
Boosting organizational identification through environmental CSR

Boosting OI
through
environmental
CSR

The role of employee empathy in driving pro-environmental behavior

61

Commercial benefits can be extracted from an organization's pursuit of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activity, while at the same time specifically localized motivational factors influence organizations to pay more attention to their people's environmental behaviors. In Pakistan, for example, an increased impetus for organizations to improve their environment has accompanied positive progress in the country's prevention of terrorism.

A research paper by Talat Islam *et al.* (2019) explores how organizations promote CSR-related pro-environmental behavior (PEB), as well as the roles that employee empathy and levels of organizational identification (OI) play in employees' engagement with environmental issues in the workplace context. Data for the study were gathered from questionnaires completed by 201 pairs of supervisors and their subordinates working in four and five star hotels in the Pakistan cities of Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad.

The pro-environmental behavior landscape

Environmental damage caused by business operations can be mitigated when organizations decide to engage their people in PEB, which is the concept of conscious, voluntary behavior that's focused on reducing negative environmental impacts. Engaging in such behavior links with how CSR activities influence an organization's level of financial success, their reputation, and their external and internal brand. Empathy is a term for how people internalize and process the feelings of the people they encounter. As such, empathy can be harnessed as a source of moral engagement that increases ethical behavior in employees. The psychology driving empathy tells us that employees with a high level of empathy will be more pre-disposed to helping others, by modifying their actions to support societal concerns about environmental damage. Likewise, the flipside of the psychology of empathy is that employees with low level empathy have little capacity to internalize concern for the well-being of others.

OI refers to the level to which an employee aligns themselves psychologically with the values exuded by the organization they work for. For example, CSR activity is attractive for engagement and recruitment purposes, because it has the effect of making employees feel good about being associated with the company. An employee's positive internal perception of the company and their view of others perceiving the company positively feeds a sense of pride in their employer's reputation. This experience rewards the employee personally by boosting their self-esteem. Therefore by growing their capacity to generate stronger feelings of pride in their employees, companies can add commercial value through elevating their distinctiveness.



The interrelation of CSR, PEB, OI and empathy

Based on the respondents being asked to score their agreement with statements like “I am a person who properly disposes of electronic waste,” the results revealed a general trend that high-empathy employees demonstrate more PEB and OI when they witness or learn about their organization engaging in CSR activities that help the environment. Addressing the five predictions made by the study, the specific relationships between the concepts of CSR, PEB, OI and empathy were uncovered as follows:

- (1) That company CSR activity being perceived by an employee does have a positive effect on that employee’s OI, as environmentally responsible employers are more attractive to be associated with.
- (2) That the relationship between perceived CSR and OI is affected by employee empathy levels. From this perspective, empathy can be classed as a boundary condition for evolving employees’ workplace behavior relating to the environment.
- (3) That OI positively associates with PEB. Employees feeling as if they’re truly part of an organization facilitates the achievement of commercial goals, and a PEB-related success factor is aligning the employee’s and the organization’s values on issues such as environmental degradation. Since PEB increases financial performance, companies who successfully build OI benefit from more engaged employees who’re proud of their organization yielding higher job performance and creative output.
- (4) That OI levels do determine how CSR activity translates to workplace PEB. The company’s environmental stance and practices can be transparently and consistently communicated to employees through their various policies, which in turn influences how those employees identify with their organization. Hence, greater OI manifests greater PEB from those employees.
- (5) That the association between CSR and PEB is affected by empathy. An observable environmental benefit of empathetic individuals is their increased tendency to engage in PEB, in contrast to the environmentally careless behavior demonstrated by low-empathy employees.

Unlocking the benefits of workplace PEB

The study’s findings help managers understand how employees arrive at a position of reciprocal behavior and provide insights for employers in strategically influencing PEB among employees. A good strategy for managers to action is to consistently communicate the organization’s CSR activities to employees, and to include employees in conducting these wherever possible. This can be done in the form of workshops or meetings, all of which tap into the explored range of performance and engagement-related benefits, as well as offering significant cost saving opportunities for the business on a rolling basis. As a final action point, the authors recommend that managers invest in delivering empathy training seminars to their teams to elevate the empathy levels they adopt in their work. Implementing this soft skill-boosting strategy should increase PEB and unlock the value of its associated commercial benefits.

Commentary

The review is based on “Environmental CSR and pro-environmental behaviors to reduce environmental dilapidation: the moderating role of empathy” (2019). This research paper concentrates on how employee empathy and organizational identification (OI) levels impact

pro-environmental behavior (PEB) in employees when they perceive their employer engaging in CSR activities. The findings reveal that high-empathy employees desirably exhibit PEB, as a result of feeling greater identification with an organization that's involved in CSR initiatives. Increasing employee empathy levels therefore emerges as an actionable success factor.

Reference

Islam, T., Ali, G. and Asad, H. (2019), "Environmental CSR and pro-environmental behaviors to reduce environmental dilapidation: the moderating role of empathy", *Management Research Review*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 332-351, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-12-2017-0408>