A CONTEMPORARY APPROACH TO MANAGING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN RELATION TO EMPLOYEES AS PERCEIVED IN ACADEMIC PAPERS

ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plays a significant role in Human Resource Management (HRM), especially when it comes to stipulating desired employee performance or behaviour, such as work performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment or retention. However, the academic literature offers very fragmented or partial answers to questions addressing this issue, as many scholars focus exclusively on e.g. one-country or one-industry based sample only. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to summarize the current “state-of-the-art” trends in academic literature and thereafter, based on the findings, propose a broader contemporary conceptual approach to managing CSR in relation to employees. The results suggest a positive causal relationship between CSR and desirable employee behaviour, with job satisfaction often playing the function of a mediator. The findings also suggest that adding CSR to HRM practices could improve employees’ work attitudes. In doing so, full compatibility with other concepts and principles across the organization is a premise.

KEYWORDS

Corporate social responsibility, employees’ needs, motivation factors, job satisfaction, retention

HOW TO CITE

Jarkovská P., Jarkovská M. (2020) ‘A Contemporary Approach to Managing Social Responsibility in Relation to Employees as Perceived in Academic Papers’, Journal on Efficiency and Responsibility in Education and Science, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 101-112. http://dx.doi.org/10.7160/eriesj.2020.130301

INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be understood as any decision of an organization that goes beyond its economic and technical interests (Carroll, 1991). The most commonly used and cited CSR concept (e.g. Bauman and Skitka, 2012; Farooq, Farooq and Jasmuddin, 2014; Kim, Song and Lee, 2016; Kim et al., 2017; Zhang, Oo and Lim, 2019) was first defined by Carroll (1991, 2015), who proposed a four-level CSR model including CSR economic, legal, ethical and discretionary (or philanthropic) levels (dimensions). New ever-emerging concepts deal with the same or similar issues as CSR. Examples include Corporate Social Performance, Corporate Social Responsiveness, Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Governance (Carroll, 1991; Kim et al., 2017; John et al., 2019). Regarding sustainable economic performance, it is clear that current organizations must formulate and implement social goals and integrate ethical decisions into all their practices and activities. Ameer and Othman (2012) found that growth in economic performance indicators, e.g. sales and revenue, was higher in the 100 most sustainable organizations in the world than in control companies (CK, 2019). Concerning the organization’s economic results, it is up to the managers to decide how to deal with the CSR concept in both the short and long term. Therefore, most authors consider the above concepts identical and interchangeable with the CSR concept (e.g. Carroll, 1991; Dahlhrud, 2008; Taneja, Taneja and Gupta, 2011; Kim et al., 2017; John et al., 2019).

According to CSR theory, an organization must satisfy different groups who would otherwise stop or cannot support the organization. The term “stakeholders” helps define and
simultaneously delimit the organization’s responsibilities, actions and activities that its stakeholders consider important. Stakeholders may vary for each organization, but it is widely accepted that employees are the organization’s key stakeholders. Their interest may be a legal claim, such as the fulfillment of contractual terms, a moral claim, such as employees’ ability to express their opinion or organizations’ fair behaviour towards employees (Carroll, 1991, 2015). It becomes defined as an organization’s management to address the urgency or importance of the demands made by different stakeholders. From a CSR viewpoint, the legitimacy of these claims is most important. Regarding organizational efficiency, the power of the relevant stakeholder group can have the greatest impact on the decision-making of the organization’s management.

Theoretical background and the formulation of research questions
Carroll (1991) presents a conceptual approach to addressing the issue of conflict of interest of individual stakeholder groups and defines a series of questions that each manager should answer before taking appropriate action. Carroll’s conceptual questions (1991: 44) are as follows:

- What opportunities and challenges do employees present to the organization?
- What social responsibility (economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic) should an organization have towards its employees?
- What strategies, practices or decisions should management undertake to better address their responsibilities and obligations to employees?

Work motivation is critical to employees’ overall performance. Motivation affects what employees do, how they do it, and with what effort (Diller, 1999; Mayer, Becker and Vandenbergh, 2004; Kim et al., 2017; Graves, Sarkis and Gold, 2019). According to Graves, Sarkis and Gold (2019), many academics confirm the important role of individual CSR activities as motivating factors in meeting employees’ needs and improving their working lives (QWL) (e.g., Ceyycota, Ferrante and Schroeder, 2016; Kim et al., 2017; John et al., 2019). Following Self-Categorization Theory (SCT), employees seek to integrate a cause or objective into their selves (SIT and SET, we can define a causal relationship between CSR and employee retention (R).

Therefore, Carroll’s (1991) first, second and third question can be rephrased into three research questions (RQs) as follows:

- RQ 1: Which CSR dimensions affect employee satisfaction?
- RQ 2: How does CSR directly and indirectly affect employees’ behaviour (JS, WP, OC, R)?
- RQ 3: What is the strength of the relationship between CSR and employee behaviour (JS, WP, OC, R)?

Macke and Genari (2019) mention a constant dilemma in Human Resource Management (HRM). On the one hand, Human Resources (HR) practitioners must support the efficiency of individual processes, such as reducing costs and increasing the organization’s profitability, and, on the other hand, invest in human capital development and ensure its long-term sustainability and performance (Kramar, 2014; Macke and Genari, 2019). This paradox contributes to the tension between the goals set by the organization and the personal goals of employees (Aust, Brandl and Keegan, 2015). Incorporating CSR components and activities into HR practices can be one of the solutions. Results were considered the most suitable for summarizing the current trends and findings in the academic literature. Literature reviews provide a synthesis of published literature on a topic and describe its current state-of-art (Ferrari, 2015). While a narrative literature review is a comprehensive, critical and objective analysis of the current knowledge on a topic (Baker, 2016), a systematic literature review identifies, selects and critically appraises research to answer a clearly formulated question (Ferrari, 2015). The narrative review can address one or more questions and the selection criteria for inclusion of the articles may not be explicitly specified. Their quality may be improved by applying quality assurance techniques and by excluding non-compliant papers (FN = 45), final number of articles based on empirical research (39), final number of articles based on a systematic literature review (6), final number of articles focusing on the relationship between CSR and employee behaviour (10), final number of articles dealing with the relationship between CSR and HR practices (10), final number of articles on CSR and EB (11) and final number of articles on CSR and IM (14). The narrative literature review was used to analyze the current state of scientific knowledge of the causal relationship between its two components: CSR and HRM. To avoid human factor bias, the review strategy and findings were consulted with two scholars. The analyzed papers were segmented as follows:

- CSR and employee behaviour (10): Bauman and Skirta (2012), Bohdanowicz and Zientara (2009), Farooq, Farooq and Jasimuddin (2014), Graves, Sarkis and Gold (2019), Jakubczak and Górska (2015), John et al., (2019), Kim and Song (2016), Kim et al., (2017), Ong et al., (2018), and Youn and Lee (2018).
- CSR and HR practices (10): Celma, Martinez-Garcia and Coenders (2014), Celma, Martinez-Garcia and Raya (2015), Ceyycota, Ferrante and Schroeder (2016), Macke and Genari (2019), Stone and Deadrick (2015), Voigtlin and Greenwood (2016) and Zhang, Oo and Lim (2019).
- CSR and EB (11): Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen (2011), Aysath Zaheera, Khan and Sethilkumar (2015), Carrico and Riemer (2011), Ceyycota, Ferrante and Schroeder (2016), Diég and Holbrügge (2014), Fu, Li and Duan (2014), Gregory-Smith et al. (2015), Hagenbuch, Little and Lucas (2015), Jones, Willness and M-aday (2014), Marler and Boudreau (2017), Puncheva-Michailova, Selent and Mihaylova (2018) and Tkalcic Verčič and Simčić Čorč (2018).
- CSR and IM (14): Chaudhary (2017), Chen and Cheng (2012), Dhanseth (2012), Dutcher and Dhanseth (2018), Ferrato, Michelotti and Hudson (2014), Grace, Ferraro and Green (2010) and Sharma (2016), Jiang et al. (2015a, 2015b), Lim and Green (2017), Ruizalba et al. (2014), Sanchez-
Hernandez and Grayson (2012), Soane et al. (2012) and Yao, Qiu and Wei (2019).

RESULTS

CSR and employee behaviour (RQs 1, 2, 3)

The studies confirm the positive causal relationship between CSR (economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic dimension) and employee behaviour (e.g. Bauman and Skitka, 2012; Kim, Song and Lee, 2010; Ong et al., 2018; Youn, Lee and Lee; John et al., 2019). In this context, employee behaviour is understood as JS, OC and R. The negative causal relationship was confirmed between CSR and employees’ Turn over (John et al., 2019) and Intention (TI). Employee behaviour is sometimes used as an index of CSR (e.g. Ahmad and Morsing, 2006).

CSR and HRM practices (RQ 4)

Given the ever-changing conditions of the international business environment, employees’ needs and well-being became the concern of many international organizations (Stone and Deadrick, 2015). In practice, socially responsible HRM practices contribute to the creation of a positive organizational environment. The number of fixed-term jobs while guaranteeing job security, enabling employees to develop, or providing employees with the opportunity to engage in social and aesthetic needs, or with the need for respect, self-realization and self-education (again through organizational resources). This QWL construct undoubtedly assumes the importance of CSR in the organization. We arrived at a similar conclusion interpreting the findings of Franklin (2008) or Kim et al. (2017).

We can conclude that CSR organizational activities providing “tangible” care to employees (e.g. fair pay, family support and employment security) create desirable working conditions for employees, increasing the number of employees with a high QWL rate, leading in turn to increased employee loyalty and OC (Bodanowicz and Zientara, 1999; Jakubczak and Gotowska, 2000) to the understanding of CSR and HRM as two interdependent and interconnected concepts.

The intersection between sustainable development and HRM is based on two assumptions: the HRM role in supporting the organization’s sustainable development, and the long-term HRM practices sustainability. As organizations strive for sustainable development of their businesses, management of employees’ development and remuneration is increasingly seen as a positive impact on their pro-environmental behaviour. In contrast, external motivation has a negative impact but suggests that the use of employee incentives to increase pro-environmental behaviour may be insufficient (Ahmed and Rafiq, 2002; Sanchez-Hernandez and Grayson, 2012).

As Youn, Lee and Lee (2018) conclude, it is important how employees perceive the industry they work in. If they know the industry has little positive impact on the development and well-being of humanity, they are less willing to effectively implement a CSR strategy (e.g. Kim et al., 2018; Ong et al., 2018; Youn, Lee and Lee; John et al., 2019). The most effective and frequently cited HRM procedures contributing to consolidating CSR and vice-versa are: employee selection, employee motivation, fair remuneration and remuneration development and employee training (Youn, Lee and Lee, 2018; Zang, Ou and Lim, 2019). The implementation of this strategy depends on the organization’s commitment to employees’ continuous training (Youn, Lee and Lee, 2018).

CSR and IM practices (RQ 5)

Although the IM concept was introduced by many authors, Foreman and Money (1995) are the first to identify and measure the specific impact of IM on employees’ motivation. For the organization, it is important to continuously improve employee motivation and communication in order to improve productivity and organizational performance (Lim and Greenwood, 2016; Celma, Martinez-Garcia and Raya, 2018; Zang, Ou and Lim, 2019).

CSR and IM practices (RQ 5)

A well-established CSR strategy is essential for engaging employees’ awareness about its CSR activities, e.g. through promoting CSR, such as the European Commission Green Paper (2001a) and other European Commission documents issued by the European Commission (2001b, 2009; Ryan, 1985; Ahrendt, 2005). According to Gill (2015), a higher level of employee engagement can be achieved through a managed narrative of CSR stories. Storytelling can be considered part of internal communication.

Duthler and Dhanesh (2018) used Gill’s (2015) link between CSR and employee engagement as a theoretical basis to combine the concept of internal communication, CSR and employee engagement. For internal communication, they used a model designed by Morsing and Schulz (2006), which allows three ways of communication between an organization and employees: one-way communication to spread positive information about the organization (e.g. information about CSR) and two-way communication (e.g. feedback from employees). This feedback mostly serves to improve the current CSR practices of the organization only, not to listen to employees. And above all, two-way symbolic communication based on a dialogue between the organization and employees. Duthler and Dhanesh (2018) demonstrate a positive causal relationship between all CSR dimensions and employee engagement at all three levels (cognitive, emotional and social). Although the study confirmed the positive causal relationship between all CSR dimensions and all engagement levels, the CSR social and emotional engagement level is the highest. Sanchez-Hernandez and Grayson (2012) used a three-level model (Ahmed and Rafiq, 2002) to effectively implement a CSR strategy. The first level, “goals” (direction), requires setting goals and defining the direction in which the organization’s strategy is to be directed. This requires an evaluation of the organization’s external opportunities and capabilities. This IM level is particularly important for raising CSR awareness among employees. The second level, “path”, deals with the specification of alternative ways of implementing the CSR strategy and identifying potential obstacles and mechanisms to overcome them. This level is specific to a particular organization and developed for specific groups of employees. Using IM tools such as job or employee segmentation is an effective way to implement marketing strategies in practice. The third level may be described as “process”. Within this level, the aim is to develop a tactical measurement meeting employees’ needs, i.e. an appropriate combination of differentiated benefits for specific employee segments (e.g. motivation, remuneration, training) to increase employee loyalty and performance of the organization. Sanchez-Hernandez and Grayson (2012) understood the need to support CSR “from below”. They added a fourth level to the adopted model, “feedback”, representing the organizational level (e.g. role of supervisors). Soane et al. (2012) and Yao, Qiu and Wei (2019).
Based on the knowledge of the relationship between CSR dimensions and employee target behaviour - increased R (T), we propose a broader contemporary concept (see Figure 1) based on managing employee motivation through positive, engaging, and expanding organizational values (thereby promoting the best interests of both the employer and the employee, through thorough employees’ knowledge and constant monitoring of their changing needs) and comprehensively, using HRM, IM and EB practices effectively and sustainably. 

Thus, looking at the EB, the CSR dimensions through economic, ethical, and philanthropic lenses may provide a means of expanding organizational values (e.g. values declaration or daily decision-making). The perceived similarity in “values fit” makes employees improve their work behaviour patterns (e.g. encourages ethical behaviour and decision-making, supports employees’ responsibility and WP, increases OC and R). 

Philanthropic activities, responsible environmental stewardship and “well-deserved” reputation of high-quality products or services align with the employees’ perception of how others perceive the company, their role in preserving the environment or community “positive impact” causes, or by the organization’s ethical adherence (e.g. values declaration or daily decision-making). The perceived similarity in “values fit” makes employees improve their work behaviour patterns (e.g. encourages ethical behaviour and decision-making, supports employees’ responsibility and WP, increases OC and R). 

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as most suitable: regular labour market research, effective recruitment targeting, existing employee segmentation, staff development and talent management, the allocation of competencies, appropriate resources and responsibilities, a fair and transparent evaluation and remuneration system and two-way symmetric communication. This concept calls for HR practitioners and managers trained and skilled in human behaviour or psychology and highly sensitive to constant changes in both, the micro- and macro-level of the environment.

as a premise. Organizational structure, strategy, corporate culture, leadership with other applicable principles within the organization such as these measures do not represent sunk costs, their compatibility undesirable rise in overall production cost. To ensure that all of employees are not only “better work performers”; they are work attitudes and behaviour (e.g. increased WP, JS, OC and HRM, IM or EB practices both designate desirable employees’ behaviour desired by the organization. The findings also suggest that adding CSR activities or components into HRM, IM and EB practices could improve employees’ overall work attitudes. These practices should mainly focus on attracting and retaining talented employees, maintaining physically and emotionally healthy employees, developing or improving their skills, expertise and knowledge. Going back to the starting point of this content analysis - ROJs based on Carroll (1991), it is essential to highlight that the relationship between CSR and employee organizational behaviour is mutually influential. The appropriate management of this causal relationship positively affects all relations between the organization and its stakeholders, which is in line with the holistic concept of organization.

Regarding employees as the major stakeholders. Most analysed papers (63%) used either one-country-based sample or one-organization-based (32%) sample only. Although the number of respondents always met statistical criteria, we might speculate whether the obtained results are relevant and applicable for all practitioners, especially when it comes to findings regarding the causal relationship between CSR dimensions (economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic) and employee organizational behaviour. We suggest that they are, because the above-summarized results indicate the importance for managers to view each employee as an individual due to the constant changes in his/her motivation factor preferences and changes in both, the micro- and macro-level of the environment.

CONCLUSION
This paper discussed the purpose of individual CSR dimensions as motivation drivers in stipulating employees’ desirable work attitudes and behaviour such as WP, JS, OC and voluntary R using the narrative literature review (content analysis) to summarize the current “state-of-the-art” trends in academia. The results indicate that the employees’ perceptions of CSR economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic dimensions are positively related to their work attitudes and behaviour, where JS often functions as a mediator between CSR individual dimensions and the ultimate employee behaviour desired by the organization. The findings also suggest that adding CSR activities or components into HRM, IM and EB practices could improve employees’ overall work attitudes. These practices should mainly focus on attracting and retaining talented employees, maintaining physically and emotionally healthy employees, developing or improving their skills, expertise and knowledge. Going back to the starting point of this content analysis - ROJs based on Carroll (1991), it is essential to highlight that the relationship between CSR and employee organizational behaviour is mutually influential. The appropriate management of this causal relationship positively affects all relations between the organization and its stakeholders, which is in line with the holistic concept of organization.

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