Different Drivers

Exploring Employee Engagement in Corporate Philanthropy

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1. Abstract (250 words)

Corporate Philanthropy (CP) is multi-dimensional, differs between sectors and involves both individual and organizational decision making. However, the CP literature characteristically focuses on strategic decisions made by business leaders and ignores the role of employees, especially those in lower status and lower paid positions. Further, there is a bias towards ‘strategic alignment’ goals, such as brand-building and enhanced corporate reputation, over Human Resource Management (HRM) goals. To redress this imbalance, we conducted a qualitative study of employees’ involvement in CP processes in ten workplaces in the South East of England to identify whether and how they are involved in CP decision making and to capture their perspective on the benefits generated by such activities. We specifically chose to study workplaces where employees are involved in the actual execution of the CP strategy, prioritising companies with a visible presence on the high street. The results illustrate the HRM benefits of democratised and devolved processes, whilst underlining the fact that CP decision making remains predominantly top-down and driven by strategic alignment goals, especially in relation to financially significant initiatives. Where employees were involved in decision making for smaller, lower stakes, CP initiatives, this typically resulted in less strategic choices of charitable partners, due to prioritisation of staff’s personal experiences and philanthropic preferences. Yet the data suggests that truly strategic CP should involve both business leaders and employee representatives in democratised and devolved CP decision making, in order to maximise the business benefits of CP that incorporates both strategic goals and HRM benefits.

2. Main text (7,935 words)

2.1 Introduction

In companies with a visible presence on the high street, such as supermarkets, retail banks and restaurants, it is not unusual to see employees engaged in raising funds for a variety of charities. People working on the tills in a supermarket might wear bright pink feather boas to encourage shoppers to donate to breast cancer research; customers at a bank might see tellers taking turns on a treadmill in the banking hall to collectively ‘run a marathon’ to raise funds for a local hospice; and waiting staff in a restaurant might ask diners to consider rounding up their bill to pay for Christmas dinner at a local homeless shelter. In all three cases shop floor employees, which are typically low status and low paid employees, are engaged in employee fundraising activities, which has become a commonplace yet largely over-looked strand of Corporate Philanthropy (CP). A common feature of fundraising around the world (Breeze and Scaife 2015), employee fundraising is “one of the major ways” that US-based companies support nonprofits (Burlingame and...
and was found to be the most common mechanism through which UK-based companies supported charities in 2015 (Institute of Fundraising/Good Values 2015). Shop floor employees do most of the legwork in this form of CP, notably organising and implementing the fundraising activities, and communicating to customers about the charitable cause and opportunities to donate. Yet despite their essential role, little is known about these employees’ involvement in making decisions, such as which causes to support or what fundraising activities to develop, what motivates them to become involved, and how their decision-making and motivations might differ from that of business owners and managers.

This article presents a qualitative study of shop floor employees’ experience with and engagement in CP decision making related to fundraising in the workplace. It uniquely focuses on an understudied population: lower-status and lower paid employees, and focuses on workplaces where employees are involved in the actual execution of the CP strategy. By doing so, it answers the call made by multiple scholars in the CP and the broader corporate social responsibility (CSR) literature to study CP across different environments and from the perspective of different stakeholders (Gautier and Pache 2015; Haski-Leventhal, Roza, and Meijs 2015; Liket and Simaens 2015; Muller, Pfarrer, and Little 2014; Rodell et al. 2016; Roza 2016). By exploring the rationale for shop floor employees to engage in CP decision making and workplace fundraising activities, and contrasting their drivers with those commonly articulated by managers and owners of firms, it increases the understanding of new facets of the multi-level and multi-dimensionality of CP. As Mize Smith justly remarks: “While it may be the company that commits corporate support to charitable projects, it is often the employees who make that support a reality by volunteering or raising the funds to be donated.” (Mize Smith 2012: p. 373). The specific research questions this study addresses: How are lower level employees involved in decisions related to CP (RQ1)? What are the criteria involved when lower level employees make CP decisions, in particular in relation to the selection of charitable beneficiaries (RQ2)? And what, if anything, is distinctive about lower level employees’ CP decision making in contrast to that of business leaders (RQ3)?

2.1.2 Corporate philanthropy

CP is often studied as one form of the much broader concept of CSR, and is typically defined as the voluntary private contribution of resources in the form of money, time and/or expertise by corporations to benefit the public good (Gautier and Pache 2015; Schuyt, Gouwenberg, and Bekkers 2015). CP is multi-dimensional, differs among sectors and is decided upon both at the individual (employees, managers and directors) and the organizational level (the firm, CSR department, corporate foundation) (Aguinis and Glavas 2012; Liket and Simaens 2015). A recent review of the literature, examining 162 articles on corporate philanthropy published over the course of 30 years (Gautier and Pache 2015) finds that the corporate philanthropy literature is scattered across disciplines: management (e.g., Muller, Pfarrer, and Little 2014), economics (e.g., Duncan 2004), sociology (e.g., Galaskiewicz 1985) and public policy (e.g., Hwang and Powell 2009). Within and across this body of work there is little consensus or overarching theory on what drives CP, but the literature characteristically focuses on CP decisions made by business leaders, such as members of the board, the chief executive or senior managers (Marquis, Davis, and Glynn 2013), and often ignores the role of lower level employees (Muller, Pfarrer, and Little 2014). It also typically considers large multinational corporations (MNLs), while limited attention is paid to larger national corporations and SMEs (Gautier and Pache 2015).
2.2 Theoretical background

2.2.1 Strategic philanthropy

Friedman’s (1970) famous assertion that business has no responsibility beyond making profits marked the start of the search for the business case to “rationalize and legitimize” activities carried out under the CSR umbrella (Carroll and Shabana 2010: p.88). Porter and Kramer’s (2002) seminal article in the *Harvard Business Review* further motivated scholars studying CP to primarily focus on the direct strategic managerial or corporate goals of CP (see for example Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2011; Wang and Qian 2011). This dominant perspective suggests that the goal of CP is best encapsulated in the concept of ‘shared value’ as: “policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates.” (Porter and Kramer 2011: p. 6). Employees are notably absent from this vision on strategic philanthropy, which refers only to the ‘company’ and ‘the communities in which it operates’, yet of course employees are doubly present because they work for the companies and live in the communities. Therefore, whilst this stream of research offers useful insights it is lacking in one significant respect: it assumes that the ‘company’ perspective can be adequately represented by the opinion of business elites, such as members of the board, the chief executive or senior managers, with no reference to the employee perspective.  Scholastic explanations of CP activity have thus tended to have a “primarily top down rational interpretation” (Muller, Pfarrer, and Little 2014: p. 1). This is curious, given that employees make up the majority of the workforce. The private sector is comprised of a small number of owners and managers, and a much larger number of employees, many of whom are employed in low-paid and low-status jobs (Office for National Statistics 2014). Thus research which only seeks the opinion of ‘business leaders’ or the ‘corporate elites’ will inevitably lack insight into the nature and benefits of CP from the point of view of the larger part of those engaged in CP activities.

Until relatively recently, this research reflected the process of CP rather well: Corporate giving was predicated on ‘chairman’s choice’ and business leaders bringing their personal philanthropic preferences into the boardroom. As Sargeant and Jay note: “Until the early 1980s corporate giving still owed much to the interests and concerns of chief executives who usually made the final decision on the organisations they wished to support” (2014: p. 252). But the last decade has seen an increasing involvement of employees, including in the selection of charitable beneficiaries. For example, the UK has seen an almost doubling of the use of democratic and devolved procedures involving consultations, staff charity committees and workforce ballots to select – for example ‘charity of the year’-partners (Ribeiro 2011, online) and a similar shift has also been noted in the US context (Mourdoukoutas 2011).

2.2.2 Different drivers: Taking into account the employee perspective

In the broader CSR literature, attention has been paid to the role of employees in CSR, including “bottom up” CSR initiatives driven by employees (Aguilera et al. 2007; Brewis 2004; Chong 2009; Grant 2012; Roza 2016) and CSR organized as a “participative processes” (Maclagan 1999). These studies suggest that focusing beyond the alignment of CSR with core business goals, and paying attention to the benefits of CSR for employees, enables a truly more strategic version of CP to evolve. This is well illustrated by studies showing the benefits of employee engagement in CSR initiatives, most notably in corporate volunteering (CV) programs. For example Liu and Ko (2011) show that the internal and external added value of employee volunteering activities for corporations can be shown through, the “enhance[ment of] a company’s legitimacy in the eyes of its employees” (Liu and Ko 2011: p. 255) as well as signalling to external
stakeholders the companies’ “increased commitment and efforts regarding community involvement” (Liu and Ko 2011: p. 259). These programmes furthermore contribute to Human Resources Management (HRM) goals, as they provide employee training and development, team building and help employees to gain self-esteem and a sense of pride in their regular jobs (Liu and Ko 2011). A decentralised management strategy with freedom for local branches and employees to customize CSR programs to suit local contexts is shown to help preserve the HRM benefits of CSR initiatives (Liu and Ko, 2011).

In another example of the HRM advantages gained by engaged employees in CSR activities, a study of employees at a financial services company in the UK shows that employees’ perceptions of their employer’s CSR activities strongly relate to their organisational commitment (Brammer, Millington, and Rayton 2007). Corporate social performance activities can also serve to signal the corporations social responsibility to potential employees, which is an attractive feature for many in the job market (Greening and Turban 2000), and may decrease employee turnover because employees, and especially female employees, are proud to work for a socially committed employer (Brammer, Millington, and Rayton 2007; Peterson 2004). Further studies confirm this point: Kim et al. (2010) show that employees’ participation and decision making opportunities in CSR initiatives positively relate to employees’ identification with the company, which in turn positively relates to organisational commitment. In a study of DHL’s employee involvement in disaster relief after the Indian Ocean Tsunami in Indonesia, Chong (2009) shows that employees involved in this program experienced stronger identification with DHL’s corporate identity, providing opportunities to signal greater employee commitment and identification. Finally, De Gilder, Schuyt and Breedijk (2005) show a positive relationship between participation in a Dutch financial institution’s employee volunteering program and higher self-reported attitudes towards job performance and attendance.

2.2.3 Employee involvement in CP

In contrast to the wider CSR literature, the CP literature has not paid much attention to the role of employees in CP. Although there are several empirical studies focused on the philanthropic behaviour of employees, such as studies focused on motivations for workplace or payroll giving by employees (Agopy, Christensen, and Nesbit 2012; Carman 2003; Haski-Leventhal 2013; Nesbit, Christensen, and Gossett 2012; Osili, Hirt, and Raghavan 2011; Romney-Alexander 2002), very few have assessed the influence of employee involvement in CP decision making.

In a case study of the United Way—a umbrella organization offering workplace giving programmes—in the Chicago and San Francisco Bay areas, Barman (2007) illustrates the institutional factors that lead some corporations to increasingly include employees’ perspective and choice in CP decision making, while others continue with old fashion ‘top down’ CP decision making. When the corporate elite holds a centralized view on philanthropy, they believe that CP should be organized rationally and effectively by professionals, and employees have very limited say in CP. Whereas when the corporate elite holds a decentralized view on philanthropy, the needs of donors—in this case employees—take precedence and less emphasis is put on meeting direct corporate strategic goals. Here employees are more strongly involved in CP decisions.

Muller, Pfarrer and Little (2014) constructed a theoretical model for CP considering the influence of employees on CP decision making. They state that employees are “important drivers of and participants in corporate philanthropy initiatives from the ‘bottom up’” (Muller, Pfarrer, and Little 2014: p. 1), and that collective empathy at the employee level influences executive CP decisions, infusing their rational CP decision making with emotions, making it less strategic in terms of direct managerial and corporate goals. Supporting Muller, Pfarrer and Little’s (2014) theory of collective empathy are studies by Mize Smith and
colleagues (Mize Smith and Sypher 2010; Mize Smith 2012; Mize Smith 2013). They conducted qualitative studies examining the attitudes and behaviours of different level employees engaged in CP at a financial institution in the US. Among other concerns, they look at how organizational and employers’ philanthropic values and practises influence employees’ attitudes and behaviours towards workplace giving. They find that for both senior and lower level employees it is important that the corporation’s motive for CP is aligned with their “own moral standards of giving” such that CP should primarily be focused on promoting the public good, whilst strategic and profit-maximizing motives should be of secondary interest (Mize Smith 2012: p. 383).

A major concern of business leaders is that employee involvement in CP decision making results in ‘unstrategic’ philanthropy, without focus and diminishing corporate benefits, such as profit maximization, competitive success and reputational value (Barman 2007; Caligiuri, Mencin, and Jiang 2013; Gautier and Pache 2015). Employee involvement in CP does appear to decrease the direct strategic alignment of philanthropy with corporate goals, as Muller, Pfarrer and Little (2014) argue theoretically and Barman (2007) and Mize Smith and colleagues (Mize Smith and Sypher 2010; Mize Smith 2012; Mize Smith 2013) show empirically. Yet, despite the alleged diminishing effect of the achievement of strategic CP goals as a consequence of increased employee involvement, the advantages of increased employee engagement from the HRM perspective should also be taken into consideration, as it is done in the wider CSR and CV literature (Zappalà 2004). This was already argued by Smith in 1994. He stated that CP and employees’ perspective on philanthropy need to be integrated into the overall corporate strategy, using the example of IBM, which by the late 1980s

“had linked its philanthropy and voluntarism explicitly to its human resource strategies. IBM found a number of ways to engage its employees in philanthropic activities through more team volunteerism, broader choices in workplace giving, more input from employees on choice of causes, and more financial support to nonprofits where employees volunteer.” (Smith 1994: p. 111).

We have been able to find only one study that paid specific attention to the HRM benefits of employee involvement in CP programs. In a study on the influence of a code of ethics on CP and organizational and job engagement in the hospitality industry in Korea, Lee et al. (2014) show that firms that pay more attention to ethical issues also employ more CP activities, such as helping the poor and bettering the local community. In turn these CP activities influenced employee engagement and turnover intention. While focusing on the direct strategic benefits of CP, Muller and Kräussl (2011) also illustrate the HRM benefits of CP. In a study of corporate disaster relief after Hurricane Katrina, which caused immense damage along the US’s Gulf Coast in 2005, communication of employee involvement in the CP response to this disaster positively relates to market value of the corporations engaged in CP. Muller and Kräussl (2011) argue this is because employee involvement in CP signals a “sincere” involvement to stakeholders in supporting the cause, and because it signals greater future employee commitment and identification.

The research presented in this paper builds on this past work and presents a qualitative study of shop floor employees’ experience with and engagement in CP decision making related to fundraising in the workplace. It uniquely focuses on an understudied population: lower-status and lower paid employees, and focuses on workplaces where employees are involved in the actual execution of the CP strategy.
2.3 Methodology

This research is primarily based on observational methods used to study the charitable behaviours and attitudes of shop floor staff in ten different work places. These observations lasted a total of 25 hours and took place in regular staff meetings within which fundraising was on the agenda, at specialist charity committee meetings, or in informal settings, such as over coffee in the staff canteen. Observational methods were the most feasible and appropriate way to gather data to answer the research questions by observing naturalistic discussions about fundraising activities. This approach follows that advocated by Silverman (2007) who draws a distinction between ‘manufactured’ data, such as that produced by surveys and interviews, and data gathered in the ‘everyday world’. The methodology of this paper reflects a belief that the latter is appropriate for investigation into topics such as charitable activity that risk generating socially desirable and pre-scripted (albeit unintentionally so) responses (Frank 1996). Distortions in manufactured data are a result of answers reflecting norms about what people believe they are expected to think about that topic in any given society. This method seeks to avoid stimulating formulaic comments and erroneously analysing them as if they were an accurate reflection of the subject, rather than the ‘appropriate script’ expected of people who are occupying the role of an employee engaged in workplace charity campaigns. We also seek to analyse this data in such a way that it is possible to generalise beyond personal experiences towards the broader social behaviours involved in CP to identify the systemic nature and meanings of philanthropic acts to this under-studied population of shop floor workers. In order to gain access to the sample it was necessary to first interact with more senior staff either on the telephone or in a face-to-face meeting, therefore data from these ‘gateway’ interactions was also collected and analysed. In addition to data gathered in the workplaces, one of the researchers attended a conference on Third Sector Corporate Partnerships (TSCP conference) held in London in November 2011, at which notes were taken of both formal speeches and informal conversations with delegates. Some contacts made at this event resulted in access being gained to workplaces.

Anonymity was promised to all companies participating in this research, so they will not be named, but their basic characteristics and the extent of their involvement in the study are described in Table 1. All the workplaces observed are in the South East of England, and the fieldwork took place between August 2011 and May 2012.

Table 1. Basic characteristics of the field work sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Type of company</th>
<th>Total number of shop floor employees interacted with</th>
<th>Total hours of fieldwork</th>
<th>Dominant method for charitable decision-making\a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Retail bank</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>C (staff choose from short list of charities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gambling company</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>C (staff involved in long-listing charities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Energy company</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>B (self-selecting staff committee)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 High street restaurant chain 2 1 A
5 Manufacturing company 2 2 B (self-selecting staff committee)
6 Retail bank 2 3 B (staff consulted ad hoc on potential charities)
7 Educational institution 12 4 A
8 Supermarket 5 3 B (staff can nominate charities)
9 Supermarket 3 3 B (staff member leads on charity fundraising as part of paid duties)
10 Supermarket 4 2 B (staff can nominate charities)

Notes: A = top-down decision-making; B = consultation with shop floor staff; C = some form of democratic decision-making

The selection of workplaces was partly a convenience sample, as getting permission for access was difficult and relied to a large extent on pre-existing contacts. However, supermarkets and retail banks were prioritised as important types of workplaces for this research for three reasons. Firstly, according to the UK Corporate Partnerships survey 2010, supermarkets and banks are the most sought-after corporate partners for fundraising, preferred respectively by 26% and 14% of charities. Secondly, supermarkets are targeted by fundraisers because they offer “wide reach, high profit margins, opportunities for cause-related marketing and customer fundraising” (Ribeiro 2010, p.5). And thirdly, banks are similarly highly prized by fundraisers because, despite the recent run of scandals relating to the banking sector, they remain attractive to charities due to their “profile-raising presence on the high street” (Ribeiro 2011, online).

The qualitative data generated by the study was analysed using a process of open coding. This involved reading and re-reading the transcripts to inductively identify the key themes in the data insofar as they related to the research questions. The process of qualitative coding clearly creates potential for bias, as coding decisions are affected to some degree by subjective interpretations. Efforts were undertaken to ensure objectivity by discussing coding decisions with colleagues with expertise in qualitative methods, and minor modifications in coding were subsequently made as a result of feedback from this process.

2.4 Findings

The findings are discussed in relation to the three research questions.

2.4.1 How are lower level employees involved in decisions related to CP (RQ 1)?

The view of shop floor staff on appropriate charity partners is sought in most of the workplaces studied (8/10), and various forms of consultation and devolved decision-making were described and observed. These included staff being invited to volunteer to attend charity committees where their views could be expressed, as well as three types of more formal processes in which they could (i) nominate charities for consideration; (ii) vote for potential charity partners to be long-listed from which managers made a final decision; and (iii) vote from a short list drawn up by managers. In no case did shop floor staff have a decisive
influence on major charity partnerships, but their views were sought for ‘lower stakes’ CP decisions involving lesser sums of money and corporate commitment. When consultations took place, their extent was restricted by managerial interpretations of ‘the business case’ and initiatives can often be viewed as tokenistic by the staff.

In the companies where the fieldwork took place, CP continues to be primarily driven by a business case as conceived from a managerial perspective, which seeks benefits such as improved company reputation, brand-building in targeted markets and strategic alignment partnerships as chosen by senior managers and the board. Only smaller corporate donations are allocated with any meaningful type of staff involvement, or the destination of funds generated by fundraising rather than from profits.

Willingness to loosen control on the CP budget when the numbers are smaller is revealed in this comment, made during the ‘gateway process’ to gain access to the shop floor in the case of one of the retail banks:

“If we’re investing a large sum, say half a million pounds or more, then we have to think it through and have rigour and be sure we’re leveraging all the value. But if it’s smaller sums we’re more relaxed about it. Our matched funding scheme, where we give a maximum of £250 to any charity, is more a gesture of goodwill to an employee to say: ‘we recognise and support what you’re doing in the community’. It’s not a Big Brother approach, we don’t say ‘here’s £150 for your kid’s football team, now put our logo on their shirts and show us the press cuttings!’” (organisation 5, gateway interview with manager, italics added for emphasis)

When democratic procedures were introduced, the goal of improving staff morale through ‘gestures of goodwill to employees’ is frequently cited, for example, one manager said: “The main aim is to give staff a ‘feel good’ factor” (organisation 8), and another noted: “The value of this stuff is from a [staff] engagement perspective” (organisation 4).

The imperative to engage staff can lead to democratised CP being denuded of cause:

“There was no link to the brand, we just wanted to get everyone engaged... we step back from the choice because at the end of the day we want an engaged workforce who feel good about the company” (organisation 3, gateway interview with manager).

Whilst shop floor staff have other drivers and motivations (see findings below), they do respond to this ‘engagement’ aim, as a shop-floor employee in the same workplace as just quoted says: “Some of this stuff makes me feel proud to be part of the company” (organisation 3).

But managerial explanations of CP are primarily instrumental and focused on achieving company objectives, such as recruiting, developing and retaining good staff, as these comments from senior managers attending the TSCP conference demonstrate:

“When I get a good approach from a charity I think: that sounds like an exciting and inventive way to develop our people”.

“We look to the Third Sector for non-traditional skills development that offer employees meaningful and memorable opportunities”.

Whilst a trend away from ‘chairman’s choice’ and towards more democratic procedures for selecting beneficiaries was apparent, the expectation that CP would serve business objectives remained intact. Even when donations were generated by employee fundraising rather than allocated from profits, managers spoke of being, “directed by a business need to be visually active in certain areas” (TSCP conference). Avoiding dis-benefits was also a managerial concern: “We’re always looking for win-win scenarios. There are certain charities we would steer [the staff] away from, if they were going to cause us [the company] issues” (organisation 3).

For these reasons, the involvement of shop floor staff in selecting charitable beneficiaries was often found to be rather tokenistic and marginal. In organisation 2, a long-list of ten charities is drawn up by a senior manager and presented to staff who can vote to select the short-list of five charities who then pitch to the senior managers who make the final choice. In this scenario, the lower-rung employees have no real say over who is under consideration nor who is ultimately successful. The lack of meaningful involvement in charitable decision-making probably explains why many staff in workplaces that ostensibly seek their opinion, remain unaware of how causes are selected, as this quote shows:

“I’m not fully aware of the process for selecting the charity of the year, it’s just announced and then we fundraise for it.” (organisation 1).

Widening staff participation in CP was sometimes viewed as an end in itself, such that the process of selecting beneficiaries is intended to generate excitement and achieve goals related to staff morale and engagement. One manager’s view that: “It’s the easiest way to give people a bit of a choice and a bit of a voice” (TSCP conference), is echoed in one of the workplaces:

“[Our] measure of success is not on the selection of beneficiaries but on the number of employees who take up the opportunity [to express a charitable choice]” (organisation 1).

In these situations, managers could be slightly dismissive of the resulting charitable choices (for example by labelling them ‘the usual suspects’) and believed that as managers they still retained control, when necessary, over the final decision:

“The shop floor staff make the decisions, but when we started out we did give them a steer... Intuitively they do the right thing.” (organisation 10).

However in some workplaces the shift towards wider control over CP does appear to be more embedded and rationalised:

“Previously this has been a bit ad hoc, where it’s been the branch manager’s interest, whereas now we’ve got a framework... The people who actually make the decision are the people on the shop floor. The people who work on the shop floor tend to live in the local community, so they’ve got a better insight into who the best charities are [whereas] lots of managers generally live farther afield.” (organisation 8).
Credible data on levels of participation in staff votes were not readily available, but where numbers were provided or guessed at, it appears turn-out rates in voting procedures are around 20% or lower. This was not perceived as necessarily problematic by senior management, given the ‘means over ends’ approach described above and also exemplified in this quote:

“Even when people don’t take up the offer to help choose charities, they feel good about the fact that it’s on offer” (organisation 1)

But the data from the shop floor offers an alternative perspective on low participation in consultations. Staff describe being reluctant to participate in decision-making, such as voting for a corporate charity partner, due to issues related to timing, having other workplace priorities and lacking confidence in their ability to make the ‘right choice’, as this exchange during a staff meeting in organisation 1 illustrates:

Hari: “[the email about choosing charities] comes round on a Friday when we’ve just got too much to do, there’s no time to sit down and think about it properly”
Iris: “Yeah, it’s better not to fill the survey in, if you don’t know enough to make good choices”
Hari: “It’s an important decision and you can’t rush it”
Iris: “I’d rather someone picked who knew more about it”

2.4.2 What criteria are involved in CP decision making by lower level employees, in particular in relation to the selection of charitable beneficiaries (RQ 2)?

Consistent with the findings of Nesbit et al (2012), workplace charitable decision-making reflects the personal experiences and preferences of shop floor staff, as a voluntary member of a staff charity committee charged with selecting beneficiaries explains:

“It’s a really difficult question to answer, how we pick which charities get help. It all depends on the individual’s circumstances. If someone has got, say, cancer in their family they have an affinity with that. Children’s charities are always popular – people always want to do things for children” (organisation 9)

This extract from an informal discussion in organisation 10 reflects similar sentiments:

Researcher: “Do you support the same charities in your private life that you vote for your company to support?”
Anna: “I think it’s the same”.
Ben: “Yeah, I’d always pick the one that I felt good about”.
Charles: “I think you make it personal to yourself, don’t you? If someone in your family had cancer then you can relate to that…”
Dawn: “I don’t think we think ‘this is the one that’d be best for [the company] to support’, I think we think: “This is the one I would support”, so I’d vote for that.
Shop floor staff expressed disquiet about the types of causes prioritised by corporate leaders, which were often perceived as less worthy than causes they would choose. A typical comment, reflecting on a major company investment in an arts organisation, was: “Theatre is like a luxury, you can live without a theatre” (organisation 1). In all the workplaces studied it was found that cancer, children and hospices were the causes most frequently mentioned as inspiring the most enthusiastic fundraising efforts amongst the staff, as these quotes further illustrate:

“Lots of people [colleagues] do tend to think of cancer charities – and yes, that’s number one in my book. And childrens’ charities for the obvious reasons.” (organisation 7)

“One of our colleagues unfortunately died in one of the hospices, so the [local] hospice is very close to us. And I’ve banged the drum for [another local] hospice because my father died there. So there is a personal feel for the hospices that we’re trying to raise funds for.” (organisation 6)

Both managers and shop floor staff recognised that widening employee participation in the selection of charitable beneficiaries creates an in-built advantage for certain charities, especially well known ‘big brands’ and those working in areas that enjoy widespread support. A manager commented that, “The [staff vote] is not very fair, the same few charities win them all.” (TSCP conference) and in another workplace a staff member explained that:

“We as individual employees have the chance to nominate, we get a vote as to who we want as our Charity of the Year [and] it’s always a big charity.” (organisation 6).

2.4.3 What, if anything, is distinctive about lower level employees’ CP decision making in contrast to that of business leaders (RQ 3)?

The data shows that shop floor staff seek two important – if apparently contradictory - qualities in the charities they choose to support in the workplace: they must be deadly serious and yet seriously fun. Firstly, the cause must be widely viewed as ‘worthy’ and of relevance to the lives of the majority of colleagues. Then, having selected a cause such as cancer research or a children’s hospice, talk amongst staff turns to their anticipation of the enjoyment involved in the forthcoming fundraising: “Ultimately it’s about having fun” (organisation 1), and the same sentiment in another workplace: “It’s totally fun-orientated” (organisation 10).

Recollections of prior successful workplace fundraising is focused on the fun-factor:

“X charity was fantastic – they had people abseiling down walls and all sorts of things [big smile]. It was great fun” (organisation 6).

As are explanations for why staff get involved in voluntary workplace charity: “Yeah, we all love it. It’s just something to get involved in, isn’t it?” (organisation 9).

This exchange at a staff meeting in organisation 1 recalls the enjoyment of a recent fundraising activity in the workplace:
Jane: “We did a sponsored bike ride where we just had to keep two exercise bikes going in the banking hall all day”

Keith: “It was really good, cos we got a load of the soldiers up from the barracks, didn’t we?” [laughter]

Laura: “But they wanted a go, everyone wanted a go. It was good fun.”

The expectation that workplace fundraising will generate fun and a diversion from the daily monotony of working life was dominant in all the observed workplaces discussions, articulated most vividly in these comments from a woman working in a supermarket:

“You’ve got to make it fun, cos you don’t get many fun days down there, believe me. Down there on the shop floor. You know, it’s hard work. People are working constantly. You know, they come in and do an hour’s shift, lugging boxes, putting things on the shelves, bringing things out of the chillers you know, and they do work hard. So it’s nice to have a bit of fun, you know? I think morale would be really bad if we didn’t, you know, let our hair down.” (organisation 9).

The same woman noted that fun-centred workplace fundraising can achieve an additional desired goal of breaking down barriers between hard-working staff and their customers:

“You go down the chilled meat [aisle], and there’s some guy standing there in a blue wig and some Elton John blue sunglasses. It’s just a bit of fun and the customers love it as well, they comment and they chat to them then, you know.”

The link between fun and charitable activity is reinforced by the inclusion of fundraising in the wider brief of organising workplace social activities. As this woman working in a retail environment explains:

“I’m on the [workplace] social club committee so it’s also my job to keep people interested in things like that – we do theatre trips and days out – it’s just a matter of keeping morale up... We try and get the store involved as much as we can, you know. Everybody. We dress up here. When we do [breast cancer charity] events you’ll see ‘em all with like the pink cowboy hats and the boa feathers and grass skirts and they’ll be sitting on the check-out.” (organisation 10).

Further, the data shows that in addition to creating opportunities for light-hearted fun, workplace fundraising can also subvert - albeit fleetingly – the normal corporate hierarchies. In the name of charity, shop floor staff are empowered to take the lead and request their managers to undertake activities, which can be embarrassing and occasionally painful. For example:

“Last year we had all of our section leaders and half our managers having their legs waxed and chests waxed. [More animated voice] Yeah! It was cool. We were meant to have a waxer come in, but she let me down at the last minute so we let the colleagues come and do it [lots of laughter]. Yeahh! [more laughter]. Some of them had their chests done, some of them had their backs done, some of them had their legs done.” (organisation 9)
The words, tone and laughter in the following exchange demonstrates the importance of managers being willing to humiliate themselves in the service of fundraising. The employee in charge of organising staff fundraising in organisation 9 explains:

Mary: “We’re having some stocks made. I’ve actually just been offered a gunge tank as well, and the managers will go in those. People will pay money to throw stuff at ‘em.”

Researcher: “Will they be willing to do that?”

Mary: “Yeaaaah!! [loud, lively voice]. . . They enjoy it, it’s a bit of fun. Nobody would do it if they didn’t want to. At Easter we all had our faces painted, all the managers were walking round with their faces painted

In organisation 1 shop floor colleagues reminisced about a fundraising activity:

Natalie: “We were at [a local shopping mall], Do you remember? We were running round with a trolley?”

Olive: “Oh my god yeah, going through [the shopping mall] with a trolley, and we had our branch manager at the time, we was dressed up as pirates, wasn’t we?”

Multiple voices: “Yeah”

Pam: “Dressed up as a pirate, in the trolley, and we basically had a bucket [to collect donations]... Bless him. He’ll do anything for charity that bloke, he really will. Once he waxed his legs in the banking hall”

Multiple voices: [lots of noises of agreement and approval, e.g. ‘yeah’]

The reason for employee fundraising being driven ‘from the bottom’ may be pragmatic, as this comment from a manager suggests:

“[Fundraising] tends to be set up and run by people right at the bottom of the organisation. The more senior you are, the less time you spend at your desk, or there’s less time to get involved and can’t promise to be there on a certain day, for example for a cake sale.” (organisation 7)

But there is also a sense in which senior managers consciously loosen their grip in order to achieve the desired objectives of raising morale and building teams:

“We did a charity bike ride, instead of being a boss and their team, all of a sudden we were just ten guys on bikes, riding along, enjoying each others company” (organisation 6)

When hierarchies are temporarily suspended in pursuit of a fundraising goal, wider business benefits can be achieved in terms of building relationships and trust between different tiers of a company, as these quotes show:

“I found myself climbing a mountain with a member of our Executive Committee – the most senior woman in our company! And there was also a new graduate there too. On the trip it didn’t matter if they earn ten times more than you, if they climbed slower then you had to all slow down and go at their speed” (organisation 3)
A final quote from the data shows a staff member in organisation 6 echoing the view that workplace fundraising involves the temporary dissolution of normal corporate hierarchies, with lingering positive effects for the manager-shop floor relationship:

“We do get the senior management along [to the fundraising events]. They all rolled up their sleeves. Barriers are taken down. Everyone turned up in tracksuits and the same [company] polo t-shirts. Our senior management don’t have too many airs and graces about them – you can have a pint in the pub and talk about football.”

2.5 Discussion

In the ten workplaces observed in this study, shop floor employees experienced limited involvement in CP decision making. Most, and especially the more significant CP initiatives, were predominantly decided top down by business leaders, who typically held a centralized view on the purpose of philanthropy. In line with the previous literature on CP and employee involvement in CSR initiatives we find that key objectives of the business leaders for CP were strategic business goals such as improved company reputation, brand-building in targeted markets and strategic alignment partnerships. Business leaders typically limited employee involvement in CP decision making to only smaller CP initiatives with low stakes involved. There employee involvement did result in less strategic CP decisions, as predicted by Muller, Pfarrer and Little (2014) and previously found by Mize Smith (2012). However, this appeared to be not only the consequence of employee emotions and preferences influencing CP decision making as argued by Muller, Pfarrer and Little (2014), but was also facilitated by particular management choices made in the organization of these smaller CP initiatives. The strategic goal of these smaller CP initiatives was deliberately HRM related: to engage staff and increase staff morale, sometimes with goals of facilitating recruitment and retention. In these smaller CP initiatives, business leaders did not seek other strategic outcomes such as reputation, brand-building and strategic partnerships. Building on the work done by Liu and Ko (2011) in relation to employee volunteering activities, we would argue that truly strategic CP incorporates both internal and external strategic goals, and as such involves both business leaders and employee representatives from a range of levels in the ‘strategic’ CP decision making.

This might be challenging, as preferences and goals for CP may differ distinctly between employees and business leaders, as illustrated here in the case of selecting beneficiaries. Shop floor staff prioritized causes based on their personal preferences and experiences, while business leaders prioritized causes based on business considerations, much in line as argued in the theory of collective empathy by Muller, Pfarrer and Little (2014). One of the solutions offered by Muller, Pfarrer and Little (2014) is for business leaders to direct “employees’ attention to some needs and not others” and with this, “executives may try to steer their employees’ empathic desire to help others to be better aligned with the organization’s business objectives” (Muller, Pfarrer, and Little 2014: p. 14). While this may be an attractive option from the business leaders’ perspective, the perceived lack of meaningful involvement might still leave the lower level employees still relatively uninvolved, as illustrated by their responses to exactly these attempts made by the managers in our study. We would thus favour a more democratised and devolved approach, where (representatives of) employees and business leaders make joint CP decisions. We believe that only then can all the benefits ascribed to CP be utilized, including the goals typically perceived as strategic by business leaders such as improved company reputation, brand-building in targeted markets and strategic alignment partnerships, as well as goals related to HRM such as employee identification with the organization, employee engagement, increasing employee morale and impact on recruitment and retention.
### 2.5.1 Lessons for companies when conducting CP

The answer to our third research question can be helpful in understanding how to organize democratised and devolved CP decision making within companies. We asked what, if anything, is distinctive about lower status and lower paid employees’ CP decision making in contrast to that of business leaders? Table 2 provides an overview of the different considerations of business leaders and shop floor staff when making CP decisions..

**Table 2. Determinants of CP decision making by business leaders and shop floor employees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rationale for Charity Choices</th>
<th>Driver for involvement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business Leaders</strong></td>
<td>Appropriate brand alignment (a ‘good fit’) between the charity and the company.</td>
<td>Improving the reputation and credibility of the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A respectable partner with the right image, a proven track record and a professional approach to working with the private sector.</td>
<td>Marketing opportunities to attract and retain customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A strategic partnership offering continuity and potential for a long-term relationship.</td>
<td>Access to HR benefits (staff recruitment, retention and development).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value for money relative to alternative charities and relative to gaining benefits such as staff development opportunities.</td>
<td>Publicity and public relations opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shop floor staff</strong></td>
<td>Similar rationale to charity choices made in personal life.</td>
<td>Supporting causes they personally care about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Based on personal connection with, and experiences of, charities and causes.</td>
<td>Pursuit of ‘having a laugh’, fun and carnival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preference for causes that are easily understood by them, have widespread appeal and are believed to make good use of donations.</td>
<td>Desire to relieve the monotony of working day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preference for well-known charity brands and local charitable organisations.</td>
<td>Subverting normal workplace hierarchies by temporarily asserting shop floor dominance over managers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another relevant finding is that—at least in one workplace—when lower level employees’ are given the opportunity to be involved in CP decision making, they have a lack of confidence in their own knowledge about and abilities to make decisions related to CP, which limits their involvement. When organizing democratised and devolved CP it is therefore important to provide all employees with the relevant knowledge and give them enough time, in order to empower them to make meaningful CP decisions.
2.6 Conclusion

This study underlines the point that, in order to fully understand the drivers and benefits of CP, all the different actors involved in CP need to be considered, and not just the managers and business owners. If a model of democratised and devolved CP decision making is found to be robust and increasingly prevalent, then it has implications for both sides of corporate-charity partnerships. Companies need to better understand how to involve staff in a way that secures greater meaningful participation whilst maintaining the desired core business and HRM benefits, and charities need to better understand the more varied motivations for involvement across the whole company, not just its leadership, and the implications of more diffuse decision-making for their efforts to seek and maintain corporate support.

New and enlarged CP initiatives may seem increasingly unattainable in the current difficult financial climate but companies are still keen to engage with charities, albeit under changing – and arguably more complex - terms of engagement. Whereas the starting point for charities seeking corporate support has traditionally been the Board (Sargeant and Jay 2014), in a democratised and devolved approach to CP decision making the chairman’s endorsement is no longer the only – or best - route to success for charities seeking support from the private sector. Charities can be self-limiting in their focus solely on the owners and senior management (Elischer 1999), yet this paper shows that if their cause can inspire employees and offer enjoyable opportunities then lower status and lower paid staff may well decide to support them.

Big brands have traditionally been preferred CP partners for corporations, as they have usually been best placed to offer and deliver the greatest business benefits when defined from the perspective of business leaders. But giving a wider group of employees a greater voice in corporate charity choices could open the door for different types of causes to secure corporate support, as democratic decision making reflects personal rather than professional imperatives, leading – for example - to more local charities attracting support. But in all cases, it is important to understand how structures operate to influence the selection of charities, because staff decisions will reflect widespread conventions in this area, for example reflecting the normative popularity of cancer research, children and hospices.

Potential limitations of this study relate to problems around access resulting in a convenience sample, lack of spontaneous discussion about fundraising during observations and the possibility that staff felt inhibited about speaking openly in front of the researcher. Also, the results may be particular for the geographical area of observation (South East England) and the timeframe during which the study was conducted (2011-2012). Further research is needed to confirm the findings, and we urge that such studies be undertaken in order to better understand the drivers for philanthropic activity across the entire workforce and in different workplace contexts and countries.

We already knew from previous research that companies and charities have distinct motivations and gain different benefits from engaging in CP. But this article highlights the difference in the philanthropic decisions making process, the drivers for involvement and the experiences of engaging with charity for those at the top and the bottom of workplace hierarchies. In conclusion, this paper finds that there is a strong argument to be made to democratize and devolve CP decision making, in order to be truly ‘strategic’. 
Endnote

1 The banking sector in the UK, as globally, has suffered a sharp downturn in public perception following its role in the global economic crisis that began in 2007, and more recently scandals such as the rigging of Libor rates, revealed in the summer of 2012.

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