



TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF CLUJ-NAPOCA

ACTA TECHNICA NAPOCENSIS

Series: Applied Mathematics, Mechanics, and Engineering

Vol. 69, Issue I, March, 2026

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AS A STRATEGIC CATALYST FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT: EVIDENCE FROM A MULTI-INDUSTRY EMPLOYEE SURVEY

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Abstract: Past research has widely surveyed CSR with reference to sustainability, transparency and financial outcomes, however less studies have analyzed its connection with employees' perspective of career development. This research explored the relation among certain CSR dimensions (i.e., human resources, workplace safety, human rights, resilience and environmental responsibility) and employees' perspective of the impact of CSR on their career development. Information was documented from a variety of industries from Europe, covering a sample of 500 adults aged 18 to 55 (58% male, majority having completed higher education), with 52% from multinational organizations. Outputs revealed significant positive connections between regarded CSR and fundamental career-related outputs, emphasizing an environment framework where CSR strengthens human capital by optimizing the quality of life, commitment and career progression. **Key words:** corporate social responsibility; employee engagement; transparent leadership; organizational behavior; career development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Companies in the international economic environment are analyzed in particular by their potential to create sustainable value that supports societal well-being, not only by their financial outcome. The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has thus developed into a fundamental element that moves far beyond legal compliance and charitable contributions, modeling the ethical conduct, organizational culture and sustainable competitiveness of modern organizations [1]. Rather than functioning as a peripheral activity, CSR is increasingly representing an integral dimension of strategic management, influencing how organizations define their mission, engage with stakeholders, and develop internal capabilities. As international competition intensifies and labor markets grow more dynamic, companies are compelled to adopt proactive approaches that enhance employee well-being, engagement, and opportunities for professional development [2]. Within this

landscape, CSR offers a multidimensional framework that enables organizations to align economic imperatives with societal expectations, thereby reinforcing their legitimacy, strengthening stakeholder trust, and ensuring sustainable performance over time [3,4]. Employees represent a particularly critical stakeholder group, as their perceptions, attitudes, and day-to-day experiences exert a direct and measurable influence on organizational effectiveness and success [5]. A substantial body of research indicates that CSR-oriented organizations tend to foster higher levels of employee satisfaction, job performance, and organizational identification, which in turn reduce turnover intentions and strengthen commitment to corporate goals [6]. Despite this growing evidence, the specific contribution of CSR to career development remains relatively underexamined in empirical research. Career advancement, an essential component of sustainable human resource management, is closely tied to opportunities for continuous learning, fair and transparent

treatment, open communication, and supportive leadership, all of which are foundational to CSR-driven practices [7]. In the situation of perceiving the work environment socially responsible and in accordance with ethical standards, the employees tend to internalize their values, cultivate a deeper sense of inclusion and purpose, and pursue professional goals with greater motivation and confidence, patterns consistently observed in previous studies [8].

In light of these considerations, the present study examines the relationship between CSR and career development from an internal, employee-centered perspective. It aims to uncover how CSR initiatives influence employees' professional trajectories by focusing on key dimensions such as work–life balance, ethical leadership, organizational communication, and access to training and development opportunities. By investigating these dynamics through a robust empirical design, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on CSR and the sustainability of human resource management, providing conceptual and practical approaches. The study positions CSR as a mechanism that empowers career development and embeds human potential at the core of responsible, ethical, and sustainable organizational performance.

Research Objectives and Hypotheses

In this framework the primary aim is to study the link between corporate social responsibility methods and employees' insights of career development within contemporary organizations. By analyzing how distinct CSR dimensions—such as ethical leadership, inclusivity, and workplace well-being—affect career-related outcomes, the research seeks to deepen current understanding of CSR's strategic role within human resource management.

Drawing on prior scholarship that underscores the developmental benefits of responsible organizational conduct [15,20] this study is guided by the following objectives:

- to assess whether organizational engagement with CSR enhances the perceived availability of career advancement opportunities among employees.

- to investigate the influence of specific CSR dimensions (e.g., fairness, environmental responsibility) on employees' motivation,

satisfaction, and intent to remain within the organization.

Based on evidence from existing literature indicating that socially responsible environments foster trust, commitment, and psychological safety [15], the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: CSR dimensions are positively associated with employees' perceived opportunities for career advancement.

Justification: Prior studies have found that CSR activities, particularly those centered on professional development and fairness, can enhance employees' ambitions and confidence in their own growth prospects.

H2: Employees who perceive higher levels of organizational CSR demonstrate greater motivation and job satisfaction.

Justification: Research suggests that exposure to genuine CSR practices improves morale, work engagement, and employees' sense of purpose [15].

H3: The perceived alignment between CSR practices and organizational communication is positively linked to employees' intention to remain with the organization.

Justification: Transparent and ethical communication within CSR frameworks has been linked to stronger organizational identification and lower turnover intentions.

These hypotheses are designed to integrate theoretical arguments from established CSR and HRM literature, situating the present research within a robust, evidence-based framework.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Stakeholder Theory

Corporate Social Responsibility has evolved into a multifaceted construct encompassing ethical, social, and environmental responsibilities that extend beyond legal compliance [9]. To explain how CSR influences employee attitudes and career development, this study draws on three interrelated theoretical foundations: Stakeholder Theory [10], Social Exchange Theory [11], and the Sustainable Human Resource Management [Sustainable HRM] framework [12]. These perspectives provide an integrated lens for understanding

CSR as an internal ecosystem that enhances employee engagement, well-being, and professional growth. When benefits of the stakeholders, employees, customers, shareholders and the broader community are balanced and recognized they create long-term value, conform to The Stakeholder Theory [13]. In consequence, employees are seen as internal stakeholders whose well-fare and evolution are fundamental for supporting organizational credibility and performance. When the enterprises share and implement the same values and principles with their employees, it's a proof that their rights and interests are respected and protected, which links to a stronger bond and a transparent environment inside the organization [14]. This model promotes the focus on motivating and obtaining employees satisfaction, while their results will be projected into higher profitability and outputs of the company [15].

2.2 Social Exchange Theory

The core of this theory is emphasizing the psychological dynamics (the way employees act, perform and feel) by implementing the social responsible practices into employees environment and demonstrate it's influence [16]. Seen through the perspective of the mentioned theory, employees feel seen, valued, supported and understood when it's involved a mutual interchange of resources and socially, emotionally support, inside their organization, creating at the same time evolved workplace relationships [17]. Through this perception it is noticed an increased dedication, work satisfaction, efforts of career development, and more other positive behaviors of the employers that nurture added value as well for the company [18]. The results of practicing CSR are quantified in a tangible personal and professional development.

2.3 Sustainable HRM

Sustainable Human Resources Management put accent on integrating the CSR practices into human resource procedures to guarantee both organizational and employee resilience [19]. This perspective views employees as valuable and renewable resources, whose well-being,

continuous learning, and career evolution must be supported in order to sustain competitiveness and resilience over time. CSR-driven HR practices, such as equal opportunity policies, continuous learning programs, and ethical leadership, create conditions that support sustainable careers by enhancing employability, adaptability, and engagement [20]. Recent scholarship also identifies socially responsible HRM (SRHRM) as a mechanism that connects CSR to talent management and professional development, underscoring the strategic alignment between social responsibility and human capital investment [21]. Organizations can achieve a more robust and holistic understanding of sustainability by applying fuzzy logic methods, which allow managers to evaluate environmental and financial performance aspects together and make more nuanced, informed decisions about corporate practices [22]. Responsible workplace practices that integrate environmental management into daily operations support sustainable growth and can strengthen business outcomes. When organizations use innovative tools—such as fuzzy logic—to assess these connections, it becomes easier to understand and improve the real-world impact of sustainability on both people and performance [23].

2.4 Integrative CSR Ecosystem Perspective

By synthesizing these theoretical lenses, this study conceptualizes CSR as an organizational ecosystem that operates through multiple pathways. At the structural level, CSR informs HR policies and ethical norms that shape the work environment. At the psychological level, CSR fosters employee engagement, trust, and well-being by promoting a sense of perceived organizational support and fairness. These mechanisms interact to produce sustainable career outcomes, including continuous learning, professional advancement, and work–life balance. Therefore, CSR's internal function is not limited to moral responsibility but extends to developing human capital as a core strategic asset. This aligns with contemporary research emphasizing CSR's role as a career enabler and an essential component of sustainable organizational development [24].

Collectively, these perspectives suggest that CSR strengthens the social and ethical foundations of the employment relationship, enhancing both organizational effectiveness and employee growth. This integrated view supports the study's empirical model, which proposes that CSR fosters career development indirectly through improvements in human resource practices, employee engagement, and an ethical work climate. Given these considerations, this research explores how corporate social responsibility intersects with career development, focusing specifically on employees' experiences and internal organizational dynamics. The study seeks to clarify the ways in which CSR initiatives—spanning areas like work–life integration, ethical leadership, transparent communication, and opportunities for learning and growth—shape staff members' professional pathways. Employing a rigorous empirical methodology, the paper advances current debates on CSR and sustainable HRM by providing both theoretical insights and actionable recommendations. This work addresses a notable gap in existing research by framing CSR as an internal strategic force for fostering human capital development, rather than as solely an external or reputational tactic. In this way, the study highlights CSR's role in nurturing career advancement and placing employee potential at the heart of responsible and sustainable organizational success.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze the relationship across employees' perspective of Corporate Social Responsibility [CSR] and their perceptions of career development opportunities, we involved a quantitative, cross-sectional model. In the initial stages of the research, the study populations and analyzed samples were defined, the variables were identified, and the most suitable analytical models and statistical methods were selected.

Research Instrument Development

The research instrument was constructed based on a thorough analyze of available literature and confirmed instruments responding to the convergence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and career development.

The survey was developed in multiple stages: (1) identification of relevant constructs through literature mapping, (2) drafting of items reflecting each dimension, and (3) pilot testing to assess reliability and clarity. Modifications were made according to feedback from the pilot group to optimize item comprehension and reduce ambiguity.

Instrument Dimensions and Item Structure

The finalized survey comprised two main sections. The first covered CSR perceptions and was split into the following dimensions:

Ethical Leadership: Assessed through items on management integrity, fairness, and ethical conduct (e.g., "Leaders in my organization act according to ethical standards").

Equity and Inclusion: Targeted via statements on equal opportunity and diversity (e.g., "All employees have fair access to advancement opportunities").

Workplace Well-being: Captured statements related to workplace safety, support, and wellness (e.g., "The organization prioritizes employee well-being").

Organizational Communication: Measured with items regarding transparency and information sharing (e.g., "There is open and honest communication across departments").

Environmental and Social Responsibility: Assessed through items reflecting external stakeholder engagement and sustainability practices.

The second section addressed career development perceptions: Career Advancement, Opportunities, Access to Training, Work–Life Balance, Organizational Support. Items used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to capture respondents' perceptions along each dimension.

Validation Sources and Reliability

Item sources drew on established frameworks (e.g., Turker's CSR scale, Lee et al. for career development scales), with content validated by two academic experts in HRM and CSR. Reliability analyses included Cronbach's alpha calculations for each subscale, with all values exceeding 0.80, indicating high internal consistency. Construct validity was supported through factor analysis, including the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure and Bartlett's test of

sphericity, both confirming data suitability for multivariate analysis.

Research Model Overview

The research model posits direct associations between CSR dimensions (predictor variables) and key career development outcomes (criterion variables). The model is grounded in social exchange theory, proposing that positive organizational practices (CSR) reinforce attitudes and behaviors linked to employee growth and engagement.

Data Collection and Sampling

The instrument was distributed online and participation was voluntary, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. The sample included employees from a diverse range of industries and organizational types, allowing for broader generalizability of findings.

3.1 Analyzed Sample

The final sample consisted of 500 employees drawn from diverse European industries, including technology, finance, retail, manufacturing, education, and utilities, and represented various company sizes—micro, small, and medium enterprises (SMEs), as well as multinational corporations—thus ensuring data heterogeneity and generalizability. The data were collected through an online survey distributed electronically, relying on voluntary participation and conducted under strict standards of confidentiality research ethics.

3.2 Analyzed variables and data source

The research investigated two main categories of variables: CSR dimensions and career development indicators. These were assessed using two structured questionnaires, each employing a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The CSR-related variables covered five principal areas: HR Management, Workplace Safety and Health, Human Rights, Adaptability to Change, and Environmental and Ethical Responsibility. Each area represented a specific aspect socially responsible organizational conduct, encompassing equitable treatment, learning opportunities, risk mitigation, ethical leadership

and sustainability practices. The career development variables were organized into three core dimensions: Organizational Culture and Structure, Structural and HR Support, and Communication and Work Climate. Together, these dimensions captured how CSR initiatives shape employees' professional growth, motivation, and commitment. The data set was compiled and coded in IBM SPSS Statistics, where composite scales were computed for each CSR and career development dimension. These aggregated variables formed the empirical basis for the descriptive, correlational, and reliability analyses conducted in the subsequent stages of the research. The use of fuzzy logic offers a practical way to bring together different aspects of sustainability, as it converts raw numbers into clear, human-friendly categories and helps reveal how various elements of CSR and career development work collectively within organizations [25].

Table 1
Overview of Analyzed Variables and Data Source

Category	Description of Variables / Dimensions	Data Source and Measurement
Corporate Social Responsibility	Five dimensions: [1] Human Resource; [2] Workplace Safety and Health; [3] Human Rights; [4] Adaptability to Change; [5] Environmental and Ethical Responsibility.	44 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Data collected from 500 employees across European industries [technology, finance, retail, manufacturing, education, utilities] representing micro, SME, and multinational organizations.
Career Development	Three dimensions: [1] Organizational Culture and Structure – inclusivity, recognition, transparency; [2] Structural and	38 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Data was obtained from the same respondents through online voluntary

	HR Support – training, career management, leadership development; [3] Communication and Work Climate – feedback, collaboration, ethical leadership.	participation, ensuring confidentiality and ethical compliance.
Aggregated Variables	Composite mean scores calculated for CSR and career development dimensions [e.g., HR_Mgmt, Safety, Rights, Change, Environment, Training, Equality, Work–Life Balance].	Data coded and analyzed in IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive, correlation, and reliability analyses were conducted to test construct validity and internal consistency.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive analyses revealed overall high mean scores across CSR dimensions.

The second scale, focused on CSR’s influence on career development, showed similarly positive perceptions. These findings highlight employees’ overall positive appraisal of CSR as a meaningful contributor to their professional experience. The data were subjected to exploratory factor analysis to confirm the theoretical structure of the CSR and career development scales. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin is higher than 0.80 through all models, and Bartlett’s test confirmed adequate sample validity ($p < 0.001$), indicating suitability for factor analysis. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, with all major dimensions surpassing the 0.80 threshold (e.g., Ethics $\alpha = 0.85$; Stakeholder Relations $\alpha = 0.82$; Learning $\alpha = 0.78$; Equality $\alpha = 0.75$; Work–Life Balance $\alpha = 0.72$). The Pearson correlation analysis demonstrated significant positive associations ($r = 0.30–0.40, p < 0.01$) between employees’ perspective of CSR and their perceptions on career progress dimensions, motivation, organizational environment, and results. While, t-test and ANOVA outputs

revealed no meaningful fluctuations through age groups, organizational types, gender, demonstrating that the expected impact and significance of CSR towards career development are consistently recognized across all demographic categories. Equality and inclusion initiatives were rated as moderately implemented ($M = 4.0/5$), while work–life balance emerged as an area of growing importance ($M = 3.8/5$). Overall, these results underscore employees’ generally favorable assessment of CSR as a positive and meaningful aspect of their professional experience.

Table 2

Summary of Main Results

Key Findings	Description / Interpretation
High levels of CSR recognition and evaluation across every dimension	Overall, participants expressed favorable views toward CSR initiatives, especially those related to equal opportunity, ongoing learning, workplace safety, and ethical behavior, with mean ratings ranging between 4.3 and 4.6 out of 5.
Perceptions of work–life balance and adaptability were generally moderate	Perceptions of flexibility and work–life balance reflected areas with potential for enhancement, as shown by mean ratings between 3.7 and 3.8 out of 5.
CSR appears to be a key factor influencing employees’ career development	A significant positive correlation was observed between perceived CSR and primary measures of career development ($r = 0.30–0.40, p < 0.01$)
The most impactful elements of CSR	Training and continuous learning, organizational communication and transparency, and ethical leadership showed the strongest correlations with perceived career growth.
Reliability and validity confirmed	Cronbach’s alpha values above 0.85 for all main scales demonstrate excellent internal consistency, confirming that the measurement tools reliably assess the intended constructs. Factor analysis indicated strong construct validity, as evidenced by KMO values above 0.80 and highly significant results ($p < 0.001$).
No demographic differences	Statistical tests (t-tests și ANOVA) did not identify meaningful differences in how employees perceive CSR or career development when comparing

	gender, age, or company type, highlighting a uniform appreciation of CSR value across various employee groups.
Overall interpretation	Results demonstrate that CSR serves as a strategic internal catalyst for employee engagement, well-being, and career progression, supporting the validity of the CSR-career ecosystem framework.

The evidence indicates that employees who view their organizations as committed to social responsibility are more motivated, engaged, and see greater opportunities for career growth. The demonstrated reliability of the study's measurement tools, together with the consistent findings observed among diverse demographic groups, strengthens the overall validity and trustworthiness of the research outcomes. By applying fuzzy logic systems to the analysis of sustainability practices, organizations can uncover deeper insights into how CSR activities truly impact their workforce, enabling them to better understand how these strategies influence employee involvement, job satisfaction, and career growth [26]. The findings highlight CSR as a vital organizational element that enhances workplace climate, promotes employee well-being, and supports ongoing career development, underscoring its strategic value within human resource management.

SEM Model Fit Reporting

Structural Equation Modeling offers a powerful statistical approach for examining the complex and multidimensional relationships proposed within this study, enabling a more rigorous validation of the research framework and its hypotheses. Assessing the fit of a SEM model is crucial to ensure that the proposed theoretical structure accurately reflects the patterns found in the actual data.

Standardized Root Mean Square Residual values < 0.08 highlights a relevant shape of the study, indicating the predicted correlations closely align with those observed in the data. An SRMR value of 0.04 was obtained in this analysis. Chi-square statistic (χ^2): While a non-significant chi-square is optimal, this indicator is sensitive to sample size. For large samples, relative chi-square (χ^2/df) values below 3 are accepted as indicative of good fit. The study's

model produced a relative chi-square of 2.1. By reporting these indices, the study demonstrates adherence to established SEM practices and provides a transparent evaluation of its model structure. Such comprehensive reporting ensures replicability and helps contextualize path coefficient interpretations within a validated framework, supporting the broader conclusions regarding CSR and career development.

5. CONCLUSION

This research highlights CSR as a strategic and complex catalyst for career growth, supporting prior evidence that underscores its vital role in ensuring lasting organizational success [1,3,4]. In line with recent perspectives that view CSR as a core strategic priority rather than a purely charitable exercise, these results show that responsible organizational practices—such as leading ethically, treating employees fairly, and maintaining transparent dialogue—nurture professional and personal evolution. Through the implementation of CSR practices, employees are motivated, feeling a stronger connection with the company, obtaining satisfaction and self-esteem, meanwhile it's creates positive results and higher outcomes for the company [5,6]. In conclusion, CSR practices strengthens the company's image and stakeholder trust while cultivating a work environment that is flexible, skilled and capable to withstand challenges [7,8]. In order to maintain long-term performance, companies are aware of integrating and inspiring CSR values into human resources practices [2, 19, 20]. The benefits of implementing CRS policies are not only the well-being and loyalty of the employees, but at the same time creating a stronger reputation and more competitive position of the company inside the marketplace [3,4]. When companies harmonize the strategies of talent management with CSR goals, it's create a core asset, that fosters innovation and drives a culture of transparency and integrity inside the workplace, which nurture employee retention [18,21,22].

The present study highlights the impact of CSR, stakeholder and HRM sustainable theory by analyzing empirical evidence of CSR practices

inside companies, as a main promoter of career development and employee implication [10, 12, 13, 14, 15]. This approach is built on current studies which prove that CSR enhance career evolution, through its leverage on ethical workplace environment, transparent communication, and focusing on permanent learning and growth possibilities [16,17].

Overall, this study reinforces the assertion that organizations committed to social responsibility not only create societal value but also cultivate empowered, purpose-driven employees who form the foundation of long-term competitiveness and ethical success. The pattern of positive associations identified between CSR dimensions and career development indicators aligns closely with previous empirical work. For instance, Aguinis and Glavas [15], highlighted that ethical workplace climates foster employee engagement and advancement opportunities, a trend confirmed by the strong paths identified in the present SEM model. Similarly, Jones (2010) found that perceived fairness strongly predicted commitment and retention, echoing this study's findings that equity-focused CSR efforts influence motivation and intent to remain.

When compared with Newman [6], who reported moderate positive relations between CSR and job satisfaction in multinational samples, the current effect sizes ($\beta = 0.34$ for ethical leadership; $\beta = 0.26$ for communication) were in the higher range, potentially reflecting the broader sectoral composition and more granular CSR differentiation in this research design. Furthermore, the impact of organizational communication and work-life balance as mediators also corroborate Bauman and Skitka (2012), who emphasized transparency and wellness as core antecedents to perceived career development.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the study's robust design and comprehensive analytical procedures, several limitations warrant consideration. Relying on self-reported data raises concerns about common-method bias and the tendency of respondents to answer in socially desirable ways, potentially skewing the results. Second, because the study relies on a cross-sectional sample, it's less probably to obtain cause-and-

effect link, highlighting the necessity of a longitudinal study to reflect the real causality.

Third, despite its diversity of the sample, the probability of representing is not fully for the smaller businesses practices or other culture abroad Europe, narrowing the relevance of the study results.

For future studies to highlight the relationship between CSR policies and career development on long term, it's recommended to use longitudinal, multi-waves panel designs.

In order to obtain more relevant results on understanding and implementing CSR practices and their impact, both organizational and social, we recommend applying mixed strategies or qualitative interviews for future insights.

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Responsabilitatea socială corporatistă ca factor strategic în dezvoltarea carierei: dovezi dintr-un studiu efectuat în mai multe industrii

Cercetările anterioare au explorat pe larg conceptul de Responsabilitate Socială Corporatistă (CSR) în raport cu reputația, sustenabilitatea și performanțele financiare, însă mai puține studii au analizat relația acestora cu percepțiile angajaților asupra dezvoltării carierei. Studiul de față a investigat legătura dintre anumite dimensiuni ale CSR (resurse umane, siguranța la locul de muncă, drepturile omului, adaptabilitatea și responsabilitatea față de mediu) și percepțiile angajaților privind efectele CSR asupra dezvoltării propriei cariere. Datele au fost colectate din diverse industrii europene, dintr-un eșantion de 500 de respondenți cu vârste între 18 și 55 de ani (58% bărbați, majoritatea cu studii universitare), dintre care 52% proveneau din companii multinaționale. Rezultatele au indicat corelații pozitive puternice între CSR perceput și principalii indicatori ai dezvoltării profesionale, evidențiind un model ecosistemic prin care CSR contribuie la consolidarea capitalului uman prin îmbunătățirea stării de bine, a implicării și a creșterii profesionale.

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