

## Charting new terrains: How CSR initiatives shape employee creativity and contribute to UN-SDGs in a knowledge-driven world



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### ABSTRACT

The relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and employee creativity has become more critical than ever for companies, such as in regards to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs) in today's knowledge intensive economy. This paper aims to examine this relationship by emphasizing the affective and cognitive processes that CSR influences creativity through. Our analysis in Pakistan's hospitality sector expands on this by pointing to the happiness and creative self-efficacy of employees as the mediated variables in this relationship, whereas polychronicity is the moderating variable. The data was collected from 409 employees working in upscale hotels in Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi by incorporating a three-wave survey technique, which makes the study more reliable and valid. The analysis was conducted using SMART-PLS software, which is effective in regards to analyzing complex models and is best suited for exploratory research. The findings show that CSR can boost employee creativity, which is a key driver in regards to attaining the UN-SDGs, when it is incorporated in a genuine manner. This study provides appropriate theoretical extensions by connecting CSR and creativity with the emotional and cognitive variables, which contributes to the existing literature regarding how CSR initiatives can foster innovation. This study offers recommendations for organizations that are interested in promoting creativity among their staff and contributing to global sustainability. We argue that increasing the positive emotional climate and enhancing the perceived creativity for change of employees are the strategies that would help in regards to advancing sustainable and innovative practices, which is consistent with the notion that CSR is best aligned with the UN-SDGs. These findings provide a strong rationale in regards to linking CSR with an organization's strategic goals and objectives in order to create sustainability as well as promote innovation. This study highlights the role of CSR in regards to stimulating change and building solutions that respond to the global aspiration for sustainable development.

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### Introduction

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs) are the world's largest plan of actions that are aimed at tackling the most urgent problems of the contemporary world by 2030. The UN-SDGs are comprehensive, because they address 17 goals, which include poverty, hunger, inequality, environment, world peace, and justice. These goals represent a global appeal in order to eradicate poverty, protect the earth, and foster sustainable development for all. They are integrated with economic development, social justice, and environmental preservation (United Nations, 2015). The UN-SDGs

are external objectives as well as internal elements that align sustainability concepts with an organization's competitiveness and development in the context of a knowledge-based economy (Ahmad, Samad & Mahmood, 2024; Ramakrishna et al., 2022). For example, Goal 8 is linked to decent work and economic growth, which is of primary concern to organizational practices, whereas Goal 9 focuses on industry, innovation, and infrastructure, which means that innovation is important in the knowledge economy. Goal 12, which is about responsible consumption and production, and Goal 13, which is about climate action, put the focus on the need to establish and practice sustainable business models that have low impacts on the environment and efficiently use resources.

Employee creativity is one of the leading forces in the context of a sustainable and innovative approach (Ahmad et al., 2022b). It drives organizational innovation and competitiveness (Bin Saeed et al.,

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2019; Guo, Ahmad, Adnan, Scholz & Naveed, 2021), and it also transforms into the key enabler in regards to aligning business practices towards achieving the UN-SDGs. Innovative minds, which are capable of creating disruptive solutions and anticipating market shifts, enable organizations in order to effectively navigate the challenges of orchestrating business activities according to sustainable development goals (Chaudhary et al., 2018). Some examples include Google's 20% time and Apple's strict emphasis on creativity under Steve Jobs, which demonstrate the importance of innovation in regards to achieving and maintaining business success and insinuating the possibility of directing these innovations towards sustainability. Solutions in these creative contexts that align with one or more of the SDGs may be discovered, which support organizational objectives as well as contribute to global improvement. Of the question regarding how to establish the brand's individuality within a framework of standard procedures and practices is even more acute in the hospitality industry context, which is where sustainability and inclusiveness aligned with the UN-SDGs are becoming imperative (Ahmad, Ahmad & Siddique, 2024; Ahmad, Ahmad and Siddique, 2024). The architecture or design of hotels and restaurants are still vital, which are easily imitable. This underlines the critical importance of encouraging creativity in the workplace, which brings about differentiation as well as could also feasibly participate in various SDGs, such as Goal 8 and Goal 12. Employees with profound role comprehension are ready to create more and do it uniquely while adhering to the principles of sustainability. For example, a concierge might provide a cultural tour of the city, which directly impacts Goal 11 and Goal 15, such as touring sustainable communities and life on land. A chef may also recreate a familiar dish with locally-sourced ingredients that are also sustainable, which corresponds to Goal 2 of ending hunger and Goal 12 of responsible consumption and production. These types of innovations are in fact difficult for competitors to emulate, but they also strengthen the hospitality sector's advocacy for the UN-SDGs, which is where there is competition in the industry and most products look similar (Ahmad et al., 2023). The sustainable and creative footprints of employees open the doors to both competitiveness and responsibility to the global environment.

The value of employee creativity is understood in today's organizations, and harnessing it is complex. The traditional management techniques struggle with the intrinsic nature of creativity (Khaddam et al., 2023). They do not always spur creativity, even though monetary rewards boost productivity. Studies, such as Amabile et al. (2012) suggest they might even hinder it. Organizational culture also plays a pivotal role. Creativity needs risk tolerance and the acceptance of failure, but the short-term goals of firms and risk aversion hinder the progress of it (Mueller, Melwani & Goncalo, 2012). The UN-SDGs highlight collaboration, but the siloed nature of organizations often obstructs interdisciplinary interactions. Training can introduce tools for creativity, but mindset shifts take time (Scott, Leritz & Mumford, 2004). Leadership styles, such as the innovation-friendly transformational versus the restrictive autocratic impact employee creativity (Rafique et al., 2022). Organizational culture defines how freely creative ideas are expressed (Akram et al., 2020). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has recently influenced employee behavior, such as when reflecting the UN-SDGs (Low et al., 2020). For instance, firms that emphasize sustainability might see employees proactively suggesting eco-friendly innovations. This research explores the link between CSR and employee creativity. This is crucial, because more companies adopt CSR as a core strategy. Recognizing its impact on creativity can offer them a competitive advantage. Harnessing employee creativity can lead to significant innovations, which provide enduring strategic benefits (AlKayid et al., 2023). Employees seek purpose in regards to their roles as CSR grows in prominence (Ahmad, Han & Kim, 2024; Garrido-Ruso et al., 2022). Marrying this purpose-driven approach with a creative

expression can foster mutual benefits for both the organization and its employees. This study aims to deepen the understanding of CSR's comprehensive advantages, which refine the ongoing discourse in order to deliver practical insights for businesses, by examining creativity within the CSR context.

Structural elements within organizations play a substantial role in regards to shaping environments that are conducive to innovation (Peng et al., 2023). However, a seminal aspect is the profound influence of human emotions and cognitions on a range of attitudes and behaviors. These emotional and cognitive aspects act as catalysts in regards to determining how individuals perceive their surroundings as well as also in how they respond to organizational practices. The expanding field of research on emotions and cognition in organizational behavior suggests that human feelings and thoughts play pivotal roles in regards to influencing outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Dreer, 2021; Wei et al., 2020), commitment (Kroll, DeHart-Davis & Vogel, 2019; Ten Hoeve, Brouwer & Kunnen, 2020), and creativity, which is important for our research. Organizations can lay the groundwork for innovation in the context of CSR, but the essence of how and why CSR can kindle employee creativity can be traced back to these deeply human elements. We propose a dual mediating mechanism in light of this in order to elucidate the underlying logic. On one hand, there is happiness, which is an emotional factor that is born out of positive organizational practices, such as CSR (Bibi et al., 2022). Happy employees tend to view challenges through a more optimistic lens and approach tasks with wider and more divergent thinking patterns (Khan et al., 2022). This emotional state of well-being and satisfaction boosts morale and opens doors to innovative thinking. On the other hand, we have creative self-efficacy, which is a cognitive factor (Bandura, 1977). Creative self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability in regards to producing creative outcomes (Tierney et al., 2002). Employees may develop a greater belief in their creative abilities, which drives them to push boundaries and think outside the box, with CSR activities showing an organization's commitment to ethical and societal values.

What magnifies or diminishes the impact of CSR on these mediators? We introduce polychronicity as a moderating variable in this study. Polychronicity or the extent that people prefer to simultaneously engage in multiple tasks simultaneously (Szameitat et al., 2019) can either enhance or attenuate the effect of CSR on employee happiness and creative self-efficacy. For instance, employees with high polychronicity might appreciate CSR efforts that cater to multiple stakeholders, which leads to heightened happiness and bolstered self-efficacy. Employees with low polychronicity might conversely feel overwhelmed or distracted, which dilutes the potential positive effects of CSR. The organizational settings, such as CSR provide the foundation, but the interplay of human emotions and cognitions, which are moderated by factors, such as polychronicity, shapes the true essence of creativity within organizations. We present a holistic framework that stresses the multifaceted pathways that CSR can spur creativity through by understanding and acknowledging this interaction.

Utilizing Pakistan's hospitality sector for our study directly connects with the UN-SDGs, such as in particular Goal 6, which involves decent work and economic growth, and Goal 12, which includes responsible consumption and production. The hospitality industry is facing differentiation, so integrating the ethos of the SDGs can provide a strategic edge. Innovative and sustainable service delivery aligns with the world's drive to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. Pakistan's emerging status as a tourism destination places it in a strategic position in order to contribute to the realization of the UN-SDGs. Integrating CSR, which is closely aligned with the SDGs, is beneficial as well as essential for long-term sustainable growth. We specifically focus on employees in the upscale hotels in the cities of Karachi, Lahore, and

Islamabad in Pakistan. Furthermore, the data was collected by using a three-wave survey, and the analysis was conducted with the help of the SMART-PLS software in order to handle complex models and the exploratory research. It is believed that this method enables us to test the moderated mediation model of happiness and creative self-efficacy on the CSR-creativity link with polychronicity as the moderator. It was expected that our research findings would show that if CSR was truthfully and genuinely incorporated that it can boost employee creativity, which is a critical key in regards to attaining the UN-SDGs. It is hypothesized that happiness and creative self-efficacy will be mediated in the relationship between CSR and creativity, whereas polychronicity will moderate these mediated paths. The findings reveal the need to maintain a positive emotional climate and strengthen the confidence of employees in their creativity as the key to sustainable and innovative organizational solutions.

This study aims to bridge the following knowledge gaps in the existing literature. First, there is a clear delineation in the approach taken by CSR scholars. On one hand, some researchers spotlighted the role of human emotions in regards to guiding attitudinal and behavioral outcomes that are related to CSR (Barakat et al., 2016; Klimkiewicz et al., 2017). Another faction in contrast intently focused on cognitive processes and beliefs by investigating their mediation in the CSR-employee behavior relationship (Lin, Liu & Lin, 2022; Mahmud et al., 2023). The potential synergy of emotions and cognition, which is intricately interwoven in human psychology, has been largely overlooked, which created a significant theoretical void. This research fills the existing gaps by examining both the emotional and cognitive mediators in the CSR-creativity link. The studies of affective and cognitive processes are traditionally separately investigated from each other. Our study also fills the gap in the literature that concerns the UN-SDGs from the individual creativity perspective, and it offers a micro-level perspective, which is missing in the literature on macro-level organizational innovation.

Second, grassroots creativity, which is also the individual's inherent innovative spark, has not received an adequate amount of attention despite its significance, such as in the context of the UN-SDGs and more specifically with Goal 9, which involves industry, innovation, and infrastructure. The macro perspective of organizational innovation has overshadowed the micro, which is the individual-centric perspective that is vital for a holistic understanding of innovation in the organizational context. Third, the socio-cultural dimension, such as in the context of developing nations like Pakistan remains under-researched. The communal values and traditions of these types of countries present a unique setting in regards to studying the reception and impact of SDG-aligned CSR initiatives. The dynamics in these contexts significantly differ from the dynamics in developed nations, which offer rich insights into the CSR-employee relationship. Lastly, the emphasis on employee creativity is indisputable in service industries that are characterized by intangibility and human interactions. However, how this creativity aligns with and contributes to the realization of SDGs, such as SDG 12, which involves responsible consumption and production, and SDG 11, which includes sustainable cities and communities, has been scarcely explored. The role of industry disruptors, who harness creativity in order to redefine sectors as well as also promote SDGs, provides a compelling case for further investigations. Our study carves a niche in the existing literature, which offers a comprehensive understanding of CSR's multi-dimensional impact on employee behaviors and attitudes, by addressing these theoretical gaps.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we review the relevant literature and hypotheses. We then describe the methodology, which includes the data collection process and analysis tools. After that, we present the expected results of our study. Finally, we discuss the anticipated implications of our findings for theory and practice and conclude with suggestions for future research.

## Literature review and hypotheses

We adopted a theoretical framework that integrates the postulates of the social exchange theory (SET) and the social identity theory (SIT) in this research in order to justify the hypothesized relationship between CSR and employee creativity. This approach enables practitioners to look at the affective and cognitive routes that CSR influences the creativity of employees, which provides a holistic view of this relationship. According to SET, social behavior is a function of an exchange process that seeks to achieve maximum gains at a minimal cost (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). Employees consider CSR activities as an organization's contributions towards their welfare in the context of CSR, so they feel that they owe the organization positive responses, such as an increase in creativity. Chaudhary et al. (2018) and Abdelmotaleb et al. (2018) also back this notion by showing how CSR enhances employee creativity through work engagement and perceived organizational support.

SIT is centered on the notion that group membership determines an individual's self-identity and subsequent behavior (Tajfel, 1978). CSR activities can also increase the organizational identification of employees, which in turn can spur them into supporting organizational goals, which include the use of creativity. Studies that were conducted by Ahmad et al. (2023) and Gullifor et al. (2023) demonstrate how CSR actions positively affect the happiness of employees and their sense of identification with the organization, which promote creativity. The integration of SET and SIT provides a comprehensive framework in regards to analyzing the rational and affective mechanisms that CSR influences the creativity of employees through. SET forms the basis in regards to analyzing how CSR activities, which are considered as organizational capital, and SET encourage the employees to exhibit mutual creative work. SIT builds on this by describing how CSR activities increase the identification of employees with the organization in order to encourage them to perform creative work. An individual is able to explore the affective, which is happiness, as well as also the cognitive, which is creative self-efficacy, mechanisms that CSR influences creativity among workers by using this multiple theoretical lens. It reveals the mediating effect of polychronicity in this relationship, which thereby provides a more comprehensive perspective regarding how various employee characteristics affect the outcomes of CSR programs.

### Hypotheses

Several studies established the link between CSR and creativity in the current literature (González-Ramos, Guadamillas & Donate, 2023; Hu et al., 2022). Abdelmotaleb et al. (2018) also revealed that individuals who work at an organization that is considered socially responsible tend to be creative. It does this, because CSR activities are related to the perception that employees who participate in these types of practices receive adequate support from the organization, which they have positive feelings towards. Chaudhary et al. (2018) also showed that work engagement mediates the relation between CSR and creativity, which implies that the implementations of CSR positively impact the engagement level of employees, which in turn results in increased creativity.

Organizations also declare their adherence to global issues and thus synchronize with the values and beliefs of employees by adopting UN-SDGs in the CSR policies of organizations (Blagov et al., 2021). According to the current literature, integrating CSR with UN-SDGs serves as a highly effective approach that can mobilize a sense of identity and pride in the workforce (Pham, Dhir & Guillomet, 2022; Stombelli, 2020). The UN-SDGs cover all major problems of society, which include poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, so the workforce feels they have a noble cause in regards to pursuing if they feel their organization is aligned with these global goals. According to the SET, when organizations link their CSR with the

globally accepted and appreciated UN-SDGs, the perceived value of these social initiatives then improves (Whittingham, 2021). Employees who realize this increased level of social obligation might have increased obligations to reciprocate, which include increased organizational commitment or creativity (Markopoulos et al., 2021). CSR processes are seen as organizational capital where the employee responds through creative contributions in the context of the SET. On the other hand, SIT postulates that CSR initiatives benefit an organization, since they increase the sense of identification of employees with the organization, which encourages them to actively engage in the organization's CSR programs in order to maintain its positive image. The opportunity that is created by reciprocity as a result of CSR practices that are aligned with the UN-SDGs can result in increased employee creativity in regards to the SET. CSR-related activities foster a climate of reasonable mutual reward, and employees perceive these types of activities to be in the interest of the firm, themselves, and society at large (Strazzullo et al., 2023). The alignment of personal values with organizational goals, such as when these goals reflect the lofty ambitions of the UN-SDGs might instill a profound sense of purpose in employees. This heightened sense of purpose, which is emphasized by scholars, such as Amabile (1996), is often a precursor to increased intrinsic motivation, and enhanced creativity by extension. Employees commitment to innovatively furthering its mission intensifies when they perceive that their organization is a proactive contributor to global challenges. We propose the following hypothesis, which considered the insights above and the significance of UN-SDGs in the current CSR landscape.

**H1.** CSR initiatives aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are positively related to employee creativity.

Relationships are fundamentally anchored on the premise of reciprocity, which draws on the tenets of the SET (Chiu et al., 2022; Ghahtarani, Sheikhmohammady & Rostami, 2020). When organizations, such as the UN-SDGs undertake CSR initiatives, such as organizations that are in congruence with global benchmarks in the context of the corporate world, they are extending beyond ordinary transactional engagements with their employees. They are instead entering into a deeper and relational contract. Employees perceive these types of CSR initiatives as an embodiment of the organization's commitment to societal welfare and a broader ethical framework (Ahmad et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). This shows the organization's benevolence as well as also sets the stage for a reciprocal relationship. Employees often feel a heightened sense of loyalty, commitment, and happiness in regards to the organization's altruistic endeavors. The logic is simple but profound. Employees feel cared for and valued when organizations care for the world, which amplifies their emotional connection and happiness.

There is a sense of personal enrichment in regards to understanding that even trivial daily activities serve greater and virtuous purposes that advance the welfare of people or the world as a whole. These findings make a direct link with a higher purpose by considerably raising the levels of happiness among employees (Bibi et al., 2022). Studies show that organizations that are committed to CSR promote a good work culture system of teamwork in most cases as well as respect in a management system and a shared vision (Kim, Hur & Lee, 2023). This type of an environment generally increases the level of happiness, because their efforts are directed towards something worthwhile and laudable in the eyes of the workers (Hatami et al., 2024). The commitment to CSR initiatives is highly central in regards to boosting the happiness of the employees especially with CSR initiatives that are committed to the resolution of general social and environmental issues (Espasandín-Bustelo, Ganaza-Vargas & Diaz-Carrion, 2021).

The SIT also expands on how CSR influences the happiness of the employees through the effects of organizational identification. The higher the perceived organizational identification is with the

organizational values, the higher the level of identity, because they are socially responsible and committed to global sustainability goals (Jeong, Kang & Choi, 2022). This enhanced identification leads to higher pride and satisfaction, which the employee enjoys and makes the employee happier. Hatami et al. (2024) revealed that CSR helps in regards to building the organizational commitment of employees, which in turn improves their level of happiness. The combination of the SET and SIT therefore allows for clarification of the impact of CSR activities that are related to the company's adherence to the UN-SDGs regarding satisfaction indicators among its employees. The SET highlights the mutual relationship between CSR and the feelings of employees in this context, whereas the SIT addresses the role of identification in regards to fostering happiness. This twofold theoretical framework offers the best explanation regarding how CSR initiatives change employee satisfaction levels and affirms the hypothesis that CSR initiatives, such as the initiatives that aimed at fulfilling the UN-SDG, which have a positive impact on the levels of employee happiness. As a result, following hypothesis is postulated.

**H2.** CSR initiatives, such as the goals that are aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals significantly enhance employee happiness.

Several of the previous studies pointed out the relationship between happiness and creativity in different research domains (Kawakubo et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2022). Happy people are more neuro-plastic, which means they are more adaptable and can learn faster (Isen, Daubman & Nowicki, 1987). This leads to divergent thinking, because it encourages employees to think in different ways and come up with different solutions to the same problem. Furthermore, the positive effect that arises from happiness increases intrinsic motivation (Amabile et al., 2005). A self-motivated person who is endowed with the cognitive benefits of happiness becomes a core of creativity (Bani-Melhem, Zeffane & Albaity, 2018). In addition, happiness also helps in regards to protecting an individual from other adversities in the workplace. Emotionally content employees navigate challenges, uncertainties, and setbacks with enhanced resilience (Naseem, 2018). This buoyancy fosters a risk-taking attitude, which is pivotal for groundbreaking creative endeavors. It is apparent from drawing on these insights in conjunction that fostering happiness is a moral imperative for organizations as well as a strategic move to drive innovation as an outcome of employee creativity.

High levels of happiness among employees enhance their creativity, which is a phenomenon that SET and SIT can fully explain. The enhanced level of happiness leads the employees to have a positive perception of the relationship of the organization according to the SET. This positive emotional state creates a feeling of payback in the form of behaviors in the organization's interest, such as creativity (Chen, Chang & Lin, 2018). Happiness leads to creating an ideal psychological climate that increases an individual's ability to think, solve problems, and accept changes, which are all essential factors in regards to creativity. For example, Diržytė, Kačerauskas and Perminas (2021) reported that positive emotions like happiness, enhance creative performance. Essentially, the interactions between the organization and its employees are transactions that can be weighed in terms of perceived benefits and losses (Ngo et al., 2020). Employees feel valued and appreciated when they reap tangible and intangible rewards from their organization, such as through meaningful CSR initiatives (Lee, 2021). This perception further fosters feelings of trust, commitment, and satisfaction. Employees often seek ways in order to reciprocate positive treatment, which is a natural consequence of this exchange. One of the most profound forms of reciprocity in this context is through enhanced work performance, which is where creativity shines as a standout metric (Li, Zhang & Liu, 2021). A nurturing and supportive organization, which is proven by its commitment to societal values through CSR, catalyzes an environment where employees feel a sense of happiness and belonging. This emotional



state is ephemeral, and it deeply impacts cognitive and behavioral dynamics.

SIT offers an additional view on the matter by focusing on organizational identification in the relationship between happiness and creativity. Several studies show that happy employees with strong organizational identification are likely to engage in behaviors that are favorable to the organization's goals and values (Stets et al., 2016). This identification brings about a positive perception of the self, which has a positive motivational effect on individuals as much as creative activities are concerned. Hetschko, Knabe and Schöb (2020) found this view valid by proving that happy employees are more inclined to exhibit creative behaviors. It is possible to understand that happiness increases the quality of the exchange relationship between employees and the organization and the extent of the identification of employees with an organization by incorporating the SET and SIT. This two-fold impact enhances the intrinsic motivation of employees and their cognitive capacity, which results in increased creativity. Hence, increased levels of happiness among employees increase their creativity to a great extent, which is theorized by both the SET and SIT. As a result, we consequently posit the following hypothesis.

**H3.** Elevated levels of happiness among employees significantly amplify their creative contributions.

The pathway from CSR initiatives to enhanced employee creativity is not always direct in an organizational context (Ahmad, Donia & Shahzad, 2019; Hur, Moon & Ko, 2018; Shao et al., 2022). Happiness, which is an emotional factor, has a mediating effect on the relationship between CSR and employee creativity. Hetschko et al. (2020) underscore the need to manage happiness through CSR activities. The study's findings reveal that the employees who are involved in corporate volunteering are happy, and the enhancement of their happiness improves their creative performance. Addi Muqit (2022) also observed that the positive ethical context that is established by CSR activities increases the level of happiness of the employees, which increases their creativity. An underpinning of this relationship can be explained with the help of the SET and SIT. The pathway, which is deeply rooted in the premises of the SET, suggests a deeper understanding of the reciprocity of emotional and cognitive exchanges in the workplace (Cloarec, Meyer-Waarden & Munzel, 2019). According to the SET, CSR activities of an organization are perceived by the employees as capital invested in them and society. This perception generates positive emotions, such as happiness, and it elicits positive behavior from employees, such as creativity. Employees who experience positive emotions from their organizational CSR initiatives are likely to exhibit creativity in their work in order to pay back the organization. This fact is confirmed by Chen et al. (2018). They show that employee happiness improves creativity by employing the SET perspective. The SIT supports this understanding with a focus on how CSR initiatives boost the identification of employees with the organization, which in turn promotes happiness and creativity. When employees have a positive perception of their organization's social responsibility and commitment to sustainability, their organizational identification increases, which results in enhanced happiness. This increased level of happiness, which stems from a strong identification with the organization, leads to creative contributions by the employees towards the success of the organization.

Organizations transmit a signal of moral integrity and societal commitment when they actively engage in CSR initiatives (Xu et al., 2022). Employees often equate the organization's values with their own when they interpret these signals, which fosters an emotional bond. This bond is not a one-dimensional exchange of services for wages but a deeper and more profound exchange of values, trust, and emotional engagement, which is in line with the crux of the SET (Birtch, Chiang & Van Esch, 2016). When employees perceive that their organizations as socially responsible, they feel a surge of pride,

satisfaction, and happiness (Onkila, 2015). The emotion of happiness, which is often perceived as an end in itself, plays a transformative role in the cognitive processes of employees. Happier employees are content as well as cognitively enriched. Their thought processes are more expansive, open to assimilating diverse perspectives, and are less constrained by traditional thought barriers (Rego, Machado, Leal & Cunha, 2009). These types of cognitive flexibility and expansiveness are the breeding grounds for creativity. When employees are in a state of happiness, they are more inclined to take risks, challenge the status quo, and venture into innovative solutions (Yuan, 2015). Moreover, happiness, which is a positive emotion, bolsters intrinsic motivation, which is a well-documented catalyst for creativity. CSR initiatives plant the seeds of a positive organizational image, so it is the emotional states that they induce, such as happiness, which foster creativity. The profound linkage between CSR, happiness, and creativity forms a cascading effect, and happiness acts as the pivotal bridge. An individual can provide an extensive account of the mediating role of happiness in the CSR-employee creativity link by incorporating the SET and SIT. The SET highlights the mutual relationships between CSR and the positive effect on the employee emotions, whereas SIT focuses on organizational identification in order to generate happiness and creativity. This dual theoretical perspective explains the processes where CSR initiatives boost the employee creativity by the involvement of happiness as a mediator that supports the hypothesis that happiness is a mediator between CSR initiatives and the increased creativity of the employees.

**H4.** Happiness acts as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between CSR initiatives and heightened employee creativity.

As organizations recalibrate their strategies that are in line with globally recognized benchmarks, CSR initiatives, such as the initiatives that are aligned with the UN-SDGs have taken the lead in regards to showing a commitment to sustainable aspirations (Kong et al., 2021). It is evident from the literature that when organizations commit to broader societal goals, such as the goals that are encapsulated by the UN-SDGs, it amplifies their social standing and aligns with the intrinsic values of employees (Vizcaíno et al., 2021). This type of alignment may help employees have a higher level of meaningful work and a well-defined direction (Saz-Gil et al., 2020), so elements that are associated with enhanced creativity and innovation. Bandura (2006) defined self-efficacy as the extent of confidence an individual has in regards to conducting activities that will enable them to achieve a given level of performance. If employees realize that their organization is making a positive impact on the larger society, they can embrace creativity in order to come up with solutions in regards to achieving these noble objectives (Karimi, Malek & Farani, 2022). In other words, CSR activities, such as the activities that are in line with the UN-SDGs have a direct relationship with creative self-efficacy among employees.

The SET provides an explanation for this relationship by arguing that CSR activities are construed as valuable organizational investments in the employee's welfare and growth (Ahmad et al., 2022a). This perception causes a sort of quid pro quo, which in turn improves their creative self-efficacy perception. An organization that is involved in achieving societal goals and sustainable development makes employees feel supported and valued, which enhances their confidence in their creativity. These types of views are supported by Mohammed, Ferraris and Troise (2022), and their study shows that CSR practices that promote psychological empowerment in an organization increase the creativity of employees. The SIT also adds to this knowledge by asserting that organizational identification can boost creative self-efficacy (Raihan et al., 2023). Employees indeed embrace those values and have a stronger perception of their self-efficacy in regards to supporting the company's creativity when they have a positive attitude towards a company that supports the UN-SDGs. This enhanced identification boosts both the self-esteem of

employees and their self-efficacy in regards to creativity. CSR activities positively affect the organizational identification of employees, which results in increased creative self-efficacy. A supportive organizational environment that is shaped by meaningful CSR actions bolsters the belief that they can generate innovative ideas and solutions (Cezarino et al., 2022). Organizations that skillfully incorporate UN-SDGs within their CSR strategies pledge their commitment to global welfare and position themselves as socially responsible innovators (Kalyar, Ali & Shafique, 2021). Internal stakeholders, such as employees, interpret these efforts as an indicator that their creative abilities will be supported and nurtured. The more genuine and impactful the CSR activities have, the greater the boost to employee creative self-efficacy (Sagheer et al., 2023). Thus, combining the SET and SIT will help in regards to providing a more extensive understanding of how CSR initiatives that are related to the UN-SDGs improve employee creativity and self-efficacy. The SET focuses on the mutually positive relationships between CSR and the beliefs of employees in their own capacity for creativity. On the other hand, the SIT explicates how a strong identification with an organization leads to creative self-efficacy. This study, which is based on this dual theoretical perspective, explains how CSR initiatives enhance the creative self-efficacy of employees as a way of supporting the hypothesis that CSR, such as the UN-SDG compatible CSR initiatives are positively related to the creative self-efficacy of employees. CSR initiatives, such as the initiatives that resonate with the UN-SDGs are positively linked to enhancing employee creative self-efficacy given the underpinnings of the SET and SIT.

**H5.** CSR initiatives, such as the initiatives that are aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are positively associated with employee creative self-efficacy.

The literature consistently demonstrates a strong linkage between the creative self-efficacy of employees and their actual creativity at work (Jaiswal et al., 2015). When individuals possess a high sense of creative self-efficacy, they are more inclined to take on challenging tasks, persist in the face of adversity, and exhibit resilience (Chen et al., 2019). This heightened confidence in their own creative capacities can drive them to explore novel solutions, take risks, and think outside the box, which are all essential attributes of creativity (Teng, Hu & Chang, 2020).

The relationship between creative self-efficacy and employee creativity can be explained within broader organizational environments, which is previously mentioned. Employees who are working in innovation-friendly organizations, such as organizations that embrace open communication, diverse thinking, and cross-organizational cooperation are likely to have enhanced confidence in regards to their innovative capabilities (Ogbeibu et al., 2021). Companies that encourage training and development and promote a culture of learning enable employees to gain new skills and knowledge. Exposure to diverse learning experiences helps employees appreciate different perspectives, which thereby enhance their creativity. These dynamic experiences in turn enhance their creative self-efficacy and push them to become more active in regards to searching for creative solutions to problems. When organizations embrace CSR practices, such as the initiatives that are anchored on global standards, a positive environment is cultivated for the involvement and innovation of employees (Di Vaio et al., 2022). CSR initiatives also have a personal fit with the employees, because they support common values of social, economic, and environmental responsibility (Markopoulos et al., 2021). This congruence of the personal and organizational goals promotes a sense of direction and esprit de corps in the employees. If people believe that their work makes a difference in society, there is a boost in the intrinsic motivation of the people, which may lead to increased creative self-efficacy (Igwe et al., 2022).

The SET can be used in order to explain this relationship by arguing that the employees who have high creative self-efficacy will

observe an organizational environment that is supportive and resource-providing. This perception creates the feeling that an individual must pay back by acting creatively. Self-confidence with their creativity makes the employees willing to take more risks and challenges, try out new ideas, and not give up easily when faced with a challenge in their creative work (Raihan et al., 2023). This view is backed by Newman et al., (2018). They established that creative self-efficacy positively influences the innovative work behavior of employees. The SIT supports this understanding by focusing on how organizational identification boosts the creative self-esteem of employees and subsequently their creativity (Ahmad et al., 2022a). When the employees are highly committed to an organization, they endorse the values of the organization and develop a higher level of self-efficacy about their innovative contribution to the organization. This identification increases their morale and self-achievement, which in turn encourages them to participate in creative tasks. The research by Park et al. (2021) shows that a positive relationship between the organizational identification and creative self-efficacy of employees enhances creativity in the workplace, so the following hypothesis is therefore presented that reflects this idea.

**H6.** The creative self-efficacy of employees positively influences their creativity.

Organizations participate in multiple CSR initiatives, so they affect the external stakeholders and create a lasting mark on the internal stakeholders (Ahmad et al., 2021). The employees feel that their work has a purpose beyond just performing routine tasks as organizations practice CSR activities that have a substantive impact (Ahmad et al., 2022b). Employees feel a greater sense of identification with the values of their organizations when they see their organizations supporting societal and environmental causes (Abdullah, Ashraf & Sarfraz, 2017). This alignment increases their intrinsic motivation and boosts their belief in their creative abilities, which thereby increases their creative self-efficacy. It is possible to explain the mediating role of creative self-efficacy in the link between CSR and employee creativity from various dimensions. Organizations convey an organizational story of purpose and existence among their workforce (Sagheer et al., 2023) when they implement high CSR activities. This kind of narrative is aligned with employees, which bring feelings of internalization and purpose. Raihan et al. (2023) pointed out that employees become more confident about creating novel ideas and solutions when they have a perception of organizational membership. This boost in confidence is therefore integrally bound to creative self-efficacy, which serves as the trigger that turns the perceived value of CSR into tangible creative outcomes. In addition, CSR has been found to influence to the extent of matching between the personal and organizational values of employees and how they appreciate the challenges and opportunities in their working stations. In addition, it has been found that creative self-efficacy, which is supported by CSR activities within an organization, results in a creativity-oriented perspective by the employees when encountering barriers (Zhang, Zhang & Wang, 2022). They may seek innovative solutions as well as exploring and test new ideas due to their confidence in their creative abilities instead of relying on conventional approaches.

CSR initiatives positively affect the creative self-efficacy of employees, which acts as a mediator between the two concepts. The SET offers an account for this mediation by arguing that employees receive CSR efforts as organizational resources for their benefit and growth (Newman et al., 2018). This perception strengthens creative self-efficacy, which results in an increased creative performance as a kind of reciprocation. Employees who have noticed that their organization is involved in CSR activities in particular feel more confident in their ability to deliver innovative solutions. Raihan et al. (2023) found similar findings to this. CSR, which is an example of the psychological empowerment practices that organizations can engage in, increases

the level of creative self-efficacy among employees, which results in higher creativity. SIT can be considered complementary to the current framework, because it highlights the significance of organizational identification in regards to boosting creative self-confidence and creativity. When the employees believe their organization is socially responsible and supports the UN-SDGs, the organization's identification increases, which gives rise to creative self-efficacy. This enhanced self-efficacy that arises from strong organizational identification promotes creativity in the efforts of employees towards the organization's success, which leads to the following hypothesis.

**H7.** The creative self-efficacy of employees mediates the relationship between CSR initiatives and employee creativity.

Polychronicity, which is the inclination towards multi-tasking, surfaces as a specific moderating variable in a variety of individual behavior research settings (Conte et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2023). It is essential to understand the important links between CSR and the behavior of employees as organizations gradually begin to appreciate the benefits of CSR. Organizations foster a culture that aligns with their workforce when they do meaningful CSR activities. The improved happiness due to an organization's socially responsible activities could act as a foundation in regards to cultivating employee creativity (Chia, Kern & Neville, 2020). However, the nature of this relationship may vary considerably depending on the degree of polychronicity of the employee. The high polychronicity of employees means that they are used to performing multiple tasks at once and perceiving and integrating various flows of information (Vizcaíno et al., 2021). When these types of employees are exposed to CSR initiatives, they are likely to absorb the positive feelings that are associated with them and incorporate these into the organizational processes. This kind of engagement enables them to capture the happiness that results from CSR activities in live streams and feed it directly into the creative process (Waheed et al., 2021). It can therefore be concluded that the process of translating happiness from CSR initiatives to creativity is much more straightforward and rapid for the high polychronic individuals. On the other hand, the employees with low polychronicity act in a sequential manner while they process information. They also enjoy and get happiness from CSR activities, which is like the others, and the way this happiness leads to creativity is clearer to them. They might first incorporate the happiness into themselves, and they might eventually transfer it into creative work. The immediacy that was noted in the high polychronic people may not be prevalent in this group.

The knowledge of the role of polychronicity as a moderator can be very valuable from a managerial or organizational viewpoint (Pachler et al., 2018). CSR initiatives generally tend to enhance happiness and therefore creativity among employees, but these effects can vary in terms of strength and time-sensitivities depending on the level of polychronicity. Organizations can manage to adopt different strategies in a way that the positive impact of the organization's CSR activities can extend to all the stakeholders without any discrimination of the levels of polychronicity by appreciating this.

Furthermore, CSR activities are self-sustaining, because they naturally give employees a sense of pride that they are part of something greater than themselves. The match between organizational values and the values of the larger society can generate an extrinsic motivation that enhances the creative self-efficacy of employees, which means the extent that they believe in their ability to come up with unique and useful ideas. However, the strength and nature of this relationship may be greatly determined by an employee's level of polychronicity (Hecht et al., 2005). Access to the CSR initiatives enables the reception of the concept's values as well as the implementation of these in various aspects of the role in regards to employees whose polychronic predispositions are particularly strong. This type of style of thinking enables them to quickly associate the positive angles of CSR with their inventive skills (Abdullah et al., 2017). In

other words, the increased creative self-efficacy that results from CSR practices is more timely and connected with their work responsibilities, and it also enhances their confidence in their creative abilities. Individuals with lower polychronicity are conversely more inclined towards linear thinking and processing, so they may undergo a more gradual internalization process. They also derive a sense of creative self-efficacy from an organization's CSR endeavors, so this upliftment might manifest over a prolonged duration. Their sequential way of processing implies that the realization of their creative potential, which is inspired by CSR initiatives, might unfold in stages as opposed to being in tandem.

The link between enhanced creative self-efficacy and employee creativity is also influenced by polychronicity. High polychronic individuals already adept at parallel processing, so they might seamlessly channel their bolstered self-efficacy into diverse creative outlets (Chong et al., 2010). Their low polychronic counterparts might in contrast exhibit creativity in a more phased manner by drawing from their sequentially enhanced self-efficacy. Organizations that are aimed at harnessing the full creative potential of their workforce through CSR initiatives would benefit from understanding the modulating role of polychronicity. Recognizing that the path from CSR to creative self-efficacy and subsequently to creativity is not uniform for all employees, and it can lead to more tailored and effective strategies in order to foster innovation. According to the SET, high polychronicity employees view CSR activities as offering multiple forms of engagement and support that make them happy and boost their creative self-efficacy. This type of positive perception results in corresponding actions, such as elevating creativity. Thus, the multitasking nature of employees is likely to maximize the various CSR advantages in order to enhance their happiness and confidence in their creativity. This knowledge, which build on the SIT, is further enriched by showing that the polychronic identification of employees with a socially responsible organization enhances the mediated pathways between CSR and creativity. The results further show that high polychronicity, organizational identification, and CSR self-efficacy are positively related to CSR's impact on happiness and creative self-efficacy. These identifications encourage them to sustain and build up their organization's image through creative work, which leads to the following hypothesis.

**H8.** Polychronicity moderates the mediated relationships between CSR and creativity through (a) happiness and (b) creative self-efficacy.

## Methodology

### Study sector

The hospitality sector serves as a cornerstone for numerous economies around the world, which plays a pivotal role in both driving economic growth and symbolizing the cultural ethos of a region. Interpersonal interactions, which are defined by its characteristic emphasis on service quality, and customer satisfaction, which is the sector that is shaped by its frontline employees, often directly translate organizational missions into customer experiences. Pakistan is a country that is endowed with a rich cultural heritage and a growing middle class, and the hospitality sector has been on an upward trajectory (Guan et al., 2023). The country's diverse landscapes, historical sites, and culinary treasures offer vast potential for tourism and hospitality growth, but the true spirit of this industry is manifest in its urban hubs, which is where modernity meets tradition (Ahmad et al., 2023). Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi, which are the three metropolitan giants in Pakistan, offer distinct yet interconnected perspectives of the country's hospitality landscape.

Lahore, which is the second-largest city in Pakistan, and was once referred to as the *heartbeat of the nation*, is teeming with cultural



celebrations, historical landmarks, and internationally recognized cuisine. The city's lively atmosphere and historical background attract domestic and international visitors, so it requires a well-developed hotel industry. Islamabad, which is the capital city, has political importance as well as beautiful scenery. It hosts a myriad of foreign diplomatic corps, representatives, and visitors as the political and administrative hub, so its hospitality industry is strategic in regards to shaping international relations and impressions. Karachi is the business hub and the largest city in Pakistan, and it is also a port city. It has a combination of both business and tourism. Its advantageous geographical location and being a business city means that the hospitality industry in this area serves a cross-section of clients, which include businesses and tourists. The rationale for selecting these three cities as data collection hubs was based on the fact that they capture the broad spectrum of Pakistan's hospitality industry. They in conjunction reflect the historical, political, economic, and cultural aspects of the development of the hospitality industry in the country. The sample from these cities guarantees that the data that was collected is diverse and presents a holistic view of CSR in the hospitality sector given the varying organizational cultures, clients, and operational environments. We can therefore provide a comprehensive and practical understanding of the relationship between CSR, employee emotions, and creativity in the urban hospitality environment of Pakistan by selecting respondents from this diverse and more representative population.

Luxurious hotels were selected as the primary sources of the data collection. These hotels are larger and more likely to be part of multinationals with an extensive chain of hotels, and they also have luxurious amenities, impeccable service deliveries, and are characterized by distinct, clear, and easily identifiable CSR strategies (Ahmad et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). These CSR strategies are not just limited to a particular city that they are involved in. They are present across the country, which makes sure that their CSR touches the lives of as many people as possible, and leaves deep impacts on several communities in the process. This level of spread and constancy in their CSR activities make these upscale hotels suitable for this research, because they are reference points for CSR in the hospitality industry. Official letters were sent to various hotel service organizations in these cities. The purpose was to seek their collaboration in this research endeavor by emphasizing the mutual benefits. These organizations would contribute to the academic realm and gain insights that might prove valuable for their operational and strategic choices, which thereby further industry excellence, by partaking in this study. These hotel services organizations that showed a positive inclination towards the research objectives were then engaged more deeply. Meetings were arranged in order to interact directly with their employees. This step was pivotal, because their employees are the very lifeblood of the hospitality sector through their daily interactions and experiences. Their perspectives on CSR and its effects on their emotions and creativity would provide the empirical backbone for this research. Every effort was made to ensure that the data collection process was respectful of the employee's time, and it designed in order to elicit genuine and candid responses.

#### Data collection process

We executed a systematic three-wave data collection strategy in order to garner a robust understanding of the relationships between our variables. This approach enhanced the quality of our findings by temporally spacing out the data collection and significantly minimizing common method biases by capturing the predictor and outcome variables at different times (Liu et al., 2024). We concentrated on obtaining data that is related to the hotel's CSR initiatives and the altruistic inclinations of the employees during the initial. We shifted our attention to the emotional outcomes as we transitioned to the second wave, which took place a few weeks after the first wave. We

collected information in regards to admiration and happiness during this wave. The third and concluding wave was uniquely positioned a few weeks after the second wave, and it primarily concentrated on the ultimate outcome variable, which is employee creativity. The data was not directly collected from the employees for this wave. It was specifically collected from the employees direct managers in order to have an independent evaluation of the creativity of the employees as opposed to the employees assessing themselves. Using this systematic three-wave data collection approach enabled us to unravel the intricate CSR-happiness-creative self-efficacy-polychronicity-employee creativity nexus. As a result, we guaranteed both the depth and width of the insights that were obtained by synchronizing the data collection and diversifying the respondents in regards to the creativity measure, which made our research more comprehensive and objective particularly within the hospitality sphere.

#### Sample size

We employed the a-priori sampling calculator, which is a tool that has been widely recognized for its reliability and precision in regards to guiding empirical investigations, in order to determine an appropriate sample size for our research (Daniel, 2010). This calculator notably offers advantages, such as accommodating the desired statistical power, significance level, and anticipated effect size, which are factors that collectively ensure the rigor and robustness of the research findings. The calculator suggested a sample size that was approximately 300 after inputting our desired parameters. However, aiming for a sample size that is larger than the recommendation is strategically beneficial. Oversampling compensates for any unforeseen data losses, such as non-responses or improperly filled questionnaires. It also augments the study's statistical power by allowing for a more precise detection of even subtle effects. We initially disseminated 600 questionnaires among the hospitality employees of our chosen cities given these considerations. We secured 409 valid responses after executing our three-wave data collection strategy and undertaking careful data quality checks, which included eliminating incomplete responses, screening for outliers, and other data cleansing procedures. This indicates an impressive response rate, which shows both the robustness of our approach and the cooperation level of the participants.

The gender distribution showed 255 males (62.3%) and 154 females (37.7%) in regards to the demographics of our sample. The largest group in regards to age fell within the 25–35 age bracket, which comprised of 224 respondents or 54.8% of the sample. The 18–24 age group consisted of had 105 individuals (25.7%), which was followed by 58 individual's aged 36–45 (14.2%), and the 46 and above age category contained 22 respondents (5.3%). 172 respondents had been working in the hospitality industry for 1–5 years (42.1%), which was followed 117 for 6–10 years (28.6%), 83 for 11–15 years (20.3%), and 37 had experience that exceeded 15 years (9%) in regards to the work experience category. Lastly, according to the departments, the front office had the most representatives with 146 employees (35.7%), which was followed by food & beverages with 132 (32.3%), housekeeping with 77 (18.8%), and others, such as administration and security, which constitutes of 54 respondents (13.2%). See Table 1 below for more details.

#### Social desirability and common method variance

The threats posed by social desirability and common method variance (CMV) are vital in empirical research particularly when dealing with self-reported measures. Both of them have the potential to introduce biases that may contaminate the actual relationships between the variables, which lead to potentially misleading results. Social desirability refers to the tendency of respondents to answer questions in a manner that others will view favorably, which can



**Table 1**  
Demographic summary.

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Total Respondents</b>	409	100%
<b>Gender (Male)</b>	255	62.3%
<b>Gender (Female)</b>	154	37.7%
<b>Age (18–24)</b>	105	25.7%
<b>Age (25–35)</b>	224	54.8%
<b>Age (36–45)</b>	58	14.2%
<b>Age (46 and above)</b>	22	5.3%
<b>Experience (1–5 years)</b>	172	42.1%
<b>Experience (6–10 years)</b>	117	28.6%
<b>Experience (11–15 years)</b>	83	20.3%
<b>Experience (16 years and above)</b>	37	9%
<b>Department (Front Office)</b>	146	35.7%
<b>Department (Food &amp; Beverage)</b>	132	32.3%
<b>Department (Housekeeping)</b>	77	18.8%
<b>Department (Others)</b>	54	13.2%

obfuscate true relationships between variables. We used self-administered anonymous questionnaires in order to reduce the level of social desirability in this study. We made sure that the responses collected from the participants could not in any way be attributed to the participants, which was in a bid to encourage honest responses from the respondents. Our questionnaire also had a note that the respondents were required to give honest answers by stressing the role of their opinions in the success of the study.

On the other hand, CMV refers to the variance that is due to the measurement method as opposed to the constructs that the measures reflect. Our study design of three waves of data collection served as a strong method in regards to dealing with the CMV. We minimized the chances of the current state or the frame of mind of the respondents affecting their responses to both classes of variables this way by taking a temporal distance between the measurement of the predictor and the criterion variables. Furthermore, we introduced a methodological separation between the predictors and the outcomes by sourcing data on employee creativity from their immediate supervisors as opposed to the employees themselves. This multi-source approach is a well-regarded strategy in regards to reducing the CMV. We also incorporated Harman's single-factor test post-data collection in order to diagnose the potential presence of the CMV. The preliminary analyses ensured that no single factor emerged or accounted for the majority of the covariance among the variables, which provided further confidence in our results.

### Measures

The participants in our study were presented with a questionnaire, which was evaluated using a seven-point Likert's scale, in order to ensure precision and clarity in their responses. We opted for pre-established scales that are consistently validated in the prior research in order to validate the constructs that are used and ensure both reliability and validity. We also enlisted the expertise of domain specialists for a comprehensive review in order to enhance the appropriateness and clarity of our questionnaire.

We harnessed Turker's established scale in order to capture the perceptions of the participants in regards to their organization's CSR activities (Turker, 2009). This scale, which is renowned for its precision, originally presented 17 items that measure an organization's diverse CSR endeavors from general, employee, customer, and government perspectives. However, we fine-tuned it to encompass 12 items in order to align this scale with the specific context of our study. These items were equally divided in order to evaluate general CSR initiatives and initiatives that were tailored for employees. For instance, one of the items, which included *our hospitality services organization participates in activities that aim to protect and improve the quality of the natural environment* was used in order to measure a

hospitality organization's general CSR initiatives. In addition, an illustrative item included *the management of our hospitality services organization primarily concerns itself with the needs and wants of the employees*, which was given in order to assess the employee-specific CSR initiatives.

We relied on a four-item scale, which was pioneered by Tierney et al. (2011), in order to evaluate the employee creativity construct. This scale was crafted in order to measure the creative performance of employees, which was rooted in the foundational work of Tierney, Farmer and Graen (1999), and it was discerned by their immediate supervisors. A representative item from this scale included *this subordinate identifies opportunities for new ways of dealing with work*. We employed the happiness scale, which was crafted by García del Junco et al. (2013), in order to assess the pivotal construct of employee happiness. An item that exemplifies the essence of this scale included *the workplace environment of our hospitality services organization is good*. We used three items from the study of Tierney et al. (2002) for creative self-efficacy. A sample item from this scale includes *I feel that I am good at generating novel ideas*. Lastly, we incorporated the five-item scale that was formulated by Lindquist et al. (2007) for the polychronicity variable. This scale is epitomized by items, such as *I prefer to do two or more activities at the same time*.

### Results and analysis

#### Initial analysis

We used structural equation modeling (SEM) with SMART-PLS in order to analyze the data and test the hypothesized relationships. SEM was chosen, because it enables the testing of multiple relationships between the observed and latent variables, which is important for the current research with a model that includes mediating and moderating variables. SEM is the most appropriate when research constructs, such as CSR, happiness, creative self-efficacy, and employee creativity are operationalized through multiple items. It checks the accuracy of the theoretical constructs that are used and tests the validity and reliability of the measurement model. SMART-PLS is preferable for the current study among the available SEM techniques, because it is a variance-based technique that can handle a non-normal data distribution and has a small to medium sample size (Ahmad, Samad & Han, 2023). SMART-PLS offers a reliable analysis given by the 409 respondents that were used in this study, which requires few assumptions compared to the covariance-based SEM techniques (Ahmad et al., 2024). It offers path coefficients that indicate the magnitude and direction of the relationships between the variables, which are crucial in regards to identifying the factors that influence employee creativity as well as assessing moderation and mediation effects. SMART-PLS employs bootstrapping techniques in order to increase the reliability of the results by giving confidence intervals for the path coefficients and significance testing of the indirect effects.

Our study aimed to comprehensively evaluate several constructs, which include CSR, employee creativity (CR), happiness (HAPP), creative self-efficacy (CSEF), and polychronicity (PLCY), by analyzing the data that was collected. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) outcomes aligned with our goals and are illustrated in Table 2. The CFA results elucidate the primary sample values, standard deviation (SD), and the corresponding t-statistics for each item linked to the specific constructs under examination. For example, the item labeled CR1, which is linked to the CR construct, registers a sample value of 0.824 and an SD of 0.028, and it produced a t-statistic of 29.198. This consistency across all items attests to the reliability of the measurements.

We identified and removed certain items during our analysis due to their suboptimal factor loadings. The items CSRGN3, PLCY3, and HAPP4 were specifically excluded from the concluding analysis in

**Table 2**  
Confirmatory factor analysis results for the constructs.

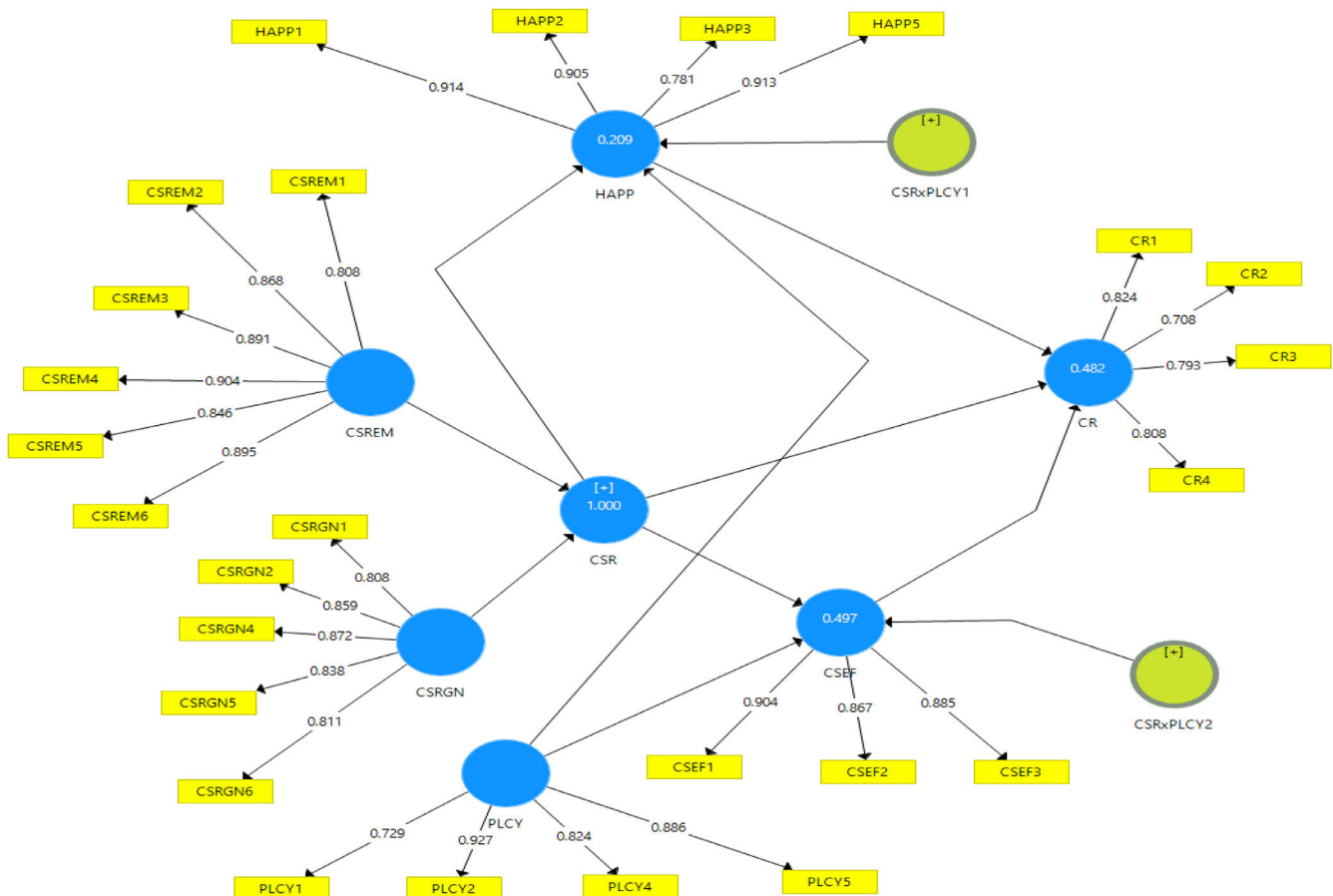
	Original Sample	Standard Deviation	T Statistics
CR1 <- CR	0.824	0.028	29.198
CR2 <- CR	0.708	0.047	14.975
CR3 <- CR	0.793	0.028	28.596
CR4 <- CR	0.808	0.026	31.425
CSEF1 <- CSEF	0.904	0.015	60.247
CSEF2 <- CSEF	0.867	0.023	37.253
CSEF3 <- CSEF	0.885	0.017	51.101
CSREM1 <- CSREM	0.808	0.031	26.373
CSREM2 <- CSREM	0.868	0.022	39.723
CSREM3 <- CSREM	0.891	0.017	51.084
CSREM4 <- CSREM	0.904	0.016	54.778
CSREM5 <- CSREM	0.846	0.03	28.533
CSREM6 <- CSREM	0.895	0.018	50.782
CSRG1 <- CSRG	0.808	0.033	24.306
CSRG2 <- CSRG	0.859	0.022	38.706
CSRG4 <- CSRG	0.872	0.022	40.418
CSRG5 <- CSRG	0.838	0.027	31.452
CSRG6 <- CSRG	0.811	0.03	26.71
HAPP1 <- HAPP	0.914	0.012	73.677
HAPP2 <- HAPP	0.905	0.014	65.291
HAPP3 <- HAPP	0.781	0.046	17.145
HAPP5 <- HAPP	0.913	0.013	69.019
PLCY1 <- PLCY	0.729	0.052	13.993
PLCY2 <- PLCY	0.927	0.011	88.264
PLCY4 <- PLCY	0.824	0.043	19.15
PLCY5 <- PLCY	0.886	0.028	31.101

order to ensure the dataset retained only the most dependable measures. In sum, the results presented in Table 1 substantiate the consistency of the items that were used in order to measure each construct, which ensures the robustness of our empirical investigation. The

significant t-statistics across the board, such as the t-statistics that exceeded the widely accepted threshold of 1.96 for a 95% confidence level, bolster the validity of our measures, which lays a strong foundation for further analyses and insights. The measurement model is provided in Fig. 1.

We present the findings from a series of reliability and validity tests, which are provided in Table 3, in order to venture forth towards internal consistency and reliability of the constructs in our study. The CR construct exhibited a Cronbach's alpha of 0.792, which suggests a good level of internal consistency. This is further reinforced by its rho\_A value of 0.802 and a composite reliability of 0.865. It becomes evident that the construct is both convergent and predictive with an average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.616 and an R square value of 0.482. The CSEF construct displayed strong reliability metrics with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.862, a rho\_A of 0.863, and a composite reliability of 0.916. The AVE for this construct was high at 0.784, which included an R square of 0.497 and an f square of 0.231. Its VIF of 1.374 indicates no multicollinearity issues. The CSR construct had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.909, rho\_A of 0.91, composite reliability of 0.924, and an AVE of 0.526 illustrates strong internal consistency. The f square was 0.141, and the VIF was 1.307. The HAPP construct also showed strong reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.902, a rho\_A of 0.914, a composite reliability of 0.932, an AVE of 0.774, an R square of 0.209, an f square of 0.041, and a VIF of 1.208. The PLCY construct had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.863, a rho\_A of 0.879, a composite reliability of 0.908, an AVE of 0.714, an f square of 0.553, and a VIF of 1.076, which indicate good internal consistency and no multicollinearity concerns.

Table 4 provides a detailed view of the discriminant validity of the study's constructs. Discriminant validity is assessed by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct with the correlations



**Fig. 1.** Measurement model.

**Table 3**  
Reliability, validity, and multicollinearity measures for the constructs.

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE	R square	f square	VIF
<b>CR</b>	0.792	0.802	0.865	0.616	0.482	–	–
<b>CSEF</b>	0.862	0.863	0.916	0.784	0.497	0.231	1.374
<b>CSR</b>	0.909	0.91	0.924	0.526	1	0.141	1.307
<b>HAPP</b>	0.902	0.914	0.932	0.774	0.209	0.041	1.208
<b>PLCY</b>	0.863	0.879	0.908	0.714	–	0.553	1.076

**Table 4**  
Discriminant validity and the HTMT analysis of the constructs.

Discriminant Validity						HTMT			
	CR	CSEF	CSR	HAPP	PLCY	CR	CSEF	CSR	HAPP
<b>CR</b>	0.785								
<b>CSEF</b>	0.609	0.885				0.724			
<b>CSR</b>	0.546	0.459	0.725			0.64	0.517		
<b>HAPP</b>	0.414	0.382	0.319	0.88		0.489	0.432	0.35	
<b>PLCY</b>	0.447	0.569	0.172	0.249	0.845	0.538	0.659	0.196	0.276

between that construct and others. The diagonal values represent the square root of the AVE (CR (0.785), CSEF (0.885), CSR (0.725), HAPP (0.88), and PLCY (0.845)). These values should exceed the off-diagonal correlations in their rows and columns. For example, CR's value of 0.785 is higher than its correlations with CSEF (0.609), CSR (0.546), HAPP (0.414), and PLCY (0.447), which indicates good discriminant validity for CR. CSEF's value of 0.885 is also higher than its correlations with other constructs, which demonstrates strong discriminant validity. The Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) is another robust criterion that is used in order to validate the discriminant validity. The HTMT values should ideally be below 0.85 in order to assert sound discriminant validity. We found by observing our constructs that CR with CSEF has an HTMT value of 0.724, a CSR of 0.64, and an HAPP of 0.489. This indicates solid discriminant validity. The HTMT value between CSEF and CSR is 0.517, which included a HAPP 0.432. All these values are well within the acceptable range, which further affirms the discriminant validity of our constructs.

### Main analysis

We utilized the partial least squares (SMART-PLS) software, which is a fitting choice given the nature of our data and the research questions at hand, for our primary analysis. The appropriateness of SMART-PLS stems from its capability to handle complex models, such as when the research is in an exploratory stage. Moreover, its variance-based approach is well-suited in regards to predicting the key target constructs and for determining the key driver constructs.

### Direct relationships

Table 5 elucidates our hypotheses in regards to the direct relationships. The data shows a significant direct effect between CSR and CR

(H1) with a path coefficient of 0.309. This is statistically significant, which is evident with a t-value of 6.342 and a p-value of 0, and it is bracketed within a confidence interval of 0.212 to 0.395. The relationship of CSR with HAPP (H2) also emerged significant, which is indicated by a beta value of 0.218, a t-value of 3.39, and a p-value of 0.001. These are all within a confidence interval of 0.096 to 0.336. These values, which are coupled with others from Table 4, highlight the hypothesized strength, direction, and significance of the relationships. Similar interpretations can be drawn for H3, H5, and H6.

### Mediation results

Our mediation analysis unveiled compelling insights. Mediation transpires when a mediator bridges the influence of an independent variable on a dependent variable. The indirect effects are presented in Table 4, such as the indirect impact of CSR on CR through HAPP (H7) with a coefficient of 0.035, a t-value of 2.488, and p-value of 0.013, which includes a confidence interval from 0.015 to 0.068. This clarifies the mediation mechanisms among the constructs. The bootstrapping techniques that were employed in SMART-PLS substantiate the significance of these mediating effects, whereas a further analysis, such as the Sobel test, can be employed in order to statistically affirm the mediation.

### Moderated mediation effects

Our exploration into the effects of the moderated mediation presents statistical results. Moderated mediation refers to scenarios where the mediation magnitude varies across different levels of another construct, which is the moderator. The interaction terms in regards to our study's context, which are listed in Table 4, which include the effect of CSRxPLCY1 on CR through HAPP (H8a) with a coefficient of 0.033, a t-value of 2.476, a p-value of 0.014, and a

**Table 5**  
Hypotheses results.

	Original Sample	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values	2.50%	97.50%
<b>CSR -&gt; CR (H1)</b>	0.309	0.049	6.342	0.000	0.212	0.395
<b>CSR -&gt; HAPP (H2)</b>	0.218	0.064	3.39	0.001	0.096	0.336
<b>HAPP -&gt; CR (H3)</b>	0.16	0.05	3.23	0.001	0.079	0.267
<b>CSR -&gt; CSEF (H5)</b>	0.321	0.06	5.348	0.000	0.215	0.458
<b>CSEF -&gt; CR (H6)</b>	0.406	0.045	9.023	0.000	0.313	0.488
<b>CSR -&gt; CSEF -&gt; CR (H4)</b>	0.13	0.03	4.337	0.000	0.082	0.196
<b>CSR -&gt; HAPP -&gt; CR (H7)</b>	0.035	0.014	2.488	0.013	0.015	0.068
<b>CSRxPLCY1 -&gt; HAPP -&gt; CR (H8a)</b>	0.033	0.013	2.476	0.014	0.015	0.073
<b>CSRxPLCY2 -&gt; CSEF -&gt; CR (H8b)</b>	0.063	0.024	2.68	0.008	0.014	0.109



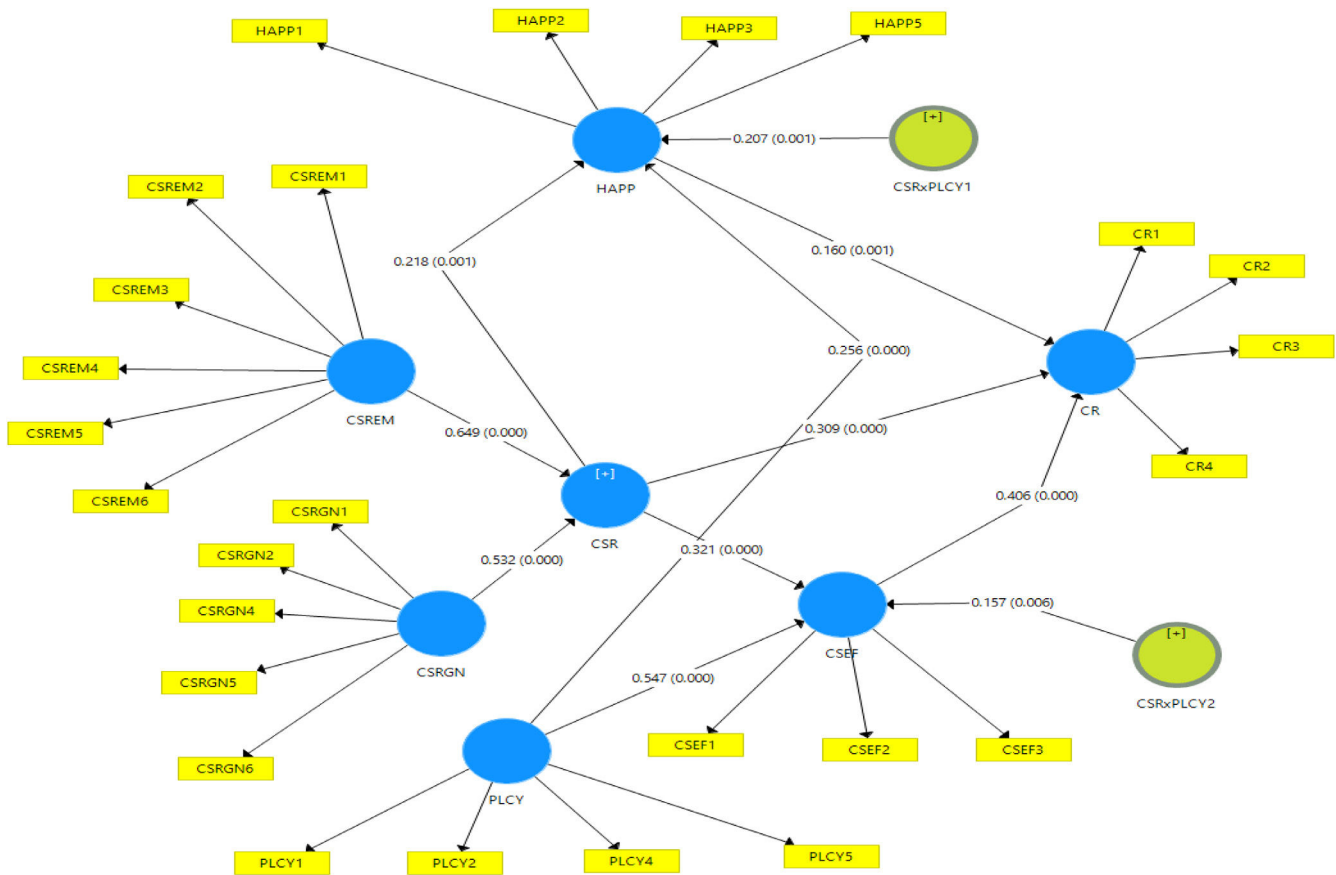


Fig. 2. Structural model.

confidence interval that is between 0.015 and 0.073, offer insights into how mediation effects are moderated under different scenarios. These types of findings are pivotal, because they demystify the conditional aspects of our hypothesized relationships as well as delineate conditions where these relationships are most robust or potentially attenuate. Fig. 2 represents the structural model.

We also tested the moderation effects of PLCY on the relationships between CSR and both HAPP and CSEF at three distinct levels:  $-1$  standard deviation (SD) from the mean, the mean itself, and  $+1$  SD from the mean. These results can be seen in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4.

The relationship between CSR and HAPP, which is shown in Fig. 3, is portrayed under varying levels of PLCY. At  $-1$  SD below the mean for PLCY, which is illustrated by the blue line, the relationship between CSR and HAPP remains somewhat stable albeit slightly negative. However, when PLCY is at its mean, which is depicted by the red line, the association between CSR and HAPP strengthens, and this indicates a positive linear relationship. When PLCY is at  $+1$  SD above the mean, which is shown by the green line, the linkage between CSR and HAPP notably becomes even more pronounced, which highlights a strong positive linear relationship. This indicates that an increase in PLCY amplifies the positive impact of CSR on HAPP.

Fig. 4 shows the relationship between CSR and CSEF, and a comparable pattern is evident. At  $-1$  SD below the PLCY mean, which is depicted by the blue line, a slight negative correlation is seen between CSR and CSEF. When PLCY aligns with its mean value, which is represented by the red line, the relationship shifts, which reveals a positive but moderate linkage between CSR and CSEF. As PLCY rises to  $+1$  SD above its mean, which is illustrated by the green line, a distinctly positive correlation surfaces between CSR and CSEF. This suggests that the positive effect of CSR on CSEF becomes more pronounced as PLCY heightens.

## Discussion

This research aimed to examine the complex link between CSR and employee creativity with the mediating variables of happiness and creative self-efficacy and a moderating variable of polychronicity. The study highlights the use of both the SET and the SIT in order to clearly understand the impact of CSR initiatives on employee creativity through emotional and cognitive routes. The findings are in line with the previous studies on CSR and employee creativity. For example, the studies by Chaudhary et al. (2018) and Abdelmoteleb et al. (2018) align with our findings that CSR positively predicts employee creativity. However, this study builds on this understanding by showing that CSR activities, such as the initiatives that are in line with the UN-SDGs, create a culture that promotes innovation among employees. CSR activities are considered organizational assets that can generate positive behaviors from the employee side, which is in the context of the SET. These types of measures demonstrate to the employees that the organization appreciates their health and beliefs, and this is followed by creative input by the employees. This type of reciprocal relationship makes CSR a strategic tool in regards to encouraging employee commitment and creativity.

Happiness plays a key mediating role in the CSR to employee creativity link. This finding is consistent with the SET and SIT propositions. The argument is that employees who view CSR initiatives as beneficial investments add to their happiness, which makes them respond with creativity, from the SET perspective. The positive emotion of happiness has been found to improve creativity by increasing the capacity to consider new ideas and ways of approaching problems. This is in agreement with Bibi et al. (2022). They established that positive ethical environments and CSR activities enhance employee happiness, which increases creativity. According to the SIT approach, CSR activities enhance the identification of the workers

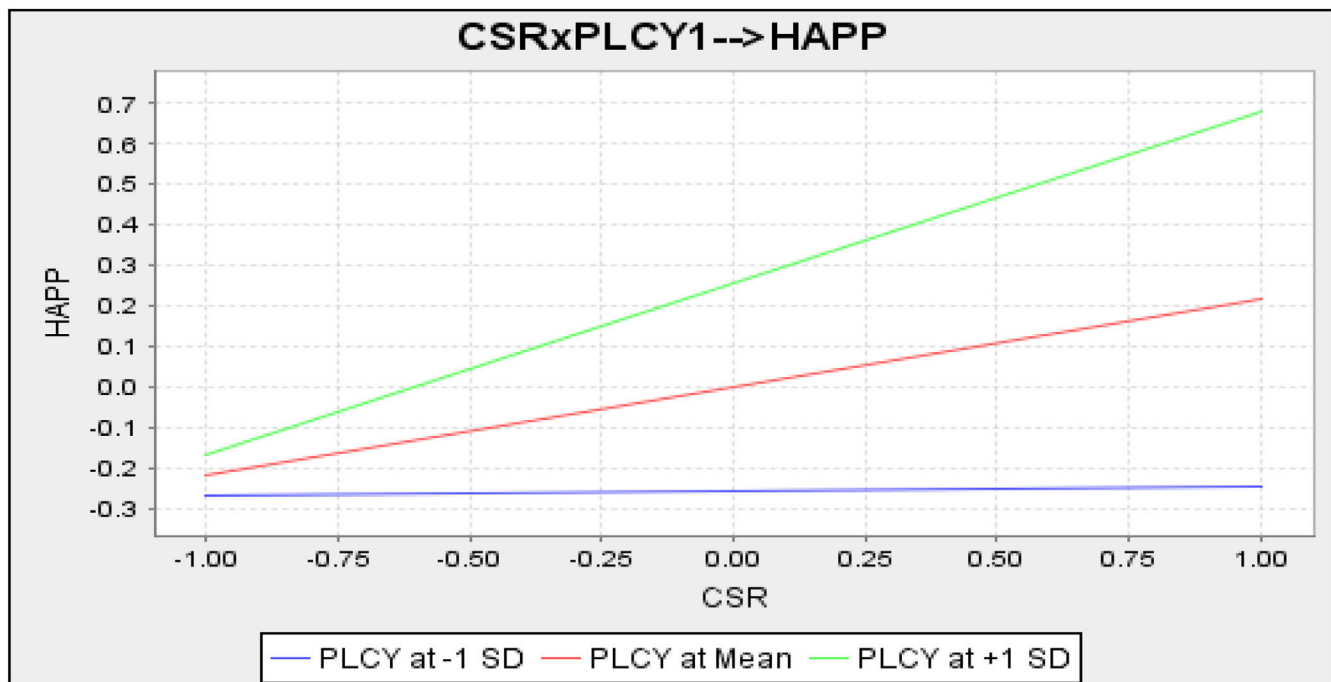


Fig. 3. Moderating effect of PLCY between CSR and HAPP at three different levels of the mean.

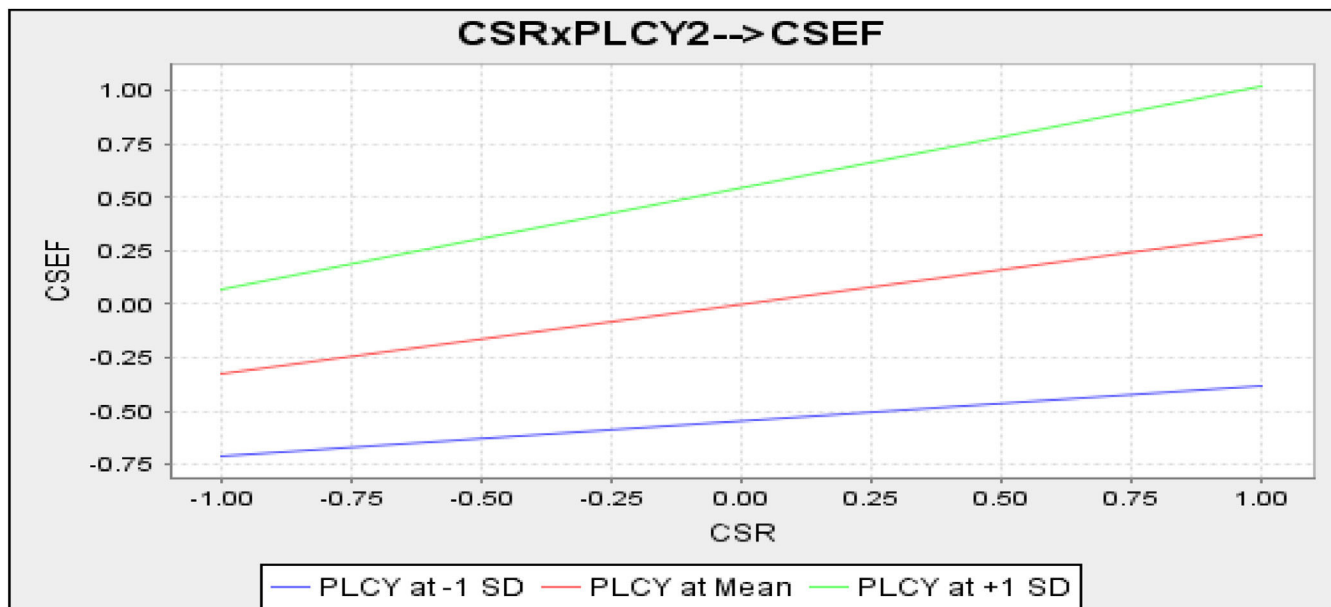


Fig. 4. Moderating effect of PLCY between CSR and CSEF at three different levels of mean.

with their organization. When employees have an affinity with an organization that is seen to be socially conscious and committed to world sustainability, they obtain increased happiness and pride. This strong identification with the organization creates self-interest in regards to maintaining and promoting the organization's favorable image, which includes creativity. This is in line with the findings by Jeong et al. (2022). This dual theoretical lens points to the importance of happiness as a mediator between CSR activities and the creativity of employees.

Creative self-efficacy is also found to have a significant mediating role in this study's CSR-creativity relationship. The results of this study suggest that CSR programs improve the perception of employees in regards to their creative proficiency, which thereby increase

their creativity. This is consistent with the SET, which views CSR initiatives as affirmative organizational support that enhances employee creativity and consequently their creative self-efficacy. Raihan et al. (2023) support this perspective by indicating that psychological empowerment and a favorable organizational climate improve creative self-efficacy and creativity. The SIT further clarifies that CSR programs help boost the sense of organizational membership, which improves the conviction of employees in regards to their creative capacity (Ahmad et al., 2022a). The socially responsible organization's values are adopted by employees who strongly identify with an organization, and the employees gain increased self-efficacy in their creativity. It enhances their self-esteem and creative self-efficacy, which encourages them to participate in innovative

activities. This integrated perspective is critical in regards to underlining how organizations should develop both the emotional and cognitive routes through CSR in order to boost creativity among employees.

This study further reveals that polychronicity moderates the mediated relationships between CSR and creativity via happiness and creative self-efficacy. Employees, who are high in polychronicity and are comfortable with the multiple activities, view CSR as numerous opportunities for their engagement and support. This in turn increases their happiness and creative self-efficacy, which enhances creativity. These employees treat CSR as a source of diverse engagement opportunities and reciprocate by infusing more creativity into it from the SET perspective. Conte, Hahnel and Brosch (2022) supported this view by suggesting that polychronicity increases the positive impact of CSR on creativity through the amplification of positive emotions. Polychronicity is high among employees, and they positively perceive CSR as a company's social responsibility, which enhances the mediated relationships between CSR and creativity based on the SIT. These employees are encouraged to keep and build a good image of the organization through creative work. Chong et al. (2010) explained that polychronicity combined with strong identification with the organization enhances the impact of CSR on employee happiness and creative self-efficacy, which increases creativity. These two theoretical frameworks help in order to explain the relationship between polychronicity and moderating factors with the former being identified as a means of increasing the impact of CSR on employee creativity.

It is possible to identify various ways CSR programs affect the creativity of employees by integrating the SET and SIT models. This type of multiple theoretical approach emphasizes the relevance of the dual-process model of the influence of emotions and thoughts and the moderating effect of personality characteristics, such as polychronicity. It is possible to understand how CSR projects can contribute in regards to creating conditions where employees feel happy and creative when they are implemented as an integral part of the organizational strategy with the help of this dual theoretical perspective. The combination of the SET and the identification processes pointed out by SIT therefore offers a comprehensive explanation of the dynamic and complex effects of CSR on employee creativity.

Our study also implies that organizations should develop CSR programs that are in compliance with UN-SDGs in order to create a positive context for employee happiness and creativity self-efficacy. It is possible this way to increase the organizational identification and perceived creativity of employees, which fosters innovation. In addition, understanding the concept of polychronicity can assist in regards to enhancing CSR initiatives by considering how they would affect various groups of employees. Knowledge of these relationships is important for managers and leaders who have the intention of using CSR as an organizational strategic tool in regards to increasing creativity and innovation. The findings of this research can help in the formulation of CSR strategies and programs that may meet social and ecological expectations as well as boost organizational performance by stimulating creative employees.

This study offers a nuanced perspective of how CSR influences workplace creativity by using happiness as a mediator and by using creative self-efficacy and polychronicity as a moderator. We provide a clear and extended model in this study that explains the relations between CSR and employee creativity by combining the SET and SIT. These findings advance the CSR and creativity literature and provide actionable guidelines to organizations that seek to build a creative and inclusive culture. The findings of this study reveal the mutual benefits of the relationships and assert that CSR is a valuable managerial approach in regards to promoting employee commitment and creativity in order to foster innovation and organizational effectiveness.

## Theoretical implications

This study theoretically contributes to the literature by developing a conceptual model where the SET and SIT are used in order to understand the dynamic CSR-employee creativity link. We deepen the understanding of the underlying processes by showing that happiness and creative self-efficacy mediate the relationship, and polychronicity moderates the relationship between CSR and employee creativity. Moreover, this study contributes to the literature on CSR and creativity through the lens of multiple theories as well as also provides a coherent framework that can be used in other organizational settings. The implications of our findings for social practice are far-reaching. Successful CSR activities are both beneficial to society and promote an organization's positive internal culture that appreciates the health and ideas of employees. This creates a positive loop of socially appropriate activities that improve the satisfaction and productivity of employees, which will be advantageous for the organization and society in return. The current research therefore highlights the importance of CSR as a tool for change and sustainable development.

Furthermore, CSR can be used as a tool in order to improve creativity in organizations by creating happy environments and boosting self-creativity among employees. Integrating CSR initiatives with the UN-SDGs can in particular enhance the organizational identification, intrinsic motivation, and innovative input of employees. The awareness of polychronicity can be useful in regards to orienting CSR activities in a way that will be most effective for employees with different needs, which enhances workplace creativity. Our study offers a multidimensional perspective that bridges the knowledge gaps and serves as a blueprint for the future research and organizational practice in the expansive landscape of organizational research on CSR and its connection to employee outcomes. The UN-SDGs present an expansive roadmap towards a brighter and more sustainable future. These goals address pervasive global challenges, which include poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, so they intricately weave the fabric of economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection by placing a universal call to action for sustainable and responsible growth. The symbiotic relationship between organizational practices and these goals has been eloquently emphasized. Goal 8, which specifically stresses decent work and economic growth, and Goal 9, which highlights industry, innovation, and infrastructure, highlight the intrinsic importance of organizational innovation in the knowledge economy.

Our study advances the discussion by placing employee creativity at the forefront in this paradigm. We position employee creativity not as a simple catalyst for organizational innovation and competitiveness but as a paramount force that can converge business practices in order to achieve UN-SDGs. History provides examples, such as Google's 20% time and Apple's unyielding focus on creativity, which underscore the essential role of innovation in regards to achieving business success and subtly suggest its potential alignment with sustainability objectives. This type of alignment becomes even more pronounced in the hospitality industry. Employee creativity in this sector does not just foster distinctiveness. It becomes instrumental in regards to realizing Goal 8 and Goal 12. These creative imprints provide a dual benefit by offering competitive differentiation as well as echoing a commitment to global responsibility.

The complexities of harnessing employee creativity in contemporary organizations remain evident. The dynamics of reward structures, organizational culture, and leadership styles all play pivotal roles. Our study uniquely dissects the intricate ties between CSR and employee creativity, such as when aligning them with UN-SDGs. Understanding CSR's impact on creativity provides companies with a competitive edge when they increasingly adopt CSR as a core strategy. As CSR gains prominence and employees seek purpose-driven roles, aligning this with a creative expression can result in mutual benefits. What truly distinguishes our research is its holistic approach to the theoretical underpinnings of creativity. The structural



elements within organizations play a role, so we accentuate the profound influence of human emotions and cognitions on creativity. The nexus between emotions, cognitions, and creativity comes to the fore in our model. We postulate a dual mediating mechanism where happiness, which is an emotional response to positive practices, such as CSR, and creative self-efficacy, which is a cognitive belief in your creative abilities, are central. The concept of polychronicity further adds depth to our framework, which suggests that individual differences in task management can moderate the effects of CSR on creativity.

Our focus on Pakistan's hospitality sector, which is stressed by its alignment with UN-SDGs, such as Goal 8 and Goal 12 adds a regional and industry-specific perspective by emphasizing the potential for sustainable growth. Furthermore, our study acknowledges and addresses multiple gaps in the literature, such as the synergy of emotions and cognitions in the CSR framework, the micro perspective of grassroots creativity in relation to the UN-SDGs, or the unique socio-cultural dynamics of developing nations. Our research in essence endeavors to fortify the current debate on CSR by exploring its multifaceted relationship with employee creativity, such as within the contemporary knowledge economy. A spotlight is cast on the imperative of aligning organizational practices with broader global initiatives, such as the UN-SDGs by doing this, which offer a harmonized vision of sustainability, innovation, and growth.

#### *Practical implications*

Our research provides valuable insights for organizations, such as organizations that are aiming to align with the UN-SDGs and foster innovation in the rapidly evolving landscape of today's business world. Embracing CSR initiatives that are closely tied to the UN-SDGs can be a potent tool for organizations to stimulate employee creativity. Our findings suggest that firms show their commitment to societal and ethical values and cultivate a fertile ground for innovative thinking by integrating CSR into strategic planning. An essential takeaway for leaders and managers is recognizing the pivotal roles of employee happiness and creative self-efficacy. Organizations can unlock tremendous innovative potential when they invest in fostering a positive emotional environment and bolster the belief of their employees in their creative capabilities. This type of an environment can lead employees to approach challenges with optimism and with a broader and more divergent thinking pattern, which drives organizational growth and differentiation. Moreover, understanding factors, such as polychronicity can enhance the effectiveness of CSR initiatives by considering the diverse nature of today's workforce. Businesses can fine-tune their CSR activities in order to maximize positive outcomes by acknowledging and catering to the varied preferences of employees in multitasking. These insights can be transformative especially for industries, such as hospitality, which is where differentiation is pivotal. Aligning services with the UN-SDGs' ethos positions firms can be viewed favorably in the market and contribute to global sustainability objectives. Furthermore, there is an increasing need for businesses in regards to understanding its perspectives as CSR becomes more mainstream. Our research stresses the importance of introducing CSR initiatives as well as effectively communicating and embedding them in organizational culture, which ensures that employees find purpose and meaning in their roles, which leads to enhanced creativity. Organizations can chart a path to sustained success in the knowledge-based economy by strategically leveraging CSR, such as in the context of the UN-SDGs, which nurtures the emotional and cognitive well-being of their employees.

#### *Limitations and future research direction*

Our study provides novel insights into the interplay between CSR, employee creativity, and the UN-SDGs in the realm of the knowledge economy, but it is essential to acknowledge some limitations. First,

our research primarily hinges on the hospitality sector in Pakistan, which does not represent the vast spectrum of industries or geographical contexts. Differences in cultural, economic, and regulatory environments across nations and industries can shape the CSR dynamics and their consequential impact. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of our study means that it captures a singular moment in time, which potentially omits the evolutionary and dynamic nature of CSR strategies and employee behaviors. A longitudinal approach could provide richer insights into the adaptive processes of organizations given the rapidly evolving landscape of the UN-SDGs. It is also worth noting that we tapped into the emotional and cognitive mechanisms, but other psychological or organizational factors may be at play that were not accounted for in this study. It is invaluable for researchers as we move forward to delve deeper into how various sectors across different nations align their CSR strategies with the UN-SDGs. The future studies can explore the long-term impact of these types of alignments on organizational performance and the broader societal outcomes. It would also be intriguing to understand how digital transformation, which is a hallmark of the current era, influences CSR's effectiveness in regards to promoting creativity, such as in light of achieving the UN-SDGs. Finally, qualitative explorations, capturing the nuances of employee experiences, leadership perspectives, and stakeholder viewpoints can offer a multi-dimensional understanding of how CSR can be optimized for both business and global sustainability objectives.

#### **Conclusion**

This study examined the complex association between CSR practices and employee creativity by employing the SET and SIT. The results of this study support the hypothesis that happiness and creative self-efficacy are mediators, whereas polychronicity moderates the relationship between CSR and employee creativity. The importance of the present study is rooted in the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. The combination of the SET and SIT offers a sound foundation in regards to explaining how CSR processes might help build the conditions in order to encourage employee creativity. As a result, this study shows that CSR impacts creativity via emotional, which is happiness, and cognitive, which is creative self-efficacy, routes by extending the CSR literature and the understanding of organizational behavior. The findings indicate that organizations should ensure that their CSR activities correspond to the UN-SDGs in a way that would be the most effective from a practical perspective. The key point is that enhancing employee well-being and creativity strongly indicates that a business can boost its innovation, and consequently gain a competitive edge. The CSR activities that increase the happiness and creative self-efficacy of employees can consequently result in increased creativity. Furthermore, awareness of polychronicity also enables the enhancement of CSR activities in regards to addressing the multifaceted requirements of an employee, which in turn fosters creativity. It is therefore possible to highlight the following broader implications for the current research by focusing on the role of CSR as a strategic management resource. Effective CSR practices help improve the welfare society and promote an organizational climate that would lead to a greater levels of employee contentment and productivity. This virtuous circle is in the interest of the organization and society. CSR is therefore capable of initiating positive social changes and sustainable development.

The present study underlines the significance of CSR activities in regards to enhancing the creativity of the employees with the help of mediators, happiness, and creative self-efficacy as well as the moderator, which is polychronicity. The research findings presented in this study can be useful to managers and organizations interested in CSR as a tool in regards to improving innovation and gaining a competitive edge. More research should be conducted on the long-term impact of CSR and other potential mediators, and moderators should

be examined in order to shed more light on the relationship between CSR and creative employees.

### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Naveed Ahmad:** Writing – original draft. **Sarminah Samad:** Methodology, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Heesup Han:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration.

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