
Guest editorial: Microfoundations of CSR and sustainable performance

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Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to the firm's actions and policies that are context-specific and take into consideration the expectations of the stakeholders and the triple bottom line (TBL: [Aguinis, 2011](#)). Organizational intention to engage in CSR could be for several reasons, including institutional pressure ([Sharma and Henriques, 2005](#)), market competitiveness ([Bansal and Roth, 2000](#)), top management commitment ([Muller and Kolk, 2010](#)), personal values of leaders ([Mudrack, 2007](#)), organizational justice ([Rupp, 2011](#)) and leader's ideology ([Hafenbrädl and Waeger, 2017](#); [Kang et al., 2016](#)). This suggests that CSR is characteristically a multifaceted phenomenon comprising viewpoints related to both institutions and individuals ([Panagopoulos et al., 2016](#)). However, CSR as an academic inquiry has primarily been studied at the macro (i.e. organizational or institutional level) than the micro level (i.e. individual level) ([Aguinis and Glavas, 2012](#)). The literature on the macro-level perspectives of CSR is fully developed. At the same time, the micro-level inquiry into the CSR discipline remains underdeveloped, which calls for further scientific research ([Alhmoudi et al., 2022](#)).

Past literature from the microfoundational lens suggests that the firm's engagement in CSR activities results in positive outcomes, namely, employee organizational attachment, lower employee turnover ([Lee et al., 2013](#)), and employee well-being ([Singhapakdi et al., 2015](#)). However, microfoundations of CSR have not received adequate attention from the research community ([Gond et al., 2017](#)). At the same time, the linkages between microfoundations of CSR and sustainable business performance remain at its nascent stage ([Glavas, 2016](#); [Glavas and Kelley, 2014](#); [Rupp and Mallory, 2015](#); [Gond et al., 2017](#)) that calls for rigorous research studies. Thus, the knowledge gap in the extant literature that calls for rigorous research at micro levels – the individual and the team – to investigate underlying mechanisms using different methodological approaches ([Aguinis and Glavas, 2012](#)) link microfoundations of the CSR with TBL ([Singh et al., 2019, 2020](#)).

Based on the literature mentioned above, we note that the research on microfoundations of CSR and its linkages with a firm's TBL is scarce, resulting in a substantial knowledge gap that necessitates rigorous research inquiries to bridge the existing gap in the literature. Therefore, we have conceptualized this special issue (SI), intending to tie together varied microfoundational threads of CSR and understand their influences on how firms should design and implement processes, mechanisms and systems to take care of “people, planet and profit”. That calls upon organizations in operations across the globe to engage in continuous renewal processes by leveraging the microfoundations of CSR to develop their dynamic capabilities for successful performance on all three levels – the economic, the social and the environmental. In this SI, we invited papers focusing on CSR's microfoundations for sustainable performance using multidisciplinary, multi-stage, multilevel and multi-temporal model analyses in various settings across different political geographies. This SI-call for papers was widely received. In the end, we found the six articles, after standard reviews and revisions that have the potential to advance and expand theory and practice in the field of microfoundations of CSR and sustainable performance of the firms.

The first paper is titled “Employees' reactions to CSR perception and disclosure in the presence of multilevel contingencies”. In this study, [Mahmood et al. \(2023\)](#) examine how and



when firm-level CSR translates into individual-level attitudes and behaviors of employees under cross-level boundary conditions of firm-level family ownership and group-level ethical leadership. They found that an employee's identification with the organization mediates the relationships between firms' CSR disclosure and employees' innovative job performance at an individual employee level.

The second paper, titled "CSR authenticity and microfoundations of business: a systematic review," addressed the need to synthesize past research on CSR authenticity so that firms can plan, design and implement CSR policies and propose directions for future research. In this study, [Hassan et al. \(2023\)](#) found several micro, macro and meso-level causes and consequences of CSR authenticity and suggested directions for future research.

The next paper is titled "Independent director-CEO friendliness and sustainable growth capability in enterprises: the moderating role of CSR and executive compensation," wherein [Liu et al. \(2023\)](#) found that independent director-CEO friendliness predicts the sustainable growth capability of an organization. This study also found that the positive relationship between independent director-CEO friendliness and the firm's sustainable growth capability becomes stronger with higher executive compensation in the Chinese context.

The fourth paper, "On the micro-foundations of corporate social responsibility: a perspective based on dynamic managerial capabilities" by [Chen et al. \(2023\)](#), deals with managerial cognition, managerial human capital and managerial social capital as individual-level microfoundations influence a firm's CSR. This study's findings contribute to the microfoundation of CSR literature and advance the understanding of whether and how top managers influence CSR engagement.

The penultimate paper is titled "Investigating the impacts of microlevel CSR activities on firm sustainability: mediating role of CSR performance and moderating role of top management support" in the Indian context. In this study, [Chatterjee et al. \(2023\)](#) found that micro-level CSR activities impact enterprise CSR performance under the moderating influence of top management support.

Finally, the last paper, titled "Doing well by doing good: why is investing in university social responsibility a good business for higher education institutions cross-culturally?" bridges the gap in the CSR literature by establishing a link between the microfoundations of CSR and sustainable business performance. In this study, [El-Kassar et al. \(2023\)](#) found that social responsibility initiatives engaged by the university help increase student satisfaction and alumni loyalty through student-university identification, perceived university image and service quality. They further note that when university social responsibility is incorporated at the center of its strategy, it complements its teaching and research goals, satisfies stakeholders' expectations and increases competitiveness and sustainable performance.

Last but not the least, we hope that the readers will like reading these six papers and find value in the contributions of these studies to advance and expand the theory and practice of the microfoundations of CSR for a firm's sustainable performance.

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