Exploring Employee Engagement with (Corporate) Social Responsibility: A Social Exchange Perspective on Organisational Participation

R. E. Slack · S. Corlett · R. Morris

Abstract Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a recognised and common part of business activity. Some of the regularly cited motives behind CSR are employee morale, recruitment and retention, with employees acknowledged as a key organisational stakeholder. Despite the significance of employees in relation to CSR, relatively few studies have examined their engagement with CSR and the impediments relevant to this engagement. This exploratory case study-based research addresses this paucity of attention, drawing on one to one interviews and observation in a large UK energy company. A diversity of engagement was found, ranging from employees who exhibited detachment from the CSR activities within the company, to those who were fully engaged with the CSR activities, and to others who were content with their own *personal*, but not organisational, engagement with CSR. A number of organisational context impediments, including poor communication, a perceived weak and low visibility of CSR culture, and lack of strategic alignment of CSR to business and personal objectives, served to explain this diversity of employee engagement. Social exchange theory is applied to help explore the volition that individual employees have towards their engagement with CSR activities, and to consider the implications of an implicit social, rather than explicit economic, contract between an organisation and its employees in their engagement with CSR.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility (CSR) · Employees · Engagement · Social exchange theory (SET)

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Introduction

Over the last 2–3 decades, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been widely undertaken by organisations, and is well reflected in practitioner and academic journals as well as the popular media (Crane et al. 2008). The benefits to organisations of CSR have included competitive advantage (Branco and Rodrigues 2006; McWilliams et al. 2006); increased financial performance (Orlitzky 2005; Orlitzky et al. 2003; Porter and Kramer 1999, 2002; Smith 1994, 2003; Waddock and Graves 1997) and corporate reputation (Fombrun et al. 2000). Specifically regarding employees, the benefits of CSR have been related to a wide range of aspects including recruitment, morale, productivity and retention (Berger et al. 2006; Branco and Rodrigues 2006; Fombrun and van Riel 2004; Marin and Ruiz 2007; Turban and Greening 1997; Turker 2009a, b).

Despite specific benefits of CSR relating to employees, and their importance as a stakeholder group, (Collier and Esteban 2007; Kaler 2009; Post et al. 2002), it is noteworthy that relatively little attention has been given to them, specifically with regard to their engagement with CSR (Aguilera et al. 2007). Rodrigo and Arenas (2008, p. 266) observed that 'employees have received relatively little attention in the CSR literature…especially surprising because attraction of talent, loyalty to a firm, and

motivation have all been used to explain why CSR can be a source of competitive advantage'. In a similar vein, Dhanesh (2012, p. 40) commented that 'employees have received hardly any research focus in the CSR literature'. In this article, we address this paucity of attention by focussing on the volition that individual employees have towards their engagement with CSR activities.

The importance of employees in relation to CSR was highlighted by Collier and Esteban (2007, p. 20) who noted that 'employees carry the main burden of responsibility for implementing ethical corporate behaviour [such as CSR activities]…and the achievement of those outcomes will largely depend on employee willingness to collaborate'. Such engagement with CSR may well fall outside of their normal economic contract with the organisation and be viewed instead as a social contract within an organisational context. Social exchange theory (SET) (Blau 1964; Gouldner 1960; Homans 1958; Settoon et al. 1996) posits two forms of exchange in organisations: economic and social. Economic exchange between employees and the organisation is usually explicit and contractually based with defined terms and monetarily rewarded. In contrast, social exchange has unspecified obligations with often indirect chains of exchange (Blau 1964) and concerns 'the non-monetary aspects of employment, especially those rooted in social exchange concepts' (Deckop et al. 2003, p. 102). Of direct relevance to social exchange are those discretionary actions and extra role behaviours (Organ 1988), which include employee CSR engagement (Deckop et al. 2003).

This research explores the engagement of individual employees with organisational CSR and the organisational context impediments that may impair such engagement. We employ SET to help understand individual employee perceptions of their engagement and to explore the notion of a social contract in the context of CSR. The contributions of our article are grounded in the relatively limited attention given to employees in the CSR literature (Duarte 2010; Hemingway 2005; Rodrigo and Arenas 2008). Furthermore, our article addresses Collier and Esteban's (2007) call for research specifically into the relationship between employees and organisational CSR. We explore the organisational context of employee engagement, adopting a case study approach, using participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews with employees. This direct engagement with employees is a further empirical contribution to the extant CSR literature.

The article proceeds as follows. In the next section, we examine the literature relevant to employee engagement with CSR and SET. We then present an overview of the case company for the organisational context before outlining the research approach and methods adopted in this study. Following this, we present our findings on employee engagement with CSR and identify impediments to engagement. In our discussion and concluding comments, we return to the notion of a social contract and question who bears the 'social responsibility' of CSR activities.

Employee Engagement with CSR

It is well established that employees are a key stakeholder group (Donaldson and Preston 1995; Freeman 1984; Greenwood 2007; Kaler 2009; Matten and Crane 2005) and specifically, in a CSR context, enact the social activities and policies of the organisation. Collier and Esteban (2007) highlighted the dependence of organisations on employee responsiveness to, and engagement with, CSR for the effective delivery of CSR programmes. Reflecting on this, McShane and Cunningham (2012) asserted the key roles of employees as ambassadors for, and enactors of, organisational CSR. However, not all employees will equally engage with CSR and it is misleading to view the employees as a homogeneous stakeholder group (Rodrigo and Arenas 2008). Indeed, Mowday et al. (1979) commented on the individual willingness of an employee to exert effort and time on behalf of the organisation.

At a conceptual level, a number of typologies have been developed with regard to employee attitudes towards CSR. Hemingway (2005) based her categorisation on employee values to CSR and identified four groups: active or frustrated corporate social entrepreneurs (CSEs); Conformists; and Apathetics. Active CSEs, supported by corporate culture, engage in organisational CSR and exhibit strong organisational citizenship, satisfying personal needs and showing reciprocity between organisational and personal gain (and see Caldwell et al. 2012). Frustrated CSEs, whilst socially motivated, lack the organisational culture to fulfil his or her social role. Conformists are employees with no inclination towards social responsibility, whilst Apathetics dismiss any value of CSR and the social duty of the employee. Along a similar typological categorisation, Rodrigo and Arenas (2008) used the terms Committed, Indifferent and Dissident employees. Committed employees, motivated by their own personal values, are concerned with social justice and commit to organisational CSR engagement. Indifferent employees are viewed as pragmatic and job goal orientated. As such they understand CSR and the role of the organisation but are indifferent to their personal CSR engagement. Finally, Dissident employees regard work as an economic contract only with no responsibility to a wider social role.

Beyond employee typologies, a further strand of the literature examines the factors that may contribute to and impede organisational CSR engagement by employees. Rodrigo and Arenas (2008, p. 272) found that those

companies that embed CSR activities experience enhanced employee attitudes to both the organisation and society because employees feel that 'what they do has an importance that transcends purely economic aspects'. However, such positive employee attitudes and engagement are not always realised. Impediments to employee engagement with CSR may stem from a lack of CSR embeddedness in day-to-day life within the organisation (Collier and Esteban 2007) and a weak CSR culture (Collier and Esteban 2007; Duarte 2010). In addition, poor communication to employees regarding the value of CSR to the organisation and themselves as employees (Arvidsson 2010; Duarte 2010) may create a lack of shared organisational and personal values towards CSR (Caldwell et al. 2012; Hemingway 2005; Rodrigo and Arenas 2008), resulting in employee disengagement from CSR activities. To embed CSR in the organisation and to facilitate greater employee understanding of, and engagement with CSR, the CSR message and related activities need to be communicated clearly (Chong 2009). In large organisations, communication of CSR is often undertaken by means of a separate CSR function or department (Bondy et al. 2008; Brammer and Millington 2003). Moreover, an identifiable CSR function serves to 'formalize the CSR program through policy implementation [and] signals to employees that CSR is important to the organization' (McShane and Cunningham 2012, p. 89).

More broadly commenting on corporate culture with regard to CSR, Collier and Esteban (2007, p. 20) emphasised the 'tone at the top' and the connection between organisational and personal values and employee engagement with CSR 'by embedding its principles and practice in hearts and minds…and in the culture of the organisation'. Similarly, Beckman et al. (2009) and Miles et al. (2006) commented on the need for CSR to be at the heart of the organisation in terms of organisational culture and not to be seen as an add-on and viewed as marginal by employees, on whose involvement it vitally depends. Whilst Rodrigo and Arenas (2008, p. 271) noted that employees could view the organisation as simply a place to work, they could more often 'view it as an institution that shares their own social views' and as a result identify more strongly with the organisation. The importance of shared personal and organisational values, when promulgating the CSR message throughout the organisation, was highlighted by Duarte (2010) and McShane and Cunningham (2012).

Social Contracts Between Employees and the Organisation

The concept of a social contract between employees, acting as organisational citizens, and the organisation is consistent with SET (see Blau 1964; Gouldner 1960; Homans 1958; Organ 1988). From its roots in psychological and economic theory, SET has been widely applied to other discipline areas such as anthropology (Gregory 1982; Neale 1976) and more recently in the ethics literature to areas such as knowledge exchange (Chen and Choi 2005), social partnerships (Kolk et al. 2010), corporate restructuring (Eby and Buch 1998) and co-worker behaviours (Deckop et al. 2003). Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005, p. 874) argued that SET 'is among the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behaviour'. Further and relevant to this research, Saks (2006) viewed SET as providing a strong theoretical rationale for explaining employee engagement in discretionary activities.

There are two distinct branches of SET: economic and social (Blau 1964; and see Chiaburu et al. 2012; Moorman et al. 1998; Organ 1988; Standford 2008). The economic branch relates to an explicit agreement providing a negotiated exchange of economic gains between the employee and the organisation in an employment relationship (Deckop et al. 2003; Ekeh 1974). In contrast, the social branch is a more generalised exchange fulfilling, for instance, a personal self interest or the personal satisfaction of societal enrichment, not being stipulated in advance. Underpinned by distributive justice, both economic and social exchanges are formed through use of a subjective, monetary or non-monetary, cost-benefit analysis of gain to both parties. Whilst economic exchanges and monetary rewards are usually explicit through contractually agreed terms, social exchanges are more implicit, fulfilling unspecified obligations (Blau 1964) providing social and emotional comfort and the satisfaction of self interest (Roloff 1981). In an organisational context, social exchanges are thus founded on the socioemotional nature of the relationship based on shared values, trust and feelings of obligation (Foa and Foa 1980).

As the exact nature of the obligations involved are often unspecified (Blau 1964), social exchange, in contrast to economic exchange, refers to individuals' voluntary actions. For this reason, SET is used to describe the motivational basis behind employee behaviours that are typically neither formally rewarded nor contractually enforceable (Settoon et al. 1996) and will vary between employees reflecting their level of social commitment to the organisation (Saks 2006). The level of employee engagement with CSR will reflect an 'interest in non-monetary aspects of employment especially those rooted in social exchange concepts' (Deckop et al. 2003, p. 102). Through employees undertaking discretionary activities, social exchange is akin, therefore, to what Mills and Clarke (1982) referred to as communal relationships, which are open-ended, less time specific and involve the exchange of social benefits.

Social exchange is built upon the principle of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960) between parties. Using SET, Collier and Esteban (2007, p. 23) suggest 'that the commitment of employees to the organisation will be contingent on their perception of the value they receive from organisational membership'. Relevant to CSR, the employee can consider their commitment at two levels: firstly, their personal volition toward CSR and, secondly, their organisational commitment to CSR activities which will reflect, *inter alia*, the perceived credibility and social rewards to them of such organisational activities. Settoon et al. (1996, p. 220) explain that organisational 'citizenship behaviour has been viewed as a social resource that may be exchanged by individuals for social rewards. The discretionary nature of extra-role behaviour such as citizenship means they may easily be given or withheld'. In other words, when employee commitment to, and engagement with, CSR is viewed in terms of extra-contractual and extra-role behaviour, 'a vested interest in…being part of the organisation' (Bakker and Schaufeli 2008, p. 151) becomes salient for employees.

Institutional and social structures and processes support social exchange (Cook et al. 2013) which is extended through organisational citizenship (Deckop et al. 2003). In this research, CSR can be viewed as an organisational structure, for instance through a CSR department, with employees being supported to engage in discretionary CSR activities by organisational social processes, including communication and culture. However, employee engagement with CSR may reflect actions more associated with economic exchange. For instance McShane and Cunningham (2012) refer to setting formal social and financial goals, although this may result in a mismatch of social transactions in a more economics based relationship (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). Out with the formalisation of CSR, we suggest that employees exhibit discretionary citizenship behaviour through their engagement with organisational CSR-type activities and, by extension, this may be viewed as a 'manifestation of social exchange' (Deckop et al. 2003, p. 103).

Method

Within the ethics literature, previous CSR research regarding employees has used a variety of research approaches ranging from conceptual, literature-based reviews (for instance Caldwell et al. 2012; Yuan et al. 2011), third party surveys (for instance Collier and Esteban 2007) and empirical studies (for instance Miles et al. 2006; Turker 2009a, b). Of direct relevance to this study are those small number of studies, often small scale, that have employed qualitative methods mainly involving case studies supported by interviews (see for example Duarte 2010; Rodrigo and Arenas 2008). In common with those studies, this exploratory study employs a case study method. To help frame our study, relevant organisational context is provided prior to outlining the research methods employed.

Contextual Background

The organisation (hereafter Sus-Energy) is a UK-based company operating within the green support-services sector, delivering residential energy efficiency products and services. Sus-Energy has a long-established organisational CSR policy and strategy, supported by a CSR department that disseminates and promotes CSR activities throughout the organisation. Its overall approach to CSR has four strands (employees referred to as partners, customers, communities, and the environment) and it is claimed that CSR is 'woven into every aspect of our work…sits firmly at the core of the business and feeds into our business objectives' (Corporate Social Responsibility Report 2010, p. 2). Within the organisation, employee engagement with CSR is voluntary, although encouraged, and, significantly for this research, it does not form part of formal work-related contractual activities. The Chairman's Statement of the CSR report 2010 (p. 4) highlights the importance of organisational CSR and the value of employees:

> As an employer, we understand our corporate responsibilities through supporting CSR projects, initiatives, campaigns, etc. Our most valuable resource is our people, who understand their responsibilities and want to make a difference. The support and scope we give to CSR across the business is unwavering, inspiring Partners to be ambitious and encouraging them to roll their sleeves up and get involved.

Further details relevant to employees include:

> We actively engage our Partners in our CSR work through a range of social and environmental initiatives that educate and inform, encouraging participation, decision-making and ownership throughout the business. (CSR Report 2010, p. 1).
> By empowering employees and effecting positive change through support and guidance, we also enable goals to be achieved by enhancing both personal experience and business objectives through ongoing development (CSR Policy, 2010, p.1).

Given the explicit statements about the organisation and employees' responsibilities towards CSR, and the stated

proactive engagement and empowering of employees, one might expect Sus-Energy's employees to engage widely with CSR projects and initiatives. Thus, the organisation serves as an interesting case for examining employee engagement with CSR.

Research Approach

A case study approach was adopted, comprised of participant observation, research diary and face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews with employees. Organisational CSR literature, internal and external, was obtained and included CSR reports, staff newsletters, website updates, annual CSR review and annual report information. At the time of the research, one of the authors was employed for a period of 8 months in the CSR department of the organisation and was able to undertake overt observation and ongoing discussion with employees throughout the organisation. Notes were entered into a research diary to support subsequent interview data and analysis. Through analysis of the discussions with employees across the organisation, it emerged that there was a divergence of engagement with organisational CSR. From a research design perspective, we sought to capture this divergence by identifying a range of employees to take part in subsequent, more in-depth, interviews. This enabled us to explore more widely employee attitudes to, and engagement with, organisational CSR.

Potential research participants were identified from those employees who had shown varying levels of engagement with CSR during the period of research observation. The researcher contacted them by email and explained the proposed research. The email enabled any employees to opt out of the research by not responding. Those contacted were full-time permanent employees who worked across the organisation. Specifically, it was important for this research to gain the views of employees who were not connected to the CSR department and were not at a managerial level (in contrast Duarte 2010, had examined the role of managerial values in CSR). Thus, the research sought to identify employees who were not constrained by functional area or position and could speak openly about their personal attitudes towards CSR within the organisation. Nine participants responded positively to be included in the interview part of the research and were reflective of the divergent employee views towards CSR that had been observed earlier. The average length of service of the interview participants was 4 years, and the longest serving interviewee had 13 years' experience of the organisation. The participants were drawn from a range of functional areas across the business including business development, commercial affairs, marketing and administration/finance.

To provide a basis of objectivity in the interviews, and to enable the employees to speak freely about their views on and engagement with CSR, the researcher assured all participants of their anonymity and explained that the research was not being conducted as part of company CSR dissemination. The exploratory nature of the research was explained to encourage employees to speak as widely as they wished on their engagement with CSR inside and outside the company. Further, the end of the data collection phase coincided with the researcher leaving the company and thus any data would only be used for this research, and the employees were made aware of this. Whilst we do not claim that the research participants are representative of all the organisation's employees, they worked in a range of functional areas and could be regarded as 'typical' employees in that none were CSR specialists or managers. As such, the research provides exploratory insights into their levels of CSR engagement, as employees.

The one-to-one interviews were conducted between January and April 2011 and were held in private meeting rooms in the organisation's Head Office. They lasted approximately 45 min and were audio-recorded. Prior to the interview, participants were again assured of anonymity, to help ensure openness and honesty of responses (French et al. 2001). Using open-ended questions, the interviews explored their views on CSR, their understanding of organisational CSR and recall of internal communication of CSR to employees, and their engagement with CSR at a personal and organisational level. To help prompt discussion, the researcher produced a mind map diagram of the organisation's CSR activities classified in the 2010 annual CSR report.

Each interview was transcribed by the in-company researcher, using a consistent format to improve comparability of responses and ultimately facilitate data analysis (King and Horrocks 2010). Transcription of the interviews also enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth familiarity with the responses (Bailey 2008; Fraser 2004; McLellan et al. 2003). Subsequent to transcription, the other two authors separately conducted detailed thematic analysis of the interview data, comprising close reading, creating categories, identifying and revising themes and isolating emerging patterns (Boyatzis 1998; Miles and Huberman 1994). From analysing the interview data and observation period diary, and re-engaging with the literature, it became apparent that no new meta-themes were emerging with respect to employee CSR engagement (Guest et al. 2006; McShane and Cunningham 2012). As we readily acknowledge the limited amount of our data, the aim of our findings' presentation and discussion is not to make substantive claims about employee engagement with organisational CSR. Instead, we offer exploratory illustrations of participants' subjective experiences of engagement with,

and impediments to, CSR activities and our 'interpretive insights' (Cunliffe 2008, p. 26) from a social exchange perspective, into the 'contextualised data' (Elliott 2005, p. 26).

Findings

A number of emergent themes were identified in relation to employee engagement with organisational CSR activities. We present these themes, supported with verbatim quotations, under two main sub-headings: employee attitudes to and engagement with CSR; and impediments to CSR engagement. To provide context, selected quotes are embedded in the findings supported by additional quotes shown in Table 1. We also provide relevant reflections from participant observation.

Employee Attitudes to and Engagement with CSR

We start with employees' general knowledge of and attitudes to CSR. This is important as it serves to reflect employees' overall views and, from these, informs us, in part, as to their level of CSR engagement within the organisation. Given Sus-Energy's stated importance of CSR to employees (Corporate Social Responsibility Report 2010), it might be expected that, across the employees, there would be a certain level of knowledge of the company's four key CSR strands. However, when presented with a 'map' of the CSR strands in the interviews, typical responses from employees indicated that their awareness of this ranged from none to at best some, although vague, reflected in Table 1. Notably, none of the employees showed a detailed knowledge of company CSR policy or the four key strands.

In spite of limited employee knowledge of the formal elements of the company's CSR, it was noted during the participant observation that employees ranged from those who were enthusiastic supporters of CSR to others who had little or no interest in CSR activities, a diversity borne out in the subsequent interviews. Some of the employees held that their, and others', engagement with CSR was indicative of good corporate citizenship with one specifically commenting about both the CSR programme and their

Table 1 Employee attitudes to CSR and impediments to CSR engagement

Main sub-heading	Theme	Data quote
Employee attitudes to and engagement with CSR	Knowledge of company CSR	This map (strands) that you've drawn of CSR, I don't think anyone knows about yet alone cares about…..didn't even connect that this was CSR activity…but it makes prefect sense (F)
		Never heard of it in my life (B)
		Certain stuff I have never heard of (C)
		I wasn't aware of it (H)
	Attitudes to CSR	Can't say I'm hugely passionate (A)
		In a nutshell, it's to be a good corporate citizen (I)
		CSR is not personal enough—that is why it doesn't interest me (B)
		I get personally involved that way to give something back to try and make a difference (I)
Impediments to CSR engagement	Internal communication	We haven't got the best communication (C)
		There's no coordination in order to make it effective…the structure of the business doesn't lend itself to clear communication (D)
	CSR culture	It's just engrained in the culture of the business (I)
		It's (CSR) got to be genuine and authentic, you can't just spin it….you know we operate in communities and it is incumbent on us to be part of that community as much as possible, to engage with them (I)
	Strategic alignment of CSR to business objectives	I would say if we aligned our CSR strategy more closely with our business strategy we might be in a better position to grow business (D)
		CSR is a big part of that, is a big part of building our reputation (E)
	Conflict between CSR and business priorities	It doesn't drive the business or become integrated (A)
		CSR should be one of our top priorities. Sometimes it isn't, and sometimes it just slides…that sort of operational level of the business tends to prioritise, understandably so I guess, day-to-day business ahead of CSR a lot of the time…that's when CSR does have to take a back seat, and it probably shouldn't (E)
		But at the end of the day we're still here to make money for our shareholders and that's absolutely key, we need to deliver shareholder return (H)

view of others' involvement: 'Sus-Energy's got a fantastic CSR programme and I think the employees are really engaged' (H). Another participant emphasised the importance of corporate citizenship, although recognising that company reputational benefits would also accrue from CSR engagement: 'from a PR perspective it's to be seen to be a good corporate citizen and to encourage others' (I). However, such positive sentiment was not reflected by others who expressed a lack of interest in CSR in general, and were at times disparaging towards CSR activities and their perceived credibility with one participant voicing 'a lot of them aren't CSR (projects), I mean really the school development project in (African country) isn't CSR; it's a jolly' (F). The credibility of organisational CSR programmes to employees was recognised by one of the employees as central to levels of engagement:

> we've got to have a strong CSR programme otherwise we're not really walking the walk, it's all just a lot of hot air. And in terms of the employees you know that it's really important that we engage in what we do. And I don't think you can do that without showing that your company does some good. If they just think that the company's just all about making money it'll disengage them (E).

Personal interest and individual gain were often cited as reasons for engagement. Some employees immediately recognised a personal benefit of engaging with organisational CSR activities: 'something advantageous for the employee' (C) and 'personally really beneficial' (A). In contrast, others dismissed CSR engagement saying: 'I have no personal sense of responsibility for company CSR…I don't think it is something that I need to address' (B). Further, some participants indicated a personal responsibility for CSR, but notably not within the organisation, indicating a separation of organisational and personal CSR engagement: 'I've planted trees at Sandy Bay (anonymised area of outstanding natural beauty) (I) reflective of the employee's personal motivation to be involved with wider community, rather than organisational, activities. One employee summed up concisely the importance of fit between CSR activities and personal interest: 'I think that a lot of the CSR stuff is about what individuals want to do rather than the company' (F). During participant observation, the researcher observed emails from employees asking for sponsorship and sharing their news about charitable activities and related causes that they were personally involved with outside of work. This seemed to have a higher occurrence than company initiated emails regarding sponsored events and causes that employees could become involved with. It seemed that the instances that gained significant traction were those where employees

were able to bring in their own CSR-related interests. For instance, when deciding which charity to give a donation to at Christmas, employees were invited to nominate charities which would then be voted upon company-wide. Many employees sent in detailed explanations of their chosen charities and in-depth reasons why they should be selected evidencing a level of personal interest that enhanced organisational CSR engagement.

Given the importance of employee commitment to organisational CSR programmes, and having identified differential levels of personal and organisational engagement with CSR, we now turn to the possible impediments behind wider employee engagement.

Impediments to Organisational CSR Engagement

A number of impediments to organisational CSR engagement emerged including: organisational communication; culture and the extent of shared values; the level of embeddedness of CSR within the organisation; and the relationship between CSR and business strategy. We now discuss these in turn.

The employees were in general agreement that poor internal communication was a major factor in their lack of engagement. This view was reflected in comments such as: 'it would have been useful at some stage to communicate this more with the staff' (I). Employees reflected on the relationship between poor communication and CSR effectiveness: 'It's massively ineffective…because it's not well publicised' (F). Therefore, a key impediment to employee engagement that emerged was communication. In the context of a large organisation, communication is a vital part of employee CSR engagement (Miles et al. 2006; Duarte 2010), and we now turn to its importance in creating a CSR culture.

Collier and Esteban (2007) had emphasised the importance of the 'tone at the top' in setting organisational CSR culture and enabling CSR to permeate throughout the organisation to all employees. Rodrigo and Arenas (2008) and Duarte (2010), further emphasised the importance of a CSR culture and shared values of employees. Employees appreciated the significance of organisational culture and values to employee engagement with CSR, as one employee explained:

> it's entrenched within the culture…it's absolutely key, key to the culture of the organisation, and fundamentally it's just the right thing to do, it's the right thing to do to give something back in the areas in which we work and play…I like working for a values-based organisation so I think that was one of the big ticks in the boxes for Sus-Energy. So it kind of resonated with me on a personal note (H)

This employee's sense of CSR being 'entrenched' within the organisational culture was questioned by others who implied that Sus-Energy's engagement might not be 'woven into every aspect of our work' (Corporate Social Responsibility Report 2010, p. 2): 'I think quite a bolt-on thing, something that a lot of companies do just to say they do it, a ticking-the-box exercise a lot of the time' (D).

Related to organisational CSR culture was the visibility of CSR within the organisation. Some employees openly referred to the visibility of CSR as being an important feature in the level of CSR engagement. However, again, we found a mixed picture with conflicting employee views. Illustrative examples of this include: 'I have seen a change in our attitudes towards CSR across the last few years. It's certainly become more visible' (H); 'So I think we do do a lot more now and we're a lot more focused and a lot cleverer about what we do now, but maybe it isn't as visible' (E). Other employees made no mention of CSR culture or shared values, which may reflect their own lack of interest in CSR or their perception that CSR is not embedded within the culture of the organisation. During participant observation, the researcher became aware of how CSR-related issues lacked presence, for instance in meetings, company announcements and in strategy updates evidencing a weak integration of CSR into organisational processes and culture.

For employee engagement, Weaver et al. (1999), Collier and Esteban (2007), Arvidsson (2010) and Yuan et al. (2011) all identified the need for CSR to be embedded within, rather than decoupled from, the organisation. We have seen that some employees viewed CSR as a bolt-on activity. Employees presented mixed views, in the interviews and during observation, on the embeddedness of CSR within the organisation. Contrasting with the belief that: 'it is part of the fabric of working for that organisation, it's at the forefront' (H), others questioned its embeddedness within the business:

> the actuality of it isn't as embedded as you would think it would be…there's no overarching strategy for how it is fully integrated and fully embedded in the business…if it was meshed more successfully, and more coherently, and more obviously, I think more people would get involved (D)

Some employees highlighted the conflict between CSR and business priorities, which may again be reflective of the level of embeddedness within the organisation (and see Table 1). Employees also commented on whether they viewed CSR activities as strategic or more altruistic in nature and the impact this had on employee engagement: 'On the whole we're altruistic, and I think we use it as a way of motivating staff' (G). However, some employees were not critical of a strategic approach to CSR: 'I don't

necessarily think that it's a negative thing that we've become more ulterior, I think alongside that we've also become a lot more strategic' (E). In fact, to engage employees more fully, some observed the need for the organisation to link CSR more strategically with business objectives: 'it needs to be strongly linked to the business objectives, it needs to be more strategic as it helps improve employees' (A). To orient individual engagement with CSR, one employee advocated a strategic and formalised link between CSR and individual development objectives:

> *CSR should be built into peoples' personal development plans, I think it should go that formal because it is something that needs to be, if it is going to be embedded and have a support strategy then it has to be something that's lived* (D).

The disparity of employee views towards CSR embeddedness within the organisation's culture and its business objectives was consistent with in-company observations relevant to the detachment of individual-level engagement with CSR. Through informal conversations, the researcher noted several cases of employees fully engaging in CSR at an individual, but not organisational, level, for instance through volunteering. Others discussed how their personal engagement with CSR involved friends and family, implying the socioemotional nature (Foa and Foa 1980) of extra-organisational CSR activities.

Discussion

The aims of this research were to explore, from an employee perspective, engagement with organisational CSR and the organisational context impediments that may impair such engagement. In common with the prior typology literature with regard to employees and CSR (Hemingway 2005; Rodrigo and Arenas 2008), this study found a wide variety of attitudes to, and engagement with, organisational CSR by employees. This ranged from positive employee engagement with CSR through to dismissal of CSR activities as nothing more than a bolt-on or jolly. Additionally, there was evidence of a separation of organisational and personal engagement with CSR activities. Behind these findings lies a complex mix of both organisational and personal factors evidenced through the employees' views on CSR engagement. These relate to a perceived lack of embeddedness of CSR within the organisation, perhaps attributable to poor communication of CSR to employees and a weak and low visibility CSR culture. Additionally, some employees felt that CSR is not strategic enough, not being sufficiently aligned to business and personal objectives, allowing it to become decoupled so potentially impairing greater employee engagement.

These findings were perhaps surprising, given the organisation's stated importance of CSR and the organisational message concerning the importance of employees in CSR. In contrast to a voluntary approach, what we found was that some employees were advocating more strategic links between organisational and individual objectives through a closer alignment of CSR to personal development plans to more fully orientate employee social commitment within the company. This formalisation is consistent with McShane and Cunningham's (2012 p. 98) findings and proposition 'to integrate CSR initiatives…to set formal social and financial goals'. From a SET perspective, this formalisation leads to a potential conflation of the economic and social branches and a break-down of the discretionary, socioemotional nature of their engagement. This tension over formalisation of CSR is seen at a wider organisational level. Mirvis (2012) found that, within some companies, CSR is seen as being a formal, contractual, integrated part of on-going employment activities whereas, in others, volunteerism remains the guiding principle with IBM for instance stating 'no company can mandate volunteerism' (p. 93).

Those employees voluntarily active in CSR engagement recognised the social returns for their personal engagement as well as the social *and* economic benefits to the organisation. Although the primary exchange is a social one from the employee perspective, this leads to both social gain through enhanced reputation and consequential potential organisational economic gain. Some employees recognised engagement with organisational CSR as being personally advantageous and beneficial, serving to increase their willingness to act as organisational citizens (Caldwell et al. 2012; Deckop et al. 2003). Such employees, who recognise the benefits to themselves and to others, and the economic reward to the business in terms of its reputation in the community, are consistent with Hemingway's (2005) Active CSEs. On the other hand, Dissident employees (Rodrigo and Arenas 2008) do not recognise a social return and choose not to engage with organisational CSR and again this was found to be evident through the interviews and observation. This is consistent with Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) who viewed such employees as exhibiting a low-exchange orientation and thus being less concerned about organisational social obligations and hence indifferent to CSR. This is contrary to Mowday et al. (1979), Manville and Ober (2003), Lennick and Kiel (2007) and Carroll and Buchholtz (2009) who viewed that all employees within an organisation should engage with CSR-type activities in fulfilment of their social duty.

However, we can draw a distinction between what employees perhaps should do in terms of a social duty compared to what employees actually do in an organisational context. Whilst, at an organisational level, a full and

formal CSR programme existed, a number of employees distanced themselves from CSR, perhaps because of a lack of awareness of the programme, a lack of a sense of social duty, and/or a perceived lack of reciprocity, and consequent self-interest, in the form of personal reward stemming from their engagement. In spite of the organisation's claim that 'our people…understand their responsibilities' (CSR report 2010, p. 4), employees seemed to view CSR as an implicit activity with unspecified obligations. This is consistent with seeing CSR as extra-role behaviour (Collier and Esteban 2007; Deckop et al. 2003; Settoon et al. 1996). This leads us to propose that, in this case study, some employees recognised CSR as a social rather than economic activity within the organisation and, perhaps because of this, were inclined, or more able, to make a choice over their level of CSR engagement at an organisational level.

This again leads to the tension around the formalisation of CSR and whether, for social or more economic reasoning, all employees should engage with organisational CSR activities. If the discretionary nature of CSR engagement is shifted to become a more formal, explicit engagement, then this may call into question the very nature of social responsibility because of its apparent subservience to more formalised economic considerations. Furthermore, if CSR becomes a conduit to achieve job-related targets and personal development objectives, this may encourage employees to take a strategic economic exchange approach to CSR engagement rather than viewing CSR as a value-based social exchange between themselves, the organisation and society (Foa and Foa 1980). Hence, employee engagement with organisational CSR, from a social exchange perspective, is paradoxically weakened, based solely on an economic CSR 'contract' between the organisation and an employee. Rather than any social obligation to engage in CSR, engagement may be motivated more through pragmatic, job-goal orientated and, ultimately, vested economic self-interests. If employees view CSR solely through an economic, rather than social, lens then, refining Friedman's (1970) argument concerning the sole responsibility of business being to maximise wealth, arguably the sole responsibility for employees would be to maximise their own economic return. This leads us to reframe Hemingway's (2005, p. 233) contention concerning CSR at the corporate level, where she claimed 'the focus of CSR is to manage stakeholder perceptions and the aim is for the corporation to be *seen* to be taking its social responsibilities seriously…regardless of whether this is actually occurring in practice'. At the employee level, a more strategic and economic engagement with CSR could lead to the aim of CSR becoming for the individual to be *seen* to undertake such activities, regardless of any serious sense of social responsibility, to achieve personal economic goals.

It has been argued that, to reinforce the social benefits to employees of their CSR engagement, a CSR culture needs to be embedded within organisations, supported by strong CSR communication and a clear 'tone at the top' (Collier and Esteban 2007). Employees in our case study claimed that their lack of awareness of the organisation's CSR strands, and by extension the social benefits they might accrue from engaging with them, was related to poor communication. This led us to explore the lack of awareness of the organisation's CSR strands and the separation of organisational and personal CSR engagement by considering the wider question of CSR ownership. The corporate ownership of social responsibility is emphasised through creating CSR structures within a business as evidenced through a CSR department, albeit with employees being responsible for underlying CSR activities (Collier and Esteban 2007). The organisational formalisation of CSR may lead to employees viewing CSR as a separate, bolt-on business activity not motivated by a genuine social consideration but rather by more economic business interests of building social reputation. The operation of a separate CSR department as a function of the business may again lead to a conflict of corporate and personal levels of engagement (Duarte 2010; Rodrigo and Arenas 2008) rather than foster authenticity of CSR (McShane and Cunningham 2012). From a SET perspective, we argue that the responsibility for such activities has now passed to a named, discrete and visible CSR department and may serve to move CSR towards a more formalised economic exchange. As such, employees with low social exchange orientation can take comfort that the CSR department discharges organisational CSR and thus the individual employee decision not to engage is not compromised.

Conclusion

It is evident from this study that employees hold diverse views towards organisational CSR and levels of engagement. There are employees who fully engage, those who perceive no value of CSR engagement at an organisational level, and others who value personal CSR engagement outside the workplace. Prior conceptual research concerning employee attitudes to CSR, and related organisational citizenship, has identified discrete and differing employee typologies ranging from the committed to dissident. This research, in part, extends those typologies through exploring both organisational *and* personal engagement with CSR. More in common with 'Active' or 'Committed' employees are those that engage with CSR at organisational and personal levels. At the other extreme, consistent with the 'Apathetic' or 'Dissident', are those employees who do not engage at either level with CSR. Between these extremes are those employees who we find engaged in CSR at either the organisational *or* the personal level. The former employees could be classified as 'strategic CSRer's'; their behaviour is pragmatic and more consistent with an economic contract to undertake CSR. The latter are those employees who are socially motivated but are frustrated by the organisational context and detached from organisational CSR activities.

The individual employee decision to engage comes down to a complex mix of both personal and organisational factors which need to be considered when generalising claimed benefits of CSR to employees. From a SET perspective, personal and organisational CSR constitute a benefit through the fulfilment of social activities. Whereas personal CSR engagement may be reflective of an individual ethical decision, engagement with organisational CSR, as an employee, is reflective of a social exchange between the employee and the organisation characterised by their level of citizenship behaviour. Thus an employee can engage with either or both (or in some cases neither) personal and organisational related CSR activities achieving value to him or herself through social fulfilment, societal gain and personal satisfaction. However, it does not necessarily follow that an individual with a strong personal engagement with CSR would also be engaged with organisational CSR. Reciprocity lies at the heart of social exchange, thus the employee's social commitment is contingent on the exchange, between individual and organisation, of social benefits and on the mutually recognised value of wider organisational citizenship behaviour. This social exchange and citizenship behaviour may be constrained by a number of personal and organisational factors. These range from the individual's perceptions of the credibility of organisational CSR activities, a lack of shared values (for instance the perception of CSR as an economic rather than social activity), the divorce of CSR ownership delivered through a CSR department, and the perceived lack of a supportive, embedded CSR culture.

Whilst communication, designed to disseminate a supportive tone at the top, was often dismissed by employees in the case study organisation as being ineffective, there were strong views on the formalisation of CSR, for instance, for it to be tied more strategically to business and personal objectives. However, if CSR becomes a formalised part of employment, by extension, employees may solely engage with CSR as economic agents. This leads us to question why some employees would then undertake any other CSR-related extra-role activities. In other words, compared to seeing potential social benefits through fulfilling a social CSR contract in the workplace, employees may focus attention only on the potential economic and vested self-interest benefits from CSR engagement in an organisational context. Further research in organisational

contexts where such close alignment exists between CSR engagement and personal development objectives and plans would be useful in shedding light on the balance of economic and social exchange perceived by employees in their engagement with CSR. Another useful extension of this research would be to compare employee and management perspectives of CSR within the same organisation to see where any breakdown in engagement occurs. Such research would give us further evidence regarding those factors that underpin organisational and employee CSR engagement.

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