Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities in the workplace: A comment on Aguinis and Glavas (2013)

Aharon Tziner*
Netanya Academic College, Israel

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Manuscript received: 07/07/2013  
Revision received: 30/07/2013  
Accepted: 30/07/2013

Keywords:  
Corporate social responsibility  
Attitudes  
Workplace  
Productivity  
Work behaviors

ABSTRACT

Recent research has indicated that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is beneficial to organizations: CSR enhances employee attitudes, behaviors, and productivity in the workplace and thus contributes to companies’ profitability. Recently, Aguinis and Glavas (2013) advanced the innovative distinction between embedded vs. peripheral CSR and compellingly demonstrated how this distinction could help straighten out the inconsistencies in the associated academic literature regarding the relationship of CSR to its antecedents and outcomes. Within this vast array of literature, however, relatively little is known about the psychological underpinnings that might define the manner in which CSR actually affects these work attitudes and behaviors, both directly and indirectly. The purpose of this note is to cast light on this issue.

© 2013 Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos de Madrid. All rights reserved.

RESUMEN

La investigación reciente ha indicado que la Responsabilidad Social Corporativa (RSC) es beneficiosa para las organizaciones: la CSR facilita las actitudes, las conductas y la productividad de los empleados en el trabajo y también contribuye a la rentabilidad de las compañías. Recientemente, Aguinis y Glavas (2013) avanzaron una distinción innovadora entre la RSC periférica y la incorporada y convincentemente demostraron cómo esta distinción podría ayudar a clarificar la incoherencia en la literatura académica asociada a la relación de la RSC con sus antecedentes y resultados. Sin embargo, en esta amplio conjunto de literatura se conoce muy poco sobre las bases psicológicas que pueden definir la manera en que la RSC realmente afecta a estas conductas y actitudes laborales, tanto directa como indirectamente. El propósito de esta nota aportar luz sobre esta cuestión.

© 2013 Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos de Madrid. Todos los derechos reservados.

Recent research has indicated that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is beneficial to organizations: CSR enhances employee attitudes, behaviors, and productivity in the workplace, and thus contributes to companies’ profitability. Recently, Aguinis and Glavas (2013) advanced the innovative distinction between embedded vs. peripheral CSR and compellingly demonstrated how this distinction could help straighten out the inconsistencies in the associated academic literature regarding the relationship of CSR to its antecedents and outcomes. Within this vast array of literature, however, relatively little is known about the psychological underpinnings that might define the manner in which CSR actually affects these work attitudes and behaviors, both directly and indirectly.

Putting this discussion into a wider context, it is useful to record Turker’s (2009a) observation that a company has four stakeholders or interest groups. The first interest group consists of society at large, the environment, the next generations, and NGOs. The second comprises the employees, for whom CSR policy is manifested in such issues as corporate fairness and transparency, especially with respect to the decisions that directly affect them. The third are the customers, for whom CSR is measured by fairness and transparency with regard to such issues as pricing and product quality. The final interest group is the government, for which CSR is manifested, for example, by companies paying their due taxes and obeying the law.

Implementing CSR policies involves heavy costs, yet it is generally believed to be profitable for organizations (McGuire, Sundgren, &...
of employee justice perception theory (Croppanzano, Rupp, Mohler, & Schminke, 2001), it can be said that employees rate organizational justice according to the degree of justice that the organization manifests. Tyler (1987) argues that individuals have a need to perceive the organization as just; it is a state of mind which stems from a psychological urge for control. CSR activities are thus seen as proof that the organization endorses the principle of fairness, and they therefore heighten employees’ perception of organizational justice.

According to the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the perception of a firm as a socially responsible member of society is likely to afford employees an enhanced self-image, as well as pride in the organization, feelings which may impact positively on work attitudes such as job satisfaction (Maigman & Ferrell, 2001; Peterson, 2004). For Eci and Alpkam (2009), there is a utilitarian component to the employer-employee relationship, whereby workers who perceive their organization to be ethical are also likely to perceive it as being fair to them and as being obligated to provide them with desirable employment as part of their non-formal occupational contract (Valentine & Fleischman, 2008).

In order to examine these relationships we conducted a study of employees in a real organizational setting (N = 101 employees) (Tziner, Oren, Bar, & Kadosh, 2011). The findings of this study unfolded, in line with previous investigations (Brammer et al., 2007; McGuire et al., 1998; Turker, 2009b), significant positive relationships between CSR and job satisfaction (r = .58, beta = 0.27, p < .0001) and between CSR and perceived organizational justice (r = .62, beta = 0.76, p < .0001). With respect to the question of how CSR affects employee attitudes, our findings supported the suggestion that CSR signals to employees that the organization tends to act in a just and fair manner, thereby leading to positive work attitudes. The strongest correlations were found between CSR and procedural justice, considered a good predictor of employees’ evaluation of the character of the organization (Sweeney & McFarlin, 1993, p. 37). The results are also in line with Aguiler et al. (2007), who found that CSR leads to lower turnover rates, as well as with Greenberg (1990), who argues forcibly that organizational justice is a basic requirement for job satisfaction (in Tziner et al., 2011’s study, r = .85, beta = 0.66, p < .0001).

Although the results are drawn from a single study, they would appear to have significant practical implications for organizations and to be germane and beneficial to companies addressing issues of CSR. CSR was found to have a significant effect on the level of job satisfaction, both directly and indirectly, by mediating the effect on perceived organizational justice. In our opinion, for this reason alone, it would be advisable to promote CSR as a vehicle to enhance employees’ OCB.

Our findings suggest that CSR not only improves perceived organizational justice and job satisfaction, but, moreover, they provide evidence for the theoretical conception of CSR as a value-creating activity whose impact on firms goes significantly beyond the direct financial benefits measured by traditional accounting-based methods (e.g., Aguiler et al., 2007).

Conflicts of interest

The author of this article declares no conflicts of interest.

References


