

## Does It Pay to Be Socially Responsible? An Exploratory Study on The Impact Of CSR On Employee Internal Motivation And Performance

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*Keywords:*

Employee Motivation, Performance, Corporate Social Responsibility, Internal Employee Motivation, NGO, AKRSP

**ABSTRACT**

This study is an attempt to the study the impact of corporate social responsibility, (CSR) on internal employee motivation and performance. It is a qualitative study and the methodology used was an Unstructured interview. Study unit of analysis were conducted the employees of an NGO (AKRSP), working in (Gilgit) the rural area of Pakistan. The results of the study are in line with the past literature and indicated that CSR activities positively affect the internal employee motivation, hence improving the overall performance. People are willing to take the lead for community oriented and environment-oriented activities by companies. It also points out the relative importance of CSR activities in terms of improving employee internal motivation as well as performance. Study limitation is its approach for considering one organization due to some time and resource constraints, therefore further research needs to be extended to other organizations.

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### INTRODUCTION

Natural and human resources have been in the use of corporations for their organizational purposes and for smooth functioning of the firm, most importantly for profits. This causes the exhaustion of these resources which effects the environment and the ultimate society around it. The concept of CSR first evolved with the apprehensions started due to the harm caused by this damage on environment and society at large by these operations. The examples of environmental issues caused by Shell Company in 1980's and 1990's triggered the wave of critique from all around the world. This totally changed the world view and many CSR definitions emerged during this period (Taneja, Taneja, & Gupta, 2011; Su & Swanson, 2019; Thanh, Huan & Hong, 2021). CSR is still in its embryonic stage in management sciences and rapid development is going on in this area from the theorists as well as practitioners during past few decades. Yet theoretically and empirically it is supported very inadequately (Galbreath, 2013; Xu, Liu & Shang, 2020; Alareeni & Hamdan, 2020; Thanh *et al.* 2021).

Corporate social responsibility and the other interrelated concepts, i.e., social performance, social responsiveness, corporate citizenship, have been a part of studies in management for over five decades. Irregularities and an active debate related to a consensus on CSR definition have hampered this systematic and scientific process of understanding and knowledge generation (Cochran, 2007; Shakil, Mahmood, Tasnia and Munim, 2019). Initially, some of the eminent researchers were advocating the traditional

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viewpoint that, the only obligation of a management is to maximize the shareholder's wealth and only wealth maximization (Friedman, 1970; Jensen, 2002 and Levitt, 1958). Whereas, there some other prominent scholars who believe in a balanced approach on stakeholder interest and needs (Freeman, 1984 and Jones, 1995) or contemplate CSR as a four-pronged, comprehensive typology of economic, legal, ethical, and unrestricted responsibilities (Carroll, 1979; 1999).

McWilliams and Siegel (2000) pronounced CSR as "activities that seem to further social betterment, not just for the interest of the e firm and that which is done by law." There is an important point which needs some attention is that CSR is more than merely after the law (McWilliams & Siegel, 2000). The meaning of what would represent CSR is: "An activity by a firm, which the firm decides to take, that significantly influences social stakeholder's welfare". As per the separation theorem, shareholders of the firms tend to earn high profits first, then invest that earnings on activities which addresses social responsibility issues. Involvement in social welfare activities of these organizations are mainly those which will ultimately earn good will or profits. The highlighted assumption is that social involvement tends to enhance their profitability (Wang, Dou, & Jia, 2016; Buallay et al., 2019). The benefits linked with CSR activities may be due to good reputé or it may be due to raised prices.

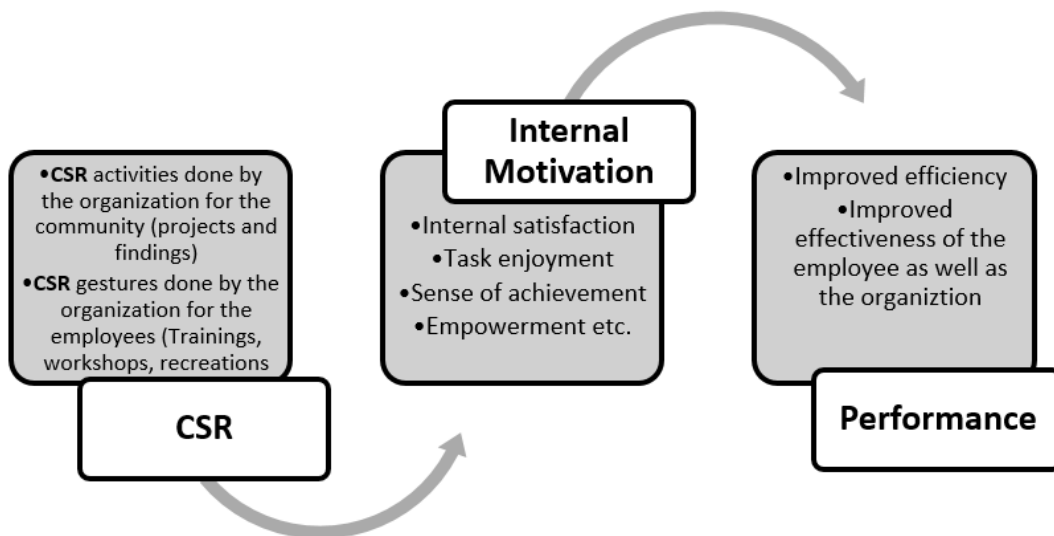
Waheed (2005) reported CSR as the investment made by a business, by thoughtful insights for social and environmental concerns in their transactions as well as concerns for the parties involved directly or indirectly. It is a common perception that Pakistan is a country that is lacking behind in the implementation of CSR practices among companies. Although, there are few exceptions which have taken the burden and must be applauded for their exertions in contributing to the society and people of Pakistan. Allan Hammond of the World Resources Institute mentioned that there is no developing country is ahead in solving the social issues faced today, until collective efforts are made. In the Asia Pacific, the second wave of CSR is at its verge. There exists conceptual conscious and a proper willingness to implement CSR (Kluza, Ziolo, & Spoz, 2021; Shakil et al., 2019; Velte, 2021). In Pakistan, however, the case is feeble and it is just the beginning of the journey.

The roots of CSR and organizational performance stretch back and theorized by the social impact theory discussing the relationship among them, which is further derived from the famous and contributory stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010). The proponents of this theory believes that there is a staunch need to look for all the different groups of stakeholders, which will ultimately enhance performance on the grounds of effectiveness and efficiency of the corporation (Su & Swanson, 2019). On the contrary, vice versa can be the case for organizations not considering the interests of the stakeholders (Huang, Sim & Zhao, 2020; Shakil et al., 2019). There is a live confrontation going on for investigating social performance and organizational performance, since the challenge posed by Milton Friedman (1970). "A corporation's social responsibility is to make a profit" (Friedman, 1970). On the contrary, the argument has changed now, most of the companies in the commercial world embraces CSR and also issue CSR reports along with the annual

statements for acknowledgment of the emerging concept (Busch & Friede, 2018; Huang et al., 2020).

One of the most important theories of management sciences is the self-determination theory. It proposes about motivation, relating the theory to CSR, external and internal rewards influence the employee motivation and ultimately performance. External, defines the external motivation (like compensation system, salary, all the fringe benefits and extra bonuses. Although, it is an important aspect, but it is argued widely it is not always enough for motivation. Minbaeva (2008), believes that it is true that external motivation aids to keep a person on job, but for more effective performance, internal motivation is essential. Internal motivation defines internal satisfaction, task enjoyment, sense of achievement, appreciation and recognition, empowered, and many more to name (Alareeni & Hamdan, 2020; Thanh *et al.* 2021; Kim & Kim, 2020).

In order to elaborate our point and to have a better understanding of the overall theme of the study, here is a diagrammatical view of the conceptual framework. Also based on the theoretical grounds discussed above, conceptual framework of the study is as follows:



The exploration on the scope of internal motivation has many reasons. First, internal motivation tends to increase concentration, enthusiasm and confidence (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Kim & Kim, 2020) which ultimately enhances performance, perseverance, self-confidence and general welfare of the employee. Second, long-term success is achieved through internal motivation (Liu, Liu, Zhang & Hu, 2021). Even though internal motivation is more important but for implementation, it is the most difficult task due to its nature, it can be only done indirectly.

Literature advocates that by building interesting and challenging tasks and environment, internal motivation can be achieved (Minbaeva, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Liu et al., 2021). Although, the interest in CSR related studies have been on a high pace during the past few decades, but the efforts on exploring its interrelation with the level of employee internal motivation is still naïve. This relationship is seldom discussed in past literature. However, notion for empirical research proposed the positive link between CSR

activities and stakeholder's satisfaction. Thus, this study in this manner, tried to examine how CSR actions upshot internal employee motivation.

## **DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

It is a qualitative paper and the study followed interpretive methodological approach to study the link between CSR undertakings and employee internal motivation and performance. This approach reflects an interpretivist epistemology and a constructivist ontology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). From this viewpoint, knowledge is supposed to be generated through socially built meanings and subjective interpretations. Researchers working with this approach investigate the meanings that people confer upon their own and others' activities.

Gillani, (2021) stated that "Qualitative research is not value-free because it is not intended to be as such. It analyzes this question by tracing the roots of qualitative research at the ontological and epistemological level". He also argued that this type of research has basically evolved from "constructivism" and "interpretivism". In which the prime concern and importance is given to people's interpretation, also applies to the social science research. Additionally, the paper also argues research in the field of social science research can never be value-free due to its consideration for ethics. That is because qualitative research is fundamentally subjective. This is not just because of the weaknesses and lacks, but because the way it is not designed for being value-free.

More specifically, within this approach, few of the employees of a renown NGO (AKRSP Gilgit) working in the remote areas of Pakistan are interviewed and observed. It is a non for profit organization with the mission statement stating to "improve the quality of life of local communities through social and economic development efforts" in the Gilgit- Baltistan and Chitral. The core objectives and projects targeting the "particularly poor and vulnerable (including youth and women) (Jiwa, 2021).

As the core office of the region, there were more number of employees who could be sampled (because of the availability of the workers). It is a very renown organization and 90 % of the working is on the grass root level and in the fields (the project area is known as field). It was almost impossible to take interviews of all the employees as most of them were in the fields. In pursuing its central aim, this study has focused upon obtaining data and insights from the employees, from all levels of the organizational hierarchy (top, middle and front line). According to McCracken (1988), Eight long interviews are a sufficient basis for qualitative research projects. Although, it cannot be generalized on all the qualitative studies, but it is the beauty of qualitative investigation that it doesn't believe in 'quantity' but 'quality'.

### **Research Questions**

The main broader research question and research theme which was followed during this whole process was: *How does it feels to be part of such an organization which is making a difference in the society and community around it?*

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND DISCUSSION**

Despite being in the scope of management sciences, CSR definition and clarity of the concept still lacks (Eweje and Bentley, 2006; Busch & Friede, 2018). Even after three decades of research and extensive work in the field of CSR, differences in perspective have only accumulated, not dissipated, thereby further escalating the confusions (Margolis, Elfenbein, & Walsh, 2007; Huang et al., 2020). The meta-analytic reviews purely on CSR theories, supported with extensive discussions and future direction, research design, and empirical analysis in the field may contribute to deal with this theoretical vagueness (Wang, Dou, & Jia, 2016). A firm must consider its decision making in conformance to the overall effect of it on the society.

### ***The CSR concept***

Earning economic gains must not be the essential aim of the firm, but also to look after the interest of the community and society. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) directs an organization to act in a sensible way (Galbreath, 201; Alareeni & Hamdan, 2020). It means, having a share in the incomes of the organization for the improvement of the society in which it exists. In that manner, CSR can be interpreted as the means for realizing commercial accomplishment by founding ethical values and regarding and caring the people at work, in the societies and the surrounding environment (Qazi, Ahmed, Kashif, & Qureshi, 2015). It is not just profit seeking, but companies have an obligation when it comes to the benefit of the society. Rather, CSR incorporated business strategies tends to bring long term returns. Sacconi (2004) defined CSR as, it accentuates corporate obligation to various firm's stakeholders.

At present, social responsibility concept in corporations is struggling in its initial stages in Pakistan. As per Yawar (2009), above 60% of the total businesses and companies operating in Pakistan have somehow made their share for community development through donations, charity and projects for both societal as well as religious purposes. Qazi et al. (2015) also, concluded that the involvement of the firms in the social benefiting activities while considering the CSR aspect in their strategic process, tends to enhance their productivity. Which resultantly increases profits as well as the good will of the company as well as the quality products produced.

This also fortify the brand's identity which not only attracts new pool of investors but improves customer loyalty. regrettably, organizational environment pertaining to Pakistan, are incapable to rationalize the impact of CSR and its worth (Qazi et al., 2015). CSR and its dimensions are yet to be explored thoroughly and examines perspectives. Cochiuș (2006) suggests in this manner, to interpret CSR from numerous (employees, customers, suppliers, community and shareholders) stakeholder's perspective. One of the interviewee explained:

*"[...] Youth, women, agriculturist, entrepreneur, carpenter, ... you name it, we try to work for all, even the mighty Glaciers, we are trying to conserve them form depletion, for our future generation".*

### ***Internal motivation***

There are hundreds of efforts done in the previous literature defining the exact term motivation (Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004). This advocates the findings of (Locke & Latham, 1990) that there is still ambiguity in the exact definition of the term motivation. Even the term motivation is usually misinterpreting and sometimes used inappropriately (Locke & Latham, 1990). Among the previous work done in this regard, one of the significant and most accepted definition is:

*“Work motivation is a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual’s being, to initiate work-related behavior and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration” (Latham and Pinder, 2005)”*.

The significance of this description is due to three main reasons. First, its comprehensiveness, (incorporates both part). Second, clarity of the origin (internal and external motivation). Third, its acceptance and recognition in various other studies. While going through the literature on motivation, the reasons for intrinsic motivations are mentioned as the interest in the work, challenges ahead, sense of satisfaction and enjoyment in the work environment. Intrinsically motivated behaviors usually come from those employees who are capable enough and are determined in their tasks (Liu et al., 2021). There are two components discussed in definition of internal motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) supported the view that it is not necessary that this intrinsic motivation is derived from the cavalries, as it is self-rewarding activity. This impression stayed largely established in the advanced research. There is a dire need to consider the concerns in the investigation of employee motivation in the past literature (Kim & Kim, 2020).

The element of satisfaction with the action, work itself and achievement springs from within the individual’s inner self or core, meeting the task, finding an activity interesting etc (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Kim & Kim, 2020; Liu et al., 2021). The aspects that affect certain behavior also include the feeling the importance of work, having to control one’s own resources, freedom to act, scope to use and develop skills and abilities, as well as having the opportunities for advancement (Pradhan et al., 2021). Owing to such positive feelings, intrinsically motivated people can become more efficient (by getting more ego-involved with their jobs, emotionally committed for doing well and take pride from evidence that they are effective in furthering the objectives of the company) (Minbaeva, 2008). As one of the interviewees responded:

*“Yes...of course! I took this job for having a job. It was back when I had no idea of what we do... we work with people and for people. This makes me come every day with a new spirit. I earn my salary, but the relief is priceless”*.

As per research done by Skudiene and Auruskeviciene (2012), internal and external CSR activities positively correlate with internal employee motivation. Internal CSR was initiated to be stronger connected to internal employee motivation among all the external CSR dimensions. Concerning the external CSR, customer-related activities shown stronger correlation by internal employee motivation as compared to local communities and business partners related CSR activities. The weakest among the relation was establish between internal employee motivation and business partners related CSR activities (Skudiene &

Auruskeviciene, 2012).

Another constituent of the research into internal motivation highlights that “intrinsically motivated” behaviors are a function of three basic psychological needs: “autonomy, competence and relatedness” (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Although ‘autonomy’ and ‘competence’ are indispensable needs. If we talk about internal motivation, ‘relatedness’ is a central social need. In the retrospective of relatedness, it is also argued that relatedness plays a key point for a stable and improved motivation. Pradhan, Bashir, Roy & Nguyen (2021) also supported and added that relatedness can even improve or even enhance internal motivation of the employees. Relatedness is suggested to be in high connection with the values and beliefs of the individuals.

Therefore, it can be inferred that employees who are internally motivated are performing well not because of getting extrinsic rewards. They do it because they feel connected and sense close connection and relationship with the corporation they work for and they trust them (Pradhan et al., 2021). Furthermore, these employees get more enthusiastically engaged with the company and also incline their personal progression towards their work and organization’s advancements. Consequently, there is an optimistic sort of attribution of the employees towards an organizations’ CSR undertakings. That ultimately leads towards a more positive assessment plus reaction of the workers (Kim & Kim, 2020; Pradhan et al., 2021). One interviewee replied: “Age does not matter son, as long as the light is glowing inside (pointing towards the heart), I want to work”. Even though it is proposed in the literature that employee satisfaction, loyalty, retention and commitment are sturdily related to their motivation, it is not clear what type of motivation is influenced by CSR activities. Despite the evidences from past literature, there still lacks clarity on differentiation of internal CSR as compare to external CSR, especially on account of employee motivation (Locke & Latham, 1990; Pradhan et al., 2021). Which creates room and gap for further research and exploration. It calls upon the scholars of the field to ponder and bring about the perspectives which still needs to be addressed.

### ***CSR and internal motivation***

CSR literature proposes that employee response can get influenced by many factors rooted especially in the overall CSR initiatives of the firm. These CSR initiatives taken by any company certainly have a positive impact on employee commitment, employee satisfaction, the overall trust, loyalty and company repute. These factors motivate individuals to choose that certain firm as it reinforces employees’ self-esteem and self-image, also inspiring for team work and ultimately boosting employee morale (Brammer, Millington, & Rayton, 2007; Pradhan et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021). These CSR features are identified as priorities of job’s searchers. These are also defined as one of the main criteria while deciding on an employer. One of the respondent, a fresh intern at the organization, commented:

*“Studied a course on ethics, besides, this was the nearest organization to have an internship. But, there is no doubt in the notion that when you work in the community, it pays you of with high level*

*of motivation. There is so much to do for youth like me.... Sometimes I feel that, I think actually, may be, I will come back few years later”.*

This argument is supported by the signaling theory. It explains the importance of good reputation of the company, applicants usually use social reputation as a mean to know about the overall environments in any firm (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi, 2007). The results of the study by Kim and Scullion (2013) suggests that although businesses seldom initiate CSR mainly with the aim of facilitating staff motivation, when businesses evaluate the results, the issue of individual motivation emerges as one of the main benefits for engaging in CSR. Employees tend to have deep connection with socially responsible actions due to the notion of more or less same socially conscious standards with the company (Aguilera et al., 2007; Pradhan et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021). Kim and Scullion (2013) likewise found employees even prefer to work in a socially responsible firm with slight low level or earnings. As one of the comment of a respondent also conforms this finding:

*“Islam is or religion. Islam also teaches to take care of the ‘EBAAD’ (Arabic word for people) to care about the whole society. Money is never enough. Not today not tomorrow. (laughs)”*

Also, a company good will and reputation has been identified as positive in many ways like high morale, productivity, decreased employee turn overs and even higher applicants and alike. The findings of this research confirm association between CSR and corporate reputation. The study has also found a significant association between CSR and employee engagement (Kim and Scullion, 2013; Ali, Khan, & Rehman, 2013; Kim & Kim, 2020; Liu et al., 2021). It is evident from the literature that CSR can be source of employees’ satisfaction, its commitment as well as devotion (Aguilera et al., 2007; Brammer et al., 2007; Ali et al., 2013; Pradhan et al., 2021).

### ***CSR activities and employee performance***

Since 1960’s, the debate on CSR and performance is going on without a solid conclusion (Lee et al., 2018; Kim & kim, 2020). Among these the majority of the studies in the literature have been conducted for developed economies rather than developing countries. However, the need for CSR initiatives is even stronger in the developing world (He, et al., 2019; Naqvi, 2021). It also concludes that multinational companies are more likely to adopt CSR than those operating solely in their home (He et al., 2019; Kim & Kim, 2020).

The impact of CSR on performance with respect to the customer’s perceptions and intentions has been prominent in the academic literature. Yet, there have been insufficient evidence for examinations of CSR and its potential impact on employees (Su & Swanson, 2019; Lee et al., 2018). Employees of the organization are one of the most important stakeholders, and CSR activities tends to build a positive image of employees’ perceptions of a firm (Lee et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2018). It influences job performance factors such as job satisfaction, customer orientation, commitment, motivation (Kim et al., 2018).

It is seen that CSR can be useful in ways to help employees by satisfying their psychological need of



belongingness. It is because it inspires the social relationships, both inside and between organizations (Aguilera et al., 2007; Nguyen et al., 2018; He et al., 2020). It is a common perception that socially responsible organizations would be a fair organization. Subsequently, employees see their company as more trust worthy. They also sense the support, the deep connection and relationships with the company as well as its management. They take pride in it and feel affiliation so they tend to perform in a parallel way that seems beneficial and fruitful for the company. This study also found positive relationship between CSR actions and employee organizational commitment and motivation and performance.

It portrays that organizations can augment their worker's organizational commitment by involvement in social activities for instance; recognizing needs of the community and achieving them, striving for better environment, connecting in employee welfare, producing eminence products for customers and conforming with government rules and regulations and working within lawful ambiance (Busch & Friede, 2018). Another interviewee observed:

*"I got an international exposure while working here, is not this a reason to look at, this is a place from where I can groom, I can learn even more. Most interestingly, I don't feel any workload despite a hectic job".*

Another comment regarding this was:

*"[...] we are owned, the organization own us and pull us, literally, for upward growth"*

Organizations' indulgence in corporate social responsibility activities positively impacts employees' attitude towards the organization resulting into better level of organizational belongingness and job satisfaction among them that, in turn, is likely to improve organizational productivity (Bashir, Hassan, & Cheema, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2020). CSR programs have a strong influence on employees' behavior as regards their organizational commitment, intention to stay, positive word-of-mouth reports, job performance and CSR championing behavior (Samanta, 2013). Empirical findings demonstrated that CSR had a positive effect on employee motivation, as mediated by supervisors' ethical leadership (Gao, Gao, He, & He, 2017). Likewise, it is established that corporations with upper level of status of doing well also tends to enjoy having higher level of employee motivation and engagement.

## CONCLUSION

The overall assessment and research on this relationship (between CSR and employee internal motivation) are in line with the previous literature. Also, it showed some evidence which are positive for the overall performance of the organizations. With the advancement and development in the field of social sciences and other applied sciences day by day, the concepts and theories pertaining to the areas are also getting refined and are widely used. With this evolution, management sciences also not lag and is continuously achieving benchmarks (He et al., 2020).

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), although a late joiner to the general philosophies of management sciences, has also continuously been growing in its standing and overall significance.

Corporate social responsibility and the other interrelated concepts, i.e., social performance, social responsiveness, corporate citizenship, have been a part of studies in management for over five decades. This emerging consciousness is making the experts to innovate new strategies and researchers to test and validate the concept of CS (He et al., 2020).

The findings and analysis of this study also suggests that employees intellectualize CSR on diverse perspectives. These varied perspectives cover broadly as the extent and level of communication with its environment and how morally and ethically it delivers benefit to its stakeholders (through its products and services). The higher level of CSR mediations and reputation of doing well can be beneficial and attract dedicated employees with higher levels of engagement (Ali et al., 2013; Shakil et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2021). The external motivation aids to keep a person on job, but for more effective performance, internal motivation is essential. There is a positive link between CSR activities and stakeholders. Thus, this study in this manner, tried to examine how CSR actions upshot internal employee motivation and how the company's CSR deeds influence employees' diverse and positive responses.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

This study is another building block in the literature on CSR and employee motivation and it proposes various managerial implementations for professionals as well. The impact of CSR related activities on the overall output of the company can be manipulated through regulating the degree of employee motivation. The results of the study can help Decision makers and strategists can have an insight about setting their priorities regarding the employees and the other stakeholders of the society. In this materialized age, there are people, who are willing to come a step forward and work for the community and people.

The findings also can help managers and they can use the CSR strategies to fuel the employee's motivation and ultimately will reap benefits for the organization. The crux of the study and prime most implication in practical sense is for the managers of the organizations. Managers may well use the outcomes of the research to overcome practical dilemmas. This can be done by giving importance to the areas of CSR, specifically focusing on employee internal motivation and performance enhancement. While contributing towards the CSR literature, this particular study gives an insight of how organizational staff and employee feel about CSR as a concept and its outcomes.

Only internal motivation is considered for investigation in this study, which is the limitation of this research. Both evaluating both internal as well as external motivation can be checked in the future studies. Aspirants of CSR-motivation research can also explore the internal as well as external aspects of CSR related to internal and external motivation. Last but not the least, the adverse impacts of CSR related activities can be assessed in future for a better comparison and a multiple view on this particular topic. Furthermore, quantitative aspects can also be well explored in the upcoming research.

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