

The CSR Professional – Undiscovered Agent of Change

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Abstract

Today change is taking place much faster than it did in the 1980s and 1990s. A company that does not keep up will be left behind and loses its competitive advantage in the business world, while those who do embrace change will constantly benefit from responding to the socioeconomic context and the societal expectations of stakeholders. Innovation and self-actualization prove to be the most effective and rewarding practices for organizations. In a reality of low-carbon economy, climate change dialogue, artificial intelligence and demographic shift, corporate sustainability and responsibility turn to be a crucial part of strategic management.

This paper examines whether the process of organizational change can be empowered and enabled by the CSR professional – the possible main change agent of the company's business model and inspiration for the company's future success. In addition, it showcases the results of a special survey that draws the profile of CSR professional in Bulgaria.

Highlighting some active efforts to improve CSR in the country, the paper concludes that the idea of incorporating the systems of

sustainability and responsibility has started but is still at a developing stage. More efforts are needed to professionally manage the processes and bring the CSR profession up to the level that serves the realization of the business as a force for societal welfare.

Key words: corporate sustainability and responsibility, CSR, CSR professional, Bulgaria

JEL Code: M14

Introduction

Organisational change occurs mainly in the context of failure or of a need to make adjustments of some kind. In organisations change may involve a difference in the way an organisation functions, who its members and leaders are, what form it takes and how it allocates its resources (Huber & Glick 1993). Nowadays, many organisations use change agents to help transition those affected by change from the current state to the desired end state, allowing the affected employees to adapt accordingly and demonstrate the required new behaviours.

Change agents may be described as those individuals who campaign to promote the changes, act as facilitators of the planned change process and enable and empower employees to adapt to and accept the changes (Lunenburg 2010).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is in the core of a long-term vision for the

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companies' development and sustainable success. It is a complex system of various elements and processes, where there is tension for balancing the various economic, legal, ethical and social responsibilities to a number of interested parties (stakeholders). Corporate social responsibility (corporate sustainability and responsibility)¹ are the policies and practices that are strategically integrated through the business processes for making decisions, aiming to minimize the company's negative effect upon the social and natural environment and for engaging its stakeholders (Stefanova, 2018).

In this context, the CSR professional is a significant element of company's CSR policy's management and implementation as well as of the long-term transformation of the existing companies' business model.

Perceiving that CSR "goes beyond the definition of a side activity of the company's core business that transforms the current model for production and realization of added value, the professionals who practice it in or outside the organization can become change agents who possess the "skill and power to stimulate, facilitate, and coordinate the change effort" (Lunenburg, 2010). They may be identified as key to creating effective change where problems are complex and culturally imbedded because of their ability to understand the barriers and envision routes through them (Peterson 2014, Wiggins et al. 2013). A person who implements organizational change must wear many different hats. Effective change agents demonstrate extraordinary versatility within a broad skill set.

This paper is organized as follows. The first section provides an overview of the relevant literature. Section 2 gives the objectives of the paper, the hypothesis and methodology of the research. The third section discusses the

analysis of the results. The final conclusions are presented in the last section.

Discussion of the relevant literature

The individual or group that undertakes the task of initiating and managing change in an organization is known as a change agent. Change agents can be internal, such as managers or employees who are appointed to oversee the change process. Change agents may be described as those individuals who campaign to promote the changes, act as facilitators of the planned change process and enable and empower employees to adapt to and accept the changes (Lunenburg 2010). They can be internal to an organization such as managers or employees, or external such as consultants who are tasked with overseeing change management (Tschorj, 2011). Other researchers like Cels, de Jong, and Nauta, (2012) refer to them as social innovators who are improving social outcomes for citizens by changing the system from within.

Organizational change is the implementation of new procedures or technologies intended to realign an organization with the changing demands of its business environment, or to capitalize on business opportunities (Radović-Marković, 2008). It is the process of recognizing, guiding, and managing the human emotions and reactions in a way that minimizes the inevitable drop in productivity that accompanies change.

Change can influence and be influenced by several important features of organizational life like organization's mission, goals and strategies; its structures; its products and process; its people and culture, and the nature of technology employed (Branson, 2008). Every organizational change, whether large or small, requires one or more change agents to bring about the desired change. For best success, it is essential that change agents, including the CEOs, are clearly behind

¹ Corporate sustainability and responsibility (CSR)

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the effort. Indeed, leaders need to drive change throughout the organization. In many innovative-driven companies, managers and employees alike are being trained to develop the needed skills to oversee change.

Change agents have various roles in the organization but the most important

role is to isolate the key areas likely to be affected — anything from a new performance management system to a reorganization of teams—and then putting in place appropriate initiatives to help them adapt to the changes with minimal resistance and political manipulations (Table 1).

Table 1. Key roles and methods to approach change

Author	Key roles and methods to approach change
Kwahar & Ichongo (2011)	The success of any change effort depends heavily on the quality and workability of the relationship between the change agent and the key decision makers within the organization. For major organizations-wide changes, companies frequently will hire external change agents because they are from outside and not bound by the firm's culture and politics or traditions.
Edna, Aondoseer, Odekina, Felicia (2016)	Change agents are divided into: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal; • External. Organizations are advised to use both internal and external change agents since external change agents are seen as having more objective view of organizational problems, their inclusion in the change process will complement the bias and subjective nature of internal agents
Carnall (2008)	Accepting the significance of organizational change with the understanding that practical steps need distinguished at least three roles that change agents play: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consulting, • training, and • research.
Stagl (2011)	He defines seven roles according to the key characteristics to be demonstrated by potential change agents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • systems thinker – seeing the relationships between moving parts; • relational – cultivating relationships at multiple levels of an organization; • analytical – using data and measurements to assess progress; • influential – using multiple forms of influence to encourage people to try new things and adopt different behaviours; • resilience – demonstrating the ability to effectively deal with difficult, changing situations; • facilitation skills – guiding conversations between key stakeholders in the organization and being able to manage difficult conversations between organizational members; • communication – besides conversations, the compilation of key messages is critical in order to ensure that messages are shared continuously in a consistent manner; • energy and drive – displaying the conviction that the change must happen; and • observant – being able to detect what employees are thinking and feeling and their level of resistance in order to design appropriate interventions.
Strebel (1998)	He distinguishes between two types of change agent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task-oriented change agents tend to be skilled at analyzing formal economic dimensions, but may have poor interpersonal relationship skills. These individuals are effective in driving processes and technology and highlighting trends in the marketplace. • People-oriented change agents, on the other hand, focus more on aligning the change initiative to the needs of their fellow employees. They usually have excellent interpersonal skills and find it easy to communicate and drive change among their co-workers.

Author	Key roles and methods to approach change
Lunenburg (2010)	Change agents maybe characterized by their characteristics and methods of implementing change: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outside Pressure Type - agents work to change systems from outside the organization. • People-Change-Technology Type - the focus of this change is the individual. The change agent may be concerned with employee morale and motivation, including absenteeism, turnover, and the quality of work performed. • Analysis-for-the-Top Type - agents use operations research, systems analysis, policy studies, and other forms of analytical approaches to change the organization’s structure or technology and improve output and efficiency. • Organization-Development Type –agents focus attention on internal processes such as intergroup relations, communication, and decision making. (cultural change approach)
Lindegaard (2011)	The author refers to the factors that characterise the effective change agency. They refer to the way in which change agents manage change rather than to any personal characteristics they may possess: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hemophily (similarity between the change agent and employees); • empathy, linkage (tied in collaborative activities); • proximity (physical and psychological closeness); structuring (ability to clearly plan and organize activities); • capacity (provide the resources needed); openness (willingness to hear, respond to, and be influenced by one another); • reward (nature and variety of potential positive outcomes of the change effort); • energy (amount of physical and psychological effort) and synergy, or how to positively reinforce the effects that each of the preceding nine factors has on one another.

The first section covered the theoretical basics of the organizational change. The author presented selected researchers who argue there are specific roles each change agent needs to play in order to complete his task and reach effective organizational transformation. In some of the cases it is better to work from outside, in other – to innovate from inside. Change agents possess specifics that allow them to select an appropriate approach to the current status quo and a combination of personal and managerial characteristics enabling them to bring this process to a successful end. The understanding that a single person in the organization can lead to a considerable change will be further explored to analyze the CSR professional and the expectation he will bring the organizational change towards a sustainable and prosperous company in the long term.

Methodology

The purpose of the present study is to gain preliminary information on the characteristics of the CSR practitioner in the Bulgarian context. The research hypothesis states that

if the special characteristics/ preliminary conditions of the change agents are provided to the CSR experts, they will play the role of a successful movers and transformers of the business. If given the opportunity, empowered by the knowledge, skills and internal infrastructure to implement strategical CSR, the CSR professional maybe the change agent within the company who can diversify the production portfolio, inspire the people to innovate and transform the existing business model.

Questionnaire. It includes a total of 25 questions, structured in four main blocks. The first block concerns issues connected with the characteristics of the organization the respondent works for, namely: ownership; size according to the number of employees; subject of economic activity and type of clients; market for realization of the made products/services and period of its operation. The second group of questions refers to the position of the CSR professional in the company: employment profile, sex, position in the organizational structure and the respective remuneration. The third block of questions regards the professional-qualification profile

of the respondents: education and additional qualification, professional experience, including one in the field of CSR as well as their previous employment. The fourth and major block includes inquiries regarding CSR professionals' specific work tasks and obligations connected with the work in the field of CSR. The last group is related to the extent of satisfaction of the practiced by them profession.

The methodology used in elaborating these questions, is the one of Acre, Carnstone, Flag of their global study upon the remuneration in the CSR sector², the role and responsibilities, the qualification, the career path and the available resources for applying the CSR policies in the private sector.³

The study is carried out in the period October 1-31st 2018 and the data collection is carried out after the method of the on-line inquiry.

Sample. The study is carried out in a random excerpt among professionals in the CSR field, working in business, non-governmental organizations and the sector of education. The sample's volume is 108 respondents. Although there is no information about the total number of the ones working in the CSR sphere (no official registry is available), the members of the Bulgarian association of the CSR specialists consists of 48 members and the number of companies engaged in CSR-related organizations is close to 200. This may lead to the conclusion that the realized excerpt includes significant part of the professionals, engaged in this sphere in the country who have outlined their interest and experience in CSR by becoming member of one of the existing CSR-related associations.

Distribution. The questionnaire is distributed among representatives of the target group through five main channels:

- The networks of the specialized CSR associations in the country: Bulgarian Association of the CSR professionals, UN Global Compact Network Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Business Leaders Forum;
- The alumni network of the VUZF University of Finance, Business and Entrepreneurship, where the only master programme in Corporate Social Responsibility in Bulgaria is taught;
- All non-governmental organizations, where experts on similar positions work;
- Consulting companies with main subject of rendering services in the field of CSR;
- Teachers in economical subjects in the Bulgarian higher educational institutions (HEIs), that teach CSR-related subjects.

Result Analysis and discussion

The nature of the CSR professionals is hard to define. They are engaged with complex and multi-aspect issues, which solutions and/ or their turning into business possibilities are at the core of one's obligations.

1.1. Organization the respondent works for

The results point that CSR is mainly practised in corporate environment. A significantly smaller share of professionals works in non-governmental organizations and HEIs (Table 2).

Table 2. *Type of organization*

Type of organization	%
Public company	12
Private company	57
Common interest company	8
Academia	7
Non-governmental organization	15

Over 1/4 of these companies operate in the field of production, and half of them are in the light industry. If we differentiate

² There again.

³ CR and Sustainability Salary Survey 2018, www.crsalarysurvey.com

the real sector representatives, then their share reaches more than a half from the total number. One of each 10 companies is in the field of information technologies and communication. Each fifth expert works in the sphere of professional services and consulting. Energy and utilities, retail and banking are the sectors that are represented by 6% of the sample each.

Differentiated CSR activities and relevant positions for their performance are predominantly in the subsidiaries of international corporations. More than half of the companies work with end consumers. The biggest share of companies having similar experts, work on the national market, and other 32% - on the international. The predominant number of companies have long experience on the market. More than 500 employees work in more than half of them, and other 15 % have between two hundred and five hundred employees.

Position in the organization. As for the particular position of the experts in the organization, most of them occupy high managing positions.

Table 3. *Position in the organization*

Position in the organization	%
Manager (reports to a more senior individual with overarching responsibility for CSR)	37
Director/Partner (senior person in a CSR team at a large consultancy or the owner/director of a smaller consultancy)	23
Specialist/ coordinator	22
Adviser/Analyst (member of a larger team reporting to the Manager or Director)	13
Director/Partner (senior person in a CSR team at a large consultancy or the owner/director of a smaller consultancy)	3
Senior consultant (has in-depth knowledge of a particular aspect of CSR)	2

Another characteristic is the fact that greater part of them is females (79%). The CSR professionals taken part in the survey

are: Some 94% are hired employees, whereas 60% are at a high or medium managing position; another 43% have salaries of 2000.00+ leva.

Professional training and qualification. Some 79% of the people practising CSR have master or doctor degree, and 13% of respondents have specific education related with CSR. Each tenth expert has additional professional qualification connected with the issues of corporate sustainability and responsibility (Table 4).

Table 4. *Education and qualifications (%)*

Education and qualifications	%
Masters/ Doctorate non-CSR	66
Professional qualifications non-CSR	33
Professional qualifications CSR	15
Masters/ Doctorate CSR	13
Recognized apprenticeship	2

Some 62% of the experts have economic educational profile (Economics, Business Management and Accountancy). Others are usually mixed (Table 5)

Table 5. *Specialties (%)*

Specialties	%
Economics	31
Public relations	29
Business administration / management	27
Other humanitarian specialty	19
Other non-humanitarian specialty	15
Human resources	10
Environment and sustainable development	9
Law	7
Accounting and control	4

The single-discipline experts from the humanitarian and non-humanitarian specialties (engineers, marketers, sociologists, philologists, etc.) stick to practising their professions.

More than 1/3 of all professionals (38%) in the field have more than 7-year experience,

which corresponds to the logics of development of the sector in the country. On that grounds, a conclusion that great part of the CSR experts works for the development of environment in the other stakeholders could be made.

More than half of the professionals have experience in corporate environment. Some 17% have experience in non-governmental organizations, another 14% - in state institutions. The results are quite similar comparing with the world survey (Figure 1).

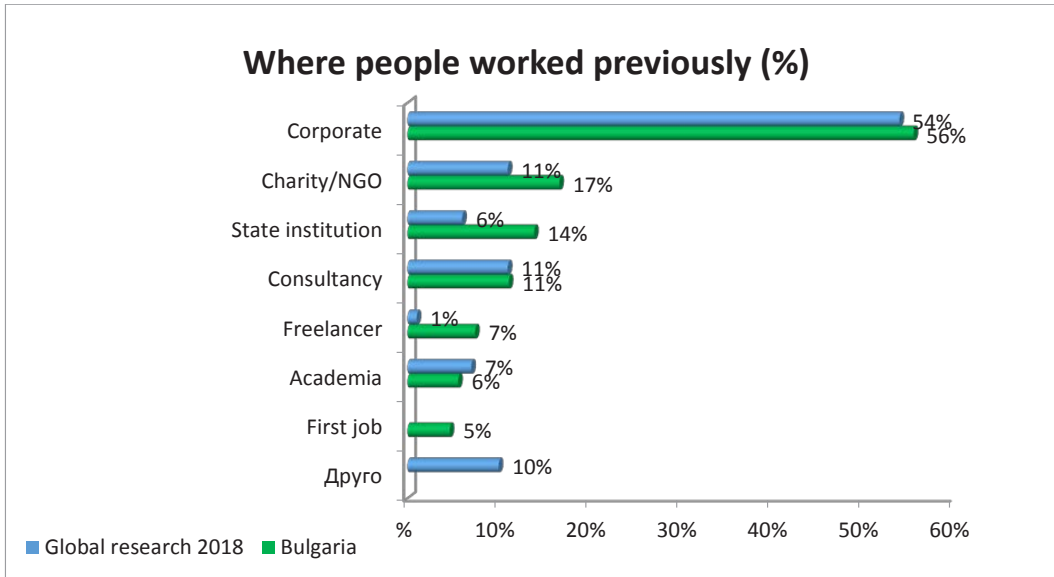


Figure 1. Where people worked previously (%)^{4*}

*The sum of percentages exceeds 100 %, because the respondents have given more than one answer.

The most frequent forms used for acquiring additional professional training and building their competencies are events for experience exchange and peer learning, thematic trainings and guidelines from the headquarters (Figure 1).

Table 6. Actions to upgrade the CSR qualification (%)

Actions to upgrade the CSR qualification	%
Exchange of good practices events	80
Training on CSR	60
Guidelines from the headquarter	35
Access to free sources of information	26
Access to paid specialized literature	16
No budget to build upon my qualification	9
No suitable offers to build upon my qualification	6
No interest to build upon my qualification	2

⁴ CR and Sustainability Salary Survey 2018, www.crsalarysurvey.com

Professional competencies, occupation and work tasks.

The work load of these experts is of special interest. Almost half of them combine CSR

activities with activities on communication and public relations. Another 11% combine them with activities on human resources management. Each fifth CSR specialist is fully engaged solely in this field (Figure 2).

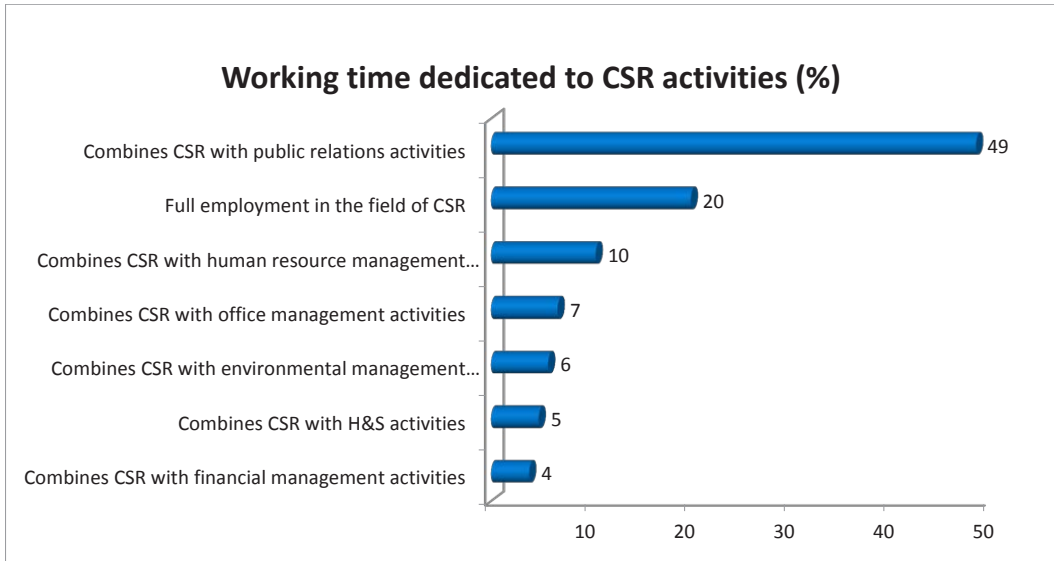


Figure 2. Working time dedicated to CSR activities (%)

It is not possible to point whether, for example, two respondents at position CR manager perform the same or similar roles. Similarly, it is not possible to define whether the imperfect differences in the position mean the conventions for naming different organizations or something more substantial (for example, whether “manager corporate social responsibility” is equivalent of “manager sustainable development”).

Key for the sector competencies such as measuring and monitoring, finding fields for innovations and impact evaluation are considerably less found among the experts (Table 7).

Table 7. TOP competencies (%)⁵

No	Bulgarian survey	Global survey
1	Engage with stakeholders	Engage with stakeholders
2	Communication	Plan & Develop Strategy
3	Project management	Influence & Persuade
4	Plan & Develop Strategy	Research & Analysis
5	Influence & Persuade	Project management

At a global level, among the CSR experts’ activities, the elaboration and implementation of strategy in the field of corporate sustainability and responsibility emerges as a leading competence. Unlikely, the Bulgarian CSR professionals deal mainly

⁵ There again.

with communication and creating new content in the field of CSR.

Table 8. TOP activities (%)⁶

No	Bulgarian survey	Global survey
1	Communication & information dissemination	CR/Sustainability Strategy Development & Implementation
2	Creation of new content on CSR	Reporting/Performance Measurement
3	Stakeholder Engagement	Stakeholder Engagement
4	CR/Sustainability Strategy Development & Implementation	Environment
5	Reporting / Performance Measurement	Community Investment

The majority of respondents have attended events on the CSR topic within the last 12 months (79 %). However, within the same period, almost half of them (49%) haven't receive specialized training. Lack of quality trainings, available budget for this as well as these experts' professional load are the probable reasons for that as far as they combine more than one position in their job description.

In comparison with the global study, the Bulgarian CSR professionals declare high extent of satisfaction with their profession (57%), with a further 37% declaring themselves to be satisfied. Taken together, these results reaffirm the findings that people working in the sector enjoy what they do. This is further supported by the fact that 95% recommend it to others.

The survey results demonstrate that the sector is at an early stage of its development and CSR has not yet differentiated sufficiently as a separate management process in the companies. Although well-educated and

positioned in the company hierarchy, CSR professionals are recognized as key resources for the company general management.

Apart of that, they combine various activities and, logically, their competencies differentiate with the ones of their colleagues at global level. Due to lack of budget and time limitations they do not attend enough training. They are not given the opportunity to gain the knowledge, skills and internal infrastructure to implement strategical CSR. Being strongly engaged with the PR profession, significant part of their work continues to be dedicated to purely communication activities.

Based on these results we may conclude that CSR professionals in Bulgaria are highly qualified and motivated experts who still lack the appropriate knowledge and skills to demonstrate at full scale the importance and positive effect of CSR activities on the overall business performance. The research hypothesis states that if the special characteristics/ preliminary conditions of the change agents are provided to the CSR experts, they will play the role of a successful movers and transformers of the business. On the opposite, as they are not given the opportunity, they cannot be expected to become the change agents within the company who can diversify the production portfolio, inspire the people to innovate and amend the existing business model. In other words, they cannot at this point fully contribute to the transformation of the companies into corporate citizens of 21st century.

Conclusion

Every organizational change, whether significant or minor, requires one or more change agents. People who has the skill and power to guide and facilitate the change effort. Obviously, the success of any change effort depends on the quality and workability of the relationship between the change

⁶ There again.

agent and the key decision makers within the organization.

In order to be successful change agents the CSR professionals shall be allowed to become leaders who cut across organizations and their business units without regard the company hierarchy (Linenburg, 2010). Directly and indirectly they shall be empowered to implement new processes, train employees on new procedures, and act as role models in order to lead and drive the change. With the assistance and empowerment of the company leaders they shall be given the instruments to prove that CSR is not a side and sporadic activity of the business units but lays in the heart of its everyday operations.

The research shows that the CSR profession in Bulgaria is in an early period of development, as the organizations implementing it. They are not acknowledged and involved according to their full potential as ones. Most of the day-to-day activities are mixed with other responsibilities and still miss enough training programs and/or budgets available for skill diversification and improvement. Being strongly engaged with PR activities, big percentage of the specialists continue conduct mainly communication activities and stakeholder dialogue and do not focus on strategy development and implementation. As corporate sustainability and responsibility are still not perceived as a source of innovation for the Bulgarian business, thus the CSR professionals cannot be recognized as the change agents who can materialize it.

In conclusion, future research could further focus on the deeper understanding of the profile characteristics of the CSR professional, his background, education and previous experience, daily obligations and activities and how the relations within the organization are structured (correlation, subordination, interdependence). Elements of

CSR may be incorporated in the work tasks of all departments and be outlined as an essential KPI for business success. These might elaborate further on the expectations on the role of companies to not only provide products and services to the market but also build the surrounding world.

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