Corporate Social Responsibility in the Danish shipping industry

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Abstract
The shipping industry is claimed to be a laggard concerning CSR. In this study, an initiative from the Danish government concerning CSR reporting is examined. It is analysed whether the initiative has been able to convince the Danish shipping industry to implement CSR in their daily operation. A qualitative study of the ten largest Danish shipping companies was conducted. The study covered annual financial statements and CSR reports in the period from 2006 to 2010. In addition, this was compared with a previous study of the 1000 largest Danish companies. The paper has an Institutional Theory approach, identifying whether the Danish shipping companies have strategy of conformity or decoupling. When legislators introduce above mentioned initiatives, there is a risk that some companies publish a non-binding CSR policy. This leads to the hypothesis of this paper that change in state regulation affect the degree of which corporations behave in a social responsible way. The paper concludes that until the amendment of the Danish annual financial statement act in 2009, the Danish shipping companies were laggards in reporting CSR issues. Furthermore, the Danish regulatory initiative has had a significant effect on the top ten Danish shipping companies CSR reporting. Finally, decoupling rhetoric from practices where practised among a minority of the companies.
1. Introduction

Reporting on issues within Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a mainstream activity for large companies. However, the shipping industry is one of the few major business segments where reporting on CSR, has been significantly absent (DNV, 2004). Until recently, CSR reporting has been absent within the Danish shipping industry. Today, however, most major Danish shipping companies have appropriate CSR reports. One possible explanation for this change could be the introduction of a new Danish legislation. In Denmark an amendment of the “Danish annual financial statement act” (The Danish Commerce and Companies Agency, 2010), passed by a vast majority of the Danish parliament, makes it mandatory for the 1400 largest Danish companies to include information on CSR, in their annual financial reports. The legislation was implemented in 2010 with reference to CSR initiatives in the previous year, 2009. CSR is still voluntary, but if a company has no CSR policy this information must be stated explicitly. The statement must contain: 1) Corporate social responsibility policies, including any standards, guidelines or principles for social responsibility, which it uses, 2) How the company translates its social responsibility policies into action, including any systems or procedures, 3) The company’s assessment of what has been achieved as a result of its work on social responsibility in the financial year, and any expectations for future work.

However, one thing is to report on CSR, another is having CSR effectively implemented in the company. An example could be a company that claims in their CSR policy that they want to reduce their co2 emissions, but in reality do not make an effort in this area.

Unfortunately, the concept of “sustainable development” and changes in environmental laws in the 1970s did not automatically lead to changes in corporate environmental practices (Lee, 2011). Regarding CSR reporting, there is a risk of de-coupling rhetoric from practices. Decoupling implies adoption of CSR as ceremony, a conscious effort of the company to portray itself as following the institutionalized rules while actually doing business as usual, pursuing what it believes to be more profitable paths.

A possible explanation for the shipping industry to be a laggard in CSR reporting could be that the shipping industry is mainly dominated by business to business, B2B. Earlier studies have shown
that there is a positive relationship between closeness to market and environmental reporting (Haddock-Fraser & Fraser, 2008a) \& (Gonzalez-Benito & Gonzalez-Benito, 2006). Companies closer to the final consumer also called Business to Consumer, B2C, have a greater inclination to report on CSR issues than B2B companies. Another reason could be what some NGOs refer to as “flying under the radar”. Research suggests that the more companies expose their ethical and social ambitions, the more likely they are to attract critical stakeholder attention (Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

Within institutional theory it is known that organisations within the same field have a tendency to become increasingly similar. There are three isomorphic processes that cause this phenomenon, Coercive which are formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society, Mimetic where companies modelling a leader in the field and innovate by copying others, and finally Normative a professional isomorphic process due to universities, training institutions, and trade organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Five strategic responses to pressures toward uniformity with the institutional environment have theoretically been identified. The five strategies, ranging from conformity to resistance, are Acquiesce, Compromise, Avoid, Defy, and Manipulate (Oliver, 1991).

Kostova, Roth and Dacin (2008) argue that Multi National Corporations (MNC) experience a weaker institutional pressure, mainly because of the diversity among the many institutional systems that the MNCs are exposed to (Kostova, Roth, & Dacin, 2008). The same argument cannot be used regarding the shipping industry, on the contrary. Even though the Danish shipping companies operate in a multinational environment, there are factors that contribute to isomorphic processes. The regulation of commercial seaborne shipping has a long history.
Together with the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has designed a global legal instrument consisting of four conventions to enhance the international regulatory regime. Furthermore, customers (like the oil majors) and classifications companies ensure a certain degree of homogeneity.

The stronger influence of isomorphism, the stronger is the tendency to adopt decoupling. Decoupling implies that an organization portray itself as following the institutionalized rules while
actually conduction business in different ways that it be lives are more in the interest of the organization.

Studies have shown that the bigger a company is, the better their CSR implemented. Most small and medium enterprises are not exposed to the same external pressures as large firms (Lynch-Wood, Williamson, & Jenkins, 2009). There is only one study (Udayasankar, 2008) showing that there is a U-shaped relationship between the size of the company and the probability to implement CSR. Several studies have shown that the better trained staff in the company, the better it gets implemented CSR. However, it is problematic to compare education levels within the same industry as it is most likely related to the size of the company. In addition, several studies have shown that as with all other implementation success, it is very important that top management is dedicated and committed to CSR.

The reason why Danish shipping companies in recent years have been much better to report CSR has not yet been investigated. We do not yet know whether the companies reported because there is a legal expectation or whether it is because the companies themselves think of any competitive advantage or whether the companies have a desire to help improve and influence society in a positive direction.

There is a lack of knowledge when it comes to factors that separate the companies that implement CSR efficiently from the companies who are adopting a decoupling approach. In recent years, many major Danish shipping companies have published an annual report on their CSR according to the Danish CSR legislation. But how many of these companies are adopting a decoupling approach - That we do not know much about.

These are interesting questions because the companies that genuinely adopt and implement CSR policies need to differentiate themselves from the free riders in order to gain a competitive advantage.

There are three fundamental competitive advantages: Demand, Cost, and Economy of scale. But to gain sustainable competitive advantage the strategy has to be accompanied by some degree of customer captivity, this is where CSR can contribute. If you want to gain a competitive advantage,
it is necessary to stand out from your competitors. One way to stand out from your competitors could be by means of the CSR policy in the company.

Nevertheless, as indicated earlier to publish a CSR policy does not necessary lead to a company behaving in a more social responsible manner. The old universal proverb “You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink” has stood the test of time but this paper argue that “When you lead a horse to water, it will probably start to drink”.

This leads to the aim of this study: How does change in state regulation affect the degree of which corporations behave in a social responsible way? And how often do companies decouple rhetoric from practises?

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: First the conceptual framework regarding CSR, the regulations of shipping, and the theory of Business diversity is reviewed. Then the method is described. This is followed by the results of the study and a discussion. Finally, the paper ends with a conclusion, where potential areas of new research are presented.

2. Corporate Social Responsibility

There exist various definitions of CSR. One of the reasons for the lack of a universal definition of CSR is that what is considered to be social responsible is changing over time and place due to evolution of society and organizational uniformity through institutionalization processes.

A study has identified at least 37 definitions of CSR (Dahlsrud, 2008) consisting of five dimensions: voluntariness, stakeholder, social, environmental, and economic. The European Commission’s definition of CSR encompasses all five dimensions: “A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (European Commission, 2001).

However, the statement: “the social responsibility of Business is to increase its profits” (Friedman, 1970) is not dismissed, as many contemporary advocates of CSR have implicitly accepted Friedman’s position by claiming that the main justification for corporate responsibility is its contribution to the bottom line (Vogel, 2005). The essential test that should guide CSR is not whether a cause is worthy but whether it presents an opportunity to create shared value (Porter & Kramer, 2006), this is also called Strategic CSR. Arguments of Strategic CSR have been used to
convince businesses to engage in CSR, stating that implementing CSR improves the financial performance. Four main areas has been identified where CSR can contribute to the business case: Cost and risk reduction; Profit maximization and competitive advantage; Reputation and legitimacy; and Synergistic value creation (Kurucz, Colbert, & Wheeler, 2008).

There have been many studies of the causality between CSR and the bottom line and examples has been found where CSR increases the profit of a company. Between 1972 and 2002, 127 published studies empirically examined the relationship between companies’ socially responsible conduct and their financial performance. The findings imply that there is a positive association, and very little evidence of a negative association, between a company’s social performance and its financial performance (Margolis & Walsh, 2003).

Instead of discussing whether CSR is contributing to the bottom line or not, Vogel (2005) argues that companies can choose different levels of corporate responsibility, depending upon the risks and opportunities they face. Instead of being a necessary condition for business success, corporate responsibility is better understood as one dimension of corporate strategy. Sometimes investments in CSR make business sense and sometimes they do not (Vogel, 2005).

Only a few scientific studies have been done in the field of CSR and shipping. One study finds that CSR has a low prevalence in the Greek cargo short-sea shipping, mainly because the Greek cargo short-sea shipping companies lack information about CSR and have a disbelief in the benefits of CSR in business (Fafaliou, Lekakou, & Theotokas, 2006). Another study finds that large shipping companies’ perception of CSR and performance were higher than those of small companies. Furthermore, the study indicates that implementing CSR has a positive effect on financial performance (Lu, Lin, & Tu, 2009).

2.1 Regulation of shipping

Regulations are a method to control the way people, companies, or entire societies behave in order to protect public goods (e.g. clean air, clean water, wild life, and stable climate) that cannot be regulated through the market. Consequently, the market does not have any incentives to protect or reduce the use of public goods. For that reason, authorities, in the interest of the public, have to introduce regulatory means (Viscusi W, 1995).
The regulation of commercial seaborne shipping has a long history and is strongly connected to politics (or change in politics), specific events, and the general public opinion. It is carried out at different levels; national, supranational, and international (Selkou & Roe, 2004).

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is the United Nation’s specialized agency with responsibility for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution at sea. When nations on a global scale follow the same rules regarding safety on board, education and training of seafarers, mitigate pollution, and labour rights there is a basis for a level playing field for the competition between the global shipping companies.

Together with the Maritime Labour Convention, IMO has designed a global legal instrument to enhance the international regulatory regime, see table 1. The four pillars are internationally rooted and apply to all vessels leaving the shipping companies on a level playing field of competition. These are all issues that coincide with the concept of CSR, even though the mentioned issues do not cover the complete area of CSR.

Table 1. The four pillars of the international regulatory regime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Key issues</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOLAS</td>
<td>United Nations, International Maritime Organization</td>
<td>Requires flag States to ensure that their ships comply with minimum safety standards in construction, equipment and operation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STCW</td>
<td>United Nations, International Maritime Organization</td>
<td>Establish basic requirements on training, certification and watch keeping for seafarers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARPOL</td>
<td>United Nations, International Maritime Organization</td>
<td>Designed to minimize pollution of the seas, including dumping, oil and exhaust pollution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLC</td>
<td>United Nations, International Labour Organization</td>
<td>Sets minimum requirements for seafarers to work on a ship, from minimum age to conditions of employment, hours of work and rest and social security.</td>
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</table>
Reporting on CSR-issues has become a mainstream activity for large companies. The shipping industry is one of the few major business segments where reporting on CSR, until recently, has been significantly absent. Shipping is an infrastructural cornerstone in globalization by securing the flow of goods around the world. But when transporting oil and other dangerous goods and operating in environmentally fragile areas, the industry has an obligation to society to try its outmost not to harm the environment and the climate or to bear the full responsibility and cost when it does.

It is claimed that the shipping business is reactive (Blanco-Bazán, 2004). The main reason for this claim is that the shipping business has a tradition to react on maritime accidents and learn how to avoid the same type of accident to reoccur. Therefore, it would be sea-change for the maritime sector to have a proactive approach, committing to various CSR issues.

2.2 Business diversity

Previous studies (Haddock-Fraser & Fraser, 2008b) and (Gonzalez-Benito & Gonzalez-Benito, 2006) have shown that there is a relationship between closeness to market and environmental reporting. Companies proximate to the final consumer (business to consumer, B2C) have a greater inclination to report on CSR issues than business to business (B2B) companies. Furthermore, the position in the value chain is an influencing factor in environmental reporting. Therefore, regulators need to differentiate between where the business is situated in the supply chain. Seaborne shipping is a typical B2B sector with passenger and cruise vessels as an exception.

The voice of the political consumer has grown louder and become more influential than in the past decades. But even though costumers (like e.g. IKEA and the oil majors) are increasingly requiring CSR issues to be taken into account, most customers in the B2B segment have price as their main concern (Wolf & Seuring, 2010).
3. Method

This paper investigates the decoupling of rhetoric from action concerning CSR implementation in the Danish shipping industry. When there is no clear definition of CSR and it can vary and have different meaning in different countries, it is difficult then to measure CSR. In this study, to have a CSR policy means that a company has a policy within at least the following five issues:

1. Human rights: Support and respect human rights
2. Labour rights: Right to collective bargaining, Elimination of discrimination, Measurement of employee satisfaction
3. Social supporting: Partnership with NGOs, supporting exposed and vulnerable groups, supporting education and research
4. Environment: Promote greater environmental responsibility, Initiate precautionary approach
5. Anti-corruption: Work against corruption in all forms,

The policies are measured in a Weberian approach, where an ideal type has policies within all five issues. A company receives one point for each issue that has a policy. According to the ideal CSR type, this gives a minimum of 0 point and maximum 5 points see figure 1. Likewise, to determine whether or not a company is actually committed to CSR, tangible follow-up must be presented the subsequent year. A tangible follow-up on the policy within one of the issues receives 1 point.

The ten largest Danish shipping companies are selected from the website: www.top1000.dk. All ten companies have published annual statements or reports on CSR in covering 2009 and 2010, published respectively 2010 and 2011.

The statements or report covering the year of 2009 were examined for any kind of promise of good deeds that the company wants to do (an example could be to reduce the CO2 emission). Thereafter, the statements or report covering the year of 2010 were examined for any kind of confirmation that the good deeds promised in the previous year were realized (ex. The CO2 emission is reduced by 6 %). Each promise, realized the subsequent year, results in 1 point.

Policy statements like: “We obviously respect and adhere to all national and international rules, regulations within the CSR area” does, in this study, not count as a CSR policy and therefore receives 0 point. Policy statements like: “We endeavour to prevent pollution through operational procedures and to ensure compliance by means of audits and inspections...” receives 1 point.
Another aim of this study is to determine whether the Danish amendment to the annual financial statements act has had an effect on the Danish shipping companies. The shipping industry is claimed to be a laggard in CSR reporting (DNV, 2004), the report will examine this claim.

To determine whether the amendment had an effect on the shipping companies, a comparative study of the top 10 Danish shipping companies and the top 1000 Danish companies was conducted. The top 10 Danish shipping companies were selected from the web-site www.top1000.dk/en. The data of the top 1000 Danish companies was found in the report “Corporate Social Responsibility and Reporting in Denmark” (The Danish Commerce and Companies Agency, The Institute of State Authorized Public Accountants, & Copenhagen Business School, 2010). The annual financial statements of the 10 shipping companies were examined and CSR reporting from 2006 – 2010 were identified. If a company did report on CSR, then the previous year were examined. This was repeated until no CSR reporting was identified in the annual financial statement.

To determine whether a CSR policy has been successfully integrated or not this paper focus on which parameters the companies use to measure their CSR achievement and the actual achievements. The fact that “what you measure is what you get” means that companies that measure on their CSR issues is more likely to be social responsible than companies that do not measure on their CSR issues (Kaplan and Norton 1992). When you decide what to measure, you set your goal and you predetermine what is going to be important.

4. Findings

The finding to fulfil the aims of this study is presented below. In table 2 & 3 and figure 1, the question regarding CSR policies and decoupling rhetoric from practice is revealed. Furthermore, in figure 2 & 3, the question regarding the Danish shipping companies being a laggard in CSR reporting is revealed.
Table 2. CSR areas and activities reported by the top ten Danish shipping companies in 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shipping company</th>
<th>Human rights</th>
<th>Labour rights</th>
<th>Social supporting</th>
<th>Environmental concern</th>
<th>Anti-corruption</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maersk Line</td>
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<td>D/S Torm</td>
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<td>D/S Norden</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFDS</td>
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<td>J. Lauritzen</td>
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<td>Clipper G.</td>
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<td>Unifeeder</td>
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<td>Scandlines</td>
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<td>Herning Shipping</td>
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*The owner of J. Lauritzen, The Lauritzen Foundation, is social engaged and has explicit charitable aims, but this has no relevance for the present study. The same apply to DFDS, Maersk Line, and D/S Norden.

Table 3. CSR areas and activities reported by the top ten Danish shipping companies in 2009 with tangible follow-up in 2010

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Figure 1. Companies’ CSR policies and follow-up measured against a Weberian ideal type of 5 points

* Clipper Group states in both 2009 and 2010 that they have no CSR policy but are working towards CSR implementation.
** Scandlines states in both 2009 and 2010 that CSR issues are important and the company wants to conform to the spirit of CSR but for the time being the company has no written policy regarding CSR.

Figure 2. The change of attitude of the Danish shipping companies towards CSR in years 2007, 2008, and 2009

Before 2007 | 2008 | 2009
In figure 1 and 2 it is shown that no shipping company mention CSR prior to 2007, only two companies had reported on CSR prior to 2009. However, all ten shipping companies mention CSR in their annual reports from 2009 and forward. Furthermore, eight of ten have a policy regarding CSR, but only seven of ten have actually implemented CSR.

Figure 3. *Comparison between the average of the top 1000 Danish companies and the top ten Danish shipping companies*

As seen in figure 3, prior to 2009, 57% of the top 1000 companies reported on CSR while only 20% of the top ten shipping companies. This combined with the fact that all Danish top 10 non-shipping companies have joined the UN Global Compact while only three of the top 10 Danish shipping companies have joined the UN Global Compact leaves a clear picture of the Danish shipping industry as a laggard regarding CSR.

Following the implementation of the new annual financial statements act, the first CSR report had to be published with reference to the financial year of 2009. By 2009 100% of the top 10 shipping companies mention CSR while 96% of the top 1000 companies. This is a strong indication of the positive effect of the initiative taken by the Danish government.
5. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper examines whether the Danish amendment to the annual financial statements act concerning CSR reporting has had any effect on the shipping. Furthermore, whether the companies decouple rhetoric from practise?

When legislators introduce above mentioned initiatives, there is a risk that some companies publish an “empty” CSR policy. There is a possibility that companies think that if people want to have a CSR policy, then they are going to get one. This study shows that the Danish shipping industry indeed was a laggard in reporting on their CSR activities. We know that the Danish shipping companies did not report on CSR before 2007. It is possible that the Danish shipping companies reported on areas related to CSR, but there were no reports of CSR.

Prior to 2009, 57% of the top 1000 Danish companies reported on CSR issues while only 20% of the top ten Danish shipping companies. The result conforms to another study made by “Det Norske Veritas” (DNV, 2004) where they conclude that shipping is a frontrunner when it comes to globalisation but a laggard in implementing CSR in their business. On the other hand, from 2010 there is no basis for calling the Danish shipping companies a CSR laggard, as 80% present and publish a CSR report.

This study shows that the initiative from the Danish government has had a great impact on the Danish shipping industry, as 100 % of the top ten Danish shipping companies have responded and mention CSR in their annual financial reports. However, this does not mean that all the companies have implemented CSR in their daily operation.

Of the five strategic responses to institutional processes, identified by Oliver (1991), three strategies are recognised among the ten largest Danish shipping companies. The three identified strategies with their respective tactics are Acquiesce in form of Compliance where you obey rules and accept norm; Avoid in form of Conceal or decoupling where you disguise nonconformity, and Defy in form of Dismiss where you ignore explicit norms and values.

A majority of 70 % comply and accept the new norm; however, 10 % avoid the new norm by decoupling rhetoric from practise and finally 20 % dismiss the new norm and do business as usual.
5.1 Further research

Seaborne shipping is one of the cornerstones in globalisation and it has a huge impact on society, environment, and climate. Therefore, it would be fruitful to further investigate the relation between CSR and shipping. Shipping is a global industry and on a daily basis deal with all aspects of CSR such as an intercultural labour force with the risk of racism and low labour standards, risk of environmental disasters and oil pollution, CO2 emissions, facilitations payment or even bribery.

There are many scholars trying to understand and define CSR from a theoretical view, and many studies on the business case for CSR have been conducted. But only a few studies have focus on CSR in relation to shipping and there is a need for further research within this important area. Among others, the following questions are important to be addressed: Being in the B2B segment, what are the rationales for shipping to address CSR? Is transaction cost lower when introducing CSR and does more transparency lead to more trust and innovation among businesses? Is there a need for new competences and human resources within the shipping industry?

What are the motivations and rationales for authorities to promote CSR and when authorities introduce compulsory reporting on CSR, how to limit the risk of decoupling rhetoric from practices? Another important challenge is the relationship between IMO and EU. Many shipping companies are concerned that the balance of fair international competition is tipping with the introduction of EU regulations.

Reference List


