

To Thine Own Self Be True? Employees' Judgments of the Authenticity of Their Organization's Corporate Social Responsibility Program

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Abstract Despite recognizing the importance of developing authentic corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, noticeably absent from the literature is consideration for how employees distinguish between authentic and inauthentic CSR programs. This is somewhat surprising given that employees are essentially the face of their organization and are largely expected to act as ambassadors for the organization's CSR program (Collier and Esteban in *Bus Ethics* 16:19–33, 2007). The current research, by conducting depth interviews with employees, builds a better understanding of how employees differentiate between authentic and inauthentic CSR programs, and how these judgments influence their perceptions of the organization. We find that employees rely on two different referent standards to form authenticity judgments—the extent to which the image put forth in the CSR program aligns with the organization's true identity and the extent to which the CSR program itself is developmental. To assess the former, employees draw on cues about resource commitment, alignment between elements of the organization's CSR program, emotional engagement, justice, and embeddedness. The latter assessments are based on the extent to which the organization adopts a leadership role with regards to its CSR initiatives. We also find that perceived authenticity can lead to positive outcomes such as

organizational identification and employee connections. This study contributes to the broad literatures on both CSR and authenticity, as well as more specifically adding to the conversation on authenticity as a potentially valuable lens for enriching business ethics theorizing.

Keywords Authenticity · Corporate social responsibility · Employee perceptions · Interviews · Organizational self · Socially constructed standard

Despite the recent economic crisis, the European Commission noted in 2010 that corporate social responsibility (CSR) “is more relevant than ever,” and that it is a “key element in ensuring long term employee and consumer trust.”¹ Similar beliefs are prevalent in North America. A 2008 IBM survey of 250 global business leaders' perceptions of CSR found that many see CSR as a growth opportunity rather than a regulatory compliance or philanthropic effort (Pohle and Hittner 2008). This survey also found that 68% of firms surveyed focused on generating revenue through CSR activities and that 54% believed that CSR initiatives contributed to their competitive advantage, giving them permission to enter new markets and to improve their positioning in the talent wars. These perceptions are consistent with findings in the extant literature. This work suggests that CSR programs can lead to numerous benefits such as increased organizational attractiveness to prospective employees (Turban and Greening 1997) and enhanced employee pride, commitment and

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¹ European Commission Enterprise and Industry, “Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can make a significant contribution towards sustainability and competitiveness, both in Europe and globally.” http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sustainable-business/corporate-social-responsibility/index_en.htm (accessed July 2010).

morale (Pelozo and Hassay 2006; Rodrigo and Arenas 2007). An implicit assumption in much of this work, however, despite much research to the contrary (e.g., Laufer 2003), is that CSR programs are typically well-received by stakeholders. In the current work, however, focusing specifically on employees, we argue that perceptions of authenticity are important in determining whether CSR programs are well-received by employees. We proceed to examine how employees assess the relative authenticity of their organization's CSR program and the subsequent influence of these assessments on their relationship with the organization.

The lure of the perceived benefits of CSR, as well as other social and institutional pressures, has led to a rapid increase in corporate participation in CSR. The result is a large number of programs that not only fail to satisfy stakeholder expectations, but rather are perceived by certain stakeholder groups as simply window dressing, designed to pacify stakeholder demands (Laufer 2003). In contrast, other programs appear more authentic. In the current research, we take steps to understand whether, and if so how, employees distinguish between these two types of CSR. Specifically, when are employees likely to believe their organization's CSR program is authentic? Further, we are interested in how judgments of (in)authenticity might influence employees' relationships with their organizations and, by extension, the organization's capacity to optimize the potential benefits of their CSR program.

The concept of authenticity has drawn the attention of researchers across a broad array of disciplines. Consistent across this work is that central to authenticity is "the notion of being true to oneself" (Liedtka 2008, p. 238). This work also notes that individuals desire authentic offerings and that individuals are engaged in an intensifying search for authenticity (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Liedtka 2008). Of particular interest is the recent, though limited, work on authenticity as it pertains to ethical issues in management. This work, drawing on the concept of authenticity as a useful lens for enriching management theory in this area, focuses on issues such as ethical decision-making (Jackson 2005), organizational processes (Liedtka 2008) and CSR (Beckman et al. 2009; Driver 2006). Authenticity seems a particularly fruitful lens for developing CSR theory given that organizations, in developing their CSR programs, must continuously negotiate both the tensions between profit-seeking and prosociality and the conflicting demands from different stakeholder groups. With regards to the former, some have even argued that CSR "asks corporations to work against their natural genetic makeup" (Devinney 2009, p. 51). Due to these tensions, and the voluntary nature of CSR initiatives, we argue that authenticity is particularly relevant to CSR judgments. The logic here is that the tensions inherent in CSR makes stakeholders

somewhat skeptical of the organization's commitment to their CSR program, thus, motivating them to ascertain the extent to which it is truthful, accurate, reliable and genuine. In other words, they want to know the extent to which the CSR program is a reflection of the organization's true self. Recent work supports this idea, finding that perceived authenticity is important in determining the relative success and acceptance of CSR programs among stakeholders in part because of their high levels of skepticism about CSR (Beckman et al. 2009). Similarly, recent work has revealed that there may be a linkage between some CSR programs and employees identification with their organization, which in turn leads to greater motivation and productivity (Berger et al. 2006).

Interestingly, despite recognizing the importance of developing authentic CSR programs, largely absent from the literature is consideration for how certain stakeholders distinguish between authentic and inauthentic CSR programs. The limited research that does exist on this topic explores authenticity judgments primarily from the perspective of external stakeholders (e.g., consumers: Ellen et al. 2006; NGO leaders, members of government: Beckman et al. 2009) or that of management (Beckman et al. 2009). Noticeably absent is consideration for employee perceptions of authenticity. Yet, given that employees are essentially the face of their organization and are largely expected to act as ambassadors for the organization's CSR program (Collier and Esteban 2007), organizations need to understand whether, and if so, how, their employees assess CSR authenticity. This is particularly true given that employees play a critical role in shaping the organization's relationship with external stakeholders (e.g., customers, suppliers, investors) (Berry 1983) and, by extension, with how these other stakeholders perceive the organization and its CSR program.

Employees share unique relationships with their organizations and, as such, there is reason to believe that they will be (i) particularly motivated to ascertain whether their organization's CSR program is authentic and (ii) likely to do so in ways that differ from those of other stakeholders. With regards to the former, consider how an individual's organizational membership shapes their self-concepts (Tajfel and Turner 1985; Ashforth and Mael 1989). As members of the organization, employees self-concepts are said to be influenced, at least in part, by what "they believe others infer about them from their organizational membership" (Dutton et al. 1994, p. 240). To the extent that these impressions are negative, employees may feel threatened (Dutton et al. 1994). It seems likely then that employees will have a particularly vested interest in ascertaining the extent to which their organization's CSR program is authentic because of the potential threat to their self-concept. Further, employees may seek to determine the

authenticity of their organization's CSR program to ascertain their value to the organization (i.e., whether they are more than just another employee that is easily replaced). Authenticity stands to enhance the employees' perceived value to the organization, indicating that they are truly part of, and share a deeper commitment with, the organization (Liedtka 2008). Implicit in this work is the notion that inauthentic organizational behavior may threaten an employee's self-concept or make them feel substitutable.

With regards to the latter, unlike external stakeholders who may be loosely connected to each other and have only limited information about a firm's CSR initiatives, employees are privy to more information and are embedded in a dense, internal social network (Rowley 1997). Further, as part of this network, employees are better able and more likely to assess corporate initiatives within the context of the organization's history and culture. Accordingly, there is a strong basis to believe that employees may rely on different cues to judge authenticity.

In the current research, we explore these issues. Specifically, by conducting depth interviews with employees, we build a better understanding of how employees differentiate between authentic and inauthentic CSR programs, and how these judgments influence their perceptions of the organization. We find that employees rely on two different referent standards to form authenticity judgments. Specifically, they assess the extent to which the image put forth in the CSR program aligns with the organization's true identity and the extent to which the CSR program itself is developmental. To assess the former, they draw on cues about the resources committed to the CSR initiatives, the degree of alignment between elements of their CSR program, emotional engagement, perceived justice, and embeddedness. The latter assessments are based on the extent to which the organization adopts a leadership role with regards to its CSR initiatives. We also find that perceived authenticity can lead to positive outcomes such as organizational identification and employee connections. Generally, this work contributes to the broad literatures on both CSR and authenticity, as well as more specifically adding to the conversation on authenticity as a potentially valuable lens for enriching business ethics theorizing.

In the following section, we begin with defining and discussing the concept of authenticity, with a particular emphasis on how it has been treated in the business ethics literature. We then move to a discussion that more specifically addresses what is meant by authentic CSR and, within that framework, how employees' authenticity judgments may have significant implications for their relationship with the firm. We then present our methodology, which involved conducting depth interviews with employees to develop an understanding of how they assess

their organization's CSR programs. Next, we discuss the themes that emerged during our analysis of the interview data. This involves a focus on both how employees confer authenticity on their organization's CSR program and the outcomes associated with these perceptions. Finally, we discuss how these findings add insight to the conversation about authenticity as a powerful lens for theorizing about business ethics and stakeholder relationships.

Background

The Concept of Authenticity

The concept of authenticity has been examined and identified as a key evaluative concept in a wide variety of contexts within the realm of the social sciences, including sociology, history, anthropology, and, more recently, management. As a result of this diversity, authenticity has developed multiple meanings. Some have defined it as moral character (Jackson 2005), as a manifestation of an individual's search for what is real (Leigh et al. 2006), as "behavior that is phenomenally experienced as being authored by the self" (Sheldon et al. 1997, p. 1381) or as perfect simulation (Handler and Saxton 1988). Still others adopt broader definitions of authenticity, as related more generally to ideas of truthfulness, accuracy, reliability, and genuineness (Beckman et al. 2009; Beverland 2006). What remains constant across these diverse literatures, however, is the idea that being true to oneself is at the heart of authenticity (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Liedtka 2008). The limited research on authenticity in business ethics is no exception.

Authenticity has only recently drawn the attention of business ethics researchers, yet has been put forth as a potentially fruitful lens for enriching theory in this area. This work, drawing on the basic premise of being true to oneself, focuses more specifically on the authenticity of the organizational self (Driver 2006; Liedtka 2008). For instance, Liedtka (2008) suggests that an organization can create a more authentic self by engaging in strategy-making processes where individuals have voice, are active participants and are emotionally engaged. Driver (2006) suggests that authentic conceptions of the corporate self, and so authentic CSR, entails the organization recognizing that it is embedded in a network of stakeholder relationships. Interestingly, both works acknowledge the central role of stakeholders in the construction of authentic organizational selves and make strong claims for the benefits of authenticity (Liedtka 2008; Driver 2006). However, both works focus on developing somewhat objective definitions of authenticity as it pertains to CSR, organizations, and processes.

In contrast, other work in this domain notes that organizations must concern themselves with stakeholder *perceptions* of authenticity. For instance, Beckman et al. (2009) find that stakeholder perceptions of authenticity are important to the success and acceptance of CSR programs. They note that stakeholders use available cues, such as transparency and consistency, to ascertain the extent to which the organization is true to its self. Other work, more generally related to authenticity themes, argues that philanthropic activities that are viewed as genuine lead to more positive moral evaluations by the community than those perceived as ingratiating (Godfrey 2005). Consumers respond more positively to CSR actions that are perceived as driven by the organization's values (Ellen et al. 2006). Taken together, this work suggests that the extent to which the CSR program is viewed as authentic influences the organizational benefits associated with the CSR program. Applied in the context of employee–organization relationships, this suggests that perceptions of authenticity may play a role in determining whether the CSR program is well-received by employees and, by extension, whether the organization is likely to optimize the potential positive employee-centric outcomes of their CSR actions. These benefits may include elevated levels of employee morale, commitment, loyalty, pride, and organizational identification (Berger et al. 2006; Pelozo and Hassay 2006; Rodrigo and Arenas 2007; Sen et al. 2006). Given the significance of these benefits, and the expected role that authenticity plays in determining whether the organization can achieve them through their CSR program, it is critical to understand how employees form these judgments.

Forming Authenticity Judgments

If authenticity denotes being true to oneself, then conferring authenticity involves assessments of whether the object of interest is true to its self (Grayson and Martinec 2004). The extant literature suggests that, to make these assessments, individuals compare their perceptions of the relevant object's characteristics to those of a socially constructed standard of comparison (Belk and Costa 1998; Beverland 2006; Fombrun and van Riel 2004; Grayson and Martinec 2004). An object will be deemed authentic when the perceived characteristics align closely with those of the established template. Interestingly, certain research implies that this template is static, such that the individual can assess authenticity based on the spatio-temporal link between the two objects (Grayson and Martinec 2004). In contrast, other work speaks to authenticity as “a process of continually becoming,” suggesting that the referent standard by which to assess authenticity is dynamic and evolving (Liedtka 2008, p. 238). Consistent, however, is the basic idea that

individuals will assess authenticity by comparing the object of interest to a referent standard.

Applied in the context of CSR, this work thus suggests that to form judgments of CSR authenticity, employees will draw on available cues to compare the characteristics of their organization's CSR program to some socially constructed standard. Thus, developing an understanding of this phenomenon first requires knowledge of what standard employees use in this comparison process. Of interest then is to determine what referent standard employees' rely on to assess CSR authenticity, the cues that employees use to make these comparisons, and the subsequent influence of these authenticity judgments on their employee–organization relationship.

Methodology

In this study, adding to the discussion on authenticity as a powerful lens for enriching business ethics theorizing, we were interested in investigating how employees understand the phenomenon of CSR authenticity. More specifically, we aimed to develop an in-depth understanding of how employees conferred authenticity on their organization's CSR programs and the subsequent impact on their relationship with the organization. Given this emphasis on the subjective employee experience, we adopted a phenomenological orientation to guide this research. This type of qualitative investigation, which is strongly reliant on descriptive and interpretive analysis, enables one to capture the “meaning, structure and essence” of phenomenon of interest (Patton 2002, p. 104).

Adhering to the suggested methodologies of Thompson et al. (1989), this phenomenological approach involved engaging in elite interviews with employees. These types of interviews have been noted as particularly effective for developing a rich understanding of “tacit perceptions, beliefs, and values” (Drumwright 1996, p. 72), which is a necessary component of this study. Each interview began with an open-ended grand tour question (i.e., How important is CSR to your organization?) to set up broad parameters for the discussion to follow. This question enabled interviewees, within the broad parameters of CSR, to steer the conversation toward issues that were particularly salient to them. More specific, probing questions were asked over the course of the discussion to follow-up on comments made by the interviewees. By allowing the employees to lead the discussion and so speak to the issues of greatest importance to them, we were able to develop a clearer picture of how they understand the phenomenon.

Notably, in the interviews, we did not provide an objective definition of CSR to employees. Rather, following the introductory question, employees were free to

discuss CSR as they defined it. The logic here is that, in the current work, we were interested in how employees defined CSR and, based on that definition, how they evaluated CSR authenticity. Conversely, we were not concerned with ascertaining whether their organizations were objectively engaged in CSR (i.e., whether the organizations' CSR programs met the necessary criteria to be objectively defined as CSR). It was interesting to note, however, that all of our informants spoke about CSR in terms of the specific activities that their organization was pursuing as part of their CSR program. This perspective aligns closely with the perspective of CSR as voluntary company activities that demonstrate "the inclusion of social and environmental concerns in business operations and interactions with stakeholders" (van Marrewijk 2003, p. 102).

We conducted a total of 24 interviews, 16 in-person and 8 over the phone, where each one lasted approximately 1 h. We determined that this was a sufficient sample size by using the concept of saturation, which is the point at which no additional concepts or relationships among concepts emerge (Guest et al. 2006). While the concept of saturation is useful, it fails to give specific guidance as to the number of interviews that are appropriate. A study by Guest et al. (2006) found that saturation occurred within the first twelve interviews, and that the basis for meta-themes was present in as few as six interviews. In contrast, the CSR-related research by Beckman et al. (2009) was based on 44 interviews, all of which were deemed essential to fully understand complex emerging phenomenon. Notably, in our study, where the sample falls within the range of these studies, we reached a point of saturation with 24 interviews and the meta-themes emerged in the first eight interviews.

Each of our informants was an employee at one of four financial services institutions. Selecting four organizations within the same industry increased the likelihood of having variance in the degree of CSR authenticity while still allowing some degree of control over variation caused by external factors. The decision to use financial services institutions as the context for this study was made for a couple of reasons. First, given the nature of the study, it was critical to select organizations that were engaged in CSR activities such that the employees would be aware of and better able to discuss and evaluate these practices. Thus, we sought organizations with established CSR programs and involvement in large-scale CSR initiatives. We did, however, want some variance in CSR authenticity across organizations. The financial services sector is such that there remains significant variance among the CSR programs of the different firms. For example, while some institutions are ranked by Corporate Knights on its top 50 Best Corporate Citizens list, others are not. Though this list is generated based on quantifiable measures (i.e., key

performance indicators) rather than perceptions, it is indicative of tangible differences among financial firms that, in turn, may shape employee perceptions of authenticity. Financial institutions were recruited through personal contacts and by contacting the organizations' CSR department directly. Employees were subsequently recruited using a combination of purposive sampling and snowballing. The final sample included a variety of employees across multiple departments ranging from information technology to communications to risk management. Further, employee tenure with the institution ranged from only a few months to approximately 30 years. All of the employees were aware of and had some degree of knowledge about the organization's CSR program. To protect the privacy of both the organizations and the employees we do not provide a detailed profile of each informant (e.g., job title, tenure, and department) and use only pseudonyms to identify the source of the quotations. However, it is interesting to note that employees' desire to assess authenticity and the cues that they used to do so appeared to transcend issues of seniority, tenure with the organization, and area of specialization.

The data was analyzed using a thematic analysis, where one moves back and forth iteratively between the transcripts and the extant literature to identify patterns of meaning and emergent themes (Boyatzis 1998). This iterative process enables one to make sense of the data by drawing out themes that build understanding of the phenomenon and generate new insights. The following section presents the results of this analysis by presenting the emergent themes that were uncovered during this process. These identified themes are critical in developing a better understanding of the antecedents of CSR authenticity within an organizational context. To illustrate what we identified as emergent themes, we use quotations from our informants to provide transparency and clarity to the themes. Unless otherwise noted, the themes and quotations summarize the views of multiple informants.

Findings

Employees and Authentic CSR

Although prior literature has established that individuals frequently strive to distinguish authentic offerings from inauthentic ones, a critical first step in this study was to explore whether employees are motivated to determine the relative authenticity of their organization's CSR program. In a sense, we were interested in whether employees, when asked generally about their organization's CSR program, naturally spoke to the concept of authenticity and/or its broader themes of truthfulness, accuracy, reliability, and

genuineness. In the interviews, authenticity quickly emerged as an important consideration in the evaluation of CSR programs. Although none of the participants directly mentioned authenticity, perhaps because it is a term that is primarily couched in the academic community, many spoke directly to its core themes. Participants used words such as “genuine,” “real,” “sincere,” “façade,” and “honesty” to describe their organization’s CSR program.

It feels genuine, it feels like you are – it doesn’t feel like a façade. And, I’m not certain that it was intended to be a façade but you definitely kind of go ‘huh’ when you’re sitting there. You have a very – yeah, this is what we’re about. It’s a sense of pride but it’s also a sense of honesty (Jen).

Jen’s comment captures this trend. She perceives certain CSR actions as genuine and honest, and others as more of a façade. Her language speaks directly to themes of authenticity, and suggests that she distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic CSR actions.

We also found additional support for the idea that authenticity, more specifically, is a construct of interest. Specifically, many of the informants’ comments, consistent with the extant literature on authenticity, imply that employees assess their organization’s CSR program by comparing it to a socially constructed standard. For example, Darcy’s comment—“but I don’t consider that very true to what CSR means to me”—suggests that she has a certain standard that she uses to evaluate her organization’s CSR program. In a sense, it seems she has in her mind a template of ‘true CSR’ that she relies on to assess authenticity. Similarly, Mary’s comment below indicates that she has also constructed a standard for CSR. She makes assessments about whether her organization’s CSR program is believable and, in a sense, ‘real,’ by comparing the breadth and depth of her organization’s CSR program to her socially constructed CSR template,

If an organization is talking about itself as being good - CSR is important to us - and they talk only about their charitable givings and the philanthropy I don’t see that as very legit either. I think that’s just – that was just the tip of the iceberg in starting all of this rolling and if that’s all you can say today then I don’t believe it.

These comments, in that they suggest that employees compare their organization’s CSR program to some socially constructed standard, are consistent with the extant literature on authenticity (e.g., Grayson and Martinec 2004). As such these findings, when taken together with the idea that employees quickly turned to authenticity-related themes (e.g., genuineness) to discuss their organization’s CSR program, suggest that employees’ do spontaneously

form judgments of authenticity when asked to broadly discuss their organization’s CSR program.

Comparison Standards for Forming Authenticity Judgments

We next sought to understand how employees formed these authenticity judgments. To do so, we were first interested in what referent employees used as their comparison standard, and, subsequently, what cues they drew on to make the comparison. Interestingly, in analyzing the transcripts, it became apparent that employees’ authenticity judgments were informed by two distinct comparisons. Specifically, to determine the authenticity of their organization’s CSR program, they appeared to both compare the organizational self as put forth in the CSR program to their perception of the actual identity of their organization and to compare the company’s existing CSR program to a more dynamic standard of what a CSR program should be based on evolving norms of social responsibility. With regards to the former assessments, employees seemingly drew on cues that enabled them to determine the extent to which their organization’s CSR program aligned with the actual identity of their organization rather than simply the image that the company was pursuing (Wicki and van der Kaaij 2007). This is consistent with previous work, which suggests that central to authenticity judgments is to determine whether the object of interest is true to its self. Thus, here, we see that employees form authenticity judgments, in part, by determining whether the identity portrayed by CSR program is an accurate representation of the organization’s true self.

In the latter case, employees used available cues to determine the extent to which the characteristics of their organization’s CSR program aligned with those of some dynamic CSR template, one that was continuously being adapted to reflect changes in the institutional and social environment. This focus on the developmental nature of CSR is consistent with Liedtka’s (2008) work on authentic organizational processes, whereby authenticity is “a process of continually becoming” (Liedtka 2008, p. 238). Applied here, judgements of authenticity were determined, in part, by the extent to which the CSR program was perceived as continually evolving to align with an ever-changing standard of what it should be. Employees appeared to transition fluidly between these referent templates, seemingly drawing on both comparisons to inform their authenticity judgments.

In the following section, we first discuss the cues that employees rely on to ascertain the extent to which the CSR actions accurately reflect the organization’s true self. We then proceed to discuss those used to assess the extent to which the organization’s CSR program is perceived as developmental. Taken together, our findings identify elements of the CSR program that are critical both in

determining employee responses to their organization's CSR program and, more broadly, in shaping the employee-organization relationship.

CSR Programs as an Accurate Reflection of the Organization's True Self

Employees relied on several cues to determine the extent to which their organization's CSR program aligned with the actual identity of their organization. Specifically, we identified five cues that employees use: a sustained commitment of resources to the CSR program, alignment between elements of their CSR program; the emotional engagement of management and staff; a sense of justice; and embeddedness. Further, and worthy of particular note is that issues related to employee involvement permeated discussions and seemed deeply embedded in the process of ascertaining whether the organization's identity, as put forth by the CSR program, reflected its true self. A discussion of these cues to authenticity, which highlights the importance of employee engagement in the development of authentic CSR programs, is now presented.

A Sustained Commitment of Resources Employees saw committing tangible resources to diverse initiatives on an ongoing basis as a form of tangible evidence by which to assess the extent to which the identity put forth in their organization's CSR program represented the organization's true self. Specifically, by making a sustained commitment of resources to the CSR program, the organization could signal to employees a depth of organizational commitment to CSR. This played a critical role in shaping the informants' views of authentic CSR, perhaps because CSR is largely an intangible corporate resource. Prior literature notes that tangible resources are important in shaping stakeholder perceptions of intangible corporate resources (e.g., service quality) (Parasuraman et al. 1988). Below, Mary comments on the centrality of tangible resources to signal the authenticity of CSR.

In general, for me to believe that [this financial institution] is authentic in its desire to move forward doesn't mean that I need to be told everything that it does but I need to see things every now and again.

Bob's comments suggest that making *ongoing* donations to charities works toward integrating CSR into the organization's system and also, in some ways, creates a tradition of CSR within the organization that persists over time.

I tend to think about the banks a lot just because we're in the business of banking and you'll see quite a bit of the big banks jumping into some high profile funding, some high profile thing if they get too much

bad press and maybe a couple of years later they're not involved anymore as opposed to having it built into the system that functions year after year after year.

Similar comments were made throughout the interviews suggesting the importance of being able to observe an ongoing commitment of resources to CSR. Many employees focused on a sustained commitment of resources in the form of employee time (e.g., volunteering). Others stressed the need for tangible, visible changes in their work environment (e.g., printing double-sided, ceramic mugs for all employees, recycled paper, recycled pens, new building standards, etc.) as proof that their organization was committing resources on an ongoing basis. Taken together, these comments highlight how authentic CSR denotes making ongoing, tangible commitments of corporate resources. Interestingly, many of the actions noted by employees as evidence of authentic CSR were unrelated to the organization's core business functions (e.g., the distribution of ceramic mugs for employees). When considered in conjunction with one of our other findings that we discuss later (i.e., that employees also base their authenticity judgments on whether the CSR program is embedded into the way the organization does business), this implies that organizations must signal their CSR authenticity to employees by making sustained resource commitments in peripheral areas as well as those related to their technical core.

Alignment In analyzing the transcripts, it became apparent that employees value consistency between strategy and action with respect to CSR programs. Further, to evaluate consistency, employees seem to focus on the degree of alignment between certain elements of their organization's CSR program. The interviews revealed four distinct ways to evaluate alignment, where alignment refers to the degree of consistency or cohesion perceived to exist between related sources of CSR information. In other words, employees wanted to ensure that certain sources of CSR information complemented rather than conflicted with one another. Specifically, employees seem to be in search of: (i) alignment between corporate statements and actions, (ii) alignment between internal and external actions, (iii) alignment between functional areas and (iv) alignment between financial and social goals.

- (i) *Alignment between Statements and Actions.* When an organization makes a public statement about a CSR initiative or commits to certain underlying CSR values, employees expect organizations to fulfill that commitment. In a sense, there must be alignment between the corporate statement and actions or

employees will question the authenticity of the CSR initiative.

There are certain things that I read, when I read the CSR, because I feel that I kind of have, I don't want to say inside track, but I'm familiar with what they're talking about, I think it's like spin doctor stuff. Like they feel they had to put it in but I'm not sure – I think it's made to seem much more meaningful than it is in practice (Kristen).

Interestingly, Kristen speaks of a gap between the expectations a corporation develops and the actual implementation and delivery of programs. Employees like Kristen are quick to observe such gaps and view them as corporate dishonesty. Her comments suggest that a failure to align statements and actions may threaten employee-corporate relationship in that employees are no longer able to fully accept the word of the company. Another informant, Mary, noted that corporate statements are often interpreted by employees as promises. In her narrative, she seems to stress that there must be a strong connection between words and actions, whereby public statements should be directly attributable to a tangible change within the organization. When these expectations of change are violated and promises are broken, the organization fails to achieve authenticity. Mary's comments highlight the importance of setting organizational CSR goals that can be monitored, tracked and reported on an ongoing basis. In doing so, organizations can demonstrate how statements are translated into concrete actions.

And, if you can see tangible proof. If you were to look at a business and see what's changed from one year to the next – if nothing's changed or if promises were made, you know, 'next year we intend to do whatever' and, in the next year's report, there's nothing stated about that or there's no evidence. Maybe they didn't talk because you can't say everything in a CSR report and so you choose not to mention it – but there's no other proof that there was anything done in that regard. Then, it's like well, what did you go and make a promise for? Why did you say that?

- (ii) *Alignment between Internal and External Actions.* Another important component of authenticity uncovered during this study was the need for alignment between internal and external programs and treatment of stakeholders in each environment. For instance, in order to be deemed authentic, organizations must treat employees in the same caring and ethical fashion they advocate treating members of external

constituencies. An outward-looking only approach to CSR is not sufficient as the following quotations show:

So it would be pretty hard for the [financial institutions] to go out to these other businesses that they deal with and call them on environmental standards and things like that when their own house isn't in order (Mary).

The finding that you need to have 'your house in order first' before taking steps to influence the behavior of others in the community suggests that a focus on customers and competitors is not sufficient. Organizations need to consider employees in their construction of their CSR programs. Similarly, diffusing knowledge about CSR internally is important, but if you don't understand employees' needs and perceptions as well, programs may be viewed as inauthentic. Sandra's quote below also highlights the importance of equal treatment:

I worked for a company where they advertise this big thing every year that – oh we're going to give money so that children can play hockey or they can participate in sports but yet the staff was paid just basically minimum wage. The minimum that they absolutely had to be paid. And, the standards that they set were really high and it was just, in my experience, it was not a good company to work for. So, I find it pretty ironic when, to this day, I'm seeing these commercials saying how oh this company is giving money so that poor children can play sports, oh big hairy deal, yet their employees may end up having to use food banks because their incomes are not good enough that they can buy food.

Here, Sandra speaks of the discrepancy between the organization's treatment of the community and the treatment of their employees. This gap, created by treating the community well seemingly at the expense of the employees, is perceived as a misalignment between the image put forth in the organization's CSR program and their true identity. Here, the gap between internal and external treatment of stakeholders results in perceptions of inauthentic CSR.

Before moving forward, it is worth noting that this authenticity cue seems particularly relevant to the notion of assessing the organization's true self. Specifically, external actions may be perceived by employees as representing the image put forth by the organization and internal actions may be taken as a proxy of to the organization's true identity. In other words, assessments of the alignment of internal and external actions may be a relatively simple and straightforward way for employees to assess the extent to

which the organization's true identity aligns with the one put forth by the organization. Given its simplicity and relatively clear link to assessments of whether the organization is true to self, it seems that perhaps this particular cue may be more directly informative in shaping authenticity judgments. Although we cannot address this issue in the current work, we return to this issue in our discussion section as an interesting area for further research.

(iii) *Alignment between Functional Groups.* Employees also noted that developing an authentic CSR program requires alignment between the organization's functional groups such that they are oriented toward the pursuit of a common goal. Specifically, though employees noted that having a CSR department was an important part of communicating the importance of CSR and creating a more formalized program, it was also deemed important that the actual CSR function extend beyond the boundaries of that department to permeate other functional roles in the organization. Isolated CSR departments that were not integrated with other functional areas of the organization were perceived as relatively inauthentic. Consider the following:

So, it's not just, there is no CSR, or you can have a couple of people, I guess, who are the forefront of coming up with new ideas but there is no CSR department where they sit behind closed doors, like they do here. You, have no idea what they're doing, and they churn out mandates that no one has any input into, and you really and don't see any difference on a day-to-day basis. I think it should be - well the CSR program is exactly that - it's not a person or two people in a department - it's a full program that everyone is committed to (Erin).

Erin's comments highlight the importance of having the actual CSR function extend beyond the boundaries of that department to permeate other functional roles in the organization. Over the course of the interviews it became clear that authentic CSR requires alignment between each functional area of the organization such that the organization is consistent in its approach to CSR and the CSR program is not confined to only certain areas of the organization. Erin goes one step further, suggesting that interfunctional dynamics, and by extension authentic CSR, requires that everyone in the organization be committed to the CSR program. This again speaks to the importance of employee involvement. It suggests that incorporating CSR practices that span department boundaries requires interdepartmental communication and, by extension, employee engagement and commitment.

(iv) *Alignment between Financial and Social Goals.* In their assessments of authenticity, employees also searched for cues suggesting that their organization's social goals (i.e., those associated with the CSR program) complemented the financial goals of the organization. Complementarity signaled to employees that *both* financial and social goals were valued by the organization. Comments by Bob are typical of this view:

So, we give really good banking packages to not-for-profit organizations. Strictly - number one - the old financial bottomline where it's a very good financial thing to do but it also satisfies that parallel bottomline where we feel we're doing a good thing in the community by providing specialized and very good banking services to the whole not-for-profit sector.

He goes on to say the following:

There's only a conflict [between the social and the financial bottomlines] if due thought isn't put into the financing of the CSR end. You know we can't be losing money so it's not that one is subservient to the other, it's just that the two have to work in tandem.

This finding supports the work by Berger et al. (2006) who found that having both economic and non-economic goals was essential to successful social alliances. It also suggests, however, that employees take special care to determine whether the social goals are subservient to the financial goals or rather that their organization truly values both sets of goals. To make these assessments, employees search for evidence of formalized CSR structures, (e.g., strategies, measurable goals, audits, policies, departments). Implementing formal systems and structures (e.g., CSR department, social audits, goals, policies) to guide the CSR program seems to facilitate the process of signaling to employees that the organization takes their social goals seriously. For example, one informant voiced her views on CSR policy, indicating that formalizing the CSR program through policy implementation both signals to employees that CSR is important to the organization and helps communicate to employees that social responsibility is not antithetical to profitability.

The policies are not fluff'n'stuff, they're there to follow. So if [this financial institution] didn't think that these things were important enough for all of us to act upon them then why would they bother - right? If they thought it was going to compromise their business to a certain degree - a degree of well we won't meet our financial objectives - they wouldn't bother but they're saying well, these are still important us (Mary).

Other employees referred to the importance of having an official CSR department or of conducting social audits. Amy perceived the CSR program as more authentic because the organization's social goals were officially *written* into their performance management processes.

There's a whole part of our balanced scorecard and important goals that they want to achieve every year – it's written right into that. So it's not just profit and losses, CSR is right in there as well, it's just as important (Amy).

Consistent across these comments, is the notion that employees perceived the organization's CSR activities as more authentic when they were formalized by the organization. These formalized structures appeared to make employees more confident that the identity put forth in their organization's CSR program represented the organization's true self.

Emotional Engagement Our findings suggest that, to be deemed authentic, CSR programs must be successful in engaging the heart as well as the head of both its managers and employees. We find that senior management must be viewed as being emotionally engaged with and passionate about the social cause in order for the CSR program to be deemed authentic. The following statement, for example, illustrates this relationship:

I guess if you'd met our CEO – you would have no doubt. You know, really. Because he comes and speaks to each of the departments - he'll go to the branches and the departments – and he is genuinely excited and happy about any of the initiatives that they've sort of decided. You can hear it in his voice, see it in his face and, all the management is like that. They truly are. It's just phenomenal (Kate).

Also of importance is the notion that a CSR program is perceived as more authentic when it succeeds in emotionally engaging the employees. For example, Susan notes the importance of having a CSR program that is driven by passion and energy.

I think if there's passion and energy put into something more would be done, more people would get involved, more sort of issues would be brought up or resolved in the community and stuff.

Interestingly, many employees went on to highlight that, in order to emotionally engage employees, management must participate in CSR initiatives that are meaningful to the employees. In other words, employees must have a personal connection such that they feel emotionally connected to the initiative. Allen captures this idea in the following:

I think having a personal connection to it certainly helps, either you have a personal connection or it's easy to see the personal connection. Let me give you an example of something that I didn't think worked out too well. I used to work in an investment bank and we would do a very similar thing [working closely with a charity]. And, the reason that we got involved in it was that, one of high muckety-mucks', call him the Chairman, daughter had diabetes. And so he engaged everybody and like this is what we're going to do, it's our corporate thing and we're going to go do it. I don't know, and then people weren't all that engaged in it, they didn't have that personal connection.

Allen describes a situation where the Chairman engaged the organization in a philanthropic activity based on his personal experience. As a result, the employees were not particularly engaged in the initiatives and felt little emotional connection.

Taken together, the findings suggest that employees who are emotionally engaged in the community are likelier to support the values that the organization is communicating through these programs and thus, the CSR program is more likely to be perceived as an accurate reflection of the organizational self. These findings are consistent with Mirvis' (1994) conceptual study of social responsibility, where he suggests that it is critical for CSR initiatives to be inclusive rather than simply a response to senior management whims. Notably, the comments once again speak to the importance of employee involvement. Organization's can only identify CSR initiatives that are meaningful for their employees by talking with them and involving them in the setting the organization's CSR agenda.

Organizational Justice Perceptions of organizational justice, both procedural and distributive, also emerged as an important consideration in shaping employees' judgments of CSR authenticity. Specifically, the extent to which CSR initiatives were perceived as procedurally and distributively just informed employee perceptions of whether the image that the organization was pursuing through their CSR initiatives aligned with the true organizational self.

The extant literature generally recognizes procedural and distributive justice as two components of organizational justice (Colquitt et al. 2001; Folger 1987). Procedural justice, which focuses on process elements, can be defined as "the fairness of the *means* by which an allocation decision is made" (Cropanzano and Ambrose 2001, p. 123). Processes are said to be fair to the extent that they demonstrate consistency, bias suppression, accuracy, correctness, representativeness, and ethicality (Levanthal

1980). Distributive justice, on the other hand, focuses on outcome elements. It can be defined as the perceived fairness of an allocated *outcome*, as determined by some comparison to a referent standard (Cropanzano and Ambrose 2001).

With regards to procedural justice, employees' comments suggest that, in order to be perceived as authentic, a CSR program must be developed and implemented using fair processes. Specifically, as captured in Andy's quote below, perceptions of authenticity seemed greatly influenced by the degree to which the CSR program offered consistency in employee treatment:

Having employees, managers and executives in this committee – it's not just dictated, it's not autocratic – it's not the managers and the executives and the directors just saying this is how we're going to do it, there's actually employee participation. So, we're all peers trying to solve shortcomings. So that's the beauty of that committee.....to me it becomes real because, [this organization] is made up of people. I mean, from somebody in the mailroom all the way to somebody who sits on the nth floor of the building...So, for me, that is more real, the different levels because if it's taken on by somebody – it doesn't become a joint effort it's one voice as oppose to 33,000 voices.

Here, Andy speaks directly to the importance of implementing the CSR processes that offer consistent treatment for all employees regardless of their position in the company. The opinion of those affected by decisions must also be taken into consideration. With regards to the latter, Andy actually speaks directly to the issue of having voice. This concept is defined in the justice literature as “expressions of opinion that feed into the decision-making process” and is noted as a central determinant of procedural justice (Folger 1987, p. 154). Consistent with this work, Andy states how much she values the ability to have a voice within the organization and to feel as though it has an impact on the decision-making process. Her comment underscores how important it is for organizations to acknowledge their employees as unique individuals who want to be involved in the CSR decision-making process.

Informants also spoke to the importance of distributive justice, noting the importance of equally allocating the workload associated with the development and implementation of the CSR program. Specifically, several informants noted that certain employees, almost as ambassadors of the CSR program, are expected to carry a disproportional amount of the associated work load. Jen captures these views quite well, noting that there is often social pressure placed on key individuals within the organization to carry the burden of certain CSR initiatives.

They're certainly still relying on those who have year after year [supported the CSR program]...there's a lot of pressure I would say on key individuals in this organization to help make that a success.

Taken in the context of the interview as a whole, it seems that these perceptions of distributive injustice influence her judgments of CSR authenticity. Specifically, it seems when the burden of implementing the CSR program rests on the shoulders of only a few employees (i.e., inequitable distribution of the workload), CSR programs may be viewed as less authentic. In a sense, given that in such cases the CSR program represents only a few individuals rather than the organization as a whole, the CSR program is not perceived as a representation of the organization's true self. Interestingly, one of our earlier themes supports the notion that justice is important to authenticity perceptions. Specifically, whereas Jen's comments speak to the importance of distributive justice in the allocation of workload across employees, the ‘alignment of internal and external actions’ theme highlights the importance of justice across internal and external stakeholders. Specifically, it seems that employees might assess whether they are being treated fairly by comparing the treatment that they receive to that of external stakeholders. This perspective then offers additional support for the notion that the perceived alignment of internal and external actions may be particularly influential in shaping employees' perceptions of CSR authenticity. The logic here is that, while the alignment of internal and external stakeholder treatment is used by employees in and of itself as an authenticity cue (as discussed earlier), it might also influence perceptions of authenticity because it is indicative of organizational justice.

CSR as Embedded in the Fabric of the Organization and the Fabric of the Community Another dominant theme across interviews was the idea that employees' perceptions of authenticity were influenced by the extent to which the CSR program was embedded into both the fabric of the organization and that of the larger community. The idea that having CSR embedded in the organization is important to authenticity is consistent with earlier work. Specifically, Beckman et al. (2009) find that stakeholders' perceived CSR activities as more authentic when they were “in the heart of the business” rather than tacked on as an afterthought (p. 201). Here, we find that employees, as internal stakeholders, also concern themselves with ascertaining the extent to which the CSR program is embedded into the fabric of the organization. Bob's statement below succinctly captures this prominent theme:

It's not a veneer laid on top of the way the organization works. It goes deeply into the functioning of the organization.

Bob's comments speak to the idea that authentic CSR must be integrated with the organization's core business activities rather than simply peripheral activities. Steven's remarks below also support the idea that CSR cannot be authentic without fully embedding it into the daily operations of the company:

I see that we talk about it, I see that we have some measures about it but you know there's... And we have a website for employees as well to learn about what we're doing in those areas, but I don't see it as really something that permeates the way we do business.

Here, Steven speaks to certain CSR initiatives that do not seem particularly authentic to him because they do not "permeate the way we do business". This again suggests that, to develop authentic CSR programs, organizations must embed CSR practices into their technical core. This has significant implications for managers given that incorporating CSR into one's core business activities is typically more time-consuming and more costly than those related to the organization's peripheral activities (Zyglidopoulos et al. 2009).

Interestingly, employees' authenticity judgments also seemed influenced by the extent to which the organization was embedded in the fabric of the community. Specifically, embeddedness in the community served as a key cue used by employees to ascertain alignment between the organization's true self and the image put forth by their CSR program. Andy speaks directly to this issue:

So this just shows to me that they're not just a financial institution that's just going to go through the motions and look good externally but deep down as well.... We're not looked upon as [a financial institution] that just takes your money. You know, we're actually, as I said earlier, we're part of the fabric of the community.

This finding is consistent with the idea that the degree of CSR authenticity varies depending on the extent to which organizations understand themselves to exist in relation to others (Driver 2006). Driver's (2006) conceptual work on authentic conceptions of the organizational self, suggests that we should think about CSR as existing along a continuum between egoic and post-egoic conceptions of the organizational self. Here, a post-egoic understanding requires that an organization recognize that the corporate self only exists in the embedded relationships among various stakeholders. As captured here, we see that employees' *perceive* CSR as more authentic when their organization develops and implements CSR initiatives that recognize these stakeholder relationships. Luke's comments below support this idea:

It's a lot about relationships – good relationships with the community around us. And, on that basis, I think it's important because there's a level of responsibility and authority on all the parts – everybody has a part to play. And, in authentic CSR, those responsibilities will be pretty obvious and the accountability will be there too on everybody's part.

The following quote provides further support for the idea that authentic CSR requires that the organization adopt a post-egoic understanding of the organizational self. Specifically, as captured by Jessica, authenticity demands that the organization recognize its embeddedness in a network of stakeholders by involving these stakeholder groups in the process of identifying CSR priorities.

And, then if you look at the bigger picture and realize that, while cystic fibrosis is a very noble cause, the general population has a greater connection to cancer research. So your employees are going to feel more connected to your company, more proud, and are going to put more energy into raising money for cancer research. And your customers are going to be just more aware of the business doing good things if you do that (Jessica).

These emergent findings, when taken together, suggest that employees draw on diverse cues to determine whether the image put forth by their organization's CSR program aligns closely with the organization's true self. In summary, these authenticity cues include: making a sustained commitment of resources to the CSR program, alignment between elements of their CSR program; the emotional engagement of management and staff; a sense of procedural and distributive justice; and the embeddedness of CSR in the organization and the community. Common across these diverse cues is the importance of employee involvement. For instance, a just program requires giving employees voice and distributing workload associated with CSR activities. Emotionally engaging employees requires involving them in selecting, developing and implementing CSR initiatives. Evident here is that assessments of employee involvement in the organization's CSR program are deeply embedded in the process of ascertaining authenticity. That is, the extent to which employees are involved in the CSR program shape perceptions of whether the organization's identity, as put forth by the CSR program, is a reflection of its true self. This view is perhaps best captured by our informant, Bob, in his statement: "if the staff aren't doing anything then it's hard to make the overall claim for the organization." We return to the issue of employee involvement in our discussion section.

As noted earlier, employees do not form authenticity judgments based solely on the degree of alignment between

the organizational identity and the image that it is pursuing via CSR. Their judgments also took into account the extent to which their organization's CSR program was in the process of "continually becoming" (Liedtka 2008, p. 238). In other words, employees' authenticity judgments were also based on their perception of whether their organization's CSR program continuously evolved to incorporate changing CSR norms and expectations. We discuss this next.

CSR Programs as in the Process of Continually Becoming

As the institutional environment evolves, so do expectations of the organization vis-à-vis their CSR programs. Bertels and Pelozo (2008) refer to this phenomenon as "CSR creep." Specifically, they describe "a slow ratcheting effect, whereby the expectations of all firms are slowly raised over time" (p. 64). Employees' authenticity judgments appear to reflect this phenomenon. Specifically, employees' appear to continuously reshape their vision of what a CSR program should look like and then compare their organization's CSR program against this dynamic standard. Employees' authenticity judgments are informed by the extent to which they perceive their organization's CSR program as continuously evolving to meet these expectations. Luke and Mary's respective comments both speak directly to the dynamic-nature of the standard for CSR performance:

There is no absolute standard and it shifts as you go but certainly it's uppermost in our mind. And, to that end, because we consider it distinctive we're constantly looking for new ways of doing things with it (Luke).

I don't know how difficult it was for you to come in and discuss these things but I think 3 or 4 years ago you probably wouldn't have been given the time of day (Mary).

Having noted this dynamic referent template for judging CSR authenticity, we then focused more specifically on how employees determined whether their organization's CSR program was developmental (i.e., evolving to meet changing CSR expectations). We noted that, to do so, employees relied on cues as to the organization's leadership role with regards to their CSR program. Specifically, the organization's ability to push traditional boundaries both *within* and *across* CSR domains was a critical authenticity cue. Here, CSR domains refer generally to the six dimensions of CSR noted in the extant literature (i.e., community support, diversity, employee support, environment, human rights and non-U.S operations, and product (Kinder, Lydenberg, Domini and Co. Inc. 1999; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001).

Leadership Within and Across CSR Domains To ascertain whether their organization's CSR program was in the process of "continually becoming," employees assessed whether their organization adopted a leadership role with regard to their CSR initiatives. Specifically, participants noted that in order to be deemed authentic, organization's should to adopt a proactive approach to CSR, seeking new initiatives that push the boundaries of what is traditionally viewed as CSR. This recurring view was brought forth in two distinct ways. First, participants noted the importance of implementing innovative initiatives in existing CSR domains. For example, consider Diane's comments:

I think if you are one of the first corporations to make the changes, especially if they're positive, I mean you become a leader in the community just because. And, I think it is important as a corporation to be able to take those steps and make those changes. I don't know any other institution that has a [states specific initiative] so that's pretty new.

Here, Diane speaks about some innovative environmental initiatives that have been implemented at her organization. Although her company has long been involved in this environmental domain of CSR, it becomes clear that she values her organization's ability to challenge the current norms and, in a sense, transform the standard of CSR expectations within this domain. She speaks to the importance of organizational leadership in the pursuit of authentic CSR. Implicit here is that, as CSR expectations and norms change, as will her definition of authentic CSR. In a sense, her perceptions of authenticity are contingent on the extent to which her organization's CSR program is developmental in nature.

Second, a number of participants also indicated a need to challenge the current definitions of CSR by pursuing new domains of social responsibility and adding breadth to their CSR portfolio. The following quote from Mary, in her explicit reference to how philanthropy used to be an adequate standard but is now merely a starting point in CSR, really captures the notion of the dynamic CSR standard for authenticity.

If you're talking about, an organization is talking about itself as being good - CSR is important to us - and they talk only about their charitable givings and the philanthropy I don't see that as very legit either. I think that's just - that was just the tip of the iceberg in starting all of this rolling and if *that's all you can say today* then I don't believe it - you're saying it to be like everybody else when you're not, you're lagging.... It's a starting point right. So that tells me you're just starting - if that's all you report on then you're just starting right. [italics added for emphasis].

While this comment certainly highlights the dynamic referent standard for authentic CSR, it also speaks more directly to the importance of pursuing CSR initiatives across domains. Perhaps more importantly, this statement also implies that the organization's involvement in certain domains is more indicative of an authentic CSR program (i.e., one that is in the process of "continually becoming") than others. For instance, consider her statement of: "*if that's all you can say today.*" This comment implies that, at some point in time, philanthropy may have been enough for the CSR program to be deemed authentic. However, given that CSR norms have evolved, Mary suggests that this is no longer an appropriate standard for conferring authenticity but rather a baseline expectation of existing CSR programs. Instead, an organization must demonstrate CSR leadership in new domains, ones that are more appropriate given the current institutional environment. Although she does not indicate specifically what domains are increasingly relevant, she suggests that, in order to be perceived as authentic, her organization's CSR program must span these domains.

These findings, when taken together, suggest that organizations that adopt a leadership role, by continuously incorporating innovative initiatives both within and across CSR domains, are more likely to be perceived as having a CSR program that is in the process of "continually becoming". In other words, employees are more likely to perceive confer authenticity on their organization's CSR program.

To date, we have found that employees are motivated to form authenticity judgments about their organization's CSR programs and that they form these judgments using two distinct referent templates. We have also identified several cues that employees use to assess authenticity in terms of both whether CSR program aligns with the organization's true identity and whether the CSR program is developmental in nature. Notably, our findings also suggest that employees, for the most part, do rely on different cues to form authenticity judgments than external stakeholders and corporate leaders. Business leaders and external stakeholders' authenticity assessments were based primarily on external cues (e.g., a holistic view of the impact of business on stakeholders, visible enactment of CSR initiatives in the community) (Beckman et al. 2009). In contrast, employees' authenticity judgments were also informed by internal concerns such as organizational justice, alignment of CSR components and, ultimately, employee involvement. There was, however, some degree of overlap in that Beckman et al. (2009) also find that CSR programs are more likely to be perceived as authentic when they are consistent and embedded in the fabric of the organization. Next, we discuss our emergent findings on the outcomes associated with employee perceptions of authentic CSR programs.

Outcomes of Authentic CSR

Previous research has identified employee-level outcomes associated with CSR programs such as their capacity to enhance employees' sense of pride, morale, commitment and loyalty (Peloza and Hassay 2006; Rodrigo and Arenas 2007; Turban and Greening 1997). Authenticity judgments, however, have not been factored into these studies, and our research suggests that it is an important variable that may mediate these important outcomes. In other words, if employees don't conclude that the CSR program is authentic, then these other desirable outcomes may not arise. The comments made by our informants throughout the interviews suggest that perceptions of authenticity are central in determining how they feel about their organization.

I'm proud of it, I'm proud to be an employee, not just because of where my career has taken me but even being part of the community and even in talking to customers, they know what we've done, we're out there (Andy).

It improves their satisfaction and loyalty to the company. So, I think when companies do that, going the extra mile, that that increases their employee satisfaction and commitment (Steven).

I think people inherently want to feel like they are doing good things and so you want to feel like there's value in what you do every day. Hopefully there's some value in what I do for the business but to also think that I'm helping to raise money for charities, that just feels good (Jessica).

Here, Andy notes that she feels proud of the organization's CSR program and, by extension, proud to be an employee of that particular organization. Her comments, when placed in the broader context of her interview, suggest that she feels proud because she believes that her organization's CSR program is authentic. Steven and Jessica's comments, respectively, indicate that authentic CSR programs can enhance employee satisfaction and commitment as well as lead to positive emotions. Another informant, Sarah, noted that her involvement in grassroots CSR initiatives "can be really invigorating for the change of routine," thus, alluding to a connection between authentic CSR and employee motivation. These positive outcomes were noted across multiple interviews. Further highlighting the importance of authentic CSR, other comments imply that perceptions of *inauthentic* CSR may be harmful for the organization. For instance, Kristen's states that "there are some things [in our CSR program] that are probably true but they're not completely honest I guess - they're not really telling the whole story". Here, her reference to

corporate dishonesty, suggests that perceptions of (in) authenticity with regard to CSR programs can significantly impact the employee by undermining the extent to which employees trust the organization.

Taken together, our findings suggest that when attributions of CSR authenticity do occur, then pride, satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, emotional connections to the firm, and an added sense of purpose is imbued into employees' day-to-day activities. Although previous work has noted some of these benefits as potential positive outcomes of CSR programs (Peloza and Hassay 2006; Rodrigo and Arenas 2007; Turban and Greening 1997), this work identifies authenticity as an important determining factor and also suggests that perceptions of *inauthentic* CSR may have negative outcomes. Of further interest, our work suggests that authentic CSR also has unique capacity to enhance organizational identification and strengthen employee connections with the organization, colleagues and the community. We now turn to discuss these particular outcomes in more detail.

Organizational Identification

Over the course of the interviews a common thread emerged whereby authentic CSR seemed to reassure employees that they can feel good about their choice to work at the organization as it serves to satisfy more than just a financial need.

You feel better about working for a place that is doing good things number one, but number two, also matching up what it's saying with what it's doing. It increases your worker satisfaction, and loyalty, people are less likely to leave and more likely to do a good job, feel good about working here and instead of being, I think, dissatisfied and only here for the money (Steven).

As such, when employees viewed their organization as having successfully pursued an authentic CSR strategy that enabled it to satisfy a certain social role in society, they were less likely to feel that they had sacrificed their own personal need to behave in a socially responsible way in order to secure employment. Specifically, it's as though many participants valued authentic CSR because it enabled them to satisfy a personal need for socially responsible behavior through work, thus, aligning their own individual needs with the actions of the organization.

I guess people have different priorities and everybody wants to be able to make a living but it's just, with how messed up things can be nowadays I expect more than just a job. (Darcy).

I don't have to spend a lot of time questioning what I'm doing here even though I might, on a day-to-day basis, it may not be so related to community, I know that I play my part (Luke).

This finding links our work directly into the organizational identification literature, which suggests that employees are likely to identify with their organization when they perceive the same attributes to define both themselves and the organization (Dutton et al. 1994). While organizational identification has previously been identified as a potential benefit of CSR (e.g., Berger et al. 2006), the mediating effect of authenticity offers an explanatory mechanism for this relationship. Specifically, in terms of this particular study, it seems that authenticity is important in communicating to employees that the underlying CSR values are in fact integral to the organization rather than simply posturing. Capturing this sentiment, Alison describes how the CSR values of the organization enable her to find integrity in her work life.

I like the idea that I'm working for a company that cares about these things because I care about those things and I wouldn't really want to work for a company – and I have – that I don't really like what they're doing.

Employee involvement in CSR changed one informant's use of pronouns from the 3rd person "they" when describing management to the first person "we as a company" showing how such efforts to involve employees led to increased identification with the program and the organization. The notion that authentic CSR may enhance organizational identification has important implications given that high levels of identification have been linked to improved performance, more organizational citizenship behaviors and lower turnover (Kreiner and Ashforth 2004).

Employee Connections

Another important outcome associated with authentic CSR practices is that it helps bridge gaps between employees and other stakeholder groups, thereby enabling employees to enjoy richer relationships with external community members, customers, and other employees across all levels of the organization. Authentic CSR seems to build recognition that employees are part of both an internal community as well as being part of a wider external community.

The feeling of community when you get that amount of people together, so it's the event that actually brings all the people together for something, a

common cause. I think that's the impact of it, that's where I see the influence of community (Allen).

Jessica, in particular, expresses how she finds CSR programs are a great way to interact with other employees, as peers, within the organization.

We were able to work with people from this department that we had never worked with before but thought that they seemed like keen, energetic, bright people. It was another neat way to get to know coworkers, which is really important in an organization of this size because you hopefully keep in touch and, get to see each other's career progress.

In a sense, both of these perspectives reinforce the notion that authentic CSR helps to unite employees with other stakeholder groups. As such it helps to both form a CSR community and satisfy a basic human need to belong and affiliate. Such communities create a much richer work experience insofar as employees are able to work with others toward a common goal. They also support the creation of common meanings attributed to work and life within the organization. Specifically, while authentic CSR programs can strengthen the organization–employee relationship by fostering numerous positive employee-level outcomes, they also bridge existing gaps between stakeholder groups and between the corporation and their stakeholders. Building from this premise, it is apparent that organizations, as well as employees, stand to benefit from authentic CSR in the form of stakeholder integration, which is defined as “the ability to establish trust-based collaborative relationships across stakeholder groups” (Sharma and Vredenburg 1998, p. 735). By developing authentic CSR programs that help connect employees to other stakeholders and enrich those relationships, organizations can themselves benefit by fostering trust-based relationships and building social capital with respect to their internal and external stakeholders.

Discussion

This study examined whether employees are motivated to form authenticity judgments about their organization's CSR program and, having found that they are, investigated how they do so. We found that employees' authenticity judgments are quite complex, informed by two different assessments—the extent to which the organization's image, as presented by the CSR program, is a reflection of its true identity and the extent to which the CSR program is in the process of ‘continually becoming’. We identify five cues that employees draw on to ascertain the former (i.e., sustained resource commitments, alignment between elements

of their CSR program, emotional engagement, justice, and embeddedness) and one cue used to determine the latter (i.e., leadership). We also find that perceptions of authenticity play an important role in determining whether a CSR program is well-received by employees. Specifically, employees noted that authentic CSR programs could increase pride, satisfaction, loyalty and organizational identification, as well as make them feel more connected with others.

Theoretical Contributions and Directions for Future Research

This research contributes to the broad literature on CSR, particularly with regards to how employees assess their organization's CSR programs and the influence of these assessments on the relationship between employees and the organization. Specifically, although the extant literature indicates that employees evaluate their organization's CSR programs, largely absent from the literature is consideration for how they do so. Without a deeper understanding how employees do evaluate their organization's CSR program, it is difficult to make predictions about how employees are likely to respond to CSR initiatives. The current work takes steps to address this gap in our understanding. Specifically, in the context of authenticity, this work clearly identifies certain cues that employees use to evaluate their organization's CSR programs.

Further, whereas much research notes the positive effect of CSR on employees, the current research suggests that perceived authenticity is an important factor in determining whether a CSR program will be well-received by its employees. In a sense, our findings suggest that authenticity judgments may mediate the relationship between CSR initiatives and employees' responses to CSR initiatives. Quantitative research is necessary to further investigate this relationship. Specifically, while adopting a qualitative approach enabled us to see how employees understand the concept of authenticity and to develop a clearer picture of how they engage in the process of conferring authenticity to their organization's CSR programs, it limits our ability to draw conclusions about causality. Experimental and survey research would be useful to explore this particular relationship, as well as other issues such as the relative influence of different types of CSR cues and whether certain cues carry more weight than others. With regards to the latter, as noted earlier, we imagine that some authenticity cues are more directly informative as to whether the organization's CSR program reflects its true self (i.e., alignment between internal and external actions). However, this is an issue that needs to be addressed in future research. Quantitative studies would better allow us to address these questions as well as to draw

generalizations about whether these findings extend to different types of industries and to different organizational structures and processes.

Importantly, this research also adds to the growing conversation about authenticity as an important concept for business ethics theorizing. To date, as noted earlier, the concept of authenticity has received scant attention in the management literature. This work, broadly speaking, has framed authentic organizational initiatives and processes as those in which the organization is true to self (Beckman et al. 2009; Driver 2006; Liedtka 2008). Implied then is that *perceptions* of the authentic CSR are based simply on assessments of whether the organization's CSR program is a reflection of the organization's true self. While this view of authenticity is consistent with our finding that employees' authenticity judgments are informed by comparing the image put forth by the organization's CSR program to their socially constructed template of the organization's actual identity, our findings suggest that this understanding of authenticity is incomplete. Specifically, we find that, in the context of CSR assessments, authenticity judgments appear more complex in that they seem to represent an aggregate of two distinct assessments. Employees seek to determine whether the organizational self, as put forth in the CSR program, is authentic (i.e., does it represent the organization's true self) and whether the CSR initiatives, in and of themselves are authentic (i.e., are they in the process of continually becoming).

The finding that employees' authenticity judgments are also informed by whether the CSR program is in the process of 'continually becoming' is noteworthy. It raises questions as to when individuals are likely to use such a standard to form authenticity judgments. Drawing on the current findings, it seems that they will be more likely do so when the object of interest is intangible and, when the norms that define that object are dynamic. This is an issue that certainly requires further investigation. However, if it is the case, then this emergent component of authenticity judgments, while certainly relevant for CSR research, is more generally relevant to how we understand authenticity in business ethics. The conversation on business ethics, similar to the phenomenon of 'CSR creep' is constantly evolving to reflect the changing expectations, norms, and structures of the institutional environment. Thus, it seems likely that the developmental component of authenticity judgments identified in this research will be relevant to other organizational structures and processes that exist at the intersection of management and ethics (e.g., strategies, leadership, corporate citizenship). Additional research is needed to better understand when assessments of 'continually becoming' are used to inform authenticity judgments, and how employees balance these assessments with those concerning the organization's identity.

Interestingly, this work also contributes to the authenticity literature more generally. Much of this literature, whether implicitly or explicitly, subscribes to the notion that forming authenticity judgments denotes some form of comparison to a socially constructed referent standard (e.g., Grayson and Martinec 2004). A general assumption here is that these types assessments are based on *a single* template. In contrast, our findings suggest that, depending on the object of interest, individuals may rely on multiple standards to inform their authenticity judgments. This raises important questions such as when employees and, more generally, stakeholders, are likely to use multiple referent standards to form authenticity judgments and the relative influence of the respective comparisons. It also suggests a need to further understand the basis of the constructed standards that individuals use to form these authenticity assessments. For instance, is the standard that individuals use to assess the extent to which their CSR program is developmental influenced by certain external reference standards (e.g., public policy, competitor's actions) and, if so, which ones and to what extent? Understanding the basis for the standards that employees use to assess authenticity might enable managers to develop CSR programs that are more likely to be deemed authentic by allowing them to influence the standard that their employees use for these judgments. On a more general level, these issues seem particularly relevant given that authenticity is increasingly a concept of interest in the management literature, where the institutional environment is dynamic and the objects of interests are often intangible. Recognizing the multi-faceted nature of these types of authenticity judgments will enrich our ability to invoke authenticity as a lens by which to develop and extend theorizing in the area of business ethics.

Managerial Implications

This research also has important implications for managers, particularly in light of recent research indicating that 76% of executives feel that they do not understand their stakeholders' CSR expectations (Pohle and Hittner 2008). The current work finds that perceptions of authenticity, at least in part, determine whether the organization's CSR program will be well-received by its employees. It then identifies what information employees rely on to make these judgments. This insight into how judgments of CSR authenticity are formed and their subsequent influence on employee-organization relationships will help managers to understand employees' CSR expectations. By extension, they will be able to develop more successful CSR programs and to strengthen their stakeholder relationships. More specifically, this work identifies the different aspects of CSR initiatives that should be taken into consideration in

order to develop an authentic program. For instance, managers should take steps to integrate CSR initiatives across departments, to gather employee input in selecting initiatives, to set formal social and financial goals. In other words, rather than simply assessing whether a particular CSR initiative was carried out, managers should take note of how this process occurred (e.g., procedurally just, actions align with statements) and employees' reactions to the initiative (e.g., emotional engagement). In doing so, they will be better able to develop CSR programs that are deemed authentic by their employees and benefit accordingly.

Importantly, the current research suggests that authentic CSR programs *vis-à-vis* employees do not require the sacrifice of financial goals. In fact, none of our informants expected their organization's to pursue social goals at the expense of financial goals. Our work, therefore, may point to a missing link in the stream of research that has worked to link CSR and performance. Work to date has produced very mixed results (see Pelozo 2009). Comparing programs that are perceived as authentic may help explain differences in the mixed results and this would be a worthwhile direction for future research.

Our informants believe that an organization must take into account both their social and financial responsibilities. To neglect either seems to result in perceptions of inauthentic CSR. Also, employees do not believe that an organization must pursue CSR initiatives for altruistic reasons. Many informants instead suggested that a CSR initiative may be perceived as inauthentic if it is pursued for *only* financial reasons. Implicit here is that a CSR initiative may be deemed authentic so long as it has some social goals. Thus, developing an authentic CSR programs is not necessarily incompatible with the notion of using CSR to create a competitive advantage. In fact, it seems that authentic CSR programs may be helpful in creating a competitive advantage. For instance, the notion that adopting a leadership role within and across CSR domains is central to developing an authentic CSR program suggests that authentic CSR programs may also be more effective in developing a competitive advantage by encouraging the organization to pursue innovative opportunities that make them distinct from competitors.

Our research also provides preliminary support for the notion that authentic CSR can be used as a tool to foster trust-based relationships between the organization and its stakeholders as well as among stakeholder groups. This issue seems especially relevant given that employees, as the point of contact between consumers and the organization, are increasingly expected to uphold the values of the organization's CSR program when interacting with external stakeholders (Collier and Esteban 2007). Accordingly,

given the significant implications of authentic CSR as a tool for building trust-based relationship, it is necessary to develop a richer understanding of how authenticity plays a role in encouraging employees to identify with the organization's CSR values and, more generally, with the organization. More research is also needed to determine how authentic CSR influences the prosocial behaviors of individuals outside of a work environment.

Finally, and perhaps of most value to managers, is the finding that employee involvement, in that it is a central component of the identified authenticity cues, is absolutely critical in the development of authentic CSR programs. For instance, we find that employee involvement is necessary to create alignment between corporate statements and actions, to develop procedurally and distributively just CSR initiatives and to emotionally engage employees. With regards to the latter, managers should take care to involve employees in selecting CSR initiatives. Their active participation in events that are part of CSR initiatives, particularly those where they get to view the results of their effort on the lives and well-being of others, also emotionally engages employees. These tactics demonstrate that the organization is pursuing initiatives that are personally meaningful to them and through which they can make a difference. This research also suggests that organizations should strive to create a community of practice, whereby employees are engaged in the CSR community and "informally bound together by their shared expertise and passion" for the CSR program (Wenger and Snyder 2000, p. 139). Fostering such a community would allow employees to develop both a collective understanding of their CSR program and a willingness to hold each other accountable for their actions. Such communities are effective for social learning and would enable employees across the organization to develop both best practices for their particular CSR program as well as communal resources (e.g., language, norms, routines, artifacts) to facilitate the process of embedding CSR into the organization.

By taking these issues into consideration, managers will be better able to involve employees and, by extension, to align the image put forth in the CSR program with the organization's true identity. Further, given that employees are a valuable source for generating ideas for CSR initiatives (Ramus 2002; Ramus and Steger 2000), involving employees will also better enable the organization to develop and implement innovative CSR initiatives. In other words, by taking steps to involve employees at every stage of their CSR program (e.g., idea generation, development, implementation), organizations will be better able to develop CSR programs that are deemed authentic by their employees.

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