

Investigating Internal CSR Communication: Building a Theoretical Framework

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Abstract Using an integrated CSR communication perspective, this chapter examines the role of internal CSR communication in achieving a successful, participative CSR approach. The special characteristics of CSR communication in general, and the distinctive challenges of internal CSR communication in particular, are identified. This allows a focus on and discussion of the challenges of the attitude-behavior gap regarding sustainable behavior in the work context. This perspective produces findings for how best to develop effective internal CSR communication that narrows the attitude-behavior gap. First, employees' attitudes towards sustainability and the consequences for communication strategies that aim at changing these employee attitudes are discussed. Second, we investigate to what extent subjective norms and perceived behavioral control influence sustainable behavior at the workplace, in addition to the influence of attitudes toward sustainability and CSR. These discussions outline that every company has its own CSR specific environment and CSR specific organizational conditions for developing an effective, internal CSR approach. This chapter, however, identifies important antecedents and characteristics, which should be taken into consideration for an effective, internal CSR communication.

1 Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is encouraged as a strategic approach for companies to promote sustainability and to assume companies' economic, social and ecological responsibilities (Crane, Matten, & Spence, 2008; Muster, 2011). The success of CSR at a company depends, among other things, on stakeholder involvement or endorsement of the CSR program. Stakeholders' perceptions and evaluation of the company's CSR program are significantly influenced by the company's communication regarding CSR. CSR communication constructs CSR meanings (Ihlen, May, & Bartlett, 2014) and, furthermore, effective CSR communication is capable of constituting its own institutionalization in the company (Schultz &

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Wehmeier, 2010). Thus, a CSR program can only be as successful as its communication will be.

This chapter examines the special characteristics of CSR communication in general, and the distinctive challenges of internal CSR communication in particular. An inside-out approach will be discussed, emphasizing the importance of an integrated communicative approach. Furthermore, the chapter discusses how employees' attitudes toward CSR influence the success of promoting sustainable behavior at work. These insights indicate that an attitude-behavior gap is often a problem for CSR and leads to the question of what influences employees to behave sustainably, or not. Our findings regarding this question offer information that is helpful for developing an effective internal CSR strategy. Practical recommendations will be given.

2 Characteristics of CSR Communication

Outlining the challenges of effective CSR communication is a reasonable approach to describing its special characteristics. CSR communication can be characterized as a (1) process-orientated, (2) target-group-specific, (3) dialogical, (4) contextually-dependent and (5) integrated discourse.

- (1) CSR is a strategic approach that generates an ongoing process. In line with this, CSR communication requires a process view for producing awareness, understanding and involvement from stakeholders (Golob et al., 2013; Morsing, Schultz, & Nielsen, 2008). Conversely, a purely functional CSR perspective and approach to communication cannot be sufficient to capture the CSR process and its inherent dynamics.
- (2) & (3) Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2004) shows that CSR communication needs to be addressed in a stakeholder-specific manner. Every stakeholder group has their own concerns, issues and understandings regarding CSR, which every company should identify before sending specific CSR messages. Stakeholder dialogues are a recommended approach to identifying stakeholder concerns and expectations for CSR and these should be included in the ongoing development of the CSR strategy. Thus, such a two-way exchange of perspectives (Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010, p. 10), constitutes a shared CSR understanding and is, therefore, a powerful communication approach. But, in fact, it is something more: it should be characteristic of CSR communication.
- (4) Due to public interest in CSR, almost every company is being confronted with an ever more "educated body of stakeholders" (Tench, Sun, & Jones, 2014, p. 4). This growing awareness and knowledge about the social and ecological responsibilities of companies, combined with greatly increased media transparency, leads to additional contextual factors that influence the CSR communication process. These factors include political, cultural, legal, technological and

industrial structures (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010; O’Riordan & Fairbrass, 2008).

The characteristics of CSR communication presented above determine the communicative content and channels appropriate for specific stakeholders. Thus, if a company is attentive to these characteristics, its CSR communication will be better capable of gaining legitimacy (Freeman, 2004), and of increasing its attractiveness to employees (Sen, Bhattacharya, & Korschun, 2006), of strengthening employees’ identification with the company (Kim, Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2010) and their general satisfaction (Bauman & Skitka, 2012), of fostering stakeholders’ loyalty and commitment (Bhattacharya, Korschun, & Sen, 2009; Du et al., 2010; Farooq, Payaud, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2014), and of minimizing stakeholders’ skepticism.

- (5) The possible outcomes of successful CSR communication mentioned in the previous paragraph refer to both external and internal stakeholders. However, the borders of this distinction may be fuzzy, as emphasized by Cheney and Christensen (2001, p. 213). Employees, paradigmatic internal stakeholders, also consume external CSR communications, while internal e-mail is easily passed on to external stakeholders. Thus, there can be a continuous exchange process between internal and external stakeholders, and this necessitates an integrated approach to CSR management in general, and an integrated approach to CSR communication in particular. Elving (2013, p. 13) points out that “Integrated CSR is based at all levels of an organization, and it is aimed at all stakeholders and parts of all policies of the organization, which include a series of different CSR domains.” In line with that, an integrated CSR communication should encompass all stakeholders of an organizations, with their special interests and issues. Furthermore, an integrated CSR approach requires reciprocal coordination of all communicative channels and contents in terms of time settings and formal structures for realizing effective CSR communication.

In line with this need for integrated CSR approaches, several researchers, such as Morsing et al. (2008), consider an inside-out approach as appropriate to implementing effective CSR communication, rather than discussing internal versus external CSR communication (Bolton, Kim, & O’Gorman, 2011). Such a process-oriented perspective leads to the positioning of internal CSR communication as the strategic starting point for the overall CSR communication process, with employees likewise understood to be key stakeholders (see Clarkson, 1995; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009). The characteristics of internal CSR communication, now conceptualized as crucial to CSR overall, will be discussed in the following section.

3 Characteristics of Internal CSR Communication

Employees and their influential role in companies' CSR strategies and CSR communication have recently become an important focus in the CSR research field. Most of the current research projects on internal CSR have focused on the possible outcomes of CSR for either employees or the company (Uusi-Rauva & Nurkka, 2010; Vlachos, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2014, p. 991). These outcomes include factors such as organizational commitment (Dhanesh, 2012), employee identification with the company and job satisfaction (Bhattacharya, Korschun, & Sen, 2009). In contrast to such linear, instrumental and functionalistic approaches (Golob et al., 2013), we discuss internal CSR communication from a process perspective, while emphasizing its special characteristics, the communicative strategies it requires, and its distinctive participative approaches. The purpose of this work is to schematically describe the internal CSR process.

Employees constitute a key but diverse group of stakeholders. Internal CSR communication should be aware of the challenges this diversity entails, and should always be cognizant that employees are simultaneously members of the company, members of certain work units. Furthermore, individuals are, also, consumers, often of their own company's products, and also have socially influenced attitudes. Every internal CSR communication process has to face this challenge, which requires an integrated communication strategy. Thus, internal CSR communication can also be described with the characteristics that were attributed to general CSR communication in Chapter "CSR as Common Sense Issue? A Theoretical Exploration of Public Discourses, Common Sense and Framing of Corporate Social Responsibility". On the other hand, internal CSR communication has specific characteristics that arise from the key role employees have as stakeholders and from influential contextual organizational factors. Its *self-referential, involving, and participative* nature, in particular, will be discussed in the following.

As the inside-out approach describes, CSR communication discourse begins with a company's employees, their interests, and their expectations, and it is dependent on the efficiency of its dialogical approach, its ability to involve employees, and gain their participation, and on contextual organizational factors. Therefore, internal CSR can be understood "as a dynamic internal process relying on employee involvement in its development and implementation." (Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014, p. 210).

Bolton et al. (2011) understand internal CSR "as an emergent organizational process that places the employee at its center." (p. 61). Based on this understanding, they cluster the whole process into three stages of development phases, which differ in the level of employee involvement attained. These are, namely, the initiation, implementation and maturation process phases. Although these three phases can be recognized, the process is not linear; rather, there is often feedback between the stages, as well as different rates of both advance, and sometimes retreat. Nevertheless, the phased nature of internal CSR communication makes a phase-specific approach appropriate. This, then, requires an ongoing analysis of the CSR

communication process (Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014, p. 210; Morsing et al., 2008, p. 102). The observation needs for this ongoing analysis can be challenging to acquire as the phases of the process are emergent, rather than being distinct and linear steps. The initiation stage primarily requires information that is specific both to the company and to the employee(s), because in this phase it is important that employees understand why the company is implementing a CSR strategy. It is useful at this stage to consider, Morsing & Schultz's (2006) terms, a stakeholder information strategy and also, roughly, a stakeholder response strategy. The stakeholder information strategy is characterized by its one-way communication approach, which aims to basically inform stakeholders about the company's CSR efforts. The stakeholder response strategy requests, in addition, the responses of stakeholders but is described as two-way asymmetric, because the emphasis is still primarily on giving them information rather than reacting to their responses. Nonetheless, this strategy emphasizes the integration of stakeholders' responses and concerns compared to the single focus of the stakeholder information strategy on target-groups specifically informing them (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, pp. 326–328). A successful implementation of CSR requires the communication process to reach the third phase, the maturation phase; in other words, successful CSR communication always ultimately requires mutual understanding between employees' CSR expectations and the company's intention to promote CSR. Thus, a fully proactive dialog and therefore, a properly symmetric stakeholder involvement strategy should be realized. "Therefore, the stakeholder involvement strategy suggests that the companies engage frequently and systematically in dialogue with their stakeholders in order to explore mutually beneficial action—assuming that both parties involved in the dialogue are willing to change." (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 328).

When thinking about employees' involvement in CSR communication, participation will appear as a relational approach to promote involvement. Furthermore, the dialogical, two-way, symmetric stakeholder involvement strategy is characterized by participative structures (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 326). In line with these insights, the CSR literature highlights participation as a key approach to CSR success (e.g., Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014; Morsing & Schultz, 2006). This in turn reveals another challenge of internal CSR communication: motivating employees to participate in CSR by means of CSR communication. Thus, CSR communication relates to itself for motivating employees to participate: every employee receives information about the CSR strategy and processes this information. Throughout this processing, employees may communicate and talk about it with others. Employees' CSR processing, however, can be understood as a form of sensemaking that refers solely to the employees' own elaboration process. Thus, every communication processing implies a form of self-referencing; however, it should be outlined as a specific characteristic of an internal, participative CSR communication. Furthermore, this form of sensemaking may increase employees' commitment to company's CSR approach and thus, influences the decision to participate in either a cognitive or behavioral manner in the CSR process.

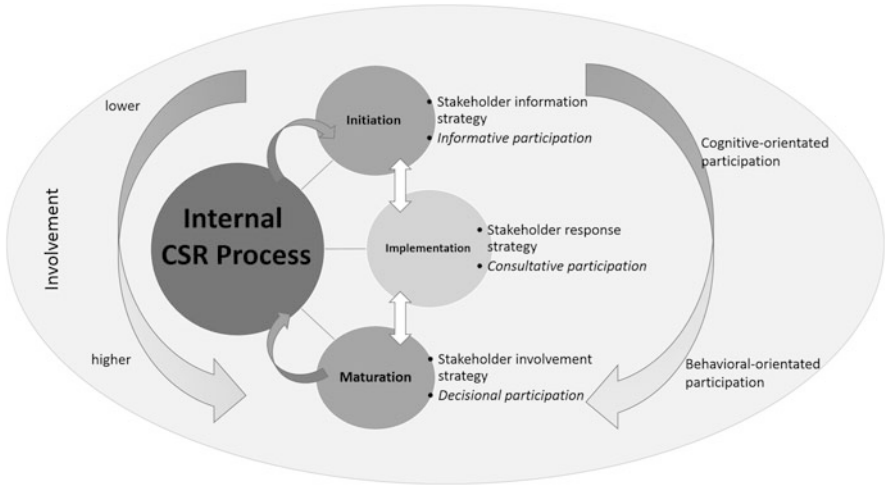


Fig. 1 The internal CSR process

In accordance with the three CSR stages already mentioned (initiation, implementation and maturation) and the three communication strategies (stakeholder information strategy, stakeholder response strategy and stakeholder involvement strategy), the three different participation levels identified by Green and Hunton-Clarke (2003) seem to be appropriate to complete a model that promises to fully depict the internal CSR process (see Fig. 1). Green and Hunton-Clarke (2003) analyzed multiple approaches to participation and identified these three levels of participation for CSR in an organizational context. These three stages are the informative, consultative and decisional participation levels, and lead to the following model, which shows how cyclical and emergent thinking is vital among those involved in CSR to ensure its success. The overlap between the different stages constantly shifts, as do the appropriate communicative and participative approaches. The figure (Fig. 1) shows an internal cognitive CSR process, its different CSR communication strategies, and their particular participative characteristics.

The overall internal CSR process applies to a mutual reinforcing understanding of participation: on the one hand, a cognitive participation in the CSR process, and, on the other hand, behavioral forms of participation.

This schematic overview of the internal CSR process (Fig. 1) represents a cognitive CSR elaboration process that leads to several forms of behavior. It can be assumed that, throughout the three stages, the processing depth and employees' involvement increase. For example, during the first stage, employees receive information about the CSR strategy. The second stage, the implementation phase, allows employees to participate in special communication about the company's upcoming CSR projects, which necessitates a greater depth of CSR information processing than previously required.

Based on these cognitive processes, employees' participation may take behavioral forms, e.g., communicating with others about the CSR strategy (*implementation stage*) or participating actively in a CSR project (*maturation stage*).

These distinct forms of participation could lead to different outcomes, so considering their differences is important. Equally important is the fact that such distinct forms of participation are likely to be provoked and influenced by different antecedents, including factors such as a company's structure or an employee's attitudes. Therefore, studying these antecedents to obtain a perspective on the different types of participation, and thus on the different possible CSR outcomes, is very important. However, heretofore, the distinction between cognitive and behavioral participation in the CSR process has not been discussed in the literature.

The model of the internal CSR processes that has just been developed, outlines, then, the importance of discussing the antecedents of effective internal CSR processes and communication. Few studies (e.g., Mattila & Hanks, 2012; Paillé & Mejía-Morelos, 2014; Slack, Corlett, & Morris, 2015) have emphasized the possible antecedents of employees' reactions to CSR. In this research, the impact of employee's attitudes on their responses to CSR approaches has, however, been indicated (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2007; Slack et al., 2015; Vlachos et al., 2014). In light of such results, we examine employee attitudes to sustainability in general and to CSR in particular and we show how the attitude-behavior gap is a common phenomenon and describe its specific characteristics when it appears in the workplace.

4 Employees' Attitudes Towards CSR

Recent market research studies show that most stakeholders in general feel that sustainability is of high importance, and this move towards sustainable consciousness is an ongoing, upward trend (Nielsen, 2013). In terms of end consumers, Nielsen, a leading global information and measurement company, concludes "You'd be hard-pressed to find a consumer who said he or she didn't care about the environment, or extreme poverty around the world" (Nielsen, 2014, p. 4). A demonstration that CSR is relevant for employees is that studies have found that job applicants take CSR into account as a criterion when searching for a job (Michailides & Lipsett, 2013). Nielsen's third annual global online survey on CSR supports the same concern for CSR among employees, showing that around two-thirds (67 %) of respondents state that they would prefer to work for socially responsible companies (Nielsen, 2014).

Attitudes towards sustainability in general, and CSR in particular, are, however, not always positive. Environmental skeptics, for example, deny the reality of environmental problems and thus reject environmental protection projects. Environmental skepticism has been, so far, a phenomenon that is particular to the US, even if Jacques, Dunlap, and Freeman (2008) have proposed that this skepticism is "diffusing abroad". In any case, it has already become evident that neither all

consumers nor all employees care about CSR. The results of Nielsen's global survey on CSR that show 67 % of employees care about social responsibility reveals at the very same time that 23 % of respondents do not prioritize social responsibility when seeking employment. Slack et al. (2015, p. 540) found, in a case study of a large UK energy company, that some employees had little or no interest in CSR, and some even expressed very negative attitudes towards CSR. Reasons behind such attitudes lie, besides negative opinions about sustainability in general, in the view of some employees that CSR will not contribute to sustainability in general or that particular CSR activities are not credible.

Plank (2011) finds that negative attitudes of employees towards sustainability issues, e.g., climate change, are a barrier to sustainable behavior at work. In his study (p. 52), one of the interviewees stated, concerning climate change and sustainability, "I don't see it as something that's at the forefront of my mind on a daily basis. I don't see it as being that important or something for me to do when I've got a million other things going on." Given testimonies like this, which researchers have found quite broadly, it can be assumed that negative attitudes towards sustainability in general and/or CSR in particular might well be a barrier to employees' participation in CSR.

5 The Attitude-Behavior Gap

Even if stakeholders' attitudes towards sustainability are positive, their actual behavior is often not in line with their expressed attitudes. For example, consumers may be concerned about environmental issues, but still "struggle to translate this concern into green purchases" (Young, Hwang, McDonald, & Oates, 2010, p. 22). In terms of awareness of and knowledge about CSR, empirical research shows a very low level of awareness about companies' CSR activities among consumers, despite these consumers' positive attitudes towards sustainability in general and towards CSR in particular, although not all consumers are very familiar with the latter idea. For example, in a study by Ingenhoff and Sommer (2011), only a third of respondents were familiar with the term CSR. Just 24 % of participants who knew the meaning of CSR were able to name a concrete CSR activity undertaken by the well-known financial and pharmaceutical companies mentioned in the survey. Likewise, Bekmeier-Feuerhahn and Bögel (2013) found that only 9 % of participants in their study were able to name a CSR activity of the popular fashion brand H&M unaided. Even with prompting (aided recall), and despite H&M's intensive CSR communication, nearly one-third of the participants did not report prior knowledge of any of the CSR activities suggested to them. Slack et al. (2015) found in their case study that the same holds true for employees' knowledge about the CSR activities of their own companies. In their interviews, no employees showed a detailed knowledge of their company's CSR policy, even if the company had a "long-established organizational CSR policy and strategy".

In studies of the participation of stakeholders in sustainability in general, and CSR in particular, results are likewise often quite disappointing. Concerning, for example, sustainable consumption, there is an ongoing positive increase in sales rates for sustainable products (Nielsen, 2014); but at the same time, these sales figures remain very small overall. In Germany, organic food represents only 3.9 % of the overall food retail market. In the EU, organic food has an even lower market impact, at 2 % of food sales. In the work context, the situation seems to be even worse than in the private sphere. For example, McDonald (2011) found that even people who recycle their waste at home often do not recycle at the workplace: “although some 95 % of respondents recycled glass at home, their workplace recycling is comparatively low at just under 28 %.” (McDonald, 2011, p.61).

The difference between the often positive attitudes towards sustainability in general and CSR in particular and the actual behavior of people has been referred to as the “attitude-behavior gap” (De Pelsmacker, Driesen, & Rayp, 2005; Ingenhoff & Sommer, 2011; Young et al., 2010).

6 Barriers to Sustainable Behavior: The Specific Case of Sustainable Behavior at the Workplace

The question arises of what causes this attitude-behavior gap in sustainable behavior. Concerning sustainable consumption, this question has gained intensive research interest and studies have identified various barriers to sustainable behavior. For example, Young et al. (2010) interviewed green consumers on their recent purchases of technology products and found that the lack of available information was a primary barrier to green purchasing. The role of information has been confirmed in further studies as being a major barrier to sustainable consumption (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005). Furthermore, lack of time has also been identified as a considerable barrier (Young et al., 2010). In addition, other research shows that sustainability is often seen as merely an add-on benefit for stakeholders. Thus, they are not willing to make concessions regarding other non-green purchase criteria for the sake of sustainability. As the Nielsen (2014, p. 13) report on CSR states, “most consumers are not willing to make efficacy or taste trade-offs as they aspire to go green”. A study on fair-trade coffee confirms this. The authors of this study identify a small group of “fair-trade lovers” for whom the Fair-Trade label is in fact the most salient purchase criterion. In contrast, however, the much larger group of “fair-trade likers”, who also have significantly positive attitudes towards buying fair-trade coffee, still attach a great deal of importance to other purchase criteria, such as company brand or flavor (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005).

Participation in the work context can be seen as a special case of sustainable behavior in general. Studies that examine sustainable behavior at work, e.g., recycling, have been, however, less common than studies examining the same phenomena in the private sphere (Davis & Challenger, 2009; McDonald, 2011).

An additional limitation in the current research is that existing studies tend to focus on forms of behavioral participation, for example sustainable behavior such as recycling behavior. Less attention has been devoted to studying barriers and facilitators of decisional forms of CSR participation, e.g., regarding the research question of which CSR projects are discussed among employees and which projects remain unknown to them. Overall, and notwithstanding the importance of employee participation, Plank (2011) highlights that there is a “distinct gap in research examining the environmental impact of people at work.” In terms of CSR research, employees have, likewise, seldom been the focus of research (Slack et al., 2015).

Although there are very few results on employee CSR in the work context, some findings on barriers to sustainable behavior at the individual level can be transferred to this context. For example, Plank (2011) found that a lack of knowledge is a salient barrier to acting in a sustainable way in the work environment just as in other environments. Scholars tend to agree, nevertheless, that specific research is needed that examines the determinants of sustainable behavior at the workplace. In particular, it has been suggested that besides the personal traits of individual employees, company characteristics also influence social orientation in general and CSR orientation in particular (Michailides & Lipsett, 2013; Marz, Powers, & Queisser, 2003). It has been suggested that the company characteristics with the most influence in this regard include factors at the organizational level and at the supervisor level (Paillé & Mejía-Morelos, 2014). Results from some early studies on these proposals reveal insights into these company characteristics, which will be presented in the following paragraphs.

In terms of determinants concerning the organizational level, previous studies especially suggest that social norms influence pro-environmental behavior at the workplace (Steg & Vlek, 2009). Likewise, in terms of sustainable behavior at the workplace more generally, perceived organizational support in general (i.e., support offered to employees regarding any aspect of their work) and support for behaving in a sustainable way, in particular, have both been shown to influence employees' willingness to engage in such sustainable behavior (Paillé & Mejía-Morelos, 2014). In terms of perceived social norms, group values also seem to play a major role. In a study on the environmental behavior of staff at a particular university, one of the interviewees stated: “We have our staff department meetings every month or every 6 weeks. We never had a talk about this sort of thing” (Plank, 2011, p. 53). Similarly, Slack et al. (2015) found that the embeddedness of CSR and its visibility in the company are important factors for employees' CSR engagement. Other determinants of employees' willingness are the perceived fit between an employee's own values and their company's communicated CSR values (Michailides & Lipsett, 2013, p. 299; Slack et al., 2015), as well as the employee's perceived level of control over their own sustainable behavior (Davis & Challenger, 2009; Plank, 2011). An employee's lack of control has been defined by Plank (2011, p. 53) as “the perception that the individual is unable to change the situation.” This type of perception might arise, on the one hand, due to an actual lack of control, e.g., the fact that the company provides no recycling facilities, or, on the other hand, due to the employee's lack of knowledge (e.g., about the presence or location of

recycling facilities at the workplace), a lack of knowledge that results in a perceived lack of control. Concerning the impact of lack of control, McDonald (2011) shows that the lower rate of glass recycling in the work context, by contrast to recycling behavior at home, is in part due to the (at least) perceived lack of recycling facilities for glass at the workplace. The lack of control, however, also stems from communication issues, particularly if the lack of control is only due to a lack of knowledge. Thus, CSR communication could contribute to improving participation by providing information (e.g., on the presence and location of recycling facilities).

Regarding these findings, it should be noted that the majority of studies dealing with sustainable behavior at the workplace concentrate on waste reduction (Davis & Challenger, 2009), with their main research aim being to identify barriers and facilitators of employee recycling behavior. Utilizing the three participation levels in the model by Green & Hunton-Clarke (2003), as well as distinguishing the different forms of CSR participation (decisional and behavioral participation), it is clear that this research on only one particular sustainable behavior covers a tiny fraction of the actual range of participation forms. Even concerning the specific topic of waste recycling, further steps that could be investigated would, for example, include feedback loops on the recycling options (consultative participation), as well as the active involvement of employees in the development of actions to improve waste recycling (decisional participation). Thus, despite the insights that the early studies mentioned above reveal, the question remains how employees' participation in sustainable behavior at different levels can be improved.

7 Improving Employee Participation: The Role of Communication

In the following section, we will outline two main ways to improve employees' participation in CSR. Steg and Vlek (2009, p. 313) have described two routes to behavioral change as follows:

When behaviour is strongly related to attitudes, one can try to promote attitude changes towards particular pro-environmental behaviour. When contextual factors inhibit particular behaviours, one can try to remove those barriers.

Accordingly, we will first analyze important aspects of the attitude construct in terms of CSR and the potential results of communication strategies that aim at changing attitudes within this context. Second, we will concentrate on how actual sustainable behavior can be achieved in the work context. We will particularly focus on the question of which determinants, besides the employees' attitude toward sustainability and CSR, influence their sustainable behavior at the workplace.

7.1 *Attitudes and Attitude Change*

Positive attitudes among employees towards sustainability in general and a desired sustainable behavior in particular, e.g., recycling behavior, are a necessary precondition for successful interventions that change behavior (Plank, 2011). As outlined above, employees' attitudes towards sustainability and different sustainable behavior may differ greatly. Thus, it is first of all important for companies to develop an understanding of the attitudes of their employees. In doing this, it is important to differentiate between attitudes towards a general target (e.g., sustainability) and attitudes towards specific behavior with respect to the target (e.g., waste recycling in the work context). If the aim is to change a concrete behavior (e.g., glass recycling at work) it is better to concentrate on the specific behavior-focused attitude, as specific attitudes have been shown to be a better predictor of specific behavior than general attitudes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Furthermore, companies should not only try to understand if employees' attitudes towards specific sustainable behavior are positive or negative, but should also try to get a deeper understanding of the development of these attitudes, as well as how strong they are, and the resulting commitment of employees to the attitude. This background information is of particular importance regarding communication strategies for attitude change. For example, it is important to note if employees have already developed a stable attitude or if, on the other hand, no particular attitude has yet been established. The level to which employees are involved with the relevant attitude is of particular importance, in the first place, with regard to the attitude-behavior relationship: if involvement is high, people are more likely to act according to their attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). In the second place, employee involvement with an attitude is important when developing different communication strategies for attitude change.

One persuasion theory that takes into account an adaptive model of communication is the elaboration likelihood model (ELM, Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; cf. for a current review Petty, Briñol, & Priester, 2009). The ELM proposes that two variables essentially determine the individual's manner of information processing and, thereby, the effect of the persuasion process; these variables are the motivation of people (involvement, need for cognition) to process information and the their ability to do so (comprehensibility of the message, domain knowledge level and general cognitive ability, degree of distraction). If people's ability and motivation is high and information is processed via the central route, then rational, information-based communication is most effective. In contrast, if information is processed via the peripheral route, then affectively-based cues (such as likeable music), heuristic cues (such as a credible source), the mere number of arguments or potential rewards are most effective. In terms of the application of this general insight to the context of CSR, previous studies on CSR communication have confirmed that stakeholders with high or low involvements differ in their processing of CSR communication and, as a result, display different needs for CSR communication, e.g., regarding their need for detailed information. Stakeholders with high CSR involvement have

been found to demand more detailed information about the CSR activities than stakeholders with a low level of involvement (Bögel, 2015). It, thus, seems likely that the ELM could provide helpful guidance for the development of communication strategies that aim to change employees' attitudes towards sustainable behavior.

Attitude change via the central route is, therefore, in general to be preferred, because the attitude changes resulting from this approach have been found to be more stable and predictive of behavior (Petty et al., 2009). However, due to employees' lack of knowledge concerning sustainability and/or lack of motivation this might often not be possible, as discussed above. Especially because central attitude change is not always feasible, it is crucial to be aware that peripheral attitude change can, in fact, also be a way to achieve stable changes of attitude and behavior. For employees not yet having developed a particular (ingrained) attitude towards the desired behavior, peripheral cues, such as responding to a supervisor as a role model, for example waste recycling, might lead to an initial imitation of (sustainable) behavior. If positive reinforcement is then given, e.g., positive feedback from the supervisor, the employee might repeat the behavior. Then, after repeating it a number of times, the employee infers his or her (rewarded) attitude is grounded in the behavior he or she performed in the past. This approach to forming attitudes is consistent with Bem's self-perception theory (cf. Jackson, 2005). However, that is not to say that if the attitudes formed peripherally evolve sufficiently, they could, in turn, become the basis of communication via the often preferred central route.

7.2 *From Attitude to Behavior*

As shown above, attitudes not only influence the processing of information, but also influence the intention to demonstrate a certain behavior. The attitude-behavior gap indicates, however, that identifying (or creating) positive attitudes is not alone sufficient in determining behavior. There are other variables that should also be considered for creating behavior and for developing an effective CSR communication strategy.

The theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991, 2011) is not limited to attitudes as influencing factors in employees' decisions to behave sustainably or not. TPB indeed posits *attitudes* towards a certain behavior as relevant factors, but also adds *subjective norms* and *perceived behavioral control* as additional influencing variables.

The importance of attitudes towards CSR has already been discussed. Turning to subjective norms, these influence behavioral decisions because people often rely on the beliefs and judgments of others in their decision regarding a requested behavior. These subjective norms are constituted by the subject's normative beliefs and cultural values as expressed in the given situation. In particular, and in a CSR context, employees will look to others whom they see as trustworthy or informed as

a model of how these general norms might be active in the given situation. A CSR process must take account of such subjective norms.

The TPB additionally posits perceived behavioral control as another important variable in a person's decision process. This variable focuses on self-perceived ability to act in a particular way. In the CSR context, this is the employee's self-perceived ability to perform a requested sustainable behavior. It is important to understand, then, how the employee perceives their own ability to behave sustainably and, furthermore, how the employee perceives the organizational support for improving the behavioral ability. Such insights are important for creating a target-group-specific, participative and self-referential internal CSR communication process that promotes employee involvement in the CSR approach.

These three related variables—*attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control*—determine the *intention* of employees to act in a sustainable manner or not. Intention represents the main variable for predicting a certain behavior. Internal CSR communication has to consider and integrate all the mentioned variables, as these determine the content and channels of the specific CSR communication strategy. Thus, the internal CSR communication process mentioned in Chapter “CSR as Economic, Ethical, and Communicative Concept”, with its three phases and different communication strategies, should look to identify and then influence attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intentions towards specific sustainable behavior at work.

- During the initiation phase, the stakeholder information strategy informs employees about the company's CSR goals and intentions.
- The implementation phase builds upon the information conveyed in the first phase, and works to develop a CSR-specific understanding and CSR-specific attitudes in employees. Employees may enter into an intercommunication with their company and through this exchange, the company can gain insights on employees' CSR attitudes.
- During the next and final phase of an internal CSR process, the maturation phase, a full stakeholder involvement strategy is recommended. This third stage requires, therefore, genuine two-way communication and participation, whereby the company talks to the employees and their voices may be heard, making a difference to the nature of the CSR program.

It, thus, occurs that the earlier two phases focus on the company's communication about their own CSR strategy, informing employees about the intention and goals of the CSR approach, and how they may be achieved. In the third stage, however, employees are actively engaged in developing the strategy themselves. Therefore, the CSR program at this stage is formed by both, company and employees, emphasizing employees' cognitive and behavioral engagement, often over a long period.

This complex organizational framing leads to a discussion of the extent to which organizational structures influence employees' behavior in addition to the three aforementioned variables of TPB. Thus, further research is required and

organizational CSR communication will particularly benefit from these insights and discussions.

8 Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

In this chapter, we have outlined the particular relevance of internal CSR communication for an integrated communication approach. Within a communicative inside-out framework, internal CSR communication is the starting point for an integrated CSR communication strategy and is, therefore of crucial importance for a company's external image. This approach stresses that employees are highly relevant, both as internal CSR stakeholders and as external consumers. Furthermore, if the company places trust in its employees and communicates its CSR to them, they will act as ambassadors FOR the company, strengthening its external image and reputation (Morsing et al., 2008, pp. 103–105). Likewise, effective internal CSR communication to current employees can percolate to prospective employees, thus becoming positively relevant in the war-of-talents, even as it fosters the relationship between employees and the company overall (Bhattacharya et al., 2009).

We have, in this chapter, however, also highlighted the particular challenges of internal CSR communication. Neither employees' attitudes towards sustainability in general and CSR in particular, nor their actual sustainability behavior are as positive as companies wish them to be. Even if employees' CSR attitudes are positive, their actual behavior is often not in line with their stated attitudes. To address this problem, we first discussed ELM-based approaches to changing existing attitudes, which can help employee participation as part of internal CSR communication. Attitude-change possibilities via the central route—using rational, information-based CSR communication—or the peripheral route, using role models, were presented. The attitude-behavior-gap means that attitude change alone is not enough, so we also discussed which additional factors are important to achieve active participation in CSR by employees. Utilizing TPB, we pointed to the particular importance of subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. We then highlighted the role internal CSR communication can play in influencing these two factors, e.g., the way in which information strategies can improve the perceived level of control.

Overall, this chapter shows that the integration of social-psychological theories such as the ELM and the TPB into the field of CSR communication offers interesting potential for a more theoretical approach to CSR research and (hopefully) as a result, for the successful design of both particular communication strategies and general intervention strategies that are adapted to the specific needs of the employees. Several lines for further research can be developed from this approach. First, previous research on the application of the ELM to CSR communication has shown that the CSR communication context has specific characteristics that need to be considered. One example of such a characteristic would be the high

level of skepticism that many consumers have for CSR communication directed towards them (Du et al., 2010; Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009), which results in high demand among consumers for facts and statistics as well as certifications and audits to demonstrate the trustworthiness of companies. Earlier thinking on CSR would have expected such demands for detailed information only from stakeholders with high motivation and capability levels (Bögel, 2015). Thus, further research on the application of the ELM to CSR communication is needed, particularly in the as yet under-researched field of internal CSR communication. Likewise, we have stressed the importance of further research into TPB in the specific CSR-organizational environment. For example, previous studies have shown that the contributions of each of the three factors, attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, vary depending on the context in which TPB is applied (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). Further research should, thus, examine the relative contributions of these factors with respect to different sustainable behavior, e.g., glass recycling, in the work context. The insights such research would generate would support more specific and therefore, more effective internal CSR communication programs. If, for example, it turns out that employees' attitudes towards CSR are central in determining their participation in CSR, interventions should aim at achieving positive attitudes in employees towards CSR. If, instead, subjective norms, e.g., behavior of supervisors and their anticipated attitudes toward CSR, turn out to be of particular importance, intervention programs should focus on training supervisors.

An internal, participative CSR approach is an especially effective starting point for an integrated CSR communication strategy, contributing to the success of a company's CSR approach. This chapter has outlined the characteristics of integrated CSR communication in general (process-orientated, target-group-specific, dialogical, context-dependent) and of internal CSR communication in particular (self-referential, involving, and participative). It is essential to take these into consideration when developing a company's integrated CSR communication strategy.

9 Exercise and Reflective Questions

1. What are the characteristics of CSR communication in general? Which additional characteristics are particularly relevant for internal CSR communication?
2. What different forms of participation are discussed in the internal CSR process?
3. How might the three variables mentioned in the Theory of Planned Behavior influence employees' recycling behavior at the workplace, e.g., glass recycling?
4. How could these three variables be influenced through internal CSR communication?

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