Can Employees Contribute to Initiating CSR? The Moderating Role of Promotion Focus between Employees’ Persuasion Knowledge and Voice Behavior

Kyungyeol Kim, Indiana University Bloomington
Kevin Byon (Advisor), Indiana University Bloomington

Management - CSR (Professional Sport)  
Poster  
Abstract 2017-196  
Friday, June 2, 2017  
1:50 PM  
Room: Sopris

There is a growing consensus that corporate social responsibility (CSR) plays a pivotal role in not only improving the qualities of people’s lives but also in benefitting organizations in various ways (Kotler & Lee, 2008). Although extensive empirical research in sport management literature has well-documented the consequences of CSR (e.g., Inoue & Kent, 2012; Walker & Kent, 2009), relatively little attention has been paid to how employees can be encouraged to become involved in CSR activities. The current study addresses this gap by highlighting the factors influencing employees’ voice behaviors regarding CSR activities. The purpose of this article is to explore the role of promotion focus as a moderator in the relationship between employees’ persuasion knowledge and voice behavior. By doing so, we offer a better understanding of the mechanism by which employees voice CSR despite their pessimistic perceptions of the social activities.

In CSR literature, a number of researchers have highlighted the significant role of employees becoming involved in CSR activities (e.g., Anagnostopoulos, Byers, & Shilbury, 2014; Babiak, 2010) by stressing the need for employees to be engaged in decision-making processes. This is because employees’ presence positively affects decision quality and organizational performance (Argote & Ingram, 2000), implying that employees have sufficient influence and enough legitimacy to sway the policies of their organizations. Therefore, we posit that employees will influence organizations in conducting CSR.

Consistent with the definition of altruism, CSR has been recognized as a key area of research. However, arguments have been raised as to how and whether CSR might trigger stakeholders’ disbeliefs and doubts about a firm’s integrity, and thus skepticism toward business is increasing (Vanhamme & Grobben, 2009). Despite the prevalence of stakeholders’ skepticism toward organizations’ social actions, a paucity of research has been conducted to examine the consequences of CSR (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). As such, it is necessary to examine the consequences of stakeholders’ negative perceptions of CSR. In the current study, persuasion knowledge was adopted to help explain employees’ negative perceptions of CSR. Persuasion knowledge refers to people’s ideas and knowledge developed over time to cope with persuaders’ (e.g., advertisements or friends) tactics, motives, and strategies intended to influence them (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Persuasion knowledge is activated when people perceive that persuaders’ hidden motives and opportunistic self-interests are salient, resulting in the persuaders having less favorable awareness (i.e., that they are manipulative and insincere). The focus of the current study is on employees’ inferences regarding the extent of their accumulated persuasion knowledge of sport teams’ CSR.

Promotion focus, which is defined as goal-focused tendencies that emphasizes individual growth, success, and achievement (Higgins, 1998), was suggested to serve as a moderator that can alter the negative effect of persuasion knowledge on voice behavior to a positive one. The rationale for this proposition is that even if people recognize the ulterior persuasion motive, they can be still influenced by other external sources despite their activated persuasion knowledge (Hamilton, 2003). Furthermore, when making decisions about whether to speak up vis-a-vis CSR, employees under promotion focus expect positive outcomes (i.e., the social activities help draw and secure sponsors) (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009) regardless of their levels of persuasion knowledge. Thus, we postulated that employees with promotion focus dispositions tend to engage in voice behavior regardless of their levels of persuasion knowledge because of their risk-taking characteristics. Based on a review of the previous studies, three hypotheses were developed, such that the negative effect of persuasion knowledge on voice behavior (H1), the positive effect of promotion focus on voice behavior (H2), and the positive interaction effect of persuasion knowledge and promotion focus on voice behavior (H3).
Data were collected from an inaugural workshop organized by the Korean Professional Sports Association (KPSA), which is the governing body that oversees all five Korean professional sports leagues that are comprised of 67 professional sport organizations. The participants in the workshop were current employees whose rankings were from frontline employees to general managers of various Korean professions sport organizations. As a result, 168 participants answered the questionnaires during the two-day workshop. A moderated multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses. While controlling for a number of variables (i.e., education, age, work status, job position, tenure, types of sports, and prevention focus) to rule out alternative confounding effects, the results indicated that persuasion knowledge had a marginally negative effect on voice behavior ($B = -0.103, p < .10$), and promotion focus had a significantly positive effect on voice behavior ($B = 0.319, p < .001$). These results confirmed H1 and H2. Moreover, the unstandardized regression coefficient of the interaction term (i.e., persuasion knowledge \times promotion focus) was found to be statistically significant, indicating that there was a significant positive interaction effect on voice behavior. More specifically, the $R^2$ change after the inclusion of the interaction term explained the additional 3.6% of variance in voice behavior, and it was statistically significant ($DR^2 = 0.036, p < .05$), supporting H3.

Overall, this research contributes to the body of CSR literature. First, previous studies focused primarily on the outcome effects of what benefits organizations might yield in exchange for CSR, leaving an important question remains unanswered: How can employees be encouraged to engage in socially worthwhile activities? To answer this, the current study investigated the critical factors affecting employees’ voice behaviors about CSR in professional sport organizations. Second, there is an unaddressed situation under which employees do not exhibit negative responses to persuasion attempts, even though their persuasion knowledge is activated (Campbell & Kirmani, 2008). The present research responded well to the call for research by examining not only direct effects of promotion focus and persuasion knowledge on voice behavior but confirming the positive moderating role of promotion focus in the negative relationship between persuasion knowledge and voice behavior.