

CSR IN E-RECRUITMENT AND ITS USE BY LARGE POLISH ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract. *Although Poland is not a leader in the use of ITC technologies, some data has shown that the new EC countries are leaders in applying these technologies in Human Resource Departments, and recruitment is one of the first areas in which this happens. One of the advantages of applying ICT in e-recruitment is broadening the scope of information used to improve the organization's image. Activities from the scope of Corporate Social Responsibilities are usually recommended as a tool for improving employer brands, as it is commonly accepted that young professionals are responsive to the organization's involvement in these fields. Although discussions about if and why companies should be active in CSR are still inconclusive in the sciences, management scientists clearly state that CSR improves an organization's employer brand and informing about CSR is beneficial for its recruitment process. Although informing about company CSR activities is in vogue in the Polish media and popular branch reports, some research suggests that entrepreneurial involvement in CSR in Poland is superficial and much lower than popular opinion holds. The article proves that e-recruitment tools, and CSR information, in particular, are less widely used by big organizations than the public believes, and that information concerning CSR activities improves organizational employer brand. Two types of data are used for this: the results of an e-survey concerning the perception of company attractiveness as an employer based on its CSR activities (a sample of 1054 young Polish professionals and students), and direct observation of 300 websites of the biggest Polish enterprises. Less than 30% of the biggest companies publish information about their CSR activities on their websites, while for about 2/3 of potential candidates, such information would attract them to submit their application to this potential employer (ceteris paribus). The importance and implication of CSR involvement for general theory and for understanding the scope in which CSR and ICT and HRM tools are used in Poland are discussed.*

Keywords: *CSR; CSR in Poland; e-recruitment; employer branding; ITC methods in HR.*

Introduction

Recruitment with the use of ICT – a widely utilized HRM tool – is standard practice in all kinds of organizations. We should, therefore, expect that it will base on the available scientific knowledge concerning image formation by employers, hence specifically on activities of a symbolic nature for potential candidates. CSR research and the role that media and professional reports assign to presenting CSR-related activities suggest that well-managed organizations should make wide use of these tools, also for creating their image as employers.

The goal of this text is to establish whether this suggestion is applicable also for large Polish enterprises. The article presents the results of two empirical studies. The websites of 300 of the largest enterprises in the country were observed to check how many of them use modern tools during e-recruitment, and specifically – how many of them describe their CSR-related activities on their websites. The second study verified whether potential candidates in Poland are sensitive to CSR-related information, i.e. whether placing such information on their website increases the attractiveness of the enterprise as a potential employer. An e-questionnaire filled out by 1054 young people verified that information concerning CSR activities increases the attractiveness of the enterprise as a potential employer not only among people professing the same values but also among bigger groups of respondents. Monitoring of websites, however, showed that the largest Polish enterprises do not make full use of the possibilities e-recruitment offers.

The text is organized as follows. The first part describes Corporate Social Responsibility and presents a discussion of the utility of activities in this area for business, and for business in Poland in particular. Part 2 describes arguments for the belief that placing easily accessible information about CSR activities on websites a rational strategy during e-recruitment. Part 3 presents the methodology and research hypotheses, and part 4 the results. Part 5 discusses the results and presents conclusions.

Corporate Social Responsibility as a tool for creating a positive image of the company

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was introduced under this name in the mid-1950s, although CSR practices were relatively widely in use in the XIX century (Husted, 2014). It was defined as the responsibility an enterprise had its impact on the environment in which it functioned, at first personified by the entrepreneur or CEO, but later taken to mean the activities of the enterprise as a whole. This company environment is generally divided into the closest surroundings (local community), own employees, the natural environment and variously marginalized groups. Any of a company's activities aimed at improving the situation of these stakeholders are considered CSR activities.

An ongoing discussion continues whether enterprises should take into consideration their impact on their environment and care for its well-being, and for what reason. A second issue concerns whether the company should be a good citizen because this is considered right (autotelic CSR), or because CSR activities are “rewarded” and improve

the company's well-being, for example, its financial status or market share (CSR activity is instrumental), which could be phrased as "doing good leads to being well" (Margolis). Extreme positions on this issue – that companies should care only for shareholder profit (Friedman), or that they should adhere to the legal and moral norms of all community members "over and above" what is required – are reconciled by showing that respect for such norms (and informing about the significant costs of doing so) is advantageous to shareholders, so CSR activities have instrumental value (Berrone & Gomez-Mejia, 2009). However, reviews of research on the relationship between CSR investment and a company's financial effects lead to unequivocal conclusions. In roughly 50%, the relationship between "being good" and "being well" (CSR involvement and positive financial results of the company) is positive, 25% find no relationship, 20% a mixed one, but in 5% –the relationship is negative (Berrone & Gomez-Mejia, 2009). This data leads us to an alternative explanation for management investing in CSR. The reasons are not so much future financial rewards, but a surplus of resources (slack resource mechanism), or else a discretionary decision made by managers with no direct connection to future rewards (good management mechanism) (Kang, German & Grewal, 2016).

Although current research shows that a good CSR reputation has promising effects for economic returns (Godfrey, Merrill & Hansen, 2009; Kang, German & Grewal, 2016), studies usually assume that CSR investments are significant, and hence that the company will not be suspected of consciously manipulating public opinion. CSR credibility is rarely taken into account as a factor in research, as it is common knowledge that manipulation of this kind has a destructive effect on reputation (Woźniak, 2014a). The manipulation problem is even more significant as companies frequently engage in CSR activities in response to public outcry caused by company "errors". To be precise: research has shown CSR activities to correlate with a company's previous CRI (Corporate Social Irresponsibilities) (Flammer, 2013; Kang, German & Grewal, 2016).

There are no agreed on definitions of the list of possible CSR target groups, the scope of CSR activities, or the scale of a company's financial or other involvement. In practice, organizations use CSR – understood as an umbrella concept describing several unrelated areas of the company's potential involvement – mimetically. In other words, they consider that CSR activities help in creating a positive image because some organizations and the media think this way.

Interest in CSR is large and growing, not only in the academia but in business as well. Consultancy reports declare that 93% of world's largest enterprises formally report on CSR (KPMG, 2013), not only from the US but also from the rest of the world. E.g., 69% of large companies in India reported CSR activities, and in 2009 15% of the CSR reports in the world were published in China (Marquis & Qian, 2014).

In Europe, the average level of involvement of business in CSR is lower than in the US, an explanation for which is sought in differences in how the role of the state is defined. An even lower involvement level should be expected in Poland. It is now commonly acknowledged in Poland that CSR-related activity is necessary for improving company image. The KPMG report (2014) showed that 96% of respondents from large and medium enterprises accept that business has responsibilities with respect to social and environmental issues. Nevertheless, only 46% of companies from the study actively

take part in CSR activities (KPMG 2014). This research, as most consultancy reports on the Polish market, is based on small (unrepresentative) samples (e.g. KPMG, 2014 – 101 respondents). Large samples yield different data – in 2011 only 31% companies (from a representative sample of 850 companies with over 4 employees) were acquainted with the concept of CSR, but only 2/3 of them declared involvement in CSR activities (PARP, 2011). Since 2009 Poland has a CSR Forum, much publicized by the media, which collects reports from enterprises concerning examples of good practices for CSR. The scale of activities has increased from about 100 in 2009, through over 400 in the years 2013-2015, up to over 800 in 2016 (c.f. (PulsHR, 2016)), which in itself illustrates the limited role of this phenomenon.

We may expect Polish enterprises to increase gradually CSR involvement, especially as – and this should be emphasized – Polish companies (particularly the largest ones) currently have at their disposal a surplus of financial resources, which are not reinvested due to the slowing down of the economy. Research, however, has shown that entrepreneurial involvement in Poland in CSR is superficial (Leszczyńska, 2011): employees know nothing of the activities communicated in CSR reports of their companies – these are designed purely for PR purposes. Additionally, some data suggests that this attitude of management boards – expectancy without investment – seems rational, as Polish clients are not interested in the CSR activities of companies, not only in their role of clients (purchasers of goods) but also in their role of job candidates (Boltromiuk, 2009).

Internet recruitment

E-recruitment has been shown to be the most dynamically developing group of recruitment tools. Access to the Internet has ceased to be a barrier both for business, as for job candidates, so technology has ceased to be a barrier in using e-tools (Woźniak, 2014b, 2014c). The advantages of using e-recruitment – from presenting an image of a modern business, lowering the costs and time needed to contact the right candidates, gaining access to a wide range of potential candidates and a global pool of talents, up to tailoring information about the company to profiles of desired candidates – have made this kind of recruitment a management standard. We should, therefore, expect it to be common practice for large organizations – which we assume should be espousing a modern approach to HRM – to harness the whole potential of e-recruitment tools.

In 2008, scientists were already stressing that Poland is not a leader in the use of ITC technologies (Runiewicz-Wardyn, 2008), and existing data confirms that this has not changed (Woźniak, 2016). Only 2/3 of Polish enterprises have their own website, and only 16% businesses employing over 10 persons declared in 2015 that they use their website for recruitment purposes, as reports the State Statistical Office (GUS). This situation is different for the largest businesses, employing over 1000 people. GUS reports that nearly all of them (91%) have their own website, with 63% declaring they publish information about job vacancies on it (Woźniak, 2016).

The justification for focusing on the existence of websites and their use for recruitment purposes is that the website is the basic carrier of information significant for the e-recruitment process. The main advantage of one's own website for e-recruitment is

that it gives the freedom to choose and build the message to be presented, with the use of a rich palette of selectively addressed means of communication:

- differing in form – from gamification, games, films or lower-density contents;
- specialized in content – addressed to different audiences;
- adjusting content credibility to the desired candidate with the use of different methods – from personal testimonies given by “those similar to me” (e.g. in blogs), through group statements (data concerning career paths of groups which are natural reference groups for the desired candidate), up to reports by experts.

We can therefore expect that the opinion – expressed basing on research on European enterprises in 2009 (Strohmeier & Kalbs, 2009) – that new EC countries are leaders in the application of these technologies and modern managerial knowledge in Human Resource Management, signifies that the largest businesses in Poland will be making full use of both ICT in HRM practice, as well as other managerial tools, for achieving economic and image-related benefits in e-recruitment processes.

Marketing research suggests that value for (potential) employees is created through both the functional (instrumental) as the symbolic features of the company brand, and recruitment literature stresses that both the functional and symbolic features of the job are of high importance for potential candidates (Lievens, 2007). However, a company which is building its e-recruitment communication strategy is limited in the way it can present its functional features (salary levels; such organizational components as place, times, flexibility, length of working hours, how the workplace is equipped, material benefits, etc.; or potential for growth and promotion), because most of them are determined by the market or rigidified by company culture. Symbolic features – the prestige of working for a given employer, or the image that certain job carries for different social groups, or how consistent the job is with the image one has of oneself – are largely at the discretion of management. Accordingly, we should expect that businesses would use a wide range of tools for developing a positive image in the area of its symbolic features, as the costs of doing so are relatively low.

We assume therefore that large companies in Poland – whose size is an indirect testimony of their being well managed and of having the necessary resources to successfully implement sound management practices – will be using CSR for recruitment purposes. This, in turn, will be reflected in their website content. If this is not the case, it is worth checking whether this decision is rational, i.e. whether potential candidates are insensitive to information about the company's CSR activities. In other words, maybe the company has nothing to gain – at least in the area of recruitment – from being a good citizen.

Research assumptions and hypotheses

The above analyses have shown that according to scientific data, we should expect information concerning CSR activities to appear systematically on the websites of the largest (assumed to be well managed) Polish enterprises. We may also suppose that during e-recruitment, modern image-building tools – such as games, personalized contact with candidates, or increasing the credibility of information presented using marketing knowledge – will also be a universal phenomenon. On the other hand, we may fear that the Polish job market does not expect CSR-related information, or that

the involvement of Polish companies in CSR is so superficial that information concerning CSR activities will not be used in e-recruitment. The second line of argumentation has led us to formulate two hypotheses, which were verified through direct observation of the internet sites of 300 of the largest Polish enterprises, distinguished on the basis of the "500" list published in n°2907 of the weekly "Polityka" (the most respected Polish weekly journal in 2013).

H.1. The great enterprises in Poland relatively infrequently use technically advanced e-recruitment tools and communication techniques.

H.2. The enterprises in the study relatively infrequently place information about CSR activities, which would be easy to find by potential job candidates, on their websites.

A separate study – concerning the effect of a company's CSR-related activities on its attractiveness as an employer – was conducted to determine whether the decision of large enterprises to place CSR related information on websites is rational. An e-questionnaire was used to gather the opinions of potential job candidates to verify the hypothesis that potential employers' attractiveness increases under the influence of information concerning their involvement in CSR-related activities.

H.3. Information about an enterprise, which the young person is taking into consideration as one from among several comparable employers, concerning its involvement in CSR-related activities, increases the attractiveness of this employer.

The survey was conducted in the Spring of 2014, by e-questionnaire on www.studentswatch.pl (a special portal for e-research with the largely young audience, where participation in surveys is "paid for" by gamification systems). The respondents were 1054 young Poles, mostly women (65% of the sample), employed on different types of contracts (70%). The respondents were relatively young: 57% aged 21-30, 14% aged 31-40; 16% over 41 years old, but only 24% were on a full parental support (declare "no actual need to work for money because of parental support"). More than 40% of the sample had already completed their tertiary education, the rest were still studying. The sample is not representative for any important strata of Polish society, but it gives some information about the opinion of young Polish job applicants or future professionals.

55% of the respondents know nothing about CSR (only 11% declare the knowledge, and an additional 27% declare that they have some knowledge, but do not know exactly what CSR is about). It should be stressed that in the case of our study, the low level of knowledge about CSR is an advantage. When analyzing website content for the purposes of testing hypothesis 1, "technical" sophistication was understood in two ways: (1) the use of tools specific for advanced forms of internet recruitment, and (2) the use of non-CSR related communication tools, i.e. typical marketing tools used to increase the impact of advertising. This means that two groups of criteria were selected for analyzing image-related sophistication in e-recruitment: (1) The use of classic means of increasing marketing effectiveness, such as testimonials, personalization of contact and English language version of the website (Woźniak, 2014c), and (2) for hypothesis 2 – references to CSR-related activities.

The most significant advanced e-recruitment tool is a web-based application form (for collecting curriculum vitae), currently the only effective means for automatically

preselecting applications; however, we also expected the occurrence of games and gamification-based methods (Woźniak 2015ab).

Research results

We should note that no new tools such as games or gamification were observed. Of 300 websites, 49,3% (148) allowed job applications to be made via an online form, 44,3% (133) asked candidates to send their documents using email. Some of the websites offered both possibilities, while others – which were not conducting recruitment for any positions at the time – did not offer any possibility of sending in CVs. We should, therefore, consider the technical sophistication of e-recruitment in large Polish enterprises to be low, as stated in the first part of hypothesis 1.

The websites of the enterprises studied did not widely feature any photos, descriptions or contacts details to employees, which would be a natural way of developing *testimonials* (the testimony of people similar to us). This information was placed respectively on web pages 53, 45 and 47 (17,7%, 15,0% and 15,7% of websites). The chairperson/president's photo and name appeared more frequently – on web pages 84 and 112 (28% and 37,3% websites).

Personalization of contact was sought even less frequently – the chairperson's email address was featured on only 20 websites (6,7%). Brief profiles of the recruiting person appeared 17 times (5,7% websites), while their email address was more frequent, often among the contact details of people from various company departments.

At the same time, it was common for distance to be “shortened” – in approximately 1/3 of the websites, position announcements, and texts used the popular “you” (similar to the French “tu”), and only 10% websites used the polite “sir/madam”(“vous” form). The dominant form used was the impersonal third person plural, e.g. “Interested persons are asked to send in their CV by email”.

Astonishingly, almost half of the job announcements were multilingual – visible after clicking the language tab and switching the whole website to other languages. Different language options for the whole website, or in the job announcement browser, were available for 134 websites (44,7%).

To summarize this short review of chosen indices of the image sophistication of websites, we may acknowledge part two of hypothesis 1 as confirmed, although not to the same extent for the different marketing tools, i.e. enterprises are selective in their use. It is difficult to ascertain, however, whether these classic tools are used for the purposes of recruitment, or for image building, as tools utilized purely for recruitment are observed far less frequently.

CSR-related data is even more disquieting. The various CSR areas were measured with a different number of indices, varying as to significance level and reliability (from general declarations, through examples of typical activities, up to non-standard solutions). Two questions were used as a measure for ethical business practices; 6 for the environment; 4 for local communities; 3 for marginalized groups; and 6 typical and

16 unusual questions measured pro-employee activities. We were surprised to find that even typical activities for the benefit of employees are relatively rarely presented (under half of the websites declared they promote career development, offer training or fund education; less than ¼ declared that the company offers additional benefits or medical packages; and under 5% offered non-standard solutions – such as flexible working hours, canteens or support for parents of small children or sportspeople). Pro-environment activities were mentioned relatively frequently, 1/3 of the businesses feature a separate tab on their websites for this issue. However, specific information about “small” pro-environmental activities (e.g. saving office paper or waste segregation) or support for chosen environmental projects were to be found on less than 1/5 of websites. The indices were built as a mean of percentages of questions from the same area, i.e. giving equal value to information about typical or less-typical activities.

The general level of involvement in CSR-related activities, however, is low – which should be set against expectations related to CSR involvement expressed by potential employees. Two comparisons were conducted, measuring (1) the percentage of respondents for whom information about involvement in CSR would increase the desire to give a given enterprise first place from among a list they are applying to, and then (2) the percentage of those who declare they participate in activities implementing these values. We should emphasize that respondents answered the question: “Will the following information, which you find on the company’s website, increase your desire to apply as a first choice for a job in it”, with the assumption that they have several equally good job positions to choose between. The high risk of unemployment for young people made such a presumption necessary; the study could yield answers concerning the symbolic component of job offers (the functional value of the competing offers were assumed as similar).

Table 1. Information concerning CSR-related activities and expectations of potential candidates – from (Wołodźko, 2014)

	CSR area				
	Environment	Local communities	Ethics	Charities	Employees
Average percentage of answers in the group					
Percentage of websites with information about the given CSR area from among a total of 300 websites	29,8	21,4	24,3	18,4	16,4
Percentage of respondents declaring increase in the company’s attractiveness as an effect of the given CSR area, from among a total of 1054 respondents	48,0	65,5	68,1	61,3	67,21
Percentage of respondents who declare a given value to be of personal significance from among a total of 1054 respondents	51,6	39,4	63,6	45,0	70,7

The above results allow us to state that enterprises do not use information about their CSR-related activities to increase their attractiveness as employers, although it would have increased in the eyes of almost two-thirds of a 1054 sample of young internet users who participated in the study.

Discussion of results and conclusion

The above data confirms that the use of modern tools for increasing attractiveness is relatively low in large Polish enterprises. The cause seems to lie in the lack of difficulty in finding desirable candidates, rather than in a lack of marketing knowledge. A case for this is made by the fact that some of the marketing solutions on websites are relatively sophisticated – e.g. distance shortening or availability of different language versions on almost half the websites. Apart from these single examples, however, website sophistication – both in the technological, as the marketing sense – is low.

Limited information concerning CSR activities, when set against the increased attractiveness for potential candidates of employers who do present such information, suggests that knowledge concerning employer branding is also insufficiently applied. It is especially surprising that information about employee benefits is so minimal, as both common knowledge and personnel marketing theory consider these highly effective as a recruitment tool. The low level of this index is partly an effect of the adopted research tactic, which assigned a low value to general information concerning whether a company cares for its employees, or teaches, develops and promotes them. It was assumed that such information would not differentiate enterprises, as it is commonly found on websites and so is unconvincing for potential candidates. However, even if the index were to be built on the most typical activities in this area, it would be lower than 50%.

The fact that there is a high percentage of respondents who declare that values associated with the various CSR areas are important, suggests that not informing about CSR activities during e-recruitment is a managerial error, justifiable only by the ease of the job market in which these enterprises function. There is, after all, no reason to suspect HR departments of the large enterprises to be incompetent, or lacking the technical means to place this information on their websites.

At the same time, there is a clearly visible group of about 20% of enterprises that take advantage of the possibilities informing about CSR activities offer in building a positive image. These companies appear in all CSR areas and generally describe specific activities, rather than just making general declarations. This suggests they are well aware of how image-building tools should be applied, and this bodes well for the further development of strategies of this kind.

It should be emphasized that – though observation of websites unequivocally confirms that enterprises make limited use of the possibilities that management knowledge offers concerning employer image – opinions concerning the irrationality of this behavior are based on a survey of a large but accidental sample of young people. We may expect their sensitivity to CSR-related information to be high in comparison to that of candidates the large enterprises seek, e.g. mid-aged professionals. In other words, it is the inappropriateness of the group whose expectations were gathered

which is the source of the observed discrepancy between facts and expectations – and this is the first limitation of the conclusions we have drawn from this study.

A second significant limitation of the study is that different image-related information is treated as equivalent. A more conclusive analysis, however, should be based on information that distinguishes a given employer (given website) from the websites of other companies it competes with for employees, and on an assessment of the credibility of this information. Enterprises compete in separate niches of the job market. Adjusting their image-building tools requires, on the one hand, an analysis of the expectations of potential employees in these niches, and on the other, a relative analysis – of information from other companies and the credibility of this information.

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