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

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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.

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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 este 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 a aportar luz sobre esta cuestión.

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Schweinis, 1998; Soloman & Hansen, 1985). The literature contains a large body of empirical evidence of positive relations between CSR and organizational measures such as reputation, customer loyalty, competitiveness, and sustainability (Porter & Kramer, 2002, 2004), all of which are factors that promote business.

Although the number of investigations that have examined how corporate social activities affect employees is somewhat limited, the findings so far open up an interesting window of potential research. First, we may note that the good reputation acquired by a corporation through CSR activities increases its attractiveness as an employer for both prospective job applicants (e.g., Greening & Turban, 2000) and for current workers who consequently exhibit high levels of employee satisfaction (Galbreath, 2010; Lee & Chang, 2008). These findings can be explained by the social identity theory that states that employees are proud to identify with organizations that have favorable reputations (Peterson, 2004).

A positive relationship has also been found between CSR policies and organizational commitment among employees (Brammer, Millington, & Rayton, 2007; Turker, 2009b), leading to a rise in employee performance and a drop in personnel turnover and employee burnout, both costly phenomena for organizations (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi, 2007; Soloman & Hansen, 1985). Initial indications of employee satisfaction as a direct result of CSR in the workplace have also been found, but this outcome has yet to be investigated empirically in a more rigorous fashion, especially in contexts outside the USA and Europe (Turker, 2009b).

Several studies (e.g., Trevino, Butterfield, & McCabe, 1998) have found that workers prefer organizations that promote business ethics. For example, positive relationships were found between job satisfaction and (1) organizational ethics (e.g., Deshpande, 1996) and (2) high-level workers' perceived justice (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). Indeed, the perception of a work environment as just has been shown to have a positive effect on the degree of employees' organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Chen, Zhang, Leung, & Zhou, 2010).

Both the quality and extent of the relationship between a business and its employees can be regarded as a precondition for CSR. Thus, if a company does not assume a high level of responsibility toward its own staff, it is unlikely to do so toward its customers or the social and natural environment in which it operates (Johnston, 2001). Aguinis and Glavas (2013) contend that “working for an organization that cares (i.e., is socially responsible) fosters a greater organizational justice (Galbreath, 2010; Lee & Chang, 2008). These findings can be explained by the social identity theory that states that employees are proud to identify with organizations that have favorable reputations (Peterson, 2004).

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 Alpkan (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 = .027, p < .0001) and between CSR and perceived organizational justice (r = .62, beta = .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 Aguilera et al. (2007), who found that CSR leads to lower turnover rates, as well as with Greenberg (1990), who argues forcefully that organizational justice is a basic requirement for job satisfaction (in Tziner et al., 2011's study, r = .85, beta = .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., Aguilera et al., 2007).

Conflicts of interest

The author of this article declares no conflicts of interest.

References


