

# Linking Corporate Social Responsibility & Work Engagement: An Empirical Evidence

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*Despite the claim that corporate social responsibility practices have a significant impact on employees' attitude and behavior and play an important role in increasing the level of employee' work engagement, the understanding of this phenomenon has been neglected especially in Indian context. The present study intends to fill this gap by analyzing the linkage between CSR and work engagement. A survey research was conducted. Primary data from 100 managerial employees from top 10 Indian commercial banks was collected. The data was analyzed using PLS-SEM method for measuring the relationship among the constructs. Results of the study show the positive effect of corporate social responsibility on employees' work engagement. Findings would be useful for managers to have a better insight towards applying corporate social responsibility to boost the level of work engagement among employees.*

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## Introduction

An accumulative interest in psychology that emphasizes human strength, efficient functioning, and employees' well-being, has steered to the development of the concept of work-engagement (Lin, 2010, Chughtai & Buckley, 2008). Work engagement is an accomplished mental state at a workplace which is specified by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Vigor is the level of energy, dynamism and tenacity. The dedication concerns the psychological state and the emotional reflection of the meaningfulness, enthusiasm and inspiration. Absorption is to be fully engrossed in one's work.

Work engagement is seen as a discretionary effort on the part of management to embolden employees to fulfil organizational interests. Existing literature indicated that work engagement helps in predicting employee outcome, organizations' financial outcome and organizational success (Bates, 2004; Richman, 2006). Previous studies also pointed out that organizational outcomes such as organizational com-

mitments, better performance, lesser intention to quit, lesser absenteeism, more enthusiasm and burnout reduction are positively influenced by work engagement (Yilmaz, Ali & Flouris, 2015; Clark & Loxton, 2012; Salmela-Aro, 2011), which places it as an important construct in organizational culture. On the contrary, disengagement leads to a lower level of commitment, loss of energy, distrust, lower level of performance and high-turnover (Fay & Luhrmann, 2004). Therefore, work-engagement is a major concern for business organizations and in particular for HR managers.

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Owing to the current dynamic, competitive and complex business environment, organizations have now realized that to remain competitive, they need highly engaged employees. Hence, identifying those factors that increase the level of work engagement is vital to the survival and growth of the organization. In this regard, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is considered an essential contextual factor to influence the level of engagement at work. Literature revealed that employees' opinion about the organizational CSR practices influences employees' attitude and behavior (Perrini & Castaldo, 2008; Fukukawa et. al., 2007; Rupp et. al. 2006). Sirota Survey (2007) revealed, if satisfied with organizations' CSR commitments, employees hold a positive attitude towards their or-

ganization. It is also found that employees are inquisitive to know their social contribution through their work-role (Bhattacharya et al., 2008). They feel satisfied and motivated while contributing to society through their work (Tsourvakas & Yfantidou, 2018). Another important study led by Hewitt Associates (2010) revealed that CSR is one in all drivers of employee engagement. Therefore, it can be concluded that organizations which have implemented CSR practices have witnessed a higher engagement level among employees at a workplace.

The relevance of CSR and employee engagement is already recognized by academicians and practitioners (Ante Glavas, 2016; Esmaelinezhad et.al, 2015; Pedro Ferreira et al., 2013; Albdour et.al, 2012). Many past studies explored these dimensions on developed countries and emphasized either external or internal dimensions of CSR but very few studies have come up with both the dimensions of CSR comprehensively. In this backdrop, the present study modifies the approach by conceptualizing and validating the relationship of both the dimensions of CSR (internal & external) with work engagement. The proposed model suggests a new perspective to look at CSR strategies to boost work engagement in the workplace.

### **Theoretical Background**

Social responsibilities are considered to be employers' obligation to follow such policies, take decisions that are required for the welfare of the society

(Bowen, 1953). It has been conceptualized and made operational in corporate configuration as corporate social responsibility or CSR. There are different perspectives to view CSR because scholars studied this concept in different disciplines (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

According to Davis (1973), CSR refers to the company's consideration of the economic, legal and technical requirements of society and their response to them, beyond the basic requirement of the organization. A company must take its decisions by considering its effects over society. It is crucial to benefit society not to gain only economic benefit. The present study adopts the work of Ligeti and Oravecz (2009), Aguilera et al. (2007), Smith (2007), Brammer et al. (2007), and European Commission (2001), who developed two main dimensions viz. external and internal. Internal dimensions of CSR encompass all the internal activities of the organization emphasizing the betterment of employees (Brammer et al., 2007). Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) also states that employees' skills and commitments are the key resources which are contributing to an organization's long run success. From this point of view, employees are considered to be an important stakeholder group for any kind of organizations. Literature provides numerous CSR practices to meet employees' expectations and needs. Vives (2006) defined internal corporate responsibility as responsible behavior towards employees, both socially and environmentally. It is expressed in terms of their safety and health (Sutherland & Cooper, 1990; Ehnert,

Harry & Zink (2014), training and development (Lee & Bruvold, 2003; Ehnert, Harry & Zink (2014), work-life balance (Wong & Ko, 2009; Ehnert, Harry & Zink (2014) and workplace inclusion or diversity ( Ehnert, Harry & Zink, 2014). Work-life balance can be defined as the extent to which a person can fulfil his or her work and family commitments and other non-work responsibilities (Parkes & Langford, 2008). Training is an approach to develop employees' skills. Neal, Griffin and Hart (2000) defined health and safety as a self-report on compliance with safety regulations, procedures and involvement in activities to remain healthy at workplace within an organization and finally, workplace-inclusion is the ability to involve diverse workforce in the organization so that everyone has equal opportunities to contribute.

External CSR practices, on the other hand, are socially responsible actions of organizations that target society, suppliers, customers, business partners, NGOs and public authorities beyond their functional limits (Al-bdour et al., 2010). The CSR pyramid of Carroll (1979) signified the comprehensive dimensions of corporate social responsibility towards various stakeholders. To understand the external CSR practices in detail, the study considers Carroll's pyramid of CSR (Carroll, 2016). According to this, organization has philanthropic, legal, economic, and ethical responsibility towards external stakeholders. Philanthropic responsibility can be defined as adopting good corporate citizenship to improve the quality of life for the community. Ethical

responsibility is to be ethical at work, whereas legal responsibilities can be defined as the obedience to rules and regulations and finally economic responsibility is to be a profitable business unit, which is the main objective of any organization. To understand the comprehensive effect of CSR dimensions we also consider environmental responsibility (Turker, 2009) which includes all the activities carried out by the organization in order to save the environment or reduce environmental damage by adopting various initiatives and replacing the traditional activities with environment friendly activities in the daily business activities.

### **Work Engagement**

Recently, work engagement has become a significant topic of interest among scholars and practitioners. It is often used interchangeably with employee engagement in literature. This term was coined by the Gallup Group as a result of various empirical studies supported by interviews and surveys of worldwide managers and employees (Little & Little, 2006). However, the first academic definition is one from Kahn (1990) who defined the term engagement as the harnessing of the members' self, at the workplace physically, cognitively and emotionally during the job role. Based on this definition, Maslach et al. (2001), Saks (2006), Czarnowsky (2008) and Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) contributed to the exposition of a definition of employee engagement.

However, the present study will embrace on the definition of work-engagement

given by Schaufeli et al. (2008) as it is adopted by many research studies across the world in different contexts (Petrou et al., 2012; Chung & Angeline, 2010; Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Bakker et al., 2007; Salanova et al., 2008). According to Bakker and Schaufeli (2008), work-engagement is positive, satisfactory, emotional and motivational well-being in the workplace. Indeed, the term work engagement has been rooted in psychology literature that emphasizes the necessity to analyze the application of positive attitudes and behaviors of employees in organizational settings.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility & Work Engagement**

Work engagement is positive, satisfactory, emotional and motivational well-being of employees' work state of mind. Hewitt Associates' (2010) research revealed that employee' perception towards organizational CSR practices has a key role in maintaining their engagement level. To sustain the work engagement culture, organizations should maintain their commitment to CSR (Kenexa Research Institute, 2008). Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter (2003) claimed that when people find their work significant and meaningful, they feel motivated leading to greater productivity in turn.

As described by the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), CSR provides favorable outcomes to meet the interests of the stakeholders, including shareholders, government, employees and custom-

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ers (Lee et al., 2013). The present study considers two main dimensions of CSR external and internal. External dimension of CSR includes philanthropic, economic, ethical, legal and environmental responsibility whereas internal dimension of CSR includes work-life balance (Wong & Ko, 2009), Smith and Gardner (2007), Thang & Fassin (2017), Health and safety (Sutherland & Cooper, 1990), training and development (Lee & Bruvold, 2003), workplace inclusion or diversity (self-developed based on ISO 26000).

### **External CSR & Work Engagement**

The relationship between external CSR and its positive individual outcome can be justified by applying social identity theory (SIT) proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979). This theory states that people have a tendency to form a social group that relate to their self-concept (Peterson, 2004; Greening & Turbante, 2000). Employees gain a positive sense of identity based on this theory when the organization is socially responsible and has a good social reputation among external stakeholders. Previous studies also showed positive association of organizations' reputation with involvement in social issues (Hess et al., 2002). By combining the aforementioned views, it can be hypothesized that:

H1: External CSR practices influence work engagement.

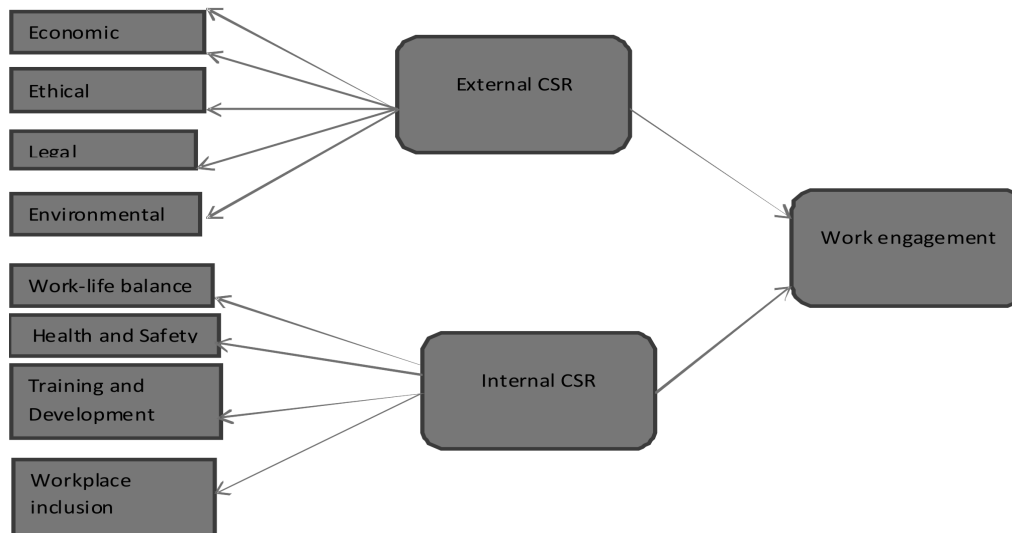
### **Internal CSR & Work Engagement**

There are some CSR activities to augment employees' well-being and engagement in terms of fair wages, appreciation, good working conditions, communication, job security, self-respect and professional as well as personal development (Eweje & Bentley, 2006). As per ISO 26000, these CSR activities are termed as internal CSR practices. The relationship between work engagement and internal CSR practices can be justified by applying social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). The theory emphasizes social behavior as mutual exchange behavior (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). When employees are given financial and socio-emotional sustenance from the organization, they exchange it by showing higher engagement level at the workplace. Saks (2006) also explicated that employees can reimburse the fair treatment of organization through their level of work-engagement at a workplace. Thus once CSR activities meet employees' expectations, they are ready to pay with enthusiasm in terms of commitment, lesser intention to quit the organization, organizational citizenship behavior and work engagement (Organ & Lingl, 1995). Hence, it can be hypothesized that:

H2: Internal CSR practices influence work engagement.

Having taken consideration from the conceptual and theoretical discussion, we propose the model as presented in fig.1.

**Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework**



To measure the constructs the present study used a Likert scale of 5 point, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Measurement scales for constructs have been drawn from various existing studies. The instrument to measure work engagement is from Utrecht Work Engagement scale established by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), comprising 9 items. The scale adapted to measure external CSR pertaining to its five sub-dimensions namely, philanthropic, economic, ethical and legal responsibilities measured by 4 items and adopted from Carroll (1979), Lin (2010) whereas environmental responsibility is measured by 3 items adopted from Hanzaee & Rahpeima (2013) Internal dimensions of CSR composed of work-life balance measured by 9 items, health and safety measured by 8 items, training and development measured by 4 and workplace inclusion or diversity measured by 5 items adapted from Wong and

Ko (2009); Smith and Gardner (2007); Ngayun (2017); Sutherland and Cooper (1990); Lee and Bruvold (2003); ISO 26000. In this way, the final instrument comprised 54 items.

**Data Collection**

For purpose of the study, a survey research was conducted. Primary data from managerial employees of top 10 Indian commercial banks were collected through a self-administered questionnaire. These top 10 banks namely, HDFC, Axis, Yes, State bank of India, ICICI, Canara Bank, Bank of Baroda, IndusInd Bank, Kotak Mahindra and Union Bank of India were selected on the basis of their CSR expenditure given in the annual reports of 2017-18. A sample of 100 managers comprising middle-level and top-level managers was drawn based on multi-stage sampling. Managers were personally contacted to fill the question-

naire. The sample includes 35 assistant managers, 30 managers, 27 deputy managers and 8 senior managers, of which 57% are males and 43% are females. The majority of respondents i.e. 53 per cent belong to the age-group 21-30 years, 33 per cent from the age group 31-40, 10 per cent from the age-group 41-50 and 4 per cent from the age group of 50 and above. Finally, most of the respondents i.e. 39 per cent had income between INR 21000-30000, followed by 28 per cent with the income between INR 35000-50000, another 28 per cent with income more than 50000 INR. Only 5 per cent had income less than INR 20000. The data was collected through questionnaire. In the sample, married respondents were 54 per cent and unmarried respondents were 45 per cent.

**Result & Analysis**

To analyze the data, Partial Least Square –Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was applied. This method allows researchers to check the validity and reliability of the constructs and also test the proposed hypotheses (Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams & Hair, 2014). For this purpose, the measurement model was assessed to check the convergent validity, discriminant validity and reliability and then the structural model is as-

essed to test the hypotheses using Smart PLS 2.0.

In the measurement model, firstly, convergent validity which is the degree of correlation to another measure of the same constructs was assessed. To establish convergent validity, composite reliability, factor loadings of the statements and average variance extracted (AVE) were also calculated. Factor loading shows the relative importance or magnitude of a collection of statements or items that form a whole collectively as one construct. According to Chin et al. (2003), factor loading of each item should be greater than 0.6. Composite reliability estimates the measurement of a construct by a set of its indicators and it should be ranged in between 0.7 and 0.9 (Hair et al, 1998) while the average variance extracted is the common variance between latent construct indicators. To confirm convergent validity, all the constructs should have AVE value greater than 0.5(Hair et al., 2006). To establish the constructs’ reliability, Cronbach’s alpha should be above 0.6 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Cronbach alpha is an indicator of internal consistency of constructs. The results of measurement model are given in Table 1. The data clearly reveal that all constructive measurements have met the criteria except WLB7 & WLB8 (Work life balance item 7 and 8).

**Table 1 Results of Convergent Validity & Reliability**

Construct	Factor loading (>0.6)	AVE (>0.5)	CR (>0.7)	Cronbach alpha (>0.7)	Number of items*
External CSR	.696-.909	.623	.845	.812	19 (17)
Internal CSR	.651-.867	.678	.835	.875	26 (24)
Work engagement	.623-.847	.507	.901	.857	9 (9)

Source: Prepared by authors \*Initial items (final items)

After establishing convergent validity, discriminant validity was estimated. Discriminant validity is the extent to which a construct is rightly different from other variables, in terms of how much it relates to other variable (Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams & Hair, 2014). Cross loading criterion (Chin, 1988) was applied to establish discriminant validity which stated that

subjective independence can help in reducing multicollinearity among the latent variables indicating that the average variance extracted from the latent variable (AVE) should be higher than the square correlation between the construct and other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 shows the discriminant validity of all latent variables under study.

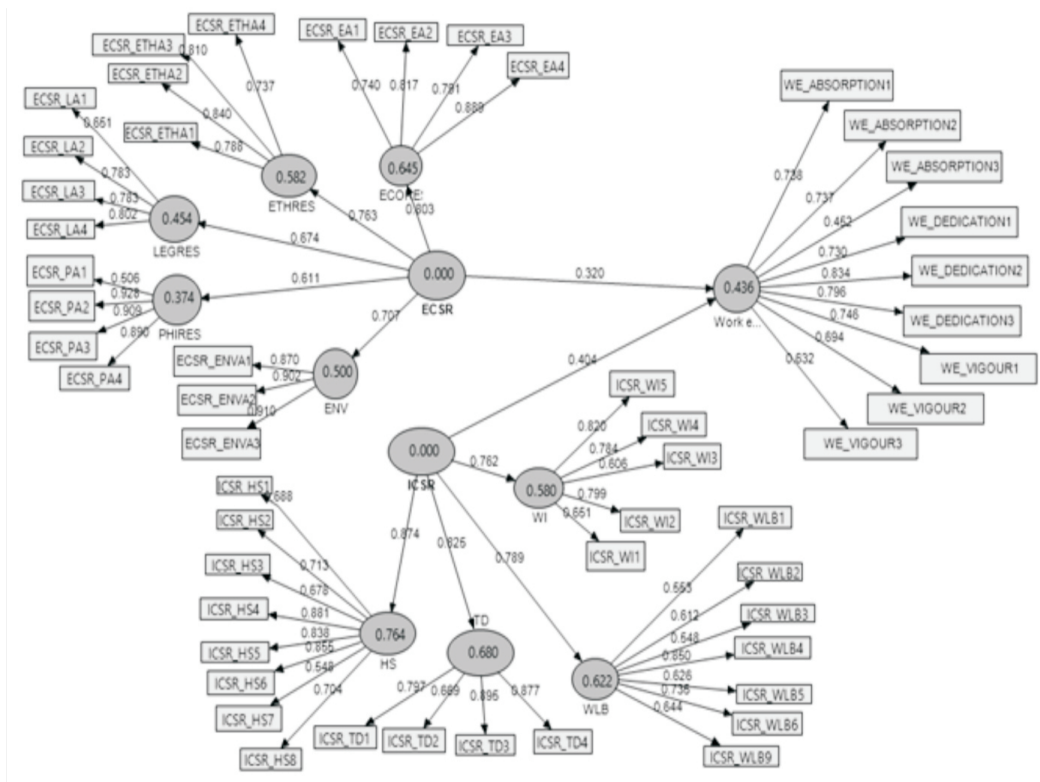
**Table 2 Results of Discriminant Validity**

Construct	Work Engagement	ECSR	ICSR
Work Engagement	.712		
ECSR	.498	.703	
ICSR	.549	.586	.697

Source: Prepared by authors

Note: The off-diagonal values of measures are the correlations between latent variables .

**Fig. 2 Measurement Model**



**Structural Model Assessment**

After establishing the reliability and validity of the constructs, hypotheses were tested by using structural equation modelling. Further, the path estimates of constructs and t-statistics for the proposed relationships were estimated applying a bootstrapping method. This method is applied with re-sampling of 2000. Statistics value of structural model assessment and bootstrapping technique are shown in Fig. 3 and Table 3. Results show that external CSR with t-value 3.083 has a significant positive impact on work engagement. It depicts that CSR practices that are undertaken to fulfil philanthropic, ethical, legal, economic and environmental responsibilities positively affect employees’ work engagement level. This also implies that higher the implementation of external CSR practices higher will be the level of work engagement. Thus, hypothesis (H1) is supported.

**Results show that external CSR with t-value 3.083 has a significant positive impact on work engagement.**

Furthermore, it is also demonstrated that internal CSR with t-value 3.359 also

has a significant positive impact on work engagement. It entails that organization should take care of employees’ well-being to secure an engaged workforce. Hence, H2 is also supported. Although, results of the data analysis reveal that both internal as well as external CSR practices positively affect work engagement, their relative influence can be judged by the beta value. Higher beta values ( $\beta=.359$ ) of internal CSR is indicative of greater influence of internal CSR practices on work engagement as compared to external CSR ( $\beta=.341$ ). To evaluate the predictive power of the proposed model, R<sup>2</sup> was calculated. Predictive power is the percentage of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the other independent variables in the model (Barclay et al. 1995). The calculated value of R<sup>2</sup> is 43.6 % in the model. This indicates the model fitness as 43.6 percent variance in work engagement can be predicted by both the constructs (external CSR and internal CSR) together and linear relationship existed among the variables. Results of bootstrapping are given in Table 3.

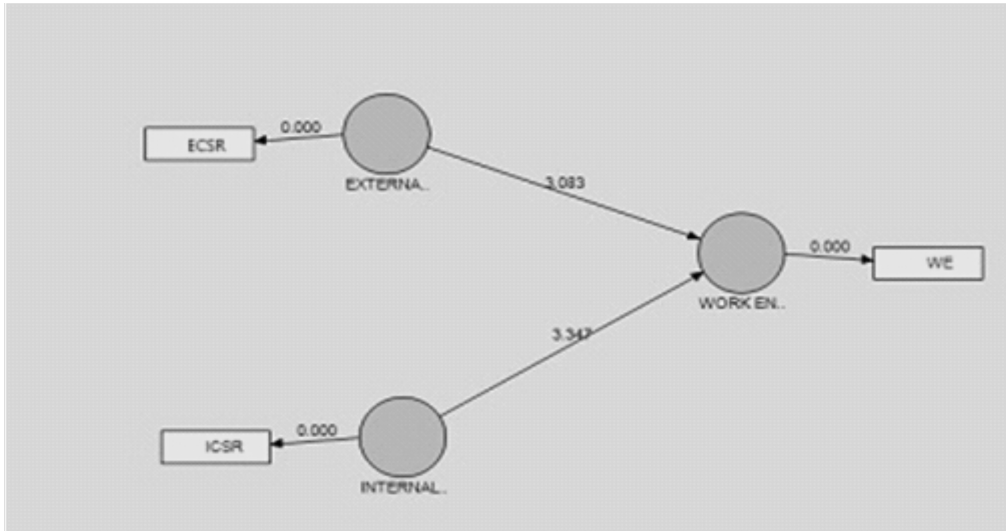
**Organization should take care of employees’ well-being to secure an engaged workforce.**

**Table 3 Results of Structural Model Assessment**

Hypothesis	Hypothesis	Beta	Standard-error	T-Value	Decision
H1	External CSR Work Engagement (ECSR)	0.341	0.118	3.083	Supported
H2	Internal CSR Work Engagement (ICSR)	0.359	0.104	3.347	Supported

Source: Prepared by authors

Fig. 3 Structural Model



### Conclusion

The findings from the present study reflect several important aspects. It adds to the theoretical development of CSR as a significant contributor to work engagement. It provides empirical evidence that both internal and external dimensions of CSR have a significant positive impact on work engagement. Results of the study revealed that internal CSR has more influence on work engagement than external CSR which is similar to the findings of previous studies by Pedro Ferreira and Elizabeth Real de Oliveira (2014). Internal CSR practices satisfy employees' psychological needs by addressing their well-being directly (Cornelius et al., 2008). When organizations are concerned about health and safety problems of employees, provide them training to develop their skills, treat all employees equally and understand the importance of the work-life balance, employees feel connected

to their organization and are obliged to get work done at the cost of engagement. It is therefore expected to have its greater influence on work engagement. It is also observed that employees are concerned about organizational CSR practices directed towards external stakeholders as well as internal stakeholders. They feel motivated, engaged and are more committed to their organizations. Thus, the socially responsible organization can foster the level of work engagement through implementing CSR practices. It is also inferred that when employees' psychological needs are satisfied at the workplace, their improved attitude reflected in higher level of engagement at a workplace. An organization needs to view CSR in a strategic way so that employees can thrive to feel more engaged, which subsequently plays an important role in increasing their performance and efficiency.

### Managerial Implications

Management practitioners can be benefitted from this research by realizing the fact that employees feel motivated, satisfied and engaged, when they contribute towards the society through their work. It is also be noted that employees' attitude and behavior can be influenced by the implementation of external as well as internal CSR practices in the organization. Hence, it would be fruitful for HR professionals to plan CSR strategies comprehensively including both dimensions, external as well as internal, in consideration to its effects on employees. This should be an opportunity for HRD professionals also as several areas of HR, such as training and development, work-life balance, workplace inclusion, health and safety, etc. are contributed towards internal CSR practices. Organization should internalize these practices so that employees can act as enablers to volunteer extra efforts that enhance the level of work engagement. The implication of the study also rely on considering external CSR practices such as organizations' economic, philanthropy, ethical, legal, and environmental responsibilities to boost the level of work engagement amongst employees. The findings would be useful in understanding the strategic role of CSR practices in harnessing benefits of employee engagement, which is considered important to be competitive in the real business world as they are the only intangible assets to the organization that cannot be substituted or replicated. Finally, we encourage organizations to take CSR steps towards the betterment of employees and better-

ment of society to increase employees' self-identification at a workplace.

### Limitations & Future Research

The study has some limitations, which opens up new avenues for future research. The present study focuses on the banking sector that too on managerial employees only. Future studies can be conducted in different other sectors of an economy on managerial employees as well as non-managerial employees as they may have different responses to different kind of organizations' CSR practices. The study is longitudinal in nature which limits the scope of the study. Further cross-sectional analysis is required to get deep understandings and widens the scope. The sample of the study is small which restricts the general application of the findings. Future studies can take a larger sample to make its results generalized. More variables can also be included that influence the nature and strength of this relationship, for example, the demographics. Moreover, researchers are also encouraged to analyze the proposed model in different organizational and cultural contexts in order to extend the applicability of the results.

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