The Social Responsibility of the Educational Institutions towards their Own Employees Regarding the Familiarity and Use of Technology in the Romanian Educational Process

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Abstract: This article deals with economic and legislative aspects regarding certain issues related to the social responsibility: protection of the employees. It is dealt with the obligation of the employers, educational institutions, to instruct their own employees regarding their assimilation of skills in using technology during the educational process. Is this a legal obligation in Romania, or only a social responsibility obligation of the educational institutions?

Key words: social responsibility, educational institutions, employees, use of technology in the educational process

1. Social responsibility

The corporate social responsibility (public or private) is philosophically [1] defined as what the society expects from a commercial company (in general, including an educational institution) as far as the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic aspects are concerned, at a certain point. The employees can be attracted to work for those companies which they perceive as being socially responsible, and can even be devoted and proud to work for such commercial companies.

Thus, the ethical responsibilities force the commercial companies to do what is just, right, and equitable, even if they are not forced to do that according to normative documents in force.[2]

It can be said that: the social responsibility is the fundamental ethical principle which expresses towards WHOM and for WHAT a commercial company is responsible, in light of the ethical system accepted and promoted by it. Based on this principle, the compliance of the laws and contractual provisions, as well as honesty, are not enough; the desiderata of the company and moral values.

The social initiatives of the commercial companies are [6]: “the major activities performed by a social company in order to support the social causes, and fulfill their social responsibility obligations”, obligations towards these categories of stakeholders, including the (social responsibility) obligations towards the employees: internal stakeholders.

The social responsibility has had a fairly fast evolution. In the 50s, it appeared at international level as a popular and efficient proposal: for the commercial companies to voluntarily take responsibility for several social aspects. The social responsibility has become predominant in the 90s, being known as a commercial company theory regarding the stakeholders, i.e. “the respective commercial company must give attention to all those who have an interest (stake) in the development of its activity”. [7]

The social responsibility has nowadays become an important purpose of the commercial companies. It is no longer enough for the purposes to be wanted only by the stakeholders. The commercial companies are more and more evaluated depending on the ethics of the company and moral values.
The ethical and constant business practice claims that neither the consumer, nor the commercial companies can ignore the consequences of their own actions.[8]

“For many years, community development goals were philanthropic activities that were seen as separate from business objectives, not fundamental to them; doing well and doing good were seen as separate pursuits.” But social responsibility changed that. “Many organizations [...] are learning that cutting-edge innovation and competitive advantage can result from weaving social and environmental considerations into business strategy from the beginning. And in that process, we can help develop the next generations of ideas and markets and employees.”[9]

2. Social responsibility in Romania – economic aspects

In Romania, the social responsibility became widespread at the same time as Romania’s accession to the European Union. The aspects related to the social responsibility have been “imported” by the Romanian commercial companies, from the economic doctrine outside Romania but also from the practice of the foreign commercial companies which opened branch offices or subsidiaries in Romania. This can be proved with examples of socially responsible actions performed by Romanian commercial companies illustrating the six main categories of social initiatives adopted by the American doctrine [10]:

A. Cause Promotions: “a corporation provides funds, in-kind contributions, or other corporate resources to increase awareness and concern about a social cause or to support fundraising, participation, or volunteer recruitment for a cause” (for instance: in 2004, URSUS Breweries Romania has developed the educational program named “The Good Ones Succeed”, in partnership with Junior Achievement Romania, and Central Europe Consulting Romania. The program has helped students understand the operation of the business environment, and develop their personal skills through: team work; communication; decision-making; time management; creative thinking. Within this program, URSUS has prepared 25 teachers and 250 students from Cluj, Timișoara and Galați, and offered scholarships to the best students [11]).

B. Cause-Related Marketing: “a corporation commits to making a contribution or donating a percentage of revenues to a specific cause based on product sales. Most commonly this offer is for an announced period of time, for a specific product, and for a specific charity. [...] Many think of this as a win-win-win, as it provides consumers an opportunity to contribute for free to their favorite charities as well” (for instance: The campaign “A Chance to Life, a Chance to New Memories” is the first ample project dedicated to supporting the children suffering from congenital cardiac malformations, launched on 1 July 2008, by the company Procter & Gamble. This campaign shall take place during 1 July - 30 September 2008, and intends to create social solidarity in order to save as many children with cardiac problems as possible, inform and make the public responsible with a view to the seriousness of these problems. The campaign “A Chance to life, a Chance to New Memories” has as its objective [12]: actual increase of the number of children operated on, and performance of interventions on the right time – by arranging a new operating block at the Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases and Transplant of Târgu-Mureș (ICvDT); early discovery of CCM (by means of a campaign of information for parents, family doctors, and specialists) in order to diagnose and treat the disease; and continuous instruction of specialists: pediatric cardiologists, neonatologists, surgeons, anaesthesiologists, nurses, by specialization abroad. The following trademarks participate in the campaign: Procter & Gamble: Ariel, Bonux, Tide, Ace, Lenor, Fairy, Mr. Proper, Pampers, Pampers Wipes, Always, Discreet, Wash&Go, Head&Shoulders, and Gillette.[13] By purchasing any product participating in the campaign “A chance to life, a Chance to New Memories” during 1 July - 30 September 2008, the consumer shall contribute to the achievement of the campaign objectives.[14]"

C. Corporate Social Marketing: “a corporation supports the development and/or implementation of a behavior change campaign intended to improve public health, safety, the environment, or community well-being” (for instance: The Apa Nova Bucharest commercial company has ensured the education and family support of 30 children, for three months, by supporting the organization “Save the Children”, in order to organize the Fir Tree Festival of December 2006 [15]; in 2007, the Carpatcement commercial company and Ecosophia Association have developed the fourth edition of the program “together for the nature”. Thus, the company has intended to change the Romanians’ attitude regarding the environment, and educate their children in the spirit of its protection. The objectives of the program have been: to change the attitude of the population towards the environment; to educate the children in the spirit of environment protection; to promote the Natura 2000 program; to collect the waste in the natural and national parks [16]).

D. Corporate Philanthropy: “a corporation makes a direct contribution to a charity or cause, most often in the form of cash grants, donations, and/or in-kind services. This initiative is perhaps the most traditional of all corporate social initiatives and for many decades was approached in a responsive, even ad hoc manner.
More corporations are now experiencing pressures, both internally and externally, to move to a more strategic approach, choosing a focus and tying philanthropic activities to the company's business goals and objectives (for instance: launching by the Vodafone Foundation of the “Vodafone scholarships for high school” in 2005. The project supports 153 children living in the rural environment having high grades but without material conditions allowing them to continue their high-school education. The scholars enjoy financial support, counseling, and medical assistance from Vodafone, until 2009 [17]).

5. Community Volunteering: “a corporation supports and encourages employees, retail partners, and/or franchise members to volunteer their time to support local community organizations and causes. [...] Volunteer activities may be organized by the corporation, or employees may choose their own activities and receive support from the company through such means as paid time off and volunteer database matching programs” (for instance: URUS has developed a plastic waste collection program in the Danube Delta, named “Put an end to the dirt in the Delta!”. I March 2007, together with the Association “Save the Danube and Delta – AC”. Over 7 tons of PETs have been collected and recycled. Those who participated in this action have been: over 300 URUS Breweries employees; 250 students from Tulcea; political and mass-media personalities [18]).

6. Socially Responsible Business Practices: “a corporation adopts and conducts discretionary business practices and investments that support social causes to improve community well-being and protect the environment” (for instance: The Western Union and Agapedia Foundations established in 2006 the SocioMed Social and Medical Assistance Center. Until July 2007, over 300 children and families enjoyed social and medical assistance, and over 100 women in danger of abandoning their children were counseled. Thus, the Agapedia Foundation has decided to turn to good account the experience they gained during working with young persons and children in need, by establishing a social and medical assistance center [19]).

3. The social responsibility of the educational institutions towards their own employees regarding the familiarity and use of technology in the Romanian educational process – legislative aspects. Proposals

The legal responsibility of the commercial company requires business to be subject to the legal provisions, observing the “rules of the game”. In most of the cases, the laws codify the views and moral convictions of the society, so that their compliance is a prerequisite of any subsequent reflection regarding the social responsibilities of a commercial company.[20]

Strictly in the field of corporate social responsibility, two normative documents have been adopted at community level:

A. Council Resolution on the Green Card with a view to the corporate social responsibility 2002/C 86/03 [21]. The council Resolution regarding the Green Card with a view to the social responsibility wishes to constructively contribute to the implementation of the Lisbon strategy to encourage the discussions regarding corporate social responsibility at national, European, and international level. It is intended to broadly involve all stakeholders in the minute debate of the Green Card, regarding the contribution of the tradesman and community in general, and social partners in particular. Moreover, it is intended to integrate business in connection with volunteering, as an initiative of the commercial companies, regarding the integration of the social and environmental issues caused by the development of business in the commercial operations of the commercial companies, and their relations with the stakeholders.

Social responsibility can contribute not only to the encouragement of a high level of social cohesion, environment protection and respect for the fundamental rights, but also to the improvement of competitiveness in all business categories and activity fields.

The corporate social responsibility can complete and promote the application of rules and normative documents in the field of social rights and environment standards. The behaviour codes (ethical codes), in particular, can promote the international labour standards, and encourage a responsible attitude for those who comply with them.

Although the social responsibility is an issue arising during business development, all stakeholders (especially: the employees, consumers and investors) can play a decisive part in encouraging the adopting of the socially responsible practices in business development.

Being compatible and consistent with the European Community and international rules, the corporate social responsibility must be understood as a completion of the rules and legislation regarding the social rules and environmental norms, which it can however not substitute.

B. Council Resolution on corporate social responsibility 2003/C 39/02 (of 6 February 2003) [22]. According to this Council resolution, the promoting strategies of the corporate social responsibility must be based on:
acknowledging the voluntary nature of corporate social responsibility;

- the need for credibility and transparency of CSR practices;
- the focus on activities where Community involvement may add value;
- balanced and broad approach of CSR including economic, social, environmental issues, as well as consumer interests;
- attention to the specific needs and characteristics of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as support of, and compatibility with, existing internationally agreed agreements.

Council Resolution 2003/C 39/02 supports the interest of the Commission especially in focusing their strategy towards:

- increase of knowledge regarding the positive impact of the corporate social responsibility on business and European and foreign community, especially in the developing countries;
- development of exchange of experience and good practice on CSR;
- promoting the development of CSR management skills;
- facilitating convergence and transparency of CSR practices and tools
- integrating CSR into Community policies.

Council Resolution 2003/C 39/02 pretends from the member States of the EU:

- to promote CSR at national level in parallel with the development of a strategy at Community level, especially by making commercial companies aware of its benefits, and highlighting the potential results of a constructive cooperation between governments, business and other sectors of the community;
- to continue to promote the dialogue with social partners and civil dialogue;
- to promote transparency of CSR practices and tools;
- to exchange information and experience regarding CSR policies;
- to integrate CSR into national policies;
- to integrate, whenever possible, the CSR in their own management.

Strictly in the field of the social responsibility of the Romanian commercial companies, up to now, no normative documents have been adopted at internal level (in order to implement the community provisions in the Council Resolution 2003/C 39/02). However, a series of internal normative documents in the field of employees’ protection, or consumer, or in the environmental field have been adopted, or modified (even republished), in order to comply with the community provisions (the internal Romanian legislation has mostly been harmonized with the community provisions).

The legislation related to the protection of the employees is regulated by the labour law, imposing a series of obligations to the employees regarding the professional training of the adults. Thus, the Romanian Labour Code, art. 188, enumerates the following objectives of professional training:

- adapting the employee to the requirements of the job or work place,
- obtaining a professional qualification,
- updating the knowledge and skills specific to the job and work place and concluding the professional training for the main job,
- acquiring advanced knowledge, modern methods and proceedings, required for carrying out the professional activities.

Moreover, the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 129/2000 states: in Romania, the professional training of the adults is a national priority. [23]

In the collective labour contract, at national level, chapter 7, the term “continuous professional training” is defined as “any procedure through which the employee already having a qualification or a profession, completes his professional knowledge either by studying thoroughly a certain field of the main specialty, or by getting used to new methods or proceedings, adopted in the field of their specialty.

We wonder whether it is the obligation of the employers, educational institutions, to instruct their own employees regarding the assimilation of skills in using technology during the educational process.

The following reality should be considered: the use of technology in the educational process is an inevitable step regarding the facilitation of sending the information from teachers to pupils/students/candidates for master’s degree/candidates for doctor’s degree. Moreover, the computer is nowadays an instrument frequently used by pupils/students/candidates for master’s degree/candidates for doctor’s degree for most of their spare time. In this context, it becomes necessary for the teachers to improve their knowledge also by using the computer programs specific to their training.

At internal level, in Romania, Labour Code [24] provides that, in case the professional training courses are initiated by the employer, all the expenses occasioned by this participation are borne by the employer. Thus, an educational institution can cover the costs related to the professional training of their own employees, if they consider it necessary. In case, at the internal level, the utility of knowledge and use of technology in the educational process is launched as a strategy, then we will be able to speak about an obligation of the educational institutions to “train” their own employees in this field. Until then, this responsibility is only moral; it is a social responsibility, as it is not legally supported.
4. Conclusions

The previous proposal aims at an internal evolution, in Romania, of all educational institutions by the professional training of their own employees, as a general obligation of the employers. However, at present, taking into account the fact the reality that also in the educational field, a certain competition begins to occur, those educational institutions which shall provide professional training of their own employees by using technology in the educational process, shall be much more appreciated and wanted by clients (pupils/students/ candidates for master’s degree /candidates for doctor’s degree). Thus, adopting a socially responsible attitude towards their own employees, certain institutions shall have a lot to gain.

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[22] Published in the Official Gazette of the European Communities C 86 of 10 April 2002 Europa, Gateway to the European Union, www.europa.eu

