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Is leadership an antecedent of corporate social responsibility?

The study in the context of positive organisational potential

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Abstract: The aim of the paper is to investigate the relationships between the manifestations of corporate social responsibility and the intra-organisational antecedents related to leadership. The study is conducted within the context of positive organisational potential. In order to achieve the aim of the paper, the following operational objectives have been set: (1) to discuss the concepts of leadership and CSR in the theory of Positive Organisational Scholarship; (2) to identify mutual correlations between CSR and the antecedents related to leadership; (3) to assess the impact of intra-organisational factors related to leadership on CSR. The analysis is based on the findings from questionnaire surveys in companies operating in Poland and the opinions of experts expressed during the Delphi session.

Keywords: leadership, corporate social responsibility, Positive Organisational Scholarship, positive organisational potential.

1. Introduction

As we have already observed both the issue of leadership and the idea of corporate social responsibility are thoroughly and broadly discussed in management studies. Nevertheless, these two issues are not frequently studied together and it is seldom that the analysis of relationships between them is based on reliable scientific research (Karaszewski and Lis, 2014a, p. 1056). Therefore, we make attempts to investigate such relationships in detail. We conduct our studies within the context of positive organisational potential, which “refers to such characteristics and states of organisational resources that create positive organisational culture and positive organisational climate” (Peyrat-Guillard and Glińska-Neweś, 2010, p. 51). The construct of positive organisational potential was developed by Stankiewicz (2010) and his team within the stream of Positive Organisational Scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003a). The idea is based on the concept of corporate competitiveness potential (Stankiewicz 1999; Stankiewicz 2002) grounded in the resource-based view (RBV) of strategic management.

The model of positive organisational potential includes leadership and corporate social responsibility considered as the key areas of positive organisational potential as well as the antecedents of positive organisational potential related to leadership. We have already studied the relationships between leadership and CSR perceived as the key areas of positive organisational potential (Karaszewski and Lis, 2014a, pp. 1056–1062). Therefore, to build up a comprehensive picture, the aim of the paper is to investigate the relationships between the manifestations of corporate social responsibility and the antecedents of positive organisational potential related to leadership. In order to achieve the aim of the paper, the following operational objectives have been set: (1) to discuss the concepts of leadership and CSR in the theory of Positive Organisational Scholarship; (2) to identify mutual correlations between CSR and the antecedents related to leadership; (3) to assess the impact of intra-organisational factors related to leadership on CSR.

The structure of the paper reflects the research objectives. First of all, the position and the role of the concepts of leadership and CSR are discussed in the context of the Positive Organisational Scholarship theory. Secondly, the method of study is presented. Thirdly, the correlations between CSR and the antecedents related to leadership

are analysed. Finally, the the expert opinions are applied to assess the impact of intra-organisational factors related to leadership on CSR.

2. Leadership and CSR in the theory of Positive Organisational Scholarship

The role of leadership in Positive Organisational Scholarship is confirmed by research in the field. Glińska-Noweś and Stankiewicz (2013, p. 21) enumerate leadership as one of the main research trends in Positive Organisational Scholarship literature (cf. Lopes et al., 2009, p. 282). As observed by Glińska-Noweś and Stankiewicz (2013, pp. 21–22):

[l]eadership studies focus on positive behaviours of leaders (Fry et al., 2005) such as expressing positive emotions (Bono et al., 2006), building positive visions, giving hope (Peterson and Luthans, 2003) or empathy (Kellert et al., 2006). Moreover, they explore the impact these behaviours have on well-being, engagement and productivity of employees.

Karaszewski and Lis (2013, pp. 65–68) point out authentic leadership and positive leadership as two concepts representing the positive movement in leadership studies. It is worth noticing that both aforementioned concepts are developed on the foundation of transformational leadership.

Authentic leadership is defined as „a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organisational context, which results in both greater self-regulated positive behaviour on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development” (Luthans and Avolio, 2003, p. 243). Referring to definitions by Luthans and Avolio (2003) and the models of authentic leadership developed by Gardner et al. (2005) and Ilies et al. (2005), Walumbwa et al. (2008, p. 94) describe authentic leadership as “a pattern of leader behaviour that draws upon and promotes both psychological capacity and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development”. Taking into account the components of authentic leadership identified above, Avolio et al. (2009, p. 423) highlight the role of a leader and their followers in the decision-making process and they define authentic leadership as “a pattern of transparent

and ethical behaviour that encourages openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while accepting followers' inputs".

The concept of positive leadership is aimed at achieving extraordinarily high performance of an organisation through the focus on organisational strengths, capabilities and the potential of human capital and simultaneously achieving human virtuousness and eudaimonia. Positive leadership puts an emphasis on strengths of organisations and their members, positive events supporting development as well as all aspects which are positive, extraordinary and inspiring. Positive leadership is developed through the four following strategies: positive organisational climate, positive relationships, positive communication and positive meaning (Cameron, 2008). As observed by Zbierowski and Góra (2014, p. 88), positive leadership is

based on entrepreneurial and optimistic mindset of leaders (Youssef and Luthans, 2012), building trust between leaders and followers (Mishra and Mishra, 2012), creating the perception of fairness and justice among employees (Mayer, 2012) by following clear rules of appraisal, salaries and promotions. The last important component of positive leadership is hope (Carlsen et al., 2012).

The focus on close relationships between corporate social responsibility and Positive Organisational Scholarship dates back to the origins of the positive movement in management studies. Cameron et al. (2003b, pp. 9–10) enumerate CSR as a correlate of Positive Organisational Scholarship. Glińska-Neweś and Stankiewicz (2013, p. 20) list corporate social responsibility “among inspirational concepts which contributed to the development of Positive Organisational Potential and foreshadowed the emergence of positive management”. Simultaneously, they point out the convergence between the CSR concept and organisational virtuousness (“undertaking unselfish activities for social improvement”) listed among the six main research trends in the POS literature (Glińska-Neweś and Stankiewicz, 2013, p. 22).

Both Positive Organisational Scholarship and corporate social responsibility are relatively up-to-date concepts. Nevertheless, their assumptions are based on the foundations which date back to the turn of 19th and 20th centuries. For instance, the principles propagated by Carnegie (1889, pp. 653–665) should be mentioned as an innovative approach to intra-organisational relationships and the role of an organisation within the social structure. A key role in this approach was given

to an entrepreneur who, besides managing their resources in an efficient and effective way, was expected to take care of their subordinates. Sixty year ago, defining the issue of the social responsibility of an entrepreneur, Bowen (1953) pointed out the key role of aims and social values. Although the issue of responsibility is highlighted within the CSR concept, it should not be limited to ethical consideration exclusively. Similarly to positive organisational potential, the concept of corporate social responsibility is characterised by business pragmatism and it points out the significance of intangible organisational resources to shape the development potential of an organisation. Therefore, sometimes the differences between the concepts of positive organisational potential and corporate social responsibility may be difficult to be clearly and objectively identified, what is confirmed by the analyses based on both primary and secondary sources. Nevertheless, for the purposes of the research project, we make an assumption that positive organisational potential is a construct of a wider scope than corporate social responsibility which is considered as one of the elements (areas) of positive organisational potential.

Discussing corporate social responsibility as one of the key areas of positive organisational potential, Glińska-Noweś and Stankiewicz (2013, p. 31) describe it as:

the activity of an organisation (company) aimed at the harmonisation of all stakeholders' aims and objectives adequately to their long-term impact on the business portfolio necessary for the sustainment and development of an organisation. It means that an organisation should be responsible to its owners, top management, employees, contractors, customers, competitors, the government, local authorities, parent organisations, partners, subsidiaries as well as local, national and global communities. Moreover, it means the responsibility for economic conditions and life conditions to future generations. The responsibility encompasses both the compliance with legal, ethical and moral norms as well as the respect for the values important for all stakeholders and their expectations towards a company. What is important, neither altruism nor philanthropy is the primary motivation of corporate social responsibility. It is the assumption that fulfilling the expectations of stakeholders is a prerequisite for creating an added value in the long-term which makes the incentive for a company to be socially responsible [cf. Hawkins, 2006].

Both leadership and corporate social responsibility are considered to be the key areas of positive organisational potential. Moreover, among the intra-organisational antecedents of positive organisational potential, some factors related to leaders' behaviours and qualities are identified.

The detailed structure of positive organisational potential and the catalogue of its antecedents according to the model by Stankiewicz and his associates (2013) are presented in Table 1. The items connected with CSR and leadership are bolded.

Table 1. The antecedents and key areas of positive organisational potential

Antecedents related to:	Key areas
– tangible resources	– corporate governance
– strategy	– leadership (top management)
– organisational structure	– middle managers
– internal communication	– trust
– innovation	– interpersonal relations
– control	– talent management
– human resources management	– the language of internal communication
– power and democratization of management	– organisational citizenship behaviours
– integration and employee identification with a company	– corporate social responsibility
– leadership	

Source: own study based on Stankiewicz (2013).

What is of significant importance from the viewpoint of our study, Stankiewicz (2013) and his associates assume that there are cause-effect relationships within the chain of positive organisational potential, which is represented in Figure 1.

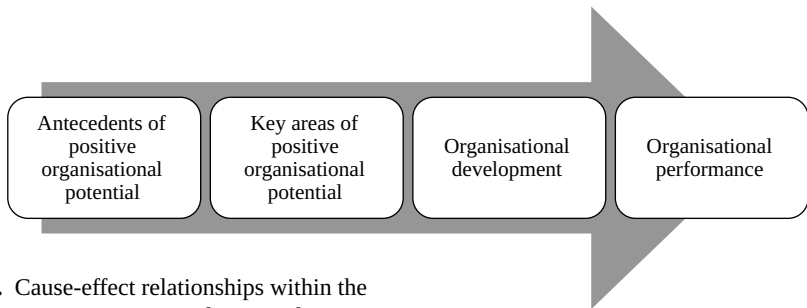


Figure 1. Cause-effect relationships within the chain of positive organisational potential

Source: own study based on Stankiewicz (2013).

The assumption of cause-effect relationships between positive organisational potential antecedents and its key areas establishes the research area for testing the impact of antecedents related to leadership on corporate social responsibility considered as a key area of

positive organisational potential. In order to conduct such a study both constructs have been operationalized and described by the following variables:

1. Positive organisational potential intra-organisational antecedents related leadership:
 - the top management provides a positive model of relations with employees (TMT role model);
 - the middle management provides a positive model of relations with employees (MMT role model);
 - supervisors are able to influence and inspire others (influence);
 - supervisors behave empathically (empathy);
 - supervisors treat others with respect (respect);
 - the chairperson of the supervisory board has appropriate experience, character, knowledge, interpersonal skills, team-working skills (board chairperson competences);
 - a person of unquestionable skills and competencies is appointed to the position of a CEO (CEO competences);
 - supervisors build trust and proper atmosphere in the company (trust).
2. Corporate social responsibility (an area of positive organisational potential):
 - a company has established HRM policies taking into account the outcomes of surveys among employees (monitoring the employee satisfaction, the development of their careers, work conditions, leaves, safety and remuneration);
 - a company has established fair and transparent rules of its relationships with employees and other stakeholders – when running business a company takes into account the interest of the society;
 - a company has developed and introduced the OH&S (Organisational Health and Safety) procedures going beyond the obligatory regulations;
 - a company contributes to the development of its local community (cooperation with local business, job creation, education);
 - a company systematically supports the underprivileged (it contributes to the improvement of their living conditions);
 - a company has established the aims of reducing its negative impact on the natural environment (i.e. the average energy or water consumption).

The variables listed above have been identified as a result of literature survey and discussions among the members of the research team at the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Management, Nicolaus Copernicus University (cf. Stankiewicz, 2013).

3. Method of study

The data for the study were collected under the umbrella of the research project entitled “Strategic management of the key areas of Positive Organisational Potential – determinants, solutions and models recommended for companies operating in Poland”, which was funded by the National Science Centre research grant (decision number DEC-2011/01/B/HS4/00835). Questionnaire surveys among the companies operating in Poland and the Delphi session were the key data collection methods.

The questionnaire survey was conducted in 2012. Questionnaires were sent via traditional mail to more than 500 companies being the leaders in their industries in Poland and via e-mail to around 5000 other companies. 73 companies responded positively and participated in the study. The sample consisted of: 28 industrial companies (38.4%), 9 trade companies (12.3%), 7 construction companies (9.6%), 18 companies operating in the service industry (24.7%), 8 energy companies (11.0%), 2 financial institutions (2.7%) and 1 IT company (1.3%). 52 companies (71.2%) were fully owned by Polish capital, 14 companies (19.2%) – by foreign capital and 6 other companies (8.2%) – by mixed capital. One company refused to provide information on its ownership structure. As regards the company size, the slight majority of large companies (above 250 employees) was observed. There were 40 large companies (54.8%) and 29 SMEs (39.7%). In case of four enterprises no data on the number of workforce were received.

The questionnaires were answered by executives. The respondents were asked to assess the status of positive organisational potential and its intra-organisational antecedents in their companies. The questionnaire included 53 manifestations of positive organisational potential categorised in key areas such as: corporate governance, leadership (top management), middle managers’ attitudes, trust (to co-workers, superiors, subordinates, executive board), interpersonal relationships, talent management, the language of internal communication,

organisational citizenship behaviours (corporate patriotism) and corporate social responsibility. Among the antecedents of positive organisational potential, the scope of analysis encompassed 89 factors grouped in the categories of antecedents related to: tangible resources, company strategy, organisational structure, internal communication, innovation, control, human resources management, power and democratization of management, integration and employee identification with a company, and – last but not least – leadership. Each variable was described by a positive statement which was the reference point for the assessments made by the respondents. The informants provided their assessment using the scale from 0% (“I totally disagree”) to 100% (“I totally agree”). In order to test the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach alpha coefficients were calculated for 21 aggregated variables (9 variables describing the key areas of positive organisational potential, 10 variables representing the areas of antecedents, and 2 variables illustrating the company development and outcomes. The Cronbach alpha coefficients ranged from 0.83 to 0.97 which confirmed a high level of the questionnaire reliability. The variables used for the purposes of this paper scored as follows: intra-organisational antecedents related to leadership – 0.90, corporate social responsibility (a key area of positive organisational potential) – 0.86.

The limitations of the research procedure should be taken into account when analysing the findings from the questionnaire survey. First of all, the dichotomy of the position and role of leadership in the structure of positive organisational potential should be mentioned. In the model of positive organisational potential used for the study, apart from being considered an antecedent of positive organisational potential, leadership is listed among its key areas. This aspect of relationships between the two variables was studied in details by Karaszewski and Lis (2014a). Nevertheless, such a dichotomy of the role of leadership within the context of positive organisational potential may be the source of some ambiguity. Secondly, the research sample consisted of companies operating in Poland. Therefore, the findings cannot be extended to firms operating in different legal, economic and socio-cultural circumstances. Thirdly, in spite of the efforts of the research team and the diversification of the channels of questionnaire distribution, only 73 companies responded positively and contributed to the study. In consequence, the limitations related to the number of respondents should not be omitted.

In order to increase the objectivity of the study, the quantitative data from the questionnaire survey were compared and contrasted with the opinions of the experts participating in the Delphi panel. We used such a technique in our previous studies (cf. Karaszewski and Lis, 2013; Karaszewski and Lis, 2014b) and we recognize it as an useful tool strengthening the quality of analysis.

The panel of experts consisted of 13 members: 5 researchers dealing with the issues included into the construct of positive organisational potential and 8 business practitioners. The majority of the experts (10 people) shared their views during the Delphi session conducted in Toruń in September 2012. The others (3 people) provided their opinions via mail. The following experts contributed to the study:

- researchers: Prof. Maria Romanowska, Ph.D. (Warsaw School of Economics), Prof. Jan Jeżak, Ph.D. (the University of Łódź); Prof. Małgorzata Czerska, Ph.D. (the University of Gdańsk), Prof. Czesław Sikorski, Ph.D. (the University of Łódź) and Prof. Janusz Strużyna, Ph.D. (the University of Economics in Katowice);
- business practitioners: Elżbieta Cabańska, MA (HR Director, Unilever Poland S.A.), Jacek Dymowski, PhD (CEO, Abadon Consulting, the author of the first Polish report complying with Global Reporting Initiative), Wojciech Grabowski, MBA (CEO, Hydro-Vacuum S.A.), Arkadiusz Krężel, MA (the former CEO of the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, the chairman of the supervisory board of Impexmetal S.A.), Jarosław Józefowicz, MSc. (CEO, TZMO S.A.), Tomasz Modzelewski, Ph.D. (CEO, Zelmer Trading Sp. z o.o.), Bohdan Wyżnikiewicz, Ph.D. (vice-president, the Institute of Research on Market Economy) and Andrzej Zieliński, MA (HRM Director, NEUCA S.A.).

The experts participating in the Delphi technique were asked to provide their assessment of the influence the intra-organisational antecedents (including those related to leadership) have on shaping ideal (desired) states of the key areas of positive organisational (including corporate social responsibility and its manifestations). The six grade scale <0, 1, 2, ..., 5> was applied as an assessment tool. The categories of the scale referred to: 0 – lack of impact, 1 – very little impact, 2 – little impact, 3 – moderate impact, 4 – high impact, 5 – very high impact.

4. Research and discussion

The study procedure is conducted in two steps. First of all, we analyse the correlations between the intra-organisational antecedents related to leadership and the elements of corporate social responsibility considered as a key area of positive organisational potential. Stage one is based on the data from the questionnaire survey conducted among companies operating in Poland. Secondly, we include the expert assessments of the impact intra-organisational antecedents related to leadership have on corporate social responsibility and its manifestations. The aim of combining quantitative and qualitative methods is to increase the objectivity of the study.

The correlations between the intra-organisational antecedents related to leadership and the elements of corporate social responsibility considered as a key area of positive organisational potential are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlations between intra-organisational antecedents related to leadership and corporate social responsibility (POP key area)

Corporate social responsibility and its manifestations	Leadership-related intra-organisational antecedents of positive organisational potential								
	TMT role model	MMT role model	influence	empathy	respect	board chairperson competences	CEO competences	trust	leadership
Corporate social responsibility	.678**	.696**	.444**	.588**	.430**	.439**	.594**	.625**	.707**
Company has established HRM policies taking into account the outcomes of surveys among employees	.491**	.531**	.346**	.472**	.285*	.231	.438**	.498**	.512**
Company has established fair and transparent rules of its relationships with employees and other stakeholders	.597**	.565**	.542**	.576**	.537**	.476**	.379**	.682**	.688**

Corporate social responsibility and its manifestations	Leadership-related intra-organisational antecedents of positive organisational potential								
	TMT role model	MMT role model	influence	empathy	respect	board chairperson competences	CEO competences	trust	leadership
Company has developed and introduced OH&S procedures going beyond the obligatory requirements	.410**	.472**	.200	.355**	.106	.378**	.490**	.390**	.448**
Company contributes to the development of its local community	.624**	.615**	.390**	.539**	.423**	.310**	.521**	.491**	.616**
Company systematically supports the underprivileged	.475**	.489**	.375**	.413**	.331**	.280*	.419**	.364**	.496**
Company has established the aims of reducing its negative impact on the natural environment	.606**	.593**	.286*	.421**	.399**	.410**	.525**	.557**	.589**

N=73, Pearson correlation coefficient, ** correlation significant at level of.01; * correlation significant at level of.05

The aggregated variable consisting of the positive organisational potential antecedents related to leadership is characterised by a relatively high level of correlation with CSR considered as a key area of positive organisational potential ($r=0.707$). Nevertheless, the strength of its relationships with the CSR manifestations is lower than in case of the aggregated value. Its most important correlates include fair and transparent rules of company relationships with its employees and other stakeholders ($r=0.688$) and company contribution to the development of its local community ($r=0.616$).

Among the individual antecedents, the strongest relationship with CSR is noticed in case of positive models of relationships with employees provided by both the top management ($r=0.678$) and middle management ($r=0.696$). These factors are especially important for fostering company's involvement in development of local communities

($r=0.624$) and reducing the company’s negative impact on the natural environment ($r=0.606$). A high level of correlation is also observed between the corporate social responsibility and building trust and positive atmosphere among subordinates ($r=0.625$). This factor seems to be of key importance for establishing fair and transparent rules of company relationships with employees and other stakeholders ($r=0.682$).

The findings confirm the study by Skrzypczyńska (2013, p. 279) which indicates that factors related to leadership are ranked only the seventh strongest correlate of CSR among ten categories of intra-organisational antecedents. The most influential antecedent of corporate social responsibility include antecedents related to HRM policies, power and democratisation of management, company strategy, company integration and employee identification with a firm and tangible resources.

In the second step of the study the opinions of the experts participating in the Delphi panel are analysed in order to validate the findings of quantitative studies. Table 3 presents the estimated values (arithmetic means) of the influence the groups of intra-organisational antecedents of positive organisational potential have on corporate social responsibility. The detailed list of variables included into each category is provided by Karaszewski and Lis (2014b).

Table 3. The influence of intra-organisational antecedents of positive organisational potential on corporate social responsibility (POP key area) based on the opinions of experts (Delphi panel)

Intra-organisational antecedents of positive organisational potential										
Variables	tangible resources	strategy	organisational structure	internal communication	innovation	control	HRM	power and management democratisation	integration and employee identification with a company	leadership
Corporate social responsibility	2.73	2.39	1.35	0.70	1.00	1.50	1.14	0.94	0.95	1.04

The assessment scale <0, 1, 2, ..., 5>. The categories of the scale refer to: 0 – lack of impact, 1 – very little impact, 2 – little impact, 3 – moderate impact, 4 – high impact, 5 – very high impact.

The expert opinions indicate that the identified groups of intra-organisational antecedents have weak influence on corporate social responsibility considered as a key area of positive organisational potential. In case of the majority of categories the value of the impact factor is around 1 which means very little impact. Antecedents related to tangible resources and strategy and the only exceptions. Their influence is estimated between 2 (little impact) and 3 (moderate impact).

The study is focused on the impact which the antecedents related to leadership have on CSR. Therefore, Table 4 provides detailed assessments made by the experts for each of such antecedents.

Table 4. The influence of intra-organisational antecedents related to leadership on corporate social responsibility (POP key area) based on the opinions of experts (Delphi panel)

Leadership-related intra-organisational antecedents of positive organisational potential									
Variables	TMT role model	MMT role model	influence	empathy	respect	board chairperson competences	CEO competences	trust	leadership
Corporate social responsibility	1.22	1.22	1.00	0.89	1.11	0.89	0.78	1.22	1.04

The assessment scale <0, 1, 2, ..., 5>. The categories of the scale refer to: 0 – lack of impact, 1 – very little impact, 2 – little impact, 3 – moderate impact, 4 – high impact, 5 – very high impact.

The study shows that, according to the expert opinions, none of the intra-organisational antecedents of positive organisational potential related to leadership can be considered as a significant, direct determinant of corporate social responsibility. The estimated values of their impact on CSR range from 0.78 to 1.22. What is interesting, the highest values (1.22) are achieved by positive models of relationships with employees provided by both the top management and middle management as well as managers’ ability to build trust and proper atmosphere in the company, which have been earlier identified as the strongest correlates of CSR in the correlation analysis based on the quantitative data from the questionnaire survey.

5. Conclusion

Summing up, we assume that the objectives of the paper have been attained. Firstly, the position and the role of the concepts of leadership and CSR have been discussed in the context of the Positive Organisational Scholarship theory. Secondly, the correlations between CSR and the antecedents related to leadership have been analysed. Thirdly, the impact of intra-organisational factors related to leadership on corporate social responsibility has been assessed on the basis of the expert opinions.

The results of the research seem to indicate presence of a certain paradox. Despite a relatively high level of correlation, the leadership-related determinants have ranked only seventh among the ten groups of intra-organisational conditions of CSR. Similarly, according to the expert assessment, intra-organisational antecedents related to leadership have rather weak influence on corporate social responsibility. However, it should be noted that leadership influences the fairness and transparency of company's rules in relation to employees and other stakeholders. Therefore, it sets the foundation for implementation of CSR's assumptions. Furthermore, leadership, together with elements dealing with power, strategy and control, is clearly one of the determinants regulating the rules functioning in the company. Therefore, despite the relatively low position among the detailed intra-organisational conditions of CSR, leadership determines the success of the implementation process.

The detailed analysis of separate relationship-related antecedents shows that the conditions with most impact on CSR in a company are: positive role models in relations with employees presented by both the top and the middle management. It is worth emphasising that these factors are especially important in fostering company involvement in development of local communities and limiting of the company's negative impact on the natural environment. The specific role of leadership is also visible in this area of research. The leaders of organisations that follow the CSR doctrine must prove the coherence of strategy and actions undertaken in their everyday work. All deviations and incoherencies underplay the authenticity of values established by the organisation and have a destructive impact on implementation of CSR guidelines.

The findings are consistent with the assumptions of the model developed and tested by Haffer (2013, pp. 296–300) who claims that CSR

should be considered a “passive”, resultant area of positive organisational potential which is directly influenced by “active” causative areas of such a potential. It may explain the low assessment of the impact the intra-organisational antecedents have on corporate social responsibility which is confirmed by both quantitative and qualitative studies.

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