ECO-INNOVATION, RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE FOR CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract
Creating a sustainable development strategy is essential for organizations that seek to reduce risks associated with tightening legislation, increased energy prices and natural resources and growing customer demands. Sustainability requires the full integration of social and environmental aspects into the vision, culture and operations of an organization, a profound process of organizational change being essential.
The purpose of this paper is to present the main drivers of corporate sustainability, illustrating – after a thorough literature review – the link between the following elements: corporate sustainability – a necessity in the current global context; eco-innovation – as a way to implement sustainability in an organization; responsible leadership – as the art of building and maintaining strong and moral relationships with all stakeholders; organizational culture and organizational change – the basic elements through which organizations continuously renew their processes and products, adapting them to the new context. Furthermore, the paper provides an overview of organizations active in Romania in terms of sustainability practices, in general, and the ecological component of sustainable development, in particular, by presenting the results of an exploratory questionnaire-based research. The research reflects the importance of visionary management in adopting and implementing sustainability in the responding organizations.

Keywords: corporate sustainability, organizational change, leadership, eco-innovation, sustainable performance

JEL Classification: M14, O31, Q56

Introduction

Sustainable development is defined as the "development that meets present needs without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations general Assembly, 1987, p. 5) and incorporates three fundamental issues ("triple bottom line"), namely: economic growth, social equity and environmental protection.

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The effects of the recent economic and financial crisis, coupled with increased energy prices, limited resources, ecological disasters and political and legislative pressures for worldwide action to mitigate climate change, show that an economic model based simply on achieving the objectives of short-term profitability is not effective. Therefore, a sustainable approach to global economic activity both at the organizational, and the institutional level, is necessary. In the new conditions, more and more organizations are interested in improving their operation, so that they can contribute to the welfare of the community (Dinu, 2010). In this respect, the ISO26000 standard was released to provide a guide of conduct on social responsibility of private and public sector organizations (Olaru et al., 2009, Dinu, 2011). The sustainable approach helps reshape the rules of competition, lead to new business models, redefine and restructure markets sectors, creating at the same time, risks and opportunities (KMPG, 2011).

A corporate sustainability strategy involves the management of these risks and achieving a balance between performance objectives (economic, social and environmental in nature) both on short and long term (Olaru et al, 2011). At the same time, there are many opportunities for innovation for better performing products that have a reduced impact on the environment and health. How organizations choose to implement sustainability principles in the business strategy will underpin their success in achieving long-term competitive advantage (KMPG, 2011). Developing a sustainability strategy is essential for organizations seeking to align to the international concerns related to environmental protection and limited natural resources, human rights and the safety and health of employees. Corporate sustainability requires the full integration of social and environmental aspects into the vision, culture and operations of an organization, with major organizational changes required. Responsible organizations survive in the long term because they help create economic value, healthy ecosystems and strong communities (Bertels, Papania and Papania, 2010).

Organizations meet their sustainability goals by developing eco-innovation activities, whether these are economic, technological or non-technological innovations, or are innovations of products, processes or organizational structures. Moreover, eco-technologies not only benefit the organizations that implement them, but national economies in general, helping to create new jobs.

In this context, the purpose of this article is twofold. Firstly, after a thorough literature review, it will offer a short, but clear, presentation of the main driving factors in the implementation of sustainability across organizations (responsible leadership, sustainable organizational culture and organizational change) through the analysis and synthesis of the main academic papers in the field. Secondly, the paper will harness the results of a questionnaire-based study developed by the authors, emphasizing the current sustainability preoccupations of the organizations in Romania, in general, and the ecological component of sustainable development – namely eco-innovation, in particular.

1. Corporate sustainability, eco-innovation and sustainable performance

The sustainable performance of an organization is the business approach that creates long term shareholder value through optimal use of opportunities and effective management of risks arising from economic, social and environmental developments. To achieve sustainable performance, a company must go beyond the simple compliance to the

legislative requirements, as it has the potential to proactively contribute to the sustainable development of society by introducing innovative products and services that are both economically attractive, and beneficial to the environment, thus contributing to the achievement of a social need (Szekely and Knirsch, 2005).

In this context, sustainable innovation, also known as eco-innovation, has a key role in achieving global sustainability objectives, with significant potential benefits for innovative organizations, industry sectors and even national economies (Paraschiv, Nemoianu and Langă, 2011). Eco-innovation is defined as "any form of innovation resulting in or aiming at significant and demonstrable progress towards the goal of sustainable development, through reducing impacts on the environment... or achieving a more efficient and responsible use of natural resources "(Eco-AP, 2011). According to Reid and Miedzinski (2008), eco-innovation may refer to products, processes, marketing methods, or organizational structures.

For an organization to be able to declare itself as truly sustainable, it must demonstrate skills, abilities and capacities in a wide range of business areas such as the following:

- *Corporate strategy*: it needs to integrate long term aspects related to economic, environmental and social impacts (Mirchandani and Ikerd, 2008; Borland, 2009; Leon-Soriano, Munoz-Torres and Chalmeta-Rosalen, 2010)

- *Governance and stakeholders*: achieving high corporate governance standards and stakeholder engagement, through rules and procedures related to organizational behaviour, public reporting and transparency (Crews D., 2010; Mirchandani and Ikerd, 2008 ; Smith and Sharicz, 2011)

- *Clients and products*: integrating product and process innovation through optimal, efficient and effective usage of natural and social resources, in the long run (McDonough and Braungart, 2002).

- *Human resources*: maintaining employee capacity, abilities and skills, while simultaneously maintaining a high level of employee satisfaction and motivation (Morsing and Oswald, 2009; Bonn and Fisher, 2011)

- *Financial results*: long term economic growth, achieving planned returns, introducing new, transparent accounting and reporting systems (Mirchandani and Ikerd, 2008; Szekely and Knirsch, 2005).

The Corporate Sustainability Model (Epstein, Buhovac and Yuthas, 2010), represented in figure 1 below, supports managers in integrating sustainability in the company's operations and in transposing this strategy in specific actions aimed at improving the sustainable and financial performance. Thus, the *inputs* are designed to guide organization leaders in developing the appropriate sustainability strategy, in establishing and implementing sustainability programs and actions (*processes*). The results of these actions can positively or negatively influence the sustainable performance and the reactions of stakeholders (*outputs*), fact that will be reflected in the organization's financial performance (*results*). These authors point out that *leadership and organizational culture are critical factors for the sustainable performance and success of the organization.*

According to the model illustrated in figure 1, the determinant factors of the implementation of corporate sustainability across the organization are: the external context

(geographical, legal), internal context (mission, long-term corporate strategy, organizational structure, organizational culture), the business context (activity sector, customers, products), and human and financial resources.

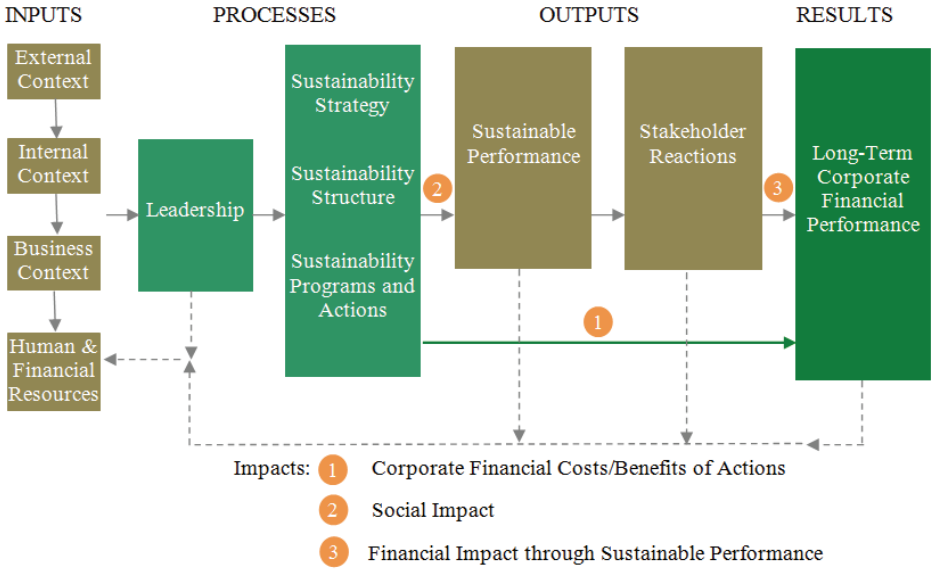

Figure no. 1: Corporate Sustainability Model

Source: Epstein, Buhovac and Yuthas, 2010, p. 42

2. The role of responsible leadership, organizational culture and organizational change in implementing corporate sustainability

As organizations try to adapt to new economic, social, ecological conditions, their leaders are beginning to recognize the importance of organizational culture in transforming businesses towards sustainable development, through organizational change. Thus, true sustainability requires vision and long-term commitment, in addition to responsible leadership (Borland, 2009).

The concept of *responsible leadership* has been developed in the context of multiple scandals regarding the responsibility of several multinational companies towards the environment and society, correlated with increasing concerns for sustainability (Pless, 2007). The concept is centred on the sustainable relations between organization leaders and stakeholders that are meant to lead to beneficial results for society and environment. (Cameron, 2011, LaRocca, 2011). For this purpose, socially responsible objectives need to be identified. Maak and Pless (2006, p.5) define responsible leadership as the art of building and maintaining morally sound relationships with all stakeholders. These relationships are based on a sense of justice, recognition, care and responsibility for a wide range of tasks of economic, social, political and human nature (Pless, 2007, p.451).

Leadership means not only providing commitment to managing the business, but also developing a system of incentives to reward leaders at all levels of the organization, leaders

who are concerned about and acting to adopt sustainable practices (Szekely and Knirsch, 2005). Furthermore, it also refers to the ability to flexibly deal with organizational change and engaging in dialogue and partnerships with various members of society (Szekely and Knirsch, 2005). Organizational sustainability and corporate responsibility are generally considered leadership challenges (Hansen, 2010) or, in other words, leadership plays a key role in integrating sustainability across the organization (Epstein, Buhovac and Yuthas, 2010; Borland, 2009).

The main challenges of corporate responsibility (Crews, 2010) of a leader include the following:

- *stakeholder engagement* – through an integrated approach of all stakeholders, and of their interests and needs, even if these are sometimes conflicting, in order to achieve mutual benefits (*symbiosis of stakeholders*, Dess, Lumpkin and Eisner, 2008 in Crews, 2010);

- *creating a sustainability centred organizational culture* – by transforming sustainability into a central organizational value, by means of convincing employees of the need and importance of organizational change, thus counteracting a potential reluctance to change;

- *organizational learning oriented towards sustainability* – to benefit from the knowledge, creativity and capacity of innovation (in general) and eco-innovation (in particular) of each employee, by providing personal and professional training and development programs, leadership ability development, but also by integrating sustainability objectives in the recruitment and selection processes;

- *measuring and reporting sustainability results* – by implementing sustainability monitoring and evaluation systems and by communicating to the various stakeholders the information on the results and sustainable performance, that are integrated in sustainability and corporate responsibility reports.

In terms of *organizational culture*, there is no universally accepted definition in the literature. Generally, researchers refer to common assumptions and values, as well as to expected behaviours and symbols that guide members in the decision-making process (Bertels, Papania and Papania, 2010; Schein, 1993 in Crews, 2010). In the long run, leaders need to promote a culture oriented towards business excellence, based on trial performance in relation to the demands of society, to help integrate sustainability values (Olaru et al., 2010). In this sense, an organizational culture centred on sustainability is an organization where members have common beliefs and opinions about the importance of balancing economic efficiency, social equity and environmental responsibility that are guiding managers and employees in their behaviour and decision-making process.

It is important to note the significant role organizational culture plays in encouraging or, on the contrary, impeding eco-innovation and innovation activities (Linnenluecke and Griffiths, 2010). As eco-innovation is fundamental in creating a sustainable strategy, it should not be hampered by rigid organizational culture that is reluctant to change. Implementing these innovations is only possible if there is room for flexibility, willingness to learn and organizational change (Dunphy, Griffiths and Benn, 2003).

Creating such organizational cultures requires the inclusion of environmental and social criteria in the employee recruiting and selection strategies (Bonn and Fisher, 2011),

resulting in a reduced degree of rejection in front of technological or management innovations. For sustainability vision and strategies to succeed, they must be reflected in the organizational norms, values and beliefs, as well as in the decision-making process. Increasingly more organizations displayed on their website or in their sustainability report the inclusion of sustainability in the way they do business – either in the mission, vision, or values underlying organizational activity. However, Bertels, Papania and Papania (2010) note that most leaders have difficulties in making sustainability operational, by including its principles and decisions in everyday processes.

In the sustainability context, it is necessary that organizations develop the ability to ensure *organizational change*, not just once, but continually, in response to changes in its environment (Buono and Kerber, 2010), as the implementation of sustainability in the organization cannot be performed rapidly, in a single stage. Moreover, sustainable organizations continually renew their processes and products, adapting them to new context (Jamali, 2006). Changing values, beliefs, assumptions and principles to integrate sustainability strategies are essential for a successful implementation. For instance, an organization that has a clear definition of its internal operating principles can more easily and positively influence other organizations and stakeholders with whom it interacts (Borland, 2009). Moreover, sustainable organizational cultures can influence the attitude of other stakeholders, such as suppliers and distributors or even society as a whole, especially if corporations can effectively adopt a leadership position in terms of sustainability (Stead and Stead, 2004 in Bonn and Fisher, 2011).

The management of organizational change involves a continuous process of renewal of direction, structure and capacity to meet the changing needs of internal and external customers (Brightman and Moran, 2000) and is especially important since, in the context of sustainability, the organizational change required is deeper. Organizational change must be also top to bottom, to create the necessary structure and to provide sustainable vision and bottom-up, to encourage participation by all employees. Schneider, Brief, and Guzzo (1996) argue that structural changes to the organization are effective only to the extent they are associated with changes in the psychology of staff. Thus, in the context of the sustainable development of an organization, change must occur at the level of each employee, through a change of perception, and an adjustment of the individual values .

Smith and Sharicz (2011) highlight the necessity to monitor the way in which sustainability is framed inside the organization, while Moran and Brightman (2000) consider that monitoring the evolution of organizational change is essential, being achieved by setting measurable objectives at the level of each employee.

3. Methodological aspects of the research

Eco-innovation (sustainable innovation) is essential in achieving the overall sustainability objectives of organizations, especially the ecological objectives of sustainable development.

The questionnaire based research undertaken by the authors had the goal to identify the concerns of organizations active on the Romanian market for sustainable development in general and eco-innovation in particular, and to highlight the main motivations and barriers in the way of eco-innovation, the main eco-innovative activities, as well as the sustainable performance indicators used. The findings confirm the importance of leadership and

visionary management, as well as the role of organizational culture and change management in the integration of sustainability within the organization.

In developing the questionnaire used in this exploratory research, the authors followed the previously described model of corporate sustainability, including questions relating to inputs, processes and sustainable performance. The questionnaire was distributed during the period October 10 – November 10, 2011 to representatives comprising top and middle management, as well as specialists from 581 SMEs and large companies operating on the Romanian market. 92 complete questionnaires were returned, with a response rate of 15.83%. The organizations that responded to our questionnaire are active in the following sectors: banking (19%), construction (17%), services – tourism, advertising, management consulting (11%), automobiles (8%), IT (7%), retail (6%), energy, utilities and transportation; oil & gas and telecommunications (5% each).

Through this research, the authors did not intend to establish an exhaustive survey to enable the generalization of the results at the level of business organizations in Romania, but wanted to offer an initial picture of the corporate sustainability of these organizations, of their sustainable development and eco-innovation initiatives, as well as of the problems that they are facing. Furthermore, their findings provide the opportunity to better understand the ways in which sustainability is incorporated at the organizational level, by means of the eco-innovation activities carried out, as well as the role that responsible leadership and organizational change have in achieving sustainability goals.

4. Research results

The research findings below are following the Sustainable Organization model previously described and include the input, processes, output and results.

4.1. The factors influencing the development of corporate sustainability strategies through eco-innovation (Input)

This research was aimed at identifying the factors that influence organizations to adopt sustainability principles in their current activity, taking into account: the external context (legislative factors, environmental protection issues), internal context (organizational issues of culture, values and mission of the enterprise), the business context (the potential evolution of demand for organic products, changes in customer perceptions, changes in the competitors in the sector, etc..), and the human and financial resources of the organization.

In this respect, one of the questions included in the survey aimed at identifying the opinion of the questioned company representatives on the impact that external challenges may have on the industry in which they operate – currently, in 5 and 20 years respectively. The impact was measured using a 5 point Likert scale, namely: very low, low, medium, strong, and very strong. The external challenges to which the question referred are the following: demographic changes and aging of population; climatic changes; resource constraints; economic and financial crises; technology blockage, including old infrastructure; changes in the value systems that influence customer demand. These challenges refer to the risks that organizations worldwide may face and that, if not treated properly, can have negative effects on the performance of organizations and even their activity sectors. Moreover, these

risks can be mitigated through proper identification by the organization leaders and through a sustainable approach to economic activity that requires profound organizational changes.

Organizations participating in the study considered that the following challenges have the strongest impact on their sector of activity: economic and financial crises – now, in 5 and 20 years (first 3 positions), followed by the potential changes in the value systems that would affect customer demand in 5 and 20 years (positions 4 and 6). On the other hand, the following challenges would have the weakest impact: climate change now and in 5 years, demographic changes and aging of population, and current resource constraints.

With respect to any environmental problems an organization might encounter, 48.91% of respondent companies said that they do not face environmental problems. Of the 51.09% of the companies facing environmental problems, the main challenges are considered the following: the obligations arising from stricter environmental legislation, as well as the costs of compliance or alignment with environmental legislation (figure no.2).

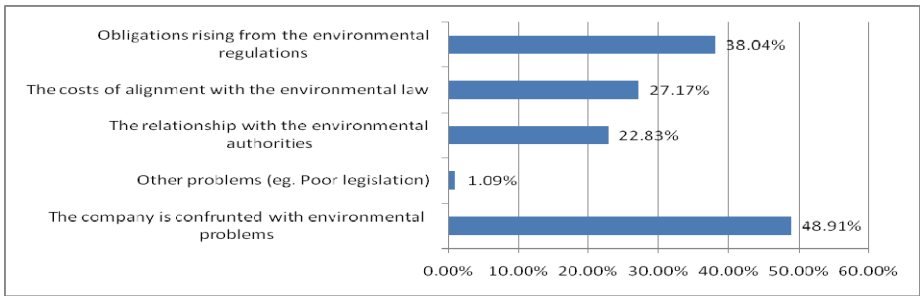

Figure no. 2: Environmental problems encountered by the responding organizations

Each of the responding organizations mentioned one or more reasons to include *sustainable development principles* in the long term strategy of the organization. Thus, these reasons refer to: the responsibility of businesses to ensure a clean environment for the benefit of current and future generations (38 responses); the economic and financial advantages and the competitive advantage gained in the market (38 responses); sustainability is a key element of organizational culture (30 responses).

With regard to eco-innovation activities, the factors that are considered by the respondent organizations as *the most important and stimulating in undertaking eco-innovation* activities, are the following: strict regulations and policies, including higher standards to be observed; qualified personnel; financial and fiscal incentives for eco-innovation; higher estimated energy prices; estimated stricter legislation in the future; a growing demand for ecological products. Among the factors considered as having little importance in influencing the eco-innovation activities of organizations participating in the survey the following were mentioned: inter-organizational collaboration or collaboration with research institutions.

According to the respondents, the main barriers to the development of eco-innovation activities were: the lack of incentives for eco-innovation from the authorities, followed by an uncertain return-on-investment of eco-innovation and a long payback period, lack of necessary funds in the organization, the high costs associated with the eco-innovation activities, and the uncertainty of demand for eco-innovative goods and services. Of the barriers that are considered low importance, we mention the following: the lack of

technological capacity in the company for eco-innovation, insufficient information on the existing technology and that fact that the market is already dominated by powerful companies.

In terms of resource requirements for undertaking eco-innovation activities, the responding organizations consider important the following resources: material resources (technical and technological equipment – 51.09%), licenses and know-how (36.96%), own financial resources equity (54.35%), financial resources coming from European funds (27.17%), or through loans from financial institutions (13.04%), subsidies from the authorities (23.91%), skilled and well trained research and development personnel (32.61%), economic and technical staff trained (31.52%) and a visionary management team (48.91%).

All in all, the factors that influence (positively or negatively) the development of corporate sustainability strategies are mainly related to legislative or economic and financial context. Thus, the main threat comes from the potential financial and economic crisis, probably influenced by the current global economic situation. The research also emphasized that the governmental incentives and the tightening of environmental regulations that require companies to perform their activities responsibly have a positive influence on the achievement of corporate sustainability. Furthermore, the respondent organizations give little importance to the issues of climate change and limited natural resources that, according to the sustainable development reports of various institutions, will have a major impact on the way of conducting business and on the whole society (reports of WBCSD, OECD, Wuppertal, etc.).

For organizations that included the principles of sustainability into corporate strategy, a special role is played by enterprise culture and organizational values that incorporate the three key aspects of sustainable development (the triple bottom line – economic, ecological, and social). Furthermore, a large number of companies consider important, in addition to their own financial resources, a visionary management team, able to guide the organization towards sustainable development, while ensuring the means and tools to achieve the necessary organizational changes.

4.2. Corporate sustainability programs and actions through sustainable innovation (Processes)

A major corporate sustainability strategy implementation method is the development of eco-innovation activities, whether these involve the sustainable innovation of products, processes or organizational structures.

According to the carried out study, 62% of respondent companies engaged in eco-innovation activities. The most common activity (65.22%) among responding organizations refers to reducing energy consumption, followed by selective waste collection; the use of clean technologies and the reduction of raw materials usage (each of these actions with over 40%).

Other eco-innovation activities refer to: the reduction of waste resulted in the production process; recycling of materials; optimization of production processes from a technological and organizational point of view; reducing pollutant emissions and the collection and recycling of end-of-life products (around 30%). It is interesting to note that the activities with the highest frequency among the responding organizations have, in addition to the

positive environmental impact, benefits related to reduced costs (energy, materials, storage, etc.) or are closely related to legislative requirements.

Less frequent are the more complex actions in terms of human and financial resources, namely: the use of environmental criteria in recruiting the personnel; obtaining a green certification for the various locations of the organization; obtaining the eco-label for products or services; or imposing different environmental performance requests on the business partners upstream in the supply chain. Furthermore, only 7.61% of organizations said they prepare sustainability reports that are made public, although it is an activity that does not require high expenditures.

The research also highlighted that only 28.3% of organizations have established a research and development budget related to environmental issues.

Although every organization can conduct a series of eco-innovation activities at no additional cost, even getting benefits due to reduced energy costs and consumption of materials, we find that a large number of enterprises (38%) ignore these issues and do not engage in eco-innovation activities. Organizations – through their leaders and each employee – need to understand the rewards of a sustainable approach to all activities and of establishing a long-term corporate strategy. This is achievable through organizational learning and capacity for innovation at the enterprise level.

4.3. Use of ecological performance indicators and stakeholder reactions (Output)

Since eco-innovation activity involves a series of financial efforts and human resources, resulting in significant social or financial benefits, it is necessary to use environmental performance indicators – for resources and processes, products and services, or organizational structures. Unfortunately, most companies participating in study (52.17%) do not use environmental performance indicators.

The environmental performance indicators can be classified in environmental performance indicators of resources and processes and indicators of environmental performance of products and services. The environmental performance indicators of resources refer to: the amount of energy used in production, the amount of water used, the intensity of material use for each use (MIPS), the amount of energy from renewable sources, and materials flow analysis (MFA).

The environmental performance indicators of processes include: the amount of waste, the amount of energy used in the transport and distribution, the amount of carbon and volatile organic substances, as well as indicators of eco-efficiency (ratio of environmental impact and economic value created).

The environmental performance indicators of products and services include life cycle analysis of product / service (LCA), the environmental footprint of products and / or services, carbon footprint of products and / or services used. General indicators of environmental performance of the organization include the company's environmental footprint, indicators of investment in socially responsible (Dow Jones Sustainability Index, FTSE4Good), reporting on the basis of GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) sustainability reporting standards.

As shown in figure no.3, the indicators most frequently used are easier to measure, such as: the amount of resulted waste, the amount of energy used in the production process, or the amount of water used. Instead, the product life cycle analysis is used by only 21.74% of the participant organizations.

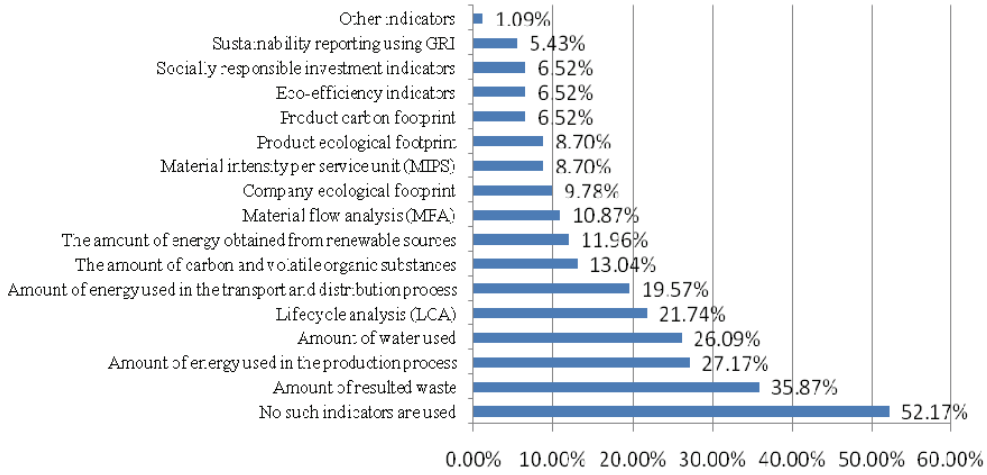

Figure no.3: Ecological performance indicators used by the respondent organizations

Lifecycle management is a comprehensive and sustainable approach for the innovation, development and introduction of new products on the market, as well as for the product information management, from the emergence of the idea until the product end of life. In this sense, using indicators to measure energy efficiency or energy consumption, both in the current activity and in the production process, should be done on a large scale.

Although there are concerns related to the energy consumption and the use of renewable energy in the case of SMEs and large organizations operating in Romania, in our opinion, attention to these issues should be higher for several reasons, including the following: reducing energy consumption and improving resource productivity are important goals of sustainable development strategies in Europe according to "Europe 2020 strategy"; reducing environmental impact can be achieved more effectively through the reduction of inputs (energy and materials consumption) rather than the control of results; reducing energy consumption and monitoring it reduce the purchasing costs of materials and energy, as well as the costs related to emissions and waste treatment, thus increasing the efficiency of organizations.

4.4. The impact of the eco-innovation activities on the organization's financial performance (Results)

Regarding the effects of eco-innovation activities, nearly 35% of the participant organizations achieved encouraging results, while 21% significant results, with a strong impact on the organization's financial performance. Less than 10% of the responding organizations specified that their obtained results were insignificant.

The analysis of responses to the open questions on the financial and social costs and results of the implementation of eco-innovative solutions revealed that most organizations have no clear evidence of the costs involved, and no precise monitoring of the results. The answers related to costs involved are divided. Thus, where there existed a monitoring of the costs of the eco-innovation activities, there were both significant financial costs to the company in the form of upgrading equipment, environmental certification and promotion of ecological products, but also very small costs to implement basic measures – such as reducing energy and resource consumption. Moreover, most organizations that implemented eco-innovative solutions claim that these resulted in substantial annual savings.

We note, therefore, that the majority of the organizations do not perform a monitoring of the eco-innovation activities or an assessment of the costs and benefits involved, despite the fact that many times, both costs and results are significant. In the absence of monitoring of efforts and results, an organization cannot show whether sustainability objectives have been met, which affects the speed and effectiveness of organizational change. Furthermore, reporting the results of the efforts to implement the sustainability principles (through eco-innovation or otherwise) is essential for investors, partners, employees and other stakeholders.

Conclusions

The literature review revealed the fact that the main factors influencing the implementation of organizational sustainability are: eco-innovation, responsible leadership, sustainable organizational culture and organizational change. Eco-innovation plays an essential role in achieving global corporate sustainability goals and objectives of organizations, especially those related to the environmental component of sustainability. For these reasons, performing eco-innovation activities represents a way to implement the environmental aspects of corporate sustainability in an organization.

Following the questionnaire-based research carried out in enterprises in Romania, we were able to assess the current state of concerns for sustainability in general, and for the ecological component of sustainable development, in particular.

The research results confirmed the importance of leadership and visionary management, as well as the role of organizational culture and change management in integrating corporate sustainability. Furthermore, the results reveal that the main reasons for integrating sustainable development principles in the long-term strategy of an organization are: the moral duty and responsibility of businesses for a clean environment, the economic and financial advantages gained on the market, and sustainability as a key element of organizational culture.

Moreover, the results show the importance given to the existence of visionary leaders in adopting and implementing sustainability in the respondent organizations. Thus, it is considered that visionary and responsible leadership influences the efficiency and speed of the organizational change process, so necessary in achieving organizational sustainability goals.

The research highlighted the fact that more than half of the responding organizations are engaged in eco-innovation activities, and most organizations participating in the research have no clear evidence of the costs involved, and no precise monitoring of the results.

Therefore, without a clear assessment of the efforts and the resulting benefits, it cannot be inferred whether sustainability objectives have been met and whether the adopted measures are effective on both long term and short term. Such an approach is not appropriate for an organization that seeks transformation towards sustainable development, the organizational change process towards sustainability being affected.

The sampling method for this research, as well as the response rate to this questionnaire represents a limitation of this research, as the results cannot be extended to all organizations in Romania.

However, the importance and originality of this paper are ensured, first of all, by the illustration of the link between the following elements: corporate sustainability; eco-innovation; responsible leadership; organizational culture and organizational change. Secondly, the paper offers a premier overview of the sustainability practices of the organizations in Romania, in general, and of the concerns for the ecological component of sustainable development, in particular.

Thus, the research provides a better understanding of these practices and of the motivations behind eco-innovation actions, in the process of corporate sustainability, facilitating the approach of the organizations willing to develop a sustainable development strategy, by integrating the corporate sustainability principles.

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