Exploring the effects of internal CSR on work attitudes and behaviors of Chinese blue-collar workers

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Abstract
The research project investigates the impact of internal corporate social responsibility (CSR), i.e., CSR activities that are designed to promote the well-being of employees, on Chinese blue-collar workers. Social identity theory and social exchange theory give rise to the argument that factories can benefit from internal CSR in terms of contributive work attitudes and behaviors. By addressing the issue of internal CSR in China, the research project responds to recent calls to investigate concepts relating to ethics and social responsibility in the HRM domain in emerging countries. In addition, the research project contributes to the literature as it focuses on blue-collar workers who, despite their utmost importance in the economic development, have received relatively little attention thus far.

In a first study, a survey among 763 garment factory workers was conducted and a positive relationship between their perceptions of internal CSR and three work attitudes (job satisfaction, trust in management, and supportive supervision) was found. In a second study, an experiment with 160 workers in the same factory was carried out. The findings show that the internal CSR treatment positively affected workers' performance in terms of quantity and reduced their complaints. However, the findings also show a negative link between CSR and performance in terms of quality. In both studies, it was found that the relationship between internal CSR and blue-collar workers' attitudes and behaviors is partially moderated by individuals' attitudes toward social responsibility.

The research project contributes to the extant knowledge about CSR outcomes. The findings of the two studies indicate that internal CSR can become a valuable instrument for Chinese factories' HR management. In addition, the experiment allows to establish a causal link between internal CSR and work behaviors. Moreover, the findings indicate that the perceived importance of CSR can influence the link between internal CSR and attitudes. Finally, the findings of the two studies have implications for practice. The practical relevance is rooted in the fact that working conditions are often poor in emerging countries in labor-intensive industries. Against the backdrop that responsible working conditions can improve work-related attitudes and behaviors, the paper reinforces the argument that it is in the enlightened self-interest of factories to engage in internal CSR.

Prof. Dr. Nick Lin-Hi is full professor at the University of Vechta (Germany) and holds the Chair of Business and Ethics. Prior to joining the University of Vechta, he was assistant professor at the University of Mannheim (Germany). Nick Lin-Hi received his Ph.D. from HHL – Leipzig Graduate School of Management (Germany) and his habilitation from the University of Mannheim. He holds a master's degree in business administration from the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (Germany).


Nick Lin-Hi's work is strongly oriented toward relevance for business practice. Since more than one decade, he has shaped the German CSR landscape and advised several companies, politicians, and NGOs. He is head of the working group “Social standards in the textile and clothing industry” of a German textile industry association and juror of the “German CSR Award”. He has been honored with several awards for his work on CSR, for example, the inclusion in the GQ magazine's list of the 100 most important men in Germany under 40 years (2013), the 3rd place in the Germany-wide selection of “Professor of the Year” (2010), and the Max-Weber-Award for Business Ethics (2009).