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Intra-organisational drivers of purchasing social responsibility

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to identify intra-organisational drivers that enhance the implementation of a purchasing social responsibility (PSR) approach and drivers that influence PSR throughout the phases of the process.

Design/methodology/approach – The conceptual framework presents PSR as a process, rather than merely a decision. It focuses on three dimensions (centralisation, specialisation and formalisation) to highlight the role and evolution of key drivers through a three-phase process (set-up, operating and sustaining). The empirical analysis is based on a single qualitative case study of Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français (SNCF), France's state-owned railway company, which is particularly advanced in its PSR-related practices.

Findings – The intra-organisational drivers differ according to the phase of the PSR process. Transitions across the three phases entail organisational adaptation, which require the company to transform from a mechanistic to an organic structure.

Research limitations/implications – This research contributes to a better understanding of the PSR implementation process through an in-depth study focused on intra-organisational drivers. Although relatively understudied, these drivers play important roles.

Practical implications – This study identifies operational, intra-organisational leverage actions that can benefit firms that aim to adopt or maintain a PSR approach. It also provides comprehensive guidance for activating these leverages throughout the PSR implementation process, and it helps firms identify their level of PSR.

Originality/value – This study proposes the first processual, organisational interpretation of PSR approaches.

Keywords Intra-organisational drivers, Processual approach, Purchasing social responsibility

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Scholars recognise that a firm's purchasing function is critical for implementing a corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy (Mont and Leire, 2009). Accordingly, abundant literature addresses purchasing social responsibility (PSR), its components and its inter-organisational drivers, such as external inducements (e.g. from customers, suppliers, investors, nongovernmental organisations and media) and regulatory pressures (Gualandris and Kalchschmidt, 2014; Islam and Deegan, 2010; Leire and Mont, 2010; Walker *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, stakeholder theory is central to PSR research (Carter, 2004; Worthington *et al.*, 2008); in a sense, it constitutes the seminal theory of PSR. Although this theory stresses the importance of considering PSR, it

cannot help answer a key question: How can firms implement PSR? The stakeholder theory also emphasises inter-organisational drivers, to the exclusion of intra-organisational drivers. It appears as if PSR simply arises from the outside, without any organisational background or influence. However, Sarkis *et al.*, (2011) argue that organisational theories can provide more insight into the operational drivers that firms can implement to enhance their PSR.

Although studies that investigate intra-organisational drivers of PSR are scarce, researchers assert that in-house adoption of PSR practices is a prerequisite for any mandates that require suppliers to respond to and adopt PSR practices (Closs *et al.* 2010; Tate *et al.*, 2012; Zhu *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, few studies that examine intra-organisational drivers tend to focus on the decision to adopt PSR practices; they do not explicate the role or contributions of these intra-organisational drivers throughout the whole process, i.e. across PSR implementation phases. Yet PSR adoption is more than a one-time decision. Regarding PSR adoption as a processual approach that occurs in several stages can offer a better understanding of implementation successes and failures (Cousins and Spekman, 2003; Leire and Mont, 2010; Maignan *et al.*, 2002). Because existing studies that use a processual approach are primarily descriptive and often focus on a single phase, they cannot specify the role of the intra-organisational drivers as the firm moves from one phase to another.

To address these gaps, the current study seeks to identify intra-organisational drivers that facilitate both the implementation and the other phases of the PSR process. On a theoretical level, this study has a twofold purpose. First, we aim to address the lack of studies that refer to PSR as a process (Leire and Mont, 2010). Second, we explore intra-organisational drivers that might facilitate the implementation of such a process. These drivers have been insufficiently addressed by prior literature.

To distinguish intra-organisational drivers, we use Burns and Stalker's (1961) approach, which provides a clear picture of key organisational characteristics and allows us to conceptualise intra-organisational drivers consistently. To date, extant literature has mostly provided a piecemeal approach. In addition, Burns and Stalker's (1961) work is useful to explain, at least partly, why some firms are more advanced than others in this respect. The sixth edition of HEC/EcoVadis's Sustainable Procurement Barometer (Bruel *et al.*, 2013)[1] shows that though 75 per cent of companies surveyed have a PSR programme, PSR practices vary significantly from one company to another. The current study therefore provides guidance for implementing a PSR approach by identifying stage-specific internal actions that firms can adopt to ensure the sustainability of their PSR initiatives.

Our empirical observations stem from a single case study, undertaken at SNCF, the French national railway company, whose PSR programme is exemplary and particularly advanced. This study is based on a multi-actor approach (interviews with top managers, middle managers, purchasers and external consultants). The results indicate that intra-organisational drivers do not remain static; they evolve throughout three successive phases (set-up, operating and sustaining), and they reveal the substantial organisational complexity related to a PSR approach.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: the next section presents a literature review of the main intra-organisational drivers of PSR and a categorisation of those drivers according to an organisational approach, which results in an analytical

grid of intra-organisational PSR drivers conceptualised as a process. We then present the SNCF case study. Finally, we detail and discuss the findings and their implications.

Theoretical framework

At a corporate level, CSR constitutes a higher-order concern that must be part of the firm's strategic plan, such that it allocates sufficient resources to respond to CSR-related issues (Galbreath, 2009). CSR requires an integrative perspective (Closs *et al.*, 2010), which implies that it must be a cross-functional consideration. Therefore, it must first be well defined as a corporate strategy, and then implemented in various functions (Carter and Jennings, 2004; Cousins and Spekman, 2003; Pohl and Förstl, 2011). In turn, functional initiatives contribute to CSR policy (Igarashi *et al.*, 2013). The purchasing function is particularly important for improving overall CSR performance (Mont and Leire, 2009), because supplier practices affect customers' environmental and social impacts. It is therefore necessary for the customer to control the entire supply chain, which implies that the firm must internally define environmental and social criteria to manage its suppliers. Many authors stress the importance of the purchasing function for implementing CSR (Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen, 2009; Bowen *et al.*, 2001; Carter and Carter, 1998; Drumwright, 1994; Tate *et al.*, 2012). The purchasing function also is recognised for its value-added capabilities, which contribute to the firm's competitiveness and customer satisfaction (Cousins and Spekman, 2003). When they participate in executive management, chief purchasing officers (CPOs) can participate in strategic decision-making and encourage the board to adopt CSR practices (Drumwright, 1994).

The purchasing social responsibility concept and its components

In the same way that CSR is the organisation's appropriation of sustainable development issues, PSR is the purchasing function's appropriation of CSR issues (Crespin-Mazet and Dontenwill, 2012). In other words, PSR is the microeconomic-level equivalent of mesoeconomic-level CSR and macroeconomic-level sustainable development. In a context in which the natural environment is an increasing concern for society as a whole, Drumwright (1994) stresses the importance of noneconomic criteria in the purchasing process. Carter and Jennings (2004) develop the concept of PSR as "purchasing's involvement in CSR", in reference to Carroll's (1979, 1991) definition of PSR: "purchasing activities that meet the ethical and discretionary responsibilities expected by society" (Carter and Jennings, 2004, p. 151). We use Carter and Jennings' PSR term, which is also the most widely used in the PSR literature. Despite the wide variety of designations to qualify the involvement of purchasing in CSR (e.g. sustainable sourcing, sustainable purchasing, sustainable procurement, socially responsible buying, green purchasing, green procurement and environmental purchasing), the definitions throughout extant literature remain close to Carter and Jennings' (2004) study. For example, according to Drumwright (1994, p. 1), sustainable purchasing consists of "taking into account the public consequences of organisational buying or bring[ing] about positive social change through organisational buying behavior". Maignan *et al.* (2002) and Salam (2009) give similar definitions, emphasising the importance of public opinion and society. Some authors, such as Leire and Mont (2010, p. 17), use the term "socially responsible purchasing" (SRP) and propose a more comprehensive definition based on Carter and Jennings' (2004) and Lobel's (2006) definitions:

> SRP is an umbrella of issues, mainly human rights, safety, diversity, philanthropy and community, including worker's rights, wages, workforce issues related to disabled workers, racial equality, minorities, ethnicity and gender equality.

A notable challenge thus arises, in that PSR corresponds to diverse issues and encompasses various activities, consisting "of a wide array of behaviours that broadly fall into the categories of environmental management, safety, diversity, human right and quality of life, ethics, and community and philanthropy activities" (Carter and Jennings, 2000, p. 7). Table I specifies the concept by illustrating Carter and Jennings' (2000) six dimensions with examples of common PSR practices encountered in prior literature.

According to Galbreath (2009), CSR issues are not universal; they relate to a particular social context at a particular point in time. As such, CSR issues could be considered as "moving targets" (Mont and Leire, 2009, p. 402). Furthermore, there are different ways to approach PSR; for example, some efforts may emphasise environmental issues, while others address social issues (Carter and Jennings, 2004; McMurray *et al.*, 2014). Efforts also might focus on the easiest practices to implement initiatives that are in line with the firm's identity or high-stakes actions with the greater impacts or risk levels (Closs *et al.*, 2010; McMurray *et al.*, 2014; Sethi, 2003). Galbreath (2009, p. 114) claims that "it is descriptively wrong to suggest that a given firms should address all social issues". Instead, CSR issues differ with the purchased commodities. Thus, environmental concern represents a greater challenge for buying industrial commodities, for example, than for buying services (Carter and Jennings, 2004).

Purchasing social responsibility intra-organisational drivers
In many works related to PSR drivers, researchers use both an institutional approach and stakeholder theory (Sarkis *et al.*, 2011). These theories are well-adapted to explain external drivers, but they are not well-suited to a fine-grained study of intra-organisational drivers. Hoejmose and Adrien-Kirby (2012), Sarkis *et al.* (2011) and Tate *et al.* (2012) note that because PSR is still a nascent concept, there are ample opportunities for investigating the field through organisational theories.

To address this void, we first present a review of the main intra-organisational drivers identified piecemeal in extant literature. We organise our review around the three dimensions that Burns and Stalker (1961) define. That is, these authors distinguish mechanistic and organic structures according to the organisation's levels of centralisation, specialisation and formalisation. This advantageous distinction provides a consistent framework for assessing intra-organisational drivers and related PSR progress. It also facilitates operationalisation of the PSR concept (Sine *et al.*, 2006). Finally, Burns and Stalker's (1961) approach provides a relatively integrated vision of the organisation and is well-adapted to our line of inquiry for three main reasons. First, it differentiates mechanistic and organic organisations, and thus clearly identifies dimensions (Cooper and Zmud, 1990; Hult *et al.*, 2000). Second, it helps us avoid taking a dualist perspective on what is actually a continuum of organisational structures, as it is appropriate for understanding complex situations. Organisations do not fall precisely into one or the other category, but tendencies can be observed (Burns and Stalker, 1961). Third, it makes it possible to consistently and effectively organise dispersed intra-organisational drivers drawn from prior literature and provides a suitable framework to examine PSR.

Table I.
Examples of PSR practices related to Carter and Jennings's (2000) six dimensions

Categories of practises identified by Carter and Jennings (2000)	Related PSR practises	Studies
Human rights/workers' rights	Customer visits suppliers' plants to ensure that they do not use sweatshop labour and excessively long work schedules. Customer ensures that its suppliers comply with child labour laws, pay a "fair wage", offer equal opportunity (e.g., male–female workers) and freely allow workers to associate	Carter and Jennings (2004), Carter (2004), Closs et al. (2010), Leire and Mont (2010), Lobel (2006) and Walker and Brammer (2009)
Security	Customer ensures that suppliers operate safely and according to International Labour Organization's standards or other international conventions. Suppliers are able to demonstrate full product traceability	Closs et al. (2010) and Walker and Brammer (2009)
Diversity	Customer purchases from small and diversity-owned suppliers (e.g. spending at least a minimum percentage of its annual purchasing dollars with minority suppliers and disabled workers associations)	Carter and Jennings (2004), Carter (2004), Lobel (2006), Maignan et al. (2002), Walker and Brammer (2009), Worthington (2009) and Worthington et al. (2008)
Community/philanthropy	Customer supports local economies and communities by buying from local businesses and considers suppliers' voluntary and philanthropic initiatives	Carter and Jennings (2004), Carter (2004), Closs et al. (2010), Walker and Brammer (2009) and Worthington et al. (2008)
Environment	Customer favours green suppliers and introduces environmental guidelines/requirements. Customer provides design specifications to suppliers that include environmental requirements for purchased items. Customer asks suppliers to commit to waste reduction goals (e.g. reduce packaging material). Customer uses life-cycle analysis to evaluate the environmental friendliness of products and packaging	Bowen et al. (2001), Carter and Carter (1998), Carter and Jennings (2000, 2004) and Closs et al. (2010), Handfield et al. (2002), Maignan et al. (2002), Walker and Brammer (2009), Walton et al. (1998) and Zhu and Sarkis (2006)
Organisational and managerial ethics/business management practices	Customer and its suppliers are compliant with relevant national and international trade laws and fulfil anticorruption obligations. Customer seeks to prevent bribery and corruption practises (code of conduct)	Closs et al. (2010) and Maloni and Brown (2006)

Centralisation. Centralisation is "the extent to which power is centralised in a few figures or diffused among several administrators" (Sine *et al.*, 2006, p. 122). In contrast, decentralisation is "the extent to which power over decisionmaking in the organisation is dispersed among its members" (Mintzberg, 1980, p. 326). When the level of centralisation is high, top management issues specific orders and coordinates others' work. Conversely, decentralisation exists when individuals (e.g. purchasers) coordinate their own work[2]. According to the PSR literature, wholehearted executive commitments to the PSR policy are key to the successful implementation of a PSR approach (Carter and Jennings, 2004; Drumwright, 1994; Emmelhainz and Adams, 1999; Hoejmose and Adrien-Kirby, 2012; Salam, 2009; Walker and Brammer, 2009; Zsidisin and Siferd, 2001). Because of their hierarchical position and key strategic roles, executives have the decision-making power and the ability to define CSR-related policies and programmes (Blome and Paulraj, 2013). Middle management is another key success factor (Carter and Carter, 1998; Zsidisin and Siferd, 2001). Walker *et al.* (2008) highlight the difficulty of implementing CSR-related policies if middle management resists, even when top management is supportive. In turn, managers' leadership and practices, if perceived as exemplary, can significantly influence employees' behaviours (McMurray *et al.*, 2014).

Factors related to the centralisation level are difficult to implement without personal beliefs and values (Carter, 2004; Drumwright, 1994; McMurray *et al.*, 2014) and the elements that drive the PSR implementation. As such, Drumwright (1994) shows that policy entrepreneurs, regardless of their hierarchical position, play a key role in putting issues on the corporate agenda. Policy entrepreneurs advocate ideas and take career risks to further their conviction. They are motivated by morality and ethics, i.e. by noneconomic criteria. Drumwright (1994) also suggests that top managers should not lead the approach but should play a supportive role. Although policy entrepreneurs require a high degree of autonomy to develop the PSR approach, they still need strong hierarchical support.

Specialisation. Specialisation is usually defined as the concentration of the types of tasks assigned to an organisation's members (Sine *et al.*, 2006). It refers to the division of labour and the distribution of official duties among multiple positions. A function thus is specialised when at least one person performs it and no other function. In turn:

> […] it can be seen whether an activity (e.g. PSR is specialised in an organisation; that is, performed by someone with that function and no other, who is not in the workflow superordinate hierarchy (line chain of command) (Pugh *et al.*, 1968, p. 73).

A PSR implementation can be supported by the development of specialised internal expertise and training (Leire and Mont, 2010). This type of internal knowledge enhancement fosters the soundness of the PSR implementation process. Carter and Carter (1998), Carter and Jennings (2000) and Sharma and Vredenburg (1998) suggest that knowledge localisation and frequent interaction of the PSR purchasing function with other internal departments are key to implementing PSR. According to Carter and Jennings (2000), the lack of internal coordination is a common barrier to PSR.

Formalisation. Formalisation, which can be defined as the degree to which intended behaviours are prescribed in writing (rules, procedures and instructions), also plays a critical role in operational PSR. Perceptions of future benefits for the firm encourage the PSR implementation. This driver is closely linked to executive commitment; the

opportunity to benefit from PSR can be a motivating factor for executives to embark on this path (Leire and Mont, 2010). Benefits might include cost and waste reductions (Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen, 2009; Closs *et al.*, 2010; Hoejmose and Adrien-Kirby, 2012; Islam and Deegan, 2010), quality improvements (Walker *et al.*, 2008), increased value (Worthington, 2009) or greater job satisfaction and motivation (Maignan *et al.*, 2002; Worthington, 2009). It is essential to establish explicit rules, such as written policies, programmes, codes of conduct and ethics or certifications, so that the PSR implementation is not considered as merely "window dressing" (Carter and Jennings, 2004; Worthington, 2009). The programme should also be ambitious enough to ensure credibility (Park-Poaps and Rees, 2010). Codes of ethics make employees aware of inappropriate behaviours and company values; at a microeconomic level, functional policies (i.e. set for each department) allow the firm to define its objectives (Carter and Jennings, 2000). Formal rules also help structure and communicate the approach and improve coordination (Carter and Jennings, 2000). Table II provides an overview and categorisation of these main drivers.

This literature review indicates that the majority of extant research views intra-organisational drivers as static, without considering a processual approach. Consequently, several contradictions arise. For example, Drumwright (1994) maintains that informal culture has a positive impact on the PSR implementation, whereas Carter and Jennings (2002) and Worthington *et al.* (2008) note the need to formulate and implement explicit rules. Similarly, Carter and Carter (1998), Drumwright (1994), Hoejmose and Adrien-Kirby (2012) and Islam and Deegan (2010) highlight the role of opportunistic motivations based on the prospect of future benefits, whereas other authors (sometimes even the same ones) suggest the importance of intrinsic motivations supported by individual and shared values (Drumwright, 1994; Salam, 2009). To resolve the ambiguities regarding these apparently contradictory drivers, we propose a processual approach to intra-organisational drivers according to the key phases of the PSR approach.

Purchasing social responsibility: from static vision to processual approach
Although several authors study PSR, only a few introduce a processual vision to define the concept. Prior literature identifies two types of processes. First, operational PSR processes detail the work of purchasing (e.g. supplier selection, requests for proposals and contracting). Walker and Brammer (2009, p. 128) explicitly include this processual dimension when considering PSR in the public sector; "it needs to be transparent and accountable in its purchasing processes". Second, other researchers describe the adoption process of new purchasing practices (Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen, 2009; Gavronski *et al.*, 2011; Tate *et al.*, 2012; Theodorakopoulos *et al.*, 2005). We focus on the latter implementation process because our purpose is to understand firms' initial embrace of PSR.

The few articles that have adopted a processual approach are mainly empirical, and there is no consensus regarding the number or name of the different phases. Different available processual models use four, five, six or seven steps (Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen, 2009; Gavronski *et al.*, 2011; Harwood and Humby, 2008; Sarkis *et al.*, 2011; Tate *et al.*, 2012) (Table III). We adopt Theodorakopoulos *et al.*'s (2005) model, which identifies a three-stage process, derived from the supply chain learning model developed by Bessant (2004) (set-up, operating and sustaining).

Dimensions	Items	PSR literature	Mechanistic	Organic
Centralisation	*Centralisation level*		*High*	*Low*
	Hierarchical authority	Blome and Paulraj (2013), Carter and Carter (1998) and Drumwright (1994)	Clear/well defined	Not clear/lateral authority
	Coordination/work management	Bowen *et al.* (2001), Carter (2004), Closs *et al.* (2010) and Drumwright (1994)	Decision-making kept as high as possible	Authority to control tasks is delegated
	Decision-making, flow of information	Closs *et al.* (2010) and Drumwright (1994)	Most communication is vertical, i.e. the flow of information is from the superior to the subordinate	Organisation is a network of people or teams. People work in different capacities simultaneously and over time. Open and cooperative spirit through advice by peers, rather than hierarchical decision and directives. There is a community interest
	Management style	Carter *et al.* (1999), Drumwright (1994), Emmelhainz and Adams (1999) and Giunipero *et al.* (2012)	Autocratic leadership is oriented towards production	Democratic leadership is oriented towards facilitating interaction
Specialisation	*Specialisation level*		*High*	*Low*
	Information localisation	Bowen *et al.* (2001)	At the top of the hierarchy	Knowledge at all levels
	Interaction between services	Bowen *et al.* (2001) and Drumwright (1994)	Rare	Frequent
	Knowledge	Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen (2009), Gualandris and Kalchschmidt (2014) and Leire and Mont (2010)	At the top of the hierarchy	At all levels
Formalisation	*Formalisation level*		*High*	*Low*
	Degree of standardisation and mutual adjustment	Carter and Carter (1998)	Extensive uses made of rules and standard operating procedures	Face-to-face contacts for coordination. Work processes tend to be unpredictable
	Performance indicators	Bowen *et al.* (2001), Drumwright (1994), Gavronski *et al.* (2011) and Gualandris and Kalchschmidt (2014)	Qualitative	Quantitative
	Informal relationship	Closs *et al.* (2010), Drumwright (1994) and Gavronski *et al.* (2011)	Limited importance	High importance
	Motivational instruments	Drumwright (1994) and Hoejmose and Adrien-Kirby (2012)	Extrinsic	Intrinsic
	Importance of rules	Carter and Jennings (2002)	High	Low
	Degree of detail in rules	Bowen *et al.* (2001) and Closs *et al.* (2010)	High	Low
	Communication	Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen (2009) and Blome and Paulraj (2013)	Generally written	Generally verbal
	Functional rights and obligation definition	Bowen *et al.* (2001), Worthington (2009) and Worthington *et al.* (2008)	Precise	Partial sharing of responsibilities
	Assessment of work	Carter and Carter (1998)	Informal status in organisation based on size of empire	Informal status in organisation based on perceived effectiveness

Table II.
Intra-organisational drivers and related organisational structures

No. of phases	Authors	Description of the processual model
3	Gavronski *et al.* (2011, p. 876)	Selecting good suppliers, developing capabilities and development of joint capabilities
	Theodorakopoulos *et al.* (2005, p. 463)	Set-up phase, operating phase and sustaining phase ensues, i.e. where impetus must be maintained
4	Andersen and Skjoett-Larsen (2009, p. 79)	Description of IKEA's staircase model, dedicated to suppliers' involvement: start-up requirements and action plan to achieve Level 2, fulfilment of minimum requirements IWAY standard, fulfilment of IKEA Level 3 standards and fulfilment of official standards and third-party certification
5	Sarkis *et al.* (2011, p. 11)	Diffusion of green supply chain management as an innovation can be viewed as a process of initiation, persuasion, planning, adoption and confirmation
	Harwood and Humby (2008, p. 169)	Similar to Rogers (2003), they identify various stages of innovation and technology diffusion. Organisations (and individuals) can be classified along a continuum: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards
	Tate *et al.* (2012, p. 177)	General practices with general mentions of Environmental Purchasing Supply Management, supplier selection, supplier involvement and development and supplier performance
6	Maignan *et al.* (2002, p. 648)	Assessing stakeholder pressures, clarifying purchasing policies based on organisational values, estimating potential business benefits and costs, choosing a SRB strategy, implementing SRB practices and leveraging SRB

Table III.
Purchasing social
responsibility
processual models

The set-up phase (Phase 1), also known as the emerging or commitment stage, consists of the identification of an opportunity by top management, and it implies the "establishment of a set of procedures to promote SCL" (Supply Chain Learning) (Bessant *et al.*, 2003, p. 4). In the operating phase (Phase 2) (Theodorakopoulos *et al.*, 2005), which Bessant *et al.* (2003) refer to as the running stage, the new procedures have been established, and an impetus is required at all levels. The strategy must engage people at both the top and the bottom of the organisation. The challenge is to ensure that procedures can be translated into a set of routines and norms that govern behaviour within the firm. Finally, the sustaining phase (Phase 3) still demands an impetus to maintain these activities and avoid their degradation (Bessant *et al.*, 2003). The natural tendency for behaviour to return to traditional patterns is thus a major risk.

Unlike other models, in this approach, PSR adoption neither solely consist of enforcing codes of conduct (e.g. establishing formal rules, developing evaluation systems and defining sanctions) nor is it automatic. Rather, PSR adoption requires the long-term development of a

capability for learning across the whole organisation and its suppliers. This requirement supposes the existence of mechanisms and structures that support or facilitate learning during various stages. However, the relevance of this three-stage process is also subject to questions, because Theodorakopoulos *et al.* (2005) focus only on the first stage. Their research goal is to understand purchasing from ethnic minority groups, which represents only one component of PSR. Furthermore, their study deals with inter-organisational learning, leaving aside the intra-organisational aspects.

Thus, the appropriate research effort here is less about listing intra-organisational drivers than about identifying the phase of the process in which distinct intra-organisational drivers exert their influence. Therefore, we propose an analytical grid of intra-organisational drivers related to the set-up, operating and sustaining phases of the PSR implementation process. Those stages can be explained on the basis of the various intra-organisational drivers identified in prior literature. Our purpose is to establish whether these intra-organisational drivers have distinct roles in the process. This line of inquiry is the focal point of our qualitative case study conducted with SNCF.

Purchasing social responsibility approach at SNCF

This research considers the phases of the PSR process and related intra-organisational drivers required to progress through them, using a case study to determine whether the proposed analytical grid (Figure I) applies to an actual firm and whether additional intra-organisational drivers might be identified. A single case can offer significant contributions to a field and focus to future research (Yin, 2013). In line with Yin's (2013) arguments for using single case studies, the SNCF case is typical, in the sense that there is no reason to believe that its PSR process is dissimilar from others, and it is revelatory, in that it reveals aspects of a phenomenon that has not been addressed previously by research. Some comments from the study informants reinforce the notion that the SNCF case provides exemplary insights:

SNCF is a key name when it comes to PSR. (external PSR training consultant).

Regarding the implementation process, nothing of its kind has ever been seen before, it's something unprecedented. And it also explains why SNCF is more advanced (external sustainable development consultant).

It [PSR] was a big gamble; we built from less than nothing. (former CPO).
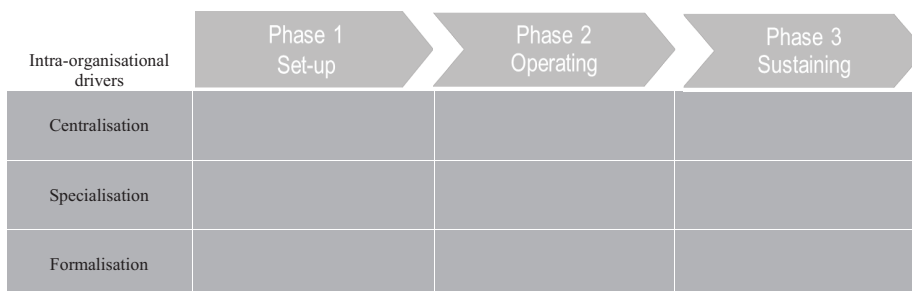

Figure 1.
Conceptual
framework: PSR
implementation
process and
intra-organisational
drivers

Single case study: SNCF choice and data collected

The case study method is justified by the complexity of the studied object (Rispal, 2002): the PSR implementation process as it relates to intra-organisational drivers. Because our focus is on understanding how to implement a PSR approach, a single case study is appropriate. That is, case studies are effective when the question is large and complex and the aim is to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon (Yin, 2013).

The SNCF case study is ideal because of the discovery potential it represents (Rispal, 2002). The company demonstrates an outstanding CSR commitment while managing purchasing. In particular:

- SNCF has been implementing a PSR approach for several years and is now at a relatively advanced stage, which allows respondents to step back from the object. The company is recognised in France for being particularly active and mature in the PSR field; for example, it has received numerous awards and titles, and SNCF purchasing executives are active participants in International Organization for Standardization meetings that work to determine future PSR regulations.
- SNCF's purchasing executives/managers are frequently called on to participate in conferences to express SNCF's commitment to PSR and provide PSR training sessions at universities and business schools.
- SNCF purchases a large portfolio of commodities, which requires both services (cleaning, maintenance of railways and structures) and industrial equipment (railway rolling stock). This extended purchasing portfolio facilitates the generalisation of the results (Krause *et al.*, 1999)[3].

Thus, the SNCF represents a unique or extreme case (Yin, 2013) that can help illustrate the complexity related to the PSR implementation process. It has been chosen not because of its public enterprise status but because it represents an emblematic example.

We based our case study on primary and secondary sources. Individual interviews provided primary data, and secondary sources included internal (e.g. dashboard supports) and external (e.g. news clippings, Gerry *et al.*'s, 2012; case study, Bruel *et al.*'s, 2013; Sustainable Procurement Barometer) data. We conducted ten semi-structured interviews with various employees involved in the PSR implementation process, with different levels of responsibilities (top and middle managers, purchasers and consultants; Table IV). The semi-structured interview guide included all organisational and processual aspects derived from the literature review, to grasp intra-organisational drivers that might have fostered the implementation of the PSR approach and determine their exact role. All the interviews (each lasting 1.5 h on average) were audio-recorded, transcribed (more than 250 pages) and validated by the respondents. We reduced the potential for retrospective bias by matching the real-time archival data with the interviews.

We analysed the qualitative data using thematic coding. Data were segmented according to categories derived from prior literature (Burns and Stalker, 1961): CSR, centralisation, formalisation, specialisation and stages of advancement.

Key phases of the process

The PSR approach can be split into three main phases, the time frames of which remain constant among respondents, even if the designations that different respondents use

Primary data (interviews)			
Interviewees		Interview flow	
Position	Date	262 pages	15:38 h of interviews
Intellectual services purchaser (SNCF)	14/11/2013	36	01:55
Strategies and risks manager (SNCF)	07/11/2013	25	01:50
External consultant for sustainable development (PwC)	07/11/2013	34	01:43
Former PSR expert advisor (SNCF)	19/11/2013	32	01:45
External PSR training consultant (Corel)	30/10/2013	26	01:40
Delegate director sustainable purchasing (SNCF)	10/12/2013	28	01:20
Commodity purchaser within the material direction (SNCF)	29/11/2013	33	01:50
2007-2012 CPO (SNCF)	20/12/2013	7	00:35
Purchasing manager for the division SNCF "Proximités"/freight	14/11/2013	21	01:40
Purchasing delegate director for services and operations (SNCF)	29/11/2013	20	01:20
Secondary data			
Internal data	Internal purchasing indicators and dashboard report for the purchasing award in the sustainable development category		
External data	Press review (journal *Les Echos*, *La tribune*), Gerry *et al.*'s (2012) case study		

Table IV.
Synthesis of collected data

might vary. The set-up phase (2007-2009) began with the impetus of two new top managers (PSR director, here called Mr PSR, and former CPO at SNCF, here called Mr CPO) and within the context of a new corporate policy called "En route vers 2012" ("On the Road Toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC), 2012"). As soon as Mr CPO became the CPO, he explicitly introduced a PSR dimension in the global procurement programme, named SynergiA (2008-2012). At this time, employees' skills were limited; therefore, he hired Mr PSR, recognised as a PSR expert, to take the position of the PSR director. In addition, Mr PSR was assigned to develop this specific strategic purchasing axis (PSR axis). With the support of the purchasing board, Mr PSR had the opportunity to hire externally to build a team committed to PSR: the delegate direction for sustainable purchasing (Direction Déléguée Achats Durables et Responsables – DDAD). The strategic position of Mr PSR on the purchasing board (CoDir) also legitimised the PSR approach internally and made this topic a priority for the purchasing function:

As I see it, the DDAD has been a powerful symbol; it might seem weird but it leaves marks, and [because] he [Mr PSR] was part of the Purchasing Board (Steering Committee for Purchasing) […]. SynergiA programme [was very quickly] introduced […]. In my memory, it had five axes, among them the Sustainable Purchasing axis. (external consultant, tax advisory).

Until 2009, the DDAD team was made up of approximately 15 members; as part of their job, they identified risky and critical commodities and proposed related actions plans. Phase 2, the operating phase, began around the end of 2009, at which point the DDAD worked together with commodities managers (middle management) to define the PSR requirements to include in calls for tenders:

We got them [commodities managers] involved in the dynamic. We gave them the objective to represent graphically the seven core subjects identified in the ISO 26,000, a graphical representation of the CSR challenges they faced in their department (strategy and risks manager at the DDAD).

Phase 3, the sustaining phase, began in 2011 when internal customers got involved in the process, through training that aimed to define customer needs. The indicators became more quantitative and more objective, so that ultimately, they could be assessed by external auditors. The main objective of this phase was to professionalise and enhance the credibility of this approach:

So we find ourselves in the same situation we were in the '90s when we introduced the concept of supplier insurance quality. At this time, we all thought that it was a constraint, expensive, not cost-effective, and that the return on investment would be long. With hindsight, we can now say that was the best way to proceed (commodity manager, material direction).

Intra-organisational drivers of the purchasing social responsibility implementation process

The SNCF case study shows that high levels of formalisation, centralisation and specialisation fostered the set-up phase for the PSR approach. Our results also indicate that those levels evolved over time, depending on the progress achieved.

Centralisation. In Phase 1, the beginning of the process corresponded with a definition of a PSR strategy linked with the firm's corporate global strategy. In SNCF's case, it meant the adoption of SynergiA, "defined to meet the SNCF stated ambitions including sustainable-mobility challenges, with the commitment to make purchasing function a leading player of the corporate global CSR policy" (Menuet and Rambaud-Paquin, 2011, p. 309). Centralisation of PSR adoption was also signified by an adaptation of the organisational structure, i.e. the creation of a dedicated team to boost and support the PSR approach. The creation of such a department, from the very beginning of the PSR implementation process (Phase 1, in June 2008), required management support and resources:

First, other purchasing delegated directors did not consider DDAD legitimate. They thought we, at the DDAD, merely had a communication role. They did not see the point of developing a PSR programme beyond communication and appearance. […] Then, as we implemented concrete things, those delegated directors demonstrated adverse reactions toward those initiatives. […] But, we had support from the purchasing director. […] Furthermore, it wasn't really possible to call into question the work we did, since we conducted it in a professional manner (former PSR expert advisor).

To encourage better communication between the DDAD and purchasers and to move from a top-down to a more bottom-up approach, PSR coordinators, called Cadès, were nominated during the operating phase. The Cadès voluntarily transmitted quantitative data to the DDAD and raised PSR awareness among the members of their purchasing teams. They also explained PSR decisions to the operational team at implementation:

For sure the creation of the Cadès was a master stroke, I mean thanks to this function, the PSR policy is supported and translated/relayed at the operating level (chief of the division freight and proximity).

Specialisation. The firm's willingness to implement a PSR approach dates back to 2006, with the initiation of the SynergiA programme. To carry it out, a PSR director was hired. He was a PSR expert and specialist, as exemplified by his previous positions and numerous interventions, notably in renowned business schools. As soon as he joined the company, he gathered the few employees who were working on the PSR issue and reinforced the DDAD by recruiting additional external experts. The DDAD was structured around several specialised sections (e.g. solidarity, environmental, recycling and revalorisation, small- and medium-sized enterprises). It took charge of shaping the PSR approach, providing technical support, and raising awareness and training the purchasing staff on PSR:

> The staff regards the DDAD team with great respect. The team members are not considered as figures of fun, but rather as helpful "experts" who do something important (CSR consultant at PwC).

During Phase 2, the DDAD, developed in collaboration with the Cadès and an external consultant, implemented PSR training. This two-day training became part of the basic, mandatory training for SCNF purchasers. This structuring and unifying element facilitated the involvement of the purchasers in the dynamic PSR approach. The firm thus considered its aim of raising awareness achieved: 80 per cent of the purchasers (approximately 500 of 700) have attended its mandatory PSR training.

During Phase 3, to ensure the continuity of the approach, internal customers received training to better define the purchasing requirements, in light of PSR criteria. The DDAD and external consultants advised this training programme. Gradually, PSR training began to occur in earlier phases of purchaser orientation, and purchasers were expected to become experts in PSR:

> I think experts from the DDAD help purchasers change their way of working and go over and above the purely financial/economic aspect of their job. Experts help purchasers develop this other [responsibility] aspect. Without their assistance, purchasers, including myself, wouldn't do it on our own initiative (intellectual services purchaser).

Formalisation. At the beginning of Phase 1, only DDAD members had a good grasp of PSR and the expertise to examine methods and tools for raising PSR awareness within the company. Thus, during Phases 1 and 2, the definition of relevant indicators was a core concern. During Phase 1, purchasers had no strict PSR-quantified objective; they were required only to gain CSR awareness through reading, exhibitions or trainings related to sustainability.

Formalisation began with the definition of the SynergiA purchasing programme, which outlined purchasing policies, structured around five priority areas (security, availability, prices, CSR and quality). It fostered the implementation process and ensured clear, coherent decision-making. The official launch of this programme was recognised as a milestone, marking the official start of the PSR approach. The credibility of the PSR initiative, particularly internally, relied on coordination and structuring efforts:

> We quickly became operational, developed a clear and comprehensive vision of the strategy, and structured our approach. And finally I think that all this demonstrated that we [DDAD] were legitimate. (former PSR expert advisor).

In general, before 2010, PSR indicators assessing the progress of in-house awareness were mainly internal, with no external validation (i.e. not ascertainable by an independent external body). At that point, PSR objectives and indicators started to become quantitative and much more in line with the purchasing functions. Then, SNCF engaged a consulting firm to implement those indicators. By the end of Phase 2, after several adjustments, DDAD's indicators had gained credibility internally among the purchasing board of directors:

> Thus, permanently, since these kinds of indicators are new, there is always a long adjustment period. It's not an easy business; systems are not ready and definitions need to be very precise. They must not be ambiguous or open to misinterpretation. Nobody did it before; therefore, everything is possible. It is a big challenge in terms of reporting, in order to increase the credibility of the approach (external consultant for tax advisory).

At the beginning of Phase 3, 85 per cent of purchasers had objectives related to PSR, measured and discussed with managers during annual individual performance assessment meetings. The definition of objectives and procedures highlighted the increased formalisation. The formalisation of performance indicators and reporting became important in Phase 2 and compulsory in Phase 3. Phase 3 thus corresponded to a stabilisation phase for the steering tools (dashboard assessment process), which helped achieve PSR legitimacy.

Figure 2 presents a synthesis of these results. Using dictionary themes, we coded the transcript interviews and secondary data. We used a four-point intensity scale to identify the intensity of centralisation, specialisation and formalisation at each stage of the PSR process, ranging from very high intensity through to very low intensity. Figure 3 depicts the results in Figure 3 graphically and proposes a schematic representation of each driver. For example, formalisation in Phase 1 took a code of $(-)$ because there were few standardised procedures. In Phase 1, informal exchanges were more prevalent (e.g. training the purchasing staff on PSR and seminars). In Phases 2 and 3, formalisation received a code of $(+)$, because formal exchanges between the top management and employees emerged, especially in the purchasing objectives and quantitative indicators that aligned with the purchasing function. The level of formalisation did not vary between Phases 2 and 3, therefore, this sign $(+)$ remained the same.

These results show that the PSR process is facilitated by organisational drivers, which were not static but instead took distinctive roles across the three-phase process. The firm adapted its level of specialisation, formalisation and centralisation, as it shifted from nonadopting PSR to fully embracing PSR. We capture this dynamic by mapping the PSR drivers over time, as evidenced by the SNCF case study and its adaptation process. Phase 1 was characterised by high centralisation, in the form of the creation of a PSR-dedicated unit (DDAD) and the hiring of experts whose objective was to stimulate and organise the approach from the top-down to a more bottom-up approach. During Phase 2, formalisation increased; in parallel, middle managers became more involved in PSR efforts, indicating a decentralisation process. Phase 3 featured further decentralisation and less intensive specialisation efforts.

Figure 3 synthesises the results related to the intra-organisational drivers that foster the PSR approach implementation across the mechanistic–organic continuum of organisation structure. During Phase 1, SNCF was mostly a

Intra-organisational drivers		2007 Phase 1 : Setup		2009 Phase 2 : Operating		2011 Phase 3 : Sustaining
Intra-organisational drivers	Centralisation	++	Human and financial resources are allocated to build a team committed to PSR, the DDAD. The director of the DDAD is part of the Purchasing Board (CoDir)	-	Middle manager implication and implementation of PSR coordinators called Cades to spread PSR related decisions at the operational team level to transmit quantitative data to the DDAD and raise PSR awareness among purchasers.	-	Operational purchasing teams should become autonomous and consider CSR issues part of their job description, so that the assistance of the DDAD is no longer required, and DDAD would disappear.
	Specialisation	++	Through hiring: - PSR director - experts to build DDAD team to stimulate and organise the approach	+	Almost all the purchasers have attended the mandatory PSR purchasing training	-	Internal customers are trained to better define purchasing requirements, taking PSR criteria into account. Environmental and social criteria are as important as economic criteria.
	Formalisation	-	Strategic alignment of the PSR strategy with the corporate global CSR strategy. Raising awareness and training the purchasing staff on PSR	+	Purchasing objectives and indicators are quantitative and in line with the purchasing functions. Establishment of a list of risky and critical commodities with related PSR actions plans.	+	Stabilisation phase of PSR indicators. Indicators become more quantitative and more objective; ultimately, they should be ascertainable by external auditors.

Note: [dashed box] Phase reached by SNCF. The four-point intensity scale for each organisational driver under consideration uses the following scores:
+ + = very high, = high, − = low and − − = very low

Figure 2.
Identification of intra-organisational drivers throughout the three-phase PSR process

mechanistic organisation, with high centralisation (hierarchy was important) and specialisation; internal capability was improved through formal training and expert recruitment. During Phase 2, the company entered a transitional phase, shifting from a mechanistic to an organic mode, and its main goals were to involve purchasers and middle managers in the PSR implementation approach. During Phase 3, only the formalisation level was fine-tuned, such that it increased slightly, as manifested by an incentive system that included individual bonuses. By 2009, the DDAD and commodities managers were undertaking collaborative work to define commodity strategies, with the objective of making the operational purchasing teams autonomous, such that they considered CSR issues part of their job description. A sign of success would be that purchasers no longer needed the assistance of the DDAD, and thus it would ultimately disappear.

Figure 3.
Main results

Note: The four-point intensity scale for each organisational driver under consideration
uses the following scores: $+ + =$ very high, $+ =$ high, $- =$ low and $- - =$ very low

The results of this study confirm that SNCF has not yet reached the sustaining phase,
and its PSR remains fragile. The incentive system helps encourage the acceptance and
usage of PSR practices by a large majority of purchasers. Commodity purchasers seek to
systematically integrate their purchasing strategy within one of the PSR dimensions:

> Personally, it [the incentive system] encourages me to do it: first simply because it is part of the
> job; second, it's an interesting aspect, it adds value to my job; and finally, it has a positive
> impact on our relationship with suppliers since we do not just talk about prices. It has a
> positive impact on relationships (intellectual services purchaser).

However, PSR is not yet a common characteristic of the organisation. Operational
purchasers have neither completely endorsed the approach nor is it a seamless part of all
purchasers' working routines. Most purchasers still lack autonomy. Therefore, the
incentive systems and control mechanisms remain necessary:

> Even if things seem embedded, they remain fragile. That's important. […] It is important to
> remain vigilant on this particular dimension [CSR], I would say, since the PSR approach is
> recent, it is still difficult to make it embedded. […] Well, we have actually done quite a few
> things; nevertheless, we should remain modest about the long-term embeddedness of what we
> did. (former CPO).

Discussion and conclusion

We analyse intra-organisational drivers according to organisational levels of
centralisation, specialisation and formalisation. Our results show that drivers are not
static; they evolve through a three-phase process (set-up, operating and sustaining
phases). These results also reveal the organisational complexity related to the PSR
approach, which involves a gradual transformation from a mechanistic to an organic
organisation as the PSR approach gets implemented.

In line with Porter and Kramer (2006, 2011) and Pohl and Förstl (2011), our results
highlight the need for alignment between a firm's PSR strategy and its organisational
structure when the goal is to maintain the approach. In line with Cousins and Spekman
(2003), Igarashi et al. (2013) and McMurray et al. (2014), the SNCF case also illustrates the
importance of a strategic alignment with the global corporate CSR strategy. In Phase 1,

the PSR programme (SynergiA) aligns with the company's global policy ("On the Road Toward UHC, 2012"). In parallel, it is necessary to align strategy with internal competencies and performance measurement systems (Cousins and Spekman, 2003). The set-up phase requires a centralised structure and specialisation of competencies around a dedicated team. These two drivers make the approach more visible and credible. The operating phase relies on the formalisation of the approach through quantitative objectives and codes of conduct. In SNCF's case, this formalisation is coupled with a decentralisation process that began with the involvement of the Cadès and middle management. These employees play a critical role in the diffusion of PSR and purchasers' gradual embrace of the concept. Finally, the sustaining phase, which has not been completely achieved at SNCF yet, relies on further decentralisation. The final step will be marked by the dissolution of the DDAD (Phase 3). Therefore, strategic alignment with the organisational structure appears necessary throughout the implementation process.

This study also recalls Linnenluecke and Griffiths' (2010) categorisation, which Mysen (2012) uses to link organisational culture and CSR; however, it is based on value systems. Although the categorisations are distinct, they present convergent outcomes. Using the competing value approach developed by Quinn and Rohrbaughf (1983) and the four-related categories of organisational systems (rational goals, internal/process-oriented goals, human relations-oriented goals and open systems), Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010) determine which cultural profile is best suited for CSR implementation. They do not consider the first two systems (closer to mechanistic organisations) favourable for CSR implementation, whereas human relations-oriented systems and open systems (closer to organic organisation) appear more appropriate. Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010) advocate abandoning bureaucratic organisations and promoting open system values. Our results move a step further to highlight the importance of accounting for the different phases of the process. From a theoretical point of view, this research proposes a classification of PSR drivers according to the levels of centralisation, specialisation and formalisation, and it distinguishes organisational characteristics throughout the different phases of the process (Burns and Stalker, 1961).

From a theoretical point of view, this article extends literature on PSR by detailing the main organisational drivers of PSR implementation processes and by providing an integrative view of organisational PSR drivers. First, we have defined ways to implement the PSR process according to three main organisational drivers that have not previously been considered (Blome and Paulraj, 2013; Carter and Jennings, 2002; Closs et al., 2010; Hoejmose and Adrien-Kirby, 2012). Instead, most prior studies on PSR investigated only external drivers. Second, we adopt a processual approach to detail the complexities related to organisational drivers during different phases, as advocated by many researchers (Gimenez and Sierra, 2013; Gualandris and Kalchschmidt, 2014; Hoejmose and Adrien-Kirby, 2012; McMurray et al., 2014; Salam, 2009) but used by very few.

From a managerial perspective, the case study results suggest several recommendations for implementing a CSR programme in the purchasing function. The SNCF case study can be used as an example by company executives considering a PSR approach. It also provides guidance to managers regarding ways to adapt the organisational structure and activate intra-organisational drivers that can help implement and maintain a PSR approach. With the findings from our study,

practitioners can identify their maturity stage and, perhaps even more important, define and implement the most effective operating drivers throughout the process. Key organisational factors must be considered during different stages of the process, including top management support, decentralisation to the right intermediaries to relay information internally and monitoring and incentive systems.

Finally, this research also has its limitations. For example, external drivers and pressures likely play significant roles. Further research should consider the complementarities among institutional drivers related to mimetic or coercive behaviours and strategic drivers. The three-phase process noted herein provides only a partial appraisal of the complexity of the process and does not consider the potential for regression or steps backward. Moreover, Phase 3 in this case study does not necessarily correspond with objective success. Thus, these initial results highlight the need for additional research that takes a quantitative approach to shed more light on the link between the PSR implementation and performance. To increase the significance of these results, scholars also could engage in research that considers different types of companies and tests the established model with companies that have reached various phases in the PSR adoption process.

Notes

1. HEC/EcoVadis' Sustainable Procurement Barometer is a survey of more than 130 large multinational companies across 24 countries. Since the first report in 2003, the survey has assessed the evolution of global procurement organisation practices (www.hec.fr/News-Room/Actualites/6eme-edition-du-barometre-HEC-EcoVadis-Mesurer-le-creation-de-valeur-par-les-achats-responsables).

2. The level of centralisation reflects a rough continuum, such that "centralisation has to do with the locus of authority to make decisions affecting the organisation. Authority to make decisions was defined and ascertained by asking, "Who is the last person whose assent must be obtained before legitimate action is taken even if others have subsequently to confirm the decision"? This identifies the hierarchical level where executive action could be authorized, even if this remained subject to a routine confirmation later, for example by a chairman or a committee" (Pugh *et al.*, 1968, p. 76).

3. Early PSR initiatives include noncore activities, such as purchases of stationery and uniforms. This experience enabled SNCF to address strategic purchasing more closely related to the railway industry, such as station furniture, on-board rail catering, railway rolling stocks and infrastructure maintenance (Menuet and Rambaud-Paquin, 2011).

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