

CSR IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY CONSTRAINTS IN EMERGING MARKET SUPPLY CHAIN CONTEXT - BANGLADESH GARMENT INDUSTRY EXPERIENCES

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Abstract: Purpose: The study aims to explore how SC suppliers respond to corporate social responsibility (CSR) implementation strategies and deal with institutional constraints within the global supply chain. **Design/Methodology/approach:** This research study followed a mixed method approach. A qualitative case study was developed based on data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, workshops and seminar discussions. **Findings:** Two CSR strategies were identified, together with managerial, organizational, and societal constraints. Both strategies fail due to CSR ignorance and economic constraints of the suppliers. The corporate-driven strategy is constrained by limiting the supplier's margins forcing them to use less responsible subcontractors. The partnership strategy fails as it allows the suppliers to ignore compliance to CSR implementation rules and especially in economically difficult situations. **Research limitations/implications:** This paper has several limitations. The data illustrate a specific industry and SC companies in a specific country context which makes generalizations difficult. **Practical implications:** Long-term economic cooperation and negotiation between involved supply chain (SC) parties is prerequisite to improve supplier ability to act independently. This means that the corporate-driven CSR strategy in SC is so far easier to manage but elicit costs for suppliers. **Originality/value:** This study addresses the difficulties in managing the corporate-driven strategy and the partnership strategy in emerging market business context that traditionally has institutionalized corporate-driven SC control. With focus on two main CSR implementation strategies applied by two case corporations, this article contributes to show how institutional constraints influence on supplier ability in the studied SC context.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility; Implementation; Strategies; Suppliers; Bangladesh; Garment industry

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1. INTRODUCTION

The coordination of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in key inter-organizational business processes including supply chain (SC) has become one of the most complex strategic challenges for companies in emerging market business transactions to manage (Ashby *et al.*, 2012; Thome' and Medeiros, 2013). One critical CSR compliance issue is how to improve supplier ability to act independently by allowing them greater CSR responsibility as SC partners. Two main CSR implementation strategies are discussed in SC research following different strategic logics (Spence & Bourlakis, 2009). The first and commonly used logic assumes that SC suppliers need to be coordinated by following corporate standards and strategies (Ayuso *et al.*, 2013). The main focus is on how multinational corporations develop governance mechanisms (Christmann & Taylor, 2006; Gimenez & Tachizawa, 2012) to assess suppliers for SC CSR compliance (Baden *et al.*, 2009; Ciliberti *et al.*, 2008, 2011; Seuring & Müller, 2008). However, there is doubt if different controlling mechanisms are as efficient as desired (Perry & Towers, 2009).

Recently a second strategic logic has been emphasized: monitoring supplier ability to act collaboratively as an SC partner (Ciliberti *et al.*, 2011; Gimenez & Tachizawa, 2012; Keating *et al.*, 2008; Spence & Bourlakis, 2009). This strategy is supported by global initiatives and standards that aim to stimulate self-regulatory CSR implementation (Keating *et al.*, 2008), pointing to the benefits of each partner acting from its own sense of responsibility. However, the partnership strategy requires that each partner develop its own control mechanisms, policies, and strategies that support CSR implementation both in its own operations and in the SC. To act collaboratively in emerging market contexts requires however, a radical transformation for the suppliers from top-down direction to proactive and independent work on CSR-related issues.

These two logics are commonly handled separately in research; few studies investigate how efficiently the two can work within the same emerging market SC context and how the suppliers respond to corporate CSR strategies. In particular, the preconditions for moving into a more partnership-driven strategy in an institutionalized, hierarchical, controlled context have received scarce attention. We follow Klerkx *et al.*'s (2012) suggestion that investigations that build on the understanding of institutionalized, contextual elements can contribute to helpful insights by clarifying which strategic CSR constraints are most important to overcome. This paper aims to explore how SC suppliers respond to corporate CSR strategies and deal with institutional constraints within the global supply chain. Special attention is paid to investigate suppliers' ability to implement CSR more independently.

With focus on two main CSR implementation strategies applied by two case corporations, this article, this study addresses main difficulties in managing these

two strategies in a business context that traditionally has institutionalized corporate-driven SC control.

The garment industry in Bangladesh is studied by conducting interviews and site visits among buying companies and SC suppliers. Multiple catastrophes have recently had a strong influence on the overall pressure on the suppliers to increase their own CSR responsibility. We focus on two different CSR strategies the buying companies apply to coordinate SC relations, to illustrate how the suppliers respond to these strategies; and then we discuss the impact of institutional constraints on SC efficiency. As the size of the company is considered to have significant impact on suppliers' preconditions to manage CSR (Perry & Towers, 2009), this paper investigates how larger and better equipped key suppliers act responsible and break institutional patterns than smaller ones. The studied suppliers are key players with substantial operations in Bangladesh and in a position to be strategically important role models for the country's economy. They also have the ability to influence second-tier suppliers to act responsibly in relation to their business context. To view their perceptions from a contextual perspective, other organizations are included to aid in understanding the business environment.

The next section presents a literature review with special focus on institutional conditions, the discussion of CSR implementation in general and in relation to SC research. Then we present our mixed method approach. Finally, the findings are discussed in relation to the aim of the study, followed by contributions from this research, conclusions drawn, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

With CSR emerging as a vital concept in most organizations, the research rhetoric has developed from resting on normative ethical arguments to normative performance arguments (Lindgreen & Swaen, 2010). This means a movement from pure, normative arguments based on how companies' should act, towards research focusing on how CSR actually is implemented and practiced (Maon *et al.*, 2009). The practical interest has contributed to the establishment of robust rules and procedures to manage CSR complexity. Researchers pay attention to regulatory aspects of CSR, focusing on the support of corporate standards and programs to improve self-regulation (Christmann & Taylor, 2006) by incorporating codes of conduct, audits, and measurements of performance in SCs (Egels-Zandén, 2013).

2.1. Institutional aspects of CSR implementation

Institutional theory provides valuable insights into the constraints that organizations experience in the situations of change and uncertainty that often occur when implementing CSR in the SC. It has proved particularly useful to

understand how changes affect business relations in newly industrialized countries (Thome' and Medeiros, 2013), which in our case is represented by Bangladesh. According to Rottig (2016) emerging market countries have unique institutional features that differ compared to developed market contexts as these include voids representing the lack or underdevelopment of certain institutions. This means that multinational enterprises operating in emerging markets are forced to take roles they commonly are not use to have in developing market contexts (Rottig, 2016). The role includes also to manage CSR, and to understand cultural elements and rules that need to be taken to strategically achieve compliance with the suppliers.

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) argue that “organizational environments are composed of cultural elements, that is, taken-for-granted beliefs and widely promulgated rules that serve as the template for organizing”, which are “associated with the demands of powerful central actors such as the state, the professions, or the dominant agents within organizational fields. This emphasis has highlighted the constraints imposed by institutions and stressed the ubiquity of rules that guide behavior” and that these rules are “products of human actions” (pp. 27-28). Jepperson (1991) refers to institution as a social pattern, whereas institutionalization is considered as the process to attain these patterns. The processes that lead to the establishment of certain patterns are referred to as “standardized interaction sequences” (p. 145). Translated to a CSR implementation in SC perspective, the institutionalization processes are initiated in the corporation by codes of conduct to coordinate behaviors, to avoid contextual uncertainties, and to attain compliance with these rules. The compliance emphasis in implementation means that institutional CSR arguments commonly guide decision-making in the SC (Husted & Allen, 2006).

However, there are various degrees of institutionalization (Zucker, 1991), which indicates that rules of behavior might involve resistance to change (Zucker, 1991) or be immutable (Jepperson, 1991). Jepperson (1991) argues that exogenous shocks or collective actions can block or disrupt the reproduction of routines (p. 145). For institutions to be strongly persistent for change, Zucker (1991) argues that three criteria must be fulfilled: (1) the transmission of culture or what is defined as real between generations, (2) maintenance of these definitions in the context of institutionalization, and (3) cultural resistance to changing taken-for-granted institutions. To understand persistence for change Zucker suggests that the focus could be on the actor's compliance with the actions prescribed by those having an impact on the institution (p. 84). From a CSR perspective, transmission implies that the company strategically implements the concept, but that the pressure of institutional isomorphism assists as well (Husted & Allen, 2006).

Besides degrees of institutionalization, Kim *et al.* (2013, referring to Scott, 1995) discuss three pillars of institution that have an impact on CSR implementation.

The regulative pillar imposed by governmental organizations provides basic rules in society; the normative pillar imposed by the business sector influences CSR practices; and the cognitive pillar is the norms and culture in a given society. All these pillars, according to Kim *et al.* (2013), both enable and constrain businesses in how to act.

In order to maintain legitimacy in their business context, companies commonly choose to decouple activities that do not comply with efficiency requirements from their operations. For example, decoupling occurs when inspections and evaluations are ceremonialized (Meyer & Rowan, 1991) and not performed seriously. Egels-Zandén (2013) discusses decoupling processes in CSR implementation but argues that recoupling might occur on two occasions: (1) when developing trusting relationships and (2) when external pressures “accidentally” occur (*ibid.*, 2013, referring to Espeland, 1998). Following Egels-Zandén’s discussion, this implies that partnership engagement and accidents can radically change and recouple CSR activities from a ceremonial operation to a serious one.

2.2. CSR implementation strategies

For institutionalized patterns to develop, it is important that companies implement strategies based on a long-term perspective. Two implementation strategies discussed in the literature view CSR implementation as either a *systemic* step-by-step development process (Crittenden *et al.*, 2011; Lindgreen *et al.*, 2011; Mirvis & Googins, 2006) or as a business *priority and selection* process (Crittenden *et al.*, 2011; Cruz & Wakolbinger, 2008; Klerkx *et al.*, 2012). The systemic approach monitors the rationale of *full* implementation of standards and programs and pays attention to CSR responsiveness to these (Christmann & Taylor, 2006), whereas the latter emphasizes the necessity to prioritize and implement *preferred activities* related to core business activities.

The systemic perspective views CSR implementation as a development process, taking time to reach complete integration in the SC context (Christmann & Taylor, 2006; Crittenden *et al.*, 2011; Lindgreen *et al.*, 2011; Mirvis & Googins, 2006). While implementation is considered as the process, CSR integration is defined as the extent to which the company reaches CSR compliance as an endstage. Full integration in business activities is commonly seen as having reached the “business case” of CSR (Murphy & Schlegelmilch, 2013).

Crittenden *et al.* (2011) highlight the lack of clear rules slowing down the implementation process. They found that only 60% of CSR strategies are implemented in companies, with poor effects on performance; they suggest a four-stage model to reach systemic CSR integration. Mirvis & Googins (2006) discuss CSR implementation as a combination of both confusion and coherence, which

must be strategically balanced according to the focal company's circumstances. How well a company succeeds with full CSR integration and institutionalization depends on its capacity and commitment to CSR standards and requirements. Mirvis & Googins (2006) identify five growth stages in which companies start with sporadic activities to comply with laws and standards and end in transformative thinking, doing both good and well in business, which requires visionary leaders and partnerships with the community and other stakeholders to succeed. Lindgreen *et al.* (2011) relate implementation strategy to sense-making, which in nine implementation activity stages gradually develops and reaches the desired end of full CSR integration. This requires both cultural change and negotiation to achieve a shared inter-organizational understanding of the change process. The commitment of top management is crucial to reach successful implementation.

The prioritizing approach views implementation strategy as necessity to select which issues are regarded as most important for the company rather than built on full integration of standards (Husted & Allen, 2006). This strategy follows the rationale that companies cannot do everything but must decide what key elements of CSR to include in business activities (Klerkx *et al.*, 2012). These decisions are commonly linked to the companies' ability to balance economic and CSR-related variables (Wu & Pagell, 2011). From an institutional standpoint, prioritizing means that certain CSR areas are given more attention while others are decoupled from standards as less important (Cruz & Wakolbinger, 2008). Variations in prioritized CSR components depend on contextual business circumstances, firm size, and the specific relationships between companies in the SC (Klerkx *et al.*, 2012).

2.2.1. The corporate-driven systemic strategy

Most CSR studies discuss how smaller companies have to rely on larger companies' control to survive (Baden *et al.*, 2009; Klerkx *et al.*, 2012). CSR in SC research commonly views corporations as accountable for social and environmental issues, regardless of whether they concern the corporation or its suppliers (Cruz & Wakolbinger, 2008). The focus is primarily on assessments of suppliers' CSR ability to comply with corporate requirements and how to gain competitive advantage by being selected as part of not an SC (Ciliberti *et al.*, 2010; Ciliberti *et al.*, 2008; Seuring & Müller, 2008). The discussion emphasizes how suppliers must be strategically managed in order to comply with the focal company's core values and principles (Ciliberti *et al.*, 2008). When suppliers are selected based on carefully chosen criteria, responsibility may be extended to those that comply with the stated requirements (Ciliberti *et al.*, 2010). This means that CSR provides competitive advantages for these suppliers; less responsive suppliers risk losing corporate confidence, leaving business opportunities to others.

2.2.2. *The partnership-driven strategy*

Recently a growing research emphasis is placed on the importance of coordinating CSR activities in SC as collaborative partners (Gimenez & Tachizawa, 2012; Vachon & Klassen, 2008). According to Vachon and Klassen (2008), efficient SC management requires different degrees of interaction with various stakeholders including sustainability issues. The benefits should be integrated in SC as a whole and not only related to a focal company (Perry & Towers, 2009). Collaborative efforts are believed to have positive influence on CSR activities (Ulstrup Hoejmosse *et al.*, 2013). However, Spence and Bourlakis (2009, referring to Cox, 2004) argue that this kind of win-win situation between suppliers and buyers is only mythical, since SC relationships are determined by the balance of power in exchange situations. Buyer power is a significant determinant of SC control, especially in geographically distant relationships.

The normative arguments of the partnership-driven perspective emphasize the importance of shared goals and values to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Perry & Towers, 2009; Stock & Boyer, 2009). SC efficiency and enhanced performance is achieved when the involved organizations act as a single entity for the benefit of the customer (Tan, 2001). The three central elements of partnership are the sharing of activities, benefits, and constituents/components (Stock & Boyer, 2009). Perry and Towers (2009, referring to Svensson, 2007) also add the importance of integrating activities, actors, and resources in the value chain from raw materials to the end users.

The rationale of the partnership logic is that each SC party needs to take responsibility for issues related to its own business in ways that go beyond corporate ownership and direct control (Gimenez & Tachizawa, 2012). Partnership engagements enable companies to move beyond compliance and stage models that suggest that CSR strategies can be governed as linear processes over time (Seitanidi, 2008). However, adopting a partnership strategy is time-consuming, requiring hard work, trust, and commitment by involved parties for success (Spence & Bourlakis, 2009).

3. METHOD

This research explores the complexity of CSR implementation strategies and coordination in garment industry SCs in Bangladesh following a mixed method approach as suggested by Brewer and Hunter (2006). As the movement towards a more supplier-driven CSR agenda requires a paradigm shift, using different methods offers a more comprehensive approach to study this phenomenon (Gil-Garcia & Pardo, 2006). Case research, with in-depth interviews, observations, and participation data collection methods, is used to provide a more complete overview of the phenomenon from different perspectives (Carter *et al.*, 2008; Esteves & Pastor,

2004), and the mixed method approach compensates for the faults and limitations of single methods (Brewer & Hunter, 2006; Gil-Garcia & Pardo, 2006).

The ability to triangulate results from different methods (Brewer & Hunter, 2006, Gil-Garcia & Pardo, 2006) creates “opportunities for cross-validation and cross-fertilizing procedures, findings, and theory” (Brewer & Hunter, 2006, p. 1). According to Gil-Garcia and Pardo (2006), the combination of data collection methods also increases the possibility of addressing a broader set of questions, to improve the likelihood of identifying paradoxes and seeing unexpected outcomes. In this study, these possibilities constitute important criteria for the choice of method, as we wanted to view the preconditions for SC suppliers to act independently in an institutionalized, corporate-driven context. This required collecting data from multiple sources to get a comprehensive picture of the situation.

3.1. Research design – the SC context

As SC research involves a complex mixture of research objects and problems (Ashby *et al.*, 2012), this paper adopts an exploratory research design. The mixed-method approach (Baden *et al.*, 2009) combines semi-structured interviews both in Sweden and in Bangladesh with observation and factory visits in the Bangladesh garment industry. Two-hour-long interviews were conducted in connection with one-day factory visits, which provided an opportunity to observe the production of garments and working conditions on the whole site, with the possibility to ask follow-up questions of both management and employees. Based on close contacts with researchers in Bangladesh, two visits were made, in October 2012 and April 2013. Table 1 summarizes the research context and study design.

The interviews with the buying companies were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of CSR implementation strategies in relation to SC suppliers. We interviewed C1 and C2 both in Sweden and Bangladesh. These companies work in similar ways in Bangladesh, which is why we included both companies. C1 is a larger buyer with global business and is using *the corporate-driven strategy*; C2’s market is Northern Europe and is using *the partnership-driven strategy*. The interviewed representatives all have long experience in managing CSR implementation in Sweden and in Bangladesh. Both buying companies have key positions as wholesalers and retailers in SCs and are well known actors in the Bangladesh garment industry. They have long provided education for garment factory textile workers at training centers in Dhaka. During a visit to C1’s training center, we had the opportunity to observe the training and talk to participants and teachers in charge.

The two first-tier key suppliers (FS1-FS2) we interviewed produce cloth for many global buyers and have between 5000 to 8000 employees, respectively, and a

Table 1
Research context and study design

CODE	ORGANIZATION	POSITION OF RESPONDENT	DATA COLLECTION	LOCATION OF DATA COLLECTION	COLLECTION PERIOD
C1	Buying Company	CSR Manager 1	Interview	Stockholm, Sweden	September 2012
		CSR Manager 2	Interview	Stockholm, Sweden	November 2012
		Sustainability Manager	Interview	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
		CSR Program Developer	Interview	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
		Training Center In Charge	Interview/Observation	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
		Manager Training Center	Interview/Observation	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
C2	Buying Company	CSR Manager	Interview	Gothenburg, Sweden	February 2013
		Global Social Compliance Manager	Interview	Dhaka, Bangladesh	April 2013
		Senior Compliance Officer	Interview	Dhaka, Bangladesh	April 2013
FS1	1st Tier Supplier	Director of Operations	Interview/Observation	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
FS2	1st Tier Supplier	General Manager	Interview/Observation	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
		Manager HR Admin & Compliance	Interview/Observation	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
SS1	2nd Tier Supplier	General Manager	Interview/Observation	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
SS2	2nd Tier Supplier	General Manager	Interview/Observation	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
SS3	2nd Tier Supplier	Director	Interview/Observation	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
SS4	2nd Tier Supplier	Director	Interview/Observation	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
BH1	Local Buying Houses	Director	Interview/Observation	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
BH2	Local Buying Houses	Director	Interview/Observation	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
LC1	Logistics Company	Managing Director	Interview	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
Sida	Sida (Swedish Internat. Dev. Coop. Agency)	3 Swedish Representatives, Dhaka	Interviews	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
DCCI	Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry	President	Interview	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
		Principal Training Center	Interview	Dhaka, Bangladesh	October 2012
	Univ. of Bangladesh	Academics	Workshop & discussion	Dhaka, Bangladesh	April 2013
	University of Gävle	Academics	Workshop & discussion	Gävle, Sweden	April 2013

yearly turnover of 40-45 million US dollars. They are key suppliers to both C1 and C2.

Among the second-tier suppliers, SS1 produces fabrics that are important to the buying companies' SCs in Bangladesh, whereas SS2-SS4 are smaller suppliers producing accessories (textiles, buttons, zippers, paper boxes, poly bags and labels) for first-tier suppliers. SS1 has 1200 employees and annual turnover of USD 22 million. SS2 has 3500 employees (annual turnover not specified). FS1, which owns the SS2-SS4 factories, represents both first- and second-tier suppliers for the buyers, but also has the role of first-tier supplier relative to its own company.

Representatives of the two buying houses (BH1-BH2) and logistic company (LC1) provided contextual SC information about CSR strategies and opinions about supplier opportunities to act independently. These three companies offered

complementary general information about the suppliers' SC condition in Bangladesh. Two factory visits were conducted at buying houses companies that have ambitions to be included in the SC but are not at present.

Finally, interviews were conducted with supporting key organizations in Dhaka: the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). These interviews generated valuable information about common issues in the garment industry related to the SC situation in Bangladesh business context.

In total, data were collected from 13 organizations with 23 representatives, plus from two workshops and discussions with academia at universities in Bangladesh and Sweden. Some questions were considered irrelevant to the company's operations and were not thoroughly discussed. Through company visits, however, we could see how the suppliers worked with CSR issues.

Each interview lasted about 2 hours. Immediately after the interview, the text was transcribed. The data were coded in areas that interviewees listed as important. Every factory visit took one day to complete. The factories were located outside Dhaka and traffic problems caused delays. After the interviews, we followed the owner/CEO on a tour of each factory and could see the entire production chain, visiting all floors and entities linked to factory production.

In April 2013 we had planned three additional factory visits. The Rana Plaza building collapse in the Savar district in Dhaka, killing close to 1200 workers, occurred at that time, forcing us to cancel these visits.

3.2. Limitations of the method

The use of mixed-method approach requires careful attention to how data from the different methods are combined. These limitations were met by collecting data via interviews, observations, and participation in workshops. Qualitative approaches complement each other, and enabled triangulation and the possibility of setting different opinions against one another for reducing bias on the part of the researchers.

Limiting the study to Bangladesh can be criticized for making it difficult to generalize the findings and compile one coherent, generic picture. Since the interviewees expressed similar perceptions of buying companies' CSR strategies in Bangladesh, we have no reason to doubt the findings. For instance, the lack of management competence was brought up as a central shortcoming during all interviews.

4. RESULTS: THE BANGLADESH CASE

This section presents the data gathered from the buying companies (C1-C2) followed by the data on how the first-tier (FS1-FS2) and second-tier suppliers (SS1-

SS4) implement CSR. Finally, the key challenges for suppliers, as expressed by the interviewees, are presented.

4.1. C1: The corporate-driven strategy

The C1 company, with long business experience in Bangladesh, has close relationships with 250 local suppliers described as “business partners.” C1 requires that the suppliers follow a systematic model for CSR implementation: *Specialist employees visit the factories and perform initial assessments of CSR performance. Information is gathered to see whether the supplier has the capacity and proper management. If they fulfill the requirements, the partnership proceeds with a full audit program (FOP) with zero-tolerance requirements. Our company has 10 auditors who visit factories in Bangladesh to conduct social and environmental audits. In addition to announced and unannounced audits, interviews with workers and management are performed continuously, and a control of documentation is carried out. In the case of a problem, the supplier receives a warning and recommendations regarding how to correct the problem before the next audit.* (C1, CSR Program Developer, Dhaka)

Compliance is the most important issue for a supplier to get purchase orders. By signing the ICOC (International Code of Conduct) provided by C1, the suppliers publicly affirm their responsibility to respect human rights and environmental issues. Their required plan for work with these issues is later reviewed by C1. C1 conducts four audits, which include a first announced visit and three follow-up audits. The process takes 4-9 months to complete. C1 also makes unannounced verification and technical audits (quality audits) aimed at getting the suppliers to solve urgent problems.

If the supplier does not comply with requirements, an additional routine audit is carried out. The supplier must solve the problem within one month before new orders are placed. If the supplier fails to correct the problem, new orders continue to be blocked; a supplier that makes improvements as recommended receives new orders again. If an order is placed and it is found that the supplier has a problem, the supplier may continue to work on that order while simultaneously taking steps to minimize the problem. When full shipment of order is received, the supplier is blocked until the factory demonstrates improvements. The ICOC proceedings are transparent to the supplier: every audit generates a clear audit report with dates by which to complete the changes.

Many challenges remain concerning workers’ wages and environmental issues, but these require collaboration with public institutions. Because C1 is only one of several buyers, which means that the supplier must also follow other codes of conduct. The most urgent problem is the need for middle management training, since they are strategically important for SC efficiency and CSR implementation.

Sida emphasizes C1's dedication and involvement in a number of women's health projects. The company's compliance issues provide a good working environment, but workers' living conditions in the slums are extremely poor. One targeted problem concerns the education of middle management, as has also been reported in the media. Sida stresses the importance of and need for collaboration within the industry to improve working conditions.

4.2. C2: The partnership-driven strategy

C2 works with 35 suppliers from around 50 factories in Bangladesh and have 11 employees to handle compliance in Bangladesh. Due to resource shortages, they use the same audit strategy in relation to all suppliers. The company requires that suppliers follow their codes of conduct and country laws. The codes should be recognized, but the implementation process is allowed to take time.

The level of compliance is, according to C2's Global Social Compliance Manager (GSCM), *"not excellent, but acceptable and developing day by day."* The audit process simply consists of suppliers' compliance inspections. After the first inspection, the supplier's factory is evaluated for CSR performance. The supplier is expected to provide an action plan, an attempt to hand over responsibilities to the supplier. Many of the buyers in Bangladesh tell the suppliers that *"this is your problem and you should fix it"* (GSCM). C2 wants the suppliers to take responsibility for their own problems without being given deadlines for when the issues should be fixed, so they do not tell the supplier how, when, or where to create the action plan. During the first factory visit, C2 checks whether the basic CSR requirements are met. C2 makes follow-up visits, tries to solve problems, offers suggestions, or provides equipment. Later inspections cover working lights, cleanliness of toilets, and overall factory conditions. The first year is seen as a period to prove reliability. Later, C2 informs the supplier how to develop the company to fulfill requirements.

C2's ambition is to be a good business partner and says; *we communicate with them each year on how to develop their company, to fulfill the requirements. This is an ongoing process. If you want to work with partnership and cooperation, you can't always monitor and police them* (GSCM). If the supplier works actively with improvements and follows the policy, they can receive direct orders.

C2 experiences several CSR obstacles in Bangladesh. *There are so many buyers, and many of them don't want to see the reality, such as overtime issues, middle management, mindset, and behavior. It's a struggle for the company* (GSCM). This causes buyer collaboration difficulties, leading to a request for improved dialogue about common problems. Although dialogue does exist in a buyers' forum where international brands are represented, common problems are only discussed on the surface. Occasionally C2 also has contact with other buyers, but not on a formal basis. Another important problem is to minimize the orders to subcontractors. *The*

suppliers should inform us where they're going to produce the orders. In a peak season, every supplier has multiple orders at the same time. When we have big orders, the suppliers distribute 10% to the subcontractor (GSCM).

One solution is to develop close relationships with key suppliers, which requires partnerships and trust. *You don't need a perfect supplier, it's not a problem. But we want to have a dialogue about their problems. We're also looking for our dream partner ... we are happy with their prices, policy, and that they also take responsibility for this (GSCM).*

According to C2, it could be unrealistic to pressure suppliers to take excessively big or fast steps in CSR implementation. Although CSR has been addressed in Bangladesh for many years, most suppliers are still, after 10 years, focusing on fire safety rather than more sophisticated issues or hygiene factors. Some of the factories are still at the same development stage as when they started. The dream is to overcome these obstacles, because the suppliers cannot rely on the buyers to point out the problems all the time.

C2 calls for a change in management mindset, where the suppliers genuinely want to make the necessary changes, which requires training at the mid-management level. They look good during inspections but return to their traditional routines in between. There are also too many people working in one factory, since owners expand the business but the production area and facilities remain the same. Each sewing machine, for instance, is operated by two people, one expert and the other an assistant.

4.3. Key Supplier CSR implementation

All key suppliers (FS1, FS2 and SS1) claim to follow the buyers' codes of conduct, which is seen as essential to get orders from international buyers. They argue that their buyers place the same requirements on second-tier suppliers as on themselves. The second-tier supplier is commonly recommended by the buyer, who occasionally also audits second-tier suppliers. Internal audits are done and some of the key suppliers audit second-tier suppliers. The suppliers are positive about the audits because the process increases "mental awareness and social responsibility" (FS1).

Many of the CSR issues undertaken by the suppliers concern organizing annual celebrations, extra pay for overtime work, snacks at lunchtime, and providing training.

During site visits, the researchers observed the buying companies' codes posted on the walls, met medical staff (in a doctor's office or other designated place close to production) who attend to health problems, visited special child-care rooms, and observed water purification equipment with a recovery system. We found big differences in how suppliers provided medical assistance, childcare (especially the spaces and the number of children, number of adults working with children,

and health care), and safety modifications in the working environment and the production lines (i.e. space between lines, bags to collect garbage, etc.).

The suppliers experience several problems in pursuing a more self-driven CSR implementation. One mentioned obstacle is the shortage of educated middle managers and limited opportunities to employ people with higher education. Since companies are located outside Dhaka and traffic is extremely bad and time consuming, it is difficult to attract skilled workers like students. A second problem is that trained employees leave after the Muslim Eid festival or when offered better salaries by other suppliers. In some cases, the entire production line has moved to another supplier. As there is a surplus of suppliers, their bargaining power is limited, resulting in high competition as result. A third problem is the lack of supplier associations improving collaboration, making interaction between suppliers weak and fragmented. Coordinated local initiatives are needed to meet common problems in garment SCs.

4.3.1. General CSR in SC experiences

The Logistics Company (LC1), the Buying Houses (BH1-BH2), and supporting organizations mentioned common contextual constraints for efficient CSR implementation in Bangladesh. They find that Bangladeshi suppliers have a long way to go compared to their counterparts in European countries. Suppliers focus on business areas cited as important by the buyers, overlooking CSR areas beyond their responsibilities. Poor infrastructure with logistic delays causes time pressure and contributes to extra costs for both the suppliers and logistic companies. Buyers impose varying requirements, causing problems especially for smaller suppliers, which adds costs and leads to the employment of child labor.

The buying companies do not cover the extra costs for compliance; with financial constraints it is difficult for smaller suppliers to meet costly requirements. In peak seasons many suppliers experience time pressure when delivering buyer orders, forcing them to forward the work to second-tier suppliers that do not always follow CSR requirements. The workers should work only 8 hours a day, but in peak periods they work 12 hours or more, requiring overtime pay. If profit margins could increase, the suppliers argue they could devote more time to CSR. The buying companies are aware that the suppliers are forced to turn to sub contractors due to limited production capacity during peak seasons, but they do not acknowledge the problem.

5. DISCUSSION

The two main strategies introduced are both considered to promote effective CSR implementation in SC. Our aim was to explore, on the basis of two companies applying these strategies, how effectively these approaches work and how the

strategic and institutional constraints influence on supplier ability in the studied SC context.

5.1. The corporate-driven approach

CSR implementation is commonly viewed as an ongoing rational development process, ending in the ideal state of full CSR integration including SC responsibilities (Christmann & Taylor, 2006; Crittenden *et al.*, 2011; Lindgreen *et al.*, 2011; Mirvis & Googins, 2006). Integration is argued to occur when policies, practices, and processes are congruent with CSR principles (Lindgreen *et al.*, 2011), supported by issue management (Mirvis & Googins, 2006), strategically integrated in daily activities (Seuring & Müller, 2008), and continuously refined through monitoring and measurements of the initiated processes. Implicitly the systemic approach assumes that if companies follow the rationale of this strategy, the outcome would be ideal.

Our findings show that C1 applies this strategy by strictly coordinating CSR activities based on code of conduct to achieve supplier compliance, which is continually followed up by audits. The company's long tradition after having worked with CSR-related issues in Bangladesh SC for almost 30 years enables them to develop distinct procedures for supplier compliance. C1's strong power position in society has also strengthened the efficiency of their controlling strategy.

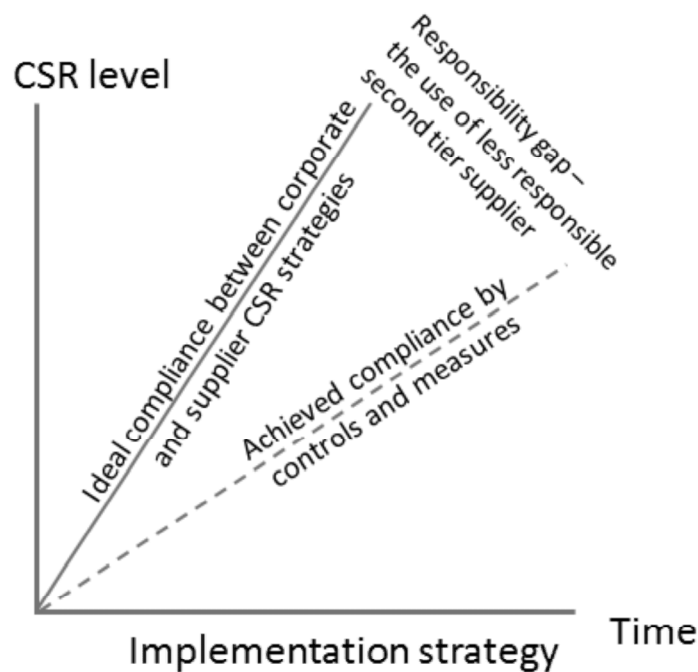


Figure 1: The corporate-driven CSR implementation responsibility gap

The interviews and visits among main suppliers' revealed how the corporate framework of rules is institutionalized and not questioned by the suppliers. For instance, the codes are placed on factory walls as signs to regulate the employees' work with CSR and communicate responsibility. The establishment of a training center is a long-term investment and serves as a commitment to improve the efficiency of work in the factories, as well as encouraging the workforce to follow the set strategy early in the process. These commitments agree with Meyer and Rowan (1991) regarding how decoupling avoidance requires that goals and rules are made clear early.

Despite the fact that CSR is institutionalized, there are situations out of corporate control, which means that the systematic corporate strategy works not perfectly but satisfactorily. Figure 1 illustrates the responsibility gap between what is ideally achievable and what actually can be managed. According to both buying and supplying companies, the gap largely results from the lack of middle manager CSR knowledge, due to difficulties employing and training skilled leaders. The fact that CSR knowledge cannot be efficiently conveyed and applied in production affects work loyalty and competition. The Bangladeshi garment industry suffers from institutional constraints in society such as bad infrastructure, the general perception of company disloyalty, and the low payment regulated by legislation in Bangladesh. Loyalty costs can be considerable, for instance in situations when the whole production line leaves and needs to be replaced, which causes major disruption and increased production costs. Even if the supplier bears the costs of interruption, CSR efficiency decreases if they are forced to use sub contractors outside of corporate control. Thus, the ideal corporate-driven strategy is subjected to institutional constraints that prevent it from functioning ideally. Due to corporate price-setting power the suppliers have narrow margins to abide the CSR requirements which economically force them to turn to subcontractors that are less controllable for the corporation.

5.2. The partnership approach

The partnership strategy suggests that instead of interfering in how the suppliers run their business, the buying companies trust them to have skills and capacity to manage their own businesses (Spence & Bourlakis, 2009, referring to Lamprecht, 2000). The strategy emphasizes the need for collaboration and joint capacity building (Perry & Towers, 2009; Stock & Boyer, 2009). This strategy is a part of SC risk management (Perry & Towers, 2009) and aims at lowering transaction costs and improving production values among SC partners (Cruz & Wakolbinger, 2008). Partnerships are adopted to jointly agree on ways to build capacity, to accept shared goals and create value (Carter & Rogers, 2008; Perry & Towers, 2009; Stock & Boyer, 2009). Based on mutual agreement, partners can act as an entity for the benefit of SC and the customers (Tan, 2001).

In the Bangladesh study C2 adapts the partnership strategy for implementing CSR in the SC. C2 wants to avoid the strict “policing” role based on SC control. The risks of moving too early and fast with high expectations on the suppliers are highlighted as too risky a strategy. For smaller suppliers this causes problems because of limited resources and time needed to adjust CSR-related issues, especially in peak seasons with the pressure of a large number of orders. C2 has seen that unrealistically high expectations of fast implementation may result in the supplier just giving up.

Interviewees maintain that closer and more extensive collaboration provides better follow-up of supplier requirements. The suppliers’ compliance with the code of conduct should be developed in line with SC business relationships. They say “We believe in collaboration to achieve safer working conditions.” However, for C2 to get suppliers to embrace their guidelines entails facing CSR decoupling problems. Especially smaller suppliers ignore the guidelines between audits, implying that the partnership strategy failed to work efficiently, with limited progress over the past 10 years. CSR is implemented in a symbolic manner by suppliers and primarily driven by audits where inspections and evaluations are ceremonialized and not performed seriously (Meyer & Rowan, 1991).

According to the logistic and buying house companies, many suppliers decouple CSR in peak season situations and experience logistic delays with added costs. Forced to prioritize and act based on a partnership-driven strategy enables them to make choices that prioritize lowering costs for economic survival. Figure 2 illustrates that based on the partnership approach, it is unrealistic to ask suppliers for rapid CSR implementation, since the strategy permits the suppliers to decouple CSR in a critical production situation. The cost of effective CSR implementation becomes too high.

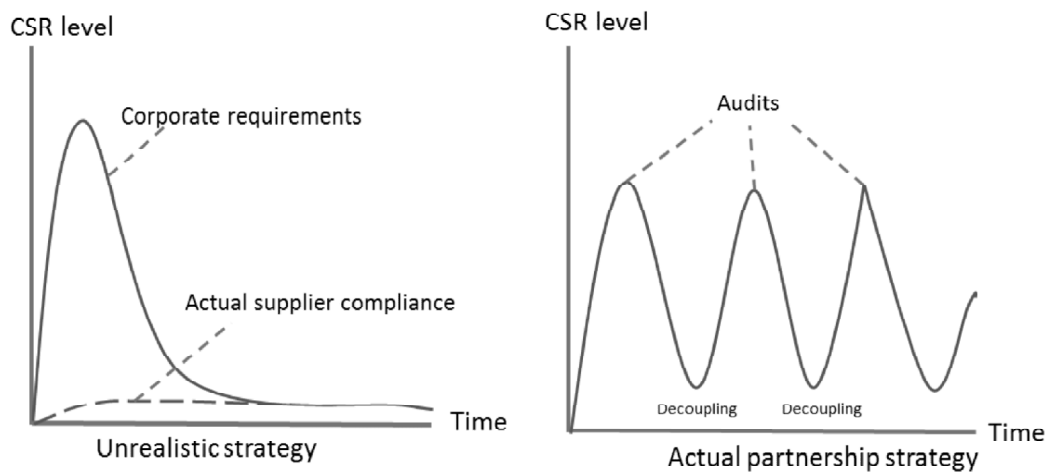


Figure 2: The unrealistic and actual partnership CSR strategy

5.3. Institutional constraintson supplier independence

The garment industry's long economic dependence on the buying companies has led to an institutionalized business pattern that portrays the buyers as those who set the rules for the SC, a pattern that is accepted by most SC partners in Bangladesh. Jepperson (1991) refers to this process as development of "routine reproductive procedures" that "support and sustain the pattern, furthering its reproduction – unless collective action blocks or environmental shock disrupts the reproductive process" (p.145). Undoubtedly this corporate strategy has contributed to significant improvements among Bangladeshi suppliers, but is also problematic because it allows the suppliers to assume the role of followers rather than encouraging them to act strategically based on their own responsibility and contextual needs. This situation is especially evident in the Bangladeshi context, where hierarchical governance is institutionalized and not questioned. The suppliers are doing what they are expected to do to get the business, while areas beyond corporate responsibilities risk are being decoupled as less important.

In Bangladesh this institutional "pattern" is, firstly, reinforced by an overall of not questioning characterized "by the elaboration of rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy" (Scott & Meyer, 1991, p. 123).

Secondly, as long as the buying companies exert institutionalized power over the SC, it is difficult for the suppliers to break free from corporate dependency. Institutionalized routines with focus on the buying company's business requirements also help to decouple areas of central importance for societal development.

Thirdly, corporate production requirements force the suppliers to adapt to pressing production conditions and to use subcontractors that do not comply with the buying companies' CSR codes. Egels-Zandén (2013) note show production requirements affect CSR adoption and confirm the buyers' view of the suppliers as not wanting to work on social issues in a serious manner.

Fourthly, if SC companies and supporting organizations work in isolation in terms of defining common problems, it is difficult to agree on what issues are most important. Buyers' development of codes means that CSR implementation issues are ruled by different interpretations and significance, which influences suppliers' abilities to follow them all. Collaboration and joint planning between SC and organizational stake holders in Bangladesh is generally poor, undermining the possibility to create a supportive environment for businesses.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study investigates two CSR implementation strategies in SC having influence on supplier performance. The SC companies are in a business context with

institutionalized corporate power, where suppliers are supported by not questioning culture and are taking for granted the regulative pressure from buying companies. These constraints make both the corporate-driven and the partnership-driven CSR in SC strategies less effective for the suppliers to follow.

We have especially noticed three levels of institutional constraints preventing the suppliers from acting efficiently according to the CSR strategies. The first level concerns middle-management implications; their lack of sustainability knowledge and weak loyalty to the company when offered better economic conditions making the whole line of workers moving to other companies. The second level of constraints relates to the corporate-driven strategy and concerns moderating effect on CSR strategy. CSR research assumes that the systematic corporate control of suppliers has direct effects on supplier compliance. We have noted that low financial margins have strong side effects on the suppliers pushing them to use less responsible subcontractors. The corporate-driven control-oriented CSR strategy is followed but with low supplier margins the effects of the interventions are reduced. Buying companies are aware of the limitations but act ignorant to the shortcoming.

Finally, the partnership-driven CSR strategy built on trust opens up decoupling opportunities for the suppliers to manage their own pressing economic conditions. Ignoring CSR requirements halts the implementation process and the collaborative intention. We conclude that the corporate-driven strategy is preferable but still imperfect. The identified constraints require long-term changes and negotiation between involved SC parties, necessitating collaboration within the whole industry.

This study adds to CSR implementation strategy knowledge based on control and partnership perspectives and shows how supplier ability to meet strategic requirements are influenced by managerial and institutional constraints requiring long-term strategic changes. This study provides new theoretical insights by showing institutional constraints at three strategic levels limiting supplier ability to act strategically in CSR implementation: the managerial level, which strategically need to be managed within the supplying company's organization; the economic level, which requires long-term economic changes including collaboration and negotiation between companies in the SC and within the business field; and the societal level, which requires political, organizational, and infrastructural changes within the SC context. This means that the corporate-driven CSR strategy in SC is so far easier to manage, whereas the partnership-driven strategy requires demanding changes.

This paper has several limitations. The data illustrate a specific industry and SC companies in a specific country context known for its CSR constraints, making generalizations difficult. It is difficult to study CSR and capture SC deficiencies,

since suppliers feel that these studies affect their relationship to the buyers. Therefore, we had to address CSR issues related to SC conditions in general. This meant avoiding questions directed against the specific SC itself. Nevertheless, we believe that visiting many suppliers on site gave us the unique opportunity to see how they work with CSR, which helped to confirm the credibility of their statements.

Based on the limitations, we suggest further research of CSR in the SC in other industries to confirm and/or improve the understanding of how suppliers can act strategically and independently in CSR-related issues. We suggest, in CSR research it is necessary to examine mediating (managerial constraints) and moderating (use of subcontractors, collaboration environment) effects on CSR strategy performance.

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