

## Corporate social responsibility and job performance: the mediating role of employee engagement: proposal of a conceptual framework

Responsabilité Sociale des Entreprises et performance au travail : le rôle médiateur de l'engagement des employés : proposition d'un cadre conceptuel.

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**Abstract**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is attracting growing interest from both researchers and practitioners. Our approach falls within the scope of micro-CSR to highlight the positive effects of CSR on individuals. Although several studies have emphasized the positive influence of CSR on involvement, satisfaction, engagement, and organizational pride, few studies have examined its impact on individual employee performance. Most organizations are not yet familiar with the role of CSR in increasing employee engagement and individual performance. Our study will focus on a relatively unexplored research topic. Its objective is to better understand the causal link between CSR and employee performance while considering the mediating role of employee engagement in this relationship. Mobilizing the existing literature, this study concludes by building a conceptual framework that links these three variables.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Employee Engagement, Job Performance, Social Identity Theory.

**Résumé**

La responsabilité sociale des entreprises (RSE) suscite un intérêt grandissant aussi bien pour les chercheurs que pour les praticiens. Notre approche s'inscrit dans la perspective de la micro-RSE afin de mettre en évidence les effets positifs de la RSE sur les individus (Bauman et Skitka, 2012). Bien que plusieurs recherches aient souligné l'influence positive de la RSE sur l'implication, la satisfaction, l'engagement et la fierté d'appartenance à l'organisation, peu d'études ont, toutefois, examiné son impact sur la performance individuelle des employés (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). La plupart des organisations ne sont pas encore familiarisées avec le rôle de la RSE pour accroître l'engagement des employés et la performance individuelle. Notre étude portera sur un sujet de recherche peu exploré. Son objectif est de mieux comprendre le lien causal entre la RSE et la performance des employés tout en considérant le rôle médiateur de l'engagement des employés dans cette relation. Mobilisant la littérature existante, cette étude conclut en construisant un cadre conceptuel qui relie ces trois variables.

**Mots-clés :** Responsabilité sociale des entreprises, Engagement des employés, Performance au travail, Théorie de l'identité sociale.

## **Introduction**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has attracted growing interest from researchers and practitioners over the past two decades. Recent research has paid particular attention to the ethical, social, environmental and sustainability concerns of companies. Globally, there is a craze to accept CSR as a corporate practice to gain stakeholder trust and remain competitive (Buertey et al., 2020; Carroll, 1991; J. S. P. Story & Castanheira, 2019). In the same vein, CSR plays an important role in the success of any business and contributes to a better world (Carvalho et al., 2010).

CSR initiatives are often seen as a socially recognized approach to meeting the expectations of stakeholders such as shareholders, customers, and employees. In addition to the growing interest in shareholders and customers, whose contribution is primarily associated with economic performance, it is crucial to recognize the importance of human capital as an intangible resource essential to achieving corporate objectives. Indeed, organizations that fail to answer employees' questions about the meaning of the tasks they perform find it difficult to retain a competent, high-performance workforce (Farrukh et al., 2020).

Our approach is based on the perspective of micro-CSR (Bauman & Skitka, 2012) to highlight the positive effects of CSR on individuals. In this line, several studies have reported that CSR positively influences involvement (Grant et al., 2008), satisfaction (Vlachos et al., 2014), identification, engagement, and organizational pride (Gond et al., 2010; Rupp et al., 2018). However, previous studies have overlooked the potential effects of CSR organizational practices on individual employee performance (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Shin et al., 2016). Story and Castanheira (2019) suggest that organizations are not yet familiar with the role of CSR in increasing employee engagement and individual performance. This study aims to examine the relationship between CSR and individual employee performance. The previous research have been conducted in Western countries (with strong regulatory agencies and efficient markets), and it is not appropriate to generalize the results of these studies to developing countries. Therefore, it is relevant to initiate research examining the link between CSR and employee performance in Moroccan enterprises.

This article will combine several streams of literature to develop a conceptual model aimed at explaining the causal link between CSR and work performance, putting into perspective the mediating role of employee engagement in this relationship. First, we will review the constituent concepts of our theoretical model. Next, we will discuss the research hypotheses from the literature. The conceptual model will finally be presented and discussed.

## **1. Literature Review**

Before developing the conceptual model and the hypotheses arising from it, it is necessary to conduct a literature review regarding the three fundamental elements of our conceptual model.

### **1.1. Corporate social responsibility (CSR)**

Despite its common usage in the field of management, the term CSR has not been subject to unanimous conceptualization. We have opted for the main definitions of CSR that have been widely accepted by the research community, from a chronological perspective. The first formal definition of CSR dates to Bowen (1953), who defined it as "the obligations of businessmen to pursue policies, to make decisions, or to follow lines of action that are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (p.6). One of the most cited definitions is that of Carroll (1979), who stated that "corporate social responsibility encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" (p. 499). Another definition proposed by the European Commission (2001) describes CSR as "a concept by which companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis." This definition ranked at the top of Google search results (Dahlsrud, 2008). A more recent definition based on stakeholder theory, which is the most pertinent theoretical framework for understanding the concept of CSR, was proposed by Turker (2009). This author defined it as "business behaviors that aim to positively affect stakeholders and go beyond their economic interests" (Turker, 2009; p.413).

The literature considers CSR as a multidimensional approach, as it is connected to the various stakeholders of an organization. Thus, CSR comprises two dimensions, namely external CSR, and internal CSR (Amann & Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2012; Brammer et al., 2007). External CSR is defined as the actions of the company aimed at promoting a positive impact on society and the environment. In contrast, internal CSR aims to meet the expectations of employees, such as health and well-being, training, participation, work-life balance, and equality (Ehnert, 2014). In this research, specific attention is paid to internal CSR since the study will examine the influence of CSR on employee engagement and job performance.

### **1.2. Job performance**

Job performance is a central concept in occupational and organizational psychology. Over the last twenty years, researchers have made progress in clarifying and extending this concept (Sonnentag & Frese, 2002). A widely accepted definition of individual job performance is that of Campbell (1999, p.402): "a set of behaviors or actions that are relevant to the organization's

goals". Motowildo (2003, p.39) proposes another definition that represents a significant advance: "Job performance is defined as the total value expected by the organization from the episodes of discrete behaviors performed by an individual over a given period of time". From this definition, it's clear that job performance encompasses a set of behaviors adopted by individuals to increase their effectiveness at job over various periods of time. In short, job performance is seen as a person's ability to perform a certain job effectively in relation to what the employee is expected to do (Eliyana & Maarif, 2019).

Job performance is a multi-dimensional concept that recognizes the distinction between task performance and contextual performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997, 1993). Task performance, associated with intra-role behavior, refers to explicit job-related behaviors that include formal responsibilities defined in the job description. It covers aspects such as quantity of work, quality of work and job knowledge (Campbell, 1990; Griffin et al., 2000; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). Contextual performance, on the other hand, is associated with the set of behaviors that contribute, indirectly, to organizational effectiveness in ways that shape the organizational, social, and psychological work environment (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). More specifically, it includes voluntary actions that are not formally prescribed in the job description, but which promote cooperation between other members of the organization to get tasks done (Sonnetag et al., 2008).

### **1.3.Employee engagement at work**

Employee engagement (henceforth EE) has been the subject of much research over the past three decades, leading to an unexpected multiplicity of definitions, measures, conceptualizations, and theories of engagement (Macey et al., 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Kahn's (1990) seminal article defines employee engagement as "the mobilization of organizational members to invest themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally in the performance of their roles". It's a state in which employees bring their personal energy (physical and behavioral) to perform and feel an emotional connection to their work. Another authoritative definition in the research community is that of Schaufeli et al. (2002; p.74), who describe work engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by Vigor, dedication and absorption". The success of this definition is due to its multidimensional nature: i)- vigour refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience at work; ii)- dedication refers to involvement and meaning in work; iii)- absorption, finally, defines a high degree of concentration and enthusiasm at work.

## **2. Theoretical foundation: social identity theory**

The social identity theory of (Tajfel & Turner, 1985) explains that individuals consider themselves members of, or identify with, a social entity when they feel that the actions of that organization match their own values, beliefs, and behaviors. These similarities can encourage these individuals to have positive perceptions and trust in other members of this group (Edwards et al., 2019). Previous studies have highlighted that the identification developed with an organization is reflected in the increased performance of individuals belonging to that organization (Carmeli et al., 2007).

Social identity theory has been mobilized to explain the positive influence of CSR on customer perceptions and loyalty towards a responsible company (Aramburu & Pescador, 2019; Latif et al., 2020). Based on previous studies CSR practices develop employees' behavior through organizational identification, as they feel proud to be part of a social group with positive characteristics, values, and reputation (Chaudhary, 2018). Therefore, considering SIT, it is postulated that being a member of a socially responsible organization enhances employees' pride and increases their affiliation with the organization. As employees' identification with the organization increases, they become engaged in their work and perform additional tasks to improve organizational performance (Chaudhary, 2017; Hur et al., 2019; Rupp et al., 2018b). In the present study, social identity theory provides a relevant theoretical framework for understanding how CSR's organizational activities increase employee engagement and promote their performance at work.

## **3. Elaboration of Research Hypotheses**

### **3.1. CSR and Job Performance**

Several studies have highlighted that CSR practices are strongly associated with beneficial employee attitudes and behaviors (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Shen & Benson, 2016; Valentine & Fleischman, 2008). The literature shows that this association is a function of social identity theory, which reports that employees' strong affiliation with their organization encourages them to take ownership of it and adopt positive behaviors for its success (Story & Castanheira, 2019). Moreover, CSR practices foster employees' affiliation with their organization (Chaudhary, 2018; Korschun et al., 2014).

The association between CSR and employee performance in multinational organizations has been analyzed in some studies (Edwards & Kudret, 2017; J. Story & Neves, 2015) and it turns out that CSR is a powerful predictor of employee performance. However, Chaudhary (2018) reported that CSR initiatives improve employee performance only when employees perceive

these initiatives as supportive and useful to them. Newman et al. (2015) extended the literature on CSR and employee behaviors by examining its impact on task and contextual performance. Based on the hypotheses of the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), employees develop a strong affiliation with organizations when they perceive that their activities align with their beliefs, desirability, and values. Organizations use CSR practices to gain recognition in society and manifest values conducive to the well-being of their employees. As a result, employees strongly identify with organizations recognized as socially responsible. This prompts them to optimize their performance and provide additional effort for organizational prosperity and success. Based on these arguments, we formulate the following hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 1: CSR is positively associated with employee performance.***

### **3.2. CSR and employee engagement**

Several research studies have recently investigated the influence of CSR on employee engagement (EE). This research has corroborated towards the positive association between CSR activities and EE (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Glavas, 2016; Potdar et al., 2018). The stimulating effect of CSR on EE has also been validated by Caligiuri et al. (2013). A gender perspective was explored by Farrukh et al. (2020), revealing that CSR increases the engagement of female employees compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, internal CSR activities have a significant effect on EE compared to external CSR (Ferreira & Real de Oliveira, 2014). The reason for this positive co-relation is that organizational commitment to CSR activities strengthens employees' self-image and reinforces their identification with the organization. This strong identification positively influences their commitment (Chaudhary & Akhouri, 2019) as suggested by SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Employees feel proud to be part of a socially responsible organization (Turker, 2009). They also perceive their existence in such an organization as meaningful and demonstrate a strong identification with the job (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Similarly, employees' awareness of their organization's CSR initiatives and their contribution to society's well-being induces a sense of satisfaction, prompting them to make extra efforts for the organization's success (Grant et al., 2008). In the light of these arguments, we put forward the following hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 2: CSR is positively associated with employee engagement.***

### **3.3 Mediating role of employee engagement**

CSR literature through social identity theory emphasizes that employees reinforce their affiliation with the company recognized as socially responsible, encouraging them to work beyond their duties (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Rupp et al., 2018). Previous work has established a positive correlation between CSR activities and Employee Engagement (Caligiuri et al., 2013;

Glavas, 2016), as employees are enthusiastic about being part of the organization that has a positive impact on society (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Barrena-Martínez et al., 2015). Alonso-Almeida and Llach (2019) pointed out that socially responsible organizations are perceived as attractive and preferred jobs by employees. Research by Chaudhary (2017) and Glavas (2016) highlighted the positive impact of CSR on EE, corroborating the findings of Ferreira and Real de Oliveira (2014).

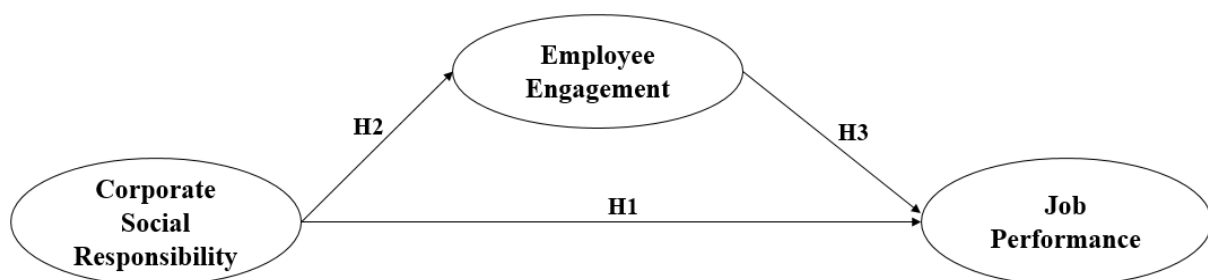
Furthermore, EE is a powerful predictor of work performance (Cesário & Chambel, 2017; Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010), as engaged employees are happier in their jobs and show strong identification with their one organization (Robertson-Smith & Markwick, 2009). Research has also shown that job performance and productivity are higher among engaged employees, as they know the importance of their role to the organization's success and have good relationships with their colleagues, which motivates them to do extra work (Anitha, 2014; Macey & Schneider, 2008). In sum, previous literature indicates a significant association of employee engagement with CSR as an exogenous variable, and employee performance as an endogenous variable. Thus, the conditions of Baron and Kenny (1986) are satisfied to establish mediation (Figure 1). Consequently, these arguments allow us to formulate the following hypothesis:

***Hypothesis 3: Employee engagement mediates the relationship between CSR and work performance.***

#### 4. Conceptual framework

Drawing on previous research and the hypotheses formulated above, we have developed a conceptual framework to explain how organizations' CSR initiatives can influence employees' attitudes and behaviors at work. Internal CSR is selected in this study, focusing on the employee stakeholder to examine its impact on their engagement and performance at work.

**Figure 1. The conceptual framework for exploring CSR impacts on engagement and performance at work.**



Source: Prepared by the authors

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## **Conclusion**

This study makes a major contribution to the literature in several ways. Firstly, it explores the impact of CSR on individual employee performance, focusing on a developing country context, such as Morocco, characterized by a specific socio-economic culture. Secondly, this research introduces a unique mediator of employee engagement to understand the relationship between CSR and work performance. Finally, it sheds light on the utility of social identity theory for understanding the links between CSR, employee engagement and job performance.

In the future, it is relevant to subject these theoretical advancements to empirical validation in real-world contexts. Therefore, our next research will focus on empirically testing the proposed relationships, thereby further enhancing our understanding of the complex interplay between CSR, employee engagement, and job performance. Through rigorous empirical investigation, we aim to strengthen and refine the theoretical foundations presented in this study, contributing towards the advancement of knowledge in this field.

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