

The Perception of Social Responsibility among Students in Higher Education

László Berényi

*Institute of Management Science, University of Miskolc, H-3515 Miskolc-Egyetemváros,
Hungary*

e-mail: szvblaci@uni-miskolc.hu

Abstract

Professional solutions, including management systems and tool set presumes a certain level of knowledge about the topic. Sustainable development can be interpreted in many ways, an engineer or an economist will emphasise different aspects. Furthermore, personal aspects and non-professional opinions must be considered because these will influence both consumer choice and business strategy. The paper analysis the difference of opinions about sustainable development and CSR between bachelor and master level students. It can be concluded that the bachelor students have a more hopeful opinion but differences are not significant in each factor.

Introduction

Personal and professional opinions about a product, service, process or organisation may be basically different from each other. The knowledge level of customers is limited and influenced by e.g. advertisement, news, and opinion of friends. Professional knowledge may be available at the product developers, producers and dealers. An interesting challenge comes from the fact that the corporation owners and decision makers may be in the absence of the relevant knowledge elements.

In order to be able to solve the global problems the reasoning above is particularly true. Exploring the personal elements of thinking is useful because it allows to develop both tool set of professional support and the educational efforts.

Experimental

The reports about the limit to growth has forecasted a global social and ecological disaster if the present consuming habits were continued [1] [2]. The proposals were rejected but it has begun finding the way out. The concept of sustainable development [3] and CSR (corporate social responsibility) [4] are to highlight as complex managing perspectives. The idea of true responsibility [5] freshens the pursuits.

These concepts and the tool set behind them is continuously developed, differentiation may disappear in personal thinking:

- The ecological, social and economical pillars of sustainable development have an equal importance, but in practice the economic one covers both the limit of feasibility of necessary actions and escape from the responsibility.
- The concept of CSR is earlier than sustainable development [6], however its popularity is due to the limits of sustainability. CSR introduces ecological and social issues as clearly subordinated ones to business goals.
- True responsibility refines the challenges and possibilities. A truly responsible corporation follows the basic principles of minimising transportation, maximal justice in decision making, avoid of economism, and producing sustainable products.

The empirical results presented in this paper does not seeks the practical differences of the theoretical models. The paper focuses on the comprehensive personal opinions of some

selected factors of a wider research. There is a comparison between the subsamples of bachelor and master students, the analysis tries to explore whether the opinions differs significantly between them or not.

The research on the characteristics of the future management generation has been launched at the Institute of Management Science, University of Miskolc in 2013. The main goal is to give an overview about the personal opinions, knowledge and attitudes of higher education students who will give the next generation of corporate decision makers of corporations.

The research sample covers respondents of the University of Miskolc in the data collection period of autumn, 2014. The sample includes 269 respondents, 221 bachelor and 48 master students. The analysis uses the independent samples t-test, calculated with the support of the SPSS software. The results are not representative because the respondents are from the same university and limited mainly to economical students and some mechanical engineering and environmental engineering students.

Results and discussion

Components of sustainability

The survey asked to evaluate the importance of some issues related to sustainable development on a 1..6 scale. The results may show a bias in opinions, each factor is evaluated rather important than not, but relative comparison is allowed and useful. The overall picture signs that social and environmental issues are more important than technological and economic issues for the respondents.

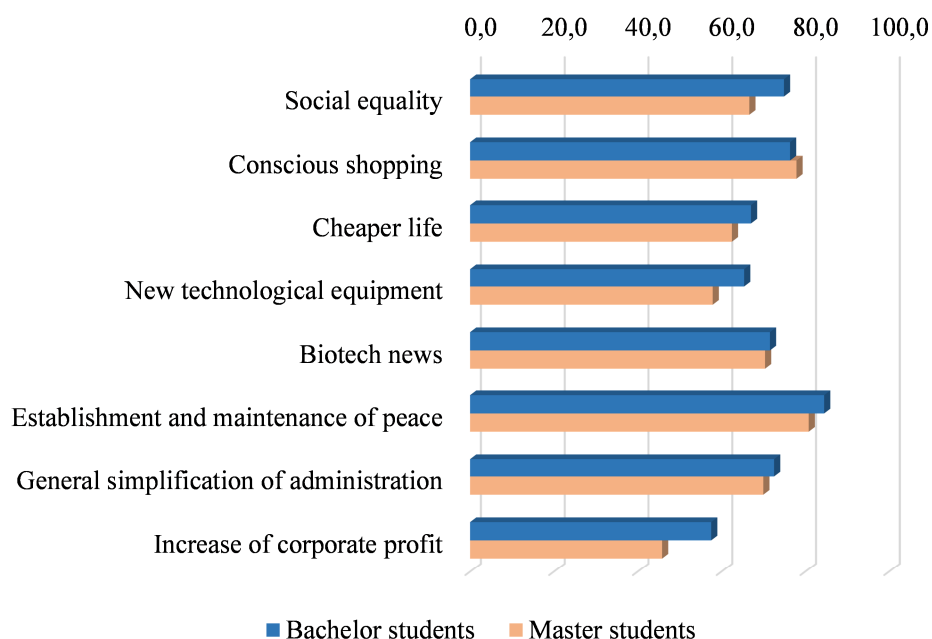


Figure 1. Bachelors and master students about sustainability (own edition, data on 0..100 scale)

Figure 1. highlights the differences between the subsamples. Bachelor students give generally higher importance to the studied factors, but significant difference is only detected in case of social equality, new technological equipment and the importance of corporate profit (Table 1.)

Table 1. summarises the results of the analysis between the total sample, bachelor and master level students. Figures are converted to 0.100 scale for an easier overview.

	Total sample	Bachelor students	Master students	Statistical results of comparison*
Social equality	73.5	74.9	66.7	t(267)=2.391 p=.017 d=.413 95% CI [0.073, 0.754]
Conscious shopping	76.7	76.4	77.9	t(267)=-0.479 p=.633 d=-0.077 95% CI [-0.393, 0.239]
Cheaper life	66.2	67.1	62.5	t(267)=1.288 p=.199 d=0.228 95% CI [-0.120, 0.576]
New technological equipment	64.1	65.4	57.9	t(267)=2.048 p=.042 d=0.376 95% CI [0.015, 0.737]
Biotech news	71.4	71.6	70.4	t(267)=.0337 p=.736 d=0.058 95% CI [-0.283, 0.399]
Establishment and maintenance of peace	83.9	84.5	80.8	t(267)=1.131 p=.259 d=0.185 95% CI [-0.137, 0.506]
General simplification of administration	72.1	72.6	70.0	t(61.436)=.0590 p=.557 d=0.139 95% CI [-0.308, 0.566]
Increase of corporate profit	55.5	57.6	45.8	t(62.143)=2.648 p=.010 d=0.586 95% CI [0.144, 1.029]

*t(df): degree of freedom, p: 2-tailed significance level d: mean difference CI: confidence interval

Table1. Opinions about the components of sustainability (own edition, data on 0.100 scale)

Judgment on CSR

Another interesting question is what the next generation of decision makers think about CSR. CSR may cover the corporate efforts in harmony with the business strategy. However, the tools and methods may give possibilities for increasing profit by mystification of consumers. The survey formed some statements based on expert interviews. Table 2. summarises the results of the total sample and subsamples, including the statistical analysis of comparison. Data collection and presentation uses the same method as in previous chapter.

There are significant differences between bachelor and master students are detected in opinions about the problem-masking role (responses of bachelor students show the lower average) of CSR and the level of required expenses (master students rather believe in the lower expenses than bachelors).

There are non-significant, but other remarkable differences in thinking to highlight. CSR as tool of masking problems and dependence of successfulness on corporation size are to mention because of the inverse evaluation of the subsamples, but the responses show the lower trust in usefulness of CSR among master students.

	Total sample	Bachelor students	Master students	Statistical results of comparison*
Helps to achieve sustainability	67.6	68.4	64.1	t(216)=1.194 p=.234 d=0.214 95% CI [-0.0139, 0.567]
Just a tool of making profit	57.7	58.2	55.5	t(220)=0.658 p=.512 d=0.137 95% CI [-0.0274, 0.548]
Only masks the real problems	51.1	49.3	59.0	t(65.912)=-2.193 p=.032 d=-0.484 95% CI [-0.925, -0.043]
Excellent marketing communication tool	74.6	74.9	73.3	t(220)=0.417 p=.677 d=0.077 95% CI [-0.285, 0.438]
Joins the goals and efforts of the business	64.8	65.4	62.0	t(220)=0.953 p=.342 d=0.169 95% CI [-0.181, 0.519]
Can be successful only for large corporation	49.7	50.1	48.5	t(197)=0.299 p=.765 d=.078 95% CI [-0.437, 0.593]
Expensive to accomplish the actions	65.2	66.9	57.1	t(188)=2.037 p=.043 d=0.493 95% CI [0.016, 0.971]

*t(df): degree of freedom, p: 2-tailed significance level d: mean difference CI: confidence interval of mean difference

Table 2. Opinions about the goals of CSR (own edition, data on 0..100 scale)

Conclusions

- Most of the respondents have not learned about CSR in details yet (based on the answers 12% has superficial knowledge and know it in details), but it does not hinders the building up a strong and definite opinion.
- Opinions about sustainable development reflects social expectations with a less weight of economic aspects. However, asking about CSR the comprehensive picture shows an opposite opinion.
- There are significant differences between the responses of the bachelor and master only in a few studied factors. The results and other experiences of the research indicates the necessity of rethinking the education and training contents.

Acknowledgements

The research was carried out as a part of the „TOWARDS science – talent management from classroom to researcher profession” TÁMOP-4.2.2.B-15/1/KONV-2015-0003 project.

References

- [1] Meadows, D. H., Meadows, D. L., Randers, J., Behrens, W. W., The Limits to Growth, Universe Books, New York, 1972
- [2] Meadows, D. H., Meadows, D. L., Randers, J., Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update, Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, 2004
- [3] Our Common Future, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987
- [4] Carroll, A.B., The Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility: Toward the Moral Management of Organizational Stakeholders, Business Horizons. 34(07-08) (1981) 39-48.
- [5] Tóth, G., The Truly Responsible Enterprise, Követ Association, Budapest, 2007
- [6] Ackerman, R. W., Bauer, R.A., Corporate Social Responsiveness, Reston Publishing, Reston, 1976