

Rotterdam, 8 september 2016

Ladies and gentlemen, honoured professors, members of my doctoral committee and honoured Rector Magnificus,

**Welcome to my PhD defense on employee engagement in corporate social responsibility:
a collection of essays**

In the next 15 minutes I will share the results of my work of the last four years. But let me start by introducing the relevance of the topic and the importance of my research.

Even though we are generally well off in the Netherlands, there are many instances where we face challenges that puts our society and our welfare under pressure, at least for some.

For example, did you know that more than 60.000 children in the Netherlands cannot celebrate their birthday, because their parents simply cannot afford it? Because of this, many of these children don't even go to school on their birthday because they are unable to treat their fellow classmates.

As another example, with the repositioning of our government, we are required to become much more self-reliant; something that is challenging to most, but might prove too difficult for some in our society. For instance, people who are psychically or mentally challenged might not be able to be as self-reliant as they are expected.

At the same time, we are also very fortunate that we have a resilient society that has a diverse range of charities and non-profits, such as Stichting Jarige Job that supports those families who cannot celebrate the birthday of their children with giftboxes or Nationale Vereniging De Zonnebloem that supports those who are physically challenged to participate in our society.

Companies are increasingly aware that they are part of this equation and can only thrive if they operate in strong and resilient societies. Thus, for companies it is of utmost importance that the challenges of our society are being resolved. Their involvement is what we call their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); going beyond what is legally required from them to better society. Within this broad topic, I am particularly interested in company's community involvement efforts and how companies can share resources such as money, time and other means to support non-profit organizations.

It might sound as though this is something for large companies alone, but also small and medium sized companies are very involved in the local community. Even though I did not recognize it back then as corporate community involvement, I vividly remember that when I was around 5-6 years old, the breakfasts and lunches at my tennis association were donated by the local bakery. This type of support was an important input for our tennis association to deliver quality services to their members and to build social capital locally. As another example of building social capital locally, since 1957 the business sector in Gorinchem-the place where I grew up and still live- fully organizes and finances a Summerfest. This was originally set up for all those families that cannot afford to go on a holiday and to bond the local community.

So community involvement by companies is certainly not new and certainly not only for large companies, but what I do see, is that companies increasingly want to engage their employees here within.

For example, companies can engage their employees through pay-roll giving programs in which employees donate money to charity through their paycheck, oftentimes matched by the employer or through corporate volunteering in which employees –on behalf of their companies- give their time and or expertise to nonprofits.

It was back in 2009 that I became fascinated by this when I did an internship at Fortis Foundation Netherlands, which was a large corporate foundation with the aim to support youth in distress. During my experience, I realized that companies can and are willing to be part of the solution to social issues and are needed to sustain and develop our resilient society. I also saw first-hand that employee engagement in such initiatives enriches corporate community involvement for nonprofits, the company and its employees.

This initial interest transpired into the main theme of my dissertation: Employee engagement in Corporate Social Responsibility, with a clear focus on community involvement. At the end of 2011, when I started this PhD journey, I realized that there were many questions in both academia and in practice that were still unresolved and that these questions were very much in line actually.

Although my research posed many questions, I grouped the academic questions into the main research question: What are the antecedents, interventions and consequences of employee engagement in Corporate Social Responsibility. Within this scope, I will highlight and address three important questions today.

First, given the anecdotal stories on how employees benefit from community experiences and how they feel about their employer after participating, I –and I assume many CSR managers alike– am wondering which role CSR and particularly community involvement can play in the relationship between an employee and its employer.

Second, given these benefits of employee engagement in CSR, many CSR managers are increasingly pressured to increase employee engagement rates. So for my second question I am puzzled why some employees participate and others refrain from such engagement in CSR; and what CSR managers can do to increase participation rates.

Finally, let us not forget the purpose of community involvement: supporting non-profits, which are fundamental to building and to remaining a resilient society, such as Stichting Jarige Job or De Zonnebloem which I mentioned earlier. This led me to ask about the consequences of employee engagement in CSR for the non-profits. Of course, I would not be at a business school without thinking about how –in this case nonprofit managers– can manage these additional resources from companies effectively.

After four years of hard work, and with the help and support of many of you here in the audience, I am proud to say that I did find some answers to these questions.

Let's go back to the first question: What role can CSR and community involvement play in the relationship between an employee and its employer? As befits an academic, I tried to simplify this complex reality into a simple typology. This typology is unique as it can be applied to both employees and employers, based on their socially responsible identity and socially responsible behavior. It is here that I show four social responsibility patterns for both employees and employers which can be used to show if they have a match or mismatch based on each of their pattern. Having a match between employers and employees on their CSR pattern may yield positive benefits such as increased commitment and loyalty of employees, but having a mismatch might lead to dissatisfied employees, and perhaps even resentment or distrust.

A second study on this question made me think about the stages that employees go through in their relationship with their employer. I found that CSR could ultimately have a positive contribution in each of these stages.

For example, when a company attracts new employees, they can use their programs to signal about who they are and what they value as a company.

If you are new at an organization, engagement in the community involvement program might help to make you become more familiar with the company culture and you can informally get to know new colleagues and build social capital.

When employees are longer with the organization, community involvement can keep the employee committed to the organization and more satisfied at work.

In later stages, community involvement also supports those who want or need to leave organization. It might help employees find a different career path or help them find a meaningful purpose during retirement.

Of course, these results all depends on how the program is designed, thus I also describe strategies that CSR managers might want to use in each of these stages. This is the first teaser of today - I refer you to my dissertation for this answer.

This points to the second question in my dissertation; given the evidence that CSR and community involvement potentially yields many benefits for the company and its employees, how can we explain why people would refrain from engaging? And what can companies and CSR managers do to stimulate their employees to engage? Based on theory, I found that there are at least five more or less related reasons why employees do not participate in community involvement programmes:

- 1) Employees might have negative attitudes about CSR and community involvement; they simply don't like the idea or feel that this is not something the company should do or spend their resources on.
- 2) Employees don't feel they are able to participate (perceived behavioural control), for example because they feel they don't have the time or feel that there is no opportunity that fits with their availability.
- 3) Employees don't have previous experiences with community involvement. For instance, they have no previous volunteer experience.

4) Employees don't have role models among their midst so their colleagues, peers and managers are not openly engaged in the community, nor do employees feel that it might be expected from them. This is what we call the lack of subjective norms.

5) Finally, people feel anxiety when they are pulled out of their comfort zone. For example, people feel anxious when they enter organisations that they do not know or need to work or interact with people that they are unfamiliar with.

Here I come with the second teaser of today: if you want to know how companies can stimulate participation and thus to lower these barriers, I would like to suggest to read my dissertation.

For the third question, let me come back to my examples at the start of my speech; about non-profits such Stichting Jarige Job, De Zonnebloem, but also my local tennis association. These organizations are important vehicles to remain and to build a resilient society. And if companies want to share resources with them, many might think that this will only *benefit* non-profits as companies oftentimes have resources that nonprofits don't have. In my dissertation I challenge this assumption that everything that companies give will actually better non-profit organizations. Based on my research I come to the conclusion that this is indeed much more nuanced.

Collaborating with companies and engaging their employees in nonprofit organizations indeed yield many benefits for the nonprofit such as receiving additional resources, but also it might enhance the visibility and reputation of nonprofits.

On employee level, it might increase the pride of their own employees and may also allow the nonprofit to extend their services or to relieve projects where capacity is tight. For example, company employees could volunteer for a museum outing with elderly clients of the Zonnebloem or packing giftboxes at Stichting Jarige Job. Having this relief from company volunteers means for example that De Zonnebloem can serve more clients with meaningful outings and for Jarige Job that their staff can focus on the distribution of these giftboxes.

However, I also found that employee engagement in non-profits can also be risky 'business' for non-profit organizations as this collaboration can result in reputational risk, and mission distraction or even drift. It can also be harmful for their services to clients as these ad hoc, company volunteers might not have the professional knowledge that is sometimes required.

What I also found is that for non-profit employees, engaging people from companies might also mean that they fear that they will be replaced by corporate volunteers, and corporate employees get all the cherries on the cake. In other words, these company volunteers oftentimes get all the fun stuff, which could lead to resentment of non-profit employees.

These benefits and challenges are factors that non-profit managers can influence or at least take into account in deciding if, how and for what purpose they want to collaborate with companies and engage their employees.

This is my final cliffhanger of today, as you can read more about this in my dissertation.

Before I give the word back to the Rector Magnificus, I would like to share that this journey of doing research on this topic has certainly not come to an end, it is just a milestone of what we do here at Rotterdam School of Management. We continue the next couple of years with research that will help to develop both academia and the field of practitioners on community involvement, CSR, corporate foundations and alike. We will continue to work closely with the field, with companies, foundations and non-profit organizations. I proud to share that one diamond in the rough that we are currently shaping is that we are working on an international project on corporate foundations and CSR with 12 scholars from around the world. A project in close collaboration with Professor Meijs and Von Schnurbein who are in our midst. And with these final words, I give the word back to the Rector Magnificus.