

# Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee Engagement in the Workplace: The Moderating Role of Employee Generation

C. Christopher Lee

*Department of Management and Organization, School of Business, Central Connecticut State University, USA*

Keshab Acharya\*

*Department of Management and Organization, School of Business, Central Connecticut State University, USA*

Youngseon Kim

*Department of Marketing, School of Business, Central Connecticut State University, USA*

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## Abstract

This study aims to examine the impact of internal and external corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on employees' work engagement. Additionally, it examines the varying effects of this relationship across three employee generations: Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. In order to examine these relationships, a survey was conducted among 546 employees using a self-administered questionnaire. The results indicate that the level of work engagement among employees is contingent upon the specific CSR initiatives undertaken by firms. Among these, environmental CSR exerts the most pronounced effect on work engagement, followed in order by product responsibility, human rights and labor-related CSR, and community engagement. Furthermore, employee generation moderates the relationship between CSR and employee engagement.

Keywords: Work Engagement, Corporate Social Responsibility, Employee Generation

JEL Classification: M10, M12, M14, M54

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\* Corresponding author

*E-mail address:* keshab.acharya@ccsu.edu

*Address:* Department of Management and Organization, School of Business, Central Connecticut State University, 1615 Stanley Street, New Britain, CT 06050-4010, USA

## 1. Introduction

Employees' work engagement is indicative of a positive state of their well-being (Schaufeli et al., 2002). It can bolster their job satisfaction and overall performance (Mishra, 2014). As such, fostering high levels of engagement is essential for superior business outcomes and success. The topic of work engagement has garnered substantial interest in management literature due to its potential to enhance numerous outcomes for both employees and organizations (Kundi et al., 2022). This growing interest underscores the importance of comprehensively understanding the factors driving its development (Kundi et al., 2022; Matsuo, 2019).

One factor contributing to the enhancement of employee engagement within organizations is the implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Lee, 2021). Employees exhibit genuine enthusiasm in firms that implement CSR (Boadi et al., 2019). Employees who resonate deeply with their company's CSR efforts typically exhibit heightened engagement compared to those who don't (Bernardino, 2021). Enhanced employee engagement can lead to reduced turnover, higher productivity, and increased profitability. In turn, this improved profitability can attract investors and boost the stock price. Dornean and Oanea (2017) demonstrated that companies embracing CSR practices tend to have higher average stock prices and dividends than those that do not. It is thus important to assess the impact of a company's CSR initiatives on its employees' work engagement (Tsourvakas and Yfantidou, 2018).

A plethora of studies have explored the impact of CSR on employee engagement (Islam et al., 2019; Johnson and McCarthy, 2015; Smith, 2018). However, to the best of our knowledge, not many studies have explored the influences of external CSR (e.g., environmental CSR, community engagement) and internal CSR (e.g., human rights and labor, product responsibility, and corporate governance) initiatives together on employees' engagement in the workplace. Moreover, there appears to be limited research examining the potential moderating role of employee generation in the influence of CSR on work engagement.

This research seeks to enrich the existing literature by exploring the relationship between CSR and employee work engagement, considering various CSR initiatives and employee generations. Specifically, drawing upon Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement, we explore how different external and internal CSR initiatives impact employee engagement. Moreover, we examine how these relationships might differ among three employee generations: Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. We first present the relevant literature with an overview of Kahn's theory of employee engagement and, subsequently, our hypotheses. Then, we present the research method and report findings. Finally, the implications of this research and its limitations are presented along with future research avenues.

## 2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

### 2.1. Theory of Employee Engagement

Kahn (1990) conceptualizes employee engagement as the extent of employees’ involvement and commitment to their work. Specifically, he defines employee engagement as the “simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s “preferred self” in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full role performances” (Kahn, 1990: 700). He suggests that certain psychological conditions need to be met for employees to fully engage in their role performance. These conditions include psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability. Psychological meaningfulness refers to the degree to which employees derive meaning from their work and feel valued in their organization. Psychological safety refers to employees’ sense of security to use their “self” without repercussion for their self-image, status, or career. Psychological availability involves employees’ belief that they have the physical, emotional, and psychological resources needed to perform their work role.

In this study, we argue that a firm’s CSR efforts will enhance employees’ psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability, leading to increased work engagement. If an organization aligns with or exceeds widely accepted CSR norms, its employees will likely find greater meaning in their work and experience psychological safety (Kahn, 1990). On the other hand, if the organization does not meet these CSR norms, its employees may face feelings of anxiety, frustration, and reduced psychological safety (Kahn, 1990). Employees’ interpretations of their company activities can differ. This interpretation can influence their psychological conditions (meaningfulness, safety, and availability) and their level of work engagement (Saks and Gruman, 2014). Therefore, we also propose that an employee’s generation influences their interpretation of the company’s CSR practices, causing a differential impact on their work engagement. Figure 1 illustrates the research model proposed in this study. Next, we present our hypotheses about the relationships of CSR practices to work engagement and the moderating role of employee generation in these relationships.

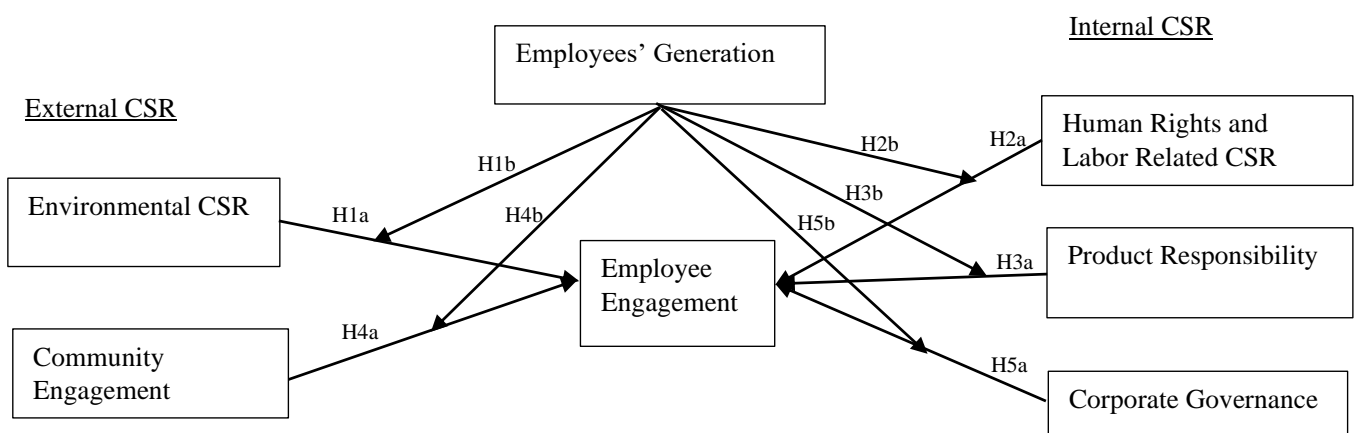


Figure 1. Research Framework

## 2.2. Environmental CSR

Implementing various CSR activities is known to enhance employees' perceptions of their business organization (Antony, 2018). CSR activities, including environmental CSR, can inspire employees to produce a higher quality of work, remain loyal to the organization, and become emotionally attached to the company (Antony, 2018). For instance, employees with greater empathy are more likely to identify with their company and exhibit pro-environmental behavior, especially when they recognize the positive impact of their organization's CSR efforts (Islam et al., 2019). Such identification often prompts employees to engage more in their organization's goal pursuit and CSR practices (Ashforth et al., 2008; De Roeck et al., 2016; Sariol & Acharya, 2018). Conversely, if an organization overlooks environmental issues or commits environmental violations, employees might feel unsafe and be less motivated to engage in their work (Abebe and Acharya, 2022; Abebe et al., 2020). Research indicates that an organization's investments in environmental CSR and sustainability can lead to positive financial outcomes and strengthen relationships with both employees and external stakeholders (Dick et al., 2019). Therefore, we predict the following:

***H1a: Environmental CSR positively impacts employees' work engagement.***

The literature documents considerable differences in attitudes among employees of different generations (Rank and Contreras, 2021; Wisse et al., 2015). Relevant research shows that an employee's generation can influence a range of attitudes and behaviors, including job satisfaction (Wisse et al., 2015), work engagement (Lee et al., 2021), leadership motivation, and CSR perception (Rank and Contreras, 2021). Scholars have also explored how generational differences among employees affect their views on environmental issues. Employees from older generations often take pride in their work and prioritize fulfilling their responsibilities (Wey Smola and Sutton, 2002). Moreover, older and younger employees differ in certain personality traits; for instance, traits such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability tend to rise with age (Roberts et al., 2006). These traits might steer employees from older generations towards pro-environmental actions such as efficient resource use, energy conservation, and recycling (Wiernik et al., 2016). A meta-analysis reveals that age is somewhat positively correlated with pro-environmental behaviors (Wiernik et al., 2016). In other words, older workers are typically more environmentally responsible than younger workers. Leveson and Joiner (2014) examined the significance of CSR work values in Generation Y workers and their preferences concerning social responsibility and job choice decisions. They found that while Generation Y valued CSR highly in job selection scenarios, a significant majority were willing to sacrifice it for other advantages, with environmental concerns ranking last in their job choice considerations. Therefore, we predict:

***H1b: Employees' generation moderates the effect of environmental CSR on employees' work engagement, such that environmental CSR is more positively related to the work engagement of older generations.***

### **2.3. Human Rights and Labor-related CSR**

The literature indicates that individuals place varied emphasis on different human rights issues when making decisions to purchase, work, invest, or support community operations for socially responsible organizations (Puncheva-Michelotti et al., 2009). Employee rights and consumer rights are particularly important areas of CSR (Obara and Peattie, 2018). The extent to which employees' human rights are protected influences the potential employee's consideration of the company as their potential employer. When a company upholds robust human rights practices, employees often commend their company's fairness and justice initiatives (Saks, 2006). In turn, they aim to reciprocate their company's equitable treatment by excelling in their job roles (Saks, 2006). As a result, robust human rights practices might inspire employees to be more engaged in their work. Cheruiyot and Maru (2014) found that human rights practices, which they termed- corporate human rights social responsibility, led to favorable outcomes such as employee retention, satisfaction, commitment, and pride. Accordingly, we propose:

***H2a:** Human rights and labor-related CSR positively impacts work engagement.*

Employees' perceptions about human rights and labor-related CSR may vary across generations. In fact, past empirical studies report that Generation Y differs in their views on internal CSR (e.g., human rights practices) from Generation X (Rank and Contreras, 2021). Moreover, individuals tend to become more sensitive to human rights issues as they age (e.g., Beji et al., 2021). We contend that employees place greater importance on human rights as they get older. Therefore, we predict:

***H2b:** Employees' generation moderates the effect of human rights and labor-related CSR on work engagement, such that human rights and labor-related CSR is more positively related to the work engagement of older generations.*

### **2.4. Product Responsibility**

A company's commitment to product responsibility (e.g., providing accurate product information and CSR labels) can lead to positive organizational and job-related outcomes. This commitment may enhance employee engagement (Carrero and Valon, 2012). Specifically, product responsibility could elevate self-esteem among employees, making them feel proud of their company and prompting them to engage more actively in their work. For example, one study demonstrates that retailers that provide consumers with responsible offerings and clear product information tend to achieve higher levels of employee engagement (Carrero and Valon, 2012). Another study shows that flight attendants identified proudly with their organizations when they saw their company diligently adhering to public health and safety guidelines during the pandemic (Kang et al., 2021). Thus, we propose a positive relationship between product responsibility and work engagement. Formally, we hypothesize:

***H3a:** Product responsibility positively relates to the work engagement of employees.*

Research indicates generational differences in preferences for product responsibility (Pencarelli et al., 2020; Severo, de Guimaraes, and Dorion, 2018). Studies also underscore the importance of tailoring product-related CSR strategies (e.g., product sustainability) to demographic characteristics (Pencarelli et al., 2020). For example, Severo et al. (2018) found that baby boomers possessed more knowledge and considered product-related CSR issues (e.g., cleaner production and eco-innovation) more crucial for fostering environmental awareness and promoting sustainable consumption than the other generations. Generation Y, in contrast, perceived such product-related CSR issues as the least important. Based on this, we propose:

**H3b:** *Employees' generation moderates the effect of product responsibility on work engagement, such that product responsibility is more positively related to the work engagement of older generations.*

## 2.5. Community Engagement

Community engagement, a dimension of external CSR, reflects a company's genuine goodwill towards its community (Norfolk, 2020). This type of engagement may influence employees' work engagement. Indeed, positive perceptions of external CSR, such as community engagement, have been found to enhance work engagement through increased organizational pride (Jia et al., 2019). When an organization is committed to helping the society in which it operates, it often signals that the company acts not out of opportunism but with fairness towards its employees (Chaudhary and Akhouri, 2018). In essence, a company's community engagement uplifts its employees' work engagement and creative endeavors (Chaudhary and Akhouri, 2018). Moreover, if a firm earnestly addresses community issues with high moral urgency, employees are likely to view these efforts favorably (Opoku-Dakwa, 2018). Such positive perceptions can further elevate employee engagement (Opoku-Dakwa, 2018). Thus, we hypothesize:

**H4a:** *Community engagement relates positively to work engagement.*

Younger employees often show greater interest in community engagement activities, such as volunteering and supporting local welfare initiatives, than their older counterparts (Leveson and Joiner, 2014). They may possess a profound aspiration for better communities, benefiting both the current and future generations (Chaudhary, 2017). The younger generations are keen to witness significant societal transformation (Abdelhalim and Eldin, 2019). As a result, they are likely to view a company's CSR initiatives as genuine when the focus is on community-related activities (Kim and Austin, 2019). This perspective aligns with findings that a firm's commitment to sustainable development, especially its involvement in community welfare and social progression programs, resonates strongly with younger generations (Abdelhalim and Eldin, 2019). Thus, we propose:

**H4b:** *Employees' generation moderates the effect of community engagement on work engagement, such that community engagement is more positively related to the work engagement of younger generations.*

## 2.6. Corporate Governance

Strong corporate governance practices, such as transparency and anti-corruption measures, demonstrate a company's commitment to ethical behavior. Because ethics carries emotional weight (Hettihewa et al., 2019), employees place significant value on such commitments (Hassan and Ahmed, 2011). Corporate governance can also enhance employees' psychological capital and work engagement (Niswaty et al., 2021). If an organization fails to disclose its governance information, employees might suspect it does not meet societal expectations (Kamal, 2021). In a study among FTSE 100 companies, Aras and Crowther (2008) found that corporations with robust corporate governance structures fostered more positive relationships with their employees. It is worth noting that management typically has considerable discretion regarding the content and presentation of information in their annual reports (Huang et al., 2022). Kamal (2021) found that low-power stakeholders, such as employees, prefer comprehensive governance information disclosure through public media and express dissatisfaction with limited or superficial disclosures. Thus, we hypothesize:

*H5a: Corporate governance positively relates to work engagement.*

Research indicates that corporations should improve the transparency of their current governance practices to attract younger employees and maintain the engagement of existing ones (Juliyanti and Wibowo, 2020; Van Marrewijk, 2003; Wylonis, 2021). Younger generations are known to prioritize robust and transparent governance practices (Juliyanti and Wibowo, 2020; Wylonis, 2021). A recent survey documented that over 84% of millennials in the U.S. were more loyal to organizations they perceived as being more transparent in governance practices (Wylonis, 2021). Thus, we propose:

*H5b: Employees' generation moderates the effect of corporate governance on employees' work engagement, such that corporate governance is more positively related to the work engagement of younger generations.*

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Sample and Data Collection

In order to test our hypotheses, we conducted a survey drawing from two distinct pools of respondents. The majority of our data, accounting for 570 responses, was collected via Amazon Mechanical Turk. In addition, 39 responses were obtained from senior undergraduates and MBA students at a public university in the New England region. We set eligibility criteria for respondents, requiring them to be employed and at least 18 years old. From the data collected from these two sources, we initially had 609 valid responses. We excluded 9 repeated responses, 24 responses with multiple missing values, and 30 responses with poor response quality. Consequently, our analysis incorporated 546 responses: 136 from Generation Z employees (24.9%), 307 from Generation Y (56.2%), 87 from Generation X (15.9%), and 16 from Baby Boomers (2.9%).

## **3.2. Measures**

### **3.2.1. Dependent Variable**

#### **3.2.1.1. Employee engagement**

Schaufeli et al. (2006) developed an employee engagement scale with three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Each dimension has three items. We adopted one item per dimension in this study. Those three items are as follows: “I am enthusiastic about my job”, “When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work”, and “I feel happy when I am working intensely.” All the measures used in this study are based on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). The scores were then averaged.

### **3.2.2. Independent Variables**

#### **3.2.2.1. Environmental CSR**

Environmental CSR includes various issues of material use, energy use, water use, biodiversity, emissions, effluents and waste, environmentally friendly products and services, and emissions from transportation (Woo and Jin, 2016). We measured environmental CSR using the items developed by the Global Reporting Initiative (2012). They were also used by Woo (2013). We averaged the following three items to measure Environmental CSR: I think the company I work for tries to – “Take care of water, energy, and material uses”, “Minimize pollutions while producing products/services”, and “Invest to protect environments.”

#### **3.2.2.2. Human rights and labor-related CSR**

The human rights and labor dimension of CSR includes issues such as non-discrimination, freedom of association and collective bargaining, child labor, forced and compulsory labor, security practices, and indigenous rights (Woo and Jin, 2016). Drawing from Global Reporting Initiative (2012) and Woo (2013), we utilized the following three items in the study: I think the company I work for tries to – “Protect human rights at workplaces”, “Allow the freedom of labor union and forbid discrimination”, and “Clarify health care benefits for employees.”

#### **3.2.2.3. Product responsibility**

Product responsibility encompasses many issues, including customer health and safety, honest product labeling, considerable marketing communication, customer privacy, and compliance with regulations (Woo and Jin, 2016). Consistent with Global Reporting Initiative (2012) and Woo (2013), we used the following three items: I think the company I work for tries to – “Clearly label/explain products/services for customers”, “Take care of customer complaints”, and “Maintain customer privacy”.

#### **3.2.2.4. Community engagement**

We measured community engagement using the items developed by Woo and Jin (2016), which were based on the Global Reporting Initiative (2012) index. We selected one item from the social



dimension of CSR and another from the economic dimension of CSR that are most closely related to community engagement. They are as follows: I think the company I work for tries to – “Invest to develop local community welfare”, and “Consider the indirect economic impacts on society.”

### **3.2.2.5. Corporate governance**

We measured corporate governance using the items developed by Woo and Jin (2016). We selected one item from the social dimension and another from the economic dimension of CSR that are most closely related to corporate governance. They are as follows: I think the company I work for tries to – “avoid corruption in business” (corruption management), and “provide the company’s financial information to the public” (transparency in the information of market presence, costs, and profits).

### **3.2.3. Moderating Variable**

#### **3.2.3.1. Employees’ generation**

Employees’ generation is often classified by birth year. We categorized each employee into three generations based on their age in April 2020: Generation Z (18-24 years), Generation Y (25-39 years), and Generation X (40-55 years).

### **3.2.4. Control Variables**

To ensure the robustness of our results, we controlled for employee age and gender. While generation is used as a moderating variable, it’s important to recognize that individuals within the same generation can have up to a 15-year age difference. Given that employee age has been demonstrated to influence work engagement (Douglas and Roberts, 2020), we incorporated the specific age of employees into our analysis as a control variable. Additionally, gender can significantly impact the level of employee engagement (Vuong and Suntrayuth, 2019), prompting us to control for it as well.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Descriptive Statistics**

On a seven-point scale, all variables averaged above 4.5. Human rights and labor-related CSR ( $5.335 \pm 1.325$ ), product responsibility ( $5.665 \pm 1.139$ ), and corporate governance ( $5.082 \pm 1.358$ ) averaged above 5. Employee engagement in the workplace ( $4.893 \pm 1.625$ ), environmental CSR ( $4.535 \pm 1.585$ ), and community engagement ( $4.808 \pm 1.538$ ) averaged close to 5. The average age of the respondents included in this study is approximately 32 years. The sample comprises of nearly equal numbers of male (50.5%) and female (49.5%) respondents.

Correlations between employee engagement and each of the five CSR variables were statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Employee engagement correlated most highly with environmental CSR ( $r = 0.475$ ), followed by human rights and labor-related CSR ( $r = 0.466$ ), community engagement ( $r = 0.450$ ), corporate governance ( $r = 0.395$ ), and product responsibility-related CSR ( $r = 0.331$ ).

A Cronbach's alpha value ranging from 0.5 to 0.7 for a short scale with fewer than five items indicates moderate reliability (Perry et al., 2004). In this study, the corporate governance variable demonstrated moderate reliability ( $\alpha = 0.545$ ). However, alpha values for the other measures are higher than 0.7, suggesting robust internal consistency (Hulin et al., 2001). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, correlations, and Cronbach's alpha values.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Alpha, and Correlations

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Employee Engagement	4.893	1.625	0.904	1										
2. Environmental CSR	4.535	1.585	0.892	0.475***	1									
3. Human Rights and Labor	5.335	1.325	0.781	0.466***	0.540***	1								
4. Product Responsibility	5.665	1.139	0.730	0.331***	0.263***	0.533***	1							
5. Community Engagement	4.808	1.538	0.776	0.450***	0.644***	0.665***	0.366***	1						
6. Corporate Governance	5.082	1.358	0.545	0.395***	0.487***	0.623***	0.449***	0.666***	1					
7. Generation X	0.1642	0.371		0.049	-0.021	0.004	0.065	-0.035	-0.007	1				
8. Generation Y	0.579	0.494		0.035	0.089*	0.059	0.007	0.061	0.08#	-0.520***	1			
9. Generation Z	0.257	0.437		-0.081#	-0.083#	-0.07	-0.063	-0.04	-0.084#	-0.260***	-0.689***	1		
10. Age	31.66	9.744		0.052	0.013	0.003	0.135**	0.006	0.038	0.811***	-0.117**	-0.555***	1	
11. Gender	0.495	0.500		0.048	0.02	0.063	0.104*	0.079#	0.041	0.011	-0.104*	0.109*	-0.005	1

Note: # $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; S.D. = Standard deviation; Alpha = Cronbach's alpha;  $N = 546$ ; Employee gender was coded as 1 for female employees and 0 for male employees

Table 2. Summary of Regression Models

Model	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Data	All Data	All Data	Gen X	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Y	Gen Z	Gen Z
Regression Type	Full	Best-Fit	Full	Best-Fit	Full	Best-Fit	Full	Best-Fit
Constant	0.575 (0.358)	0.739* (0.316)	1.489 (1.967)	0.656 (0.999)	1.354* (0.624)	1.079** (0.388)	-3.455# (1.931)	-0.157 (0.503)
Environmental CSR	0.282*** (0.049)	0.285*** (0.049)	0.308* (0.126)	0.428*** (0.096)	0.280*** (0.065)	0.287*** (0.064)	0.432*** (0.101)	0.411*** (0.090)
Human Rights and Labor	0.180** (0.068)	0.191** (0.066)	0.158 (0.189)		0.071 (0.087)		0.538*** (0.142)	0.517*** (0.101)
Product Responsibility	0.197** (0.063)	0.215*** (0.061)	0.324# (0.194)	0.431* (0.174)	0.225** (0.079)	0.272*** (0.067)	-0.017 (0.125)	
Community Engagement	0.109# (0.062)	0.131* (0.057)	0.195 (0.164)		0.135 (0.082)	0.206** (0.069)	-0.137 (0.116)	
Corporate Governance	0.059 (0.061)		-0.139 (0.171)		0.091 (0.076)		0.104 (0.136)	
Age	0.004 (0.006)		-0.017 (0.036)		-0.014 (0.017)		0.147# (0.086)	
Gender	0.028 (0.116)		0.105 (0.334)		-0.120 (0.147)		0.617* (0.250)	0.646** (0.244)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.321	0.319	0.321	0.291	0.326	0.317	0.456	0.438
R <sup>2</sup> adj	0.312	0.314	0.260	0.274	0.310	0.310	0.425	0.425
F	35.899***	62.640***	5.324***	17.233***	20.394***	46.227***	14.939***	33.465***
N	546	546	87	87	307	307	136	136

Note: # $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; Standard errors of the regression coefficient estimates are reported in parentheses; Employee gender was coded as 1 for female employees and 0 for male employees

#### 4.2. Regression Analysis for All Generations

We utilized two regression approaches- the full model and the best fit model- for each generation and the overall data set. The full regression model incorporated five independent variables: environmental CSR, human rights and labor-related CSR, product responsibility, community engagement, and corporate governance. Additionally, we incorporated two control variables, employee age, and gender, to determine the dependent variable. For further analysis, we developed the best-fit regression model for each generation using the stepwise method. This model was chosen based on the highest adjusted R<sup>2</sup> and includes only those independent variables that have a significant relationship with employee engagement.

As can be seen in Model 1 of Table 1, the first regression model includes the entire dataset (N = 546). The overall model was statistically significant [R<sup>2</sup> = 0.321, R<sup>2</sup><sub>adj</sub> = 0.312, F (7, 531) = 35.899, p < 0.001], explaining 32.1% of the variance in the employee engagement outcome. Environmental CSR (p < 0.001), human rights and labor-related CSR (p < 0.01), and product responsibility (p < 0.01) were significantly related to engagement. Community engagement was marginally significant (p < 0.1), whereas corporate governance showed no statistical significance. Based on the regression coefficient, environmental CSR had the greatest impact on employee engagement (b = 0.282), followed by product responsibility (b = 0.197), human rights and labor-related CSR (b = 0.180), community engagement (b = 0.109), and corporate governance (b = 0.059). Similarly, the best-fit model, shown in Model 2 in Table 2, included four independent variables – environmental CSR, human rights and labor-related CSR, product responsibility, and community engagement, and had the highest adjusted R<sup>2</sup> and was statistically significant [R<sup>2</sup> = 0.319, R<sup>2</sup><sub>adj</sub> = 0.314, F (4, 534) = 62.640, p < 0.001]. Employee engagement was significantly related to environmental CSR (p < 0.001), human rights and labor-related CSR (p < 0.01), product responsibility (p < 0.001), and community engagement (p < 0.05). According to the regression coefficient, environmental CSR had the greatest impact on employee engagement (b = 0.285), followed by product responsibility (b = 0.215), human rights and labor-related CSR (b = 0.191), and community engagement (b = 0.131).

Model 3 of Table 2 assessed the Generation X data using the full model. The overall model was statistically significant [R<sup>2</sup> = 0.321, R<sup>2</sup><sub>adj</sub> = 0.260, F (7,79) = 5.324, p < 0.001], explaining 32.1% of the variance in the employee engagement outcome. Environmental CSR (p < 0.05) was significantly related to engagement. While product responsibility (p < 0.1) was marginally significant, human rights and labor-related CSR, community engagement, and corporate governance were not statistically significant. According to the regression coefficient, environmental CSR had the highest impact on employee engagement (b = 0.308), followed by product responsibility (b = 0.324). The best-fit regression model for Generation X is shown in Model 4 of Table 2. This best-fit model consists of only two independent variables – environmental CSR and product responsibility, and had the highest adjusted R<sup>2</sup>. This model was statistically significant [R<sup>2</sup> = 0.291, R<sup>2</sup><sub>adj</sub> = 0.274, F (2, 84) = 17.233, p < 0.001]. Employee engagement was significantly related to environmental CSR (p < 0.001) and product responsibility (p < 0.05). According to the regression coefficient, product

responsibility had the highest impact on employee engagement ( $b = 0.431$ ), followed by environmental CSR ( $b = 0.428$ ).

The regression Model 5 of Table 2 tested Generation Y data utilizing the full model. The overall model was statistically significant [ $R^2 = 0.326$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = 0.310$ ,  $F(7, 295) = 20.394$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ], explaining 32.6% of the variance in employee engagement. Environmental CSR ( $p < 0.001$ ) and product responsibility ( $p < 0.01$ ) were significantly related to engagement, but human rights and labor-related CSR, community engagement, and corporate governance were not. The regression coefficient indicated that environmental CSR had the greatest impact on employee engagement ( $b = 0.280$ ), followed by product responsibility ( $b = 0.225$ ). Similarly, the best-fit model for Generation Y indicated that the best-fit model included three independent variables, environmental CSR, product responsibility, and community engagement, and had the highest adjusted  $R^2$  and was statistically significant [ $R^2 = 0.317$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = 0.310$ ,  $F(3, 299) = 46.227$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ]. Employee engagement was significantly related to environmental CSR ( $p < 0.001$ ), product responsibility ( $p < 0.001$ ), and community engagement ( $p < 0.01$ ). The regression coefficient revealed that environmental CSR had the greatest influence on employee engagement ( $b = 0.287$ ), followed by product responsibility ( $b = 0.272$ ) and community engagement ( $b = 0.206$ ).

The regression Model 7 of Table 2 examined Generation Z data using the full model. The overall model was statistically significant [ $R^2 = 0.456$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = 0.425$ ,  $F(7, 125) = 14.939$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ] and explained 45.6% of the variance in employee engagement. Environmental CSR and human rights and labor-related CSR ( $p < 0.001$ ) were significantly related to engagement, whereas product responsibility, community engagement, and corporate governance were not. The regression coefficient demonstrated that human rights and labor-related CSR had the greatest impact on employee engagement ( $b = 0.538$ ), followed by environmental CSR ( $b = 0.432$ ). Additionally, the best-fit regression model for Generation Z, as shown in Model 8 of Table 2, indicated that the best-fit model consisted of only two independent variables, environmental CSR and human rights and labor-related CSR, and a control variable, gender. It had the highest adjusted  $R^2$  and was statistically significant [ $R^2 = 0.438$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = 0.425$ ,  $F(3, 129) = 33.465$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ]. Employee engagement was significantly associated with environmental CSR ( $p < 0.001$ ) and human rights and labor-related CSR ( $p < 0.001$ ). The regression coefficient suggested that human rights and labor-related CSR had the most pronounced impact on work engagement ( $b = 0.517$ ), followed by environmental CSR ( $b = 0.411$ ). In this study, all regression models exhibited no serious multicollinearity, with variance inflation factors (VIF) under 10 (Vittinghoff et al., 2012) and condition index (CI) below 30 (Kennedy, 2003) for all models.

### 4.3. Hypotheses Testing

Results for our baseline hypotheses, which examine the impact of various CSR dimensions on employee engagement, are shown in Model 1 of Table 2. The results for the moderating hypotheses, focusing on the influence of employee generation on the relationship between different CSR dimensions and employee engagement, are presented in Models 3, 5, and 7 of Table 2. As can be seen

in Model 1, environmental CSR significantly enhances employee engagement ( $b = 0.282$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1a. This result aligns with previous literature, supporting the notion that environmental CSR positively impacts work engagement (Antony, 2018; Dick et al., 2019; Islam et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2021). Employees tend to support environmental CSR initiatives, such as efforts to safeguard the environment and operational efficiency, based on their perceptions of their companies' environmental strategies (Latif et al., 2022). Organizational endeavors in environmental CSR engagement profoundly influence employee behavior. For instance, research indicates that CSR activities often encourage employees to adopt eco-friendly actions, fostering environmentally conscious and socially responsible behaviors (Latif et al., 2022). This underscores the likelihood of enhanced employee engagement when companies adopt progressive stances on environmental issues. Such initiatives by companies can motivate employees to remain loyal and foster a stronger emotional bond with their organization (Antony, 2018), culminating in heightened work engagement.

The results showed that CSR is positively related to work engagement for Generation X ( $b = 0.308$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), Generation Y ( $b = 0.280$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), and Generation Z ( $b = 0.432$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Analyzing the regression coefficients, while Generation X and Y don't have notable differences in their regression coefficient, Generation Z demonstrates a stronger association with engagement than Generation X and Y. Given these results, Hypothesis 1b, which suggests a stronger positive relationship between environmental CSR and work engagement in older generations, was not supported. While environmental issues are equally important for employees of all generations, it is most important for Generation Z. While generation does indeed moderate the CSR-engagement relationship, the direction was contrary to our predictions. The ongoing climate crisis has intensified in recent times, manifesting in increasingly frequent and devastating events such as storms, droughts, and wildfires. These climatic shifts seem to be deeply influencing the decisions and priorities of the younger generation. As this crisis has worsened over the last couple of years, young employees, especially those from Gen Z, appear to be more sensitive to these issues.

Our evidence supports Hypothesis 2a. The results indicate a significant association between human rights and labor-related CSR and work engagement ( $b = 0.180$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), corroborating prior studies (Albdour and Altarawneh, 2012; Buhmann, 2011; Obara and Peattie, 2018; Puncheva-Michelotti et al., 2009). This signifies that companies safeguarding human rights in workplaces and offering employee benefits, such as healthcare, can foster greater work engagement.

Hypothesis 2b, which suggests that human rights and labor-related CSR is more positively related to the work engagement of older generations, was not supported. No statistical significance between human rights and labor and work engagement of Generation X ( $b = 0.158$ ; n.s.) and Generation Y ( $b = 0.071$ ; n.s.) was detected. However, we found a statistically significant association between human rights-related CSR and Generation Z's work engagement ( $b = 0.538$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Generation does moderate the relationship, but in a direction opposite to our hypothesis. This suggests that Generation Z employees are more aware of human rights and labor-related issues, perhaps because of their greater exposure to the issues of human rights and labor-related issues. This holds

notable significance among Generation Z, as they predominantly turn to the Internet for information and rapid data access (Szymkowiak et al., 2021). Generation Z individuals enjoy better economic well-being, a higher education level, and greater ethnic and racial diversity compared to previous generations (Schroth, 2019). As they transition into adulthood, they possess lesser workforce exposure compared to earlier generations (Schroth, 2019), making them more sensitive to human rights and labor issues in the workplace.

Hypothesis 3a received empirical support. The results showed that product responsibility-related CSR is positively and significantly related to work engagement ( $b = 0.197$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). The result is consistent with the literature (Carrero and Valon, 2012; Kang et al., 2021). These findings suggest the company's commitment to product responsibility can enhance employee engagement, as it may bolster their self-esteem, leading them to take pride in their company and engage more actively in their roles (Carrero and Valon, 2012).

Hypothesis 3b posited that product responsibility-related CSR would exhibit a positive relationship with work engagement for older generations. We found only partial support for this hypothesis. Specifically, Generation X showed a marginal significance to employee engagement ( $b = 0.324$ ;  $p < 0.1$ ), while Generation Y demonstrated a statistically significant association ( $b = 0.225$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). However, the relationship was not significant among Generation Z ( $b = -0.017$ ; n.s.). Indeed, past studies (e.g., Severo et al., 2018) have shown that baby boomers possess a more profound understanding and place higher importance on product-related CSR issues, including cleaner production and eco-innovation, for fostering environmental awareness and promoting sustainable consumption compared to subsequent generations. Our results also hint that millennials also focus on product responsibility-related CSR. Their exposure to ready access to information about the products might have heightened their concern for sustainable practices related to products, aligning them closer to the values of baby boomers.

Hypothesis 4a was supported as community engagement was positively related to work engagement. While our full model suggests that there is a marginally significant ( $b = 0.109$ ;  $p < 0.10$ ) relationship between community engagement and employee work engagement, the best fit model shows a statistically significant ( $b = 0.131$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) relationship. These results are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Chaudhary and Akhouri, 2018), suggesting that community engagement employee work involvement. It appears that when firms actively engage with important community issues, this involvement not only strengthens positive employee perceptions but also elevates their level of engagement (Opoku-Dakwa, 2018).

Hypothesis 4b received only partial support. Analyzing the full model, we did not find a positive link between community engagement and work engagement across younger generation categories (Generation Y and Z). We did not observe any significant relationship between community engagement and work engagement for Generation X ( $b = 0.195$ ; n.s.) and Generation Z ( $b = -0.137$ ; n.s.). While the full model did not indicate a significant connection between community engagement



and work engagement for Generation Y ( $b = 0.135$ , n.s.), the best-fit model revealed a statistically significant association ( $b = 0.206$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Millennials have grown up in a transformative era characterized by profound sociocultural changes (Arriscado, Quesado, and Sousa, 2019). Many individuals within this generation place a high value on a company's value proposition (Arriscado et al., 2019) and their own active civic engagement (Rebori, 2019), seeking work that aligns with their personal beliefs and provides a tangible societal impact. This alignment between personal values and organizational community engagement can foster trust and collaboration, ultimately enhancing work engagement.

Hypothesis 5a was not supported ( $b = 0.059$ ; n.s.) as corporate governance was not positively related to work engagement. Similarly, hypothesis 5b was not supported as corporate governance was not positively related to the work engagement of the younger generation. The results showed no statistical significance between corporate governance and work engagement for all generations. Although corporate governance is vital for ensuring that a company adheres to ethical standards and adopts optimal strategic directions, it might not always resonate with the day-to-day experiences of employees. Given that it primarily involves strategic leaders, such as CEOs and board members, non-executive employees may perceive governance-related initiatives as somewhat abstract. In particular, younger generations may prefer more tangible CSR initiatives—such as those focused on the environment, product responsibility, human rights, labor-related issues, and community engagement—over the more abstract concept of corporate governance. Thus, while corporate governance is crucial for a company's long-term success, its influence on employee work engagement seems limited.

## 5. Discussion and Implications

This study demonstrated that an organization's CSR initiatives can profoundly influence work engagement. We tested our hypotheses through regression analysis and determined that the influence of CSR initiatives on work engagement varies according to the type of CSR initiative. Specifically, environmental CSR has the most substantial impact on work engagement, followed by product responsibility, human rights and labor-related CSR, and community engagement. Furthermore, an employee's generation also affects which CSR initiative has the most influence on them. For Generation X employees, environmental CSR, followed by product responsibility, has the most significant impact on work engagement. For Generation Y employees, the order of influence is environmental CSR, product responsibility, and community engagement. Intriguingly, for Generation Z employees, human rights and labor-related CSR have the most profound impact on work engagement, followed by environmental CSR.

This research not only builds upon previous literature examining the impact of CSR on employee engagement but also contributes to management literature by providing empirical evidence of the importance of CSR initiatives in enhancing work engagement within an organization. By implementing appropriate CSR initiatives, companies can enhance work engagement. This enhanced

engagement can lead to organizational success markers, such as increased productivity and profitability.

Our findings also have important managerial implications. Both the full model and the best-fit model utilized in this study showed that environmental CSR, product responsibility, human rights and labor-related CSR, and community engagement significantly influence work engagement. This indicates that these CSR practices yield positive outcomes for organizations that adopt them. However, with potentially limited resources for various CSR activities, organizations should prioritize their environmental CSR initiatives foremost. Subsequent investments should then be directed toward product responsibility and, human rights and labor-related CSR, based on the specific context of the organization. While community engagement may not carry the same weight as the other factors, it continues to be an essential consideration for business organizations.

Table 3. Executive Recommendations

Priority	All Employees	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z
1.	Environmental CSR	Environmental CSR	Environmental CSR	Human Rights & Labor
2.	Product Responsibility	Product Responsibility	Product Responsibility	Environmental CSR
3.	Human Rights & Labor	N/A	Community Engagement	N/A
4.	Community Engagement	N/A	N/A	N/A

Our results propose different implications for different generations of employees, as can be seen in Table 3. For Generation X, both environmental CSR and product responsibility are important to elevate their work engagement, but if the company should choose one over the other, environmental CSR is the one to focus on first. When considering Generation Y employees, the company should put environmental CSR first, followed by product responsibility and then community engagement as the priority for their CSR strategy. For Generation Z, both human rights and labor-related CSR and environmental CSR have significant impacts on work engagement, with the former having the biggest impact. Thus, when considering Generation Z employees, business organizations should put human rights and labor-related CSR first when prioritizing their CSR strategy.

## 6. Conclusion

This study sought to examine the impact of internal and external CSR initiatives on employees' work engagement and to understand the differential effects of this relationship across three employee generations: Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. The findings indicate that CSR policies, programs, and practices related to environmental CSR, human rights and labor-related CSR, product responsibility, and community engagement can significantly enhance work engagement. Heightened work engagement is crucial for the ongoing success of business organizations. This engagement can lead to reduced absenteeism and turnover and an elevated quality of work. Cumulatively, these

advantages increase productivity, which, in turn, can raise profits and enhance the organization's stock value.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations, which provide avenues for future research. First, this study does not include different types of employee engagement but only considers a general category of employee engagement. Future studies could consider specific types of employee engagement, such as job engagement and organizational engagement. Second, we examined employee generation as the only moderating variable. Future research could explore additional moderating variables such as education, years employed with a company, and cultural context. Third, we used multiple regression analyses to examine the hypotheses. Future studies could employ other statistical approaches such as path analysis, factor analysis, structural equation model (SEM), and Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM). Finally, future research could examine these relationships with a more representative sample or in the not-for-profit sector.

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