



Bachelor's thesis research proposal

The HRM-CSR interface and how it affects organizational attractiveness

Author:
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Copenhagen Business School



Introduction

In a world where firms engage in “war for talent” and competing on becoming the employee-of-choice, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a central element of business management in recent years. Earlier CSR has been looked as a zero-sum game but has maintained a crucial role in strategic management toward gaining advantage in terms of reputation and employee attraction. Former studies focused on how organizational attractiveness is obtained by looking into prospective employees’ perceptions on different CSR-measures. This study aims to add to literature by investigating how CSR affects the attractiveness of an organization and how it is perceived by various actors. Furthermore, it looks into which role Human Resource Management (HRM) plays in addition to CSR. Moreover, the study investigates how CSR is implemented in order to increase organizational attractiveness. All this is done from an in-house-perspective for the purpose of gaining a deeper insight in how organizational attractiveness is obtained and to contribute to future research.

Research objective

Firstly, the research will examine the importance behind adopting CSR. Secondly, it will investigate the HR-CSR interface and the motivation for having a HR-function in a leading position in companies. Thirdly, the research seeks to address the effects that CSR has on the organizational attractiveness. The latter is of primary interest. These objectives can be summarized into the question:

Which impact does Human Resource Management have on CSR and how does it affect the organizational attractiveness for employees?

The empirical background

In order to understand the importance of the proposed research paper, it is essential to understand what corporate social responsibility (CSR) is, and how Human Resource Management (HRM) can contribute in a positive way for the firm to benefit from it.

Development of CSR

The CSR-term can be approached from many perspectives and the definition has evolved throughout the years. However, CSR is defined by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization as “a management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders.” (UNIDO, n.d.). It is far from Milton Friedman’s CSR-definition in 1970 where he stated that the only social responsibility for firms is to increase economic profit (Friedman, 1970). Now key issues such as working conditions, employee

and community relations, social equity and gender balance is just as important (UNIDO, n.d.). “..Corporate social responsibility.. has quickly become a crucial part of any large company’s long-term strategy – not just in marketing, but in recruiting too: ..employees now want more from their employer than a paycheck. They want a sense of pride and fulfillment from their work, a purpose and importantly a company’s whose values match their own” (Meister, 2012,). This means that internal mechanism by which organizational engagement in CSR influences organizational attractiveness among employees and job seekers (Joo et al., 2016)

In a meta-analysis of CSR research, a range of studies supports that job applicants are more likely to pursue jobs with firms that they consider socially responsible than firms with poor CSP or bad reputation (Backhaus et al., 2002; Lis, 2012; Turban & Greening, 1996). Furthermore, Gale, (2018) provided a census from the U.S. Census Bureau which suggest that 82% of employees in generation Z; that is people born after 1996, consider CSR of great importance when choosing a workplace. Moreover, general research suggests that from a firm perspective it creates value to engage in CSR; it attracts skilled workers, create brand value, increase financial performance and gain positive employee branding(Backhaus et al., 2002; Garr et al., 2017; Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017). This indicates that it is crucial for firms to engage in CSR when it comes to the increasing phenomenon; ‘war for talent’ and to become an employee-of-choice. (Lis, 2012; Story et al., 2016)

Studies indicates that it is essential for firms to promote their CSR initiatives in order to attract skilled workers(Richards & Wood, n.d.), but it is hard to measure CSR with quantitative data, because it is a rather broad and intangible term, which cover a broad set of actions that is done by firms. But a way of looking at the development in firms engaging in CSR can be seen on the growth in CSR reporting:

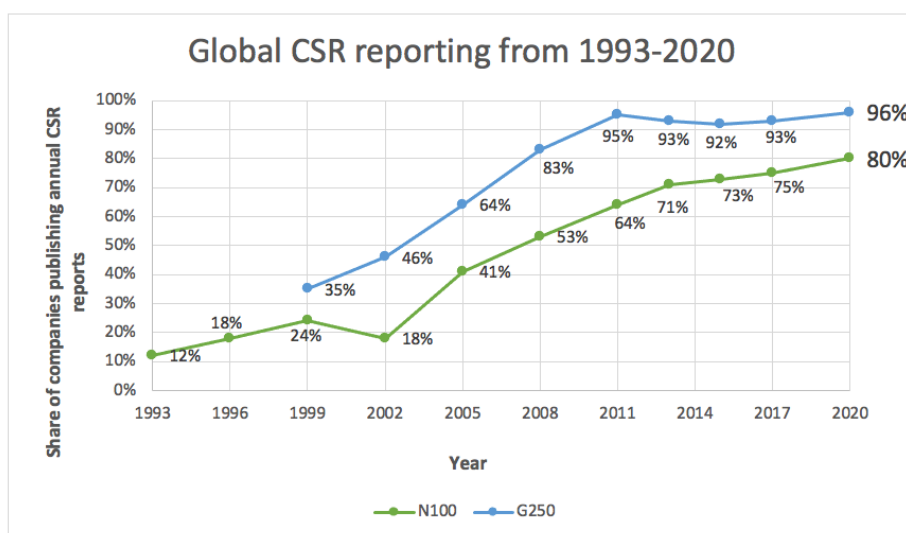


Figure 1: Growth in global CSR reporting between 1993 and 2020.
 G250 refer to the world's 250 largest companies by revenue
 N100 refer to a worldwide sample of 5,200 companies (top 100 companies by revenue in 52 countries)
 Source: King, Bartels, Shulman and Threlfall: "KPMG Survey of Sustainable reporting 2020"

Among the 250 largest companies measured by revenue, 96% published annual CSR reports in 2020 up from 46% in 2002 (King et al., 2020). It is a remarkable fast growth and shows how firms use CSR to create credibility and to brand themselves (Richards & Wood, n.d.). Furthermore 80% of the top 100 companies in 52 countries published annual CSR-reports in 2020 (King et al., 2020). This demonstrate that CSR has become a universal phenomenon within the business environment and is crucial to implement within business-strategies to increase the organizational attractiveness (Richards & Wood, n.d.).

The HR-CSR-interface

In order to increase organizational attractiveness, it is crucial that the CSR-strategy is effectively internalized within the organization (Sarvaiya et al., 2018). The development and implementation of CSR strategy is associated with considerable changes in an organization and studies show that Human Resource Management (HRM) is considered as a facilitator of CSR within the organization. (Cohen et al., 2012; Gond et al., 2011; Lis, 2012; Sarvaiya et al., 2018). Reasons why is that HRM handles all aspects of employees including recruiting, inducting, motivating and maintaining proper relations with employees as well as the responsibility of communication within an organization (Human Resource Management, n.d.). This is seen as pivotal elements in implementing a valuable, strategic CSR mindset and create an organizational culture where CSR is embedded in the employee's values and daily practices(Gond et al., 2011; Sarvaiya et al., 2018) Similar is CSR benefitting HRM by being a responsible organization because it improves the ability to attract and retain the most talented employees, increase job satisfaction and organizational attractiveness (Backhaus et al., 2002; Lis, 2012; Story et al., 2016; Turban & Greening, 1996).

However, practicing internal CSR by incorporating CSR in business processes and with employees is a relatively new phenomenon and how HRM contributes to that process is not widely investigated. Many studies focus on the external stakeholder perspective; however, studies show that firms with a high reputation for high quality CSR and socially valued characteristics may be more attractive for jobseekers, which is important in a world where increasingly engagement in "war for talent" and firms are competing on becoming the employee of choice. (Lis, 2012; Story et al., 2016) This makes it attractive for an organization to use sustainable HRM practices such as diversity and

work-life balance etc. (Lis, 2012) Deloitte provided a survey where 78% stated that diversity and inclusion gave firms a competitive advantage over other companies. (Garr et al., 2017) Furthermore research from Danish MNEs, provided by Boersen (2022), shows an increasingly tendency of having HR-functions presented in top management and indicates that HRM plays a strategic role in CSR-related issues such as diversity, me-too, talent development. As Joris Huijsmans, HR-director at Carlsberg, says; “employees is the key to a successful future of a company” and states further that “to bring our employee-agenda closer to the core business it is crucial to have a HR-function represented on an Ex-Com level.” HRM is no more considered “just a part of the conclusion, but rather the conversation” (Jasper & Askjær, 2022) This demonstrate that CSR-related subject and the CSR-HRM interface is becoming crucial for maintaining a successful business. (Cohen et al., 2012; Gond et al., 2011; Jasper & Askjær, 2022; Lis, 2012)

The Theoretical background

Building on to the empirical background, this section aims to provide a theoretical framework for the proposed research. This includes different aspects and methods of CSR covered by previously papers which is critical in determining the optimal approach for this research paper. Furthermore, examining existing research on the area creates the opportunity to learn about common pitfalls in relation to this research topic. I will at the end of this section conclude on the most optimal approach for this study.

Organizational attractiveness

Organizational attractiveness can be defined as “the degree to which an individual perceives the organization to be a place to work or the general desirability an individual has to work for an organization” (Williams, 2013, p. 863) The impact of CSR on organizational attractiveness has been subject to extensive research. Many researchers have found a positive correlation between CSR-engagement and organizational attractiveness but under varying circumstances.

Turban and Greening (1996) investigated the impact of Corporate Social Performance (CSP). Using a quantitative approach, they conducted an experiment design manipulating CSP. They found that job applicants were more likely to pursue jobs in socially responsible organizations and supported their hypothesis that CSP were positively related to organizational attractiveness. Another study by Backhaus et al. (2002) found that diversity, community relations and environment had a large effect on employee’s attractiveness toward a firm - ratings based on students’ perception of the different dimensions of CSP. Similar took Lis (2012) the quantitative approach by a policy capturing study whereby creating manipulated scenarios that contained either high or/and low levels of each

CSR-dimension (product, environment, diversity, and employee relations). The sample consisted as well as in Turban and Greening (1996) and Backhaus (2002)'s study of undergraduate students, which is seen as an appropriate sample as they are likely to be attractive potential employees. This study also confirmed that there is a positive correlation between CSR and organizational attractiveness, and findings indicated that especially diversity and employee relations had a positive impact on organizational attractiveness, but product and environmental perceptions of CSR had little impact on ratings of employer attractiveness. Although Lis B (2012) did not cover HRMs role in the research design, however the empirical theory stated that the results of the study indicated that sustainable HRM can be an effective tool of implementing the most important CSR-results.

External and Internal CSR

In order to understand how organizational attractiveness is perceived a study by Story J et. al (2016) distinguished between internal and external CSR; Internal CSR represents those activities related to the betterment of working conditions of the internal stakeholders of a firm such as career opportunities, training and development and diversity. External CSR refers to those activities aimed at the protection of the environment, community development, sustainability and philanthropic activities (Story et al., 2016). They conducted a field study; the sample consisted of 532 external stakeholders (e.g., customers) to the identified 16 organizations that the study concerned. They were to rate questions on each of following subjects; external CSR, internal CSR, reputation and overall attractiveness using a five-point Likert-scale. Through a statistical analysis the study suggested that stakeholders' perceptions of internal and external CSR were positively related to organizational reputation, but only perceptions of internal CSR practices had a direct impact on organizational attractiveness. Perceptions of external CSR practices influenced ratings of organizational attractiveness only when mediated by reputation. Furthermore, through an experimental study to take away relational bias to the specific organizations. They found that CSR positively impacted organizational attractiveness. Finally, the study made a statement: "These results lead to important theoretical and practical applications for organizations and human resources managers" Story J et. al (2016 p. 494)

Sarvaiya et al. (2018) explored the role of human resource management on CSR using a qualitative approach by interviewing HR/CSR managers from 16 organizations. They generally found that HRM is responsible for CSR-development and that HRM is involved in firm's CSR-strategy and initiatives by promoting employee participation, providing administrative support and

managing CSR-related change. Moreover, they found that HRM was crucial in terms of implementing and strategize internal CSR, but also had an impact on external CSR-initiatives.

Signaling theory.

Research provides different approaches for measuring organizational attractiveness, however several studies used signaling theory as a part of describing the positive link between CSR and organizational attractiveness (Backhaus et al., 2002; Joo et al., 2016; Lis, 2012; Story et al., 2016; Turban & Greening, 1996). Signaling theory argues that, because job-applicants suffer from a lack of information, they tend to interpret information they receive about organization as a ‘signal’ about the working conditions which will lead overall justice of an organization and its attractiveness. (Lis, 2012; Story et al., 2016) According to Story et al. (2016) the signaling theory focuses on the deliberate communication of positive information as a way to signal positive organizational attributes, such as CSR, to increase organizational attractiveness. By signaling CSR through working conditions, diversity, environmental involvement etc., they increase their attractiveness as receivers perceive the positive signal on how it would be to work for the organization.

Moreover, in a world were climate change, increased focus on internal CSR and ‘war for talent’ is central issues for organizations, it is critical to signal a strong CSR strategy to attract skilled workers (Story et al., 2016). It is shown that signaling theory can be used as a HRM tool to ensure that a firm’s sustainable goals and visions are effectively communicated from an internal perspective; ‘employees who perceive strong signals of organizational and supervisory encouragement are more likely to engage in behaviors positive for the natural environment’ (Cohen et al., 2012, p.7) and as this is seen as an important factor for prospect employees it can be used to increase the organizational attractiveness. (Backhaus et al., 2002)

Conclusion

All though several studies supported the importance of CSR as a predictor of organizational attractiveness, few of them discover how these subjects are effectively obtained from an organization perspective and how HRM contribute to that process. This is exactly what this study aims to discover. Earlier studies’ approaches can be used to construct a relevant research design to research further on the subject. Theories and approaches are used to formulate relevant questions for an interview as well as theories and empirical theory will be used to interpret and analyze the data.

Research design

Population and Sample collection

It is impossible to collect data from the whole population - therefor a sample is needed. A geographical limit is set to Danish MNEs due to the time constraint and limited resources. As the firm is not chosen randomly, there is used non-probability sampling. The sample is selected by conducting a desk research on widely CSR-engaging Danish MNEs which: i) have introduced relative new initiatives which allows for better and "fresh" reflections of the impact ii) have a HR-function in top management to get a deep insight in the impact of HRM in terms of CSR.

The sample was collected through newspapers and looking at the firm's annual CSR-report (if published). By using the purposive judgement sampling method, it allows for systematically select the case with attention to the criteria.

The case-study seems to work with A.P. Moeller - Maersk for several reasons. They are increasingly investing in both internal- and external CSR and have recently gone through organizational change due to CSR-initiatives. This includes focusing on diversity, no dress code at offices, working conditions. Furthermore, they are aiming their shipping-procedure to be non-oil-based by 2025 to become CSR-leaders in their industry. (Friis, 2021; Larsen, 2021; Maersk, 2020; Tholstrup, 2017, 2020). Moreover, they have a HR-function represented at ex-com-level (Jasper & Askjær, 2022). This makes Maersk an attractive subject in order to investigate the research objective.

A clear limitation is that there is a possibility of sampling and selection bias when using a small sample-size and utilizing the purposive judgement sampling method. This limitation could be partially accommodated for using a larger sample size across industries. Even though the impact of CSR might be different between firms, the reliability of the results would improve as the sample size increases. Due to practical considerations including time constraints and limited resources this is not possible. Although the intent of the study was not to make inferences about a large population of firms, the study would benefit from increased reliability through a larger sample size.

Data collection

A quantitative methodology would have been suitable for establishing a correlation between CSR and attractiveness, whereas establishing a causal link requires more in-depth data. This is possible to achieve through a qualitative methodology based on interviews. A qualitative research design approach allows us to gain a rich, detailed understanding of how Maersk strikes to become an

employee-of-choice from an organizational perspective and gather data about their CSR-philosophy and how employees were affected of the new CSR-initiatives as well as gain a deeper understanding of HRM role in CSR. It is done through an exploratory approach which means that the objective of the research is not to make inferences about a population, but rather look if results indicates a causal-link and to build on to theory for future research papers.

The desired interviewee is one of the executive vice presidents (EVP) of Maersk as it will gain a broader perspective of the reflections by their CSR-vision and also the thoughts behind having HRM at top management. The EVP will be contacted through email and the description will aim to give a professional first-hand impression. Therefor the invitation must show knowledge and clear interest about Maersk by recognizing CSR-initiatives and not look standardized in any way. This will increase the likelihood of a response.

For the aim of this study a research interview allows to answer the research objective nuanced. The EVP will take part in a semi-structured face-to-face interview. This allows for collecting an original insight and asking probing questions making clarifications. An inexperienced interviewer will experience difficulties regarding interview techniques such as paying attention, formulating questions and writing notes at a proper pace at the same time. Therefore, the interview will be recorded with the consent of the EVP. This will relieve the burden of taking notes and only limit it to necessary observations that is needed to be probed for a more thorough explanation. After the interviews it will be transcribed. This is a time-consuming process but will help when the data has to be analyzed and interpreted.

Questions will feature some kind of open-ended questions to have the interviewees provide as nuanced deceptions of their experiences as possible. A draft of the questions for the thematically structured interview would look as follows:

The CSR of Maersk

- What are the general thoughts behind CSR at Maersk?
- What benefits are you experiencing as a result of focusing on CSR?
- Did you experience an increased pressure for the new initiatives by employees?

The HR-CSR interface at Maersk

- What is the philosophy behind having a HR-function in the executive board?
- How does it affect your CSR-profile to have a HR-function in the executive board?
- How did a HR-function at the executive board made it easier to innovate, implement and manage new CSR initiative and which implications did Maersk face in such processes?

The effect of CSR and attractiveness of Maersk in term of (potential) employees.

- How has Maersk as an organization changed internally to meet external demands?
- What CSR-values do u perceive to be most important among current employees and job applicants?
- How do you think it strengthen your position/reputation and differentiate you from other employers in the job-market in order to attract skilled workers/from a potential employee-perspective?
- Do Maersk experience an increase in achieving goals such as motivation and productivity from employees as a result of your increased focus on CSR?

Table 1: Draft for interview.

A limitation with collecting data through an interview is that the EVP is prone to biases. Especially the interviewee will be prone to social desirability as the EVP might portray the organization in good light and avoid including negative information about the organization. Another limit is the issue of accessibility for the interview. As the research is carried out by a bachelor student, there is a probability that the vice president would not consider it worthwhile to engage in. Here a bigger sample size would likely increase respondent-rate. However, this is potentially issue is tried to be accommodated by the mentioned factors as well as indicating a high degree of important within the research area.

Methods of Data analysis

Once the data is collected, data analysis is needed to draw conclusions. In order to analyze and interpret the interview a narrative structured approach will be conducted on the transcribed interviews. Moreover, there will be used existing literature and theories to by interpreting the interview to address important points of the investigated subjects in order to relate them to the research objective. These methods are useful as the it conducts an in-depth investigation of data in terms of understanding why different CSR-initiatives is done and the experienced effects caused by engaging in CSR and last in order to understand which role HRM plays in terms of CSR in Maersk.

We get a deeper insight in the actions the firm has done to accommodate with the increasing pressure for a strong CSR-strategy, however it does not cover whether the initiatives had a significant impact from an (potential) employee-point-of-view due to time and resource limitations of this research paper. This could have been done by using a triangulating method by interviewing different sources such as a HR-manager and employees in Maersk. This would have helped strengthen the validity and credibility of the findings. Although this paper was not to make any conclusions on populations, it would have gained a more complete picture and possibly

strengthen the credibility in the findings. Although, this can be used as an inspiration for future research.

Time frame

The time constraint for completing the research proposal is set to six months. The time frame for completing main activities is presented in table 1

Month	Activities to be completed
January 2023	Further research on the topic by investing new/or larger part of existing literature Read Maersk' new sustainable report and search media for new information. (2023) Clarify and refine research question and interview questions. Meet supervisor throughout the process
February 2023	Reach out to Maersk Prepare interview. Start writing thesis
March 2023	Held the interview. Transcribe, analyze and interpret and develop explicit conclusions on the interview
April 2023	Complete writing the thesis.
May 2023	Extensive revision and proofreading the thesis (get assistance from someone else when doing it) Hand in thesis.
June 2023	Prepare oral defense of the thesis.

Table 2: Time frame

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