



ROTTERDAM SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, ERASMUS UNIVERSITY

- ▶ Employer and employee engagement in CSR

Chris Murray talks with Lonneke Roza and Lucas Meijs

- ▶ Corporate illusionists: socially but not politically responsible

By Frank Wijen

- ▶ Does climate change affect global innovation?

By Mathijs van Dijk

- ▶ Automation: is your product too good?

By Eugina Leung, Gabriele Paolacci and Stefano Puntoni

- ▶ The power of love in organisations

By Stefano Tasselli

- ▶ Strategic renewal in institutional contexts

By Jacomijn Klitsie



Employer and employee engagement in CSR

Chris Murray talks with **Lonneke Roza and Lucas Meijs**

After years of studying corporate social responsibility in Dutch companies, Dr Lonneke Roza and Prof. Lucas Meijs conclude that the challenges of implementing CSR, especially in terms of shared employer-employee engagement, have been oversimplified. Through their research and articles, Roza and Meijs highlight the nuances and dynamic complexities of CSR, thus helping practitioners – especially corporate leaders, managers and (activist) employees – to find effective ways for organisations to encourage and implement successful CSR initiatives.

Roza and Meijs first emphasise that when addressing CSR issues, corporate leaders must understand that people judge organisations both on their company's *identity* as much as its *behaviour*. A company's identity includes its business purpose and strategy, its espoused values and its philosophy – everything that makes the company unique. And that identity may not always include CSR values. In turn, CSR behaviour includes all the actual practices that a company or individuals within that company have partaken. "It takes

social responsibility important. It's not about where they should go with CSR. It's where they want to be, what their ambitions are, what's in their identity." Then, says Roza, "they have to change their behaviour accordingly."

In some cases, companies can change their views on the importance of CSR. "In other companies," explains Roza, "the organisation starts with CSR behaviour as they might be pressured by stakeholders, but through their CSR experiences they socialise with CSR and internalise the importance."

"In the Netherlands, we are not really used to talking about our philanthropy, and especially about corporate philanthropy..." Lonneke Roza

these two aspects to have a thrilling CSR tango," Roza explains. The action that a company leader might take to address the company's CSR activities "will depend on whether the company finds

Social responsibility

The term 'corporate social responsibility' is traditionally used to refer to social responsibility attitudes and actions at both the organisational and individual

level. However, as Roza and Meijs note, employees may have different attitudes or act differently than the company as a whole. So, in addition to highlighting the distinction between social responsible identity and behaviour, Roza and Meijs underline the equally important and even less well-understood distinction between social responsibility at the organisational level and at the individual level – in short, whether *employees* are on the same CSR page as their *employers*. As a result, they coined the phrase *employee social responsibility* (ESR) to refer to employee-specific social responsibility values and behaviours, retaining corporate social responsibility to refer to top management or corporate-wide social responsibility values and behaviours.

Four categories

Roza and Meijs used high and low levels of identity and behaviour to develop four categories of engagement in social responsibility (SR) that applies to both employees and organisations:

Identity-based social responsibility: This category of engagement describes companies and employees alike that espouse social responsibility values but don't follow through with any CSR action (high SR identity, low SR behaviour).

Behaviour-based social responsibility: This category of engagement occurs in companies or with employees that don't actively identify and proclaim their CSR values, but quietly behave in socially responsible ways (low SR identity, high SR behaviour).

Low social responsibility: This category of engagement is reflected in com- ▶

Employer and employee engagement in CSR *(continued)*

Chris Murray talks with **Lonneke Roza and Lucas Meijs**

panies and individuals that don't value social responsibility and act accordingly (low SR identity, low SR behaviour).

Entwined social responsibility: This category of engagement is reflected in companies and/or individuals that value social responsibility and follow through with socially responsible behaviours (high SR identity, high SR behaviour).

Although some might think that behaviour-based social responsibility is the least common pattern, it does ex-

pouse social responsibility values but do not practice them (sometimes with good reason: young parents or informal caregivers may not be able to volunteer every Saturday morning with other employees even if they wanted to).

Employees can also engage in *behaviour-based social responsibility*, notes Meijs. He gives the example of an employee who does not care about social responsibility but engages in CSR activities "to impress a manager."

engagement, corporate leaders, employees and even prospective employees can determine if there is a good fit – "congruence" in the terminology of the researchers – between an individual and an organisation. Meijs explains that the concept of congruence is non-judgmental. For example, if a company does not want to be engaged in socially responsible activities and an employee shares the same attitude, the SR values and behaviour of employer and employee are congruent.

For example, a CEO having trouble pushing his company to be more actively involved in socially responsible activities may realise that there is a disconnect between the company's "entwined" level of engagement (high CSR identity, high CSR behaviour) and the employees' identity-based level of engagement (they profess socially responsible values but these are not translated into action).

Likewise, "if you are looking for a job, you can also start with: who am I and what do I find important and what is my own behaviour?" Roza says. You then ask which company fits with that. This is important as a good fit between the organisation and the employee leads, for instance, to organisational commitment, employee engagement and less absenteeism. A mismatch between the organisation and the employee could lead to resentment, disappointment and, in the end, higher turnover.

The most productive impact of understanding CSR congruence, however, is to guide both top managers and individual employees in improving the socially responsible attitudes and activities in their companies. "Let's assume

"...employees can positively influence their organisations in doing good, and vice versa..."

Lonneke Roza

ist, especially, says Roza, related to the philanthropy element of CSR. "In the Netherlands, we are not really used to talking about our philanthropy, and especially about corporate philanthropy," she says. "That is changing a little bit now, but I do know that a lot of companies are making really big investments in corporate philanthropy and don't talk about it. It is simply not in our culture."

The four types of social responsibility engagement can be applied to employees as easily as to organisations as a whole. "Employees also have their norms and values and attitudes and beliefs," says Roza, "and it may also be that not all employees who value social responsibility might actually behave accordingly," she says, describing in this case employees in the *identity-based social responsibility* category: they es-

These four categories help companies, their leaders and individual (prospective) employees identify where they are in terms of social responsibility and where they want to be. A company, for example, may want to launch CSR initiatives so that it moves from identity-based social responsibility focused on espousing CSR values to *entwined social responsibility* (ESR) that supports values with action.

"Or a company may be exactly at the point it wants to be," notes Roza. One example: the companies described above who want to be discreet about their corporate philanthropy. "It depends on which of the four types you want to be," she says.

The power of congruence

By matching CSR and ESR levels of en-



just somewhere you're not congruent," says Meijs. "You're the CEO of the company and you think the employees are not following what the company wants them to do." Once the CEO recognises the incongruence, he or she may realise that employees need to be stimulated to participate in CSR activities.

There are many ways to stimulate employees, including, says Roza, to offer a variety of opportunities, "because one person wants to do this and the other person wants to do that – one person is more inclined to work on sustainability while the other is more inclined to do something for charities." Leadership support is also key to encouraging individual initiatives, say Roza and Meijs.

Although the majority of CSR activities are initiated at the organisational level, individual employees can make a major difference, according to Roza and Meijs. "If you're an employee and you find yourself in a place where you want to move the organisation up the CSR ladder in behaviour or in identity," says Meijs, "find yourself some friends and start doing something – because in many cases companies are not going to fight about small CSR initiatives. For example, if you want to start recycling within your company, you should probably just do it."

The bottom line, say Roza and Meijs, is that awareness of employer-employee congruence can encourage top-down or bottom-up initiatives that im-

prove the CSR pattern of a company. "I really find it interesting," says Roza, "how employees can positively influence their organisations in doing good, and vice versa, and I think that's also the whole underlying notion of this research." ■

This article draws its inspiration from the paper *Congruence in Corporate Social Responsibility: Connecting the Identity and Behaviour of Employers and Employees*, written by Haski-Leventhal, D., Roza, L. & Meijs, L.C.P.M, and published in the *Journal of Business Ethics* (2017) 143: 35. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2793-z>

Dr Lonneke Roza is an academic researcher with the Department of Business-Society Management, Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University.

EMAIL lroza@rsm.nl

Lucas Meijs is Professor of Volunteering, Civil Society and Businesses, and Professor of Strategic Philanthropy, Department of Business-Society Management, Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University.

EMAIL lmeijs@rsm.nl

▶ RSM Expertise

The Department of Business-Society Management at RSM specialises in researching, teaching and advising on the complex and challenging relationships between business and society.

WEB www.rsm.nl/bsm