Corporate Social Responsibility
A practical case

Faculty of Applied Economics

Johan Braet

Lecture on December 13nd 2016
Community Service Learning
Ucsia

U Universiteit Antwerpen

What is CSR

- Probably the most discussed issue in CSR is its definition (surprise, surprise,..) or rather the lack of a proper unambiguous definition
- A lot is being sold under the flag of CSR, which has nothing to do with the essence of it

What is CSR (2)

- If we look into the evolution from quality of products to nowadays Total Quality Management, we have to admit that CSR has originated from that context

- Indeed, safety, care for the environment and finally the social context are major principles based on a general concept of respect, conglomerated in the idea of sustainability

What is CSR (3)

- Finally the CSR concepts are converted into an ISO norm 26000, mixing so many elements of the industrial and societal context that presumably its application is jeopardised

- In stead, we only needed a logical elaboration of the quality standards being developed over the last six decades and inspired by major Japanese and US guru's

Origin of the project CSR (MVO)

- Heritage of the former dean's forum to the outside world
  - Concept out-dated
  - Students did not like it, lecturers were embarrassed, academics were frustrated
  - Boring
- Our then-current (Economy) students were a little bit too focused on the evidence of money
  - All of them have equipment for at least a few hundred euro's
  - When something is broken, buy a new one
  - The non-evidence of money had completely vanished
  - Only a few students new about social profit
  - And yet… the majority of our Economy students become leading business people

So we started very carefully

- A test was run in the framework of a seminar (2009-2010)
  - ✦ Three organisations
  - ✦ Huge success
  - ✦ It was a win-win-win
    - ◆ Students liked to do something with their knowledge
      - – Indicative for the conflict between theoretical and applied scientific work
      - – More and more our educational system will be challenged by the huge information level of our society
    - ◆ The organisations were very pleased as they do not have the money to pay consultants on the commercial markets
    - ◆ We were pleased as the students liked doing the projects, and they did have some major life experiences

So we started very carefully (2)

- Initial goal setting
  - Let the students be aware of (the presence and the need of) social profit organisations
  - Let students realise that money is not an evidence
  - Let them –being smart youngsters- help organisations that cannot afford consultants
  - Let us help turning social profit organisations into strong and well-managed organisations
  - Let students do practice about what they had learned about
  - As they will enter top functions in industry, hopefully they will recall the project –the positive collateral concept

Then we started for real

- **The forum was renamed into Project MVO (CSR project since 2010-2011)**
  - ✦ 50 organisations are being assisted during the academic year
  - ✦ Contents of the mission can vary enormously from one organisation to another
  - ✦ Start in October and final deliverables beginning of may
  - ✦ The whole project is run according to the principles of good project management as learned during a compulsory course "Project Management"

- **Timing**
  - ✦ Call for projects (form to be filled out by the organisation) in June - September
  - ✦ Students make preference list beginning of academic year
  - ✦ We constitute teams and allocate internal coaches (full department of ENM) (October)
  - ✦ The teams have to reformulate the mission in their own words, and let it be approved by the organisation and the internal coach
  - ✦ Then a project management is being developed and the project starts
  - ✦ Regular meetings with organisation responsible and UA-coach
  - ✦ Two intermediate reports, regular communication
  - ✦ Final event

Then we started for real

- Final Event
  - A booklet is composed of all "abstracts"
  - A poster is being developed
  - A poster session (after an introduction lecture by a third party)
  - All social profit organisations are invited
  - Closing academic session where the winners have to present
  - Three awards (academic, industry and students)
  - Networking

Some figures

- About 50 organisations per year
- Some of them have continuous projects (Payoke, Auxilia, since the very beginning)
- About two to three dossiers have problems mostly in terms of communication
- The vast majority of organisations is pleased
- In 2015 a cut down to 30 projects due to rearrangement of the course
- In 2014-2015 we won the award for most innovative course of the University of Antwerp
- Other universities were present: "to copy"

Issues

- The students complain about the amount of work and the non-representativeness of the ECST points
- Becomes more difficult to get things financed as formerly industry was subsidising the event
- Given the effort of the academic team (a large part of the department is involved) and as it is not giving rise to money, PhD's or publications…
  - So negative connotation for career evolution
  - No effect on financing mechanisms for high schools and universities
- Some of the dossiers needed for additional knowledge (law, medical, biomedical, engineering, social sciences, ICT,…)
  - Huge potential for extension to other faculties, universities and high schools
- Demand exceeds offer by a factor of three or four…
- Media are barely interested

- Continuity?
- Scalability?
- Coaching?
- Coordination?
- Organisation?
- Career effects?

And what about the goal setting

- ✦ Let the students be aware of (the presence and the need of) social profit organisations ✓
- ✦ Let students realise that money is not an evidence ✓
- ✦ Let them –being smart youngsters- help organisations that cannot afford consultants ✓
  - ◆ It is one of the big discussion subjects (and discriminators) in job applications
  - ◆ The added value amounts more than 1 M€ when looking to the accumulated cost-benefit realised by all projects…based on those cases where the amounts were communicated
- ✦ Let us help turning social profit organisations into strong and well-managed organisations ✓
  - ◆ We only succeeded partly in this goal as the way is so long
- ✦ Let students apply theory in practice ✓
- ✦ As they will enter top functions in industry, hopefully they will recall the project –the positive collateral concept ✓
  - ◆ A first contract has been closed between an industrial partner and a SPO

Q&A

✦ Johan.Braet@Uantwerpen.be