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Corporate implementation of socially controversial CSR initiatives: Implications for human resource management

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ABSTRACT

An organization's success in recruiting, selecting, and retaining employees can be attributed, in part, to reactions to a firm's CSR activities. Today, organizations appear to be more frequently pursuing CSR initiatives that are related to social issues. Unlike CSR initiatives which are unrelated to social issues, those that are attached to social causes are more likely to be perceived as controversial. Consequently, how individuals view such actions can impact their perceptions of the firm and may lead to changes in individual behavior. Grounding this work in social identity theory, we explore the effect controversial CSR actions can have on HRM functions. The goal of this effort is to explore and delineate how this shift in CSR may alter the nature of the CSR-HRM relationship and to examine the potential implications for HRM practice. Future directions for research and HRM practice are discussed.

1. Introduction

In today's competitive business environment, consumers, employees, and stakeholders look for companies to not only provide quality products and services but also be responsible corporate citizens (Fuentes-García, Núñez-Tabales, & Veroz-Herradón, 2008; Hess, Rogovsky, & Dunfee, 2002). Consequently, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become standard practice for modern organizations – a powerful statement of who they are and what they stand for. In the broadest of terms, CSR represents a company's moral obligation to both internal stakeholders and external audiences to be responsible in regard to the production of company products, how the company conducts business, and the organization's overall impact on society. CSR encompasses critical firm actions that generally advance some form of social good, beyond simply what is required by law. Often these actions are aimed at building goodwill within the community (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Firms who actively engage in CSR are often rewarded with strengthened brand images (Arendt & Brettel, 2010), enhanced reputations (Brammer & Pavelin, 2006), increased employee commitment (Brammer, Millington, & Rayton, 2007), and improved financial performance (Bučiūnienė & Kazlauskaitė, 2012; Lin, Yang, & Liou, 2009; Porter & Miles, 2013).

Despite this useful conceptualization, the scope of what CSR entails, how it is defined, and the way it is enacted varies substantially between organizations depending on the philosophies, preferences, and personal values held by organizational leadership, employees, and shareholders (Dahlsrud, 2008; Fleming & Jones, 2012; Matten & Moon, 2008; Spence, 2007; Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016). Traditionally, organizations were thought to pursue CSR as a way to satisfy internal stakeholders and improve performance (Bučiūnienė & Kazlauskaitė, 2012). Thus, corporate social initiatives often aligned with organizational values and stakeholder interests, as engaging in actions unrelated to such interests would not be considered beneficial and could negatively affect firm performance (Brammer & Pavelin, 2006; Hess et al., 2002). Contrary to this traditional reasoning, in today's socially charged climate, the

link between CSR initiatives and stakeholder benefit or approval is becoming less clear. Increasingly, organizations have begun to use their CSR to take social actions that may be viewed as controversial. Often, these actions appear aimed at taking a social or political stance rather than trying to align with stakeholder interests. It should be noted that the nature of what social and political issues are perceived to be controversial may shift over time. The controversial nature of and public response to company action is strongly tied to the historical context which surrounds those actions.

Given the potential for misalignment between controversial socially responsible behavior and stakeholder interests, it is possible that controversial actions and stances can impact important organizational and human resources (HR) outcomes in ways that have been previously unexamined. To use the process of recruitment as an example, applicants who strongly support a social issue (e.g., traditional marriage) may negatively view firms that openly voice alternative views (e.g., support for gay marriage). Applicants who have negative views of the firm may avoid applying to work for that firm or may even choose to work for competitors who either share their views or have remained socially neutral. Alternatively, applicants who agree with a firm's social stance may actually be more interested in working for that company. Outside of recruitment, a firm's participation in socially controversial CSR may also have implications for selection, retention, compensation, and organizational ethics.

Overall, organizations spend a sizeable amount of money and resources on CSR initiatives and the maintenance of their reputation in the eyes of the public and their stakeholders (Simon, 1995). For example, according to *Forbes* list of most generous companies, in 2015 alone organizations including Google ($160 million), Walmart ($301 million), Microsoft ($130 million), Goldman Sachs ($276 million), and AT&T ($113 million) made charitable contributions (Preston, 2016). If organizations are to reap theorized reputational benefits from participation in CSR activities, and if these activities are to effectively assist in HR processes, it is imperative that the most recent developments in usage and implementation of CSR be investigated. Thus, the purpose of the present effort is to examine modern developments in the usage of CSR initiatives by organizations and to understand how these shifts impact public perceptions of the firm. This effort also seeks to better understand how the influence of controversial CSR on public perceptions ultimately impacts key HR functions and outcomes. The potential factors influencing this shift in CSR will also be discussed.

2. CSR, HRM, and organizational performance

In discussing the evolution of CSR and its implications for HRM, current research on the relationships between CSR, HRM, and organizational performance must first be clarified. To begin, HRM can be defined as "institutions, discourses and practices focused on the management of people within an employment relationship enacted through networks comprising multiple public and private sectors" (Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016, p.6). As mentioned, CSR initiatives are often tied to HRM and firm performance. For example, companies with more developed strategic HRM policies tend to have stronger CSR policies (Bučiūnienė & Kazlauskaitė, 2012; Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003; van Beurden & Gössling, 2008).

One of the ways that CSR helps firm performance is by working to build a positive corporate image - "a loose structure of knowledge, beliefs, and feelings about an organization. It may be vague or clear, weak or strong. It may vary from person to person, change over time, and differ from one organization to the next" (Tom, 1971, p. 576). In general, when stakeholders are aware of firm CSR, a positive corporate image results, and this positive image is related to higher firm value (Servaes & Tamayo, 2013). Firms with increasingly negative corporate images are likely to suffer in financial performance and lose firm value (Frooman, 1997; Johnson, 2003; Servaes & Tamayo, 2013). For example, following Volkswagen's emission scandal in 2015, the company completely dropped from the Reputation Institute's list of the "Top 100 companies with the best (perceived) CSR reputations in the world" (Strauss, 2016). Overall, the relationship of CSR to a positive corporate image tends to vary with company size, industry, and marketing budget (Arendt & Brettel, 2010).

CSR also works to grow positive corporate image through word-of-mouth advertising and by building customer loyalty (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002). Today's consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the responsible and irresponsible actions taken by organizations (Fuentes-García et al., 2008; Gildea, 1994; Hess et al., 2002; Paul, Zalka, Downes, Perry, & Friday, 1997). Increased awareness of an organization's CSR activities through word of mouth advertising and the media can influence the public's perceptions of and responses to a firm. In fact, in a survey conducted by the New York Times, Smith (1996) found that 88% of consumers considered themselves more likely to purchase goods from companies that they perceived to be socially responsible. Since CSR tends to help firm performance, CSR activities are also likely to benefit shareholders (Hong, Li, & Minor, 2016). Benefits for shareholders further enhance the cyclical benefit of CSR to subsequent firm performance. Given such influence on individual attitudes, and brand image, CSR has been found to influence many HR practices including: recruitment, selection, retention, compensation and the development of organizational culture (Adetunji & Ogbonna, 2013; Greening & Turban, 2000; Gully, Phillips, Castellano, Han, & Kim, 2013; Sharma, Sharma, & Devi, 2009). For example, in relation to recruitment, Backhaus, Stone, and Heiner (2002) found that elements of corporate social performance were positively related to employer attractiveness.

Although these linkages between CSR and HRM appear promising, the measurement of CSR and the effects of CSR on organizational reputation and performance is long-term and often difficult to capture (Carroll, 1991; Graves & Waddock, 1994; Lin et al., 2009; Porter & Miles, 2013; Turban & Greening, 1997). Not only is CSR difficult to measure, but the impact of the relationship between HR and CSR is as well (Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016). To further complicate this issue, the relationship between CSR and HRM appears to be a reciprocal one, whereby CSR can affect HRM practices and HRM practices can affect a firm's choice in CSR (Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016). Although both of these perspectives are potentially interesting in terms of examining the controversial CSR practices, this effort will focus on how controversial CSR effects public views of the firm, and how these views may then impact HR practice. The topic of strategic selection of CSR initiatives by HR lies beyond the scope of this effort.

It could be argued that no matter what link CSR holds with firm performance, CSR is not a traditional HRM function. After all,

HRM is largely focused inwards toward the organization's employees, while CSR is often focused on the external community (Jamali, El Dirani, & Harwood, 2014). Despite this, HRM has recently started to play an increasingly larger role in CSR initiatives. Inyang, Awa, and Enuoh (2011) specifically note that in today's organizations, HR employees are being tasked with "leading and educating employees on the value of CSR, developing responsible and sustainable practices, communicating CSR activities to employees and other stakeholders, and providing direction, control and action plans for implementing the program in the organization." (p.118). The increasing role HRM has in conducting CSR initiatives is largely due to research that supports their integration. Indeed, given their responsibilities in the management of human capital, HRM is well qualified to make valuable contributions to CSR initiatives (Jamali et al., 2014). Some institutions are even beginning to require CSR training as a segment to professional HR education (Voegtlin & Greenwood, 2016). Overall, HR has become so instrumental in directing CSR initiatives with employees that many researchers have begun to investigate the usage and implications of socially responsible HRM (SRHRM) practices as a dimension of CSR (Shen & Benson, 2016).

3. Evolution of CSR implementation

There is some evidence to suggest that the nature of how organizations utilize CSR may be changing. Given the established CSR-HRM link and its influence on firm performance, it is reasonable to conclude that changes to the use of CSR may influence the CSR-HRM relationship. In discussing changes to the use of CSR and its relevance to HRM practices, it is important to first make clear distinctions between traditional usage of CSR initiatives, social issue statements, and socially controversial CSR initiatives. These activities are inherently different from one another in terms of what they require from organizations and the outcomes that they produce.

3.1. Traditional use of CSR

To begin, the conceptualization of CSR has largely been developed over the past 50 years, thus making CSR a relatively new organizational practice (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Carroll, 1999; Carroll, 2008). In fact, the first definition of CSR was introduced by Bowen, 1953 which stated that CSR "refers to the obligation of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (p.6). At the time of Bowen's writing, increased corporate social, economic, and political power led many to question the responsibilities organizations had to society as a whole.

Generally, organizations exist because they provide a good or service to society, and in doing so they are supported by their stakeholders within that society. The term stakeholder encompasses those who have a vested interest in the organization's success (e.g., customers, employees, investors). If organizations are allowed to attain power through the support of stakeholders and general society, it could be suggested that these companies have a social responsibility to these groups and that they should be held socially accountable for their actions (Bowen, 1953; Carroll, 1999). Specifically, it has been suggested that the "social responsibilities of businessmen need to be commensurate with their social power" (Davis, 1960, p.71). Especially in today's information age, people, and governments are increasing their expectations of social responsibility from organizations (Fuentes-García et al., 2008). However, the key question for organizational CSR ultimately remains "what responsibilities to society may businessmen reasonably be expected to assume?" (Bowen, 1953, p.xi). Indeed, the nature of what activities CSR includes continues to shift over time.

Traditional theories suggest that CSR is the product of social responsibility, responsiveness, and business ethics (Epstein, 1987). This traditional view describes corporate CSR behavior from the lens of stakeholder theory, which suggests that organizations are solely responsible to stakeholders, and not to society as a whole. From this perspective, organizations participate in CSR because it is profitable for them and their stakeholders (Abbott & Monsen, 1979; Clarkson, 1995). These stakeholders can be internal (e.g., employees) or external (e.g., investors) to the organization itself. Additionally, the construct of CSR is multidimensional (Berman, Wicks, Kotha, & Jones, 1999), and various stakeholders may be impacted differently by corporate performance on various CSR dimensions. Much of the current literature specifically examines firms' collective performance on corporate social performance (CSP) dimensions such as community relations, product issues, and employee relations (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Backhaus et al., 2002). A prime example of an organization that uses such traditional CSR is the bakery chain, Panera Bread. Every day, each Panera bakery makes a Day-End Dough-Nation in which they donate their leftover bread from that day to local food shelters. This donation initiative is estimated to have a retail value of $500 million since 2010 (Panera, 2014). Panera has also implemented other CSR initiatives that involve toy drives, and fundraising for breast cancer research. As indicated by traditional models of CSR, these CSR actions work to positively influence the organization's brand strength and CSR reputation (Hower, 2015) within the community. Each of these actions presents a relatively neutral cause (e.g., feeding the hungry, helping children) that arguably any average person or stakeholder could easily support. Additionally, specific actions, such as feeding the hungry, are clearly related to the organization's domain of food service.

3.2. Organizations and social movements

Recently, organizations have begun to use CSR not only as a way to contribute to society in stakeholder approved ways, but also as a way to take specific stances on social issues that the firm or firm leaders view as important. Organizations' have a long-standing history of making public statements regarding social issues. The instances where companies make such statements are of interest, because, like CSR, these statements influence brand image and communicate information about company values (Drumwright, 2006).

Traditionally, these statements have been strategically used by organizations, often encompassed under topics like social issues marketing (Simon, 1995) or social campaigns (Drumwright, 2006). For the purposes of the present effort, social issue statements are defined as a public declaration by an individual or organization that indicates a definitive position on a social or political issue (e.g., abortion, immigration, healthcare reform). A distinction should be made between social issue statements presented by organizations who exist for the purpose of advocating for a social cause (e.g., Mothers Against Drunk Driving) and organizations that predominantly serve another purpose (e.g., Amazon, BP) but may choose to become involved in social issues.

Social issue statements are traditionally externally facing, and as such, have often been handled by advertising or public relations departments. These statements have also often been used to promote a specific product or idea. A classic example of this is Coca-Cola's 1971 "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke" ad. This ad features a group of diverse young people on a hilltop, delivering a message of peace and harmony as they sing about the Coke product. Although seemingly innocent, this advertisement was released during the height of the Vietnam war, a time of great unrest in the U.S. The message this ad delivers is about peace and togetherness, which was something that many Americans were fighting for and identified with at that time. In linking the Coke product with movements for peace and the concept of togetherness, Coke helped to build their reputation as a friendly international brand.

This salient example of an organization's strategic use of a social position is far from the only one available. Beginning in the 1930s, Edward Bernay marketed cigarettes to women as "Torches of Freedom" during the time of the women's suffrage movement. Using cigarettes as a symbol of women's emancipation was so effective for the Lucky Strike brand that their market share increased by 200% following the campaign (Haglund & Amos, 2000). Even today, organizations are using controversial social issue statements to improve their image. For example, following a wave of U.S. nationalism in the wake of President Donald Trump's election, companies such as Budweiser, Coca-Cola and Airbnb released socially charged Super Bowl ads which expressed their commitment to multi-culturalism (Maheshwari, 2017). Although not all people viewing these ads will perceive multiculturalism as a controversial issue, some will, and their agreement or disagreement with this social stance will alter their view of those companies.

3.3. Socially controversial CSR initiatives

Due to the controversial nature of social issues, some of the statements made by organizations are likely to be perceived as contentious. Whether or not an issue is contentious to the public and stakeholders depends on the social and political climate in which the statements are made. For example, regulations over environmental protection have become particularly controversial within the last ten years due to concerns related to global warming. In earlier decades, this issue was not as adamantly contested. It is also important to note that social issue statements are specifically labeled as "statements" because they communicate a social or political message but do not necessarily include specific action. A social issue statement that may be controversial only becomes a socially controversial CSR initiative when an organization takes action. For example, Chick-Fil-A has historically maintained a stance against gay marriage. However, these social issue statements were not tied to CSR initiatives until the company took action in 2012 by explicitly donating to an anti-LGBTQ group (Severson, 2012). In terms of its social implications, explicit action taken in promotion of a political stance is inherently different from simply using or presenting socially charged messages.

Although CSR initiatives and social issue statements both work to influence a firm's public image, they are still often explicitly separated within the literature. Harking back to traditional theories on CSR, many researchers assert that organizations work to maintain relationships with stakeholder groups, rather than the general public (Abbott & Monsen, 1979). From this perspective, the effectiveness of social performance in developing corporate social image is defined by stakeholder's perceptions of firm fit with those social issues (Brammer & Pavelin, 2006). In fact, Hillman and Keim (2001) found that firm social participation in issues not explicitly related to stakeholder issues were negatively related to shareholder value.

Despite their separation in the literature, today, more organizations appear to be purposefully introducing CSR initiatives that simultaneously include a social issue statement. These hybrids, often socially controversial statements, appear to reap both the advantages of CSR and the disadvantages of social issue statements. Specifically, socially controversial CSR initiatives help to grow brand strength and communicate organizational values to the public. However, these statements may also receive polarized responses from various community individuals.

One prime example of the complex nature of socially controversial CSR is the mixed attention Starbucks received over their recent pledge to hire 10,000 refugees in the next five years (Hersher, 2017). This action clearly contains both a social responsibility element and a social issue statement. In taking this action, Starbucks is being socially responsible by supporting civilians caught in the crossfire of war (e.g., giving back to the community). However, in their support of refugees, Starbucks is also taking a stance on a social issue with this CSR action. Given the rise of nationalism and political activism in the United States, there has been a great deal of social unrest regarding the topic of immigration. Contrary to traditional theories on CSR, the choice of Starbucks to use this CSR initiative as a method for propagating a social agenda, does not appear entirely beneficial. Although the actions of Starbucks may garner the organization support from certain groups of the population, it is likely to angry many others.

Unless it is specifically demanded by stakeholders, organizations should be under no obligation to support social movements. In the case of Starbucks, this organization is not particularly well known for poor diversity practices, and should therefore feel little pressure to increase their diversity by pledging to hire refugees. If Starbucks wanted to participate in a CSR initiative that involved hiring they appear to have little need to make their choice in CSR initiative a controversial one. Some may argue that this socially controversial CSR action will positively enhance the image of Starbucks with younger generations, women or minorities. Younger individuals tend to be more liberal (Newport, 2014), and arguably more liberal individuals tend to be more supportive of refugees. In addition, women and minorities are particularly responsive to diversity-related CSR (Greening & Turban, 2000). If Starbucks has the primary objective to improve their image with younger individuals, women, or minorities, this socially controversial CSR action is

likely to help. However, it could also be argued that an equal, less socially charged, CSR action would have produced the same results without distancing certain factions of the potential market. For example, in 2013 Starbucks committed to hiring 10,000 veterans and military spouses by 2018 (Kell, 2017a, 2017b; Starbucks, 2017). This CSR initiative is highly synonymous to the company's refugee initiative, yet it does not include a controversial social issue statement. Unlike the refugee CSR initiative, hiring veterans should work to enhance the organization's social appearance overall.

If traditional, non-controversial, CSR actions (e.g., veteran support) are more likely to benefit an organization's brand image with the general population than socially controversial CSR initiatives (e.g., refugee support), it remains unclear why organizations would choose to participate in socially controversial CSR at all. Unlike traditional CSR initiatives, socially controversial CSR initiatives are contentious in nature and not always a useful impression management tactic. Any use of a social issue statement by an organization is potentially a double-edged sword in terms of the salient implications for brand management. Naturally, social issues have opposing sides to them. In choosing a "side" through the implementation of socially controversial CSR initiatives, firms might alienate consumers and employees who disagree with their stance.

Overall, the idea that organizations are generally becoming more socially responsible due to increased visibility and pressures from internal (employees) and external (customers, stakeholders, governmental legislation) sources is not new (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi, 2007; Backhaus et al., 2002; Fuentes-García et al., 2008). However, there is a fundamental difference between completing more CSR activities that align with stakeholder interests and choosing to complete CSR initiatives that are likely to be perceived as controversial. Organizations have an infinite number of options when it comes to choosing what issues to devote organizational attention to and what specific CSR actions to take. No organization chooses CSR actions that are likely to be controversially received due to a lack of alternatives. Companies explicitly choose to implement socially controversial CSR actions.

4. Implications for HRM

Undoubtedly, more firms are starting to enact CSR initiatives that are potentially controversial. The controversial nature of these CSR initiatives is likely to influence how individuals perceive firms and their values. What remains uncertain, is if these initiatives somehow benefit or harm organizations and HR in ways that have not been previously considered. Today, HR is more frequently taking on a role in the development and implementation of CSR initiatives (Inyang et al., 2011; Jamali et al., 2014). If HR is to play a role in CSR, it is important to understand the evolution in the usage of CSR functions within organizations, and how this functioning relates to HR practices.

4.1. Employee recruitment and selection

In general, the use and implementation of most CSR initiatives have a variety of implications for HRM. To begin with, CSR can be an effective tool for attracting job candidates and strengthening a firm's competitive advantage (Adetunji & Ogbonna, 2013). As discussed, CSR effects organizational brand image (Arendt & Brettel, 2010). This CSR image then influences organizational attractiveness (Backhaus et al., 2002) and ultimately applicant job pursuit intentions (Rupp, Ganapathi, Aguilera, & Williams, 2006; Rupp, Shao, Thornton, & Skarlicki, 2013) and decisions (Collins & Stevens, 2002).

Broadly, companies that participate in CSR initiatives are more likely to be labeled as "good" companies. If an applicant is accepted by what they consider to be a "good" organization, then the applicant is likely to feel an enhanced sense of self-worth and self-esteem based on the belief that they too must be "good". Especially for those who value ethics or have a strong moral identity, being part of a socially responsible company may even help them to maintain a favorable social identity (Rupp et al., 2013). Dutton and Dukerich (1991) specifically found that social actions taken by the Port Authority of New York not only influenced corporate image, but the self-images of the organization's employees as well. Based on the Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model and social identity theory, when seeking employment applicants look for and apply to companies they view favorably and generally want to work for. Specifically, ASA theory presents a cyclical model whereby employees are attracted to, selected, and leave a company based on their personality and value match to others in the organization (Schneider, 1987). Over time, this cyclical process results in a more homogeneous workforce. Furthermore, social identity theory suggests that employees are overall more likely to self-identify with organizations that participate in CSR, and this will affect employee's attraction, retention, commitment and motivation (Brammer et al., 2007; Peterson, 2004).

In addition to the ASA model and social identity theory, signaling theory suggests that the CSR actions organizations choose to take, whether traditional or socially controversial, communicate information about the organization's values to the public and the organization's stakeholders. It has been shown that communication of an organization's societal and environmental values influences applicant perceived fit, attrition, and job pursuit intentions (Gully et al., 2013; Schneider, 1987). Today, applicants tend to assess fit by reviewing firm characteristics in relation to their individual needs and values (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014). In addition to seeking out organizations that meet their instrumental, relational, and certainty needs, today's applicants may also be looking for companies that align with their moral and ethical values (Bauman & Skitka, 2012; Rupp et al., 2013; Rupp & Williams, 2011; Rupp, Williams, & Aguilera, 2011).

Ideally, increased public awareness of an organization's values through the use of CSR will have a positive influence on individual perceptions of a company. However, this assumes that the companies' voiced values align with the values of the individual. Given the controversial nature of many social and political issues, socially controversial CSR statements tend to spark passionate opinions among those who are socially and politically sensitive. Those who agree with the social stance promoted by socially controversial CSR actions are likely to view the acting organization more favorably than if the CSR had been devoted to a less controversial topic.

Given that the number of organizations using CSR has increased (Aguilera et al., 2007; Fuentes-García et al., 2008), today's applicants may be less impressed by traditional CSR initiatives. Considering the current social climate in the U.S., applicants may be more excited by companies that work toward social change. Any company can raise money for cancer awareness. It is far more striking for an organization to take a stance on a social issue and then to take action on that position using CSR initiatives. If an applicant agrees with the social stance a firm takes by using controversial CSR initiative, that applicant may more strongly identify with the organization and perceive greater social identity fit with expressed corporate values. Organizational identification is defined as the process by which individuals develop and perceive a sense of unity and belongingness to an organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970). Perceptions of greater fit and stronger identification may then lead applicants to seek out positions within companies who participate in controversial initiatives that they care about. Perceived fit has been found to be the strongest predictor of applicant attraction (Uggerslev, Fassina, & Kraichy, 2012). Strategic use of both traditional and socially controversial CSR may help organizations to attract and retain vital talent.

Proposition 1. For applicants who support the initial social stance taken, socially controversial CSR actions will be viewed more favorably and result in more positive perceptions of fit than traditional CSR actions or social issue statements will alone.

Proposition 2. When recruiting new employees, a firm's choice of CSR initiative will narrow the applicant pool. Specifically, the applicant pool for companies who consistently participate in controversial CSR initiatives will be more restricted than those who participate in traditional CSR initiatives alone.

4.2. Recruitment and selection of millennials

There is reason to believe that millennials may respond differently to CSR activities than individuals in older generations. For example, research suggests that the current millennial generation is more attracted to organizations who participate in CSR and emphasize a psychologically healthy workplace that takes into account their values (Catano & Morrow Hines, 2016). Applicants who strongly self-identify with a particular cause or social issue may be more likely to seek out organizations who demonstrate similar values through CSR actions. If an organization is looking to hire new, young talent, it might be beneficial for that organization to take a more deliberate stance on social issues.

Younger individuals are especially more likely to have consistent access to social media and the news via the internet. Research conducted by the Pew Research Center and the American Life Project suggests that 93% of teens and young adults between the ages of 12 and 29 use the internet (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). This is compared to the 81% of adults aged 34–39 and 70% of adults aged 50–65 who use the internet (Lenhart et al., 2010). In addition, 72% of internet users who are 18–29 use social networking sites in comparison to the 39% of internet users aged 30 and above (Lenhart et al., 2010). More consistent usage of the internet may give these millennials and teens an increased awareness of both social movements and corporate CSR actions. In general, it is becoming increasingly more common for individuals to use social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) to share social and political content. In 2012, 38% of social network users indicated that they had promoted social or political content by "liking" it, 33% had reposted social or political content others had shared, and 31% had specifically used social media to encourage others to act on a social or political issue (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012). Such findings suggest that a reasonable proportion of those who use social media are aware of and participate in the propagation of social and political information. In addition to social and political content, it appears that social media users are also communicating about companies and CSR online. For example, after the announcement of their refugee hiring initiative, Starbucks received social media backlash from Twitter users who employed the hashtag #boycottstarbucks (Kell, 2017a, 2017b). Other companies who have experienced similar social media attacks include Kellogg, and PepsiCo (Kell, 2017a, 2017b). Although, it should be noted that these boycotts are often short-lived, and the total impact such public social media responses have on millennial individual's perceptions of the firm and of firm values remains unknown (Bolton et al., 2013). Given the contentious nature of socially controversial CSR actions, these initiatives are likely to get more media attention and to become particularly salient for those highly attached to the media. If an applicant is more aware of company CSR initiatives, these initiatives will be more likely to influence their perceptions of fit.

The current workforce is also becoming more mobile (Sullivan, 1999), and in the US specifically, it is becoming more common for younger individuals to live at home or to be partially supported by parents or relatives later into their lives (Fry, 2017). When looking for a job, young applicants today may also have more time and more resources to shop around for an organization where there is high perceived fit. Furthermore, there is some research to indicate that individuals (consumers, applicants, employees) with fewer choices will not be as impacted by organizations' CSR reputations (Albinger & Freeman, 2000). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017), the unemployment rate in the U.S. has dropped from 10% to 4.7% since the 2008 recession. Today's applicants may have more job choice than they had previously. This may allow people to be more selective when choosing a company to work for or to buy from. This point may be especially pertinent for millennials who may not have been in the workforce during the time of the recession. Although, it should be noted that not all applicants will have these luxuries. Those with lower socioeconomic status are potentially more concerned with having a job, than on evaluating an organization based on its CSR communicated social values. The perception of fewer choices may lead these individuals to disregard CSR information (Albinger & Freeman, 2000). Similarly, those lower in SES are more likely to have inconsistent access to the internet or other news outlets. It should also be noted that some of the characteristics possessed by millennials which may lead them to be more aware of and respond differently to firm CSR may also apply to Generation Z (e.g., increased social media use, support from parents). Those individuals who compose Generation Z were born roughly between 1997 and 2013. Based on the age of individuals in this generation, it can be assumed that most of Generation Z has

yet to enter the workforce. Given the changeable nature of economic climates which effect CSR perceptions and the limited research that has been conducted on the work preferences of those within this generation, the focus of this effort will be on millennials rather than their younger successors.

Proposition 3. CSR initiatives will have a greater impact on the perceptions of fit for those in the millennial generation in comparison those in older generations.

Proposition 4. For those in the millennial generation, perceptions of fit will be more strongly influenced by socially controversial CSR actions than by traditional CSR actions.

4.3. Employee retention

Along with recruitment and selection, shifting CSR initiatives may also have an impact on employee retention. Theories of organizational support (Kurtessis et al., 2017) and organizational identification (Lee, Park, & Koo, 2015) suggest that socially controversial CSR may lead consumers, and current and potential employees to feel more supported by the organization. For example, Company X donates to a charity who helps children with cancer. This is a traditional CSR cause that most people can support, and feel generally positive about. Company Y donates to Planned Parenthood because the CEO is a women's rights advocate. Now Company Y is giving back to the community, while also promoting women's rights. For those who strongly value women's rights, not only is Company Y a good company, but they are working to fight the same social fight as the average feminist. Those who identify with this social cause may see Company Y as a better fit for their employment and consumer loyalty than Company X. Employees, millennials especially, want to make an impact through their work (Gully et al., 2013; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Current employees are likely to feel more supported by organizations who fight for social causes that they value or fight for themselves.

According to social identity theory, we define ourselves based on our group membership and then work to increase our self-esteem by comparing our group to other (usually lesser) groups (Stets & Burke, 2000). Being a part of a company that actively participates in social issues that an employee cares about may make that employee feel positively about themselves and about the organization. This increased pride may lead to greater organizational identification, commitment, and more organizational citizenship behaviors (Shen & Benson, 2016). Furthermore, employees may feel more pride in interviewing with or working for companies that support social causes that they care about. Ultimately, the culmination of these positive feelings toward the organization is likely to increase retention. This assumes of course that a firm's participation in CSR is not to the detriment of that particular employee (Shen & Benson, 2016).

As it relates to social dichotomization, liberal employees may also find organizations that participate in socially conservative CSR activities to be embarrassing to work for, and they may choose to leave those companies. Similarly, conservative employees may find companies who participate in socially liberal CSR activities equally unappealing. Applicants and employees generally anticipate pride from joining and working for their employer (Jones et al., 2014). Especially for those who hold strong political opinions, working for an organization that goes against their social views may degrade their social status among friends and peers. This is supported by Moral Foundations Theory which suggests that individuals develop left or right wing views based on adaptations, which inform personal narratives (Haidt, Graham, & Joseph, 2009). Continuing to work for an organization that goes against one's moral and social beliefs may harm one's self-narrative. In order to avoid harming one's self-narrative, employees may choose to leave companies that participate in socially controversial CSR initiatives that go against their social values.

Proposition 5. Employees who support the initial social stance taken, will feel more supported by organizations that participate in socially controversial CSR initiatives than organizations who only participate in traditional CSR initiatives. These enhanced feelings of support will lead to greater employee retention.

Proposition 6. Employees who support the initial social stance taken, will have stronger identification with and commitment to organizations that participate in socially controversial CSR initiatives than organizations who only participate in traditional CSR initiatives. These enhanced feelings of identification and organizational commitment will lead to greater employee retention.

4.4. Organizational ethics

Along with growing involvement in CSR, HR is also becoming more highly involved in organizational ethics. In the past two decades, ethical misconduct has become an increasing concern (Treviño, den Nieuwenboer & Kish-Gephart, 2014). Although seemingly different, organizational ethics and CSR tend to go hand in hand. For example, the successful implementation of both CSR and ethics initiatives require management buy-in. One theory on ethical culture is that it is spread by ethical leaders (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Unethical leaders (e.g., Enron's CEO Jeffery Skilling) tend to propagate lack of concern for ethics, which often leads an organization to perform unethically (Sims & Brinkmann, 2003). HR contributes to the development of responsible leadership, and this leadership then leads to CSR (Gond, Igalens, Swan, & el Akremi, 2011). Some research has even gone as far as to suggest more of an organizational focus on societal human resource development (SHRD). SHRD specifically focuses on "making long lasting contributions to CSR, sustainability, and ethics through its capacity to question a continual focus by organizations on efficiency and performance" (Garavan & McGuire, 2011, p. 487).

It has been suggested that CSR helps to facilitate ethical behavior through the attraction of ethical employees. Applicants who value morality or see ethics as a priority are likely to look favorably on CSR and to select into organizations that they deem to be

socially responsible (Rupp et al., 2006; Rupp et al., 2013). Organizations are expected to be both proactive and reactive in being responsible for themselves and their impact on the public. For example, Exxon's negligence prior to the Valdez oil spill lacked proactivity and was deemed socially irresponsible both by the federal government and the public (Kohn, 2000). Proactive CSR actions, such as promoting environmental clean-up, are a convenient way to publicly signal that a company is making strides to be ethical. Employees generally want to work for organizations that they perceive to be morally "good" (Rupp et al., 2006). For many people, an assessment of how "good" an organization is, includes a review of their perceptions of an organization's ethics. Using proactive CSR to signal an organization's ethical priorities can lead applicants who value morality to self-select into an organization. In conjunction with HR facilitated ethical leadership, the cycle of CSR and self-selection may ultimately lead to a more ethical organizational culture. A more ethical organizational culture means less spent on legal fees and higher organizational performance.

Even though all types of CSR initiatives tend to attract those who more strongly value morality (Rupp et al., 2006, 2013), applicants may be less attracted to organizations that are perceived to be too extreme or radical. Due to their tendentious nature, controversial CSR initiatives may lead organizations who participate in them to be perceived as more extreme. Such perceptions may turn away relatively moral applicants who are ambivalent to the social issue at hand or do not agree with the company's stance. Those who do agree with and seek out firms who use CSR for social advocacy may have more extreme moral and social views than the average applicant. Overall, the consistent use of controversial CSR initiatives and self-selection by those with aligning social values may lead to the development of a highly niche workforce in terms of social, political, and moral values. However, these effects may be mitigated by the ratio of firm participation in controversial CSR initiatives compared to traditional CSR initiatives. It appears unlikely that one controversial CSR initiative will have as strong of an impact on the homogeneity of a firm's workforce if that firm is also involved in many traditional CSR initiatives.

Proposition 7. Firms that consistently participate in controversial CSR will develop a more socially, politically, and morally homogenous workforce than firms who do not utilize controversial CSR.

Proposition 8. Firms that consistently participate in controversial CSR will attract employees with more extreme social and political views. This attraction will lead to the development of a workforce that on average has more extreme moral, social and political values when compared to the workforce of firms that only participate in traditional CSR.

4.5. Organizational communication

The success of any CSR initiative relies on the organization's public communication of that initiative. If people don't know about the CSR initiative or information about the initiative is incorrectly presented, the anticipated long-term positive effects of CSR for HR and for firm performance may not be realized (Servaes & Tamayo, 2013). Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen (2010) specifically note that a variety of factors including message content, communication channels, and other stakeholder factors can influence the effectiveness of CSR initiatives. In presenting CSR initiatives, lack of communication, communication that is inadequate, or communication of information via ineffective channels, may communicate the wrong information to the public and attract the wrong stakeholders.

Communication may be particularly important for socially controversial CSR initiatives, which by nature have a higher likelihood of being poorly received or misconstrued by the general public. For example, a firm's choice to run a toy drive for children may require less explanation and strategic communication to result in positive outcomes than a firm's donations to Planned Parenthood. Additionally, in order for any CSR initiative to be effective, both organizational leaders and employees will need to genuinely support or buy-into the initiative. Akgeyik (2005) specifically found that communication with employees works to enhance the overall effectiveness organizational CSR. Given their role with human capital, HR is uniquely equipped to structure the internal communication of CSR initiatives. As Inyang et al. (2011) indicate "the HR professional can serve as a veritable channel or source for effectively communicating CSR activities to employees and the public or community" (p. 123). If HR continues to take on a larger role in CSR development and implementation, it will be vital that HR also works to communicate these initiatives effectively.

Proposition 9. The relationship between CSR initiatives, HR practices, and organizational outcomes will be moderated by the amount and appropriateness of organizational communication regarding the CSR initiative. This mediation will be stronger for controversial CSR initiatives in comparison to those that are not controversial.

4.6. Compensation

Compensation is another key HR function that is likely to be impacted by a firm's choice of CSR initiative. To begin, a broader understanding of compensation must first be examined. For employees, compensation is multifaceted in that it may include the exchange of skills and time for a wide variety of benefits. According to social exchange theory and work on the psychological contract, employees generally maintain exchange relationships with their employing organizations using three currency types, which include economic (e.g., money, tangible benefits), socioemotional (training opportunities, job security), and ideological (e.g., opportunity to be a part of a broader social purposes) currencies (Blau, 1964; Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). Of these, ideological currency is perhaps the most relevant to the discussion of CSR. Ideological currency involves a covenantal exchange whereby organizational participation in social causes that the employee's values are exchanged for employee's commitment to and participation in an organization's social causes (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). Often, employees who experience an exchange of ideological currency may see themselves as contributing to something bigger than themselves or to a higher set of overarching values (Graham &

Organ, 1993; Thompson & Bunderson, 2003; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwatz, 1997).

Arguably, CSR actions on the part of the organization are likely to fall within the exchange of ideological currency, given that these initiatives often include contributions to broad social causes. Employees who work for an organization that participates in CSR or those that are given the opportunity to participate in a firm's CSR initiatives may feel that they are able to participate in a broader social calling. Companies who choose to participate in CSR actions may be able to fulfill employee's personal ideological and value related needs that extend beyond those that are strictly monetary. Although monetary compensation is the most traditionally discussed form of compensation, the other, intangible, forms of socioemotional and ideological currency are also likely considered by individuals are choosing to accept or to remain in a position. As many researchers have begun to suggest, people are not only motivated by extrinsic monetary compensation (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Sorauren, 2000). Although, it should be noted that the literature on covenantal exchange, ideological currency, and their presence within different job sectors is still developing. One recent study does suggest that both white-collar (29%) and blue-collar (38%) demonstrate expectations for covenantal exchange through the use of ideological currency (Krause & Moore, 2017). Such findings suggest that that many employees and potential applicants may recognize and care about the opportunity for covenantal exchange with their employing organization, but not all will.

Those employees who do pursue the attainment of ideological or other value related currency are, by nature, motivated by intrinsic, rather than extrinsic motivations (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). According to self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation leads to increased employee performance (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Individuals are likely to be more intrinsically motivated to do work when they believe they work for a good company that values social causes they care about. Firms can work to demonstrate such values through deliberate use of CSR initiatives. It is well known that companies allocate a sizeable portion of their budget to compensation and that HR is primarily responsible for handling this allotment. For the same amount of compensation, a firm highly involved in CSR may be able to get more profitable work from employee's due to increased intrinsic motivation, than organizations that are not as involved in CSR. This additional work may come in the form of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), which help to enhance organizational functioning (Organ, 1997; Rupp et al., 2013), or in the form of unpaid overtime. Dolan (1997) even found that in a sample of 2,100 MBA students, over half the students would be willing to accept a lower salary in order to work for a socially responsible organization. When it comes to compensation, companies who participate in CSR may be getting more "bang for their buck".

Furthermore, the use of socially controversial CSR initiatives may have implications for compensation beyond that of traditional CSR initiatives. Overall, controversial CSR initiatives are likely to incite stronger reactions than traditional CSR initiatives. According to social identity theory and moral foundations theory, applicants may place a greater personal and social value on working for and identifying with a company that advocates for social issues through the use of controversial CSR. For example, a gun rights activist may place a greater personal value and receive more social benefit among peers by working for a company that donates to the National Rifle Association (NRA) than they would work for a firm that donates to the Childhood Autism Foundation. Kim, Lee, Lee, and Kim (2010) specifically found that employee's perceptions of firm CSR actions and their organizational commitment was mediated by perceived external prestige (PEP). Generally, employees felt more committed to organizations who participated in CSR that was perceived well by those outside of the organization. Those who strongly agree with a firm's controversial CSR actions may perceive there to be greater social benefits from working for that firm. Greater social gain and personal value attachment may push some individuals to work harder for their company or to make greater monetary compensation compromises in order to work for that company.

Proposition 10. Applicants who support an organization's stance on a social issue, will be willing to accept a lower salary in order to work for an organization that participates in socially controversial CSR compared to an organization that only participates in traditional CSR. This relationship will be moderated by the value the employee places on the receipt of ideological currency.

5. Conclusions and directions for future research

Before discussing the contributions of this effort to the current literature, it is first important to note a few areas for pondering. To begin, the propositions presented are theoretical. Although efforts were made to support these proposals through the discussion of past research and theory, empirical data is scant will be needed in order to elucidate stronger support of these ideas. Additionally, the majority of the examples presented throughout this manuscript are U.S. based. It is uncertain if the ideas presented here will hold for organizations in different countries. Similarly, many of the propositions regarding individual responses to CSR are largely dependent on economic status and are likely influenced by individual differences (e.g., concern for social issues).

Despite these limitations, the present effort contributes to the current literature by opening a discussion about corporate usage of potentially controversial CSR initiatives, and by discussing the implications of these initiatives for HR practices. Although much research looks at the link between CSR initiatives, HR, and firm performance, many assume that the responses to CSR are generally positive or neutral. Little research works to examine how the controversial nature of some CSR initiatives may result in strongly negative or strongly positive responses from the public and how these responses may fundamentally change the relationship of CSR to HRM and ultimately firm performance. Arguably, such strong reactions to CSR are conditionally dependent on the political and economic environment. However, the current trends of increasing political division and activism in the US may yield a prime opportunity for organizations and HRM to more closely examine public responses to CSR actions and what they mean for their workforce.

Traditional theories of CSR claim that organizations complete CSR to serve their stakeholders. If these traditional theories are to remain unadjusted, researchers need to better understand how the current trends in CSR fit into these theories. Additionally, it is

known that traditional CSR and HRM are connected, often positively. If the impact of controversial CSR on HRM practice is inherently different than that of traditional CSR initiatives, more research also needs to examine how these trends impact the functioning of HR. For example, it would be useful to understand whether potential applicants are in fact willing to make compensation trade-offs for companies that participate in socially controversial CSR. If applicants are willing to make such trade-offs, is there a limit to how socially controversial organizations can be? Furthermore, public perception and organizational usage of CSR appear to vary in conjunction with economic trends. Generally, when the economy is performing better people take more effort in associating themselves with socially "good" organizations. More research needs to be done in mapping out these trends. Overall, more well-rounded knowledge of how various types of CSR initiatives are being chosen, implemented, and perceived will provide organizations and HRM managers more clarity in the strategic use of CSR initiatives.

Today, HR is often being asked to play an increasing role in the development and implementation of CSR initiatives. If HR continues in this role, HR managers should work to make CSR initiatives productive for both firm performance and of HR practices. Broadly, if the perceived controversial nature of CSR initiatives influences the ability of HR to effectively conduct key functions, more needs to be done to better understand the mechanisms underlying firm usage of these CSR actions. Corporate usage of socially controversial CSR may be particularly relevant to the processes of attraction, recruitment, selection, and retention. However, it is worthwhile to investigate the impact of socially controversial CSR practices on other HRM functions. Furthermore, research should be conducted to investigate the influence of media use and generational differences on the functional use of controversial CSR in organizations. In addition, it remains unclear what specific environmental or social influences may lead organizations to participate in controversial CSR, rather than more traditional forms of CSR which are likely "safer". More research needs to investigate the mechanisms underlying the CSR choices forms make, and how these choices effect HR practice.

Overall, the types of CSR initiatives that a firm chooses to participate in are likely to influence public perceptions of that firm, and these perceptions have the potential to influence the ability of HR to recruit, select, and retain employees. When compared to non-controversial CSR initiatives, it appears that controversial CSR initiatives have the potential to impact public perceptions and behaviors in inherently different ways than have been previously considered. For example, firm participation in controversial CSR initiatives may restrict their available applicant pool rather than widen it. Given the potential for CSR to influence HR practices and its relationship to firm performance, HR may have a vested interest in becoming more involved with a firm's CSR choices. Furthermore, in order to be most effective, HR may need to have a central role in the development and maintenance of CSR initiatives.

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