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‘We are all responsible now’

Governmentality and responsabilized subjects in corporate social responsibility

Abstract

The corporate social responsibility (CSR) promise is a fascinating one: companies are able and willing to regulate themselves, and self-regulation is manifested in collaborative efforts that promote individual well-being. Yet, this macro-level promise has a silenced flip side in organizational contexts. We argue that CSR has diffused the idea of employee responsabilization into organizational environments, so it entails a dual role for employees: employees become both the objects and the subjects of CSR. The primary aim of this article is thus to develop a theoretical understanding that acknowledges the role of individual members of the organization in communicating and defining CSR while taking into consideration the well-being perspective. We draw on critical management studies as a form of counter-conduct towards mainstream theorizing and seek an alternative to Freirean critical dialogue as a tool to promote empowerment alongside ethics in CSR.

Keywords

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), counter-conduct, critical management studies (CMS), dialogue, governmentality, responsabilization

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Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has spread as a globally applied, encouraged and accepted organizational discourse with the political philosophy of soft law and corporate self-regulation at its foundation. Scrutiny of CSR, however, has shown it to be of limited effect in delivering social good through self-regulation (see Banerjee, 2007). This implication has provoked research on the factors that CSR is actually designed to regulate and how they should be regulated. Whereas the relationship between CSR and governance is relatively well examined, a few recent studies have also focused on CSR from the perspective of *governmentality* (Bonsu and Polsa, 2011; Shamir, 2008; Vallentin, 2013; Vallentin and Murillo, 2012). CSR is therefore regarded as a new form of governance: namely, the business of government (Vallentin and Murillo, 2012) or a market-embedded morality (Shamir, 2008) that promotes and is promoted through various techniques of government (Foucault, 2007), such as ‘responsibilization’. The term responsibilization means ‘expecting and assuming the reflexive moral capacities of various social actors’ (Shamir, 2008: 7), and those capacities are expected to concretize in individual self-regulation promoted by legal norms, moral exhortation, informal

sanctions and tacit conventions (Biebricher, 2011; Rose, 1999). The goal of the responsabilization set by some instance, person or cause is that a person is responsible according to certain idea(s), rule(s) and rationality(ies) while keeping in mind the telos – the goal – of the responsible action. In the case of corporate responsibility, corporate self-regulation is expected to take place through, for example, codes of ethics, codes of conduct and formalized corporate responsibility policies.

These aforementioned studies then imply that CSR is constructed around a dual core: on one side, we see self-regulation and corporate voluntariness, and on the other side, we see responsabilization and control. However, the question thus far unanswered in these macro-level studies is as follows: who actually carries the responsibility when entities such as corporations claim to be responsible? This question is crucial because responsabilization is closely linked to (neo-)liberal forms of governance that aim to turn individuals into subjects who desire freedom and who take responsibility for their actions and for the outcomes of those actions (Rose, 1999). Indeed, philosophical underpinnings of responsibility tend to emphasize its voluntary nature with respect to its performers (Montada, 1983).

We argue that in an organizational context, the dual core further results in a dual role for employees: employees become both the subjects and objects of CSR. More specifically, they are seen as a group that the organization should be responsible for (as objects) but also a group that needs to perform responsibly (as subjects) for the

organization to achieve its CSR goals. We find this problematic because the idea of employees as subjects *is not explicitly acknowledged* in conceptualizations of CSR. More specifically, conceptualizations merely emphasize the role of corporations in generating well-being for all the stakeholders, including employeesⁱ. Through the responsabilization process, however, the well-being of employees is in danger of being solely determined by management and markets, rather than by the majority of those whose well-being is in question (cf. Bookman and Martens, 2013).

We strengthen our argumentation by identifying some of the main assumptions that underlie this paradox from an employee perspective and problematize (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) the way in which the existing theorizations and practices actually include both roles but rarely acknowledge the subject role, despite the latter being embedded in responsabilization. Instead, CSR is more or less presented as a fixed and morally correct phenomenon, managed and controlled by those in power and learned and performed by others. This, however, can be seen as counterproductive for employees' learning about their own and others' well-being.

The primary aim of this article is thus to develop a theoretical understanding that acknowledges the role of individual members of the organization in communicating and defining CSR while taking into consideration the well-being perspective. We claim that acknowledging the subject role of an employee requires an alternative conceptualization of CSR. Our alternative is based on critical management studies (CMS) that can offer a

form of counter-conduct to mainstream theorizing on CSR. We draw on the Foucauldian views on ethics (Foucault, 1997, 2005) and Freire's theorizing on learning and critical dialogue (1970). We argue that together these contribute to the creation of a theoretical and practical understanding that illuminates the pitfalls of the mainstream CSR discourses. The Foucauldian and Freirean approaches, combined, also support the search for alternative ways to approach CSR in an organizational context while simultaneously acknowledging the dual role of individuals. Our essay then joins the CMS-oriented group of studies that elaborates organizational responsibility as a critical practice (Ibarra-Colado, Clegg, Rhodes, Kornberger, 2006; Weiskopf and Willmott, 2013).

Setting the scene: the promise and its fulfilment in the CSR and responsabilization literature

What corporate responsibility is about

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been used to describe the voluntary activities undertaken by firms that are expected to contribute to social and environmental welfare beyond the sole focus on economic welfare. Depending on the context, such practices can include (but are not limited to) a focus on long-term economic responsibilities (including economic performance and tax and employment

contributions), social responsibilities (including partnership programmes, such as firm-NGO cooperation), philanthropic activities and community programs (including housing and hospital projects and educational programmes) and employee programs focusing on diversity policies, work-family balance and safety issues. Environmental responsibility often comprises practices such as the use of environmental performance measurements, renewable energies, life cycle assessments and environmental systems (including environmental training).

The majority of the early CSR debates and definitions originate in the USA (Carroll, 1999). This early discussion centred on the social responsibilities of businessmen and managers, emphasizing the businesses and their managers' willingness and obligation to behave like moral (corporate) citizens in their local communities (Carroll, 1999; Crane, McWilliams, Matten, Moon and Siegel, 2008). However, whereas the idea of responsibility in this sense was primarily driven by individuals' philanthropic activity, the debate paid little attention to the role played by the integration of economic and political factors in the development of CSR. Literature on CSR has since shown not only that CSR is perceived differently in various cultural contexts but also that this difference results from the way that responsibilities are understood to be allocated in business/society relations (Matten and Moon, 2008; Preuss, Haunschild and Matten, 2009; Secchi, 2007). More recent literature on so-called political CSR has further extended this discussion in terms of how governments around

the world are becoming unable or unwilling to exert power over multinational firms and to govern them in an integrated manner (Banerjee, 2007). Definitional work in CSR is therefore not only a normative exercise in outlining what corporations should be responsible for but also an ideological exercise describing how the political economy should be organized to regulate and restrain corporate power (Marens, 2004).

A number of scholars have attempted to identify and organize the great variety of existing approaches to CSR (Garriga and Mele, 2004; Mele, 2008; Secchi, 2007) despite the fact that few subjects in management have actually been claimed to engender as much controversy and debate as CSR (Crane et al., 2008b). The concept is regarded as essentially being both “appraisive” (or considered as valued) and “internally complex” because of relatively open rules of application (Matten and Moon, 2008). It is therefore no surprise that CSR has received criticism that it is just old wine in new bottles.

Despite these complexities, scholars do tend to agree upon certain issues. For example, most definitions of CSR address either all or some of the following five key dimensions: stakeholder, social, economic, environmental and willingness to pursue CSR (Dahlsrud, 2008). Conceptually CSR is 1) social, hence not specifically or particularly addressed; (2) about responsibility, commonly understood as the consequentialist equivalent of the deontological notion of duty; and 3) about

corporations, which refers to business organizations in general (Van Oosterhout and Heugens, 2008: 201).

Scholars also tend to agree not only that responsibility is a much more compelling and desired issue than irresponsibility but also that the underlying rationale for CSR can be provided through instrumental, moral and relational standpoints (see Aguilera et al. 2007). Accordingly, CSR can be driven by instrumental motivation, being ‘a business case’ associated with enhancing firm competitiveness. Moral motivation is concerned with ethical standards and moral principles with a sense of business responsibility for the betterment of society. That is, the foci are the right things to do and the right manner in which to do them. Relational motivation then builds on suggestions for how positive social relationships among actors can increase trust and belongingness, by building social cohesiveness. The three types of motivation are not mutually exclusive but can co-exist to a varying degree.

For example, the popular definition by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2000) mixes the aforementioned perspectives by stating:

...corporate social responsibility is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the local community and society at large.

In this definition, the CSR promise is a continuous long-term approach that contributes to the well-being of individuals, which specifically aims to improve the quality of life of individuals through economic activity. The recent definition of CSR by the European Commission (2011) does the same while stating the following:

To fully meet their corporate social responsibility, enterprises should have in place a process to integrate social, environmental, ethical, human rights and consumer concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close collaboration with their stakeholders (COM, 2011).

The definition by COM 2011 differs from that of the World Business Council in emphasizing collaboration as a key feature in the accomplishment of responsibility. Interactions between firms and other parties are actually a prerequisite for CSR: Corporations cannot fulfil their responsibility if stakeholders do not cooperate and provide resources that assist them in reaching their responsibility goals. However, the processes are not always as mutually reinforcing as the definitions imply (Banerjee, 2007), and problems result from the fact that conceptualizations do not discuss the extent to which an individual in an organization is willing to be *responsible* (Roberts, 2003). Although the literature emphasizes the catalytic role of CEOs and managers (cf. Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004), they can hardly be regarded as the sole performers.

More specifically, definitions of CSR seem to ignore the role of employees in communicating and delivering CSR, implying that it is entities such as corporations or responsible business managers who are the delivering subjects.

What responsabilization is about

The recent emphasis on market-based solutions, privatization, deregulation and reliance on corporate self-regulation reflects a more voluntary world that is created for private companies instead of binding laws (Banerjee, 2007; Vallentin, 2013). As a result, firms are expected to be better equipped to identify and acknowledge strategic opportunities within their environments because of the absence of social and environmental restraints imposed by government (Kinderman, 2012; Vallentin and Murillo, 2012). However, the consequences of these macro-level principles at the micro level (i.e., at the level of individuals rather than firms) are rarely discussed in the CSR literature, reflecting the more general tendency in the CSR literature not to address CSR as thoroughly with respect to organizational policies.

The term responsabilization then contributes to our understanding by encapsulating how people are 'made responsible'. Responsibilization has received closer attention in studies of 'governmentality', a concept first developed by Foucault in the late 1970s and later expanded upon by a number of scholars (e.g., Dean, 2010; Foucault, 1997, 2007; Rose, 1999). The concept of governmentality is used to provide a

link between the analysis of the regime-level institutional arrangements and the processes of subjectification (Foucault, 2002: 225; Rose, O'Malley and Valverde, 2009). Governmentality is used particularly in the context of explaining how power and power relations usually work in liberal democratic political regimes (e.g., Foucault, 2008).

Foucault approaches government as 'the conduct of conduct' and as a term that encompasses 'governing of self' as well as 'governing of others' or, more precisely 'governing how others conduct themselves' (Foucault, 2007). Responsibilization is therefore a governance technique that is designed to address the issue of governance and control that originates from freedom of choice and individual liberties (Biebricher, 2011). In the responsabilization process, it is often the state that encourages people and communities to acknowledge their responsibility, for example, for governing their own risk. The idea is designed to address the problem of governing from a distance. People are considered capable of governing themselves if they are prepared to take the responsibility for their own choices and actions, but the number of choices is always limited, and the choices are more or less delimited by laws, norms, moral codes, behavioural routines and the like (Rose, 1999: 67-70).

Shamir (2008: 7) defines responsabilization 'as expecting and assuming the reflexive moral capacities of various social actors' and views responsabilization as a call for action: an interpellation that constructs and assumes moral agency and certain

dispositions towards social action that necessarily follow. Responsibilization is a means to address individuals in a certain way; it imposes new demands on individuals with respect to the regulation of their conduct – and often that of other people – to maintain their well-being. That is the central objective of the biopolitics of modern democratic societies. For example, common qualities towards which one should aspire are often those that are exhibited by ethical and responsible consumers or by employees with entrepreneurial subjectivity. In those societies where the principles of neoliberalism are influential, responsibilization reproduces a distinct concept of the human actor as the master of him/herself or ‘an entrepreneur of his or her self’ (Foucault, 2008: 226; Rose, 1999: 144). This idealized description of the entrepreneurial subject, however, has an inherent contradiction: the subject is disciplined but simultaneously creatively chaotic; s/he is also a team player but at the same time highly individualized (Biebricher, 2011).

Empowerment is offered as a solution to the paradox and is often linked to the idea of responsibilization because empowerment and independence can imply individual responsibility as well as individual rights (Courpasson, 2011; Hannah-Moffat, 2000). Empowerment is described as being contrary to traditional management control; empowerment establishes new expectations and forms of accountability that are associated with corporate goals in conjunction with increased personal autonomy and variety (Bach et al., 2007). The responsibilization process, however, may undermine this personal autonomy. Moreover, as Cruikshank (1999), among others, has shown, the

projects of empowerment often intertwine with the ideas and promises of liberal governmentality in making individuals more self-responsible and committed to the ‘common values and ethos’ while simultaneously increasing their autonomy.

Indeed, personal responsibility without the freedom to define such responsibility may result in anxiety, stress and depression (Biebricher, 2011; Freire, 2005:78). It is impossible for an individual to be *freely responsible* without room for flexibility. This means that in every system or occasion of liberal responsabilization is an opportunity for ‘counter conduct’ (Foucault, 2007: 205). Counter-conduct is a refusal to be governed by others and particular norms and involves a different self-relation, a reflexive engagement with ethics and morality (Foucault, 2007: 191-226). However, the potential for counter-conduct – a struggle against processes that are implemented to influence the conduct of others – is always limited. That is because of the limits of freedom taking place in all power practices and because of their sets of relations, positions and organizational settings.

The main elements of both CSR and responsabilization are illustrated in Table 1. However, there is no overall consensus with regard to the premises, potential or necessity of CSR.

INSERT Table 1 about here

We now proceed to demonstrate that the theorization concerning CSR includes the means by which objects also become subjects and that, on the micro level, the theory centres on responsabilization rather than on empowerment.

Responsibility and responsabilization in CSR models

Our aim in this section is to illustrate the extent to which responsabilization is embedded in CSR theory and to show how the idea of employees and individuals as subjects and performers of CSR becomes apparent when CSR is implemented, even if the official conceptualization treats employees and individuals as objects of corporate responsibility. Instead of focusing merely on theories that directly address CSR – this being something that conceptualization tends to focus on – Secchi (2007) builds a theoretical framework of CSR that adopts categories of *utilitarian*, *managerial* and *relational theories* of CSR, according to how the theories address the role of the firm and the question of corporations as social institutions. Although our goal is not to extend the work of Secchi, we chose to apply his framework because it directly addresses the question of the allocation of responsibility. In so doing, the framework enables us better to connect CSR theorization and Foucauldian theories and to provide the reader with a view of the two sides of the Foucauldian approach to subjectivity and its “liberal governmentality”. On the one hand, responsabilization binds the

subjectivities of the subjects to the norms and rules of the organization; on the other hand, it always opens up the possibility that new kinds of subjectivities and realizations of counter-conducts will emerge through dialogic practices.

The *utilitarian stream* consists of theories with respect to social costs and functionalism (Secchi, 2007). This theoretical discussion allocates responsibility to the economic system rather than to organizations. This approach views a business as part of the wider economic system, but the environment is purely economic. Traditionally, these theories did not consider political, social, cultural and other conditions (Etzioni, 1988). The motivation for CSR according to this perspective is mere corporate self-interest, and *if an investment in a particular CSR issue results in improvements in shareholder value, then according to neoclassical theorists, the investment is a sound fiduciary decision whose 'social' benefit is irrelevant* (Banerjee, 2007: 25).

The utilitarian core is evident in one of the very recent approaches to CSR, namely, in Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP) thinking, which can be used to illustrate responsabilization from the more general individual perspective of those who should benefit from CSR. The BoP approach views market-based solutions as an essential means of alleviating global poverty and suggests that the *profit motive of companies can accelerate (not inhibit) the transformation towards global sustainability* (Hart, 2007: 3). Consequently, the poor can be labelled as self-governing agents who 'allow' MNCs to 'negotiate' norms of responsibility within the universalizing framework of

contemporary capital (Bonsu and Polska, 2011). Poor people are therefore encouraged to adopt an entrepreneurial attitude that facilitates the shift from the traditional employee or citizenship role to one of active consumer citizenship (cf. Cruikshank, 1999). For example, in the case of BoP, the subjects become categorized not as poor or as persons in need but as consumers or entrepreneurs whose new identity is reliant on the existence of markets.

The effect is that the well-being of poor people becomes negotiated through market order and existing hierarchies in processes that leave very little room for alternative ways of doing things if one wishes to adopt a new identity that resembles an active subject. Just being poor does not encompass this meaning. However, if the poor do not wish to participate in this predetermined process, they are excluded from the narrowly defined well-being group because only markets can generate well-being. BoP therefore enforces the argument by Rose (1999) with respect to the changing nature of citizenship: it is not achieved in relation to the state but instead occurs in a variety of corporate and quasi-public practices.

The *managerial stream* approaches responsibility from an internal perspective and is a type of counter proposal to the utilitarian stream. Advocates of this perspective argue that everything outside the firm is principally managed through organizational decision making. The theories in this stream attribute responsibility to the firm (Secchi, 2007). Therefore, the research in this area has largely been conducted to convince

business managers to accept responsibility for outcomes beyond profit. Theories of corporate social performance (i.e., regarding the management of inputs and outputs), social accounting, auditing and reporting as well as the social responsibility of multinationals are part of this stream (see Secchi, 2007). Thus, the main focus of this stream is on the creation of managerial tools and measures of social performance and the definition of universal guidelines for moral behaviour in different contexts.

To illustrate the dual role in this stream, we selected the corporate codes approach that Secchi (2007) sees as a part of *social responsibility in international business* theorization. Corporate codes of ethics have become a popular management tool and a mechanism that is expected to illustrate how CSR translates into the corporate context. Codes are moral standards that are used to bring ‘*the behaviour of organization members into conformity with a shared ethical standard*’ (Weaver, Treviño and Cochran, 1999: 540).

Organizational members become the subjects of CSR because they are expected to obey the moral prescriptions defined by managers. The literature has particularly emphasized the role of CEOs/top managers and of top-down processes that direct organizational members towards the responsible translation of codes (see Hemingway and MacLagan, 2004; Weaver et al., 1999). Webley and Lejeune (2005) indicate that employees often feel that the primary purpose of codes is then to control their actions. This type of approach to ethics and responsibility relies on externally

regulated conduct. Employees are expected to position themselves with respect to the moral codes of the markets that may work against their subjective view of their well-being. For example, when corporate codes of ethics enter into organizational life, organizational members are ‘empowered’ to accept a predetermined responsibility because situations in codes are often determined *a priori* (Jensen, Sandström and Helin, 2009). This results in limited personal autonomy and limited opportunities to learn right from wrong and restricts how employee well-being is created.

The relational approaches in the CSR literature view relationships as central to the analysis. The relational theories in Secchi’s (2007) division include theories of business and society, the stakeholder approach, the theory of corporate global citizenship and social contract theory. The relational approach is not merely concerned with the analysis of corporate internal dynamics, as in the managerial approach, or the external environment, as in the utilitarian approach. The emphasis is in fact on the way in which external and internal dynamics interact. The responsibility in these theories depends on the type of relationship that the parties have, such as a business and society relationship.

We have chosen to illustrate responsabilization in light of one of the most recent business/society theories, the institutional approach, which highlights field-level processes and the role that institutional actors and arrangements play in CSR in a variety of contexts. This then brings the relationships and interactions between stakeholders

into the analysis, which is vital to understanding CSR, given its societal orientation. Matten and Moon (2008) elaborate the significance of an institutional approach by conceptualizing two types of CSR: explicit CSR and implicit CSR. They use the term ‘explicit CSR’ to describe voluntary policies, philanthropy and corporate activities within the community at large that corporations use to address various issues related to social responsibility, mostly in a North American context. ‘Implicit CSR’ traditionally occurs in a Western European context and is related to the formal and informal institutions within society that define the extent of corporate responsibility and that assign that responsibility to businesses to serve society’s interests. Context therefore affects the ways in which employer-employee relationships are organized, the degree to which trust governs those relationships and the degree of discretion in the task environment granted to employees (Matten and Moon, 2008).

The two approaches also view the role of employees differently and help us to understand how and why responsabilization is currently increasingly embedded into CSR and how responsabilization is also a decontextualizing project. Implicit CSR has traditionally emphasized the object perspective – the rights and well-being that the organization and society *should provide* for employees. Thus, the concept of employees as a subject in CSR has been more or less absent. However, the subject role becomes more evident in explicit CSR, which stresses the duties that employees *should carry out* so that the organization can fulfil of its commitment to CSR (Preuss et al., 2009). Thus,

explicit CSR makes employees responsible but does not acknowledge employees' right to participate in processes addressing and defining the meaning and the content of well-being in CSR.

More important, responsabilization spreads because explicit CSR is a growing trend – particularly in multinational establishments and management education (Matten and Moon, 2008). Explicit CSR has also spread to countries that might have traditionally emphasized implicit CSR but that have experienced deregulation and the dismantling of institutional arrangements, which has led to the creation of competitive markets for CSR (Vallentin and Murillo, 2012). Such transition has meant that employees have been required to accept at least some responsibility for the collective good that businesses claim to provide. A good example of carrying individual responsibility for the collective good becomes evident in organizational rearrangements, such as downsizing or outsourcing. These rearrangements normally involve redundancy for some employees to support the long-term prosperity of the company. In many cases, employees are forced to adopt an entrepreneurial attitude by becoming self-employed yet continuing to provide services for the same enterprise, which becomes their major, and often sole, customer. Thus, the self-employed person carries the economic risk without having the entrepreneurial freedom. Hence, employees become a group of individuals *'who must now bear the burdens of being both profitable and principled'* (Roberts, 2003: 257).

The theoretical discussions are presented in Table 2. While the table was originally developed by Secchi, we have added the dimension of responsabilization to this discussion.

INSERT Table 2 about here

Are employees subjects or objects of CSR?

We apply Foucault’s ideas on ethics in order to elaborate how the negative sides of the responsabilization of the modern, somewhat neoliberal, subject further illustrate the issues underlying CSR: employees are responsabilized by corporate responsibility without having real autonomy or the collective power to define its content or to redefine themselves as a collective. This, we argue, then demonstrates the problematic nature of corporate responsibility in the current mainstream theories. On the meso and macro levels, CSR is approached and regarded as a voluntary act by corporations contributing to the well-being of their stakeholders, including their employees. However, as our examples of BoP, codes of ethics and explicit CSR illustrate, employees are assigned the duty to perform responsibly on behalf of the organization. The subject role is thus embedded in responsabilization. However, the outspoken core of CSR rests on the assumption of collaboration and consent in the efforts of all parties to improve quality

of life and to respect human and ethical rights within business operations. Through responsabilization, employees are made responsible for something that they most likely have not been given an opportunity to express their opinion on – and for which they have had no opportunity to develop a shared meaning (Roberts, 2003). How can employees act as empowered subjects if they are treated as mere implementers of the CSR strategy defined by their superiors? What is the goal when CSR is introduced into the organizational discourse in this way?

An example of this issue is provided by social partnerships, which not only are extremely common in firms' CSR portfolios but also capture the idea of responsabilization and employee involvement in an important way. Bookman and Martens (2013) argue that partnerships are a specific form of employee responsabilization: employee labour is used to embody and communicate the ethical value of brands through voluntary action and entrepreneurial efforts. First of all, employees are required to participate in these partnership programmes, and second, they are required to assure others (consumers) that they feel good about doing good. Employees' ethical interest and orientations are thus channelled in ways that fit the brand image. Despite the fact that employees are often sceptical about these programmes, they also become co-creators of norms regarding what is perceived as CSR (Bookman and Martens 2013).

Organizational practices such as safety issues further illuminate responsabilization in action. Grey (2009) provides an illustration of this by unravelling the claim that workers and employers are supposed to be equal partners, with a shared responsibility for workplace safety. However, the process does not affect all parties equally. The traditional lenses on the topic indicate that firms should provide safe working conditions for their employees, but due to the responsabilization strategy, employees are increasingly being assigned greater responsibility for their own safety at work. Employees not only are redefined as both potential victims and offenders but also are more or less forced to adopt a rights-defined identity. This means that the responsabilization strategy reconfigures individual risk for safety while neglecting the social and cultural environment in which individual responsibility is embedded. Workers have the right and responsibility to exercise safety at the workplace but are less regarded as *rights-bearing subjects outside the local work context* (Grey, 2009: 327).

According to some criticism levelled at Foucauldian approaches, morality in CSR is embedded in the rules of right conduct that are determined by those in power (cf. Crane et al., 2008). These rules reward conformity and penalize resistance in order to impose and enforce norms of behaviour (Chikudate, 2002). What is 'right' in such contexts is what is 'normal' (Crane et al., 2008a). These aforementioned views, however, imply a restrictive understanding of ethics where control discourages people

from being reflexive (Ibarra-Colado et al., 2006) and actually prevents them from fully understanding what corporate responsibility means.

Providing an alternative

CMS as a form of counter-conduct

The concept of counter-conduct was earlier briefly referred to as a struggle against processes that are implemented to influence the conduct of others. We see critically oriented studies as a form of counter-conduct for mainstream CSR theorizing. More specifically, we claim that the fundamentals of the approach labelled Critical Management Studies (e.g., Adler, Forbes and Willmott, 2007; Alvesson and Willmott 2003) allow us to provide the counter-conduct. These fundamentals include questioning what is taken for granted and paying attention to oppressive asymmetries of power and means of turning individuals into mere objects of management. Furthermore, CMS approach identifies business as a key participant in the creation of fundamental social problems such as global poverty, ecological imbalance and neo-imperialism (Willmott, 2012). Additionally, the CMS approach itself has been substantially influenced by the work of Foucault.

Counter-conduct today is a struggle against the procedures that have been implemented to control others and has the potential to incorporate freedom into governmentality (Foucault, 2007). Foucault explains that counter-conducts do not

necessarily use completely different strategies from those that already exist but are border elements at the margins of existing power practices (2007: 204–15).

More specifically, counter-conduct does not necessarily mean questioning the importance of a specific phenomenon or denying its existence. The same idea is evident in CMS, which are not against management as such but oppose oppressive management practices (see the debate between Clegg, Kornberger, Carter and Rhodes, 2006 and Parker, 2006). Consequently, the importance of responsibility will not be questioned. The idea then is not to change people to make them more suited to management practices but to change management practices to make them more suitable for people.

In support of our attempt to better conceptualize the dual role of employees in CSR, we see critically oriented studies inspired by Foucauldian ideas as offering an alternative way to bring empowerment along with ethics into CSR. Crane et al. (2008a) argue that one of Foucault's main contributions to organizational ethics is the suggestion that current organizational practices and discourses intervene in the positive sides of the self-formation process of developing subjectivity (e.g., establishing autonomy, empowering self-development, increasing happiness) rather than docility in the face of power. Furthermore, value lies in making explicit the connections between power and subjectivity, which also provides tools for critiquing and seeking alternative ways of being and becoming.

Acknowledging freedom and autonomy as crucial elements in the employee role as a CSR subject

As briefly mentioned above, Foucault sees ethics as a dual character phenomenon according to his theory of subjectivity: it is about the adaptation to the general and 'external' moral rules and codes, but it is also always about the subject's own actions towards herself in relation to those external rules. More specifically then, Foucault emphasizes the potential for individual ethical projects and practices (Foucault, 1997). Similarly, CSR not only is about external rules and codes but also should be about individual employees' own actions in relation to these rules. This means that ethics is also about a subject's freedom to think, define and act. Hence, freedom is the ontological condition of ethics (Foucault, 1997: 281–284). Foucauldian freedom is not an entitlement to be acknowledged by managers, but it is a condition that can never be absolute and that always relates to discipline and control (Crane et al., 2008a). Ethics is central to what it means to be an individual in this world and how we construct our identities as moral and responsible subjects of our actions. How can individual employees carry such responsibility if these conditions of freedom are not met?

Conducting oneself like an ethical agent is a form of self-care. Ethics and responsibility develop in the context of choice (Foucault, 1997), and care of the self is one way in which individual freedom can be reflected as ethics. Care of the self is a

prerequisite for directing others, but it also aims to secure the well-being of others by functioning as a regulative principle of activity – of our relationship to the world and to others (Foucault, 2005: 538; see also Freire, 2005: 74). More important, care relates to well-being in a very ontological sense: *caring can be viewed as an activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and transform our world so that we can live in it as well as possible* (Tronto, 1993: 103). The Freirean approach to ‘learning ethics’ rests on the idea of individuals having the right to ‘name the world’ yet acknowledges the existing power asymmetries. The Foucauldian approach brings power more strongly into the picture: responsabilization is a matter of conducting and steering a person’s self-conduction. Currently, this usually takes place through supporting a person’s rights and freedom to act in a certain way. Furthermore, it is partially based on disciplining the subjects of responsibility by punishing them for incorrect behaviour or by setting their minds, souls and bodies to the ‘right position’, for instance, through effective education on responsibilities.

As stated above, ethics as a ‘practice of freedom’ (Foucault, 1997, 2005) always entails resistance or counter-conduct, or at least the possibility of them. If we are to somehow empower employees in their ‘dual CSR role’, we need conceptualizations that move beyond silent resistance, cynicism and/or denial. We need an approach that does not try to veil the power asymmetries but that tackles the well-being ideal as something that people are allowed to be reflexive upon. We therefore need to acknowledge the role

of freedom, in terms of both the possibilities that it offers and the limitations that it imposes on this process. Grounding ethics in self-related practices rather than in approaches in which there is ‘one rule to rule them all’ requires viewing individuals as active and ethical subjects who operate through power and governmentality, *enabling the consideration of organizational ethics in relation to both individuality and organizational control* (Ibarra-Colado et al., 2006: 51). More important, we argue that Foucault would not say that acting as a subject in CSR is pointless; rather, organizational conditions should expressly acknowledge the actors who perform it and should enable responsibility to be exercised in a manner that maximizes our potential to realize our moral agency and our capability to generate well-being for ourselves and others. After all, CSR tries to address societal issues, so why would it be addressed only from a market viewpoint?

If we are to take the role of employees as self-governing subjects seriously when communicating and defining CSR, we will need alternative theorizing. However, we do not intend to remodel or reconceptualize the macro-level theories. More specifically, we focus on the micro level but emphasize that responsibility is always relational and that it exists in interactions and relationships between parties. In order to complement Foucauldian theorizing and to integrate theoretical readings and their critical evaluation into practice, we draw on Freirean theory on critical dialogue. Complementary theorizing is needed because Foucault, despite providing a substantial account of why

we should develop ethics of the self, is reluctant to elaborate on its practical application, claiming that doing so would lead to the kind of normalizing moral rules that he challenges (Crane et al., 2008a). Freire, however, offers a practical understanding of this problematic. Furthermore, Freirean critical dialogue opens up possibilities for communicative processes that acknowledge the power asymmetries but that make it possible for all parties to act as reflexive and autonomous subjects in naming the world of CSR.

Critical dialogue in CSR actions

Although Brazilian Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was an educator and his best known and most influential work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, applies to educational theorizing, his critical philosophy and theoretical concepts can be adopted in other fields of critical enquiry. Freire's interest lies in the order of social systems and the role of individuals within such systems. Just like Foucault, Freire emphasizes freedom as a prerequisite for ethical and responsible behaviour that is beneficial for the individual concerned and for others. Neither Freire nor Foucault believes in absolute freedom. Unlike Foucault, Freire expressly focuses on the models and rules of emancipatory actions, and therefore, his theories are more deployable in critical enquiries searching for alternative ways to conceptualize and foster a practical understanding of CSR. For Freire, authority and freedom are intertwined; therefore, both *must be considered in relation to each other*

(Freire, 2005: 178). According to Freire, authentic authority does not come about by the mere transfer of power but requires delegation and adherence. Here, the analogy to the concept of empowerment is obvious. In order to experience true authority, Freire encourages leaders and other people to engage in dialogue, which he perceived as a key means of successful transformation.

As discussed above, collaboration with stakeholders is regarded as a key feature in the accomplishment of responsibility. However, at present, responsabilization in practice reinforces authoritarian knowledge and control in collaboration, ruling out authentic dialogue. We do not deny the need for control and authority in CSR practices but emphasize that responsabilization without empowerment reinforces the superior knowledge of those in power and undervalues the knowledge of those who are both responsible and responsabilized. If this is not acknowledged, employees will be seen not as people who act inside the structure but as people who are merely influenced by it. The solution, however, is not to forcefully integrate them into the structure of CSR but to transform the structure so that they can become subjects acting not only for themselves but also for others (cf. Freire, 2005: 74). Achieving responsibility through top-down processes and forms of control that neglect self-reflective and reflexive practices is contrary to authentic dialogue and can be understood as being similar to integrating empowerment with punishment (see Hannah-Moffat, 2000). Hence, there is

an obvious need for constructive dialogue that is open to both organizational and human concerns in defining and implementing CSR.

According to Freire, dialogue is the encounter between people who seek to name and change the world. It does not relate to the way in which one person reacts to another; rather, it relates to people working with each other. Criticality is essential in Freirean dialogue and is the factor that distinguishes critical dialogue from other dialogic approaches.

The fundamentals of critical dialogue can be understood from Freire's proposals on *problem-posing* education. Problem-posing education is based on his critique of the dominant banking model, in which teachers metaphorically *deposit* information that students are to receive, memorize and repeat. The banking approach implicitly treats individuals as spectators and passive receivers – not re-creators or co-creators of knowledge. Freire states that those who use the oppressive banking approach serve only to dehumanize, and they do not realize the contradictions concerning reality in what they teach (Freire, 2005: 75). The banking approach is similar to corporate responsibility processes in which employees are expected to memorize corporate values by heart, to operate according to codes of ethics without understanding what the ethical dilemmas/ethics actually are and to generate well-being without participating in the processes through which conditions of well-being are defined. This instrumental means of implementing CSR can easily lead to conditions similar to those presupposed in the

banking approach, which *begins with a false understanding of men and women as objects* (Freire, 2005: 77).

Yet, the dual role of employees together with the call for communicative processes and consideration of ethical and human rights in CSR practices requires an understanding of the subject role as well. Critical dialogue, based on the idea of problem-posing, is a process of constantly uncovering reality in striving for the emergence of consciousness (Freire, 2005: 81). Using problem-posing as a starting point for communicative practices within CSR would offer an alternative that makes it possible to reflect corporate social responsibility in a way that acknowledges the dual role of employees. Addressing and defining corporate responsibility in authentic dialogue would also provide moral space for learning ethics and responsibility instead of merely reacting to codes determined a priori. The CSR promise implies the designation of power and authority to all members of an organization so that they can determine what well-being means for them and can see that they have the right to act for their own and others' well-being.

Conclusions and Implications for Learning

Our essay was based on the argument that the conceptualizations of CSR entail a dual role for employees, making them both the objects and the subjects of CSR. The dual

role is a clear outcome of the dual core of the promise of CSR: an organization should be responsible for its employees, who in turn have to perform responsibly on behalf of the organization. Yet, the subject role materializes only through responsabilization. We demonstrated the origin of this problem in meso/macro-level theories of CSR and showed that conceptualizations of CSR are silent regarding the subject role, especially with respect to defining ethical behaviour and individual/communal well-being. Our critical examination was based on a Foucauldian understanding of ethics and his idea of counter-conducts in producing an alternative understanding and conceptualizations. In order to challenge existing theorizing on CSR, we drew on CMS as a form of counter-conduct. The integration of Foucauldian ethics with Freirean critical dialogue was then introduced as a solution both for acknowledging freedom and well-being as ontological conditions of responsibility and for producing a practical model of the communicative processes of CSR.

From a learning perspective, the promise and the means based on mere responsabilization are paradoxical and contradictory. Statements and definitions that address human rights and well-being can be interpreted as exemplifying a humanistic, individually focused attitude towards learning, whereas emphasis on top-down implementation processes implies a behaviourist attitude. From the humanistic learning perspective, upon which the CSR promise seems to rest, approaches such as BoP should empower people to acknowledge their citizenship (not merely their role as consumers),

codes of ethics should empower employees to consider and learn ethical issues (not merely those determined a priori by superiors), and the implicit/explicit 'CSR mix' should acknowledge the dual role of individuals. Furthermore, studies seem to continuously seek concepts and models of motivation for CSR actions, as if employees (including managers) require incentives to behave ethically. This is redolent of the traditional reward versus punishment strategy (i.e., the carrot and stick approach) favoured by behaviourist approaches to learning.

The concept of dialogue, however, as a means of communication relates to the fundamental idea of mutual learning (e.g., Corlett, 2013; Cunliffe, 2002; Raelin, 2008) and collaborative knowledge creation (MacIntosh, Beech, Antonacopoulou & Sims, 2012). Freire's dialogue connotes the idea of mutual learning, but the knowledge creation process, *naming the world* (as Freire calls it), is based on critical reflection. Employing problem-posing as a tool for critical reflection enables knowledge creation that is based not on the superior knowledge of the dominant party but on the acknowledgment that all parties involved have their own understanding of the reality that is to be defined and transformed. Critical reflection within CSR practices makes it possible for individuals not only to act as autonomous subjects but also to understand concerns on the organizational level. However idealistic it may sound, and despite the fact that our opinions may differ because we view things from different perspectives, we

do share the same world and the responsibility for creating both individual and mutual well-being. The following excerpt from Freire (2005: 96) summarizes our concern:

'We must never merely discourse on the present situation, must never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears—programs which at times in fact increase the fears of the oppressed consciousness. It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours.'

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ⁱ We refer here to the definition by the World Business Council for sustainable development (2000).