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Evaluating Companies’ Commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility: Perceptions of the SA 8000 Standard

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Abstract

In today's global markets, issues related to environmental sustainability, ethics and the working environment have greater importance on business performance.

The SA 8000 standard can be used as a tool to assess organizations' performance on the social dimension of sustainability and understanding its relevance, could become a key element for the implementation of a sustainable strategy.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to investigate the implementation experience of the Social Accountability 8000 standard, through an empirical research on the motivations, the perceived benefits and the barriers to implementation by companies in the Italian context. A survey was conducted, which involved 1,081 Italian certified companies through the submission of a questionnaire. A Principal Component Analysis was applied to factors influencing motivations, benefits and barriers to SA 8000; to verify the reliability of the factor analysis, the Cronbach’s alpha test was computed. Finally, a logistic regression model has been used to assess whether the motivations and the perceived benefits contribute to determine an overall positive judgment about SA 8000 implementation by firms.

The research shows how companies’ SA 8000 certified are strongly oriented to the environment that surrounds them, and pay much attention to all relationships in the supply chain. The respondent companies seem to approach the standard not only for external reasons linked to the image and promotion of themselves, but also for a real desire to improve their internal working environment.

In conclusion, it can be drawn from the research that the ethical SA 8000 standard may be used as a tool to internalize the corporate sustainability, and develop a successful sustainable strategy if effectively developed.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility; Corporate Sustainability; SA 8000; Quality Standard.

1. Introduction

In the global context, enterprises are called to make themselves promoters of sustainable societies (DeSimone and Popoff, 2000), carrying out a proactive role. The awareness of a Social Responsibility began in the 1950s with the publication of Bowen (1953), in which he “refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society” (Caroll, 1999, p. 270). During the ’70 and ’80 years the debate about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was intense with a proliferation of CSR definitions and approaches about the role of business in the political and social arenas. The stakeholder approach (Freeman, 1984) is able to personalize social
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