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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL PROGRAMS IN IMPLEMENTING BUSINESS SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

This study analyzes the features of social programs on corporate social responsibility and examines the difficulties and shortcomings of its implementation. The main goal of the research is to study the influence of social programs on an effective implementation of social responsibility in the business. Social programs are aimed at solving socially significant tasks and improving the social well-being of citizens. The article presents the research results conducted in 2023 to study the social responsibility of Kazakhstani business. The obtained research results indicate the insufficient effectiveness of social programs and mechanisms of their implementation in ensuring social responsibility in the business. During the study, respondents noted their desire to receive support and assistance from management in solving important life problems. Thus, the results of the conducted research demonstrate the necessity of increasing the competitiveness of social programs in implementing business social responsibility and strengthening efforts to prevent social inequality. The analysis also shows that social programs need to be regulated by the government. The development and improvement of social programs for the effective implementation of business social responsibility have significant practical importance.

Key words: corporate social responsibility, social responsibility, social programs, entrepreneurs, social investments.

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Қазақстан Республикасында бизнестің әлеуметтік жауапкершілігін жүзеге асыруда әлеуметтік бағдарламалар рөлі: эмпирикалық зерттеулер

Бұл зерттеу бизнестің әлеуметтік жауапкершілігін жүзеге асыруда әлеуметтік бағдарламалардың қазіргі ерекшеліктері, оны жүзеге асыру қиындықтары мен кемшіліктерін талдауға бағытталған. Зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты – әлеуметтік бағдарламалардың бизнестің жауапкершілігін тиімді жүзеге асыруға әсер ету механизмін анықтау. Әлеуметтік бағдарламалар адамдардың өздігінен шеше алмайтын әлеуметтік мәселелерін шешуге және азаматтардың әл-ауқатын арттыруға арналған. Мақалада бизнестің әлеуметтік жауапкершілігін дамытуда әлеуметтік бағдарламалардың рөлін анықтау мақсатында 2023 жылы жүргізілген зерттеу нәтижелері ұсынылған. Зерттеу нәтижелері әлеуметтік бағдарламалардың дұрыс жұмыс істемеуі мен оларды жүзеге асыру механизмдерінің толық қанды нәтижелерге жеткізбегенін көрсетеді. Зерттеу көрсеткендей, қызметкерлер өздерінің өмірінде маңызды оқиғаларға басшылық тарапынан қолдау жасап, көмек көрсетулерін қалайды екен. Алынған зерттеу нәтижелері бизнестің әлеуметтік жауапкершілігін қалыптастыру мен дамытуда әлеуметтік бағдарламалардың бәсекелестік деңгейін арттыру мен теңсіздікті болдырмауға бағытталған жұмыс сапасын арттыру қажеттілігін көрсетеді. Сондай-ақ, осы талдау әлеуметтік бағдарламалардың мемлекет тарапынан реттелу маңыздылығын айқындайды. Бизнестің әлеуметтік жауапкершілігін дамытуда әлеуметтік бағдарламаларды орындау және оны одан әрі зерттеу практикалық маңызға ие.

Түйін сөздер: корпоративті әлеуметтік жауапкершілік, әлеуметтік жауапкершілік, әлеуметтік бағдарламалар, кәсіпкерлер, әлеуметтік инвестиция.

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Роль социальных программ в реализации социальной ответственности бизнеса в Республике Казахстан: эмпирические исследования

В данном исследовании анализируются особенности социальных программ по социальной ответственности бизнеса и рассматриваются трудности и недостатки их реализации. Основной целью исследования является изучение влияния социальных программ на эффективную реализацию социальной ответственности в сфере бизнеса. Социальные программы направлены на решение общественно значимых задач и повышение социального благополучия граждан. В статье представлены результаты исследования, проведенного в 2023 году, по изучению социальной ответственности казахстанского бизнеса. Полученные результаты исследования свидетельствуют о недостаточной эффективности социальных программ и механизмов их реализации в обеспечении социальной ответственности в сфере бизнеса. В ходе исследования респонденты отмечали о желании получения поддержки и помощи со стороны руководства в решении важных жизненных проблем. Таким образом, результаты проведенного исследования показывают необходимость повышения конкурентоспособности социальных программ в реализации социальной ответственности бизнеса и усиления работ в минимизации социального неравенства. Анализ также показал, что социальные программы требуют регулирования со стороны государства. Развитие и улучшение социальных программ в целях эффективной реализации социальной ответственности бизнеса имеет важное практическое значение.

Ключевые слова: корпоративная социальная ответственность, социальная ответственность, социальные программы, предприниматели, социальные инвестиции.

Introduction

The importance of social responsibility of business is increasing in modern Kazakh society. Social responsibility of business in Kazakhstan is not established at a legislative level compared to developed European countries where it is. The development and formation of business social responsibility are being recently studied and analyzed in Kazakhstan. There are enormous number of issues in Kazakhstani business such as the factors influencing the formation of social responsibility, the challenges in its formation, as well as the alignment of societal and business interests, the need for social programs and charity. Issues related to social programs and charity are still insufficiently studied and require further research in Kazakhstani business. The issues related to effectiveness of business for companies implementing social and charitable policies are also being raised.

Moreover, it is known fact that general and humanistic norms have been relevant since ancient times. In classical philosophical thoughts, from ancient times to the modern era, thinkers such as Aristotle, Plato, T. Hobbes, I. Kant, M. Montaigne, B. Spinoza, and D. Hume have laid the foundations of considering political and legal theories in combination with moral theories.

Additionally, the contributions of scholars such as R.G. Lotze, E. Husserl, F. Nietzsche, G. Rickert, N.A. Berdyaev, I.A. Ilyin, S.L. Frank are important in studying the values that underlie social norms related to socio-economic changes in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Social programs play a significant role in implementing corporate social responsibility. They can contribute to sustainability by affecting the formation of human capital. Therefore, appropriate identification of principles in developing and implementing social programs and considering the way of increasing their effectiveness are crucial.

The current reforms in the national economy bring business and government closer together in addressing social issues. Non-material factors are starting to play an important role in the economic development. They become part of the corporate development strategy and contribute to the growth of corporate social responsibility and its social programs.

There are many issues regarding the content of corporate social responsibility in applied sociology. For instance, how companies are accountable to corporate social responsibility and the activities and obligations they undertake in this regard. In response to this statement companies participating

in corporate social responsibility initiatives can be demonstrated in social programs.

As we observe the social policies of developed countries, it is known that government intervention plays a crucial role in regulating social programs. It can be explained by the fact that social programs have not only social significance but also contain some obligations. It means that they should not totally relieve social obligation from the state, employers and employees. In our opinion, the state should regulate the fundamental aspects of corporate social responsibility. Studying the experiences of implementation of corporate social responsibility by commercial organizations in developed countries may contribute to eliminating legal gaps in corporate social responsibility.

Western scientist M.D. Ermann believes that charity plays an important role in solving social problems and defines it as a tool for social support that accompanies the activities of authorities (Ermann, 1978).

Today, the role of intangible factors in the development of the economy is increasing, especially importance of social programs and corporate social responsibility are increasing. Each company will independently determine the forms, methods and amount of its contribution to the socio-economic component of public relations. Structural activities are a prerequisite for creating social programs in business. Social programs are defined as healthcare activities and professional development of employees, organizing proper working conditions by companies and labor groups. Also, they contain proper mechanism of protecting the interests of employees and providing benefits for them. In addition, it is known that environmental protection, local community support, charity, and business practices are voluntary activities.

The main criterion for creating and implementing social programs is their compliance with business goals and strategy. Social programs can be divided into the following types (Konovalova, 2003):

- personal programs of the company;
- partnership programs with regional, national and state bodies;
- partnership programs with non-profit organizations, public organizations, trade unions;
- programs of informational cooperation with mass media.

Literature Review

Social program is a systematic document in the social, environmental, and economic fields related

to the company's mission and development strategy and aimed at meeting the needs of various interested parties. The management decision in implementation of social programs is developed by taking into account the interests of the main internal and external stakeholders, it is made with the assumption that the company will find social and economic benefits in strategic relations. A prerequisite for the implementation of social services is focused on social investments. Lack of social investments is the main reason for the impossibility of implementing social programs (Shcherbachenko, 2012). In this case, there is need for strict control by the state in the implementation of social programs.

Creation and implementation of social programs consists of the following stages:

- determination of priority directions of the company's social policy;
- formation of the management structure of social programs;
- trainings in the field of social responsibility;
- creation of social programs;
- implementation of social programs of the company;
- assessment of effectiveness of social programs implementation;
- share the results of the company's social programs to all interested parties.

In addition, the following principles are observed in the implementation of social programs:

- relevance – timeliness – being in demand;
- volume – coverage of a certain audience;
- effectiveness – achievement of results.

The means of implementing social programs are undoubtedly the methods used by the enterprise for the practical implementation of approved social programs (Shcherbachenko, 2020).

Within the framework of corporate social responsibility social programs develop in two directions. The first direction is intended to solve internal problems of corporations, and the second direction is aimed at to solve external problems that are beyond the economic activity of corporations. Priorities of social responsibility and directions of social programs are interconnected (Dementieva, 2009).

M.M. Ivashina argues that large-scale social programs should be formed at the local community level, as well as at the international level with a good business reputation. The effectiveness of social programs can be divided into economic and social types. The economic efficiency of the programs is the return of resources invested in human capital and effective use of funds and budget belonging

to the organization. The social effectiveness of social programs is explained by the growth of the intellectual and physical potential of the society, labor productivity and standard of living (Ivashina, 2018).

Social programs are directly related to the economic situation: the higher potential of business structure, the more aspects involve in structure of social programs. Social programs are more effective if they satisfy the interests of all participants. Social programs should always be systematic, they are recreated depending on the macroeconomic activity and financial situation of organizations. Therefore, it is important to stimulate the development of such social programs by the state. This is beneficial for the business itself as well. In the procedural plan, social programs are services intended to nature protection, personnel development, support of local communities, as well as activities that implement voluntary business practices (Poghosyan, 2012).

In the implementation of such kind of business practice, it is necessary to create an all-inclusive system of various forms of independent external evaluation (permanent, periodic, phaseal) in order to implement a real structural reconstruction of public administration. Only such kind of an assessment will make it possible to determine the following:

- the degree of current effectiveness of any social program;
- conformity of models, programs and projects created and introduced at the state level;
- the degree of need for their regulation (Khananashvili, 2011).

In the experience of many companies, the following areas of social programs are commonly integrated:

- personnel development;
- health and safety at work;
- rebuilding corporate social responsibility;
- environmental protection and resource conservation;
- community development;
- fair labor practices (Emelyanov, 2014).

In the current situation, national companies, major banks, and companies in raw material sector in Kazakhstan are main drivers of corporate social responsibility development. However, in the Kazakhstani experience, the involvement in implementing social programs is often only associated with improving the company's image in the society. Previously, the company's reputation suffered from improper relations with business partners, disregard for consumers, and violations of

human and environmental laws, and from situations associated with crime (Sansyzybayeva, 2015).

In the current situation, it is clear that the social-economic conditions in Kazakhstan are challenging, making it difficult for small and medium-sized businesses to implement social programs effectively. However, larger businesses tend to have more resources to invest in corporate social responsibility initiatives. Nevertheless, the country's circumstances and being depended on the capabilities and scale of the business, society still expects significant contributions from businesses in terms of social programs.

Usually, it is necessary for the state to create favorable conditions for the implementation of social programs. While the tangible results of corporate social responsibility initiatives in terms of investment projects by major companies can serve as specific examples. A good example can be the water issue in the city of Kulsary that demonstrates the significant social impact of a large oil company's reinvestment (Rakhmatullayeva, 2014). Initially, the corporate social responsibility of businesses was seen primarily through traditional charity. However, now they have strategic social programs developed from their strategic plans. These include intellectual investments, programs for regional and national development, initiatives for sustainable development in regions, support for youth sports, and other related activities.

In our society, social programs mainly are aimed at assisting vulnerable groups such as sick children, orphans, disabled individuals, the elderly, and homeless people.

The decline in people's health, along with the loss of health itself, is a significant problem for society and is the most acute issue to address. Because the state's responsibility for labor-related benefits separates it from the government, the joint efforts of individuals, employers, and the government are essential to improving public health (Zemlyanukhina, 2018). Providing proper working conditions, conducting free medical-preventive examinations, sanatorium-resort treatment, provision of sports facilities, and promoting a healthy lifestyle are crucial measures to ensure public health. The effectiveness of health care policy is closely related to corporate social responsibility. Since most of the time is spent at work, working conditions, team relationships, corporate culture, and even sports activities play a significant role in improving quality life. Authors based on modern experience, argue that companies can enhance their corporate culture by forming football, volleyball,

chess, and table tennis teams, which can positively impact employees' well-being (Sorokina, 2015).

Material and Methods

The research study was approved by Al-Farabi Kazakh National University Ethical Committee (IRB-A365). The research completion date is December 30, 2021.

The study was conducted in the period since January until March 2023. Survey was conducted based on electronic questionnaire in Astana, Almaty, Shymkent cities, as well as in Atyrau, Karaganda, and East regions of Kazakhstan. The questionnaire was designed in both Kazakh and Russian languages. Respondents were explained about the questionnaire and its objectives. Data was collected through the online platform Google Forms (<https://docs.google.com/forms>). The data collection process was anonymous, and no personally identifiable information was requested. The target audience consisted of fully qualified citizens, as official letters were sent to each city and regional Chamber of Entrepreneurs "Atameken," requesting email addresses of participants. Respondents were given the option to fill out the questionnaire in Kazakh or Russian languages. Participation was voluntary and therefore there were individuals who chose not to participate without specifying reasons.

The sample size is 701 individuals, who represent various sectors of small and medium-sized businesses. The age range of respondents was between 18 and 60 years old. For the sample size of 701 respondents and a 95% confidence level, the maximum statistical error for the survey results is 3.8%, which means that the statistical error of the survey results allows for extrapolation of the findings to the general population. Statistical methods were used to assess and determine the research parameters. The confidence level at 95% ensures the reliability of the data within the specified range. The margin of error (N=701, confidence interval – 95%) indicates a maximum statistical error of $\pm 3.8\%$. The survey was conducted using a random sampling method, and the maximum statistical error was calculated according to the formula.

The gender distribution of the sample is as follows: 52% male and 48% female. It quantifies the existence of opportunities equally available to all individuals engaging in business. However, there was a noticeable gender discrepancy when dividing respondents by city and region. The primary representation of female respondents was observed in Shymkent (64%) and East Kazakhstan Region

(57%), while Atyrau Region (76%) and Karaganda Region (57%) showed a higher proportion of male respondents. In both North and South regions, the indicators for total participation in the survey were synchronized. This division is attributed to two factors: the topic of the survey and the specific business relations within a designated region. To interpret the acquired data accurately, it is essential to acknowledge the need for utilizing the method of quota-free natural selection in respondents within the B2B segment, where a screening question was introduced to understand the significance of the survey's value in socioeconomic terms.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents (88%) are urban residents. The most economically active age category among participants from all regions is 35-44 years old, comprising 30% of the total. The presence of young adults, aged 18-24 (32%), particularly females, is notable in our target audience. Another significant demographic characteristic is the prevalence of distinct groups in the East Kazakhstan and Atyrau regions, indicating an organized representation: the 44-55 age group, roughly 26% on average, while those aged 55 and above constitute 11%. It is noteworthy that respondents' socioeconomic stability and their reluctance to engage in societal issues are apparent in the survey results. They tend to consider resolving social issues as the responsibility of each individual. Regarding the ethnic composition of participants, Kazakhs make up 60%, followed by Russians at 30%, and other ethnic groups at 10%.

Results and discussion

Based on the empirical section of the article, we present the following diagrams reflecting the results of our study. Regarding the question "What tools are used to implement social business programs?" respondents' answers predominantly focus on the opening of job positions (45%-68% range), creating job opportunities for their employees (47%-66% range), and social investments (35%-62% range). It is evident that companies play a significant role in the country's economic development, as they are keen on opening numerous job positions. Opinions from various sources, including social media like Facebook and Telegram, highlight the importance of job creation and the necessity for manufacturing and production facilities.

"Workplaces are the best protector against poverty and vulnerability. Government plays a crucial role in stimulating workforce growth by

creating conducive employment environment” notes Kaushik Basu, Vice President of the World Bank (World Bank, 2012). The study results are provided in Figure 1.

Additionally, the discussion on social investments and their development is essential due to the variance in regional budgets, geographical features of regions, cities, and rural areas.

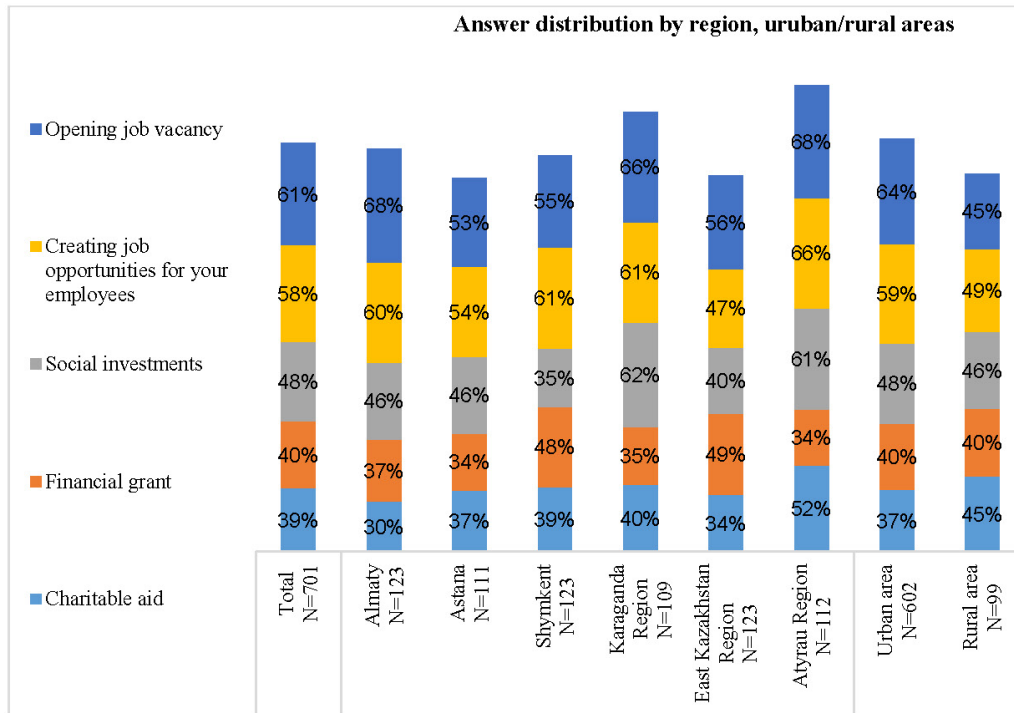


Figure 1 – The distribution of responses to the question “What tools are used to implement business social programs?”, N=701

Analyze the responses of respondents to the question “What social programs are implemented to support and assist your employees?” demonstrates the initial three answers:

Financial support/assistance (significant events in the lives of employees), (distribution 45%-58%, by region, city, village);

Increasing employee competence (42%-60% distribution, by region, city, village);

Medical insurance (38%-59% distribution, by region, city, village, where Eastern Kazakhstan region is leading with 59%).

Based the study results it can be identified the importance of financial support/assistance provided during significant events in the lives of employees. We are observing the increase in morale among employees who have received rewards during festivals. Addressing the issue of enhancing employee competence also deserves careful consideration in terms of the company’s strategy. The issue of medical insurance is one of the pressing

matters where a viable solution is being sought. The public’s interest in a system of medical insurance without any complications remains unflagging. This issue requires a dedicated study. The results of the study are provided in figure 2.

Both managing human resources and company policy affect employees’ satisfaction. Additionally, understanding human resources and their needs has become crucial in the recent from the perspective of each employee. In increasing motivation among employees, various forms of stimulation are becoming more important than just financial ones (Gabcanova, 2011).

Study of foreign and other scientific works shows that foreign companies have different methods of stimulation. The Western approach combines financial, material and non-material incentives.

It is possible to adopt foreign practices of motivating employees in providing support and assistance taking into account the specifics of mentality, culture, geographical location,. However,

we should also know that methods of non-material incentives work only when material needs of employees are satisfied. An additional issue relates to the rationale for the programs' rules and policies. Social programs are usually limited to certain groups of people and not available to everyone (Zibar, 2014).

Kazakh scientists argue that there is a big gap between the reports given by of modern companies

and their actual activities in the field of social and environmental responsibility. This can be seen, including the example of the impact of the economic crisis on the mentioned projects, first of all, most companies cut funding for social and environmental services, as well as social packages and payments to employees. All this undermines the trust of the majority of the population in such kind of social programs (Baykenova, 2018).

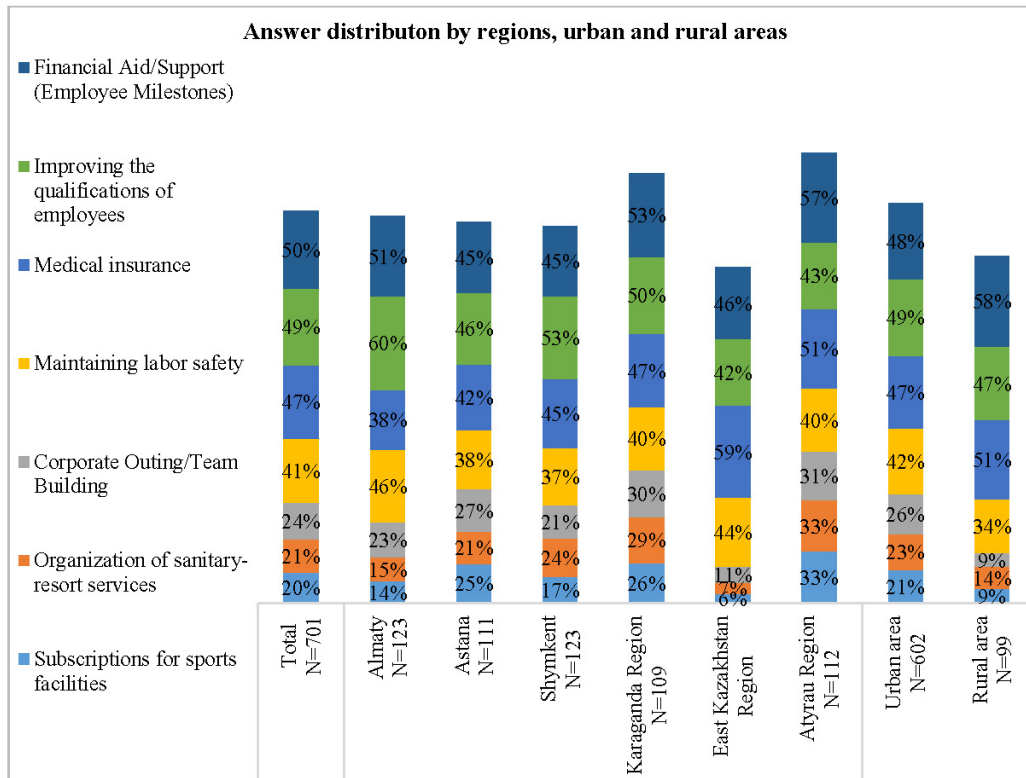


Figure 2 – “What kind of social programs does your company run to support and help its employees?”. N=701

Further, the question “What kind of social programs does your company manage to provide support and assistance to its employees?” was analyzed based on gender, age, and labor market experience. In our study, men (54%) and women (45%), and 55 years and older (63%), and 5 to 15 years of work experience in the market (53%) have showed a high percentage of “financial assistance and support (employee milestones)”. Employees want support and assistance from the management during important events in their lives. It is known that increasing the material interest of the employee affects the timely and quality performance of the work.

The next answer is “improvement of the qualifications of employees” (between 43% and 60%). Also, increasing professionalism or improving the qualifications of an employee is a type of professional development of personnel. We believe that continuous improvement of employees’ knowledge is an objective necessity. Improving the qualifications of employees, their training increases labor productivity, creates an opportunity to achieve the company’s strategic goals.

The third response is “health insurances” (range 39%-55%) which has a high percentage. It is known that the main principles of the health insurance model are cooperation, universal coverage and

social justice. In addition, it adheres to the principles of “every person can pay and receive medical care – according to their needs”. It can be seen that health

insurance for employees is the main social program in providing support and assistance for them. The results of the study is given Figure 3.

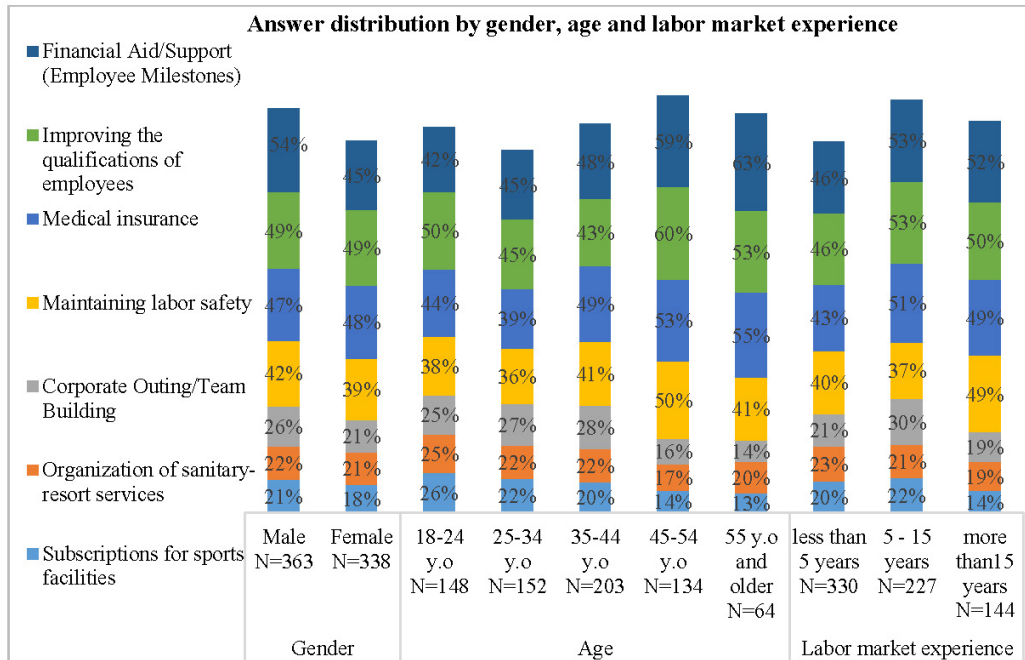


Figure 3 – “What kind of social programs does your company run to support and help its employees?” (answer distribution by gender, age, market experience), N=701

We also asked about the tools used in implementing social programs within the framework of corporate management of the business. According to the survey results, they were divided into two main categories (each entrepreneur can belong to the same group according to the total number of opinions gathered):

-Rational – creating conditions for the implementation of the main mission of the business, creating jobs, and providing opportunities for employees to fulfill their job responsibilities properly (about 60% on average).

- Irrational – requiring substantial investments aimed at ensuring employee satisfaction, social and emotional well-being, which in turn contributes to the improvement of employee efficiency, including but not limited to: social investments, monetary grants, and charity (the indicators change from 39% to 48% on average).

The results of the study have revealed the essential tools of social programs supported by employees (see Figures 2 and 3): financial assistance for significant life events (50%); skills enhancement (49%); and healthcare (47%). Ensuring workplace

safety according to the top four basic platforms (41%) is the most critical aspect for employers. Currently, ensuring workplace safety is also an urgent research topic. Workplace safety measures directly correlate with employee mortality. There is significant evidence and examples to support this claim.

Moreover, many companies overlook providing information about financing their own social programs. However, large companies have the potential and resources to implement their social programs in different regions. Corporate social responsibility is the most significant and visible form of corporate social responsiveness, manifested through social investments tailored to the community’s needs. Businesses expect social orientation and sustainability from these investments.

Social programs are primarily aimed at improving employee well-being. Understanding that each industry and company has its own unique social programs is crucial. Such social programs enhance flexibility, eliminate disparities, and improve the work quality of each employee. Material and various

socio-psychological support services are essential for employees.

In implementing corporate social responsibility business involvement and adherence to international standards, as well as the comprehensive development of social programs, are crucial. The formation of corporate social responsibility involves a complex process because it reflects the diversity of economies and living conditions in different countries.

Currently, theoretical and empirical research on corporate social responsibility, extensive sociological studies, the emergence of various information tools advising businesses on corporate social responsibility, as well as initiatives to involve large and small companies in various projects, contribute to its effectiveness.

In Kazakhstan's business significant challenges, such as the absence of consistent state regulation of social responsibility, the prevalence of informal economic relationships, and issues related to the enforcement of legal norms, remain unresolved. Therefore, businesses are compelled to expand and develop their corporate social responsibility.

Corporate social responsibility makes Kazakhstan a leader among the Central Asian countries (Smirnova, 2015). At present, public awareness of the fundamental principles of corporate social responsibility in national companies is increasing. The formation of a comprehensive framework for corporate social responsibility in Kazakhstan is still ongoing.

Conclusion

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the government, as a social state, is committed to accepting all social obligations, and the volume of these obligations is increasing from year to year. It is clear that this imposes an additional burden on the state. Therefore, the government is struggling to share these social obligations with businesses. However, the government cannot create a sustainable system that would relieve the burden of social programs and, at the same time, maintain a system that businesses can rely on to fulfill their

social obligations completely. Nevertheless, the government has the resources to fulfill this service. Therefore, the joint responsibility of business and government in implementing social programs needs to be clearly defined, and a list of social needs must be identified.

Company commitment to ensuring the satisfaction of its employees, fostering a social and emotional environment, and investing without overextension are all contributing factors to increased efficiency. Social investments, financial grants, and charitable activities are avenues through which companies can facilitate sustainable development of their social programs. The following activities are crucial for the sustainable development of a company's social programs:

- creating a favorable social climate;
- establishing partnerships with various educational institutions and community organizations;
- opening up job opportunities and engaging young people in employment;
- developing long-term strategies for the company's social programs and finding innovative solutions to social issues, including providing employees with affordable housing, increasing literacy, and paying attention to health and spiritual development.

The implementation of social programs by the government and companies cannot be achieved without the social responsibility of both business and the public. As part of the current innovative economy, social programs are an essential subject for attracting social investments.

Acknowledgement

We extend our sincere gratitude to all entrepreneurs who participated in this questionnaire, as well as to the Chamber of Entrepreneurs "Atameken" in Almaty and the Chamber of Entrepreneurs "Atameken" in East Kazakhstan region. Furthermore, we express our deep appreciation to the anonymous contributors of this journal for their valuable insights and suggestions.

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