

# Employee Creativity

Subjects: Management

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Employee creativity means individuals could work innovatively and proactively in order to create exceptional results. Individuals who can creatively solve problems and work proactively are required by every sector. From an organizational perspective, to cope with an uncertain environment and achieve sustainable growth, employees are expected not only to perform their formal roles, but also to engage themselves in different informal roles, like their creative performance. The current surge in the organizational literature is evident of the fact that the importance of creative employees is being recognized by various contemporary scholars.

Keywords: CSR ; job autonomy ; employee creativity ; extra-role ; tourism ; hospitality

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## 1. Introduction

The competitive global environment has forced enterprises to take different steps to be alive and to remain competitive. Therefore, companies that desire to be leaders in their field or want to maintain their competitive position should develop strategies with a special focus on creativity and innovation <sup>[1]</sup>. Organizations in the current age must respond appropriately to the dynamic business environment, otherwise, their existence will be jeopardized, and even if they do survive, growth will not be expected. Therefore, to be competitive, organizations must have a well-differentiated organizational management strategy to survive and prosper, regardless of their form.

However, an exploration of the existing literature unveils that most of the prior studies have considered employee creativity to foster organizational performance <sup>[2][3]</sup> or to spur competitive advantage <sup>[4][5]</sup>. There is no denial in recognizing the importance of investigating the impact of employee creativity on the above-stated organizational outcomes; however, we argue that it is also important to explore the factors that motivate employees in different extra-roles, like creativity. Nevertheless, this perspective is still under-explored, and no universal consensus has been reached until now to answer the question of what exact set of factors may explain employees' engagement in different extra-role behaviors. To this end, we propose that employees' corporate social responsibility (CSR) perception about their organization is an important factor to engage employees in creative tasks. Therefore, the first objective of the present analysis is to explore the relationship between CSR and employee creativity.

Many organizational factors influence employee performance, especially their creative performance. In this regard, job autonomy has emerged as an important imperative to enhance employee performance <sup>[6]</sup>. Job autonomy not only spurs employee performance but also helps to boost employees' creative potential <sup>[7]</sup>. Moreover, job autonomy helps employees to make free decisions on how to perform their work creatively. The componential theory of creativity <sup>[8]</sup> also views autonomy at the workplace as an important factor to boost the creative potential of employees. When a firm provides employees with adequate freedom at work, it leads to a relaxed state of mind that is a necessary condition for employee creativity. Thus, another objective here is to investigate 'job autonomy' as a potential mediator between CSR and employee creativity.

## 2. The Relationship of CSR and Employee Creativity

Over the last three decades, different studies of creativity have been published in top-tier journals at an ever-increasing rate, and have provided valuable information for researchers and professionals <sup>[9]</sup>. Perhaps the most widely used theory to explain employee creativity is the componential theory of creativity by Amabile <sup>[10]</sup>, which posits that an individual's state of intrinsic motivation is a major source to undergirding the association between different factors (personal and contextual) and employee's engagement into different creative tasks at the workplace. In contrast to domain-specific skills, which can also facilitate a person's creativity, intrinsic motivation is more diverse and depends largely on the work environment <sup>[11]</sup>. Therefore, the context of the work environment is a critical factor for employee creativity, implying that even a creative employee would not be able to perform creative tasks efficiently if he worked in an inappropriate work environment. This argument can also be seen in the work of Shalley, et al. <sup>[11]</sup>. Drawing upon this theory, we argue that a

socially responsible organization is expected to provide its employees with a kind of work environment which is flexible, transparent, and keeps the employees at ease, implying that employees working in a socially responsible organization are expected to be engaged in different creative activities.

## 2.1. CSR and Employee Creativity

CSR has emerged as one of the most significant realities in the world of business. In fact, the concept of CSR is so broad in its scope that it is still evolving even in 2021. The concept was originally defined by the founding father Carroll <sup>[12]</sup>, who asserted that “CSR is the economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic expectations of a society from a business”. Over time, the concept of CSR has transformed itself from a charity-based concept to a phenomenon that provides a solid basis to contemporary businesses for competitive advantage <sup>[13]</sup>. There are different perspectives in which contemporary scholars have explored the effectiveness of CSR for different organizational outcomes. For instance, the most dominant perspective is that CSR positively influences a firm's performance, especially in terms of financial performance <sup>[14][15][16]</sup>. In fact, this perspective still dominates the field, as it serves the prime objective of every business: economic efficiency. Another dominant perspective of CSR studies is evident in the field of reputational studies, in which organizations use their CSR strategy to earn a better organizational reputation <sup>[17][18][19]</sup>. Yet another perspective is to influence employees' formal behavior through CSR <sup>[20][21][22]</sup>.

There is another perspective that recently joined the lexicon of CSR studies, emphasized here also, which is to shape employee extra-role behavior. Extra-role behavior can be understood as any behavior that is not formally required by an organization <sup>[23]</sup>, but is considered critical to foster overall organizational performance. Studies under this domain of CSR are quite a recent addition in the literature. In the current context, we argue that the CSR commitment of an organization is an extra-role that is performed by the organization in the larger interest of society and the environment. This commitment of an organization is well observed by the employees serving in a socially responsible organization, as acknowledged by several preceding scholars <sup>[24][25]</sup>. The employees, in response, feel a higher level of intrinsic motivation to support their organization, not only through performing their formal job obligations but also by engaging themselves in different extra-roles, one of which is employee creativity. Employee creativity is referred to as “the process that involves employees to generate ideas that are novel and valuable for an organization” <sup>[26]</sup>. Different scholars have established a positive link between employees' CSR perception of their organization and creativity. As an example, Hur, et al. <sup>[27]</sup> noted a positive link between CSR and employee creativity in the hospitality sector of Korea. Moreover, Abdelmotaleb, et al. <sup>[28]</sup> concluded the same finding in the context of the Egyptian Telecom sector. In like manner, Kim, et al. <sup>[29]</sup> noted that a socially responsible organization provides an atmosphere at the workplace in which employees feel a sense of safety and confidence, which encourages them to demonstrate their creative capability. The same kind of arguments can be seen in various other studies <sup>[30][31]</sup>.

To sum, the CSR engagement of an organization provides its employees with a justified reason to be engaged in different creative tasks in order to enhance the overall performance of an organization. Further, as CSR engagement is an extra-engagement of an organization for the betterment of all stakeholders, and employees themselves are, of course, stakeholders, employees acknowledge this extra-commitment of their organization, and thus are expected to return to their organization positively by engaging themselves in different creative tasks which may be valuable for the organization. From another standpoint, following componential theory, as a socially responsible organization provides its employees a workplace environment that is flexible, encouraging, and above all, takes care of the employees—therefore in line with componential theory—a link between CSR and employee creativity is fostered.

## 2.2. Job Autonomy and Employee Creativity

Job autonomy can be defined as freedom, independence, and the degree to which an individual exercises discretion in determining time schedules and job procedures at work <sup>[32]</sup>. The importance of job autonomy was first acknowledged in the work of Hackman and Oldham's theory of job fulfillment. The theory of job fulfillment asserts that job-related characteristics change the psychological state of employees and affect their motivation, attitude, and task performance significantly. In order to give meaning to their jobs and to set and pursue their own goals, employees should be given autonomy to perform their jobs <sup>[33]</sup>. Job autonomy is a critical variable that positively affects the motivation and attitude of employees <sup>[34]</sup>. Moreover, job autonomy is a job characteristic that is related to creativity. Past studies have reported that job autonomy has a positive effect on employee creativity and innovation behavior <sup>[35][36]</sup>. For instance, in their seminal work, Zhou <sup>[37]</sup> indicated that when a firm facilitates its employees with a higher level of task autonomy, it positively influences their capability to think in new and novel ways. Likewise, in one study, Pattnaik and Sahoo <sup>[38]</sup> noted that employees performing jobs with a high level of autonomy had higher levels of creativity in the Indian software sector. The seminal work of Amabile <sup>[10]</sup> also confirmed that creativity is high when employees have a choice in task performance. We

argue here that when employees are endowed with autonomy, they are likely to be more intrinsically motivated and more creative than when they are under direction and control. This view is also supported by Jin and Kim [39]. Furthermore, other scholars have also proposed a positive association between job autonomy and employee creativity [7][40][41]. Thus, the following hypothesis is framed.

### 3. Take the Hotel Sector of Pakistan as an Example: The Mediating Role of Job Autonomy

The finding of this analysis confirmed that there exists a positive relationship between CSR and employee creativity. The CSR engagement of a hotel helps employees to build the narrative that they are working for a socially responsible organization that takes care of the interests of all stakeholders, including the employees. Further, they are also self-convinced that, being the member of a socially responsible enterprise, they have a flexible, unbiased, and secured work environment, which spurs their creative capability. Similarly, the CSR perceptions of an organization are well observed by its employees, and in return, they want to support their organization not only by performing their formal job tasks but also by performing some extra-roles, like employee creativity [27][42]. Evans, et al. [43] referred to this as a value congruence between employees and socially responsible organizations that motivates employees to perform certain extra-roles.

Creativity is one of the main factors affecting the competitiveness of hotel businesses. The strategic importance of employee creativity cannot be disputed. Regardless of the type of sector, it is one of the most important tools for organizations in the current age. In this respect, a plethora of previous studies has also realized the importance of CSR to spur employee creativity [28][44][45]. Lastly, the established relationship between CSR and employee creativity can also be explained in light of the componential theory of creativity, which specifies an appropriate work environment as a necessary pre-condition for employees to gauge themselves in different creative tasks. From this perspective, undoubtedly, the CSR orientation of an organization provides a work environment in which employees are at ease to be engaged in different creative tasks. Hence, the first objective of the present analysis was well achieved in light of the literary discussion supported by empirical findings.

The other objective of this analysis was to test the mediating effect of job autonomy between CSR and employee creativity. The empirical results of the present analysis established that CSR not only directly predicts employee creativity, but also indirectly predicts it through the mediating support of job autonomy. When employees are given the freedom to work or solve problems on their own, they are more likely to come up with creative solutions that involve their creative thinking process. Furthermore, the more the availability of creative solutions, the better will be the future of an organization. Differing views lead to such assumptions only if organizational support (CSR-orientation in the current case) is available for the employees. The direct and mediating role of job autonomy in fostering employee creativity is also established in past studies [7][33][34][40]. In fact, Kalyar [40] asserts that job autonomy converts the employees into self-leaders who are self-governed and self-responsible, and thus willfully act for the betterment of their organization. Further, a socially responsible organization characterized by job autonomy paves the way for employees to be involved in different creativity-related tasks. Creativity and innovation are undoubtedly receiving increasing attention from scholars to induce the performance of an enterprise. Among some of the factors that consistently induce creativity, job autonomy is a critical factor [10]. On this point, the results of the current study established that when job autonomy is included in the relationship between CSR and employee creativity as a mediator, it produces a significant effect (almost 45%) in explaining employee creativity. Thus, the second objective of the current analysis was also well served.

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