

Embodying CSR Through Aligned Communication - A Case Study From a Small Sustainable Danish Bank

Following the onset of the financial crisis in 2008, allegedly sparked by the misuse of subprime mortgages in the financial sector, it seemed quite tempting for a number of businesses in the financial sector – as well as other sectors – to resort to using CSR communication as a lever to improve a somewhat tarnished image and reputation clinging to the entire sector – regardless of whether the particular business was in fact to blame for contributing to the crisis. Amidst this tendency to use and sometimes misuse CSR communication, a few businesses stood out as they chose not to use this lever – one of them is the small Danish bank Merkur, which is the focus of this case study. As a sustainable bank lending money to business customers, which are committed to focus on sustainability, Merkur actively and deliberately chooses not to communicate CSR in the more conventional way through text and talk. However, it seems evident that this small bank is committed to CSR. So how does the bank communicate CSR – or in this particular case rather enact CSR through careful alignment? And may this case in any way be inspirational to other businesses in the sector and in other sectors?

This dissertation thus poses the following research questions:

RQ1: How may Merkur align CSR communication among stakeholders, when Merkur actively tries to avoid conventional CSR communication?

RQ2: How is CSR communicated or enacted in Merkur?

RQ3: How is alignment ensured – if at all possible?

Together these research questions should help answer the overall question:

How does Merkur manage to align communication and enact CSR without communicating the concept in the conventional sense?

This dissertation comprises a compilation of research articles each addressing various issues related to the overall questions. Three empirical studies address the research questions from the perspectives of disclosing how communication and enactment between three central stakeholder groups – management, employees and customers – take place.

Article 1, Employee stakeholders' role in ensuring alignment between employee and organizational branding, investigates, as the title suggests, how management may allow for alignment of organizational branding, particularly as management does not wish to explicitly communicate CSR in text and talk.

Article 2, The Bank Refused – a case study of CSR enactment through subtle discursive negotiation of power, focuses on how the meetings between employees and customers play out and renders examples of efforts on the part of employees trying to limit power differences, which has been established to be one of the ways in which the bank can enact CSR.

Article 3, Corporate Social Responsibility in Deed and not in Word – the Social Practice of CSR in a Values Based Bank, explores how management and customers interact at the annual general meeting. This can be

considered a test of how successful alignment of communication has been, but also an opportunity for management to be face-to-face with customers.

Together, the three articles are meant to illustrate how CSR is interpreted and enacted from when it is conceptualized at management level till it is enacted through employees and received and responded to by customers.

The dissertation is a longitudinal single case study employing mainly primary, qualitative data made up of both an in-depth, semi-structured interview, a focus group interview, several internal meeting and finally sound recordings and emails from employee-customer interaction.

The contributions of the dissertation are to a limited extent theoretical, but mainly empirical. Theoretically, the dissertation contributes by emphasising the importance of the self-promoter's paradox particularly when approaching stakeholder segments in the banking sector who already have an interest in both CSR and sustainability – even suggesting that this might be relevant to many other sectors. Empirically, it becomes evident that behind rejecting self-promotion lies an attempt to change the hegemonic neo-liberal discourse, which is characteristic of this sector. The interest in changing the discourse lies with all the stakeholder groups investigated.

PhD projekt

Titel

CSR udtrykt gennem tilpasset kommunikation - et casestudie fra en lille bæredygtig dansk bank

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Bankers CSR-kommunikation

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