A METHODOLOGY TO ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY. A STUDY OF THE EUROPEAN AUTOMOTIVE SECTOR

Cristina, Gănescu[1]

Abstract:

This paper aims to develop a methodology to assess the corporate social responsibility performance of European car manufacturers. The research started with a content analysis of sustainability and social responsibility reports published by European automotive businesses in 2010, 2011 and 2012, identified the indicators used in the respective reports and created a comparative table. The methodology focused on developing a unique model to assess CSR performance, consisting of four dimensions: business performance, work relations performance, environmental commitment performance and societal commitment performance. Applying this model has allowed us to create a composite index of CSR performance and corporate hierarchy and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of CSR performance. The results of the study reveal that analysed organizations focus most of their attention on business performance and less on environmental and societal commitment performance. Limitations of the current research arise from the complex choice of indicators relevant to the model we have created and from the need to standardize data, which is often reported in various ways by companies. This study contributes to knowledge in the field, while at the same time, opens up opportunities to be extended and improved in terms of methodology by including new indicators to evaluate CSR performance.

Key words*: corporate social responsibility (CSR), indicators assessing CSR performance, CSR performance evaluation model, CSR performance composite index, automotive industry, Europe.*

JEL Classification: *M14, Q01, O52.*

1. Introduction

Establishing the balance between social and economical performance is a preoccupation and, in the same time, a challenge for any important company. Hence, researchers and, mainly, practitioners, focus mostly on identifying corporate social responsibility specific instruments that would allow managers to achieve economical-social objective in real time.

Corporate social performance is a concept for which there is yet no unanimously accepted definition in the literature. This concept was created by American author, Prakash S. Sethi (1975), followed by Archie B. Carroll (1979) and redefined by Steven L. Wartick and Philip L. Cochran (1985). These authors marked the evolution of the corporate social performance model by focusing on three challenges of corporate social responsibilities: economical responsibility, public responsibility and social acceptance.

The basic idea related to corporation social performance represents the recognition of the fact that companies have ethical obligations and they must pragmatically answer to social pressures. The studies and researches conducted in recent years reveal that different company managers get involved in social responsibility initiatives because of the most diverse motivations, which may vary from the desire to do the right thing to strengthening the company community role or the need to find a solution to some problems, in order to obtain direct or indirect benefits. On the other hand, the consumers want more and more responsible companies.

2. Social responsibility instruments applied globally

In the last fifty years, proliferation of the interest to create new instruments for conceptualize the corporation social responsibility was noticed, corresponding to an increasingly higher number of the company social responsibility forms. Thus, until

[1] Lecturer, PhD, „Constantin Brâncoveanu” University of Pitești, cristina_ganescu@yahoo.com

currently, over 300 such instruments had been formulated, most of them being standardized, used, primarily, to achieve two main purposes: firstly, *they promote the corporate responsible practice*, which becomes also measurable; secondly, *they allow the creation of a clear and common way of understanding the basic concepts*, such as company sustainable development and social responsibility. Even if the use of these instruments in voluntary, they assure legitimacy, consistency and comparability, required by companies and stakeholders. Many confusions and uncertainties still arise regarding the role, function and quality of some corporation social responsibility instruments.

At global level, the issue of identifying some coherent social responsibility instruments raises special interest. Many institutions established such instruments, classified in: codes of conduct, management standards, audit and reporting standards. In this context, it is indeed difficult to specify the numerous instruments adopted at global level. Consequently, within the paper herein, we will only try to reinforce the fact that the research efforts have increased throughout time; that the problem for the social responsibility conceptualization instruments description is the centre of attention for theoreticians, but also for the practitioners and up to now they have settled a consistent set of instruments.

The United Nations Union has created "*The Global Compact*" (United Nations, 2013), with the purpose to offer a guide for responsible behaviour in business, made of corporative behaviour principles. We are discussing a pact by which companies take to range their activities and strategies according to 10 principles universally accepted about the human rights, work conditions, environment and fight against corruption. The global pact, the main global initiative of the corporative citizens, regroups thousands of participants from over 100 countries and has the promotion of social legitimacy of companies and markets as main objective.

The Organisation for Cooperation and Economical Development has accomplished a guide for the multinational companies that includes voluntary principles and standards for responsible business, structured on the following fields: general policies, confidentiality non-respect, the work force occupation and the industrial relations, environment, corruption control, consumers' interest, science and technology, concurrence and taxation (Shelegeiko, 2009). These first degree instruments complete the private initiatives for social corporative responsibility and represent the key-expressions for the broad public and private governing systems, from which private initiatives derive.

We have to highlight the research made by the author Ran (2005), who identified and described 16 specific instruments for corporate responsibilities. The big companies problem is not how much time they can use these instruments, but how these can be applied. Basically, the author has made a selection of these instruments regarding the organisation social responsibility, based on the following criterion: the use frequency, the quotes from the corporatist responsibility guides, the multilateral support and the relevance for Canada. These instruments structured by Ran Goen are, on their turn, quoted by different organisations and guides.

Subsequently, McKague and Cragg (2007) have published a collection of ethic codes, principles, guides, standards and other instruments for social responsibility used on the global market, the result of a research project founded by the Research Council in Social Sciences from Canada. This compendium includes the complete text of some instruments for social responsibility from the most important sectors, organised in several chapters: general codes, environment, sustainable development, labour, type, corporative governance, money laundry, bribe and corruption, human rights, codes specific for one country, codes specific for a sector, and also sections regarding the govern laws and the socially responsible investment practices. The author idea to make a list with the name of ethic companies is extremely interesting.

The corporation adherence to these measuring and evaluation instruments for social performances influence positively the capacity of a certain company to treat serious problems to which it is confronted. This conclusion results from an empiric study of the Norwegian Boasson (2009), regarding the manage manner of the corporatist social responsibility problem at Hydro and Shell. The author has determined that the tendency for social responsibility problems management exists within both companies, the behaviour is profoundly influenced by this sector, but also by the degree of regulation for the problem regarding corporate social responsibility.

3. European level concerns regarding conceptualisation instruments for corporate social performance

At European level we have this type of concerns, materialised not only in companies' policies and practices, but also at the level of European social policy (Steurer, Martinuzzi and Margula, 2013). The first accomplishments in this direction were materialised in the paper *Green Book – the promotion of corporatist social responsibility at the European level*, published in July 2001 at Brussels. We observe that in practice there are a lot of instruments used in order to manage, measure, communicate, monitor, check up and awarded the social performance associated with corporative social responsibilities, varying from the general directives, corporate conduct codes which settle the principles for a responsible behaviour, up to the complex management systems, fine communication instruments and the evaluation methodologies for the investments (Iamandi, 2009, p.306).

In report „ABC of the Main Instruments of Corporate Social Responsibility" (European Commission, 2004)**,** published in 2004, the General manager responsible with the social policy at the European level said: *„the characteristic instruments of the corporate social responsibility policy plays a fundamental role in what concerns the assurance of a favourable environment for the sustainable corporative performances development, supporting an efficient promotion of CSR. These instruments settle minimum performance levels, help companies to monitor their processes, systems and results which they introduce at the community level and, not lastly, it encourages the excellence in business. Although, generally accepted as component parts of the business environment, the percentage of European companies which don't appeal at one or several CSR instruments is low, and the majority of companies still ignore or are not convinced by the benefices of these instruments".* The European Union has highlighted the main instruments for the corporative social responsibility, grouped in three categories: *social responsible management (corporative conduct codes, management standards and report on the corporative, social involvement), social responsible consumption (the ecological and social labels) and the social responsible investments.*

a) Social responsibility management is the assembly of instruments which allow the companies to settle their own business strategies including the specific values for corporate social responsibility: conduct codes, management standards and social implication report. The organisations which follow the observance of a value set and the adoption of certain attitudes for the employees and managers create conduct codes and the benchmarking code allows the increase of economical and social performances and acquiring market advantages, in comparison with the concurrent companies. The social performances of a company depend also insomuch as managers know and apply these norms comprised in a benchmarking code. If the company elaborates a series of ethical regulations and codes and it sets for itself beautiful ethical objectives, but impossible to accomplish, it will not achieve the goals and they become useless. So, for an organization to be able to have an ethical behaviour, it must have an organizational culture that promotes ethics in business (Gangone, 2007).

The management standards are, also, the internal instruments which support the incorporation of values within the current activities and follow the accomplishment of certain objectives and the accomplishment of certain activities. They support the improvement of strategic corporatist social responsibility and consolidate the social performance, responsibility and credibility of a company (Iamandi, 2008, p.30). By means of these management standards the organisations can manage efficiently the social and ecological risks and assure a bigger efficiency for the organisation by the creation of a better coordination between the functional departments of the company. The adoption of these standards is, also, a volunteer action of companies.

Reporting on social involvement is another corporative communication modality used for the economical, social performances, and company environment. The accomplishment of a report regarding the social involvement of the company starts with the data collection and processing, by their comparison with certain specific indicators, after which the correctness of the data is verified and evaluated. As the other specified instruments the report on the social involvement represents a volunteer action, but it has become more and more obvious the interest for the processes standardisation and information presented in this one, for a simple comparison between different organisations. The social report contributes at the credibility construction. *„It is not enough to give up old habits and to offer employees the possibility to work without worrying for their children safety. It is necessary for stakeholders (from shareholders and employees to the NGOs and community) to be convinced that their actions ensure the sustainable development of the company and community"* (Ducu, 2008).

At the European Union level, we identify three forms of report for the social involvement of companies: national public report, multi-stakeholders report (GRI – Global Reporting Initiative, AA 1000s – Accountability Assurance Standard) and other reports. There are efforts for the standardisation or regulation of the frame for social report. France has introduced a regulation by which companies are obliged to report the measures that they take regarding the social and environmental consequences of their activities. Denmark has adopted in 2008 an "action plan for CSR" as a continuation of the policy regarding the sustainable development and has settled explicitly the report lines. This plan has the force of a law for all who wish to be aligned care to the responsible policies of the Danish government. There is a global tendency within the great companies to appeal at a standardised model. Starting from the idea that the same model is necessary at a global level for transparency and efficiency, these companies use the GRI G3 system developed by Global Reporting Initiative. GRI is the framework most commonly used by companies to measure CSR performance, as shown by reports of companies worldwide (Panayiotou, et al., 2008; Castka, et al., 2004). On the other hand, there are companies which prefer to use their own model, especially made in order to correspond to standards SA 8000 or AA 1000. Beside the recognised benefices of the standardised systems for reports, there is a disadvantage: the organisations might become interested only to report, and not to evaluate the social responsibility programs and, ulterior, to communicate the social performances.

b) The social responsible consumption describes those market instruments addressed to the consumers which confirm and certify the fact that the organisation, has respected certain socio-ecological criterion for the accomplishment of that product. Within the category we include ecological and social labels, having a certain role for the promotion of an equitable and sustainable demand, by the influence upon the buy decision of the consumers, suppliers, producers, dealers etc. The creation of these ecological and social labels was justified due to an increasing interest of the consumers for products made in conditions which respected the environment and society. The use of ecological and social labels is a result for the attestation of that certain company by the labelling organisations, like Fair Trade Labelling Organization, Forest Stewardship Council.

In the European Union they use the following categories for labelling: labels which promote an equitable trade (FLO International – Fair trade Labelling Organization, IFAT – International Federation for Alternative Trade, EFTA – European Fair Trade Association), social labels (Belgium Social Label, Flower Label Program) and ecologic labels (EU eco-label, FSC label) (European Commission, 2008).

c) The social responsible investments suppose the integration of sustainability engagements in the investments decisions (Iamandi, 2008) and present a lot of interest in the last years. It has been determined that there is multitude of products and instruments that are characteristic for socially responsible investments, such as: the ecological, social and ethical funds, the pension funds, the sustainability indicators, the listing processes for securities. In fact, socially responsible investments feature a distinct level of interest on the market due to the fact that they stress their credibility through transparency and responsibility, the on-going dialog between the companies, the financial analysts and institutional investors.

Studies in recent years show that CSR practices and reporting arrangements differ between companies in North America and Europe: the degree of social behaviour of European businesses is higher than that of U.S. firms, while environmental concerns are at the same level. Instead, U.S. companies are more active in the community compared to European ones (Sotorrio and Sanchez, 2008).

Hence, the need for organizations to adopt these social responsibility instruments becomes obvious, seeing how pressure from society becomes stronger and stronger, but also seeing that their role in creating the real competitive advantage is being acknowledged.

4. A methodology to assess CSR performance of European car manufacturers

Scholarly literature highlights various attempts to define methodologies to assess CSR performance of various industry fields (Mărăcine, 2013; De Grosbois, 2012 Le Gal and Salaun, 2010; Barlet, et al., 2010; Baret and Petit, 2008) or of key organizational processes (Gănescu, et al., 2013; Gănescu and Gangone, 2012). In this context, this paper seeks to identify indicators used in 2010, 2011 and 2012 by European car manufacturers to evaluate their CSR performance, and to create a composite index of CSR performance that could help rank these organizations.

The research objectives are: O1. Create a list of companies operating in the European automotive sector O2. Content analysis of the reports published by these companies in 2010, 2011 and 2012 O3. Aggregate CSR performance evaluation indicators and present a statistical overview of companies reporting CSR evaluation indicators; O4. Create a composite index of CSR performance based on our own methodology, O5. Rank European car manufacturers according to the 2010, 2011 and 2012 values of the composite index of CSR performance.

European automotive industry plays an important role in supporting EU competitiveness. Car manufacturers operating in Europe provide employment to more than 2 million people in the sector and a further 10 million jobs in assembly manufacturing and distribution. Worldwide, the European automotive industry covers 24% of the total vehicle production, with over 17 million cars per year. Given that cars are one of the most complex and innovative products, companies invest annually over EUR 26 billion in R&D, which is 5 % of their revenue, becoming the largest private investor in R&D in Europe (Gănescu, 2013). From the point of view of responsible practices, businesses in this sector state that numerous CSR initiatives are carried out for the benefit of employees and society as a whole (European Automobile Manufacturers' Association, 2012). Their industrial products meet environmental and safety standards, as a result of a long tradition in innovation and investing in R&D, so that: currently, 100 cars pollute as much as one car did in the 1970s, while vehicle noise levels were reduced by 90%, and improved safety systems have reduced the number of deaths and serious injuries by 80%.

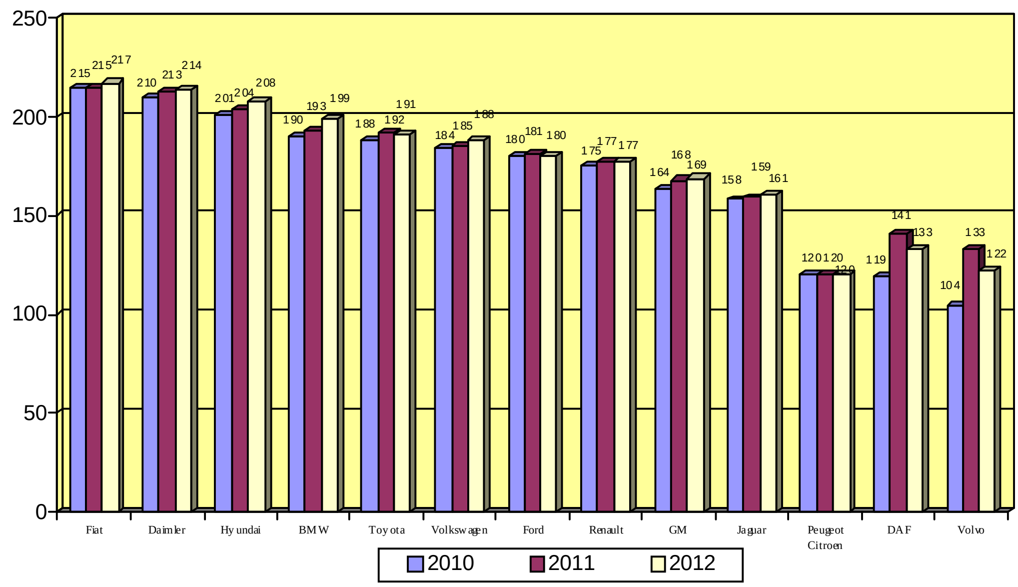
In creating the list of companies operating in the European automotive industry, we started out by studying the members of the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association. We have chosen only 13 of the 16 members of this association because we lacked complete data for IVECO SpA and Porsche and MAN Nutzfahrzeuge AG and Scania AB were taken over by Volkswagen Group.

Based on content analysis of internal reports, CSR reports, and sustainability reports published in 2010, 2011 and 2012 by the analysed companies, we identified the key indicators and tools used to evaluate CSR performance. Among these are: ISO 26000 (used in 2012 by 8 of the 13 companies), ISO 14001 (11 companies), ISO TR 14062, ISO 362, ISO 50001, ISO 22628, ISO 14040, ISO TS 16949, ISO 39001, ISO 9001, EN 16001, GRI, ISAE 3000 Certificate, United National Global Compact, the UN Global Compact Korea Network, Carbon Disclosure Project, Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship, Sustainable Asset Management, Vigeo, Sustainalytics, Oeckom Research, Imug / EIRIS, Dow Johns Sustainability World, ASPI Index, FTSE4 Good Index, Global Framework Agreement on Responsibility, The STOXX Global ESG Leaders Index, FTSE ECP I Italia SRI Benchmark Index and FTSE ECP I, ECP I Ethical EM U Equity Index, MSCI ESG Indices, etc.

Based on this analysis, we designed a statistical overview of companies that implemented the GRI tools or international standards regarding environmental protection, quality, energy or protection of employees' rights to evaluate CSR performance. We also ranked organizations based on the number of CSR indicators reported in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (Figure no. 1).

Indicators reported by analysed organizations fall into three categories: indicators that assess the economic performance (27% in 2010, 27% in 2011, 28% in 2012), indicators that assess the social performance (42% in 2010, 43% in 2011, 44% in 2012) and indicators that assess the environmental performance (31% in 2010, 30% in 2011, 28% in 2012).

Figure no. 1. Number of CSR indicators reported in 2010, 2011 and 2012



Source: created by author

The analysis shows that in 2010, 12 of the 13 companies adhered to GRI's sustainability principles, and in 2011 and 2012 all 13 companies adhered to the GRI principles. Although they adhered to the conceptual framework of GRI, some companies did not fully apply it. A total of 10 companies reached the A+ maximum reporting level and 5 companies audited their sustainability reports.

An important goal of our research was to create a composite index of CSR performance (PI_{CSR}). We designed a model to assess CSR performance on four dimensions: business performance (BP), labour relations performance (LRP), environmental commitment performance (ECP) and societal engagement performance (SEP). BP was assessed using the following indicators: total revenue, number of sold vehicles and R&D expenses. LRP was evaluated using the following indicators: the ratio of women in the total number of employees, number of hours of training per employee and frequency of accidents. To evaluate ECP we used: CO2 emissions in g / km, water usage per vehicle, energy consumption per vehicle, waste amounts in kg / vehicle. SEP evaluation was based on 2 indicators: donations and corporate citizenship expenditure.

Our methodology to calculate the PI_{CSR} involved the following stages: values for each indicator within each dimension were sorted in a descending order, we determined the value that defines a contribution to CSR performance: the best result (maximum value) and the value of the lower (minimum), we scored each value of the indicators with 0 to 1000 points (0 to 1000 minimum and maximum), we normalized the values using by the following formula:

$$P_i=1000*(X_i-val_{min})/(val_{max}-val_{min}) \quad (1)$$

where: X_i=*the value of the indicator to be normalized*, val_{max} =*maximum value*, val_{min} =*minimum value.*

We set the weighting coefficients: each indicator is equally weighted within each dimension and each dimension has equal weight in the total index; we aggregated all dimensions by multiplying the number of points given during normalization with the weighting coefficients (0.33 for BP and LRP, 0.25 for ECP and 0.50 for SEP) using the following formula:

$$P_{i/d}= P_i*C_d \quad (2)$$

where: $P_{i/d}$=*points for indicator i after weighting*, P_i= *points for indicator i*, C_d =*weighting coefficient for dimension d.*

We calculated a composite index by summing up the scores each organization received after aggregation, for each separate dimension, using the following formula (the values of the total index will range from 0 to 1):

$$I_t= (P_{i/d1}+P_{i/d2}+P_{i/d3}+P_{i/d4})/4/1000 \quad (3)$$

where: I_t= *composite index*, $P_{i/d1,2,3,4}$=*points for indicator i after weighting, dimensions 1, 2, 3, 4.*

We ranked organizations according to the values of the PI_{CSR}, the entity with the highest index value being also the organization with the highest CSR performance (Table no. 1).

Table no. 1. Corporate standings based on PI_{CSR} values

Company	$PI_{CSR\ 2010}$	$PI_{CSR\ 2011}$	$PI_{CSR\ 2012}$	Average of PI_{CSR}
Toyota	0.803	0.803	0.773	**0.793**
Ford	0.528	0.564	0.735	**0.609**
Daimler Group	0.519	0.611	0.636	**0.589**
Volkswagen	0.554	0.58	0.605	**0.580**
GM	0.509	0.538	0.516	**0.521**
Hyundai	0.497	0.527	0.505	**0.510**
Bmw	0.482	0.485	0.501	**0.489**
Psa Peugeot Citroen	0.449	0.473	0.419	0.447
Renault Group	0.422	0.404	0.425	0.417
Fiat Group	0.294	0.413	0.426	0.378
Volvo	0.368	0.357	0.372	0.366
Paccar	0.221	0.233	0.219	0.224
Jaguar/Land Rover	0.158	0.242	0.231	0.210

Source: calculated by author

Results for the PI_{CSR} show that 7 out of 13 organizations have average and above average CSR performance. None of the organizations received the maximum number of points, which is a normal situation, given that we used a total of 12 indicators and dimensions were applied the same weighting (0.25). For organizations located in the lower ranks we noticed a low score for BP, resulting in an unsatisfactory result of the index. Businesses in the top of the ranking are the world's leading car manufacturers, and economic, social, societal and environmental issues are cumulatively included into their major priorities.

Based on social performance scores, Daimler Group Mercedes Benz stands out because the indicator for reduced frequency of accidents places the company in a privileged position. Therefore, ensuring safe working conditions may increase the values of the CSR performance index. The evaluation of environmental commitment performance places BMW Group in a leading position and shows a homogeneous spreading of the scores received by the top nine producers under analysis. BMW's leading position is supported by their ability to recycle waste. Ford is the company with the lowest CO2 emissions, and the company with the lowest consumption of water and energy per total number of vehicles is Toyota.

5. Conclusions

Precise knowledge and accurate use of tools to assess CSR performance are extremely important because they help analyse CSR programs and compare CSR performance. In Europe, there is great focus on standardizing the evaluation of CSR performance, and one of priorities of the European Commission is to draw up a set of tools to assist companies in monitoring and evaluating their CSR policy.

The present research facilitates the assessment of CSR performance based on a unique methodology, which helps pinpoint strengths and weaknesses of companies by using the four dimensions and provides all interested parties with a general overview of CSR performance, and also a closer look at business performance, labour relations performance, environmental and societal commitment performance or at the assessment indicators; it also gives researchers and practitioners a clearer picture of CSR indicators reported by European car manufacturers and of their focus on adhering to the principles of voluntary sustainability reporting; it opens up opportunities to extend and improve the methodology by including new indicators to assess CSR performance that can be used regardless of sector.

Limitations of this study arise from the existence of rigors in the choice of indicators for each dimension, constraints that were determined by the need to equally highlight each of these dimension, from using only the reports published by companies (sustainability reports, annual reports, social responsibility reports), from the fact that companies needed to design their own calculations when reporting customized indicators (currency unit, etc.), from the fact that each dimension has equal weight and consequently equal importance of determining the total index.

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