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CSR PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE LOYALTY TO THE EMPLOYER – A REVIEW OF THE SUBJECT LITERATURE

Agnieszka KWARCIŃSKA

University of Szczecin; agnieszka.kwarcinska@usz.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-2766-1856

Purpose: The aim of this article is to identify and systematise the current state of knowledge and ongoing research in the field of both CSR practices—particularly those aimed at employees—and employee loyalty towards employers. Achieving this aim will help to organise existing areas of analysis, identify research gaps and suggest directions for future research.
Design/methodology/approach: This article takes the form of a literature review based on desk research. The review involved analysing the content of selected academic publications—as up-to-date as possible—identified through an analysis of Google Scholar using relevant search terms. Given the substantial body of literature on the subject, the focus was placed on selected publications.
Findings: An analysis of the content of selected publications has, above all, helped to systematise the current state of knowledge on corporate social responsibility and related initiatives aimed at employees, highlighting their broad benefits. Additionally, it enabled an understanding of the category of employee loyalty, identifying its attributes and determinants. As a result, it was recognised that CSR practices aimed at employees can influence employee loyalty. Finally, the study noted the objective, subjective, temporal and territorial limitations of the analysed body of literature covering the impact of CSR activities on employee loyalty.
Research limitations/implications: A limitation of this article is, first and foremost, that it relies on just one of the many available search engines to conduct the literature review. Furthermore, no specific criteria for selecting publications were applied.
Practical implications: The analysis of secondary data forms part of the conceptualisation phase and serves as a prelude to the operationalisation stage for the verification of the identified relationships. It therefore constitutes preparation for the conduct of empirical research.
Originality/value: The article presents an analysis of the content and subject matter of recent academic publications, highlighting opportunities and directions for future research.
Keywords: corporate social responsibility, CSR, CSR initiatives aimed at employees, employee loyalty, attributes of employee loyalty, determinants of employee loyalty.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The current trend of conducting business in accordance with the principles of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) – a concept that, incidentally, resonates with the forward-looking idea of sustainable development – is steadily gaining ground and taking root among an increasing number of market players. There are many drivers behind the spread of responsible behaviour. It is worth noting, for instance, the growing public awareness of the values of sustainable development, which are important both for the functioning of current communities and for future generations.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the concept of CSR involves the implementation of positive behavioural standards that foster the creation of strong and long-lasting interpersonal and inter-organisational relationships. Finally, the benefits of such conduct, enjoyed by both society and businesses (organisations), serve as specific, almost intrinsic motivators for undertaking activities that align with the message of corporate social responsibility. These also include benefits relating to employee-related aspects, encompassing primarily: the development of a positive company image among employees, increased employee satisfaction and contentment, or the recruitment and retention of the best staff, which directly or indirectly influence the loyalty of these internal stakeholders towards the organisation.

The subject and aim of this article require a review of the literature, primarily in three areas: CSR practices, including those directed at employees; employee loyalty to the employer; and current research on the connection between these two issues.

2. Research methodology

The article employed a desk research method, focusing primarily on the collection, analysis and synthesis of publicly available academic publications, books and articles relevant to the concepts under study. In searching for the necessary data, one of the internet search engines – Google Scholar – was also used, entering the terms “CSR”, “CSR activities towards employees”, “CSR and employee loyalty” and “CSR activities and employee loyalty”, as well as their English equivalents. The multitude of results prompted the need for appropriate selection. First, a preliminary review of the titles and abstracts of the articles was carried out, followed by a review of the content of the selected publications. On this basis, the article presents a characterisation of the necessary concepts and categories, taking into account the division of the content into three analytical strands.

The first strand of analysis focuses on the implementation of CSR practices, including those aimed at employees, highlighting primarily the utilitarian motives that prompt organisations to adopt them. The second strand concerns employee loyalty, outlining its nature, attributes and key determinants. The final strand examines the findings of previous research on the interrelationships between the implementation of CSR concepts by various organisations—including specific CSR initiatives directed directly at employees—and employees' loyalty to their employer.

3. Implementation of CSR initiatives aimed at employees – a theoretical and utilitarian perspective

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), in accordance with its fundamental principles, is based on organisations and businesses respecting the interests of various stakeholders whilst carrying out their core functions (Dahlsrud, 2008; Bartkowiak, 2011, pp. 15-16; Paliwoda-Matiolańska, 2012, p. 177; Sheehy, 2015; Hope, 2017, p. 300). This stems mainly from an awareness of the importance to the organisation of maintaining good relations with all entities on which it has an impact or which influence it. Ensuring the soundness of these specific ties often determines the strength and sustainability of the organisation. Among the internal stakeholders of any organisation are, first and foremost, the employees, who in a special way constitute it, build it from within and act as its ambassadors externally. Presumably due to the great importance of employee relations for an organisation, this area of CSR is highlighted in international guidelines and standards defining the framework and principles of responsible business conduct (OECD, 2024; Zasady Global Compact; ISO 26000) and is relatively frequently the subject of discussion, research and analysis in the relevant literature (Onkila, Sarna, 2022; Kwarcińska, 2023). It is worth noting that the publications examined, which cover CSR issues relating to employees, are highly diverse. Some present individual case studies of market entities and their activities in various countries (Arzenšek et al., 2018; Badura-Mojza, 2016). Others refer to practices in the employee sphere, but only within relatively large organisations and not necessarily enterprises (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2021; Bhatti et al., 2022). Finally, there are also those which, in the area of human resources, focus solely on broadly defined groups of actions taken towards employees (Santoso, 2014; Furmańska-Maruszak, Sudolska, 2017).

Given that this article addresses the issue of building, strengthening and maintaining employee loyalty to the employer as a specific benefit of implementing CSR practices aimed at employees, the literature review also identified and analysed publications discussing the benefits of implementing CSR concepts (Rok, 2004, pp. 54-55; Madrak-Grochowska, 2010, p. 51; Bachnik, 2017). It was found that the benefits of responsible business conduct include,

amongst others: improving the organisation's image, increasing the loyalty of consumers and stakeholders, fostering a positive image of the company amongst employees, attracting and retaining the best employees, and increasing employee satisfaction and contentment.

The review also examined publications specifically addressing the assessment of the impact of CSR implementation on stakeholders, such as employees, and their job satisfaction (Barakat et al., 2016; Murshed et al., 2021) and their engagement (Esmaeelinezhad et al., 2015; Glavas, 2016; Nanayakkara, Sangarandeniya, 2022). It has been observed that, although the research conducted in this area involved samples from different countries and sectors, its findings confirm both the direction of the relationship and the validity of implementing CSR concepts to improve employees' job satisfaction and build their engagement, which in turn largely translates into employee loyalty towards the employer.

4. Employee loyalty, its characteristics and determinants

Employee loyalty is a concept examined from the perspective of various disciplines (Świątek-Barylska, 2013, p. 19), which likely explains the variety of ways in which it is defined and described. Hirschman's (1995) approach can be regarded as one of the earliest analyses of employee loyalty, useful in the field of management studies, as he focused primarily on the significance of employee loyalty in the context of their propensity to leave or criticise. He stated, amongst other things, that 'if loyalty is present, departure is less likely…' (Hirschman, 1995, p. 78). This aspect of a kind of 'staying put' within the organisation, sometimes described as attachment to the organisation or remaining in the organisation alongside other attitudes and behaviours, features in contemporary definitions of employee loyalty. Lewicka-Strzałecka (2014) noted that "apart from maintaining a relationship with the company over a long period, employee loyalty can be expressed in many other ways. These include behaviours and attitudes such as: a willingness to sacrifice one's own goals for the good of the company, avoiding external criticism, sharing knowledge and skills acquired within the company with other employees, commitment to one's work, maintaining professional confidentiality, raising issues that arise at work, caring for the customer, etc.". Other authors also draw attention to the context of understanding loyalty through the prism of attitudes and behaviours. According to Bloemer and Odekerken-Schroder (2006): "When discussing employee loyalty, a distinction must be made between loyalty as an attitude (attitudinal loyalty) and as behaviour (behavioural loyalty). The attitude of loyalty is equated with commitment (affective, normative and calculative)". Loyalty as behaviour manifests itself in: expressing positive opinions about the company, the intention to remain in the organisation, low sensitivity to financial offers from other companies, and reporting problems within the organisation. Due to conceptual differences, the various types of commitment have a different

impact on loyalty as behaviour". Similarly, Lipka (2012a, p. 20) defines employee loyalty as "an (ethical) value manifested in attitude/behaviour – the (perceived) likelihood of an employee continuing to work in the organisation – towards which, regardless of any temporary loss of its reputation in the labour market, the employee harbours constant and positive feelings – either because of the benefits they themselves derive or the well-being of other people employed in the organisation, or because of a lack of other opportunities or the high costs of changing employer".

The various definitions of employee loyalty presented above reveal its specific attributes. Krupski and Piórkowska-Wojciechowska (2005) attempted to categorise the attributes of loyalty according to two dimensions: internal (emotional) and external (behavioural). According to them, the internal dimension of employee loyalty comprises: strong internal motivation to work, identification with the organisation, emotional attachment to the organisation, honesty, reliability, the belief that the employer deserves the employee's loyalty, commitment, a willingness to learn and apply knowledge for the benefit of the organisation, and a willingness to go the extra mile in times of crisis. In contrast, the external dimension comprises: rejecting other job offers, recommending the organisation, looking after the customer, not questioning the employer's authority, representing and pursuing the organisation's goals, behaving in accordance with established standards, building positive relationships with other members, organisational citizenship behaviour, safeguarding the organisation's reputation and image, striving for the organisation's development and strengthening its market position, safeguarding the organisation's financial and non-financial resources, not overstepping one's authority, and a high level of staff retention.

It should be emphasised that employees' attitudes and behaviours regarding loyalty are not static and depend on a number of factors, such as the prospect of higher future pay, organisational justice and prestige, or bonds between employees (Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2021). Lipka (2012c) identified the following determinants of the formation of an effective, i.e. long-lasting and mutually beneficial, employee-employer relationship: the type of pro-loyalty strategy employed by the company, the quality of human capital / HC-marketing (including: retention investments dependent on the loyalty strategy), the company's use of loyalty assessment methods, the socio-demographic characteristics of employees, employees' motives for loyalty, employees' multi-loyalty and its intensity, employees' perception of time, and the type of workaholism they exhibit. In addition, one may also take into account the broadly understood determinants of employee loyalty, which are rooted in (Lipka, 2012b, pp. 54-75):

- the organisation's environment, which comprises external factors such as competition, market characteristics, the organisation's image, employee-focused marketing activities, as well as demographic, social, cultural and legal aspects,

- internal organisational factors related to the organisation's identity, the quality of human capital management, and its strategy, structure and organisational culture,
- determinants directly concerning employees, which constitute psychological correlates of loyalty.

It should be noted that CSR initiatives undertaken by employers and directed at employees fit within the set of determinants and conditions of employee loyalty presented above, particularly those related to the internal workings of the organisation and the quality of human capital management, and may influence specific attributes of loyalty, such as, amongst others: length of service within the organisation, planned duration of employment with the organisation, recommending employment with the organisation to others, and speaking positively about the organisation outside the workplace.

5. Research into the relationship between the implementation of CSR principles and employee loyalty

A review of the most recent publications from 2020–2024 covering the topics of corporate social responsibility and issues related to employee loyalty has, above all, highlighted the topicality of this subject and the diversity of research approaches and analyses in this field. The research findings presented relatively often highlight a positive correlation between CSR activities and employee loyalty, as well as, frequently, their job satisfaction, engagement and the organisation's performance outcomes. According to Stojanovic et al. (2020), "CSR activities significantly influence employee loyalty, and consequently lead to greater employee commitment to the company". Their findings also suggest that "the greater the employee loyalty, the higher the company's productivity and competitiveness". Similarly, the findings of Shafique and Ahmad (2020) showed that CSR positively influences employee satisfaction and loyalty, and that employee loyalty positively influences financial performance. Karmoker et al. (2021) confirmed that CSR towards employees and CSR towards the community have a significant positive impact on employee loyalty. Singh and Lakshmi (2023) reached similar conclusions, finding that there is a positive correlation between CSR and employee loyalty to employers. At the same time, they suggest that the organisations under study must improve and integrate CSR in order to attract and retain motivated, committed employees. The positive and significant impact of CSR on employee loyalty was also highlighted by Jin et al. (2024). Similarly, according to Cachón-Rodríguez et al. (2022), actions promoting sustainable social development have a significant impact on the social capital perceived by employees, and social capital significantly influences their loyalty and retention. It can therefore be concluded that CSR activities may constitute, alongside other factors of course (Cuong, 2023), determinants of employee loyalty and may form part of a loyalty-building strategy.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The literature review concluded, first and foremost, that both the issue of corporate social responsibility in the context of employee relations and employee loyalty are topics that are constantly discussed and remain highly relevant, with an emphasis on their evolving nature and a suggestion that research areas should be expanded to include further aspects and issues related to these topics. First, the state of knowledge on corporate social responsibility and related initiatives aimed at employees was outlined (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2021; Bhatti et al., 2022; Santoso, 2014; Furmańska-Maruszak, Sudolska, 2017), highlighting their broadly defined benefits (Rok, 2004, pp. 54-55; Madrak-Grochowska, 2010, p. 51; Bachnik, 2017). There is a wealth of literature in this field, which primarily indicates researchers' unwavering interest in issues related to the implementation of the CSR concept and its various areas, including the employee aspect. It should be emphasised that among the advantages of implementing a CSR strategy, those frequently cited are those whose benefits are manifested in improved employee engagement and job satisfaction, which may also be reflected in strengthened employee loyalty.

For this reason, amongst others, the article goes on to highlight the significance of the impact of CSR strategy implementation on employees' job satisfaction (Barakat et al., 2016; Murshed et al., 2021), as well as their engagement (Esmaeelinezhad et al., 2015; Glavas, 2016; Nanayakkara, Sangarandeniya, 2022). It appears that research in this area is extensive and constantly expanding. There are numerous contextual factors, including sector-specific and territorial conditions.

To broaden the scope of research on the utility of implementing the CSR concept for fostering employee loyalty, the literature on the understanding of the category of employee loyalty was analysed (Hirschman, 1995; Lewicka-Strzałecka, 2014; Bloemer, Odekerken-Schroder, 2006; Lipka 2012a), the attributes of loyalty (Krupski, Piórkowska-Wojciechowska, 2005) and its determinants and conditions (Lipka, 2012c) were identified. On this basis, it was concluded that employee loyalty manifests itself primarily in various attitudes and behaviours of employees, and among these, particular attention should be paid to: maintaining a relationship with the company over a long period, the intention to remain in the organisation, expressing positive opinions about the organisation or recommending it, which, incidentally, constitute specific attributes of employee loyalty.

In turn, the identified factors and determinants of employee loyalty have, above all, highlighted their alignment with CSR initiatives aimed at employees, which means that they can influence the development of loyal attitudes and behaviours among staff.

As the subsequent part of the analysis of the relatively recent literature on the subject has shown, the issue of CSR implementation and employee loyalty has been the focus of many researchers (Stojanovic et al., 2020; Shafique, Ahmad, 2020; Karmoker et al., 2021; Singh, Lakshmi, 2023; Jin et al., 2024; Cachón-Rodríguez et al., 2022). The studies were conducted

in various countries, covered different market entities and took into account various aspects of CSR. However, they confirmed the relationship between the implementation of CSR and employee loyalty to the organisation.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the analysed body of thematic literature is not an exhaustive list. Given the significant number of publications, certain temporal and thematic restrictions were applied. This made it possible, on the one hand, to outline the current state of knowledge and, on the other, to organise key issues and recognise the inexhaustibility of the subject matter. It also turned out that each study constitutes an important contribution to filling research gaps, but does not completely fill them; indeed, it sometimes serves as a starting point for further research. Therefore, when setting out directions for future research in this field, it is worth considering, for example, conducting studies that, firstly, in terms of subject matter, take into account both a detailed proposal for CSR activities directed specifically at employees and a specific set of employee loyalty attitudes and behaviours; and secondly, in terms of the subject, small and medium-sized enterprises in Poland, which, to a significant extent, do not yet demonstrate a strategic approach to engagement in the implementation of CSR concepts.

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