

ORGANISATIONAL SOCIAL IRRESPONSIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: Organisational social irresponsibility (OSI) as an indicative symptom of organisational malfunction (not only associated with large corporations but also with various types of organisations) has become a popular subject of the research interest, also in reference to the academic world. This paper presents various examples of socially irresponsible practices in higher education according to stakeholders they refer to. Some determinants of this phenomenon are also indicated.

Keywords: organisational social responsibility (OSR), organisational social irresponsibility (OSI), higher education, corruption, academic integrity.

1. Introduction

The popularity of corporate social responsibility (CSR) concept in general management discussion is undeniable. Scholars argue its utility (see for instance: Carroll, 1979; Lee, 2008; Frederick, 2008), but also indicate that CSR does not prevent a company from irresponsible practices (Gonzalez-Perez, 2011). Corporate social irresponsibility (CSI) may refer to many organisational levels and may harm various company's stakeholders (Murphy, and Schlegelmilch, 2013), that is why it may be used as a useful indicative symptom of organisational malfunction.

Today, those concepts (CSR and CSI) usually associated with large corporations, need reconsideration as the public demand for socially responsible impact has expanded to other types of organisations – e.g. public or non-profit institutions (Popa. and Salanță, 2014). The new approach in the literature is reflected in notions such as organisational social responsibility – OSR (see: Popa, 2010; Vandekerckhove, 2006) and organisational social irresponsibility – OSI (Stachowicz-Stanusch et al., 2017).

In recent years, the literature on management sciences more and more often reveals scientific reports on academic irresponsible behaviours (Neubaum et al., 2009), what has resulted in the occurrence of the current research focused on the diagnosis of the causes of misconduct occurrence in the widely understood academic community as well as searching for the solutions for its prevention by integrity development (Randall, Bender, and Montgomery, 2007) at all levels as well as within and by various stakeholders – students, faculties, and academic staff (Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2012). That is why some efforts are made to create an environment that reflects the academic integrity in an individual attitude of academic community members (McGowan, 2005), but also in the organisational conduct (McCabe, Butterfield, and Trevino, 2006).

This paper presents various examples of socially irresponsible practices in higher education according to stakeholders they refer to. Some determinants of this phenomenon are also indicated.

2. Academic integrity and academic corruption

Defining integrity, Peter Drucker argued that it is “concurrence between actions and words, between behaviour and professed beliefs or values” (Drucker, 1992, p. 115). Thus, it is the notion that is strongly associated with morality and is understood as one of personal virtues (Huang, 2011) that may be shaped by leaders, who may enhance ethical as well as unethical behaviours within an organisation (Sims, and Brinkman, 2002). In the subject literature, integrity is usually associated with particular attitudes and behaviours, which causes its recognition at the individual level (East, 2010).

However, it has been noticed that a kind of integrity may be shaped and recognised at the organisational level, namely the institutional integrity (Bertram, Gallant, Beesemyer, and Kezar, 2009). This idea has also been reflected in academic institutions, but we should still be aware that the integrity of universities’ authorities is not enough to build the university’s integrity as a whole. Integrity of this kind of institution depends on integrity and moral attitudes of all the members of the academic community – students, faculties, and academic staff (Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2012). An instrument of rationalisation of academic community members’ behaviours that functions at particular universities, is ensuring the ethical infrastructure, namely creating adequate policies, procedures, codes, etc. (Kuranchie et al., 2014).

On the other hand, it is worth remembering that the problem of widely understood corruption has become one of the most intensively discussed problems in several recent decades. The problem is discussed not only in popular journals but increasingly often in scientific publications, including papers on management sciences. Scientists have been trying

to define this phenomenon precisely for years, although there still exists an opinion that the applied definitions are too general to be utilitarian (Waite, and Allen, 2003). Some of the authors indicate the material gain (Anechiarico, and Jacobs, 1996), others focus on its private character (Nye, 1967), while others notice the strong embeddedness of this phenomenon in the public office (for instance: Jain, 2001). Not surprisingly corruption is quite often discussed in association with sectors especially prone to the abuse of public functions, including police (Bouza, 2001), politics (Kotkin, and Sajo, 2002), or the health care sector (Nishtar, 2010). The sector of education has not been ignored in this discussion (Hallak, 2007). An important field in these considerations is the education of widely understood business and economics, what is caused by the common critics of this sector (Swanson, 2004; Bennis, and O'Toole, 2005; Sims, and Felton, 2006). Many scholars indicate the higher education (in business) as the indirect cause of global corporate collapse and of the global economic crisis a few years ago (Ghoshal, 2005; Mitroff, 2004). However, there are some authors that express their hopes for active shaping of the future moral climate in business activity, as they notice that today's students will be the future employees, managers, executives, and public officers (Jaffe, and Tsimerman, 2005). That is why in the proposed project efforts will be made to identify corrupt behaviours in such organisations (business, schools, universities educating in economics and management).

3. Academic irresponsible behaviours

Most of the available research reports on the irresponsible behaviours in higher education focus on cheating (see for instance: Nowell, and Laufer, 1997; Teixeira, 2013), that includes the use of prohibited crib notes, helping someone else to cheat in a test, learning in advance what the test was about from someone who took it previously (Teixeira, and Rocha, 2010), use of unauthorized electronic equipment during exams, or work on assignment with others when asked for individual work (Lin, and Wen, 2007). This specific misconduct has been investigated in detail by a great number of authors. Determinants of cheating, such as demographic characteristics, attitudes toward cheating, personality variables, and situational factors (Freire, 2014) have been indicated. Moreover, cheating occurs to be a very rational activity and it depends on the perception of potential benefits, risk of being caught, and perceived costs of detection (Williams, and Hosek, 2003).

Cheating is also often associated with plagiarism (see for instance: Kiehl, 2006; Park, 2003), understood as the failure to proper credit ideas or materials taken from another, namely the deliberate use of another's work, without any indication, as one's own (East, 2010). Also in Poland the problem has been recognised and some systemic solutions are being

implemented in the universities' procedures with the use of IT technology (Kawczyński, 2007).

A noticeable characteristic for the presented research is the focus on dishonest conduct of students as they are the only group of interest in this field of investigation. Also the research on perception of corruption in the higher education sector is usually conducted just from the students' perspective (McKibban, and Burdsal, 2013). However, Rumyantseva (2005), who presented the taxonomy of corruption in the higher education, argues that other aspects of corruption exist in that sector which include the various groups of academic community in the investigation process. Academic corruption has been distinguished which is connected with the relation between students and a faculty, as well as the academic services corruption that includes the activity of administrative and university's staff. Also Heyneman (2011) indicated corruption of different university's members and divided examples of dishonest academic behaviours into two groups.

The first one is the corruption committed for personal gain which includes faculty's research falsification, plagiarism, sexual favours, and personal favouritism, as well as students' sexual exploitation, exchange cheating, and plagiarism. The second one is corruption for monetary gain, which is strongly related to bribery. Behaviours such as purchasing accreditation (rectors buying from the ministry of education), enrolment (students buying from the rector, dean, or enrolment committee), transcripts, housing, library use (bought by students from administrators) and grades (purchased from faculties) have been mentioned.

In accordance with the above, there are some research studies that indicate those and other rarely investigated examples of academic misconduct, such as falsification of biographies in research papers (Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2012), nepotism (Orkodashvili, 2011), bribery (Jain, and Shelly, 2013), financial frauds (Kranacher, 2013), or ghostwriting (Logdberg, 2011). This set of unethical behaviours among the academic community may be supplemented by the cases discussed in the Global Corruption Report on Education prepared in 2013 by Transparency International (Sweeney, Despota, and Lindner, 2013), where practices such as teacher absenteeism (Ngwé, 2013), selling fake diplomas (Diallo, 2013), shadow education understood as providing extra-fee charging classes (Bray, 2013), or sexual harassment (Leach, 2013) are also mentioned. Nnodum (2008) also mentions compelling students to buy handouts or extortion, and neglect of duty (by faculties).

4. Determinants of academic social irresponsibility

Some studies related to irresponsible behaviours in higher education concentrate on recognition of the determinants of such conduct. The most discussed determinants are demographics that shape people's attitudes to the phenomenon of corruption. In the literature demographics such as gender (Abbey, Abukabar, and Boghossian, 2009), age (Borkowski, and Ugras, 1998), studies profile – business-related or non-business (Tse and Au, 1997), or education level – undergraduates, graduates, post-graduates (see: Lopez, Rechner, and Olson-Buchanan, 2005; Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2011) have been discussed. The impact of other environmental factors (see: Peterson, Rhoads, and Vaught, 2001; Wimbush et al., 1997) has also been analysed.

Moreover, in the field of study that is focused on recognition of determinants of academic misconduct, we may notice culture as the another discussed issue. For instance, Mirshekary & Lawrence (2009) investigated corrupt issues in relation to the universal ethical values and ethical behaviours in the international context with the use of cultural values as the significant variables. There have also been other studies that were conducted from cross-national perspectives (see: Whipple, and Swords, 1992; Wankel, Stachowicz-Stanusch, and Tamtana, 2011). Some of them focus on national cultures or contexts as comparative investigations have been conducted between the United States and the nations such as Chinese and Mexicans (Waite, and Allen, 2003), Czechs (Preiss et al., 2013), or Emirians (Williams et al., 2014). Corrupt processes at the universities in European countries such as Portugal (Freire, 2014) or Romania (Teodorescu, and Tudorel, 2009), African ones such as Ghana (Kuranchie et al., 2014), Arabic regions such as Pakistan (Ramzan et al., 2012), or Taiwan from the Asian continent (Lin, and Wen, 2007) have also been scrutinised.

5. Conclusion

Irresponsibility in academia happens in each part of the world, at each level and refers to various university's members. However, it is usually described as a separate phenomenon without scrutiny of its organisational and societal context and the presented studies do not reveal the mutual impact between behaviours of different groups that compose the academic community. There are still many challenges in this research problem and still an open discussion on its nature.

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