

ENACTING DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY AS PART OF CSR POLICY: AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE

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Over the past two decades there has been a vast amount of research into diversity and equality within the UK construction industry. This has produced a body of literature which highlights the ways in which the industry inhibits a diverse workforce, as well as beginning to suggest ways in which the homogeneity of the industry's workforce might be addressed. Yet despite both this focus and the growing body of legislation enforcing equal opportunities, construction remains a predominately white, male-oriented and hegemonic industry. Given this apparent resistance to embracing the diversity agenda, an alternative strategy could be to incorporate diversity and equality within the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agenda, particularly as this is a discourse which is currently gaining traction within many contracting and consulting organizations. This position paper critically reviews the CSR and diversity literatures, examining the extent to which CSR might provide a vehicle for enacting the diversity agenda and analyses its ability to make inroads in attracting, retaining and developing a diverse workforce. It is suggested that the transformative potential of CSR offers an alternative route through which diversity principles could be enacted within the industry; particularly with regard to consulting and contracting firms.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, diversity, equality, business case.

INTRODUCTION

The construction industry is one of the largest industrial sectors in the United Kingdom, employing over 6% of the total working population (Office for National Statistics, 2008). Despite this, it remains the most male-dominated industry (Dainty and Bagilhole, 2005). Government figures confirm that women account for only 11% of the workforce (Office for National Statistics, 2008). Moreover, most women are employed in construction are occupying administrative roles (CITB, 2003). Furthermore, Construction Skills (2008) report that just 3-4% of construction workers come from ethnic minority backgrounds as compared to 7.9% of the economically active population. Newton and Ormerod (2005) also suggest that the industry largely ignores disabled people in the labour market.

For the past 30 years there has been a sustained effort to remove discrimination from the workplace with legislation such as the Race Relations Act 1975, Equal Pay Act 1975, Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (now embodied within the Equality and Human Rights Commission 2010) outlawing such practice. However the industry has continued to remain dominated by white males. Most academic literature (e.g. Gale and Cartwright, 1995; Dainty *et al.*, 1999; Powell *et al.* 2006) supports the argument that the industry and management needs to change in order to embrace diversity. It would appear, however, that fresh ways of enacting

change need to be found which have greater influence on behaviour within the industry.

Within the last decade, the term Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained impetus within the business world. The CSR agenda has become an integrated, if unregulated backdrop to which most companies do business, and construction companies are no exception (Jones *et al.*, 2006). This paper aims to examine the transformative potential that CSR might bring to the diversity agenda. By reviewing both CSR and diversity literature, this position paper suggests that there may be advantages in realizing the business benefits of diversity through CSR policy. Such a position presents a departure from the majority of literature which has treated these issues as separately enacted agendas.

‘DOING’ DIVERSITY IN THE CONSTRUCTION WORKPLACE

Esty *et al.* (1995) develop their definition by acknowledging the two main challenges that managers face when posed with diversity. First, they face day-to-day challenges when issues arise because someone deviates from the norm (e.g. gender, region, disability). These issues can be the result of language barriers or the need for special equipment to support an employee who has a disability. Secondly, managers face a challenge in terms of creating a work environment where difference is valued and celebrated allowing employees to reach their full potential within a company.

‘Diversity is generally defined as acknowledging, understanding, accepting, valuing, and celebrating differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and public assistance status.’ (Esty *et al.*, 1995 cited in Green *et al.*, 2002:1).

The benefits of employing a diverse workforce are well documented (Cox and Blake, 1991; Hammond and Kleiner, 1992; McEnrue, 1993). The business case rests on the assertion that diversifying the construction workforce will not only bring a more creative, well-rounded team, but may also remove the industry’s ‘traditional’ white male image. If diversity is managed correctly it can result in some of the following competitive advantages.

- Lower recruitment, labour and training costs due to improved employee relations, which in turn helps to attract and retain more employees (Davidson and Fielden, 2003).
- Has the power to build cohesive, productive and cross-cultural work teams: by knowing how to recruit, retain, mentor and promote employees from a range of socio-economic backgrounds (Davidson and Fielden, 2003).
- Greater team innovation, creativity and problem solving: due to acknowledging people for their individuality and removing the effects on team homogeneity regarding group decision making. This can also improve the quality of group problem solving, which can enhance new product development (Cox and Blake, 1991).
- Cross-cultural teams can lead to greater organizational flexibility: As policies and practices become less standardized. This has a positive effect in relation to different cultural values and lifestyle differences (Cox and Blake, 1991).

- Diversity can lead to an improved public image of a sector or organization: by being more inclusive of its employees needs (McEnrue, 1993).

As well as the business case argument to adopting a diverse workforce, there are also moral imperatives. The moral and philanthropic argument to develop diversity would suggest that the construction industry (being a significant part of Britain's economy) has a responsibility to the employee in terms of welfare and development. Firms should also be seen to have responsibilities to the community it works in. Ethically, firms should be seen to be trying to remove oppression from historically disadvantaged groups, while still providing equality for all employees.

There is now legal protection to ensure that employees do not face discrimination within the workplace. Legislation compels companies to accept and practice the mandatory Equality and Human Rights Commission 2010. However, government legislation on removing discrimination from the workplace has yet to bring diversity to the industry. Kandola and Fullerton (1998) suggest that Equal Opportunities legislation will be insufficient in creating diversity within the workplace, as all it does is eliminate overt inequality. They argue that the motivation to be more diverse should be internally driven.

Reflections on external influences effecting diversity in the construction industry

Kandola and Fullerton (1998) assert that Equal Opportunities legislation is insufficient, as in creating diversity, it merely illuminates inequality. This assertion is supported by other studies (Gale and Cartwright, 1995; Dainty *et al.*, 1999; Powell *et al.* 2006) whose underlying argument is that the industry and management needs to change in order to embrace diversity. Powell *et al.* (2006) argue that if the industry is to change then "Men need to be part of the process of change, if attempts at change are to be accepted." The argument is that the construction industry will not change without a catalyst which can be embraced by its workforce and management. Thus, the industry needs an internal tool or motivation to drive construction organizations into the diversity and equality agenda. Internal change based on internal motivations can therefore, be presented as a way of addressing the construction industry's diversity dilemma.

This theory applies to current literature; for example, Powell *et al.* (2009) examine how female engineers 'do' gender. They investigate how women manage their gender in the engineering and construction professions detailing the methods women use to assimilate themselves into the industry; for instance, acting like 'one of the boys' or accepting gender discrimination and adopting an anti-woman approach. If an individual is conforming to organizational 'norms' in order to be accepted by the firm or colleagues, then the true meaning of diversity is not achieved as those persons are limiting their unique input by conforming. Women who 'do gender' is an issue that cannot be managed by Equal Opportunities legislation, as the legislation cannot regulate the ways in which a person conducts themselves in order to be accepted within a particular industry. However, well managed diversity policies and practices would be able to function in this way. This supports the theory that an internal motivation to change diversity will be the only way for diversity to be successfully implemented.

At this point, it is important to recognize that the demands of clients are increasingly leaning towards favouring companies who can be seen to demonstrate robust diversity policies and practices. Government clients are starting to take responsibility regarding diversity, by including social clauses in contracts. A powerful illustration of this is the

2012 Olympic developments whereby the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) has statutory duties to promote race, gender and disability equality. Not only do their contractors have to meet certain diversity requirements, the ODA's supply chain is aimed to actively promote diversity. Although increasing client demand for diversity may be seen to be a positive influence, Kandola and Fullerton (1998) suggest that diversity is best realized when internally driven, voluntary and unregulated.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE CSR AGENDA

CSR has been defined by Hopkins (2003) as being "... concerned with treating the stakeholders of the firm ethically or in a responsible manner." (Hopkins, 2003:1). In this definition 'ethical' and 'responsible' mean treating stakeholders in a manner accepted by wider society. Hopkins understood that CSR aims to increase the quality of life for people within or outside the firm, whilst still protecting the firm's profit.

The development of the CSR debate grew during the post-war economic expansion, instigated with the enactment of Keynesian theory of economic growth through governmental stimulus. The modern CSR concept was originated by Bowen (1953:6), who stated that CSR "refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those politics, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of actions which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of society". Davis (1967) later expanded Bowen's theory by asserting that businessmen were not always the managers of a particular business; therefore suggesting that corporations have obligations to be socially responsible. The late sixties and early seventies saw the development of stakeholder theory (Freeman and Reed, 1984). Stakeholder theory is essential in order to understand the CSR debate. Post *et al.* (2002) define stakeholders as, "the individuals and constituencies that contribute, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to its wealth-creating capacity and activities, and that they are, therefore, its potential beneficiaries and/or risk bearers." This brings to the fore the assertion that other shareholders would also be interested in a company's CSR activity and that their interaction with firms could determine a company's success.

The actions associated with CSR were questioned by the American economist, Milton Friedman, who believed that managers are obliged by contract to maximize return to shareholders and that their actions are bound only by legal guidelines and economic rules. Acting beyond these two commitments will show no corresponding gains. If managers want to work toward the betterment of society, they should do so as private individuals so as not to impact on the profits of shareholders (Friedman, 1970). Friedman held the extreme view that manager's activities should only be focused on profit maximization for the company they work in. Such a view thrived during the years of the Thatcher government, where the concepts of free markets and entrepreneurship within a framework referred to as 'the enterprise culture' (Green 2008). Green discusses how the conservative government of the 1970s and 1980s encouraged entrepreneurship, 'own your own business' initiatives and self-employment. The operative of certain trades were encouraged to become self-employed, incentivized through the tax and insurance system. The increased number of construction operatives who in the period became self-employed had, and continued to have, a direct impact on those who now advocate CSR. This is simply because the self-employed and sole traders may not have the capacity (both in fiscal and in influence terms) to support CSR in the way in which larger corporations would.

The governance of New Labour saw a growing governmental interest in the inefficiencies within the industry, in direct reaction to recent poor performing projects.

The Egan Report (1998) was commissioned by the government and aimed to drive forward the industry, becoming more efficient and improving quality. This report was praised by the industry, with Murray (2003) describing the 'Eganization of construction'. Further government commissioned reports such as, 'Accelerated Change' and 'Respect for People', made reference to the importance that the construction industry has to wider society.

It is also important to note that the government have vastly encouraged the voluntary standards of CSR into the industry, with movements such as the 'Respect for People' initiative, which is a governmental tool aimed to foster good relationships with the local community. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) are also heavily encouraging businesses to embark on CSR activities, by promoting voluntary audits and standards. Other CSR indexes are increasingly being used by large numbers of companies, such as Business in the Community (BITC). It is undoubtedly important that the government is encouraging and advising businesses on how to conduct their trade; although ultimately CSR decisions are up to the particular firm in question.

However, on a positive note, the CSR agenda represents an integrated, but as yet unregulated backdrop, against which companies do business, and construction companies are no exception (Jones *et al.*, 2006). CSR broadens a corporation's view of social systems, encouraging businesses to embrace their responsibilities to achieve positive impact with their activities. The impact that construction activity has on society, the environment, employment and the economy is colossal. Therefore, the industry could arguably have multiple reasons to embrace the voluntary, self-regulated CSR agenda.

A company's moral standards and contribution to CSR are now judged by a variety of stakeholders (from employees to customers) (Moon *et al.*, 2001) suggesting that a company's social commitments have a positive effect on the firm's profitability (Margolis and Walsh, 2001; Orlitzky *et al.*, 2003). Their research suggests that the business case which supports CSR, is leading to CSR being increasingly practiced. In support of these competitive advantage arguments, Reeves (2003) states that the 'business case' supporting CSR has become an important part of its evolution, moving away from its once philanthropic nature.

DIVERSITY AS PART OF CSR

Literature linking the CSR and the diversity agenda is another path that is developing. Grosser and Moon have published several papers (Grosser and Moon 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2008a, 2008b) which argue that 'CSR is a tool for advancing gender mainstreaming.' Grosser and Moon's research can be divided into the discussion on CSR reporting and discussion on acting out CSR within the private sector. Grosser and Moon (2008a) reported that CSR is an ever-increasing influence on the reporting of workplace gender issues. This reporting is transparent and can be used by external stakeholders to judge gender quality. This paper stated "we found that gender and diversity have become central elements of CSR and the CSR agenda". External reporting on gender equality was found to be amplifying and increasingly being requested within several CSR reporting frameworks (Grosser and Moon 2008b; Grosser and Moon, 2005a). However, there is still some reluctance on the part of the industry to report on gender issues (Grosser and Moon, 2006). This is thought to be because of the perceived impact that resultant negative media focus may have on companies.

Grosser and Moon (2005b) investigated how CSR can be used to advance gender mainstreaming and argued that CSR goes far beyond the ‘business case’, implying that social drivers are becoming more prominent within the private sector, and suggesting that CSR is now a form of ‘social governance’; meaning CSR provides direction to society. Therefore, businesses who participate in CSR activities have the power and responsibility to provide direction to society. Despite Grosser and Moon (2005b) arguing for gender mainstreaming contributing to a large part of the CSR agenda, this paper takes an uncritical view of linking the two concepts, insisting that “practices are to be taken up at core business level... ..as opposed to being an add-on to business as usual”. However, the paper did briefly discuss potential reasons why CSR has not been documented as a suitable vehicle for gender mainstreaming: the first reason being that corporations may be resilient to gender mainstreaming as certain companies are unsympathetic when seeing the business case for CSR; secondly, corporations may be viewing CSR in a traditional way, through a philanthropic lens, rather than viewing CSR as a way to initiate ‘good business practice’. Grosser and Moon (2005b) conclude by arguing that although CSR is a tool for improving gender equality, these processes were still being developed amongst business organizations and that changes were up to employers’ discretion as to whether they were pro-actively increased in gender mainstreaming and if they used CSR as a tool for gender equality.

Aside from Grosser and Moon’s research findings, other literature suggests that diversity is increasingly becoming a more important part of CSR (McWilliams and Siegal, 2005). McWilliams quoted the Swedish organization ‘Partnership for the Development of Diversity in Swedish Industry’ as saying ‘We link the strength of having a diverse workforce to the question of corporate social responsibility (CSR). This is an important area of development throughout Europe... ..We are now going one step further and are developing diversity issues in the context of CSR’. Smith *et al.* (2001) also investigated the importance of diverse minorities who are shareholders and/or stakeholders, finding that they have a greater demand to examine a company’s commitment to CSR; in particular their diversity policies. Therefore, if the industry is to recruit and retain more women, ethnic minorities and disabled people, the firm may be more successful if they have well established CSR activities in particular relation to their diversity policies.

Enacting diversity as part of CSR: A critical perspective

In order to understand CSR’s transformative potential, it is important to firstly understand its weaknesses and take into account critics’ views on CSR. CSR is a complex issue and is in the early stages of development in most construction companies. Despite CSR being a growing influence on business and society, it is fair to say that CSR has suffered from a lack of definition. As a consequence of this the industry has not learnt what may and may not be good CSR practice. This has been highlighted by the media focus on transgression of companies who report on social responsibility (Falck and Heblich, 2007; Herridge and Kleiner, 2003).

With previous reference to Grosser and Moon (2005b), a prominent theme throughout this paper argued that businesses who participate in CSR activities have a responsibility to provide direction to society, as CSR is a new form of ‘social governance’. This concept develops the responsibilities that companies have to society (such as education, community development and health) and these increased responsibilities naturally raise the question of corporate accountability. However, a Milton Friedman view of this would insist that it is not a business responsibility to

provide direction to society: government should provide legislation and regulation to issues effect the social order. A more liberal stance would maintain that if corporate accountability is not managed, then corporations and government may be opening themselves up wider to scrutiny.

Moving on to more construction related criticisms, in 2008, Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) made up 74% of construction companies (BERR, 2008). The question that therefore needs to be asked is whether CSR can be a driver for change within SME. If so, these companies may be less responsive to change due to not having major annual recruitment drives, diversity policies, or the ability/finance to send trainees on career development training. However, the importance of valuing employees on a personal level for their knowledge and skill set and allowing them to reach their full potential can still be installed. It can be argued that until these SME change, the industry as a whole will not. There is a major focus and much pressure on larger companies to implement change, but unless smaller firms embrace the CSR agenda it will have little effect on the industry given its composition.

As previously discussed there is an increasing demand from public sector clients (e.g.; ODA and Transport for London) and insistence on social clauses within contracts, causing contractors to impose well developed diversity policies that meet client requirements. It could be argued that this government requirement to implement diversity will be a client driver towards diversity. However, this contradicts the ways that the literature suggests diversity should be implemented. Kandola and Fullerton (1998) assert that diversity should be transformed internally in order for it to be embraced, as external force will never fully or successfully manage diversity. At the moment Equal Opportunities are part of the legislative framework; an involuntary action that is imposed by law. The 'voluntary' factor of CSR could have a negative effect on controlling diversity. A worst case scenario of this is the industry not managing diversity through CSR at all; hence the only way to fully adopt diversity would be by external legislation forcing diversity upon the industry. Diversity policies and practices may vary from company to company; again an alternative way to make sure managing diversity is consistent throughout the whole of the industry is by imposing external legislation. This supports Greed and Reeves' (2005) position, that external legislation has not been implemented correctly, and legislative and procedural reform is the best way of embracing diversity. Despite this, a large amount of literature has been published which supports the argument that a company's internal motivation to become more diverse must be present in order for diversity to be adopted (Kandola and Fullerton, 1998; Gale and Cartwright, 1995; Dainty *et al.*, 1999; Powell *et al.* 2006). Even the government has begun to recognize the positive impact that voluntary CSR initiatives can have on the industry, launching such schemes as 'Respect for People'. If the government are endorsing such schemes as a way of tackling diversity change within the industry, this sends a strong message out about their views on the ability of external legislation to challenge the industry.

CONCLUSIONS

Existing diversity literature suggests that the construction industry has remained relatively unchanged, despite the strong business case for diversity and the introduction of external legislation. The literature discusses the implementation of external legislation, and its ability to remove discreet discrimination, but essentially confirms that external legislation does not necessarily mean that diversity has been

embraced. In turn this has led to major clients (such as the government) enforcing diversity policies and targets within client requirements.

In recent years, CSR has gained impetus within industry, and provides an important new area of social governance. The construction industry is no exception, with many large contractors and consulting firms seeing a newfound benefit of socially responsible reporting as more stakeholders are increasingly demanding ethical construction. The importance of gender mainstreaming and equality has been suggested as being an integral part of the CSR agenda, which is now increasingly being practiced. This paper has suggested that CSR might provide a vehicle for enacting diversity in a way which is more likely to be accepted within the industry. However, the extent to which companies will seek to combine these agendas remains questionable, especially given the lack of legislative support for such change initiatives.

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