The Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility and the Impact on the Organizations

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Abstract

With the increase of the interest of the interested parties for the non-financial performance of an economic entity, at the level of the practices of the economic entities it could be noticed the appearance of concrete actions to support their involvement in increasing social welfare and environmental protection. In this paper, the evolution of corporate social responsibility policies was reviewed. The methodology used aims at analyzing the historical evolution of CSR practices, by highlighting their impact on the activity carried out by organizations. Following the analysis, there were highlighted the aspects that had a major impact on the evolution of CSR, the way in which it impacted the economic activity and the temporal delimitation of the stages that influenced the appearance, evolution and existence of CSR.

Key words: Corporate social Responsibility, Global Reporting Initiative, Nonfinancial reporting
J.E.L. classification: M41

1. Introduction

Because of the ramifications it has on the operations carried out, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a topic of interest at the level of economic organizations. Since the period of the Roman Empire, early forms of socially responsible conduct have been discovered. The laws of the Roman legal system governed socially responsible behavior, which was manifested in the construction of poor people's residences, asylums, hospitals and orphanages. Regulations aimed at the socially responsible behavior of economic entities can be found in the laws existing in the English legal system from the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century to somewhere in the XVII century. These regulations had ramifications at the academic level, in municipalities and in a variety of religious organisations. Furthermore, there has been an extension of regions that control socially responsible behavior as a result of the British Crown's aggressive colonization activities in the XVI-XVII centuries, which saw economic organizations as a way of social growth. As a result, the English Empire expanded dramatically in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, imposing its laws, particularly those governing social responsibility of economic enterprises, on the new colonies.

In the XVIII and XIX centuries it can be highlighted the existence of a theological approach which paved the way for social reforms which addressed a variety of social challenges such as poverty, ignorance and children's labor (Carroll, 2008, p.27). By the end of the XIX century, the attention had shifted to the working class and the formation of relief programs to help the poor (Harrison, 1966, p. 362). This program have taken on a new perspective since the late XIX century and the beginning of the XX century, with the goal of protecting and retaining employees, as well as a paternalistic approach aimed at improving the workforce's quality of life. It is possible to highlight an increase in the social involvement of organizations that were engaged in various actions of this nature, such as making donations for the construction of asylums, schools, or other elements of social interest, as well as taking actions to improve the quality of life of employees.

During this time, there is also a rapid increase in urbanization and of the industrialization. Various aspects of the labor market can be highlighted in this context, such as the new challenges faced by the small businesses to keep up with a fast-growing economy, the formation of trade unions aimed at improving employee quality of life, and social concerns about the blurring of religious and family values in the context of that period's accelerated industrialization. Organizations were formed to adapt to the new problems posed by increased industrialization by promoting traditional values and improving people's working circumstances.

Economic organizations have had the task of optimizing outcomes in a way that takes into consideration customer demands, employee working conditions, and the influence they have on the community since the 1920s. As a result, the organisations took on economic and social duties at the community level, where they carried out their activities (Carroll, 2008, p.35). Following WWII, corporations' social responsibility was seen as a natural part of doing business. At this time, the question was raised as to what precisely an organization's social duties were.

2. Research methodology

The subject of CSR is intensely debated at the academic level as papers on this subject can be noted since the 1930s. In this context, the research methodology consisted in the analysis of the most important scientific papers on the emergence and evolution of CSR, thus highlighting historical landmarks in the appearance and development of the subject, as well as the delimitation of certain stages that have finalized the concept of CSR as it is known today.

3. Literature review

The foundations of corporate social responsibility (CSR) are not new, however the notion gained traction in the first decades of the twentieth century. Responsible behavior emerged about the time that individuals began to form business ties, but it has only recently been acknowledged as vital and consistent with the company's purpose of profit and social welfare. (Mironiuc, 2008, p.3).

The contemporary notion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) may be traced back to the 1950s, when it was established precisely what duties should be accepted by businesses. The notion of CSR has undergone continual evolution following WWII, as well as in the 1950s, defined by adjustments and alterations dictated by the changing social situation. Moreover, it should be highlighted that CSR-type operations were almost solely restricted to charity initiatives throughout this time period, with only a few exceptions (Carroll, 2008, p.22).

The emphasis on an organization's influence at the societal level has been a major development in this time on CSR. Large economic entities have a considerable social effect as a result of their activities, necessitating a shift in the decision-making process to account for the influence on society. Decisions made by decision-makers in a business have a direct influence on stakeholders, consumers, and workers, altering society's overall quality of life. As a result, a basic contemporary definition of social responsibility is "*the obligation of organizational decision-makers to adopt policies, take acts, and make choices commensurate with the values, beliefs, and purposes of the community in which they operate*" (Bowen, 1953, p.147). This is the earliest contemporary definition of CSR, and it distinguishes itself by emphasizing the importance of an organization's management strategy in enhancing its social effect.

Bowen's formulation is called the "*Father of Corporate Social Responsibility*" since it was the first academic publication to focus on the notion of corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 1999, p. 277). Other viewpoints on CSR may be seen in the 1950s and 1960s, depending on the societal setting of the time. One viewpoint is that, during a period when inflation was skyrocketing, powerful economic organizations were not as worried about social responsibility as they should have been (Eells, 1956, p. 203).

The rapid rise of the population, pollution, and resource depletion characterized the major social issues of the 1960s (Du Pisani, 2006, p.90). To address all of these issues, social movements focused at environmental conservation and worker rights were formed (Carroll, 1999, p.93).

The social setting of the 1960s was marked by a rise in protests led by various activists, as well as ordinary people, with the primary goal of respecting people's civil rights or avoiding new wars. These demonstrations put pressure on economic entities (banks, financial bodies, and huge firms) that the protesters believed were destructive to society and the environment, causing them to take action to alter their conduct (Waterhouse, 2017, p.15).

During this time, there were also some critical viewpoints on what corporate social responsibility entails, with some writers believing that in a capitalist system, an economic entity's sole goal should be to make a profit. Furthermore, CSR policies were seen as an inefficient use of a company's resources, resulting in unjustifiable expenditures in order to assure a social contribution.

CSR was viewed as a reaction to the challenges, demands, and expectations of the emerging modern society at the academic level. Economic, social, and political developments have put ongoing pressure on businesses to define their position in society and, as a result, their social responsibility (Davis, 1960, p.70). Given that social responsibility is to some extent connected with the level of an economic entity's revenues, corporations have duties to society in terms of respect for economic, cultural, human, or social values (Davis, 1960, p.70).

As can be seen, there were several approaches to CSR at the social and academic levels during the 1950s and 1960s, however these activities remained charitable in nature (Carroll, 2008, p.19). During this time, however, the pressure exerted on businesses through various protest actions might be highlighted in order to alter their conduct in accordance with specific societal norms.

In the early 1970s, the US economy had a severe downturn, which accelerated the inflationary process, culminating in a major energy crisis (Waterhouse, 2017, p.16). The US federal government has prioritized the elaboration of regulations that would influence the behavior of organizations in terms of social and environmental impact as a result of these problems, as well as the protests in the streets. All of these rules were designed to hold organizations accountable for particular societal issues that existed at the time (Carroll, 2015, p.87).

CSR is very popularized in the 1970s, gaining traction and being used by a large number of businesses throughout the world. However, one issue that has arisen as a result of the popularization of CSR is that it has been implemented by enterprises from all areas of activity, each in their own way, resulting in a loss of understanding of what CSR means, with each organization having its own interpretation of the same idea (Sethi, 1975, p.60). There were differing viewpoints in academic field. According to certain authors, companies had a social obligation that was clearly defined by specific bounds, and anything that went beyond those limits was not deemed required. Exceeding such restrictions had no bearing on what it meant to fulfill an organization's fundamental goals; rather, those extra activities may be considered wasteful use of resources. Also, according to the same source, an organization is only accountable for the issues that occur as a consequence of the direct activities in which it is engaged, and not for the problems that arise at the level of society.

Other scholars argue that an organization's social responsibility should be linked to societal standards, human values, and social expectations, and that it should be mandated (Sethi, 1975, p.60). This ambiguity concerning the concept of CSR persisted until the end of the 1970s, more precisely until 1979, when CSR was defined as follows: "*Corporate social responsibility covers the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary demands of society on a corporation throughout time*" (Carroll, 1979, p.507). One of the most essential aspects of this concept is that social and economic goals are not placed in opposition to one another, but rather as an inherent component of the corporate strategy for social responsibility.

The most straightforward method to comprehend how CSR was operationalized in the 1980s is to explore the challenges that were regarded significant at the time. The international concern for sustainable development is worth highlighting in this respect. A number of significant factors from the time period might be recognized in order to help efforts for sustainable development. The Directorate of the European Commission for Environmental Issues was founded in 1981, the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED) was established in 1983 by Norway's Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, and the Chernobyl nuclear tragedy occurred in 1986, In 1987, the Brundtland Commission released the report Our Common Future, in which the idea of sustainable development was established for the first time.

These events have raised international awareness of the need to protect the environment and support initiatives for sustainable development, thereby influencing the conduct of businesses to meet these new criteria. The key societal challenges that needed firms to model their behavior in the 1980s were pollution, degradation of urban living quality, abusive activities by multinational corporations, and employee well-being and safety (Carroll, 2008, p.19). Corporate ethics and stakeholder management have been popular topics in business operations throughout this time.

A slew of worldwide events can be traced back to the 1990s, the majority of which focused on social responsibility and sustainable development. The European Environment Agency is established in 1990, and the United Nations Summit on Development and the Environment in Rio de Janeiro is held in 1992, with the Rio Declaration for Environment and Development and the introduction of Agenda 21 for Sustainable Development. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was established in 1992, and the Kyoto Protocol was enacted in 1997. All of the international regulatory bodies that were established, as well as the rules that were enacted, had the goal of emphasizing the importance of climate issues and the responsibility of organizations in resolving these concerns.

In 1991, the so-called "*Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility*" was also unveiled (Carroll, 1991, p.40). The fundamental goal of this pyramid was to offer policymakers with a method that satisfies both the needs of shareholders and those of other stakeholders. Companies have four primary obligations with this tool: 1. Economic responsibilities, which form the foundation for the pyramid's other elements; 2. Legal responsibilities; 3. Ethical responsibilities, which shape an organization's behavior beyond regulation; and 4. Philanthropic responsibilities, which refer to concrete actions taken to improve the social quality of life. In addition to these obligations, an economic entity is required to be a good corporate citizen in society.

The 2000s were a time when the continual evolution of CSR was highlighted, and features such as organizational recognition, extension, and execution of CSR policies, as well as a strategic approach to CSR, were highlighted in papers published during the time period under consideration. The establishment of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) in July 2000 is one event that might be considered to have had a significant influence on CSR. The UNGC's goal was to build a tool that would guarantee that governance flaws in terms of human rights, social issues, and environmental issues were addressed while also introducing universal social principles.

The United Nations enacted the Millennium Declaration in the early 2000s, which featured eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), setting the worldwide agenda for the following 15 years. Despite the fact that the MDGs did not specifically target CSR policies, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) pointed out that they might be utilized as a working framework for the private sector to accomplish their suggested goals, with worldwide acceptance of the notion of CSR growing.

Regarding the literature on CSR that existed throughout the 2000s, a number of studies may be mentioned that have made major contributions to the concept's evolution. As a result of the implicit social compact created between organizations and society, CSR requires enterprises to consider long-term goals and requirements articulated at the societal level, maximizing positive impacts and minimizing negative effects of their activities at the company level. CSR may be addressed as a strategic element when it is an inherent component of the management strategies of profit-oriented enterprises, according to the same author. CSR is given a strategic component in the literature of the 2000s, with a variety of traits peculiar to the social setting of the period. Some authors, on the other hand, did not believe that CSR activities should be limited to those that bring economic advantages. There were works that stated that organizations should be operated in a way that considers the requirements of a broader variety of stakeholders (Friedman, 2002, p.16), and others that stated that economic entities had duties to suppliers, consumers, employees, or the local community (Freeman, 2001, p.144).

It is also emphasized that organizations can gain competitive advantages through their strategic approach to CSR, explaining that they can address the competitive context in which they find themselves through a strategic approach that creates value for society as a whole while increasing the organization's competitiveness. According to the same authors, a business should first assess the social impact of its operations across the logistical chain, highlighting both good and negative consequences, before focusing on those activities that have strategic value. The influence of the external environment on productivity and company strategy must then be assessed (Porter et. al, 2006, p.7)

From the standpoint of an economic organization, the strategic approach to CSR offers two significant advantages (Husted, 2007, p.594). The first is that a strategic approach to CSR offers new opportunities by focusing on value creation all of the time, which eventually leads to innovation. The second benefit is that it is linked to the fulfillment of an organization's social duties when CSR is used strategically in order to produce value.

Other perspectives in the literature on competitive advantages and value creation through a strategic approach to CSR said that no matter how customized various CSR activities may be, they are all founded on a set of general principles (Heslin et al, 2008, p.125). According to them, a company's CSR efforts are guided by seven principles: increasing labor skills, finding new markets, safeguarding worker well-being, decreasing negative environmental consequences, profiting from by-products, involving consumers, and an ecological logistics chain.

After 2010, the notion of shared value creation underwent significant changes. This was regarded as a significant step forward in the evolution of organizations in light of the new social context, and was defined as "*a set of operational policies and practices that improve an organization's competitiveness while adhering to certain economic or social requirements established at the community level where they operate. The identification and expansion of the relationships between social and economic advancement is at the heart of the value generated collectively*". (Porter et. al, 2011, p.12).

The requirement for collaborative value creation, according to the same authors, stems from business plans with a restricted scope, which fail to account for the full variety of elements that influence an economic entity's long-term performance. They place CSR policies in this category, deeming it an out-of-date notion whose significance was determined by the possibilities of boosting a company's reputation. As a result, it is proposed that corporate social responsibility be replaced with the notion of shared value creation (Porter et. al, 2011, p.13). The authors go on to say that "*the aim of an organization must be redefined as the production of shared value*," *and that "the first step in this respect is to identify diverse demands at the societal level, as well as the benefits and drawbacks that an organization has through its products*."

The literature emphasizes the notion of CSR's continual evolution and adoption as a major element in an organization's strategic decision-making process, as well as in the performance of operational operations. The essential goal of CSR strategic strategy is to produce value in a sustainable manner. In this way, a new dimension of CSR strategic approach, namely the optimization of the value generated, is added. This element implies that organizations should not aim to maximize profits as their primary goal, but rather to maximize the value created over time by focusing on the activities in which they are most skilled, resulting in a reorientation of efforts toward the joint creation of value rather than profit maximization. Other scholars believe that the concepts of stakeholder involvement, stakeholder management, business ethics, corporate citizen, corporate sustainability, and the creation of shared value are intertwined and should be incorporated into the concept of CSR, which is defined as the central reference element for social responsibility (Carroll, 2015, p.87).

4. Findings

The evolution of CSR has known a continuous evolution throughout history, adapting to the changes in the socio-economic environment. Incipient forms of CSR can be located since the time of the Roman Empire, when economic entities were required by law to take certain actions aimed at increasing social welfare. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the main historical source regarding the responsible social behavior of economic entities is the English legal system. Until the seventeenth century, in the English legal system can be found the most important regulations regarding the responsible social behavior of economic entities. Moreover, as a result of the expansionist activity of the British Empire, one can notice the territorial extension of the regulations on responsible social behavior, as a result of the intense colonization carried out.

In the XVIII-XIX centuries, the socially responsible behavior has a philanthropic character, aiming mainly at programs meant to help the needy and later, the workers. After the 1920s, one can notice the accelerated growth of industrialization and urbanization, which led to new challenges in terms of the socially responsible behavior of economic entities, which had to assume certain obligations that had a strong social character.

After the WWII, in the context of huge firms' rapid expansion, it was thought that an organization's duty went beyond its legal and economic requirements, with organizations being required to be actively involved in politics, social welfare, and employee education and quality of life The ideological shifts of the 1950s and 1960s resulted in legislative changes, some of which concerned the impact that a particular organization must have on improving the economic or social conditions of a given period, with social responsibility as an element that highlighted the relationship between society and business.

After the Second World War, socially responsible behavior is an increasingly important element in the activity of an economic entity, in 1953 appeared the first concrete definition of CSR, namely *"the obligation of organizational decision-makers to adopt policies, take acts, and make choices commensurate with the values, beliefs, and purposes of the community in which they operate*". In the 60's we can mention the intensification of protest activities aimed at improving working conditions and reducing pollution, which led to various legislative changes, but also to changes in the way activities are carried out by companies. Thus, the protest activities aimed to put pressure on entities to correct their behavior in accordance with the social norms in force.

In the 1970s, there was a lack of faith in organizations to meet the many requirements and expectations that society had of them (Waterhouse, 2017, p.17). The oil spill in Santa Barbara, California in 1969, which prompted several demonstrations from civil society, heightened this sense of distrust in institutions. Earth Day was born as a result of these demonstrations. It was originally conducted in 1970, and was accompanied by several protest actions advocating for a clean and sustainable environment, as well as the battle against pollution, which was mostly caused by companies, as a result of oil spills, garbage dumping, or polluting factories. As a result of the increase of protests and the new rules enacted in the 1970s, CSR policies had a significant impact on a variety of factors. The notion of CSR has been hotly contested at the academic level, with a variety of perspectives on its practical implications. Companies faced a significant challenge in terms of CSR since they were required to comply with new regulations that required them to fulfill specific environmental, product safety, and working conditions criteria All of these factors contributed to the need to figure out how to put CSR policies into practice, a topic that was highlighted in the 1980s.

The 1970s saw the creation of various rules that addressed the social issues of the period and assigned more responsibility to businesses in order to address these issues. In the 1980s, there was a shift in strategy, with the government lessening the pressure on businesses in order to lower inflation. The new strategy entailed attaining economic growth as naturally as possible with as little government involvement as feasible. In order to do this, the US has seen a dramatic drop in regulations aimed at the private sector, as well as tax breaks for businesses.

With the reduction of governments' involvement in regulating private sector activity, economic organizations faced the challenge of satisfying the expectations of numerous interest groups, who, while social responsibility was no longer strictly controlled, nonetheless expected firms to behave responsibly.

The 1990s were marked by the ongoing progression of the globalization phenomenon, which resulted in the worldwide expansion of huge businesses. Large corporations' expansion has created worries about their competitiveness, reputation, market visibility, and stakeholder relationships (Carroll, 2015, p.87).

The expansion of roles and duties in each social sector has resulted in a new approach to CSR as a strategic response to the current issues facing organizations. Firms are addressing the difficulties they confront by incorporating CSR into the structure and policies of their organizations at various levels (Marrewijk, 2003, p. 126).

After 2000, the importance of social responsibility has grown, with CSR progressing from a voluntary commitment to a strategic imperative. In order to provide organizations a durable competitive edge, successful strategic integration of CSR must be done by making a solid commitment to change and self-analysis at all hierarchical levels, including the operational element.

The essential point to remember is that CSR has evolved into a strategic imperative for an organization's survival in the market. CSR policies intensified their evolution in the 2000s, both on an international and European level, underscoring the role they may play in producing value for businesses while also providing value for diverse stakeholders or society as a whole. Companies should use these policies in this framework to create value together and meet social duties.

After 2010, CSR is defined as the point at which economic organizations assess the impact of social and global issues on their operations, even if some of those issues are not immediately related to the core activities (Trapp, 2012, p.468). This generation has arisen as a consequence of changes in the duties and responsibilities of each sector of society, with the private, public, and social sectors becoming increasingly interdependent. As a result, this version of CSR may be regarded as a result of firms' understanding of their new position in society and the actions that these new responsibilities involve. The strategic approach to CSR may be considered as a major factor in strategic decisions, as well as operational activity decisions, dictating that firms can produce goods and offer services in a socially responsible manner in this way

5. Conclusions

The contemporary notion of CSR has evolved through time, and incipient elements of CSR have been detectable since the 1930s, when the social responsibility of commercial enterprises was first called into question. However, the initial definition of CSR did not occur until the 1950s, when economic social responsibility was defined as decision-making in accordance with existing societal norms. The term "corporate social responsibility" (CSR) was given a new meaning in the 1960s, emphasizing the interaction between an economic organization and society, focusing on topics such as maintaining employee well-being or taking activities to improve societal welfare. During that period, CSR was primarily intended to provide financial advantages at the organizational level. The 1970s saw a rise in public awareness of concerns such as the environment, human rights, and working conditions, leading to a rise in society's expectations of economic organizations in terms of their social influence. In this context, it was assumed that economic organizations are required to accept far greater social duties than they did previously, based on the growth of the social compact between society and organizations. As a result, CSR became popular in the 1970s, but on a limited scale and with a restricted range of concerns addressed, including as waste disposal, pollution, human rights, and working conditions. The notion of CSR had been assigned multiple uses and definitions by the end of the 1970s, resulting in a blurring of the term's meaning. This ambiguity concerning the meaning of CSR persisted until the end of the 1970s, namely until 1979, when CSR came to be connected with economic, legal, ethical, or discretionary duties and expectations from organizations. At the same time, it was stressed that an organization's social and economic goals are complementary, not contradictory, components of its business plan.

This new approach served as the foundation for the operationalization of CSR in the 1980s and early 1990s, when it was characterized as a decision-making process and numerous models and frameworks were established to aid its implementation. In 1991, the so-called "Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility" was introduced, which emphasized an organization's four most significant obligations and thoroughly defined what they include. During this time, there was an increase in international interest in sustainable development, which led to the conclusion of certain international agreements that indirectly aimed at the social behavior of organizations (the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED) was established in 1983, the report Our Common Future was published in 1987, the Montreal Protocol was adopted in 1987, and the Intergovernmental Panel of Experts on Climate Change was established in 1988). All of these factors have resulted in a shift in the meaning of CSR, which is now considered as a factor in assisting firms in seizing opportunities and overcoming obstacles. The institutionalization of CSR begins in these conditions.

In 1996, it was questioned whether the strategic application of CSR may lead to the development of measurable and traceable value in the form of economic advantages acquired by an organization, and a novel approach to the notion of CSR was proposed, sparking discussions about its operationalization. It was recognized in the late 1990s that there was no universally acknowledged definition of CSR at the worldwide level.

With the adoption of the MDGs and the establishment of the UNGC in 2000, the concept of social responsibility was given a new dimension, with additional duties for firms being allocated. These additional responsibilities included environmental protection, human rights and working conditions, anti-corruption efforts, and long-term growth. International authorities, such as the European Commission, have regarded CSR as a means of addressing new difficulties at the business level, resulting in a stronger appreciation of CSR in the first decade of the 2000s.

The definitions given to CSR in the 2000s reflect the new role allocated to organizations in society, which must be much more active in what societal expectations entail and be driven by attaining sustainability, which necessitates specific strategic decisions.

The advantages of the CSR strategic approach are now being debated, with the conclusion being reached in the early 2010s that a firm may develop value collaboratively while enhancing competitiveness by implementing the CSR strategic approach holistically.

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