

How Corporate Social Responsibility Culture Sparks Innovation: Evidence from Malaysian Employees

Louis Yong Yu Lee¹, Jamin Kun Peng Xia¹, Ranjith P V², Huey Min Beh^{1*}, Baiduri Binti Khalid¹, Tiantian Cai¹, Yangpeng Cai¹, Lakshmi L², Daisy Mui Hung Kee¹ 

¹Universiti Sains Malaysia, Jalan Sg Dua, 11800 Minden, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

²Ramaiah Institute of Management, Gate No.8, Building, C Block, General Sciences, M.S, R.I, T. POST, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560054, India

*Corresponding Email: behhueymin@student.usm.my

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As organizations increasingly integrate social responsibility into their core strategies, understanding how CSR shapes internal employee outcomes becomes essential. This study investigates how the organizational CSR climate (OCSRC) affects employees' innovative job performance through the mediating roles of job satisfaction, work motivation, and employee creativity in Malaysian organizations. Using a quantitative approach, data were gathered from 153 full-time employees, and regression analyses were conducted to test nine hypotheses. The results indicate that OCSRC significantly enhances job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.896$, $p < 0.001$), work motivation ($\beta = 0.276$, $p < 0.001$), and employee creativity ($\beta = 0.213$, $p < 0.01$). Job satisfaction positively affects work motivation ($\beta = 0.607$, $p < 0.001$) and creativity ($\beta = 0.217$, $p < 0.01$) but does not directly influence innovative job performance ($\beta = -0.125$, $p > 0.05$). Work motivation significantly affects both creativity ($\beta = 0.429$, $p < 0.001$) and innovation ($\beta = 0.176$, $p < 0.05$), while employee creativity strongly drives innovation ($\beta = 0.880$, $p < 0.001$). The model explains 83.5% of the variance in innovative job performance ($R^2 = 0.835$). Overall, the findings show that CSR climate fosters innovation indirectly through satisfaction, motivation, and creativity, underscoring its role as an internal driver of engagement and innovation.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility; Employee Creativity; Innovative Job Performance; Job Satisfaction; Work Motivation

INTRODUCTION

With today's knowledge-based and dynamic economy, organizations need to change, grow, and innovate constantly to be competitive. Innovation, being the implementation of new and useful ideas within a role, group, or organization, is today a necessity and no longer an extravagance. While traditional drivers of innovation, such as research and development, leadership, and the adoption of technology, remain important, a growing body of research emphasizes the role of psychological and social facilitators of innovation at the employee level (Anderson et al., 2014). Among the organizational factors believed to influence employee innovation is corporate social responsibility (CSR). Referring to a company's compliance with social, environmental, and ethical standards above the legal obligations (Carroll, 1991). CSR is not only seen as a way of reputation building or fulfilling moral obligations anymore, but also as a strategic cultural influence on employee attitudes and behavior, including innovation.

CSR can manifest in numerous ways through practices in environmental sustainability, employee welfare, community development, and governance ethics. After CSR is deep-rooted in an organization's culture, that is, organizational CSR climate (OCSRC), it guides the employees' shared perception and expectations regarding the firm's social and moral responsibility (Glavas, 2016). Employees who consider their company ethically and socially responsible are more likely to have positive emotional and motivational responses towards their firm, and this can, in turn, influence their work performance and innovativeness (Afsar et al., 2018; Farooq et al., 2017).

Employee innovation in this context does not occur in isolation but is based on a complex psychological process. This research follows a mediation approach in the sense that it is assumed that the connection between an OCSRC and innovative job performance of employees is indirect and occurs through its influence on job satisfaction, work motivation, and creativity. A positive CSR climate can enhance employees' job satisfaction by enhancing their sense of pride, belonging, and purpose (Kim et al., 2010). When employees feel valued and think they are doing something for a meaningful purpose, they will be more motivated in their jobs, particularly intrinsic motivation, where they find joy and fulfilment in doing their work (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Motivated and satisfied employees are also becoming more innovative at work; they will generate new ideas, experiment with new approaches, and find creative solutions to problems (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Such innovative efforts, in turn, contribute to employees' innovative job performance.

The theoretical underpinning of this study is drawn from social exchange theory (SET) and self-determination theory (SDT). According to SET (Blau, 1986), employees, after finding their firm to be socially responsible and concerned, feel morally obligated to reciprocate in terms of positive behaviors, including increased engagement, creativity, and innovation. SDT further explains that values related to CSR, by aligning with employees' personal beliefs and sense of purpose, can underpin intrinsic motivation, a key driver of innovation and creativity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Together, these theories validate the view that CSR climates can promote a supportive psychological climate in which innovation can thrive.

This research is positioned within the Malaysian context, a nation undergoing accelerated industrial transformation while increasingly embracing sustainability and CSR principles. In recent years, Malaysian companies have encountered growing pressure from government regulations and civil society to adopt more sustainable, transparent, and socially responsible business practices (Securities Commission Malaysia, 2021). Despite these developments, there remains a scarcity of empirical

evidence exploring how the CSR climate within Malaysian organizations, often conceptualized as the OCSRC, influences internal organizational outcomes such as employee innovation. Moreover, while previous research has predominantly focused on the direct effects of CSR on employee-related outcomes (Glavas, 2016), limited attention has been paid to the intervening psychological mechanisms, specifically job satisfaction, work motivation, and creativity, that mediate this relationship. Accordingly, this study seeks to address two central research questions: (1) What is the relationship between OCSRC and employees' innovative job performance? and (2) What roles do employees' job satisfaction, work motivation, and creativity play in mediating this relationship?

Addressing these questions extends the growing literature on CSR and employee innovation within and beyond the Malaysian context in several important ways. First, the study advances the conceptualization of CSR as a strategic internal driver that enhances organizational functioning, rather than merely an external tool for reputation management. Second, it offers empirical insights into the underlying psychological pathways through which CSR climates foster innovation, a dimension that remains relatively understudied in CSR scholarship. Third, by focusing on employee-level innovation, the study underscores the critical role of individual attitudes, intrinsic motivation, and creative behavior in driving bottom-up innovation within organizations transitioning toward sustainability.

This research bridges the identified gap by investigating the mechanisms through which OCSRC influences innovative job performance, with a specific emphasis on the mediating roles of job satisfaction, motivation, and creativity. In contrast to prior studies that concentrated on CSR's external outcomes, such as corporate reputation or customer loyalty, this study redirects attention toward the internal psychological processes that connect a socially responsible organizational climate to innovation behavior. It provides new theoretical insight by integrating SET and SDT, elucidating how CSR-oriented work environments cultivate employee satisfaction, motivation, and creativity, which in turn enhance innovative performance.

In summary, this study contributes to the field by conceptualizing CSR as an internal strategic resource capable of stimulating sustainable innovation, empirically examining its indirect effects through psychological mediators, and contextualizing these relationships within Malaysian organizations that are increasingly aligning with sustainability-driven industrial transformation. Through this multidimensional approach, the research not only enriches theoretical understanding but also provides practical implications for organizations seeking to embed CSR values into their internal culture to drive innovation and long-term competitiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Interplay Between OCSRC, Job Satisfaction, and Work Motivation

CSR is a self-regulating business model that helps a company be socially accountable to itself, its stakeholders, and the public. CSR is a self-regulating business model that assists a company to be socially accountable (Sehgal et al., 2020). Job satisfaction is a measure of an employee's contentment with their job, the feeling of enjoyment or fulfilment that a person derives from their job. Work motivation refers to a person's desire or willingness to make an effort in a job or professional area. According to Hossen et al. (2020), a study of fourteen Jordanian pharmaceutical companies showed that practicing ICSR will boost the effectiveness and productivity of employees. For instance, employees are more satisfied when they think their organization's actions reflect the ethical values that they personally care about, such as environmental protection and community service. Employees would also refer to the organizational cultures as an

indicator when they perform a certain task (Teoh et al., 2021). Employees' orientation of CSR plays a key role in constructing efficient and consistent employer-employee relationships (Nikkhah, 2023). OCSRC can also motivate employees to work hard. According to Ibrahim et al. (2006), the successful motivation of younger employees could be affected by a company's engagement in CSR activities. If a company has low engagement in CSR activities, its employees might not be motivated when working. For example, when employees see their organization involved in ethical practices, community development, or environmental sustainability, they feel that their works contribute to a greater good. Employees who are satisfied with their jobs will be more attentive and committed to their tasks (Monga & Soni, 2023), leading to better overall job performance. Employees who feel satisfied will possibly increase their motivation to work (Husna et al., 2020). Employees who feel valued and satisfied in their roles tend to offer better service (Lee et al., 2024). In contrast, employees who are dissatisfied with their jobs may not be so motivated and have low engagement in their tasks

OCSRC, Job Satisfaction, Work Motivation, and Employee Creativity

Defined as a development and useful idea for the organizations, employee creativity includes new products, ideas, services, and management methods (Baer & Oldham, 2006). CSR practices improve employee motivation and engagement, which results in a positive influence on creative behavior, and thus, an organization should prioritize CSR to drive the innovation and creativity of employees (Ejoh & Omoile, 2023). For example, when an organization cares about the environment and society, it encourages employees to work better together and think of a creative way to solve an issue. Happiness plays a key role in linking CSR and employee creativity (Bibi et al. 2022). When employees witness the organization has a positive environment and CSR activities, it gives them the feeling of happiness, which encourages them to work more creatively in leading to new ideas and solving problems in fresh ways. This can also be in line with other studies (Jeong et al., 2022) that point to happiness as the link to CSR and employee creativity.

Job satisfaction is known as a pleasurable emotional state arising from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Locke, 1976). In other words, it is a reflection of employee's thoughts and feelings regarding their job. Employees who are highly satisfied with their job will likely have a positive feeling upon performing and participating in their task activities. According to the study results of Kusumajati (2018), employees have high creativity because of the influence of employee satisfaction, especially on personality, relationship with coworkers, and work environment. The most creative quality of an employee is their abilities, which can be demonstrated within their specialized field. Job satisfaction is positively and significantly associated with employee creativity (Miao et al., 2020). It acts as a mediator in influencing employee creativity. The factor contributing to job satisfaction is supportive leadership. When employees work in an organization under supportive leadership, employees are most likely to feel satisfied, which leads them to express creativity.

Motivation is a collection of both internal and external elements that drive employees to work-related tasks and determine their course, level of intensity, and persistence (Latham & Pinder, 2005). It is stated in the study of Diefendorff et al. (2022) that the idea of goals is the key to understanding motivation since they stand for the desired results that motivate effort and persistence. When employees feel intrinsically motivated, it leads them to engage in trying new things. This can help employees in developing and generating more creative ideas. This is supported by (Vu et al., 2021), which states that intrinsic motivation, in the challenge aspect, has a strong effect on employee creativity, and the relationship will be even stronger under empowering leadership. Amabile et al. (1994) further discovered that enjoyment in doing a task and a sense of challenge are

the elements of intrinsic motivation, or types of motivation that come from within individuals. It concluded that there is a positive correlation between both elements of intrinsic motivation and creativity. To put it in another way, employees who are motivated by interest and enjoyment in their task will likely be inspired and enthusiastic to come up with more exciting ideas, as it helps them boost creativity.

Job Satisfaction, Work Motivation, Employee Creativity, and Innovative Job Performance

As mentioned previously, job satisfaction is one way of determining how one general feels about how they react to what happens in and around their working environment at work. More content employees mean they are apt to become further committed, provide higher organizational citizenship behavior, and have stronger psychological commitment. The above attitudes constitute an enabling arena for innovation in the sense that happier workers become more inclined towards exploring new areas and improving workflows. High job satisfaction will increase intrinsic motivation and reduce psychological resistance to change, which supports risk-taking and novel idea generation necessary for innovation. Studies have shown that job satisfaction not only enhances productivity but also encourages employees to work beyond the norm, resulting in innovative performance (Zhou & George, 2001). Satisfied employees are more likely to own up to their tasks, contributing innovatively and engaging in constructive problem-solving that, collectively, results in innovative job performance (Ng & Feldman, 2010). According to Lam et al. (2020), employee satisfaction with benefits relates to overall job satisfaction.

Work motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation, plays an important role in driving employees to work toward objectives with passion and determination. Motivated employees are more likely to take initiative, seek alternative ways of task completion, and overcome obstacles, all of which are required behaviors for innovation. Motivated employees are more likely to take proactive and innovative actions because they are driven to make meaningful changes. Amabile (1996) emphasized that intrinsic motivation generates creativity and innovation through the focusing of attention, heightened cognitive flexibility, and taking risks. The workers become increasingly involved in critical thinking and their performance improvement when they are motivated, leading to augmented levels of innovation in their work environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Furthermore, employee creativity refers to the generation of new and useful ideas within a job role or organization. Creativity is generating ideas, but innovation is implementing ideas. Therefore, creativity is a prerequisite for innovation. Creative employees provide the ideas that can be transformed into innovative solutions, products, or processes (Shalley et al., 2004). Without employees' creative contribution, the innovation process is constrained. Creativity offers the platform for new thinking strategies that, when well done, raise the level of job performance in innovative ways. Research has consistently found that employee creativity has a positive impact on innovative task performance, especially in constantly changing environments where flexibility and innovation are essential (Anderson et al., 2014). Innovative staff are likely to challenge the current situation and introduce innovations, hence playing pivotal roles in innovation activity within an organization

Hypotheses Development

Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: OCSRC positively influences job satisfaction.

H2: OCSRC positively influences work motivation.

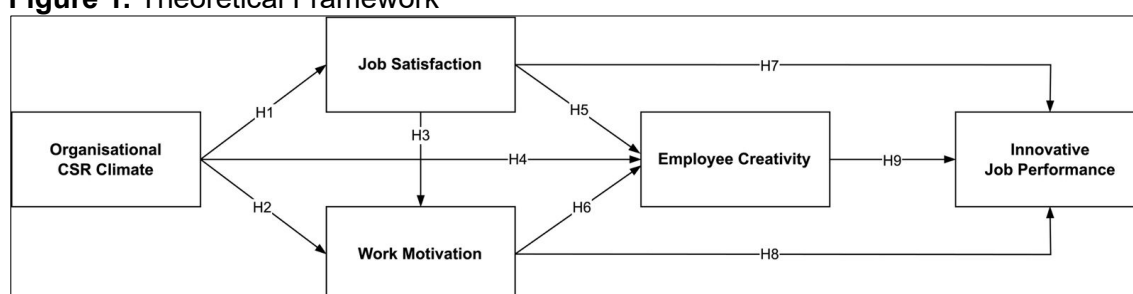
H3: Job satisfaction positively influences work motivation.

- H4: OCSRC positively influences employee creativity.
 H5: Job satisfaction positively influences employee creativity.
 H6: Work motivation positively influences employee creativity.
 H7: Job satisfaction positively influences innovative job performance.
 H8: Work motivation positively influences innovative job performance.
 H9: Employee creativity positively influences innovative job performance.

This framework integrates CSR culture, satisfaction, motivation, and creativity as sequential predictors of innovation, aligning with [Amabile and Pratt's \(2016\)](#) model that creativity precedes innovation.

The research theoretical framework is presented in [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework



RESEARCH METHOD

Sample and Procedure

This study examines the effect of OCSRC on employees' innovative job performance among full-time employees in Malaysia. The eligibility criteria for participant screening included the following: (1) individuals had to be Malaysian citizens, and (2) employed full-time in organizations located within Malaysia. A quantitative approach was employed, and questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms in March 2025. The instrument consisted of demographic items to capture participants' socioeconomic information and Likert-scale measures for all study constructs. A total of 158 completed questionnaires were collected over a two-week period. After a thorough review, five responses were excluded due to incompleteness or failure to meet the eligibility criteria, resulting in 153 valid responses used for data analysis.

Measures

Validated and widely recognized measurement scales were adopted for all constructs examined in this study. Consistent with prior evidence indicating that Likert-type scales with five or more response categories yield no significant differences in internal structure, such as mean values, inter-item correlations, and item-total correlations ([Leung, 2011](#)), all items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

Organizational CSR Climate (OCSRC)

A three-item scale developed by [Shen and Zhang \(2019\)](#) was employed to measure OCSRC. The items included: "my company is committed to improving the welfare of the communities in which it operates," "my company is very concerned with environmental protection," and "my company is very concerned with customers' benefits." The original scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90.

Job Satisfaction

The widely employed job satisfaction scale developed by Brayfield and Rothe (1951) was utilized for measuring this construct. The full items were “I feel fairly satisfied with my job,” “I find real enjoyment in my work,” and “I feel enthusiastic about my work.” The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale ranged from 0.85 to 0.95.

Work Motivation

To capture an employee’s work motivation, a six-item scale by Kuvaas and Dysvik (2009) was adapted. Sample items included “The tasks that I do at work are themselves representing a driving power in my job,” and “sometimes I become so inspired by my job that I almost forget everything else around me.” The Cronbach’s alpha of this scale was 0.94.

Employees’ Creativity

This study utilized the creativity scale with 13 items that was developed by Zhou and George (2001) for quantifying employees’ creativity. A sample item was “I actively search for new technologies, processes, techniques, or ideas that could be useful at work.” The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.97.

Employees’ Innovative Job Performance

A nine-item scale was adopted for measuring an employee’s innovative job performance in the workplace from Janssen and Van Yperen (2004). Sample items include “I frequently search for new working methods, techniques, or instruments,” “I frequently transform innovative ideas into useful applications,” and “I frequently make important organizational members enthusiastic for innovative ideas.” The Cronbach alpha of the original scale is 0.98.

RESULTS

Table 1. Summary of Respondents’ Demographic Information (N=153)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group		
20 - 25 years old	22	14.4
26 - 30 years old	19	12.4
31 - 35 years old	27	17.6
36 - 40 years old	32	20.9
41 - 45 years old	12	7.8
46 - 50 years old	15	9.8
51 - 55 years old	13	8.5
56 - 60 years old	11	7.2
61 - 65 years old	1	0.7
66 - 70 years old	1	0.7
Gender		
Male	76	49.7
Female	77	50.3
Race		
Malay	52	34
Chinese	58	37.9
Indian	43	28.1
Educational Attainment		
Secondary school	25	16.3
High school diploma or equivalent	32	20.9
Bachelor’s degree	51	33.3
Master’s degree	30	19.6

Doctorate degree	15	9.8
Monthly Income Level		
B40 (below RM5,249)	77	50.3
M40 (between RM5,250 and RM11,819)	52	34.0
T20 (above RM11,820)	24	15.7

The profile of the research sample is presented in Table 1. The gender distribution was nearly equal, with 76 men (49.7%) and 77 women (50.3%). In terms of age, the largest group was between 36 and 40 years old (20.9%), followed by those aged 31–35 years (17.6%) and 20–25 years (14.4%). Respondents represented diverse ethnic backgrounds, consisting of 37.9% Chinese, 34% Malay, and 28.1% Indian. Regarding educational attainment, 33.3% held a bachelor's degree, 19.6% a master's degree, and 9.8% a doctoral degree. A majority of 50.3% were from the B40 income group, while 34% belonged to the M40 category and 15.7% to the T20 category. This demographic diversity enhances the generalizability of the findings to the broader Malaysian workforce population.

Table 2. Mean, SD, Cronbach's Alpha, and Zero-order Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 OCSRC	3.996	0.748	0.856				
2 JS	3.908	0.812	0.826***	0.915			
3 WM	3.840	0.775	0.792***	0.856***	0.936		
4 EC	3.815	0.722	0.787***	0.821***	0.844***	0.965	
5 IJP	3.821	0.759	0.729***	0.739***	0.803***	0.909***	0.956

Note: n = 153; The diagonal entries represent Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Abbreviation: organizational CSR climate (OCSRC); job satisfaction (JS); work motivation (WM); employee creativity (EC); innovative job performance (IJP). *** p < 0.001.

Table 2 presents the mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha, and intercorrelations among the study variables. All constructs show relatively high mean scores ranging from 3.815 to 3.996, indicating overall positive perceptions of organizational CSR climate, job satisfaction, work motivation, employee creativity, and innovative job performance. The standard deviations, ranging from 0.722 to 0.812, suggest moderate variability, reflecting a reasonable spread of responses. The Cronbach's alpha values (0.856–0.965) exceed the recommended reliability threshold of 0.70, confirming excellent internal consistency for all scales. Furthermore, all correlations are positive and statistically significant at the 0.001 level, indicating strong relationships among the variables. The highest correlation is observed between employee creativity and innovative job performance ($r = 0.909$), supporting the theoretical assumption that creativity serves as a key antecedent of innovation in organizational settings.

Table 3. Regression Analysis

Variables	JS	WM	EC	IJP
1 OCSRC	0.896 (0.050)***	0.276 (0.074)***	0.214 (0.071)**	
2 JS		0.607 (0.068)***	0.217 (0.078)**	-0.125 (0.070)
3 WM			0.429 (0.075)***	0.176 (0.073)*
4 EC				0.880 (0.072)***
R Square	0.682	0.755	0.763	0.835

Note. $n = 153$. Values are standardized regression coefficients; standard error estimates are in parentheses. Abbreviation: organizational CSR climate (OCSRC); job satisfaction (JS); work motivation (WM); employee creativity (EC); innovative job performance (IJP).

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Linear regression analyses were conducted using SPSS and R to test the proposed hypotheses (H1–H9). As presented in Table 3, OCSRC significantly influences Job Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.896$, $p < 0.001$), Work Motivation ($\beta = 0.276$, $p < 0.001$), and Employee Creativity ($\beta = 0.214$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H1, H2, and H4. Job Satisfaction positively affects Work Motivation ($\beta = 0.607$, $p < 0.001$) and Employee Creativity ($\beta = 0.217$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H3 and H5. However, its direct effect on Innovative Job Performance is not significant ($\beta = -0.125$, $p > 0.05$), thus rejecting H7. Work Motivation positively affects both Employee Creativity ($\beta = 0.429$, $p < 0.001$) and Innovative Job Performance ($\beta = 0.176$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H6 and H8. Finally, Employee Creativity strongly and significantly influences Innovative Job Performance ($\beta = 0.880$, $p < 0.001$), confirming H9.

The model explains 83.5% of the variance in Innovative Job Performance ($R^2 = 0.835$), indicating high explanatory power. Overall, eight out of nine hypotheses (H1–H6, H8, H9) are supported, while H7 is not. These findings indicate that CSR climate indirectly enhances innovation through the sequential mediation of job satisfaction, work motivation, and creativity, consistent with the underlying assumptions of SET and SDT.

DISCUSSION

Results Analysis

The Influence of OCSRC on Employee Attitudes (H1–H4)

The findings confirm that OCSRC significantly enhances job satisfaction, work motivation, and employee creativity. These results provide strong empirical support for the conceptualization of CSR as an internal strategic resource rather than a purely reputational concern. Specifically, the significant and strong path between OCSRC and job satisfaction (H1) indicates that employees in socially responsible organizations tend to experience greater fulfillment and identification with their work. This aligns with the findings of Barpanda (2024) and Nazir & Islam (2020), who reported that CSR initiatives foster meaningfulness and belonging, leading to higher job satisfaction.

Furthermore, OCSRC also exerts a positive influence on work motivation (H2), consistent with SET (Boadi et al., 2020), which posits that value-driven work climates enhance intrinsic motivation by fulfilling employees' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The significant relationship between OCSRC and employee creativity (H4) extends prior work by Kaghazchi and Atan (2025), demonstrating that socially responsible organizations create psychologically safe environments that encourage experimentation and idea generation. Collectively, these results support the notion that CSR climate acts as a psychological enabler, motivating employees to contribute positively to organizational innovation.

The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction (H3, H5, H7)

Job satisfaction is found to significantly enhance work motivation (H3) and employee creativity (H5), which reinforces earlier evidence by Alshebami (2021) and Iqbal et al. (2023), suggesting that satisfied employees are more engaged, optimistic, and willing to take creative risks. However, its direct influence on innovative job performance (H7) was not significant. This finding diverges from some previous studies (e.g., Grolleau et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2020), which found that satisfaction can directly promote innovation-related behaviors. A possible explanation is that, while satisfaction strengthens psychological readiness, it does not always translate into implementation behaviors

unless reinforced by motivation or creativity. In the Malaysian context, hierarchical work cultures and limited autonomy may also weaken the direct link between satisfaction and innovation.

The Role of Work Motivation in the Innovation Process (H6, H8)

Work motivation demonstrates a strong and positive effect on both employee creativity (H6) and innovative job performance (H8), confirming its pivotal function as a catalyst of proactive and innovation-oriented behavior. These findings are consistent with prior studies by Nurhaeda et al. (2024), who emphasized that motivated employees channel their energy toward productive exploration and performance enhancement. The results affirm that intrinsic motivation acts as a psychological bridge between positive perceptions of CSR and behavioral innovation, as employees internalize organizational values into purposeful action.

Employee Creativity as the Final Pathway to Innovation (H9)

Employee creativity emerged as the strongest predictor of innovative job performance (H9), with the highest standardized coefficient among all tested relationships. This finding aligns with the conceptual distinction proposed by Fernandes and González (2020), where creativity represents the generation of ideas and innovation represents their application. Empirical evidence from studies such as Atkočiūnienė and Siudikienė (2021) supports this sequential logic, confirming that organizations fostering creative expression are more likely to achieve higher levels of innovation. The result highlights creativity as the key behavioral mechanism through which CSR-driven climates ultimately yield innovative performance outcomes.

Theoretical Implications

Advancing CSR as an Internal Strategic Resource

Traditionally, CSR has been conceptualized as an external-facing activity aimed at stakeholders such as investors, customers, and regulators (Branco & Rodrigues, 2006; Gossett & Haske, 2017). This study contributes to a growing body of literature that reconceptualizes CSR as a critical internal force. By framing CSR climate as a shared employee perception, the finding underscores that CSR is more than a formal policy or reporting tool; it becomes a guiding value system that shapes employee attitudes and behaviors. In doing so, the study affirms the view that CSR, when integrated into organizational culture, functions as a strategic internal resource that fosters desirable employee outcomes.

This reconceptualization extends the classical CSR pyramid by providing empirical support for its spillover in psychology into the internal work dynamics (Carroll, 1991). The findings also build upon Glavas' (2016) conceptualization of internal CSR, which asserts that ethical work climates can serve as emotional cues that enhance employee well-being. The results not only support this proposition but empirically link CSR climate to creativity and innovation via a multistage process involving job satisfaction and motivation.

Integration of Social Exchange and Self-Determination Theories

This study contributes to theory by demonstrating how two dominant psychological frameworks, i.e., SET and SDT, can be integrated to explain the employee innovation outcomes in CSR-rich environments. SET posits that when employees perceive the organization as morally responsible and socially engaged, they are more likely to reciprocate with constructive work behaviors. The findings support this notion, showing that employees respond to CSR climates with increased satisfaction, motivation, and ultimately innovative behaviors that serve as indirect forms of reciprocity. Simultaneously, SDT provides a deeper psychological explanation for these outcomes.

SDT argues that intrinsic motivation is enhanced when individuals perceive their work as aligned with their core values and sense of purpose. The CSR climate, in this context, serves as a value-affirming context that fulfils employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, key components of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The results confirm that such motivation fosters creativity, which subsequently drives innovation. By aligning CSR with both social exchange and intrinsic motivation, this study offers a dual-process explanation for how and why CSR is able to influence employee behavior. This extends theoretical boundaries by positioning CSR not merely as a top-down managerial practice, but as a bottom-up psychological enabler that satisfies reciprocal expectations and intrinsic drives simultaneously.

Employee Creativity as the Central Conduit

Another theoretical contribution of this study is the positioning of employee creativity as the central conduit between motivational states and innovative job performance. While prior studies have often conflated creativity and innovation, the model clearly delineates them and empirically validates their sequential relationship. Creativity functions as the bridge between feeling motivated and performing innovatively, a point often assumed but rarely demonstrated with such clarity. This finding adds empirical weight to Amabile and Pratt's (2016) dynamic componential model of creativity and innovation, which suggests that the presence of motivation and domain-relevant skills must be activated by environmental supports for creativity to translate into innovation. In the model, CSR climate acts as the environmental support, job satisfaction and motivation represent individual resources, and creativity is the behavioral mechanism that connects the two to innovation.

Practical Implications

CSR as an Internal Management Lever

From a managerial perspective, the findings offer compelling evidence for treating CSR not just as an external compliance or branding tool but as an internal management lever. When CSR values are genuinely embedded into an organization's culture, they have the power to transform workplace climates into spaces that promote psychological safety, motivation, and innovation. This means that CSR departments should collaborate closely with HR, leadership, and organizational development units to translate CSR principles into day-to-day organizational practices. Managers are encouraged to design internal CSR initiatives that are visible, participatory, and aligned with employee values. Examples include promoting ethical leadership, community involvement days, and environmentally sustainable operations that involve employees directly. These initiatives not only reinforce organizational values but also cultivate a shared belief system that enhances job satisfaction and motivation.

Fostering Motivation and Creativity through CSR

Given the findings on the mediating roles of motivation and creativity, organizational leaders should develop CSR programs that do more than signal corporate virtue. They should be used to foster a deeper sense of purpose and autonomy among employees. For instance, involving employees in the design and execution of CSR initiatives can enhance their ownership and intrinsic motivation, which in turn contributes to greater creative engagement at work. Moreover, leaders should be trained to communicate CSR values effectively and consistently. When leaders visibly champion CSR-related values (such as fairness, environmental responsibility, or social contribution), it not only strengthens organizational identity but also validates employees' intrinsic beliefs. This alignment can make employees feel that their work contributes to a higher purpose, reinforcing the motivational and creative cycles identified in this study.

Employee-Centered Innovation Strategies

Another implication is the need to shift innovation strategies from solely structural or technological interventions to more employee-centered approaches. Traditional innovation initiatives often focus on tools, processes, or R&D budgets. While important, these efforts should be complemented by psychological enablers such as a positive CSR climate that energizes employees to take risks and think creatively. Human resource practitioners should incorporate CSR dimensions into performance management, reward systems, and talent development programs. For example, employees could be recognized not only for outcomes but also for embodying CSR-aligned behaviors, such as ethical decision-making or sustainable thinking. Such practices reinforce a culture that values both social responsibility and innovation.

Relevance for Malaysian and Emerging Economy Contexts

Lastly, this study offers context-specific insights that are particularly relevant for Malaysian organizations and other emerging economies. As Malaysia continues its transition towards more sustainable industrial practices, CSR has become a normative expectation from regulators, consumers, and civil society. However, its role as an internal force for employee development and innovation remains underleveraged. The findings also highlight the potential for CSR to be a vehicle for enhancing employee well-being and organizational innovation in Malaysian firms. Policymakers and business associations should promote CSR not just as an ESG or compliance goal, but as an internal business strategy that can enhance workforce performance and national competitiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the OCSRC shapes employees' innovative job performance, focusing on the mediating roles of job satisfaction, work motivation, and employee creativity. The findings provide a clear and connected picture of how socially responsible organizational environments stimulate innovation through employees' psychological states and creative engagement.

The results show that OCSRC positively influences job satisfaction, work motivation, and employee creativity (supporting H1–H3). When employees perceive their organization as socially responsible, they tend to experience higher fulfillment, stronger motivation, and greater creative energy at work. Job satisfaction and work motivation were also found to enhance employee creativity (supporting H4 and H5), suggesting that positive emotional and motivational experiences are important drivers of idea generation. Creativity, in turn, was shown to improve innovative job performance (supporting H6), confirming that creative engagement is a key stepping stone toward innovation.

However, the mediating role of job satisfaction between OCSRC and innovative job performance (H7) was not supported, indicating that satisfaction alone does not translate CSR perceptions into innovative outcomes without other reinforcing factors such as motivation or creativity. In contrast, the mediating roles of work motivation (H8) and employee creativity (H9) were both significant, showing that CSR climate encourages innovation primarily by enhancing intrinsic motivation and creative behaviors rather than through satisfaction by itself.

These findings underscore that CSR functions as a powerful internal force when embedded in organizational culture. Rather than serving merely as an external image-building tool, a strong CSR climate fosters motivation and creativity, two essential ingredients for innovation. The results also strengthen the theoretical integration of SET and SDT, suggesting that CSR climates not only encourage reciprocity but also satisfy intrinsic needs for purpose and competence.

Practically, organizations are encouraged to integrate CSR values into their internal systems and leadership practices. Managers should design participatory CSR initiatives, promote ethical and inclusive leadership, and support environments where employees feel motivated to think creatively. By doing so, CSR can serve as both a moral and strategic lever for innovation.

Looking forward, future research could explore how different leadership styles, team dynamics, or cultural contexts influence the pathways between CSR climate and innovation. Overall, this study concludes that when CSR becomes part of an organization's lived culture, it can elevate motivation, spark creativity, and ultimately cultivate innovation, even if satisfaction alone is not sufficient to drive that process.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors claim there are no conflicts of interest.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

1st Author

Mr. Louis Lee Yong Yu is currently pursuing his undergraduate program at the School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Alongside his curricular pursuits, he is actively involved in research activities as a research assistant. His areas of academic interest span CSR, financial analysis, organizational behavior, human resource management, and corporate governance. His works have been published in leading journals, including

Corporate Social Responsibility and Environment Management and Energy Policy. In addition to his research work, Mr. Louis is affiliated with the Association of International Business & Professional Management (AIBPM) and serves as its guest reviewer.

2nd Author

Mr. Jamin Xia Kun Peng is a postgraduate student at the School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, where he also serves as a research assistant. His research interests include organizational behavior, human resource management, strategic management, and industrial-organizational psychology. He has published in high-impact journals such as *Energy Policy* and *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*. He is also an active member and guest reviewer of the Association of International Business & Professional Management (AIBPM) and the International Association for Chinese Management Research (IACMR).

3rd Author

Prof. Ranjith P. V. is a professor in the Department of Operations and Supply Chain Management at M.S. Ramaiah Institute of Management. He has over 23 years of teaching experience and one year of industry experience. He teaches courses such as Consumer Behavior, Quantitative Models of Marketing, Service Quality, Operations Management, Supply Chain Management, Supply Chain Analytics, and Marketing Metrics. Prof. Ranjith has published research papers in the areas of Supply Chain, Consumer Behavior, and Service Quality. He has been a keynote speaker at international conferences and is actively involved in guiding international student research activities. He holds a Ph.D. in Management, is qualified with NET, and has an MBA in Marketing and Operations.

4th Author

Huey Min Beh is currently an undergraduate student focusing on Accounting at Universiti Sains Malaysia.

5th Author

Baiduri Binti Khalid is currently an undergraduate student focusing on Accounting at Universiti Sains Malaysia.

6th Author

Tiantian Cai is currently an undergraduate student focusing on Management at Universiti Sains Malaysia.

7th Author

Yangpeng Cai is currently an undergraduate student focusing on Management at Universiti Sains Malaysia.

8th Author

Lakshmi L. is currently a postgraduate student focusing on Operations and Marketing at Ramaiah Institute of Management.

9th Author

Dr. Daisy Mui Hung Kee is an Associate Professor at the School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). She earned her Ph.D. from the University of South Australia and an MBA from USM. A prolific scholar with over 75 Web of Science and 113 Scopus-indexed publications, she also serves as the Country Director for AIBPM (Indonesia) and the STAR Scholars Network (USA).