Does CSR perceptions have an impact on employee creativity ?

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Abstract:

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a management concept that describes how a company contributes to the success and well-being of stakeholders. In fact, CSR enhances the benefits for employees through enhancingis positive behavior and attitudes. The current study is an attempt to examine the the impact of employees' perceptions of CSR on their creativity and work engagement. The methodology combines a literature review with an empirical study, conducted through questionnaires with 200 emplyees of industrial Tunisian companies The results reveal that employees' perceptions of CSR has a positive effect on their work engagement. However, CSR perceptions and work engagement have not an impact on employee creativity.

Ke words: Corporate social responsibility (CSR) perceptions, Employee creativity, Work engagement.

Introduction

CSR represents an innovative approach where companies integrate social and environmental concerns into their practices (Tayeb and Ettor, 2025). It has become a vital element of the overall performance of the company (Ouassal, 2020). In addition, some authors consider that employees' perception of CSR is a mechanism to contribute to company performance (Benlabbah, 2020 ; Bouraoui et al, 2019). That's why; Companies have an interest in measuring and evaluating CSR by now using individual perceptions of CSR (Gond et al, 2017). Further, the research on the psychology of CSR suggests the need to focus on its micro-foundations to contribute to comprehensive understanding of CSR (Chaudhary and Akhouri, 2018).

However, only a limited number of studies in organizational behavior / human resource management domain have dealt with micro-level CSR phenomenon (El Akremi et al, 2018). The majority of research on the integration of CSR within the company has often all been conducted at the level macro, that is to say taking into consideration only the strategies and practices of the company in general without taking into account the individuals interacting with the company (Aguinis et Glavas, 2017). It is only recently that the research on CSR has shifted its focus from institutional and organizational level studies to individual level studies incorporating stakeholders' perspective (Chaudhary and Akhouri, 2018). In this regard, studies have examined the impact of CSR on behaviors and attitudes of various stakeholders such as employees (Glavas and Kelly, 2014), investors (Graves and Waddock, 1994) and customers (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). Referring to this studies, CSR initiatives of organizations are well received by employees. For example, employees' CSR perceptions have been reported to result in enhanced job satisfaction (De Roeck et al, 2014), organizational commitment (Gond et al, 2017), organizational citizenship behavior (Iqbal et al, 2018) and organizational identification (Gond et al, 2017). However, when compared to external stakeholders, studies on organizational stakeholders are sparse (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012).

At the same time, the processes that explain why and how CSR motivates employees to engage in organizationally desired behaviors and attitudes are not clearly understood (Chaudhary and Akhouri,

2018). The present study suggests overcoming this gap by examining the relationship between CSR perceptions and employee creativity while highlighting the mediating role of work engagement. Such inquiry is realized, in a first part, on the theoretical side by mobilizing some hypothesis. In a second part, an empirical study is engaged to test the relevant links between the variables, discuss the results, and infer the implications useful for practice.

1. Theoretical Background

We present, in this section, the concepts related to the study and establish their link to research question.

1.1 CSR perceptions

El Akremi et al. (2018) defined CSR as the viewpoint of employees regarding the CSR activities in which an organization participates. According to Choi and Yu (2018), employees' perceived CSR is defined as the degree to which employees see whether or not their company was involved in CSR practices. Lee et al (2013) defined the perception of CSR activities as the degree to which a company is perceived to support activities related to a social cause. Individual-level research involves the psychological foundations within individuals (Frynas and Stephens, 2015) that provide a better understanding of how individuals perceive and react to the responsible or irresponsible actions of their company (Rupp and Mallory, 2015).

In this sense, individual and subjective perceptions of CSR are particularly crucial in explaining employee reactions (El Akremi et al, 2015). For their part, Roeck et al (2016) defined perceived CSR as an employee's perception of the effects of the organization's discretionary actions on improving the well-being of external stakeholders. Vlachos et al (2017) highlighted that employee perceptions of CSR include judgments of organizational motivations to engage in CSR. According to Keita (2020), having perceptions of CSR requires informing all stakeholders about this policy and its implementation.

1.2 Work engagement

Work engagement was defined by Allport (1943) as a participatory attitude at work. Since his work, interest in work engagement has generated several studies (Desgourdes and Leroy, 2019). Indeed, the concept of commitment to work has been defined by numerous authors including Kahn (1990) who was interested in it (Karrakchou, 2020) by defining it as the attachment of the person to the role assigned to them by the organization that houses them (Kahn, 1990). Recent literature therefore tends to focus on a rather broad definition of the concept of engagement at work which includes particular poles of engagement such as the work, the employment situation, the organization, the union and even the group of employees. work (Blau et al, 1993). Concerning the definition of work engagement, there are several approaches in the literature (Megha, 2016), which has contributed to some confusion in the concepts and measures used (Kilic, 2018). Kahn (1990) also suggested that work engagement reflects the ego's investment in the employee's work role.

Following Kahn (1990), Rothbard (2001) defined work engagement as the psychological involvement of the individual. According to Maslach et al (2001), work engagement consists of demonstrating mastery in one's work. Schaufeli and Bakker (2001) defined this concept as a state of mind marked by vigor, involvement and assimilation at work. Schaufeli et al (2002) defined work engagement as a positive, satisfying state of mind associated with work and characterized by absorption, dedication and vigor. For his part, Saks (2006) defined work engagement as the provision and use of a certain number of resources by the individual in his work.

According to Rich et al (2010), work engagement reflects a form of involvement and investment in one's work role, persistence and intensity in accomplishing tasks. These authors also defined it as a psychological mechanism corresponding to an active allocation of one's personal resources (physical, cognitive and emotional) in one's work. Hence work engagement includes facets or dimensions of an

emotional, physical, and cognitive nature (Rich et al, 2010). This definition has been the subject of much research in recent years (Robert and Vandenberghe, 2017).

According to Bakker et al (2014), work engagement refers to the link that is built between the self and work in which the feeling of absorption, self-esteem, and immersion is central. Along the same lines, Lu et al (2014) suggested that this concept would make it possible to better manage the demands and resources present in the work environment, which contributes to a better fit between self and work.

Work engagement is a concept that has a motivational basis (Harter et al. 2002). Along the same lines, Byrne (2015; cited by Karrakchou, 2020) defined the notion of engagement as a state of motivation. According to this author, for the individual at a given moment, it is a state of motivation where he will concentrate and deploy, on a physical and psychological level, all his efforts to achieve the objectives assigned to him by the 'organization. In addition, the individual will tend to align with and serve organizational objectives while developing their knowledge to make their work a universe that brings them a mark of accomplishment and a feeling of usefulness to the organization. organization (Byrne, 2015; cited by Karrakchou, 2020).

According to Byrne et al (2016), work engagement is a concept that is characterized in particular by an overwhelming affective/emotional component, high energy, and focused attention. It is now widely accepted that work engagement refers to the way employees relate to their work through identification, attachment, and loyalty to diverse anchors (Klein, 2016).

In the academic literature, work engagement is most often defined and measured as a fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker, 2017). By way of summary, commitment is defined as the attachment of workers to their organization. It is often considered as a psychological state which characterizes the relationship between the worker and the organization and which has different behavioral consequences (Meyer et al, 1997; cited by El Ammary and Balhadj, 2020).

1.3 Employee creativity

Being a concept that evolves over time and different points of view (Delpech et al, 2020), creativity is an individual resource (Helzer and Kim, 2019). If creativity and innovation are two related concepts (Sarooghi et al, 2015), they differ on the status of the idea: if in organizational creativity, the idea is the result to be achieved, it is the starting point of innovation (Mendonça et al, 2017).

Management researchers consider creativity to be the first phase of innovation, the stage where ideas emerge, while the term innovation is more specifically attributed to the process of implementing ideas (Zaltman et al, 1973). Creativity has been associated with organizational survival and success in a turbulent business context (Lubart et al, 2019; Mendonça et al, 2017). At the organizational level, creativity is likely to nourish the entire innovation process and even renew the organization itself (Cohendet et al, 2017). Also, according to Bezzaa and EL Yadari (2020), creativity in an individual makes them emotionally positive which predisposes them to perform well in their work. It takes an increasingly important place in our society and it is therefore important to evaluate it with a view to encourage its development (Lubart et al, 2019). Its effects were first studied in positive psychology (Bezzaa and Elyadari, 2020). On an individual level, Conner et al (2018; cited by Bezzaa and Elyadari, 2020) established a direct link between creative behavior and improved well-being in a sample of young adults. Helzer and Kim (2019) stated that it is interesting to use creativity in the context of managing stress at work.

Given its importance for the company and its economic, strategic and scientific interests, the study of creativity applied to the organization is of growing and particular interest. Indeed, several studies have focused on factors that increase creativity, such as management practices (brainstorming group, support from immediate superior) and the practice of meditation (Ding et al, 2015). Much research

has examined the organizational and individual factors promoting or impairing employees' creative performance at work (De Stobbeleir et al. 2011). Certainly, the results of the study by Mendonça et al. (2017) supported the idea that individuals' creativity is affected by both internal (e.g., motivation) and external (e.g., task) factors.

2. Hypothesis Development and Conceptual Model

In this section, we will develop the conceptual model and the underlying hypotheses dealing with the nature of the links between, work engagement, and employee creativity.

2.1 Effect of CSR perceptions on work engagement

Researchers have previously shown that there is a positive correlation between CSR practices and employee engagement (Tong et al, 2019 ; Gao et al, 2018). Intrisic and extrinsic CSR are positively linked to work engagement (Chaudhary and Akhouri, 2018). On the contrary, Ferreira and de Oliveira (2014) observed no association between internal and external CSR and dimensions of work engagement, in a study conducted among private sector employees in Portugal. Ismael et al (2021) as well as Glavas (2016) conducted studies and came to the conclusion that there is a positive and significant relationship between CSR and work engagement.

Other research has indicated that perceived CSR is positively associated with employee work engagement (Wang, 2018; Farid et al, 2019 ; Gao et al, 2017; Tsourvakas and Yfantidou, 2018; Svergun and Fairlie, 2020). Gao et al (2017) found a positive link between employees' perception of CSR and their work engagement mediated by perceived organizational support. Similarly, Esmaeelinezhad et al (2015) showed a significant association between employees' perceptions of CSR and work engagement mediated by an organizational identification mechanism. Most studies have therefore shown that employees' perception of CSR has a positive relationship with their engagement at work (Issac and Sebastian, 2019).

2.2 Effect of work engagement on employee creativity

Although work engagement has been considered an antecedent of creativity, it has received very little empirical attention in the literature (Truong et al, 2020). Only a few studies have been conducted to attempt to test how work engagement and creativity are related. Research conducted by Demerouti et al (2015) indicates that there is a positive relationship between work engagement and employee creativity. Additionally, engaged employees often experience positive emotions that facilitate creative behavior (Truong et al, 2020). Furthermore, in a study of nurses in Japan, Toyama and Mauno (2017) demonstrated that work engagement is an intervening variable in the relationship between emotional intelligence and creativity.

Mubarak and Noor (2018) also supported the idea that work engagement has a significant and positive effect on employee creativity. Truong et al (2020) also demonstrated that work engagement is positively linked to employee creativity. In a study carried out in Nigeria, Adekanmbi and Ukpere (2021) showed that employee engagement significantly influences their creativity. Along the same lines, Eldor and Harpaz (2016) revealed that engagement promotes employee creativity.

According to Atwater and Carmeli (2009), engaged employees have greater energy to pursue creative paths than those who are not engaged. Other research confirms that there is a positive relationship between work engagement and employee creativity (Chaudhary and Akhouri, 2018; 2019). Work engagement acts as a strategic driver to increase employee creativity (Ismail et al, 2019; Sonnentag et al, 2019). At the level of this logic of thought, Ismail et al. (2019) suggested that employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on their creativity. Vila-Vázquez et al (2020) also showed that work engagement is positively associated with individual creativity.

On the basis of the above, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Work engagement have a positive effect on employee creativity.

2.3 Effect of CSR perceptions on employee creativity

The influence of employees' perceptions of CSR on their creativity has attracted the attention of researchers and practitioners (Hur et al, 2016). Indeed, several studies in the literature have attempted to explore the link between employees' CSR perceptions and creativity (Brammer and al, 2015; Hur et al, 2016; Tong et al, 2019; Chaudhary and Akhouri (2018); Abdullah and al, 2017).

Based on the above, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: CSR perceptions have a positive effect on employee creativity.

Based on the theoretical argumentation, the issue related to the extent to which the CSR perceptions influences employee creativity through work engagement becomes more relevant than ever before as illustrated in the figure 1. Such relevance needs to be validated empirically.
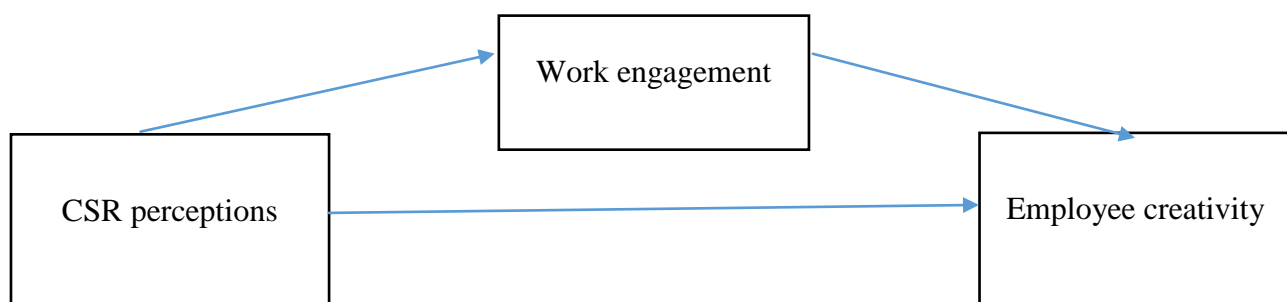

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Study

3. Methodology of Research and Results

We present, in this section, the methodology of the empirical study and the results obtained.

3.1 Methodology of Research

A quantitative study through a survey is conducted. Data were collected from the employees working in industrial tunisian organizations known for their CSR activities. The chosen organizations were located in varied parts of the country Sousse, Sfax and tunis. Questionnaires were distributed to the employees and their team leaders via both personal visits survey using snowball sampling. In total, 200 usable questionnaires were received in which team leaders responded to the questionnaire on creativity of their subordinates and subordinates responded to their own CSR perceptions and work engagement. Table 1 presents the variables and the sources of scales used.

Table 1: Measurement of Variables

Variables	Nature	Reference
CSR perceptions	Independent	El Akremi et al (2018)
Work engegement	Mediator	Schaufeli et al (2006)
Employee creaivity	Dependent	Zhou et George (2001)

3.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The results of EFA show that all variables have a determinant different at 0, and at 1 and a KMO value between 0.6 and 0.7 (Table 2). Hence, principal component analysis can be applied. **Table 2: Results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis**

Variable	Number of item	VEM	KMO
CSR toward employees	7	,775	0,867
CSR toward customers	4	,893	0,845
CSR toward environment	7	,792	0,845
CSR toward community	8	,826	0,794
Work engagement	9	,803	0,846
Creativity	11	,784	0,909

3.3 Results of Research

The validity validity and reliability of the constructs are verified before testing the hypotheses.

3.3.1 Validity and reliability results

Table 3 indicates that the constructs have high levels of reliability with values between 0.817 and 0.927 as recommended by Hair et al. (2014). All constructs have satisfactory average variance extracted indices that exceed the threshold recommended by Fornell et Larcker (1981) and Bagozzi et al. (1988).

Table 3: Results of Reliability and Validity Tests

Constructs	VEM	α
CSR toward employees	,775	0,883
CSR toward customers	,893	0,916
CSR toward environment	,792	0,919
CSR toward community	,826	0,929
Work engagement	,803	0,905
Creativity	,784	0,888

3.3.2 Hypothesis testing

Our research model is composed of 3 direct relationships and 1 indirect relationships. The alleged effects tested using SPSS with AMOS, yield to the following results as exhibited in table 4. The analysis confirms the positive and significant effects between CSR perceptions and work engagement.

Table 4: Results of Direct Relations

Relation	Estimation	CR	P value	Decision
Engagement ⟵ Employees	,254	3,917	***	Accepted
Engagement ⟵ Customers	,321	4,926	***	Accepted
Engagement ⟵ Environment	,179	3,420	***	Accepted
Engagement ⟵ Community	,202	2,903	***	Accepted
Engagement ⟵ Creativity	,021	,224	,004	No Accepted

Creativity	←	Employees	,028	,363	,823	No Accepted
Creativity	←	Customers	-,063	-,813	,716	No Accepted
Creativity	←	Environment	,131	2,098	,416	Accepted
Creativity	←	Community	,242	2,912	,036	Accepted

As for the mediating effect of work engagement, table 5 shows that work engagement no intervenes in the relationship between CSR pereptions and both types of innovation. The mediation was tested by Sobel test.

4. Discussion of the Results and Conclusiond

Three main paths of relationships addressed in the present research are grounded not only theoretically but also empirically. These paths witness the existence of some dynamics favorable to CSR perceptions, work engagement and employee creativity in the studied context.

4.1 Discussion of the Results

The first path deals with the effect of CSR perceptions on work engagement which is statistically significant and positive. Such effect may be explained by the following reasons. The second path no confirms the link between work engagement and employee creativity.

To examine the potential effect that perceived CSR may have on work engagement, a structural equation analysis was carried out. The results showed that the proposed structural links between the four components (CSR-Employees, CSR-Customers, natural environment-oriented CSR and community-oriented CSR) of perceived CSR and work engagement are significant. From here, we can validate the first hypothesis (H1) which predicts that perceived CSR has a significant effect on work engagement. According to our analyses, it seems that CSR perceived by employees has a positive and significant effect on their commitment to work.

These results are in the same direction as those of Tong et al (2019); Gao et al (2018); Ismael et al (2021); Glavas (2016); Wang (2018); and Farid et al (2019). In fact, an organization's investment in CSR initiatives can produce benefits because these initiatives influence employees' work engagement, which again represents a good predictor of employee behaviors and work performance. These CSR initiatives can strengthen employees' relationships with and through their organization. They make it possible to maintain and legitimize a strong relationship, thanks to the organizational identification of employees. These results can be explained by the fact that from a social exchange perspective, when employees perceive that their organizations are involved in citizenship, they become more engaged in the workplace by increasing their vigor, dedication and absorption.

According to social exchange theory, if employees perceive that their organizations support customers and themselves, they tend to invest more energy and time in the workplace to reciprocate (Zientara et al, 2015). As a result, reciprocity norms lead employees to shape perceived management support and be motivated to repay it by cognitively, physically, and emotionally devoting themselves to task performance. In other words, if a company develops and implements CSR initiatives, its employees are trusted, which motivates them to engage in the work (Hu et al, 2020). Also, if employees perceive that management cares about employee well-being, they will attempt to improve their company's prosocial reputation by making additional contributions. And according to social identity theory, when employees work for a values-driven organization, as evidenced by its CSR programs and actions, they are likely to identify strongly with it. This feeling of unity with the organization can strengthen the intrinsic motivation of employees to display attitudes and behaviors supporting organizational interest. Therefore, when employees perceive their employer's CSR actions favorably, they are likely to bring more energy to work and demonstrate high dedication and

absorption in work. Thus, we can expect employees to bring their true and complete selves to work to maintain the organization's reputation and contribute to its success.

Researchers in the field of management and organizational psychology have argued that employees of responsible companies benefit from rewards in the form of intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, effectiveness, commitment and satisfaction (Nazir and Islam, 2020). Other researchers (Farooq and Salam, 2020; Tisu et al, 2020) have claimed that employee engagement is a precursor to employee productivity in the workplace. Several factors affect employee engagement, as Edwards (1991) explains on the fit of the person's job and the person's organization in the workplace (Chung, 2016).

Employee engagement is emerging as a key success factor for organizations (Ouahbi and Yahyaoui, 2025). It has become an imperative for organizations, because by engaging employees, organizations can better cope with modern problems (Fatima et al, 2020). Employee engagement is a planned and intentional approach and develops from employee behavioral outcomes. The involvement of companies in CSR activities can modify the identity of employees. That is to say, employees can feel motivated and show vigor once they have identified themselves with the firm. By adopting socially responsible practices, companies send a clear message to their stakeholders, including employees, about their commitment to serving the environment and society beyond any financial benefits. Thus, according to social identity theory, employees react positively to CSR practices because of their self-improvement motivations. As a result, employees' perception of CSR activities will lead to better engagement in their work. The results of this study suggest that the organization's CSR activities improve employee engagement. Therefore, organizations should take active steps to develop and improve perception.

From the above results, we can conclude the absence of the effect of work engagement on creativity. The value of CR being less than 1.96 (CR=.224<1.96) > and the value of the associated probability is greater than 0.823 (p=.017>0.05). Comparing these results with those of previous research, we find some discrepancies. We note that Bakker and Xanthopoulou (2013) also reported a significant association between work engagement and creativity in a study of teachers.

For its part, Demerouti et al (2015) demonstrated a positive association between work engagement and employee creativity in the Netherlands. This result also diverges with the conclusion put forward by Ali et al (2020). The latter found that work engagement has a positive and significant effect on employees' OCB. Contrary to our findings, the results of this study supported social exchange theory as an essential framework for understanding employee behaviors in the workplace. In sum, employee engagement has attracted growing research interest from academics, and it remains an extremely relevant and contemporary topic as it is considered a vital factor in well-being at work (Farrukh et al, 2020). It is one of the essential elements for the success of any organization. Knowledge of the link between work engagement and employees' OCB remains limited and contradictory, with some obtaining a significant relationship (Meyer et al, 1993), others none (Meyer and Allen, 1986).

According to the results found above, we can affirm that the effect of this hypothesis is not total. It turned out that the two components (CSR-Employees and CSR-Customers) did not generate an effect on creativity (β Employees = 0.028; CR = 0.363; p = 0.716; β Customers = -0.063; CR = -.813; p = 0.416). While the other components (environmental CSR and community-oriented CSR) generate significant effects at the 5% threshold (β environment = 0.131; CR= 2.098; p= 0.036; β community = 0.242; CR= 2.912; p= 0.004).

This hypothesis is partially verified. It diverges with the results found in previous studies. For example, we find Glavas and Piderit (2009) who reported, in a study conducted among employees of seven companies in North America, a direct association between employees' perceptions of CSR and their creativity.

These results do not support the observations of Bramer et al (2015); Hur et al (2016); Yang et al (2020). For their part, Bramer et al (2015) showed, in a study conducted among employees of a Spanish multinational telecommunications company, an indirect effect of CSR perceptions on creative effort through organizational identification. Also, Hur et al (2016) found, in a study of hotel employees in South Korea, that the relationship between CSR perceptions and employee creativity was fully mediated by workplace compassion and motivation intrinsic. Recently, Yang and colleagues (2020) who demonstrated that working in a well-organized ethical environment will encourage individuals to display more positive attitudes and behaviors, including employee creativity. Furthermore, CSR encourages employees to engage in creative activities. In addition, CSR practices reflect companies' concern for well-being and personal development.

Our results also diverge with those of Chaudhary and Akhouri (2018). The latter authors mentioned that a work environment characterized by a sense of responsibility and a desire to help others encourages employees to propose innovative ideas.

4.2 Conclusion

The main idea behind this article is to test the impact of the perception of CSR and creativity among employees. We proposed a model by mobilizing the three variables namely: An explanatory independent variable (exogenous): perceived CSR, a dependent variable to be explained (endogenous): creativity and an explanatory variable: work commitment. We tried to validate part of this model on a set of 200 employees who work in industrial companies in Tunisia. Based on a quantitative study that allows us to measure the relationship by a questionnaire, we were able to confirm that CSR practices toward employees, community, environment, and customers have a significant effect on employees' engagement. The findings suggest that being a good corporate citizen can pay employers in terms of enhanced employee engagement, which can provide competitive advantage to the organizations in this highly competitive business environment. This will help organizational managers appreciate and understand the benefits and the influence of CSR engagement beyond positive external image. Furthermore, CSR perceptions of employees and work engagement have not a significant influence on employees' creativity. However, a partial mediation was observed between CSR perceptions of employees practices and creativity. The results also indicate that no mediation was found between CSR and employees' creativity. This finding is surprising given that extant literature showed the positive effect of CSR perception on emloyees creativity. Although the positive effects of CSR on employees are expected, an ambiguitymay exist for this relationship due to a lack of employees' awareness of these initiatives and/or failure to meet their needs. From this perspective, one speculation is that Tunisian companies currently fail to educate their employees regarding CSR engagement and/or to implement CSR programs that would satisfy employees' demands or morale. Another interpretation that can be drawn from this result may be that initiatives that show a company's sensitivity toward customers and emplyees may be able to enhance its external image and project a caring identity able to improve their competitiveness.

Although the findings of the present study are significant, it does have some limitations that can facilitate future research in this domain. First, our study focused on understanding the behaviour of employees in industrial sector in the Tunisian context, therefore future research with employees from diverse cultural contexts is needed to validate our findings and confirm their generalizability. Second, this study did not explore the effects resulting from employee creativity behaviour; future research could further examine the impact of employee creativity behaviour on corporate performance. In addition, more factors associated to employee personalities could be included in the

conceptual model of the current research such as self-esteem. Third, we used only one survey to collect data for model testing. Empirical research following a cross-sectional design often suffer from potential biases in data collection. Future scholars may select other methods, such as experimental design or a qualitative studies or, as well as longitudinal data, to overcome such biases.

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