

# Corporate Social Responsibility: Psychological, Person-Centric, and Progressing

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## Abstract

Micro-CSR, or the psychological study of how corporate social responsibility (CSR) affects individuals, is gaining significant attention within industrial/organizational psychology and organizational behavior (IOOB). Although this research has the potential to offer insight into how CSR impacts individuals representing various stakeholder groups (e.g., consumers, shareholders), to date the term micro-CSR has generally been limited to describing research on employee responses to CSR initiatives. We argue that the taxonomic constriction of micro-CSR to employees alone exacerbates current friction within the field pertaining to the effects, utility, and importance of CSR. This review synthesizes the accruing research on employee-focused micro-CSR and summarizes current theories while addressing some of the concerns regarding CSR, particularly as it applies to other stakeholder groups. It repositions the study of CSR toward its ostensible ultimate purpose, reducing human suffering, and in doing so draws together theories and evidence focused on why CSR matters to employees and why the study of another stakeholder group—CSR recipients—is essential toward a valid understanding of the true micro-CSR experience (of employees, among others).

## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), or the “context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders’ expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance” (Aguinis 2011, p. 855), has long been interpreted through the lens of stakeholder theory, wherein CSR is seen as fulfillment of organizational obligations to a panoply of stakeholders both internal and external to the firm (Carroll 1991, Freeman & Moutchnik 2013). Yet not all stakeholder groups have historically been given equal attention in the literature. For decades, sociologists and economists have examined CSR from a firm’s perspective, whereas marketing and consumer research has sought to understand how the public’s views of an organization’s level of social responsiveness translate into consumer preference. Collectively, this research was undertaken largely to understand the instrumental, financial benefit of CSR. Accordingly, and with some irony, for many years this focus overshadowed the examination of two stakeholder groups perhaps most relevant to the seeming purpose of CSR (e.g., ameliorating human misery; Margolis & Walsh 2003): those who plan for, participate in, and witness CSR (e.g., employees of all levels), and the intended beneficiaries of CSR.

With the rise of employee<sup>1</sup>-focused micro-CSR research, person-centric work psychology, and humanitarian work psychology (HWP), a sea change is occurring regarding the field’s perspective on CSR (Rupp et al. 2014). Just a few years ago only 4% of the CSR research was reported to take an individual-level perspective (Aguinis & Glavas 2012). Subsequent to this, the CSR literature has seen a marked jump in empirical research on the psychology of CSR, leading to the need for the current review. This is important because, after all, although it is on behalf of corporations that acts of CSR are planned and completed, it is truly individuals who advocate for, comply with, and participate in CSR (Crilly et al. 2008, Ones & Dilchert 2012).

Mindful that CSR is a multilevel, multidisciplinary, and often fragmented construct encompassing decades of research across many areas, we do not aim to speak to all associated issues of CSR as a field of research and practice. Rather, we have organized this review around a series of questions aimed at touching on the most salient topics surrounding micro-CSR today. We present five broad questions pertaining mainly to employee-focused micro-CSR and use each to organize and review the burgeoning research in this area. Our responses to each question incorporate the varied theoretical perspectives on CSR motivations, the vast array of findings on employee-focused micro-CSR, and an analysis of gaps in the literature. The review also attempts to unearth some of the less discussed issues pertinent to CSR research, including the dimensionality of CSR, the role of individual differences in influencing how employees engage with CSR, and the “dark side” of CSR [i.e., the rarely discussed potential for CSR initiatives to have negative consequences for intended (and other) beneficiaries].

This review also invites the reader to explore what is (and is not) known about micro-CSR from a person-centric and humanitarian perspective (Lefkowitz 2012, Reichman & Berry 2012, Weiss & Rupp 2011). Although scholars from many fields study CSR, we draw primarily from industrial/organizational psychology and organizational behavior (IOOB) to offer two reasons that we believe this perspective is helpful and necessary. First, the putative purpose of CSR is to “ameliorate human misery” (Margolis & Walsh 2003). Even so, most employee-focused micro-CSR studies do not assess whether this has been achieved—either for the employees studied or for the targets of the CSR interventions reported. From a purely practical standpoint, this important omission diminishes our ability to make statements about the true efficacy of CSR (beyond the financial benefits to the firm) or

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<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this review, an “employee” is an individual employed by a firm at any level of the organizational hierarchy. This includes the entire range of personnel, including executives, managers, supervisors, and rank-and-file workers.

how CSR itself is phenomenologically experienced. Indeed, the failure to incorporate such indicators of success may render the discussions on the impact of CSR as purely speculative as we fail to tease apart the difference between mere beliefs that socially responsible corporate acts are taking place (which might or might not pair with reality) versus the effect when such acts actually occur.

Second, IOOB has long held social or consequential validity as a necessary criterion for evaluating any intervention carried out by the organization (Messick 1995). This criterion involves consideration of all intended and unintended impacts caused by an organizational initiative. Further, most disciplines have established professional and ethical codes of conduct. For example, professional standards for psychologists in the United States, which are consistent with both international standards (International Union of Psychological Science 2008) and other nations' ethics codes (e.g., British Psychological Society 2009), clearly dictate that all psychologists are meant to use the psychological knowledge of behavior "to improve the condition of *individuals, organizations, and society*" while abiding by the ethical principles of "*responsibility*" and "*beneficence*" for those they work with, as well as obligations toward "*justice,*" "*fairness,*" and "*nonmaleficence*" (APA 2002, preamble, italics added). Thus, for organizational psychologists to only consider how CSR impacts employees' attitudes and behaviors toward the organization is incomplete (see Lefkowitz 2013). Further, it is our ethical responsibility as psychologists, within both the science and practice of CSR, to consider the psychological impact of carrying out CSR, observing CSR, and receiving CSR (as a beneficiary of the initiative).

At the end of this review, we offer a deeper discussion on why a person-centric and humanitarian perspective matters for CSR research and how CSR scholars can harmonize future scholarship with the ostensible spirit of CSR without disrupting what has become conventional scholarship within the field. Through the presentation and synthesis of the current research, this scholarly review intends that all readers—students, scholars, and professionals—will gain new perspectives on how CSR can and is influencing employees, and how it can and should have a broader positive societal impact.

## WHAT IS CSR?

### The Basics: CSR and Micro-CSR

Foremost, we must consider what CSR is more broadly, before shifting the conversation toward an expanded definition of micro-CSR, which informs the rest of this review. For what might seem a simple question, there has never been a simple answer, and reviews have struggled for years to shift the conversation toward greater clarity (Aguinis & Glavas 2012, 2013; Carroll 1991; Kakabadse et al. 2005). Despite this, only basic consensus seems to permeate the CSR literature. This section extends the definition offered in the introduction of this review and grounds the reader in a larger understanding of CSR as a broad, meta-construct.

As is the case within all research domains, clear and concise delineation of the topic or construct under observation is crucial for the understanding of existing research and for the future creation of new scholarship. Perhaps the best-known attempt from scholarly circles to make sense of CSR is the watershed four-part definition from Carroll (1979). The most recent iteration reads, "Corporate social responsibility encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations that society has of organizations at a given time" (Carroll & Buchholtz 2014, p. 32). In other words, according to Carroll (1979), CSR is the amalgam of various responsibilities firms have to society. Though certainly the most cited scholarly standard for CSR, Carroll's definition is by no means the only widely used conceptualization of CSR, as many other authors have reassessed CSR from other angles (e.g., Davis 1973, Jones 1980, McWilliams &

Siegel 2001, Peloza 2009, Waddock 2004, Wood 1991). As we venture from purely academic outlets, definitions diversify even further. Dahlsrud (2008) conducted a poll of the frequently referenced definitions in more mainstream venues, such as websites for corporations and government bodies, in addition to journals. He discovered that frequently referenced definitions for CSR research numbered at least 37. By Dahlsrud's count, the most cited definition on websites was not academic, but political in nature, coming from the Commission of the European Communities (CEC), which refers to CSR as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (CEC 2001, p. 4).

Both Carroll and the CEC construct CSR with a similar build—as is actually the case across most definitions (see also Jones & Rupp 2014). Ultimately, of course, less important than the words used to describe CSR may be the concepts represented by them. Dahlsrud's analysis of multiple definitions suggested that most government, corporate, and scholarly definitions reference five distinct dimensions within CSR (see the list below). In some ways, these dimensions may be thought of as a reorganizing of Carroll's (1979) framework rather than a negation of them, the primary differences being parsimony given to the social dimension and the explicit reference to the environment.

1. **The stakeholder obligation dimension.** A belief that organizations are responsible to all parties connected to their business operations, not only shareholders and investors but also consumers, employees, communities, and the environment. Discussions on sustainability often extend from this dimension.
2. **The social obligation dimension.** An emphasis that businesses are in some way obligated to positively impact society. This concept is often entwined with moral, ethical, or humanitarian ideals.
3. **The economic obligation dimension.** The directive that organizations are profitable for their shareholders and ensure continued profitability of the organization itself and those connected to it. This dimension is the base of Carroll's conceptualization.
4. **The voluntariness/discretionary dimension.** The notion that CSR activities should extend beyond the law, driven by voluntary standards. Some visions of CSR suggest that activities should similarly extend beyond best practices, in that to be termed “CSR” an endeavor must hold unique merit over standard industry practices that impact stakeholders.
5. **The environment dimension.** Prioritizing, protecting, and preserving the natural environment in parallel to all business activities. This dimension pertains to the sustainability of organizational practices as much as it does to the stewardship organizations have toward the environment as a unique stakeholder.

Collectively, firm adherence to responsibilities in each of the five dimensions above is meant to ineluctably draw organizations closer toward the fabled triple bottom line—the achieving of positive outcomes for “people, planet, and profit” (Elkington 1999).

### The Dilemma of Specificity

As many have observed, and as should be clear from our discussion above, the CSR literature is not lacking in conceptual breadth.<sup>2</sup> Rather, problems may be found in construct specificity. In fact,

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<sup>2</sup>In fact, when all five facets are included, one might wonder what best practices in business would not fall within CSR (Jones & Rupp 2014).

throughout definitions, the specific nature of CSR is rarely clearly identified. Accordingly, in both research and practice, the types of acceptable activities potentially fitting within the CSR profile are seemingly endless, with the term eagerly applied to an almost paralyzing range of prosocial corporate activities, many of which would be considered by organizational psychologists as distinct research domains (e.g., safety and health, Bennett & Tetrick 2013; diversity, Bradley-Geist & King 2013; organizational justice, Rupp 2011). This makes assessing CSR at any level a herculean endeavor.

**Taxonomies of CSR.** Over time, some scholars have confronted the disarray across fields in the CSR literature, and numerous nomenclatures have subsequently arisen. From strategic management, Waddock & Graves (1997) conceived that CSR occurs as inputs (financial investments toward CSR), internal behaviors and processes (actions within the organization), and outputs (behaviors outside the firm). Matten & Moon (2008) drew from institutional theory to show how CSR can be either implicit or explicit to the functioning of a firm. Pulling from a taxonomy in the sustainability literature (Laszlo & Zhexembayeva 2011), Aguinis & Glavas (2013) suggested that CSR be classed as either embedded within the core functioning of a company or displayed as peripheral, parallel activities. Brammer et al. (2007) took a human resource (HR) perspective, splitting CSR into actions directed at internal members and operations (internal CSR) versus those aimed at affecting external stakeholders (external CSR). Each of these classifications emphasizes different aspects of CSR, though it is difficult to use any one system or definition to subsequently operationalize CSR. This makes any discussion of the psychology of CSR quite challenging.

**Types of CSR activities.** Table 1 shows just a sampling of the range of activities frequently noted as CSR in contemporary publications on employee-focused micro-CSR. But are they all, by any definition or taxonomy, CSR? Jones & Rupp (2014) describe the problems that emerge when micro-CSR research considers many of the internal practices listed in Table 1 as CSR. These various practices constitute what our field would consider standard HR practices. Thus, carrying out these sorts of practices would be considered “beyond compliance” (i.e., the discretionary aspect that in part defines CSR) only in parts of the world where it is not already normative to have such programs in place. In addition, as our field has already amassed a great deal of knowledge about these individual practices, it seems counterproductive to now wrap them into an already

**Table 1** Types of CSR according to the internal versus external designation<sup>a</sup>

Internal CSR	External CSR
Employee training	Activism
Continuing education programs	Philanthropic giving
Safe working environments	Community development programs
Diversity policies and practices	Volunteerism initiatives
Daycare programs	Environmental sustainability programs
Ethical labor practices	Economic development efforts

<sup>a</sup>Following the employee-oriented external versus internal dichotomy, activities oriented toward external stakeholders appear as “external CSR” while those directed toward employees appear as “internal CSR.” Abbreviation: CSR, corporate social responsibility.

(perhaps overly) broad construct domain that is still evolving. In the words of Jones & Rupp (2014, p. 8), “We think it is vital to avoid confounding findings about things we already know much about (e.g., employees care about and respond to their employer’s fairness and treatment of employees) with findings about things we have only just begun to explore (e.g., do employees care about and respond to their employer’s philanthropy and service to its community?).” We invite readers to hold this tension in mind while considering the expanding literature on CSR as it pertains to employees.

**Micro-CSR redefined.** Although we may not resolve the definitional issues surrounding the CSR construct, we can offer greater clarity on the newer term, micro-CSR. The creator of stakeholder theory, Edward Freeman, recently listed consumers, contractors, employees, and even financiers as groups of individual stakeholders affected by CSR (Freeman & Moutchnik 2013). As Freeman illustrates, each of the noted stakeholder groups may (and should) be studied at the individual, psychological level and at higher levels. Thus, micro-CSR becomes the study of the effects and experiences of CSR (however it is defined) on individuals (in any stakeholder group) as examined at the individual level. As such, micro-CSR is not limited to employee considerations. Some stakeholder groups (particularly consumers) have been studied at the micro level for decades. Others are largely unexplored. Ultimately, if we embark upon the study of the effects of CSR on individuals, we must accustom ourselves to venturing through multiple domains, including marketing, strategic management, HR, and environmental studies, among others. For the purpose of this review we center our discussion primarily on employee-focused micro-CSR. However, throughout this review we give special consideration to other stakeholders relevant to the employee experience of CSR.

## WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF CSR ON EMPLOYEES?

When asking whether CSR works, for decades the question pertained largely to a company’s bottom line. Whatever compunctions economists would have with the value creation corporate involvement within society brings, it now seems definitive that CSR does fulfill an instrumental corporate purpose in its positive effect on corporate financial performance (CFP; Orlitzky et al. 2003), although the exact size and nature of this impact are still questioned (Margolis et al. 2007). Indeed, if the only purpose of CSR were to increase the bottom line, we may stop here: It unequivocally “works.”<sup>3</sup> Yet a narrow focus on financial performance without a full and parallel focus on the parties and processes that produce and are affected by it is not only impractical (as it ignores the pathways by which financial outcomes are achieved), it also strips away the inherently humanitarian nature of CSR (Vogel 2005).

This tension between firms and individuals that arises when considering macro- versus microapproaches to CSR may be more reflective of differential levels of analysis than philosophical differences per se. As CSR research emanating from strategic management studies and economics focuses on the firm level of analysis, it is naturally interested in the motives of the firm. Thus, the focus on firm performance in this case, although seemingly utilitarian, makes sense. In contrast, as organizational psychologists are keenly interested in the motives and needs of individuals, including their attitudes and well-being, it is only natural that the orientation of this subfield would seem more deontological or values based. Consequently, it may be due more to differing levels of analysis that the gap between micro- and macroperspectives may seem to exist.

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<sup>3</sup>This effect is moderated by many factors. Orlitzky et al. (2003) reported that conceptualization of CSR moderated the link between CSR and financial performance. Margolis et al. (2007) found a significant difference between types of CSR and subsequent CFP.

When we bring these traditions together with an understanding of these multilevel issues, some of these seemingly philosophical tensions melt away and a cross-level perspective becomes more easily attainable. Regardless of whether historical differences are viewed as mere artifacts of disparate levels of analysis or as reflections of core value differences, we argue that the time is ripe to reintroduce the purpose of CSR (reducing human misery) into CSR research at all levels and that even individual-level research has yet to fully embrace this notion.

How can we determine the impact of CSR at the individual level? Aguinis & Glavas (2012) attempted the first review of employee-focused micro-CSR as part of a multilevel analysis of the state of CSR research. At that time, only 4% of the CSR-related articles in 17 top journals dedicated to organizational research pertained to the individual level. The authors provide an enlightening discussion of the contemporary state of micro-CSR findings. However, reflecting the trend toward studying CSR effects on employees, much has changed since the publication of this review. **Table 2** illustrates the momentum employee-focused micro-CSR has gathered in recent years, with old findings demarcated by red text and new findings demarcated by black text.<sup>4</sup> Today, many of the same 17 journals conspicuously absent of a micro-CSR presence according to Aguinis & Glavas (2012) have hosted a number of employee-focused papers. At the time of the present review, evidence for previously reported findings has in many cases doubled or tripled in size. Moreover, new findings and propositions from diverse areas across countries and fields have grown. Owing to the changing nature of the field, coupled with the need to take a broader multistakeholder perspective that includes intended beneficiaries, casting a wider net aimed at more fully identifying reliable and interesting findings not published in mainstream IOOB outlets seemed warranted. The following discussion is therefore not limited to the journals used in the previous review (Aguinis & Glavas 2012). Indeed, we explicitly sought well-conducted research examples from less well-known sources. With some limitations, this new review of the literature adds greater evidence to the marked impact CSR directed toward external stakeholders can have on employees.

## Effects of CSR on Employees

Some of the first research on employee-focused micro-CSR was aimed at how prospective employees viewed potential employers (displaying different levels of CSR). This research largely finds that positive perceptions of firm CSR activity increase applicants' attraction to the firm (Turban & Greening 1997). Since that time, in both lab and field environments, many studies have similarly confirmed that prospective employees' perceptions of organizational attractiveness (Backhaus et al. 2002) and job pursuit intentions are impacted by what they know about the focal firm's CSR (Albinger & Freeman 2000, Bartel 2001, Behrend et al. 2009, Evans & Davis 2011, Greening & Turban 2000, Gully et al. 2013, Montgomery & Ramus 2003, Rupp et al. 2013b, Sen et al. 2006, Tsai et al. 2014).

In addition, employees working for firms engaged in CSR experience a number of positive attitudes, including increased organizational and work commitment (Brammer et al. 2007, De Gilder et al. 2005, Dhanesh 2014, Farooq et al. 2013, Hofman & Newman 2014, Maignan & Ferrell 2004, Stites & Michael 2011, Turker 2009), job satisfaction (De Roeck et al. 2014, Dhanesh 2014), and organizational identification (Bartel 2001, Carmeli et al. 2007, Kim et al. 2010). Employee CSR perceptions can predict organizational citizenship behavior (De Gilder et al. 2005, Hansen et al. 2011, Jones 2010, Lin et al. 2010, Rupp et al. 2013b), in-role performance (Jones 2010), improved employee relations (Glavas & Piderit 2009), and work engagement

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<sup>4</sup>Note that studies often report multiple significant findings, but in most cases those findings appear under only one general heading.

**Table 2 Employee-level outcomes of CSR, and moderators and mediators of the CSR-outcome relationships<sup>a</sup>**

Outcomes of CSR	Moderators of CSR effects	Mediators of CSR effects
<b>Conceptual papers</b>		
LMX (Mallory & Rupp 2014)	Awareness (Bhattacharya et al. 2008, Mallory & Rupp 2014) Management support for CSR (Mallory & Rupp 2014) Effective social accounts (Rupp et al. 2006)	LMX (Mallory & Rupp 2014)
<b>Empirical papers</b>		
<p><i>Performance</i></p> <p>Organizational citizenship behaviors (De Gilder et al. 2005, Hansen et al. 2011, Jones 2010, Lin et al. 2010, Rupp et al. 2013b)</p> <p>Employee engagement (Caligiuri et al. 2013, Glavas &amp; Piderit 2009, Rupp et al. 2013a)</p> <p>In-role performance/effort (Bartel 2001, Jones 2010)</p> <p>Employee creative involvement (Glavas &amp; Piderit 2009)</p> <p>Improved employee relations (Agle et al. 1999, Bartel 2001, Glavas &amp; Piderit 2009)</p>	<p>Type of CSR (Backhaus et al. 2002)</p> <p><i>Management attitudes</i></p> <p>Equity sensitivity of supervisors (Mudrack et al. 1999)</p> <p>Supervisor commitment to ethics (Muller &amp; Kolk 2010)</p> <p><i>Organizational justice</i></p> <p>First-party justice and moral identity (Rupp et al. 2013b)</p>	<p><i>Perceptions of trust</i></p> <p>Followers' perceptions of visionary leadership (Sully de Luque et al. 2008)</p> <p>Organizational reputation (Behrend et al. 2009)</p> <p>Organizational trust (Farooq et al. 2013)</p> <p>Organizational justice (De Roeck et al. 2014)</p> <p>Organizational identity (Carmeli et al. 2007, De Roeck et al. 2014, Farooq et al. 2013, Jones 2010)</p>
<p><i>Organizational attitudes</i></p> <p>Employee identification with the organization (Bartel 2001, Carmeli et al. 2007, Kim et al. 2010)</p> <p>Job satisfaction (De Roeck et al. 2014, Dhanesh 2014)</p> <p>Organizational commitment (Brammer et al. 2007, De Gilder et al. 2005, Dhanesh 2014, Farooq et al. 2013, Hofman &amp; Newman 2014, Maignan &amp; Ferrell 2004, Stites &amp; Michael 2011, Turker 2009)</p> <p><i>Organizational attraction</i></p> <p>Organizational attractiveness (Backhaus et al. 2002)</p> <p>Job pursuit intentions (Albinger &amp; Freeman 2000, Behrend et al. 2009, Evans &amp; Davis 2011, Greening &amp; Turban 2000, Gully et al. 2013, Montgomery &amp; Ramus 2003, Rupp et al. 2013b, Sen et al. 2006, Turban &amp; Greening 1997, Tsai et al. 2014)</p> <p>Professional development (Caligiuri et al. 2013)</p> <p>Intention to stay (Jones 2010)</p> <p>Corporate social irresponsibility (Ormiston &amp; Wong 2013)</p>	<p><i>Individual differences</i></p> <p>Values (Evans &amp; Davis 2011, Gully et al. 2013, Tsai et al. 2014)</p> <p>Exchange ideology (Jones 2010)</p> <p>Minority race and gender status (Backhaus et al. 2002)</p> <p>Individualistic orientation (Hofman &amp; Newman 2014, Rupp et al. 2013a)</p> <p>Feminine orientation (Hofman &amp; Newman 2014)</p>	<p><i>Other perceptions of the firm</i></p> <p>Organizational pride (Jones 2010)</p> <p>Organizational attraction (Gully et al. 2013)</p> <p>Perceived person-organization fit (Gully et al. 2013)</p>

<sup>a</sup>This table extends that provided by Aguinis & Glavas (2012). To highlight the growth of research in this field, studies newly published or identified since the Aguinis & Glavas review are displayed in black typeface, and previously identified studies are displayed in red typeface.

Abbreviations: CSR, corporate social responsibility; LMX, leader-member exchange.

(Caligiuri et al. 2013, Glavas & Piderit 2009, Rupp et al. 2013a). Employees also show more creativity (Glavas & Piderit 2009) in response to CSR. Job-relevant CSR initiatives, or activities that allow employees to exercise and learn new skills, can also be effective sources of professional development and predict other positive outcomes (Caligiuri et al. 2013). Finally, at least one study (Jones 2010) has found that CSR participation was linked to a stronger intent to remain with the organization.

Despite what seems to be a positive manifold for CSR's effect on applicant and employee attitudes and behaviors, not all findings have shown that CSR has a uniform positive effect. For example, in an innovative archival study, Ormiston & Wong (2013) found evidence for moral licensing (in the form of subsequent unethical behaviors) among CEOs whose companies had previously engaged in CSR. The authors suggested that leaders with a symbolic versus an internalized moral identity are more likely to engage in acts of corporate social irresponsibility following acts of social responsibility.

## Moderators

Many individual difference variables have been proposed and tested as moderators of the extent to which CSR predicts applicants' and employees' reactions to CSR. For job seekers, having a desire to create a meaningful impact through work has been shown to positively moderate job pursuit intentions after exposure to socially and environmentally responsible messages (Gully et al. 2013). Similarly, management students reporting an other-oriented value system, as well as those who had a greater understanding of CSR, have reported more organizational attraction to organizations with high CSR (Evans & Davis 2011). Tsai et al. (2014) described parallel findings—the degree to which individuals were socio-environmentally conscious positively influenced their job-seeking intentions toward a socially responsible organization.

Studying both job seekers and employees over two studies, Rupp et al. (2013b) documented that first-party justice perceptions weakened the relationship between CSR perceptions and both applicants' job pursuit intentions and employees' organizational citizenship behaviors. They also found that the effects of CSR perceptions on job pursuit intentions and organizational citizenship behaviors were stronger for individuals high in moral identity.

Other research has shown that the type of CSR message conveyed to job seekers can impact their reactions, and individual differences can further complicate these effects. Jones et al. (2013) found a signaling effect on prospective employees for community- but not environment-related CSR. This differential effect, the authors conjecture, was likely due to the environmental information's lack of signals for how a firm treats people. Backhaus et al. (2002) also showed that when firm environmental responsibility was high, it added little draw to prospective employees. However, when environmental stewardship was low, it was perceived as a critical flaw. Whereas applicants seemed willing to tolerate a neutral environmental record, organizational attractiveness was strongly influenced by high community involvement. The authors also offered unique findings pertaining to minority and gender status, which are frequently used as control variables across other studies. They reported that CSR information was more critically appraised by women and minority applicants, who showed greater concern for CSR-related issues. Finally, Jones (2010) evaluated the effects of participation in employee volunteer programs. Jones showed that employees with stronger exchange ideologies (expectations of reciprocity) contributed more to their organizations after volunteering, compared with those with weaker exchange ideologies.

Facets of culture have received infrequent mention in micro-CSR studies. In a large study spanning five countries, Rupp et al. (2013a) considered how collectivism and autonomy to participate in CSR moderated reactions to CSR. Whereas more individualistic employees experienced higher levels of engagement when reporting higher CSR autonomy, collectivistic employees were more positively inclined to CSR when they had less discretion in participating in

CSR. Hofman & Newman (2014) found evidence in China that CSR efforts toward external stakeholders had a nonsignificant to marginally significant effect on employees' organizational commitment (whereas the company's efforts toward employees had a strong influence). These positive effects were dampened, however, by individual collectivism and masculinity orientations.

## WHAT ARE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS UNDERLYING THE EFFECTS OF CSR ON INDIVIDUALS?

In the 1970s, famed economist Milton Friedman was one of the most outspoken opponents of the rising attention placed on CSR. Drawing from theories of economics, his well-known article in the *New York Times Magazine* summed up his argument in its title, "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits" (Friedman 1970). Friedman's opposition to the philanthropic component of CSR has been outlived by decades of research indicating that CSR can be a functional part of profitable business (Orlitzky et al. 2003). However, the CSR-CFP results are not as clear-cut as some would like, and some still question whether the financial gains are worth the investments (Rogers 2013). This concern is legitimate. Most definitions of CSR note firms' obligations to be profitable, among their other social duties.

Ultimately, however, questioning whether CSR is financially worth it may now simply be the wrong question. A better query would be why is CSR worth it, both financially and as a moral duty. We have good theoretical and empirical evidence that CSR matters to stakeholders—from consumers to shareholders to employees. The added value borne of CSR likely contributes to the link between CSR and CFP. Thus, repositioning our efforts to understand why CSR works yields implications for all three pillars CSR seeks to impact (profit, people, and planet). Consequently, such an understanding could assist organizations in better fulfilling organizational obligations to all stakeholders.

### Theories on Applicants' and Employees' Attraction to CSR

No matter the perspective from which one approaches the issue of CSR efficacy, developing more effective CSR and understanding why CSR as it stands affects stakeholders begin with understanding the theoretical underpinnings behind why CSR appeals to stakeholder groups. In the past 15 years, a profusion of theories have speculated on why CSR appeals to individuals. As was the case in our attempt to define CSR, orienting to the many theories used to explain the salience of CSR behaviors is not an easy task. We introduce some of these theories below and describe the research that has sought to empirically test the causal mechanisms proposed.

**Signaling theory.** According to signaling theory (Rynes 1991), applicants approach organizations with little knowledge of what the ultimate employment experience will be like. Thus, they rely on indicators of potential outcomes throughout their experiences with the organization as signals of unknown organizational traits. Social policies and behaviors toward stakeholders are potential indicators of expected treatment as an employee, and thus individuals may find companies participating in such initiatives more trustworthy and desirable. Jones et al. (2014) measured employees' levels of anticipated pride from working with a CSR-participating firm, perceived value fit, and expected treatment upon employment. Greening & Turban (2000) theorized a more diffuse signaling array, suggesting that CSR signals an organization's goals and norms, commitment to diversity, and working conditions. Behrend et al. (2008) found that applicants' job pursuit intentions were increased when they received a proenvironmental message from the firm during recruitment. This effect was mediated by signals about the organization's reputation, such that individuals receiving a proenvironmental message viewed the firm as more prestigious and

were more likely to apply for employment. The work of Gully et al. (2013) demonstrated that advertisements conveying CSR information about a company can raise the likelihood of prospective employees applying for jobs at these firms through signals about the organization's overall value system and its fit with employees' own. The authors showed that organizational attraction and perceived value fit mediated the link between the proenvironmental message and job pursuit.

**Social identity theory.** Social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael 1989) proposes that people engage in innate classifications of themselves and others, which they then use to develop and maintain their self-concepts. Such classifications allow the individual to organize and define others and to locate themselves within the social environment. Thus, individuals organize themselves and others (individually or in groups) into in-groups and out-groups, which subsequently predict perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. As work is often a fundamental part of individuals' self-constructed identities, people seek to define themselves in part by their organizational membership. People are more likely to identify with organizations with positive values, such as those communicated by CSR. Employees' attitudes about their organization's volunteer programs were tested as a mediator of CSR effects by Jones (2010), who found that a sense of pride gained from being a member of a socially responsible organization explained the relationship between volunteer program attitudes and organizational identification. Jones theorized that organizations with volunteer programs experienced enhanced prestige and reputation, which contributed to employees' sense of organizational pride.

**Organizational identification theory.** Organizational identity theory, an offshoot of social identity theory, has also been used to explain CSR effects with similar reasoning (Dutton et al. 1994, Turban & Greening 1997). That is, it has been argued that employees are attracted to CSR owing to perceived value alignment and the opportunity CSR provides to achieve a higher purpose in work (Aguinis & Glavas 2013). Using an organizational identification backdrop, De Roeck & Delobbe (2012) evidenced these claims by showing that perceived environmental CSR led to increased organizational identification, as mediated by organizational trust. Carmeli et al. (2007) used the same framework to evidence mediation via organizational identity between information on corporate social performance and employee adjustment to the job and subsequent performance.<sup>5</sup>

**Relationship management theory.** Frequently used within the field of public relations to articulate the relationships between firms and customers, relationship management theory (Broom et al. 2000) postulates that the effective management of relationships between organizations and their constituents, which may include employees, can increase beneficial results for both parties. The theory asserts that effective relationship management is based primarily on perceptions of trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction between the organization and its publics (i.e., stakeholders; Hon & Grunig 1999). Dhanesh (2014) used relationship management theory to cast four dimensions of CSR (legal, ethical, discretionary, and economic) as predictors of positive employee relationships within several companies in India. The author reported that, as predicted, CSR was an effective relationship management tool, with the legal dimension of CSR relating most to commitment and satisfaction, the ethical dimension most strongly predicting trust, and the discretionary dimension predicting perceptions of control mutuality (i.e., the degree to which both

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<sup>5</sup>Note that in this study, CSR was measured as internal organizational practices (employee relations, employee retention, product/service quality, and new product development) and thus differs from other micro-CSR research, which focuses largely on external CSR.

parties feel they have control over the relationship). The economic dimension showed the weakest, though still significant, relationship to all outcomes.

**Cognitive categorization theory.** Cognitive categorization theory works from the premise that individuals have cognitive schemas representing prototypes of certain organizations or leaders (Lord & Maher 1991). When employees observe certain value-driven behaviors being taken by leaders or the firm, they try to match these behaviors with one of the prototypes that they have in their minds. This interpretation helps them categorize the firm as socially responsible or irresponsible and perceive the leader as autocratic or visionary. These perceptions then influence the individuals' own behaviors in terms of their effort and organizational participation. In one study, perceptions of visionary leadership were found to mediate the relationship between perceived leader CSR values and work outcomes. Employees categorized leaders with high CSR values as visionaries, which itself led to increased work effort and higher firm performance (Sully de Luque et al. 2008).

**Social exchange theory.** Social exchange theory merges economics, psychology, and sociology to propose that individuals engage in different types of interactions on the basis of their assessments of potential risk and gain. When individuals perceive mutual benefits from interacting with a person or group to be high, they develop positive feelings toward the other party, leading to feelings of trust, obligation, and mutual benefit (Blau 1964). Conversely, when interactions are seen as one-sided or costly, distance between the two parties emerges, with individuals subsequently limiting investments to minimize risk. Organizations can foster social (as opposed to economic) exchange with employees through their policies, actions, and reputations, which signal to employees the nature of their (or others') present and future value to the company. When employees sense the exchange relationship to be more social (i.e., less transactional) in nature, they express more positive attitudes and behaviors toward the firm (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005, Molm et al. 2000). Studies that rely on social exchange theory tend to assay social exchange through variables such as affective organizational identification and commitment, which focus on perceptions of similarity and trust. Farooq et al. (2013) theorized that when organizations take part in CSR activities, the principal consequence of their social engagement is that they are perceived as trustworthy in the minds of their employees, leading to stronger employee identification with the organization and, consequently, attachment and organizational commitment. In their study, they found that increased organizational commitment borne of a company's CSR initiatives was explained by organizational trust and identification. Employees were also more inclined to trust and affiliate with organizations when the CSR programs were seen as directly beneficial to the employees (as opposed to only the general community), as such programs were argued to contribute more to the social exchange process.

**Engagement theory.** Engagement theory proposes that employees will be more motivated to engage in their work (participate with vigor, absorption, and dedication) the more they are able to integrate their full selves (e.g., values, interests, strengths) into the workplace experience (Kahn 1990). Numerous workplace factors indicate how much of the self may be safely expressed and subsequently influence levels of engagement. CSR scholars contend that ethical policies and actions on the part of companies, particularly when integrated into the working experiences of employees, allow individuals to express concerns for the well-being of others. The value- and virtue-driven parts of the self may otherwise find rare opportunity for integration at work, and thus CSR is argued to uniquely contribute to higher levels of employee engagement. Relying on engagement theory, Glavas & Piderit (2009) assessed and found an effect of employees' perceptions

of CSR on work engagement, workplace relational connections, and creative involvement. They theorized that companies utilizing CSR, by fostering an environment that promotes employees' access to and display of their own value systems at work, enable employees to be more effective in their social interactions and more creative and engaged in their workplace activities.

**Theories of justice.** The justice literature suggests that employees are influenced by perceptions of how they, and others, are treated by organizational members. A unified model of extant justice theories, the multiple needs model of organizational justice, was first developed to explain what drives employee justice concerns (Cropanzano et al. 2001a,b). In brief, the model posits that employees concern themselves with justice-pertinent information for three reasons: an instrumental interest in exerting control over their environments; a need for belongingness, or close relationships with others; and a morally driven need for meaningful existence. The last is based on the deontic model of organizational justice (Folger et al. 2005), which asserts that evolutionary-based, universally held beliefs regarding ethical treatment compel individuals to respond not only to the treatment that they experience themselves but also to the observed third-party treatment of others.

Acting on the propositions that employee perceptions of firm CSR behaviors act as a unique form of third-party justice perceptions (Rupp 2011, Rupp et al. 2006), Rupp et al. (2011) applied this framework to theorize how CSR can serve to meet each of these individual needs. An increasing number of CSR studies are drawing from justice theory to develop their hypotheses. For example, De Roeck et al. (2014) found that organizational justice perceptions (in addition to organizational identification) mediated the positive effects of CSR perceptions on job satisfaction.

### Care-, Self-, and Relationship-Based Concerns

Jones & Rupp (2014) noted the convergence of theoretical perspectives within both macro- and micro-CSR around three sets of concerns individuals and groups seem to express when advocating for, reacting to, or carrying out CSR. They refer to these as C-S-R concerns, which correspond to care-based, self-based, and relationship-based mechanisms. We have already mentioned the multiple needs model of justice as it has been applied to CSR, which discusses control (self-based), belongingness (relationship-based), and meaningful existence (care-based) needs of individuals. Aguilera et al. (2007) applied this model up several levels of analysis, articulating the instrumental (self-based), relational (relationship-based), and moral (care-based) motives of top management, organizations, governments, and NGOs in pushing for CSR. In an inductive qualitative analysis of why organizations adopt environmental policies, Bansal & Roth (2000) identified competitiveness (self-based), legitimacy (relationship-based), and social responsibility (care-based) as motives for why organizations go green.

The other (individual-level) theoretical perspectives we have discussed can be similarly placed within this framework. For example, Mirvis (2012) presents transactional (self-based), relational (relationship-based), and developmental (care-based) levers of CSR engagement. Similarly, Jones et al. (2014) found evidence for three signal-based mechanisms explaining job seekers' attraction to socially responsible firms: perceived value fit (care-based), expected treatment as an employee (self-based), and anticipated pride (relationship-based) from being affiliated with the employer. In **Table 3** we have mapped the theoretical perspectives reviewed thus far, along with the mediating variables authors applying these theories have proposed to account for individuals' (and higher-level entities) reactions to CSR, according to the C-S-R framework. Although not all three concerns are explicitly acknowledged in all studies drawing from the theories presented in **Table 3**, overall we find the convergence to be striking. Owing to these apparent connections among theories,

**Table 3 Theories and representative studies applied to the study of CSR motive, organized by the C-S-R motive framework of Jones & Rupp (2014)**

Level of analysis	Care-based concerns	Self-based concerns	Relationship-based concerns	Theory	Representative papers
Organizational	Stewardship	–	–	Stewardship	Davis et al. (1997)
	Social responsibility	Competitiveness	Legitimacy	Sustainability	Bansal & Roth (2000)
Multilevel	Moral	Instrumental	Relational	Justice	Aguilera et al. (2007)
	Meaningful existence	Control	Belongingness	Justice	Rupp et al. (2011)
Individual	Perceived value fit	Expected treatment	Anticipation of pride	Identification	Jones (2010)
	–	Control mutuality/competence/commitment	Shared trust	Relationship management	Dhanesh (2014)
	Organizational identification	–	Organizational trust	Social exchange/social identity	Farooq et al. (2013)
	Alignment of values	Safety for self-expression	Citizenship opportunities	Engagement	Glavas & Piderit (2009)
	Developmental	Transactional	Relational	Engagement	Mirvis (2012)
	Value fit	Expected treatment	Anticipated pride	Signaling theory	Jones et al. (2014)

explicit consideration of how needs are met seems prudent as we approach new CSR research in the future.

In addition, the consideration of individual needs or concerns seems particularly relevant for practice. On the basis of a mixed-method investigation of over 10,000 employees, Bhattacharya et al. (2008, p. 39) argued for a revision of how CSR is used as a strategic internal marketing tool. They state,

As with the basic facets of job-product such as pay, benefits, advancement opportunities and job role, a company's CSR programs can satisfy one or more higher-order psychosocial needs. In fact, it could be argued that CSR's power as an internal marketing lever rests largely on its ability to satisfy those needs meaningfully. However, companies are mostly oblivious to such issues.

Although the multiple needs model claims that these three needs are universal, the expression of individuals' needs will likely be governed by individual differences and characteristics of the job and work under question. Nevertheless, using this framework as a starting point for either assessing existing programs' need-fulfillment capabilities or developing new programs (or even the presentation of CSR information) with the C-S-R concerns framework in mind may provide practitioners a well-grounded starting point.

## **WHAT REMAINS UNKNOWN ABOUT MICRO-CSR? (A PERSON-CENTRIC PERSPECTIVE)**

At this juncture, we wish to step away from our coverage of the empirical support of the relationships between independent and dependent variables and revisit micro-CSR through the lens of person-centric work psychology (Weiss & Rupp 2011). Following such a perspective requires researchers not only to focus on interrelationships among variables, but also to attempt to understand the individual, phenomenological, and relative experience of individuals as they engage with organizations and society. We briefly discuss below how CSR research might more explicitly take a person-centric perspective. Herein our hope is to propel the field toward a better understanding of individuals' true experiences surrounding issues of CSR.

### **Considering the True Psychological Impact of CSR on Multiple Parties**

Recall that the noninstrumental purpose of CSR may be summarized as an organization's formal attempts to reduce human misery (Margolis & Walsh 2003). To date, the micro-CSR literature has focused exclusively on how employees are impacted by CSR. Whereas it can certainly be argued that employees are an important stakeholder group, and their reactions to an organization's CSR efforts are relevant to understanding the social good generated by CSR initiatives, the research to date has not exactly taken this position. Rather, in the industrial/organizational psychology tradition, this research seems to lean toward the organizational (as opposed to societal) gains produced by CSR efforts, in the form of employee engagement, commitment, and the like. We do not see research that considers employee responses to CSR as a criterion of CSR success. Further, we do not see the micro-CSR research considering the impact of CSR on individuals comprising other stakeholder groups.

A number of scholars, including Freeman & Moutchnik (2013), reference communities as stakeholders. Rarely, however, are the recipients of external CSR activities singled out in studies on the effects of CSR. Despite Margolis & Walsh's (2003) attempt to refocus the CSR agenda,

ironically, with a decades-long emphasis on the social-financial performance link, the actual impact of CSR on intended targets has been all but abandoned to the shadows. These authors and others (Porter & Kramer 2002, Walker & Kent 2013) make strong ethical and financial arguments for the harmonization of the two seemingly (but not) competing parts of the triple bottom line (profit versus planet and people). However, research that directly and objectively assesses whether CSR is actually having a positive impact on targeted individuals is rarely undertaken. We call for micro-CSR research that considers the impact of CSR on individuals associated with various stakeholder groups. This would include, at minimum, managers who make decisions regarding CSR initiatives, employees who may or may not participate in CSR initiatives, and the individuals who are directly targeted and impacted by the CSR initiatives. We also call for research that considers the exposure of and interrelations between these groups of individuals (e.g., see Mallory & Rupp 2014 for propositions about how leader-driven CSR has the power to engender leader-member exchange).

We view CSR as a social development process rather than a perceptual phenomenon (Gloss & Thompson 2013). As such, we call for research that incorporates multiple methods for assessing CSR impact. This could come in the form of clear-cut metrics, such as the attainment of specific goals around reducing emissions, improving health statistics, reducing poverty or unemployment, and so forth. The macro literature commonly uses a number of corporate social performance metrics compiled by various consulting firms to score organizations on their level of CSR [e.g., Kinder, Lydenberg, Domini (KLD) Research & Analytics, Inc.]. Within the research literature, such metrics are often used more for economic analyses of the utility of CSR for the firm than for the assessment of generated social good per se, whereas such indices are regularly used by socially responsible investors for the creation of socially responsible index funds. We might also consider CSR's impact more ethnographically by analyzing the social accounts of CSR's impact through the eyes of recipients, community members, and partner organizations (e.g., nonprofits and NGOs).

Caligiuri et al. (2013) offer an example of a quantitatively laden presentation on the effects of a corporate volunteerism program supplemented by insightful qualitative excerpts. Using a longitudinal design, this research showed that certain types of corporate volunteering initiatives can lead to higher levels of sustained engagement while also creating lasting impact on community partner organizations. The inclusion of excerpts from employees and partner organization members offered clarifying illustrations for their statistically supported conclusions. Although the authors did not measure the affective changes of employees, they proposed, on the basis of employee interviews, that future studies should examine potential positive affective effects from CSR endeavors. The study underscores that without more dedicated inquiry into how individual experience as a whole is affected by CSR, we cannot speak to the additional benefits CSR may bring to individuals or organizations, or to the psychological and sociological mechanisms undergirding these effects. We question why so few studies report on subjective measures of well-being, stress levels, or feelings of connectedness to the community—all of which stand to elucidate the experience of CSR and the efficacy of certain types of CSR efforts versus others.

We also call for more research that explores longitudinally the psychological impacts of CSR programs as social change interventions. Few, if any, studies have followed the implementation of new CSR initiatives, monitoring changes in employee affective and behavioral experiences. Indeed, most scholarship still seems neutral to the long-term implications of CSR pursuits on firms, employees, or targeted recipients. Though the research process may be slowed, evidencing the long-term psychological effects of CSR is essential to furthering our knowledge of the ultimate effectiveness of responsible initiatives. Regardless of how we obtain information on whether CSR has actually had a psychological impact on individuals in a way that is meaningful to

them, only through the collection of such data will we begin to understand CSR in a person-centric way.

### **CSR as Psychological Need Fulfillment**

Scholars would do well to consider more systematically whether the proposed connections between CSR and individual need fulfillment hold true, and contemplate appropriate measures for assessing this. We know that employees' relationships at work can be affected by CSR (Glavas & Piderit 2009). Questions remain about whether it is direct participation in CSR initiatives that fosters need fulfillment, or if there is something offered by the mere presence of CSR (i.e., without participation). Future research can also explore how CSR affects social dynamics at work, including group cohesion and identification or manager-employee relationships. We are aware of no work that has looked beyond the workplace to inquire whether CSR perceptions or participation affects employees' overall self-concepts or carries over into other aspects of employees' lives, such as community engagement or family life. To each of these questions, seeking to document the effect of both observing and participating in CSR will push the field further toward realizing the full potential of CSR to meet psychological needs.

### **The Black Box of Individual Differences**

As we gather more information on how CSR efforts affect employees, we can begin to sort out the differential effects across individuals. Only a small number of studies have reported moderating effects of culture, gender, race, age, and other demographic variables on the effects of CSR on employee-level outcomes, though many studies have controlled for these variables in their analyses. Yet scholars and practitioners are benefited by a deeper understanding of when these variables affect employee CSR experiences—and why. We know, for example, that individuals in situations of power lower than that of their peers (e.g., women and minorities) respond more powerfully to CSR messages. Similarly, individuals adhering to more collectivistic or masculine norms have been found to be affected less positively by CSR (Hofman & Newman 2014, Rupp et al. 2014). What are the differences in the ways that employees value CSR across cultures and contexts, then? Furthermore, are these differences reflective of culture or economic or political circumstance, or are they due more to personal orientations (see Dhanesh 2014)? And how might organizational culture, CSR type, or CSR proximity/participation influence how culture influences individuals' reactions to CSR?

### **The Dark Side of CSR**

Very few studies have proposed or tested for potential unintended negative consequences of organizational CSR initiatives, though there is some evidence to suggest that in some cases CSR efforts may have deleterious effects. Research has shown that individuals who view an organization's CSR efforts as disingenuous have negative reactions (McShane & Cunningham 2012). Mallory & Rupp (2014) also proposed situations in which employees may react negatively toward CSR initiatives, such as when resources dedicated to CSR are seen as misspent on external stakeholders rather than reinvested toward employees. Rodrigo & Arenas (2008) used grounded theory to identify one type of worker (the dissident employee) that reacts strongly against CSR messages and efforts, seeing them as unjust and unnecessary. As reviewed earlier, Ormiston & Wong (2013) found that in some cases CSR participation may result in moral licensing, in which

employees having contributed to CSR efforts may subsequently behave less responsibly because of prior CSR “credits.” Other research (Rupp et al. 2013b) has shown interactive effects between employees’ morality and reactions to responsible behaviors. Although there is no reason to assume that negative CSR effects are commonplace for individuals, gaining a better grasp of when these effects emerge is essential for understanding the CSR experience.

## WHERE SHOULD THE FIELD GO FROM HERE?

We hope that this review has organized the valuable theoretical and empirical contributions of CSR scholars in a way that is both accessible and meaningful, while illustrating that there is more work to be done. Among the many actions firms take, CSR has the unique potential to add significant value to organizational stakeholders, from shareholders, to employees, to the targeted recipients of CSR initiatives. In this review we have sought to highlight several limitations of the current research base and numerous paths for new research. In addition to the research questions we offered in the previous section, below we offer some final perspectives on future directions for micro-CSR research and practice. Specifically, we suggest broad actions for furthering our understanding of CSR, as it experienced by employees. First, we recommend more unity in how micro-CSR is operationalized. We suggest how a strategically developed meta-analysis could move us toward this goal. Second, we see the immediate need for an increased reliance on objective measures and innovative research methods when conducting CSR research of any kind. Finally, we advocate that the field as a whole adopts an ethical code of conduct for CSR implementation and research.

### Toward a Unified Definition of CSR

We have offered significant collateral toward the argument for developing a unified definition of CSR, both as it pertains to organizational operations and as it occurs at different levels of analysis. Although determining the suitability of each activity, taxonomy, and definition of CSR was beyond the goal of this review, it seems that the proliferation of scholarly and nonacademic work on CSR may be drifting further from a consolidated understanding of CSR rather than toward it. **Table 1** gave only a small glimpse into the diverse activities collectively labeled as CSR behaviors and appearing in research pertaining to stakeholder perceptions and experiences. Whereas scholars may ultimately determine that each endeavor listed in **Table 1** is appropriately nested within CSR, their present de facto acceptance as such creates hazardous implications, whether assessing CSR at the organizational or individual level of analysis. Without meticulous case-by-case examination, for example, workplace safety initiatives or ethics codes may not constitute as acts beyond the voluntary, a generally accepted sine qua non for CSR inclusion. By extension, the effect of such practices may improperly suggest that outcomes pertain to CSR itself, when they may be better captured by other indicators (such as organizational justice perceptions, in the case of employees). With so many perspectives, definitions, and activities melded into the same construct, it may be unsurprising that CSR remains in a state of construct cloudiness and outcome uncertainty. Even at the micro level alone, researchers must wade through muddy waters when undertaking the task of meaningfully identifying, organizing, and reviewing CSR research.

Any future unified definition may do well to keep in mind the five tenets of CSR, described in the first section of our review. However, to appropriately measure CSR’s effects, we must engage in both more contextual referencing and greater parsimony when defining CSR.

## Allowing for CSR Contextualization

It has been asked before whether CSR acts should be gauged on intentions or outcomes. To us, it seems the answer lies somewhere in between. As we have reasoned, we cannot well claim that a firm engages in CSR solely on the basis of the desire to make the world a better place, and a combination of motives driving CSR engagement may be perfectly healthy. When CSR initiatives actually cause unintended harm, or are nothing more than clear attempts to manipulate stakeholder perceptions (such as greenwashing, or the superficial adherence to environmental sustainability practices; Ones & Dilchert 2012), such acts may not be well-suited for inclusion as CSR—in the literature or otherwise.

We must also consider the specific context, in terms of industry and country, in which CSR is applied. CSR is often staked as corporate acts going beyond what is required by legal or industry standards. Understanding legal requirements is somewhat more straightforward than tracking industry norms. However, even this is nuanced. In some countries, such as the United States, legal requirements are often stringent, demanding more from companies in terms of protecting stakeholders, compared with the requirements in, say, Bangladesh. What does that say then of an equal-opportunity hiring practice employed by a Bangladeshi firm or a safety campaign in the United States? Do both count as CSR? Neither? Similarly, the world's biggest firms may be internally compelled to participate in an array of CSR practices (see the arguments made regarding competitiveness in Bansal & Roth 2000). With an ever-changing baseline of normative expectations, how can we assess what goes “beyond”? We encourage researchers to face this issue head-on and to be transparent about the context in which their research is being carried out.

## A Comprehensive Meta-Analysis on Employee-Focused Micro-CSR

To avoid biasing future reviews and to proceed with greater cohesion in summarizing what is known about micro-CSR around the world, we recommend that a systematic review and meta-analysis be undertaken on the subject, using a full spectrum of the extant terms pertaining to CSR and drawing from the many sources in which micro-CSR research is published. The sidebar Potential Search Terms for Use in the Broad Identification of Studies on Corporate Social Responsibility provides a tentative list of such search terms based on our own foray in this direction—and it is expansive, though far from comprehensive. The completion of such a review, and the synthesis of the results (focusing on activity type, delivery method, and other known and proposed mediators and moderators), stands to greatly inform our understanding of the phenomenon, future intervention development, and even the development of a comprehensive definition of CSR.<sup>6</sup>

## Incorporating Objective Measurement and Innovative Research Methods

In addition to the above issues, as CSR scholars both broaden and limit the definitions of what constitutes CSR initiatives, we must begin to operationalize what success looks like for a given CSR act. As some industrial/organizational psychologists have articulated in discussions on how

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<sup>6</sup>Of course, meta-analyses alone cannot sufficiently tell us the full story about the experience of CSR, as they are limited by the measures and methods that have been used to date. Nonetheless, the literature may be approaching a point where it soon may be able to code for a number of objective CSR program characteristics (as well as sample demographics) that to date have been largely unexplored.

## POTENTIAL SEARCH TERMS FOR USE IN THE BROAD IDENTIFICATION OF STUDIES ON CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

These search terms can be used to identify CSR studies across journals and fields. We suggest including both American and British alternative spellings of these terms.

Business citizenship	Corporate reputation	Environmentally friendly behavior
Community involvement	Corporate responsibility	Environmentally responsible
Community outreach	Corporate responsiveness	behavior
Community social responsibility	Corporate social performance (CSP)	Environmentally significant behavior
Company responsibility	Corporate social responsibility (CSR)	Green behavior
Conservation behavior	Corporate socially responsible	Green business practices
Corporate accountability	behaviors	Organization effectiveness
Corporate accountability theory	Corporate sustainability	Organizational performance
Corporate charity	Corporate volunteerism	Proecological behaviors
Corporate citizenship	Eco-friendly behavior	Proenvironmental behavior
Corporate community	Ecological behavior	Responsible environmental behavior
Corporate community involvement (CCI)	Ecologically responsible behavior	Social entrepreneurship
Corporate community relations (CCR)	Employee relations	Social performance
Corporate conscience	Environmental action	Social responsibility (SR)
Corporate environmental performance (CEP)	Environmental behavior	Social responsibility in business
Corporate environmental sustainability	Environmental performance	Strategic corporate social
Corporate financial performance (CFP)	Environmental protection	responsibility (strategic CSR)
Corporate governance	Environmental responsibility	Strategic philanthropy
Corporate greening	Environmental stewardship	Sustainability
Corporate moral agency	Environmental strategy	Sustainable behavior
Corporate outreach	Environmental sustainability	Sustainable development
Corporate philanthropy	Environmentally conscious behaviors	Sustainable responsible business

IOOB can be used in the developing world, in many ways CSR has more in common with development work than it might with other more conventional business practices (Gloss & Thompson 2013). Accepting this assumption allows for a shift in perspective, from seeing CSR as a string of discrete projects and policies to assessing it as a longer-term, holistic social intervention. As it currently stands, however, with micro-CSR often operationalized entirely through cross-sectional stakeholder perceptions, we are hard-pressed indeed to suggest that findings from micro-CSR studies help evidence fulfillment of the value proposition of corporate citizenship (e.g., doing CSR because doing good pays)—much less its higher purpose toward society. The real success of CSR would be shown through positive short- and longer-term social outcomes, as evidenced by stakeholder, partner, and beneficiary reports—all contingent upon actual project completion. Methods of program evaluation and the detection of social change would be well suited for this (Lipsey & Cordray 2000).

Experience-based rather than variable-focused information gathering from individual stakeholders, including employees and CSR recipients, is also essential. Bansal & Roth (2000) demonstrated how using such a technique can elucidate our understanding of CSR. Through inductive theory building and analytic induction, while drawing from archival records and in-depth interviews, they described various company motivations for CSR participation. The presentation of the theory was supplemented by illustrative quotes, which gave unique insight into the individual-level reasoning of managers' CSR attitudes. As we stated earlier, Caligiuri et al. (2013)

used qualitative methods in their empirical study as a supplement to their quantitative analyses, the combination of which offered readers a clear image of the overall and personal effects of a corporate volunteering endeavor. The call has been made before, and we too believe that to fully understand the impact and experience of CSR on individuals, we must reach beyond our respective fields and methodologies (Aguinis & Glavas 2013). Doing any less dilutes our ability to discuss the actual effects of CSR on stakeholders at any level.

### **Considering the Social Responsibility of Our Research and Practice**

Just as CSR requires that firms act in ways that go beyond the minimum required by law and field, so too must we, as a collective field of professionals, go beyond the minimum when identifying best practices for CSR implementation and evaluation. One example of how we might accomplish this is found within the practices of aid organizations, which often draft or adopt formal codes of conduct that govern the relationship between the aid organization, donors, and recipients. Many such documents exist, but we draw attention to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (Bissio 2008). This international document reviews a number of ways by which aid organizations can minimize waste and maximize efficiency (by aligning with existing strategic partners and streamlining work), manage projects effectively for results (rather than only for completion), and be sensitive to the mutual benefit of all parties involved.

Another set of ethical principles we might apply to our own work are provided by the United Nations Global Compact, a worldwide strategic policy initiative for businesses and business-related entities. Participation in the Global Compact requires that signatories champion ten principles pertaining to human rights, labor, environment, and anticorruption. Some professional IOOB organizations, such as the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychologists (SIOP), have become formal Global Compact participants. Individual SIOP members are invited, though not required, to follow Global Compact principles (Scott et al. 2013).

Of course, as our work often falls within the field of psychology, we already have principles and standards in place to ensure that our research and practice are carried out in a way that considers the impact of our work on all relevant parties. As we reviewed at the start of this article, both professional and psychometric standards exist that define our ethical responsibilities with regard to the populations we study and serve—all of which have direct implications to how we might explore CSR issues (Lefkowitz 2013, Messick 1995). We argue that making standards and principles such as these a much more explicit part of our work not only will allow us to better fulfill our ethical obligations to a broader set of stakeholders, but might also lead to a more organic shift in the way CSR is conceptualized, defined, carried out, and evaluated, which could ultimately have the effect of broadening its impact.

### **PARTING WORDS**

Recent years have produced a shift in CSR scholarship, leading to a focus on the psychological phenomena associated with perceiving, enacting, and receiving CSR. Nevertheless, the field remains to be unified, both within and between disciplines. Obstacles include the difficulty in operationalizing CSR at various levels of analysis and the volume of untested theoretical propositions. Further, considerations of the impact of CSR initiatives on intended beneficiaries are largely absent from scholarly reports. We have provided a number of recommendations throughout this review for how some of these problems may be addressed, including advocacy for

a more humanitarian and person-centric approach to the science and practice of CSR. As micro-CSR research moves forward, we anticipate the incorporation of CSR recipients' perspectives and experiences into scholarship, in addition to more phenomenological inquiries into the employee CSR experience overall. CSR has been shown to be an effective means of doing well for the environment and society. We can state with growing certitude that its positive effects extend to employees as well. As research and practice move ahead, we look forward to research that provides insight for organizations wanting to do good—better.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors are not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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