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COMPANIES' COMMITMENT ON CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: PERCEIVED BENEFITS AND BARRIERS OF SA 8000

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ABSTRACT

In today's global markets, issues related to environmental sustainability, ethics, working environment conditions and security, stakeholders' relations and the protection of workers' rights have greater importance on businesses performance. For this reason the aim of this research is to analyze the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility, which incorporate all these issues, investigating the perception of Italian companies about the International standard Social Accountability 8000, voluntary standard used as a tool to certify companies' commitment on Corporate Social Responsibility. The main reasons which have driven companies to be certified has been investigated, highlighting the main benefits and limitations resulted from the certification. Furthermore the presence of additional social responsibility practices adopted by companies in the Italian context has been analyzed.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; SA 8000, quality, standard, ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade increasing pressure on companies has been spread to widen their focus on sustainability and on accountability for financial performance as well as for business in general; they had to follow universally recognized standards and also communicate with the outside their intentions and the results obtained (Saen, 2012). The Social Accountability 8000 (SA 8000) standard is considered a multi-stakeholder standards and the member groups include not only businesses, but also certified bodies, non-governmental organizations, academia and trade unions. The constant involvement of stakeholders in the execution of social responsibility practices means that it becomes very difficult for organizations to avoid following a standard (Stigzelius, 2009). Moreover in addition to being a necessity to answer to the demands and needs of stakeholders, according to Welford, Meaton and Young (2003) adherence to social and environmental responsibility through a standard is also a way to differentiate itself from other organizations.

The survey was conducted on the total sample of Italian certified SA 8000 organizations until December 31st, 2015 that were 1081. All the information needed to contact companies has been obtained from the Social Accountability Accreditation Services database through its website (<http://www.saasaccreditation.org/>). The survey began September 15th, 2016 and answers have been accepted until November 15th, 2016. The administration of the survey took place by e-mail, when it had been possible to find an e-mail address of the company, while it took place by phone, in case it had not been possible to find it. 221 companies

participated at the survey reaching a response rate of 20.4%. The questionnaire design is the following: the first section defines the sample profile of companies; the second section investigates the motivations which led Italian companies to be SA 8000 certified, and the main perceived benefits and limitations of this International standard. Subsequently, section three investigates the corporate social commitment and finally section four their future commitment on social responsibility. In data processing it has been used SPSS 23.0 program, Statistical Package for Social Science.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research show that the major motivations which pushed Italian companies to be SA 8000 certified are the improvement of image and reputation, followed by the improvement of the working environment and a greater impact on customers and suppliers (Table 1).

Table 1 - Companies' motivations to be SA 8000 certified (five-point Likert scale)

	Mean	SD
Creation of new partnerships	2,90	1,255
Competitive advantage over competitors	3,49	1,139
Greater impact on customers and suppliers	3,81	0,903
Improvement of the working environment	3,90	1,000
Improvement of the efficiency of business management	3,54	1,093
Improvement of the image and reputation	4,33	0,794
Achievement of economic benefits	2,72	1,188
Presence of incentives at regional or local level	2,27	1,193
To be promoters of a new way of doing business	3,48	1,064
Demand from the market	3,14	1,208
Enterprise risk management	3,08	1,239
Brand protection	3,04	1,266

As a whole, the study shows how organizations believe that being in possession of the SA 8000 has been positive and convenient, however, among the barriers that emerged during empirical analysis, the more perceived by the sample was staff training. Moreover, most of the companies show the willingness to broad and improve in future their actions in the field of corporate social responsibility.

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