

# A Conceptual Framework for Exploring the Impacts of Corporate Social Responsibility on Employee Attitudes and Behaviour

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## Abstract

This article develops a conceptual framework that explains how organizations can influence employees' attitudes and behaviour through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. There are plenty of studies to suggest the financial benefits of CSR. However, studies are scarce to link CSR with non-financial measures of organizational effectiveness, such as, affective commitment, job engagement and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB). Moreover, studies are rare to delineate the process through which CSR can bring positive attitudes. Thus, this article focuses on organizational prosocial identity as a mediating variable. The role of communicating CSR activities is almost negligible and to address this gap, this article considers CSR communication as a moderating variable. Drawing from literature, this article argues that the success of an organization lies in enhancing positive attitudes among employees and probably, one of the ways to promote this is through CSR. Based on this assertion, the framework identifies CSR activities towards four stakeholders (employees, customers, community and environment) and its impacts on employees. Several research implications are proposed based on the propositions highlighted in this article.

## Keywords

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), work engagement, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, CSR communication and organizational prosocial identity

## Introduction

Globalization, rapid technological advances, demographic changes, government regulations and so on have brought drastic changes in the work environment, such as, increased competition, lengthy work hours, temporariness in job, multiculturalism and increase in stress levels of the employees which in turn affect work attitudes and behaviours of employees. In this changing context, organizations always

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desire for employees who can engage in their jobs, demonstrate higher psychological attachment with their employer and engage in organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB). Subsequently, management's responsibility is to adopt human resource practices which will enhance such positive attitudes and behaviours of employees, as they are essential attributes for the growth of any organization. One such human resource practice is believed to be corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Crowther & Capaldi, 2008). Arevalo and Aravind (2011) define CSR as the 'discretionary allocation of corporate resources towards improving social welfare that serves as a means of enhancing relationships with key stakeholders'. CSR helps the employees identify themselves with their organization and mould their attitudes towards the organization. The importance of the concept is evidenced by considering CSR as one of the truly innovative initiatives to promote wellness of the employees and improve work attitudes (Rupp, Ganapathi, Aguilera & Williams, 2006).

There are abundant studies to suggest that CSR activities bring several outcomes to the organization, such as, attraction and retention of employees (Brammer, Millington & Rayton, 2007; Ghosh & Gurunathan, 2013), reputation of the organization (Skudiene & Auraskeviciene, 2012), increased level of engagement (Smith & Markwick, 2009) and financial growth (Keinert, 2008). However, a very little attention has been given to link CSR with employee work attitudes and behaviours with the exception of few studies (Ghosh & Gurunathan, 2013; Hansen, Dunford, Boss, Boss & Angermeier, 2011; Maignan & Ferrell, 2001; Peterson, 2004; Turker, 2009). Despite the acknowledged effectiveness of CSR in generating social and business returns as well as work attitudes, there has been limited research explicitly examining the process of how CSR influences these work outcomes, such as, affective commitment, job engagement and OCB (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

There is thus a clear need to understand how CSR initiatives get translated into employee positive attitudes and behaviours so that organizations can effectively promote these desired attitudes and behaviour. The intention of this article, therefore, is to develop a conceptual framework that explains how organizations might influence positive employee attitudes and behaviour in terms of affective commitment, job engagement and OCB through CSR initiatives by focusing on various intermediate mechanisms.

## **Literature Review**

CSR has captured a prominent place in the global corporate agenda (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). In '1970', Nobel Prize-winning economist Friedman triggered a debate on CSR when he claimed that 'the ultimate objective of any business is profit making and nothing else' (Friedman, 1970). This provoked many researchers to raise their voices for the moral obligations of businesses as against profit making (Gautham & Singh, 2010). Davis (1973) defines CSR as 'firm's considerations of, and response to, issues beyond narrow economical, technical, and legal requirement of firm'. According to Carroll (1979), 'CSR encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point of time'. Carroll's pyramid model for CSR covers four aspects, namely, economic, legal, ethical and discretionary. In his opinion, organizations should fulfil their economic needs by adhering to the law, doing business ethically and also involving in discretionary activities. Some of the other models on CSR are: the ethical (Gandhian) model, the statist (Nehruvian) model, the liberal (Friedman) model and the stakeholder (Freeman) model (Garriga & Mele, 2004). The ethical model concentrates on the voluntary contributions of organizations to public welfare. The statist model emphasizes more on state requirements and fulfilling legal compliance. The liberal model focuses more on private partners and finally the stakeholder model reacts to the requirements

of its stakeholders, such as, employees, customers, community and environment. The stakeholder model has captured the attention of researchers and practitioners because of its comprehensive nature (Arevalo & Aravind, 2011).

In India, for more than 100 years, remarkable work in CSR has been done by one of the biggest conglomerates, Tata group (Shah, 2014). CSR has given opportunities for professionals to work as an auditor, certifier or consultant in CSR field. This creates more employment opportunities. The concept has received a lot of support as well as criticism (Crane, Matten & Spence, 2008). The concept of CSR has been discussed a lot in Indian literature (Arevalo & Aravind, 2011). In 2006, TNS automotive—one of the leading research firms—conducted a study to understand the perceptions of general public with regard to contribution for CSR activities by the companies. They found that globally, consumers are very likely to accept or reject the products/services of the company based on its reputation for CSR activities. Specifically in Indian context, 8 out of 10 consumers made a statement that they buy a product or service from the company which has high responsibility towards their society (Shanmugam & Mohamed, 2011). India has played a major role in long-term business development through CSR activities. Earlier the motive behind CSR was strategic (profitability), but now the motive has been shifted to moral (community development) (Arevalo & Aravind, 2011; Mishra & Suar, 2010). Indian firms have also shifted their focus from the profit-oriented or shareholder-focused model to stakeholder-oriented model of CSR (Balasubramanian, Kimber & Siemensma, 2005; Mishra & Suar, 2010).

Engaging in CSR activities reaps benefits to the organization, such as, better purchase intention, investment in the organization, organization image and strong stakeholder–organizational relationship. Though many companies do CSR activities for creating impact in the nation, the implicit goal of CSR activities is to accrue the benefits that arise out of it in order to benefit the company (Du et al., 2010).

There is a drastic change in the approach of CSR. During ‘1950s’, society’s expectations from the business are almost negligible. But the trend has changed in the last decade. In ‘2002’, Ernst and Young surveyed among 1000 companies and found that 73 per cent of them have CSR as their policy (Keinert, 2008). The primary aim of CSR is not to harm the society by doing their businesses and also to fulfil the needs of their stakeholders through their CSR activities. There are few companies, namely, Bertelsmann, Nokia and GlaxoSmithKline (or) Siemens, who adopted the concept of CSR as ‘Corporate responsibility’, but later they extended it to ‘Corporate social responsibility’ to extend the benefit to the society (Crane et al., 2008).

## **CSR to Various Stakeholders**

CSR is an indispensable agenda of every organization and CSR practice is pervasive in all sectors (Crane et al., 2008). There has been a paradigm shift from a philanthropic approach of CSR towards one that concentrates on various constituents of the organization (Arevalo & Aravind, 2011). These constituents are named as stakeholders and they determine the effective functioning of the organization (Pirsch, Gupta & Grau, 2007; Rohini & Mahadevappa, 2010). We focus on CSR towards four stakeholders, namely, employees, customers, community and environment, based on stakeholder theory. When the stakeholders lose confidence in their organizations, employees will underperform; customers stop buying the products; shareholders will sell their stocks (Freeman, 1994; Mishra & Suar, 2010). Stakeholder’s role is therefore indispensable for an organization (Pirsch et al., 2007). In the Indian context, a few researchers have used stakeholder model to study CSR and its outcomes (Arevalo & Aravind, 2011; Mishra & Suar, 2010; Shanmugam & Mohamed, 2011). This article too uses the same to study CSR–outcomes relationship.

This section discusses each of the stakeholders in detail.

*CSR towards employees:* Employees are valued as internal stakeholders of the company because they are assets of the organization. Sound policies and practices, employee participation in decision making, equity in employee remuneration, good working conditions, elimination of child labour, avoidance of gender bias—all reflect an organization's CSR towards its employees. An organization can enhance its employees' attitudes by adhering to the aforementioned policies and practices (Mishra & Suar, 2010; Skudiene & Auruskeviciene, 2012).

*CSR towards customers:* Customers are vigilant in receiving the products and services in a competent, just and environment-friendly way. At the same time, they also prefer a favourable relationship with the organizations by having a healthy transactional process. They also insist on fulfilling statutory compliance. They play a vital role in organizational effective functioning. An organization's CSR activities towards its customers include practicing ethical advertising, adhering to product standards, prioritizing customer health and safety, and providing products at right prices. An organization's policies and practices towards its customers will in turn affect customers' attitudes towards that organization (Ghosh & Gurunathan, 2013; Mishra & Suar, 2010; Skudiene & Auruskeviciene, 2012). Customers develop loyalty towards particular product/brand when they are aware of the CSR activities of the organization to which that product belongs to.

*CSR towards community:* Organizations that practice community outreach programmes as part of their CSR are known for their interventions towards community developments, such as, building schools, hospitals, temples, etc. (Skudiene & Auruskeviciene, 2012). Though Indian organizations have gained competitive advantage in the global market, there still exists problems, such as, poor employment opportunity, unfairness in the income level, poor access of health and education, malnourishment, lack of safe drinking water, etc. (Arevalo & Aravind, 2011). These conditions should serve as a signal for organizations to show more concern for the community through CSR.

*CSR towards environment:* In recent years, there has been enormous pressure on organizations to adhere to environmental standards for their sustainability in the long run. Organizations are thus forced to comply with ISO 14000, OHSAS 18000 and so on. Companies are also taking proactive measures for emission reduction in anticipation of future requirements (Mishra & Suar, 2010). The manufacturing sector plays a prominent role in protecting our environment since it consumes more resources from it.

## **Job Attitudes and Behaviour**

This section discusses the types of job attitudes and behaviour relevant to this study.

*Work engagement:* It is commonly known as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006). Engagement is a key driver of individual behaviour and performances; it also drives organizational performances through factors, such as, productivity, retention, financial performance and shareholder return (Gruman & Saks, 2011). Hewitt Associates have made a universal report on employees' engagement level and they observed that this is the largest decline that they have ever seen in the last 15 years (Smith & Markwick, 2009). Similarly, the Gallup employee engagement index reported that, on an average, as of '2010', only 33 per cent of employees were engaged (Mirvis, 2012). This triggers the need of some

unusual measures to engage employees. A majority of research has explored personality factors, and job demand and resource factors based on Job Demand and Resource (JD-R) theory as determinants of employee engagement. However, there are only a few studies that link CSR with work engagement (Lin, 2010). This article elaborates CSR–work engagement relationship using stakeholder’s theory (employees, customers, community and environment) as mentioned in the previous section.

*Affective commitment:* Organization commitment is defined as, ‘employees’ interest in and connection to an organization’ (Hoeven & Verhoeven, 2013). There are three types of commitment: continuance, normative and affective. Affective commitment is defined as ‘employee’s positive emotional attachment to the organization’, whereas the other commitments are described as a feelings of obligation towards their organization (Brammer et al., 2007). Affective commitment produces positive behavioural outcomes, such as, high job performance, low turnover and decreased absenteeism (Grant, Dutton & Rosso, 2008). Employees exhibit affective commitment when the distance between employee and stakeholders’ relationship is less and also that particular stakeholder is highly benefitted of CSR activities (Hoeven & Verhoeven, 2013). Earlier studies suggest that there is a strong relationship between external CSR (community, customer and environment) and affective commitment (Brammer et al., 2007). There are studies that suggest that CSR activities can lead to employee’s organizational commitment only when that employee has a personal belief on CSR activities. It clearly signals the fact that employee’s personality will have an impact in the link between CSR and employee’s attitudes and behaviours (Peterson, 2004).

OCB is defined as an ‘employee’s voluntary activities that may or may not be rewarded but that contribute to the organization by improving the overall function or quality of setting in which work takes place’ (Cha, Chang & Kim, 2013). It can be classified as behaviour directed towards an individual and behaviour directed towards an organization. When employees perceive their organization as exhibiting prosocial characteristics towards their stakeholders, it will also motivate them to display citizenship behaviour towards their organization as well (Cha et al., 2013). Literature reveals that there is a positive relationship between perceptions of employees towards their organization’s CSR activities and intention to quit and exhibiting OCB (Hansen et al., 2011).

## **Link between CSR and Job Attitudes and Behaviour**

The link between CSR and employee attitudes and behaviours, such as, work engagement, affective commitment and OCB can be well studied using Social Identity Theory or SIT (Brammer et al., 2007; Peterson, 2004; Turker, 2009). SIT proposes that, employees develop self-concept by identifying themselves within a group and comparing themselves with the other groups (Peterson, 2004). The image of an individual is contingent upon the social categories they belong to. That in turn exhibits his social identity, describes and prescribes the way one should behave. Employees always expect positive social identity to distinguish themselves from others (Turker, 2009). Organization is one of the social categories where employees share their success and failures and display their emotions accordingly (Turker, 2009). According to SIT, employees in the organization have two types of images about their organization, which in turn defines his/her organizational identification (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). The first type is perceived organizational identity, in which employees believe their organizations are distinctive, central and enduring. The second type is construed external image, which defines the way on how outsiders think about their organization (Dutton et al., 1994). These two images affect the employee’s well-being and behaviour. When employees perceive that their organization is not having good external image, then this may lead to depression and stress, which in turn negatively affect the employee

engagement level (Kahn, 1990) and other attitudes and behaviours. Hence, according to SIT, if an employee feels proud of his/her organization's social responsibilities towards various stakeholders, then it will lead to positive work attitudes (Peterson, 2004; Turker, 2009). Employees who are content with their organization's social responsibility will display positive emotions, attitudes and behaviour, such as, engagement (Pivato, Misani & Tencati, 2007; Rupp et al., 2006), affective commitment (Grant et al., 2008; Hoeven & Verhoeven, 2013) and OCB (Cha et al., 2013). Thus, based on the above discussions, the following propositions are made:

*P1: CSR activities focussed at employees, customers, community and environment will be positively related to employee engagement.*

*P2: CSR activities focussed at employees, customers, community and environment will be positively related to affective commitment of an employee.*

*P3: CSR activities focussed at employees, customers, community and environment will be positively related to OCB of an employee.*

## **Mediating Role of Organizational Prosocial Identity in the Link between CSR and Its Outcomes**

*Organizational prosocial identity:* Individuals while exhibiting prosocial characteristics such as helping and empathizing with other people may get a sense of personal identity. Similarly, employees get a greater sense of organizational pro-social identity, i.e., when their organizations exhibit such prosocial characteristics towards employees and society (Cha et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2008). However, we anticipate that CSR may induce positive work outcomes, through the mediation of organizational prosocial identity, because when employees become aware of the CSR activities of their organization towards the stakeholders, they perceive their organization as caring and genuine. They also experience external prestige and pride of membership, which in turn fulfils their need for self-esteem or self-enhancement (Bhattacharya, Rao & Glynn, 1995; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). As a result of enhanced self-esteem, employees are motivated to exhibit positive attitude towards their organization and thus generate better work outcomes (Cha et al., 2013), such as, affective commitment (Bansal, 2003; Grant et al., 2008) and OCB (Cha et al., 2013). Thus, employees' awareness about their organizational CSR activities towards themselves and towards various stakeholders will result in organizational prosocial identity and thus paves way for attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. Extrapolating these findings, we predict that CSR activities towards the stakeholders will enhance the sense of organizational prosocial identity, which in turn will induce employee engagement too. Therefore, the following proposition is posited:

*P4: CSR activities focussed at employees, customers, community and environment will be positively related to employee engagement, affective commitment and OCB of an employee through organizational prosocial identity.*

## **Moderating Role of CSR Communication in the Relationship between CSR and Its Outcomes**

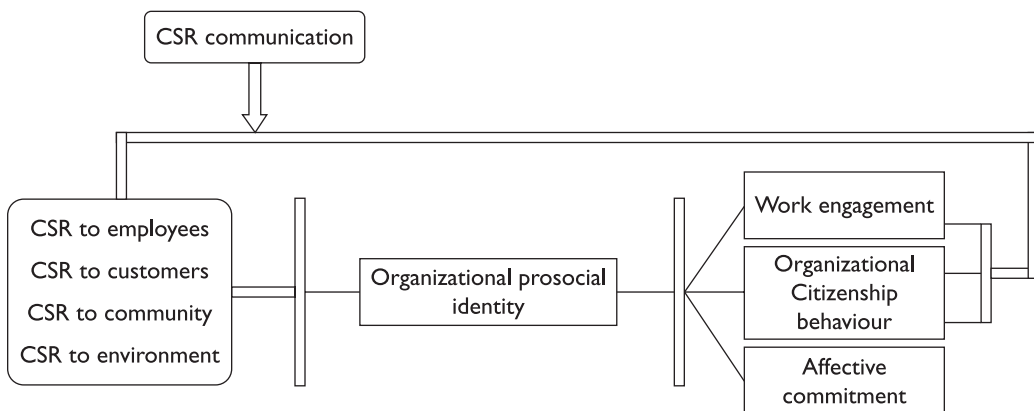
*CSR communication* can be explained as 'flow or exchange of information from one party to another' (Hoeven & Verhoeven, 2013). CSR can be effective only when it is promulgated through proper

channels. Though CSR communication is a delicate process, its role is crucial in arriving necessary changes. Employees' attitude and behaviour are shaped by the communication they receive. The relationship between employers and employees are determined by communication patterns (Hoeven & Verhoeven, 2013). When an organization engages in CSR activities towards various stakeholders, but leaves its employees unaware of those activities, it may not induce positive attitude towards the organization (Alon, Lattemann, Fetscherin, Li & Schneider, 2010; Hoeven & Verhoeven, 2013). According to Ball, Coelho and Machas (2003), communication is proposed as an antecedent of trust. They made an attempt in studying the influence of communication on customer satisfaction and trust. Many organizations fail to communicate their CSR efforts to their stakeholders by not speculating the outcomes of it (Du et al., 2010). The real challenge with any organization lies on communication strategy rather than mere CSR activities. Thus, the benefits of CSR activities are contingent upon how well it is communicated. Therefore, we believe that organizational CSR communication may strengthen the relationship between CSR activities and organizational prosocial identity, highlighting the moderating effect of the same. This leads to the following proposition:

*P7: CSR communication will moderate the relationship between CSR activities aimed at employees, customers, community and environment and organizational prosocial identities.*

## Conceptual Framework

We propose a conceptual framework that explains how organizations might influence employee's attitudes and behaviour through their CSR initiatives (see Figure 1). Lately, the interests of the stakeholders have been prioritized in the business world. In view of this, this framework focuses on CSR towards various stakeholders' interests and its impact on its employees' attitudes and behaviours, such as, work engagement, affective commitment and OCB, which are key drivers of organizational effectiveness. The framework also takes into account the process through which CSR activities induces positive work outcomes by considering organizational prosocial identity as a mediator between CSR towards stakeholders and work engagement, affective commitment and OCB. It is believed that when



**Figure 1.** A Conceptual Framework for Exploring the Impacts of Corporate Social Responsibility on Employee Attitudes and Behaviour

**Source:** Authors' own.

employees come to know about their organization's CSR activities, they perceive their organization as prosocial and this in turn fosters their trust towards the organization. Literature reveals that organizations fail to communicate the CSR activities to their employees (Du et al., 2010). Hence, the proposed research framework considers CSR communication as strong influencers in the above-mentioned links such that when these factors are strong, the strength of the relationship is also strong and vice versa. To sum up, this article attempts to develop a link between CSR and employee attitudes and behaviours by elaborating the roles of organizational prosocial identities and CSR communication.

## **Discussions and Implications of the Study**

In today's competitive world, motivating employees and enhancing their positive attitudes and behaviours has become a major challenge before organizations. Based on review of literature, this article has proposed a conceptual framework and formulated certain propositions which aim to provide insights to managers to enhance positive employee attitudes and behaviours through CSR. Although a lot of research has been done to find out the impact of CSR activities, there still exist a lot of research gaps that need to be addressed. One important point is to delve into the process through which CSR initiatives can bring positive outcomes (Crane et al., 2008). This study discovers that organizational prosocial identity and CSR communication play a crucial role in translating organizational CSR initiatives into positive employee attitudes and behaviours. The research implications of this article are discussed below.

## **Research Implications**

The conceptual framework provides many significant propositions that need further empirical scrutiny. Future research is required in order to test the model using a questionnaire survey among employees of a particular industry sector, probably in the manufacturing sector. The manufacturing industry contributes to more social development because it consumes more resources (land, water, electricity, manpower, etc.) from the society. Consequently, it is obliged to give back to the society in the form of CSR (Elving & Kartal, 2012; Gautham & Singh, 2010). With effect from 1 April 2014, the Government of India had made CSR initiatives as mandatory for all sectors whose net profit is ₹ 50 million and has to spend minimum of 2 per cent of its average net profit on CSR initiatives. This implies that, the study can be conducted across sectors also. There is evidence that many organizations have started implementing CSR in the last decades and thus creates pathway for the researchers to explore more on the new practices through qualitative study.

The framework developed here shows that employees may perceive their organizational CSR activities as positive which may result in more positive attitudes and behaviour. Though many studies attempted to identify the same (Arevalo & Aravind, 2011; Shanmugam & Mohamed, 2011; Turker, 2009), this study is distinguishable from them as it includes various stakeholders which are the pillars of the organizations. This study also explores the mediating effect of organizational prosocial identity which draws the attentions of many practitioners. The most important contribution of this framework is identification of CSR communication as a moderator between CSR activities and employee outcomes.

The framework informs managers how an organization can attain its effectiveness through CSR. Many organizations implement CSR activities but they fail to connect it with employee attitudes and behaviours. The reason behind is that there is no proven evidence for them to believe on the same. Thus, the current framework motivates them to see the link between CSR and employees attitudes. Nowadays,



organizations are investing lots of money on enhancing positive attitudes and behaviours among employees. An intelligent way to do that is to focus on CSR activities and channelize it in a proper way to make employees aware of it. The real challenge for the management thus lies in communicating CSR activities.

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