the state, and at the same time, business representatives are aiming at analyzing possible financial and non-financial benefits comparing them with the associated investments in sustainability innovations and technologies.

Methods

To reach the main objectives of the chapter, the methodology of a systematic review was used (Danese 2018). Thus, the inductive analysis was performed and, based on it, a theoretical model on CSR and sustainability practices was developed. The systematic analysis was done according to the following stages:

Stage 1. Determining the key concepts of CSR and sustainability principles and applied by businesses practices based on scientific papers published in reputable peer-reviewed journals.

Stage 2. The manual content analysis was performed and as a result of it, the main related social, technological and economic business activities fulfilled by businesses to reach the efficient implementation of CSR and sustainability were determined.

Stage 3. Thus, based on the detailed content analysis of all related concepts and theories that influence the efficiency of implementation of CSR and sustainability principles the theoretical model on the nature of managerial activities towards environmental sustainability was developed.

Stage 4. The discussion of found results was done and further research directions were given.

The chapter aims at a comprehensive systematic analysis of the currently existing literature in order to study the social, economic, environmental and technological nature of the process of an efficient implementation of CSR and sustainability principles. The latest literature highlighted the need to develop a theoretical model on CSR and sustainability practices that can be used as a roadmap by organizations that are trying to follow those practices (Khan 2021, Saha 2021). It should be mentioned, that authors, as a rule, focus on a particular business or a sector of the economy (Pinuer 2022, Wentzel 2022, Yousaf 2021), thus, the design of a general model suitable for organizations in various sectors of the economy or countries was highly demanded.

Results and Discussions

As it is known, environmental sustainability is seen by businesses mostly as a strategy of getting environmental competitive advantages through adopting modern environmental oriented practices and can be determined according to the following policies as a specific entrepreneurial orientation that determines the overall approach of making environmental decisions within an organization, its vision and behavior at the market, the level of proactiveness and involvement of environmental activities; customer orientation towards environmental issues that includes the common beliefs and social norms regarding the acceptance and integration of public environmental needs into the business strategy, corporate social responsibility (CSR) which shows the business readiness and wiliness to take part into the global environmental and social problem-solving processes (Pinuer et al. 2022). Accordingly, the practice of implementing CSR is seen as a key component and in a way as a compulsory precondition of reaching the efficient level of environmental sustainability by businesses nowadays.

Furthermore, another approach should be mentioned, according to which, an effective fulfillment of environmental sustainability can be achieved by introducing the following practices as launching and supporting environmental management initiatives, thus, the environmental oriented projects should be determined and realized according to the decisions of the top management; environmental management system, which should be established and modified to respond to the changes in the social and economic business environment, the system itself is seen as a strategic organizational roadmap on the environmental problem-solving activities; corporate social responsibility, that represents the extension of responsibilities that an organization is ready to take as in CSR social and other issues related to all stakeholders are included rather than just environmental (Yousaf et al. 2021).

It's important to mention, that the personal characteristics of the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) have a great impact on the efficiency of sustainability activities, thus, the level of education of CEOs can positively or negatively affect the level of involvement and the depth of integrating sustainability activities into business strategy. So, the holders of higher engineering or related science degrees show a higher level of readiness to invest in research and development, sustainability innovations and to adopt a proactive strategy towards environmental sustainability compared to CEOs with other specializations.

Also, the longer the CEOs are taking their responsibilities the higher the level of involvement in the social and environmental problem-solving process and, consequently, the better the overall financial and environmental performance of an organization (Ghardallou 2022).

Besides that, the composition of the CEOs plays a crucial role in the efficiency of implementation of CSR and sustainability activities, thus, having a combination of representatives from different nations leads to a higher level of acceptance of CSR and sustainability principles, stimulates the spreading of these new activities among businesses in general (Tandoh 2022).

Connectedness to Nature

Regarding the personal characteristics of all related stakeholders, the concept of connectedness to nature should be discussed. Connectedness to nature shows stakeholders' values, social norms and patterns of behavior toward nature. Thus, following the inner social and ethical norms, that were formed while interacting with the society, individuals decide how they are going to act, meaning if they are going to pay attention to the possible harmful outcomes of their activities for the nature or they will stay indifferent regarding the environmental consequences of their lifestyle (Jilani 2021). Therefore, the higher share of the population, employees or stakeholders feel a strong connectedness to nature, the higher level of integration of CSR and sustainability activities in business strategy will be seen, in turn, it will lead to higher environmental and corporate performance (Hongxin et al. 2022).

Additionally, based on the published corporate social responsibility and sustainability reports of businesses, the variety of environmental activities was determined and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Variety of environmental activities.

<i>Managerial</i>	<i>Technical</i>	<i>Social</i>
Eco certification	Shift to renewable sources of energy, reduction in energy consumption	Education on environmental issues
Eco-oriented volunteering and charity	Reduction of the greenhouse gas emission	Eco-oriented volunteering and charity
	Waste reduction, recycling	
	Reduction of water use	Access to recreation for communities
	Protecting ecosystem	
	Sustainable resources in production	
	Tree planting	
	Reduction of chemicals in production	

Source: developed by the author based on (Grazhevskaja and Mostepaniuk 2020).

Sustainable Governance

The process of integrating sustainability principles into the business strategy is limited by the main issue regarding ensuring sustainable value creation in the long-term perspective (Hristov et al. 2021).

It should be mentioned that besides stakeholders that put additional pressure on businesses regarding their attitude and the degree of involvement in sustainability-oriented activities, international organizations such as the European Commission (2022), ISO, specifically “ISO 26000 Social Responsibility” (2022) and the Global Reporting Initiative (2022) also recommend integrating sustainability principles into the business strategy. According to their recommendations, further adoption of sustainability principles will have a wide impact on the creation of culture and moral norms oriented towards the social and environmental consequences of business activities, as well as the incorporation of stakeholders’ needs with the organization’s interests. From the business perspective, the benefits of the integration of sustainability principles into the business strategy are seen as follows (Hristov et al. 2021, Wentzel et al. 2022):

- Financial advantages through cost reduction and revenue growth, can be reached as the result of material substitution, smaller amount of used resources, green packaging, lowering energy consumption in the production processes, waste disposal, usage of renewable resources, reusing and recycling inputs, the use of eco-innovations;

- Corporate image and reputation as the integration of sustainability practices into the business strategy is positively perceived outside an organization, meaning by actual and

potential clients, provides new opportunities regarding future collaborations, stimulates entering new market segments, makes stronger consumer loyalty, provides access to social initiatives in cooperation with universities and public institutions, helps an organization to get a competitive advantage and increase brand value in general;

- Stakeholders' perception of current and potential clients, investors, suppliers, employees and financial institutions influences their business decisions depending on the level of involvement of an organization in sustainability activities. Furthermore, this leads to gaining non-economic benefits, namely improving brand reputation, consumer retention, creating value for the society, getting easier access and more favorable conditions while interacting with financial institutions because of previously built-up trustful relationships between an organization and their stakeholders;

- Cultural change within an organization and community, moreover, it modifies the organizational culture, corporate strategy and develops sustainability goals, which include employees working space, involvement, university and public institutions cooperation.

Ethics

The role of ethics in CSR and sustainability practices should not be underestimated, thus, in business perspective ethics is defined as moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity (Torelli 2021). In this context, it should be mentioned that the first stage in a shift towards CRS and sustainability activities is to perform business activities according to the generally accepted moral norms and principles. It is impossible to implement sustainability principles without following the ethical standards and commonly shared moral values by businesses.

Meaning, that businesses that violate the universal ethical norms will be seen as "dishonest" and "unethical", thus, will be losing their loyal consumers, partners, etc. So, to be able to get competitive advantages from CSR and sustainability, businesses should first of all be completely ethical and this information should be spread among all their stakeholders. Moreover, an unethical way of doing business will lead to higher risks and lower efficiency of CSR and sustainability activities as a stakeholder will not consider those practices as sincere and serious.

Here the extreme case should be discussed, when businesses use and follow incomplete communication and reporting, meaning hiding/misrepresenting undesirable information, performing activities, receiving outcomes, exaggerating positive sides and underestimating

negative ones. Those practices can be called “greenwashing” if they are seen regarding the environmentally oriented activities of businesses (Torelli 2021). As a rule, the practice of “greenwashing” is seen among unethical businesses that are aiming at getting benefits without paying the corresponding costs. Thus, a false-positive perception is created, that has the same consequences as the true-positive perception, meaning that it creates the positive feedback and image of an organization, belief that it is following practices that are socially and environmentally orientated. Therefore, businesses that follow the strategy of “greenwashing” starting with unethical practices, but, despite that, will be seen and recognized as truly ethical, as only organizations that follow the commonly accepted moral norms can be involved in environmental and social problem-solving processes.

It should be stated, that stakeholders can judge the level of ethics only with time, as later the results of this social and environmental responsibility will be obvious, but the benefits will be already received and used by that kind of unethical organizations. In this case, the government should intervene by requesting to provide an access to business performance information for all the stakeholders and to make some independent evaluation of business performance to avoid unfair creation of a positive image of an organization, competitive advantages and to enlarge the number of its loyal consumers, etc.

In this context, the concept of authenticity perceived by stakeholders should be discussed. Perceived authenticity shows the inner attitude of stakeholders towards the level of sincerity and real purposes of integrating social and environmental activities into business strategy. Hence, the positive perception of stakeholders, meaning that they truly believe that an organization is willing to minimize the harmful impact on the environment, etc. leads to the higher environmental performance of an organization through getting access to financial and non-financial benefits from following sustainability and CSR initiatives. In contrast, if stakeholders consider environmental and social activities just as a strategy of getting environmental advantages and do not see the inner motivation of an organization it will lead to the false formation of a green reputation and image of an organization, which will prevent an organization from receiving some of the benefits (Yousaf et al. 2021).

Green HRM

As the pressure from the stakeholders and other external economic, social and political changes force businesses to switch towards CSR and sustainability practices that are aimed at dealing with social and environmental issues, accordingly, businesses are actively

implementing CSR and sustainability principles throughout the whole business activities and integrating the new approaches of doing business in their business strategy. It is a common practice for businesses to implement the principles of green human resource management (GHRM) in their activities. First of all, GHRM is seen as a set of activities associated with the initiation, implementation and continuous maintenance to sustain the green ideas and orientations within employees of an organization (Zhao et al. 2021, Herrera and Heras-Rosas 2020). The result of an efficient implementation of GRHM can be seen as highly motivated and empowered employees that are truly involved in the environmental problem-solving process, specifically, it is important in regard to construction of green projects and other creative and innovative solutions and approaches, etc.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that a sustainable supply chain can create second-order social capital, which is seen as resources and expertise developed by the organization's stakeholders (Zhao et al. 2021, Bazylevych et al. 2019). Thus, second-order social capital is derived from the connections and relationships of consumers and suppliers. Accordingly, an organization will be able to access the information and resources that are beyond its direct social network including its stakeholders.

Creation of Shared Values

While studying the specifics of CSR and sustainability principles implementation, the creating shared value theory should be mentioned. The authors of the theory defined the creation of shared values as activities that are aiming at rethinking products and markets to identify and meet unmet needs; redefining productivity in the value chain to eliminate risks and improve productivity; and the creation of ancillary industry clusters by enriching the extremal network that supports the company's operations, furthermore, those activities lead to the creation of opportunities for other market actors by enlarging the value and an increase in social and organizational benefits (Porter and Kramer 2011). Besides that, the creation of shared value involves individuals, social groups, organizations and their business environment, meaning that it is an interrelated process with various stakeholders, including companies, value chain partners and society (Yang and Yan 2020). In general understanding, CSR and the creation of shared value theories have some common features, specifically, they are seen as “doing well by doing good” and both are aiming at integrating the social and environmental problem-solving activities into the business strategy. At the same time, CSR is seen as a practice required and needed by the stakeholders, why the creation of shared value

is understood as an inner need targeting balancing between economic and social benefits, that will have continuous return because of identifying new needs and, thus, creating or expanding the existing market including the improvement in services that are needed for that new market, changes in packing, that can have a positive impact on the costs and environmental degradation, improving the skills of suppliers, retailers and other related stakeholders, etc. It should be mentioned that to ensure the efficient implementation of CSR and sustainability principles the fulfillment of ideas of creation of shared value theory should be taken as a compulsory precondition.

Sustainable Supply Chain Management

A supply chain, as a rule, is determined by a variety of organizations that are involved in the forward and backward flows of information, services, finance and products from primary suppliers through a channel to consumers or end-users (Khan et al. 2021). While talking about the level of involvement in the environmental problem-solving, it should be mentioned that it's possible to have a situation when some partners of the supply chain are highly involved in sustainability practices, while others are staying neutral. Today, with the increase in the formed public pressure regarding the role of businesses in the solving of vital global social and environmental issues, businesses are transforming already existing practices according to the expectations of the stakeholders. Thus, sustainable supply chain practices aim at dealing with ecological issues namely reduction in the use of energy, lethal chemicals, air contamination, implementation of sustainable technologies in their activities to increase the efficiency of an organization. In this context, it should be stated, that inbound logistics is associated with activities linked to the internal supply chain and production, while outbound logistics is concentrated on consumer wants recognition, productivity and quality. Therefore, adopting the principles of a sustainable supply chain will improve financial and environmental presentation for the supply chain partners that support the whole range of outcomes, which will ensure the formation of competitive advantages.

Additionally, an efficient adaptation of the sustainable supply chain principles requires constant control and monitoring of the relationships and interactions among participants of the supply chain and stakeholders, based on their image and stakeholders' perception of the overall attitude towards an organization, its business profit and a market share will be determined (Khan et al. 2021). Moreover, active and extensive implementation of the sustainable supply chain principles, constant evaluation of their efficiency and modification

if required allows an organization to reach the highest level of sustainability efficiency, which stresses the essential need for development and maintenance of the sustainable supply chain approaches. Besides that, it should be highlighted that as the principles of sustainable supply chain overlap with the principles of CSR, businesses by adopting a sustainable supply chain are getting involved in CSR practices as well.

Business Groups and Networks

As it is known, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are lacking resources, the scale of production and benefits-awareness to be able to actively participate in the social and environmental problem-solving processes, that is why, it is a good practice to form a business group, which includes few SMEs (Liakh and Spigarelli 2020). Specifically, it can be seen during the stages of transformation or shifting towards a new business strategy as a response to the constantly changing economic, social and political environment, that put additional pressure on each SME. During the transformation period, the elements of the previous business strategy are not relevant anymore, but the new one is only at its early stages of development, meaning that during this time the risks are getting extremely high, which makes it almost impossible to survive for an individual organization. But in the case of the formation of a business group, mentioned risks will be distributed, so the group itself will be able to survive and efficiently adopt the new business strategy, as the efforts will be consolidated. At the same time, while joining a business group, SMEs form networks, that can be defined as building up stable relationships among participating SMEs, but despite being in contracting relationships with other market actors, participating SMEs legally are remaining independent. Additionally, a business group can be seen as a type of a network, where legally independent participants are operating under the common ownership, administrative and financial control utilizing formal or informal links (Liakh and Spigarelli 2020).

Among key advantages of forming a business group, the following should be mentioned as reduced transaction costs, shared risks and resources, exchange of knowledge of clients, industries, foreign markets, moreover, all participants receive a positive referral from other members of the business group concerning the reputation, image, reliability, etc. In the context of social and environmental problem-solving, it should be stated that a business group stimulates the exchange, discussion and development of the environment-oriented innovations, later, a business group should invest in environmental innovations once, but the benefits of those new technologies will be available for all SMEs of that group. Therefore, forming a business group can be seen as the only way to the involvement of SMEs in the

social and environmental problem-solving process and, consequently, the efficient implementation of CSR and sustainability principles, integrating them into the business strategy of the whole group of SMEs.

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the multi-nature essentials that can ensure the efficient implementation of CSR and sustainability activities by businesses, the theoretical model on the nature of managerial activities towards environmental sustainability was developed (Figure 1).

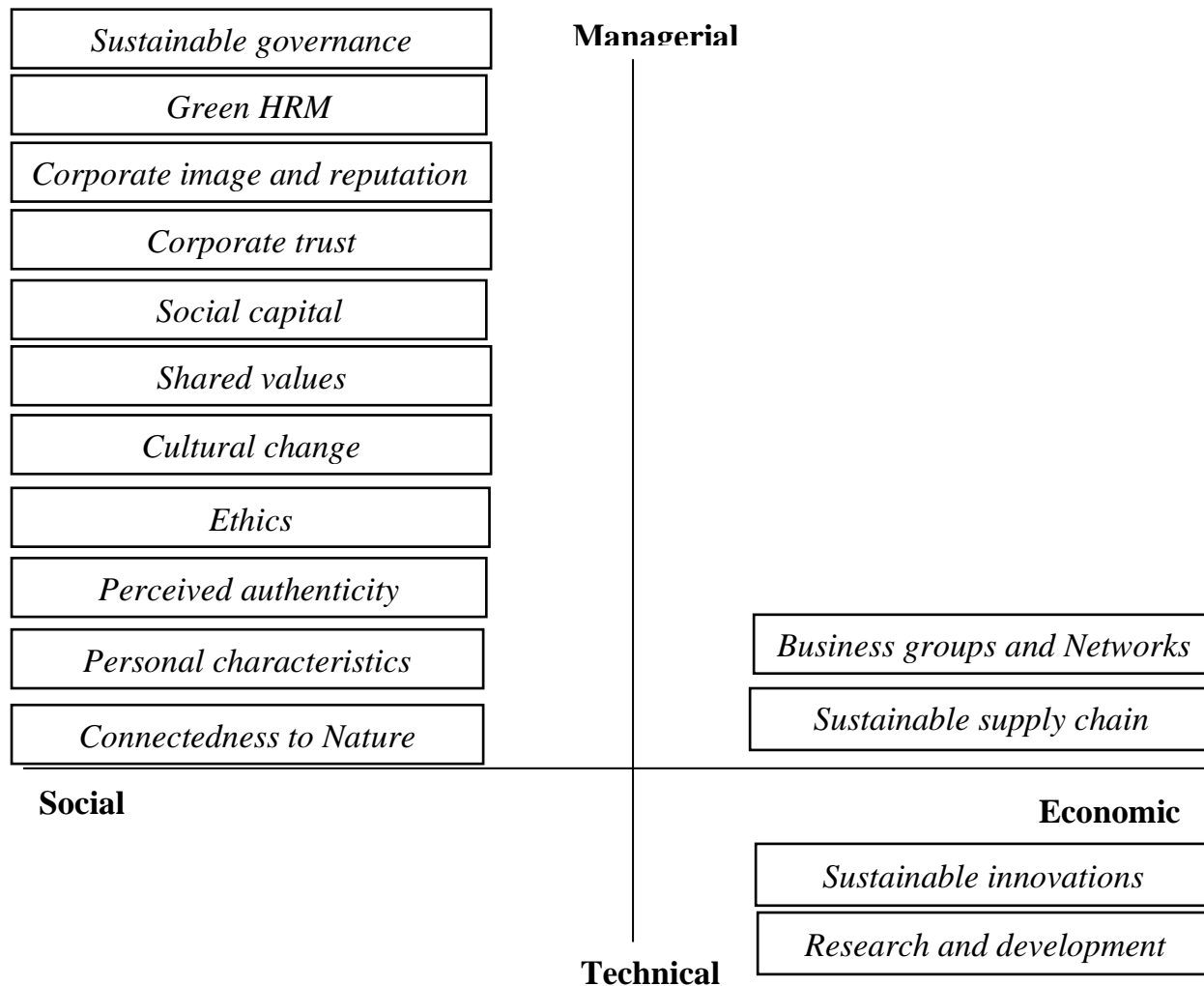


Figure 1. The model on the nature of managerial activities towards environmental sustainability.

According to the model, such activities as launching green HRM, forming trustful relations between employees, suppliers, dealers and other stakeholders, promoting the further accumulation of social capital and shared values, stimulating cultural changes and norms regarding environmental issues, which modifies personal characteristics including personal attitude towards nature, presenting the inner motivation of an organization to participate in

environmental problem-solving have the dual nature as they are used as managerial practices and directly affect the overall creation and gathering of social capital at the national and global level. At the same time, research and development, as well as sustainable innovations first of all are aiming at technical improvements, which, consequently, lead to economic efficiency and other competitive advantages. Lastly, such practices as implementing the principles of a sustainable supply chain, forming business groups and networks are seen as managerial tools that focus on the creation of sustainable and favorable links with other market actors, using of which allows businesses to employ available resources in the most rational and economically efficient manner.

Political System and Corruption

Additionally, it should be said, that exclusively the attempts and activities made by businesses cannot determine and predict the efficiency of CSR and sustainability practices, as many external factors can influence those activities. Among those factors are the political system and the level of corruption that directly depends on the political elites in each particular country (Saha et al. 2021). Thus, the existence of a high level of corruption means that the public officers are involved in the process of making decisions by businesses, including CSR and sustainability initiatives and activities. Under these conditions, businesses are restricted in their activities, which can discourage them from adopting and getting involved in social and environmental problem-solving processes that are highly requested and needed by stakeholders, consequently, businesses will not be able to get an environmental competitive advantage and stay competitive at the global market, in turn, it will prevent the national economy from its potential economic growth. Based on mentioned, the high level of corruption can reduce the efficiency of CSR and sustainability activities and leads to an overall economic recession. Besides that, a high level of corruption allows unethical state intervention in business activities, meaning that businesses themselves will not be acting according to the commonly accepted moral norms and ethics, which is also seen as a factor that predicts the dishonest implementation of principles of CSR and sustainability, which can be determined as greenwashing.

As a rule, the high level of corruption is formed by unfair and dishonest politicians, which aim at getting financial and non-financial personal benefits rather than providing favorable financial and legal conditions to businesses, stimulating the development of competitive entrepreneurs, investing in research and developments, supporting the adoption of CSR and sustainability principles at the national level. The possible influence of the level

of corruption and the political system on the efficiency of environmental and social business practices is shown in Figure 2.

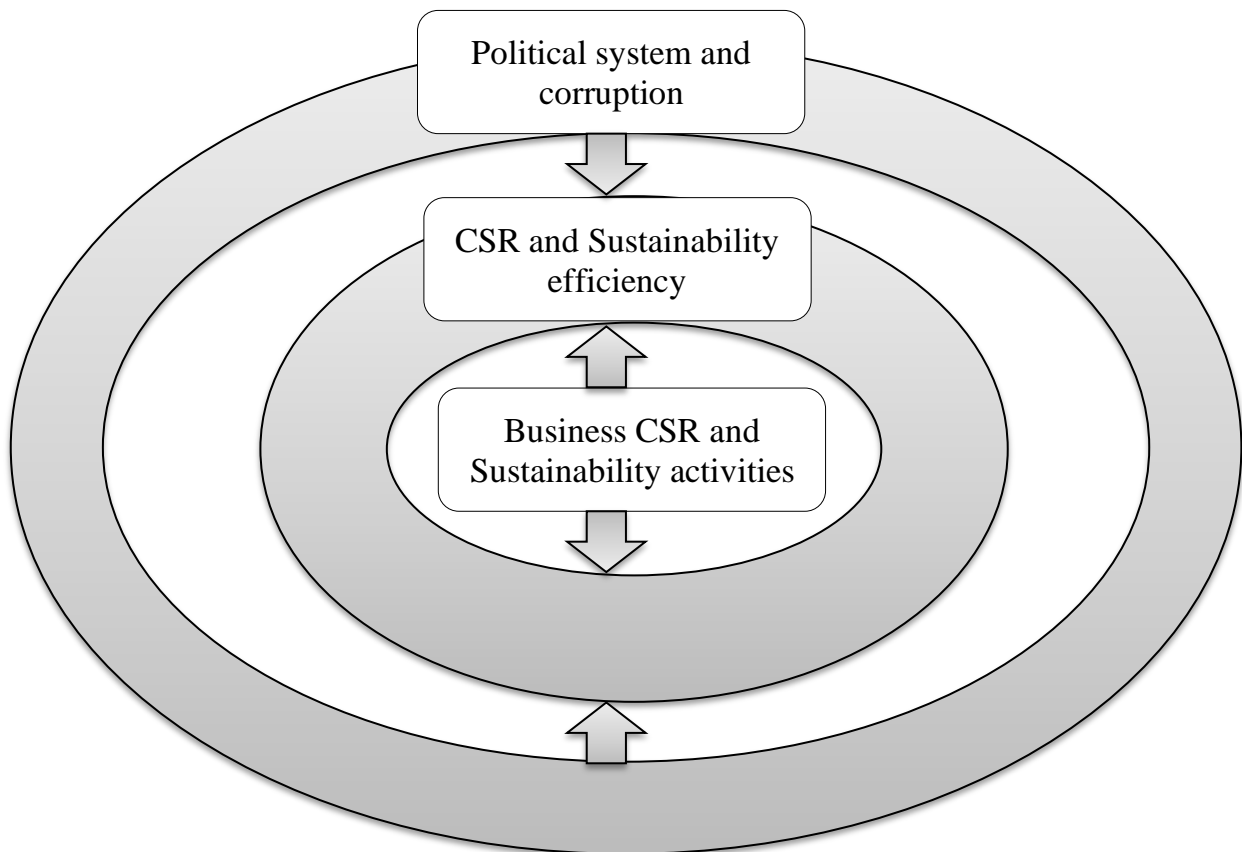


Figure 2. The model on the external and internal influences on the efficiency of CSR and Sustainability activities.

Source: developed by the author.

In this context, it should be highlighted that an unfair and dishonest external social and economic environment will negatively affect the efficiency of CSR and sustainability activities regardless of the inner and sincere attitude of an organization and its employees towards those practices. Besides mentioning the countries with weak and corrupted political systems, there are several social, economic and environmental issues seen all around the globe, namely disbalances in national budgets, the extensive financial pressure on the state because of the aging population, massive outflow of the labor force, the existence of grey economy, continuous resource deprivation and environmental degradation, etc., solving of which requires the joint efforts of all economic actors as the state, businesses and other stakeholders. Consequently, the implementation of CSR and sustainability principles by businesses can be determined as a way of eliminating vital global issues as those practices are seen as a mutually beneficial interaction and cooperation between three groups of economic actors, where all individual, corporate and state interests are consolidated.

Thus, integrating CSR and sustainability principles into business strategy will make the following favorable changes concerning the global social, economic and environmental issues (Grazhevska and Mostepaniuk 2021):

- When businesses provide additional social services to their employees or local community it reduces the financial pressure on the local budget and can spare some funds to be used on other needed directions or investments;
- While providing sustainable working conditions businesses can prevent the outflow of the labor force, which, in turn, will stimulate the overall economic growth of the country;
- By following the ethical and moral norms businesses will limit the expansion of the grey economy, where employers are trying to avoid obeying the formed governmental system of rules and obligations, which as well will positively influence economic growth;
- At the same time, integration of CSR and sustainability principles into the business strategy stimulates the formation of trustful relationships among employees, suppliers, dealers and consumers, networks and business groups, shared values, meaning that those practices ensure the building up and accumulation of social capital, which nowadays is seen as one of the most important preconditions for further economic growth and obtaining competitive advantages in general.

Conclusions and Further Researches Directions

Implementation of the methodology of a systematic review on the specifics of the adoption of CSR and sustainability principles allowed to show the multi-nature of this process, meaning that using some managerial practices leads to multi-dimensional results, which were divided into three groups as social, economic, and technological. Such practices as "green HRM" aim at forming a pro-environmental attitude in employees and setting up an environmentally oriented corporate atmosphere, which, in turn, changes the commonly accepted moral norms and beliefs, stimulates the creation and accumulation of social capital and shared value, and encourages ethical behavior of employees and other stakeholders.

At the same time, technical initiatives such as investments in research and development and sustainability innovations ensure future economic and financial benefits, while the formation of business groups and networks and the adoption of sustainable supply chain principles provide economic competitive advantages for such CSR and sustainability-oriented businesses. Additionally, it was proved that unfavorable external factors such as the unethical

political system and corruption can prevent businesses from shifting towards CSR and sustainability practices or reduce the efficiency of implementation of those practices. Thus, a high level of corruption will restrict the freedom of business activities, meaning that businesses will not be able to get environmental competitive advantages and because of that lose the market share of the global market. The unethical political system can be determined based on its main goal to meet the personal interests of the public offices rather than to support and stimulate the development of the free market and innovative business practices.

Corporate social responsibility and sustainability activities can eliminate the negative outcomes of the global social, economic and environmental issues such as a massive outflow of the labor force, extreme financial pressure on local budgets and population aging. So, it is necessary for businesses to actively follow those innovative business strategies that can provide financial and non-financial benefits for an organization and the whole society as well. Based on the above-mentioned, future studies should focus on providing practical recommendations for organizations regarding an efficient implantation of CSR and sustainability practices, analyzing possible economic, social and technical challenges that can arise for businesses while shifting from a traditional way of organizing business toward the sustainability-oriented and the methods of overcoming those challenges.

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