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In highly structured organisational fields individual efforts to deal rationally with uncertainty and constraints tend to lead, in the aggregate, to greater homogeneity in structure, culture and output. Drawing on institutional theory, this paper develops research propositions regarding the nature and scope of corporate social responsibility (CSR) engagement at trade/industry association level. The cases of the water and sewerage and film industries are used in order to test these propositions. The findings suggest that (a) trade associations in more homogeneous industries are more likely to engage with CSR-related issues; (b) trade associations in industries that face greater external scrutiny and threats to legitimacy are more likely to engage with CSR-related issues; and (c) trade associations are more likely to engage with those substantive CSR issues that are of greater concern to the industry's most salient stakeholders. The findings also suggest that trade associations may have a greater tendency to engage in symbolic legitimation efforts through CSR if faced with the task of repairing industry legitimacy.

Introduction

This paper explores the ways in which trade associations in two UK industries (water and sewerage, and film) engage with corporate social responsibility (CSR). Trade and industry associations are an underresearched social phenomenon in general, and their CSR engagement has received very little academic attention so far. This is part of a general dearth of research addressing non-corporate and non-governmental organisations and their role as agents in CSR processes

with CSR issues than many of their member organisations (interview reference, Water UK) this is beginning to change.

... The CSR movement is for us not a threat but an opportunity ... it offers a course to follow that can help to establish a new relationship between business and society based on trust and shared values, leading to greater freedom for business and a more enlightened public attitude to profit. (Speech by Sir John Egan, CBI President, CBI National Conference, 25 November 2002, <http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdfs/content.nsf>)