The Mediating Effects of Meaningfulness and Work Engagement in the Relationship between Internal Corporate Social Responsibility Perception and Employee Creative Behaviour

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Abstract

In recent years, the trend of research on corporate social responsibility (CSR) has increased, but the question of how employees perceive internal CSR, its association with meaningfulness, work engagement, and employee creative behaviour is unnoticed. Thus, the main aim of this study is to explore the intervening role of meaningfulness and work engagement in the relationship between employees' internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour. The quantitative study was conducted based on primary data which were gathered from 176 employees from five selected commercial banks through structured closed-ended questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed by using univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses. The findings of this study revealed that employees perceive high levels of internal CSR, meaningfulness, work engagement, and creative behaviour. In addition, there are strongly positive and significant relationships existing among internal CSR perception, work engagement, meaningfulness, and employee creative behaviour. Moreover, the mediating analysis revealed that meaningfulness as well as work engagement mediates the relationship between internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour. Hence, the findings suggest that being a good corporate citizen can pay organizations in terms of enhanced employee work engagement, meaningfulness and creative behaviour, which can provide a competitive advantage to the organizations in this highly competitive business environment. Further, this study contributes to the extant literature by advancing the

understanding of how employees' perceptions of internal CSR relate to various workplace outcomes.

Key Words: Employee Creative Behaviour, Internal CSR Perception, Meaningfulness, Work Engagement

Introduction

As a result of the increase in the number of financial institutions in Sri Lanka, the competition among them has intensified during the recent decades (Hemachandra, 2013). For instance, in 1960 there were only two domestic commercial banks and six foreign commercial banks in Sri Lanka. According to Annual Economic Review Report of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (2023), there were thirty (30) banks, i.e., twenty-four (24) licensed commercial banks including eleven (11) branches of foreign banks and six (6) licensed specialized banks, which undoubtedly contributed to the increase in competition. Studies have found that the entry of foreign banks improves competition and makes the domestic banking system more efficient (Claessens, Demirgüç-Kunt, and Huizinga, 2001). However, most Sri Lankan banks are unable to define their products and services according to customers' expectations for maintaining their profit and competitive position in the marketplace (Abarajithan and Abarajithan, 2014). Therefore, the need for creativity and innovation are undeniable. To perform creatively, the banks expected their employees to express creative and innovative thinking and behaviour in business practice such as thinking outside of the box and suggesting better solutions which can be boosted through internal CSR perception.

In response to today's globalized knowledge economy, organizations need to introduce more innovations in their business practices, products, and services than before to survive and be successful in this challenging and dynamic working environment (Moghimi and Subramaniam, 2013). Hence, a company's success and survival depend on the degree to which they can transform creative ideas into innovative products and services. Innovation is the successful implementation of creative ideas within an organization (Kruger, Millard, and Pretorius, 2005). Creativity has become essential as organizations are facing global economic competition today. Thus, creative behaviour by employees and teams is the starting point for innovation.

Creative behaviour is a process of exploring and generating ideas including idea exploration, looking for ways to improve current products, services, or processes, or investigating alternative ways (De Jong and Den Hartog, 2007). Most organizations invest heavily and search for effective ways to encourage employee's creativity. In this way, service providers also seek to foster employee creative behaviour as a means to deliver high-quality services. In such service industries, employees can add substantial value if they can generate, exploit, and implement creative ideas (Hon and Lui, 2016). Further, the creative behaviour of frontline employees is important in-service firms as they serve as boundary workers and face customers with quite diverse needs implying that they need to be more creative (Wang and Netemeyer, 2004).

Extensive research are dedicated to understanding the dynamics of creativity, by identifying its drivers. Various personal and contextual factors have emerged as beneficial for employee creative behaviour including motivation, learning orientation, organizational culture, transformational leadership, coworker support, and experience (Zaitouni and Ouakouak, 2018). In this context, Wang, Tsai, and Tsai (2014) concurred that the workplace atmosphere influences employees' creative behaviour. Firms in which employees can identify organizational justice, support, and trust lead to a higher level of commitment and enhance the employee's creative behaviour. If the employees perceive that their firms are responsible towards them and concerning their wellbeing, it may promote a strong ethical context in an organization that develops employee creative behaviour.

Internal CSR is socially responsible behaviour by a company towards its employees (Mory, Wirtz, and Göttel, 2016). This behaviour is mainly expressed through employee-oriented CSR activities such as fostering employment stability, a positive working environment, skills development, diversity, work-life balance, empowerment, and tangible employee involvement. Even though an organization's socially responsible way towards their employers influences employee creative behaviour, it can be further stimulated or fostered through work engagement and meaningfulness. Engaged employees have high levels of involvement in their work, pride and identity in the organization, and a sense of self-identity. Engagement is a core resource in promoting innovative work. Engagement and innovation reinforce each other, engaged employees are more likely to be innovative and an innovative organization is more likely to motivate and engage its employees. Engaged employees are flexible in their thinking and invest considerable effort in their work (Bakker and Xanthopoulou, 2013). Thus, when employees are highly engaged in their work, they are open to new ideas on how to optimize and change their work processes.

Meaningfulness is another important factor to be discussed in this research context. Meaningfulness is a perceived fit between the individual's values and beliefs, and the requirements of a work role (Bass, 1999). People actively seek meaning in their lives, including in their work. Meaningfulness in the workplace helps to shape individuals' motivation and enhances a sense of growth and flourishing (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). It is thus critical for enabling identification processes, positive psychological experiences, and, ultimately, creativity to emerge.

In the last few years, the trend of research on CSR has increased, but the question of how employees perceive internal CSR is ignored. The extent of CSR literature has mainly focused on macro concepts rather than micro concepts (Rasool and Rajput, 2017; Gurlek and Tuna, 2019). Furthermore, there is still a lack of attention on the effects of perceived internal CSR and perceived external CSR activities separately on employees as a major internal stakeholder (Lee, Park, and Lee, 2013). Further, the processes that explain how and why internal CSR motivates employees to engage in organizationally desired attitudes and behaviours are not clearly understood (Chaudhary and Akhouri, 2019). Hence, from the above argument, it is quite clear that there is a *knowledge gap* existing in this area. Further, theoretical and empirical attention to the relationship between internal CSR and an employee's attitude and behaviour

in the banking sector is warranted (Albdour and Altarawneh, 2012). Furthermore, the effect of internal CSR on employee behaviours and attitudes is yet to be explored (Santoso, 2014). In addition, the observed literature has also revealed that by and large, research on corporate social responsibility has been conducted from the Western perspective (Jones, Willness, and Madey, 2014), and the investigation of internal CSR in developing countries has not been explored fully (Abd –Elmotalib, Saha, and Hamoudahb, 2015). Furthermore, the majority of the research on internal CSR perceptions of employee creative behaviour has been done in the manufacturing and IT sector industries when compared to the banking sector. Further, there is a lack of research carried out in Sri Lanka to investigate the impact of internal CSR perception on employee creative behaviour mediated by work engagement and meaningfulness. This indicates that there is a *population gap.*

Hence, the following research problem is formulated in this research:
"Whether work engagement and meaningfulness mediate the relationship between internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour?"

For this purpose, this study intended to explore how internal CSR perceptions foster employee creative behaviour. Specifically, an attempt is made to investigate the intervening role of meaningfulness and work engagement in the relationship between internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour. The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the level of employee's perception of internal CSR, meaningfulness, work engagement and employee creative behaviour.
2. To examine the relationships among employee's perception of internal CSR, meaningfulness, work engagement and employee creative behaviour.
3. To explore whether meaningfulness mediates the relationship between an employee's internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour.
4. To explore whether work engagement mediates the relationship between employees' internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour.

This study contributes to the literature by examining the positive effect of internal CSR beyond positive external brand image by relating it to the creative involvement of employees, directly and indirectly. This study aims to empirically confirm the complex mediation process where psychological meaningfulness and work engagement generated as a result of favorable internal CSR perception influence employee creative behaviour. Further, to the best of our knowledge, this may be the first study that provides empirical evidence on the mediating effect of psychological meaningfulness and work engagement between internal CSR and employee creativity in the Sri Lankan context.

The paper is divided into six sections. The second section deals with theoretical and empirical literature and hypothesis development (literature review), while the third section explains the methodology, and the fourth section addresses the results and discussion. In the fifth section conclusion is given and in the final section contributions and recommendations of the study are given.

Literature Review

Perceived Internal Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR can be defined as the context-specific activities and policies of an organization that are aimed at enhancing stakeholder welfare by taking into account the triple bottom line of financial, social, and environmental performance (El Akremi, Gond, Swaen, De Roeck, and Igalens, 2018). According to Opatha (2019), CSR is defined as the extent to which a business organization will strive to improve the overall welfare of society and he also stated that social responsiveness is the degree to which a particular organization engages in pursuing its social responsibility. The organization's CSR includes all social and environmental practices and policies implemented to enhance the well-being of all stakeholders (Turker, 2009; Priyanka, Thevanes, and Arulrajah, 2020). CSR is classified into internal CSR and external CSR (Story, Castanheira, and Hartig, 2016). Internal CSR deals with the physiological and psychological working environment of internal stakeholders, especially employees (Ferreira and Oliveira, 2014). In recent years, employees have become more interested in understanding the role of internal CSR for their welfare and interest instead of for society and external stakeholders (Abd-Elmotalib et al, 2015). Therefore, this study has focused broadly on internal CSR.

Internal CSR initiatives may promote positive attitudes of employees and improve their performance, thus, affecting organizational efficiency particularly those that affect individual employees directly (Cohen, 2010). As internal CSR focuses on employees, it builds a strong relationship between the organization and its employees. Further, internal CSR practices such as employee development, and health and safety policies, create a motivating environment within organizations, reduce the organization's operation costs and enhance its productivity (El-Garaihy, Mobarak, and Albahussain, 2014). Therefore, Internal CSR can be defined as the ethical behaviour of an organization towards employees because the behaviour of an organization can be better perceived through internal marketing and the practices of internal CSR (Mory et al, 2016).

According to Thang and Fassin (2017), there are five dimensions for internal CSR practices, and the same is adopted for study purposes as well. The first dimension is Labour Relations, which refers to the study of rules, regulations, and agreements by which employees are managed both as individuals and as a collective group, giving priority to the individual as opposed to a collective relationship that varies from company to company depending on management values. According to Opatha (2016), labour relations refers to all the feelings and dealings that occur between trade unions and the management in an organization. The second one is Social Dialogue, a mechanism through which employers, employees, and government representatives share information and opinions, discuss, negotiate, and conclude agreements on issues of concern to them. The third dimension is Work-Life Balance, which includes all the efforts of the company that lead to the fact that the leisure time and family life of employees do not come into conflict with work and therefore ensures a good balance for each person. Increasingly employees encounter conflicts between their work life and non-work life (Opatha, 2015). The fourth one is Health and Safety at Work which requires safe working practices that do not create a significant risk of people being deemed unable to do their work. It is thus intended to create environments, skills, and behaviours that allow employees and

their organizations to carry out their work effectively in a manner that prevents incidents that could harm them (Garcie-Herrero, 2012). Training and Development; a method of continuously improving people's work-related knowledge and expertise to improve their performance (Swanson, 2001) is the final dimension of it.

Employee Creative Behaviour
The ability to think creatively and work in such a way is fundamental to business in order to sustain in the market and to be competitive (Gandotra, 2010). Hence, organizations are constantly dependent on the creativity of workers (Arulrajah, 2017). The innovative potential of an organization lies in the knowledge, skills, and abilities of its employees (Rao, 2016). Employee creativity, a key element of intellectual capital, is concerned with the generation of new and valuable ideas (Kumara, Neruja, and Arulrajah, 2023). Thus, employees' creativity and innovation are the engine of change which provides the opportunity for organizations to create the future (Pitta, 2009; Arulrajah, 2014). According to Torrance (1993), creativity is a process that starts with attention to problems, proceeds to look for solutions, makes suggestions, and ends with testing and sharing results. Tierney, Farmer, and Graen (1999) defined employee creativity as the unique and useful solutions of employees to work-related problems based on the objectives and visions of the organization. Further, employee creativity is defined as the generation of new and useful ideas, products and processes (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, and Staw, 2005).

Creative behaviour is intended to initiate consciously and intentionally new and useful ideas, processes, products or procedures to be introduced within the scope of a work role, group or organization (Scott and Bruce, 1994). In accordance with George and Zhou (2001), creative behaviour is the production of new and useful ideas by employees that can be the starting point for innovation. Further, Janssen and Van Yperen (2004) defined employee creative behaviour as a set of activities that are designed to generate, encourage and implement ideas for new technologies, processes, techniques, or products. Zhou and Shalley (2003) viewed creative behaviour as extending the construction and devoting more scientific attention to putting ideas into practice. Further, according to Shalley and Gilson (2004), creative behaviour focuses on the initial phases of the innovation process, which are the generation of ideas, the discovery phase, and execution or the implementation phase.

Meaningfulness
Work is a fundamental human activity, and as individuals seek to find meaning in life, they often do so through work (Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski, 2010). Humans spend almost one-third of their day at work, and they have an important place in human life. As individuals spend more time at work, they also turn to work as a focal area in the provision of meaning, stability, and identity in their lives (Hoar, 2004). Allan, Duffy, and Douglass (2015) have seen meaningful work as a subset of meaningful life and further, argued that experiencing meaning at work can make life meaningful by balancing work life with non-work life.

Psychological meaningfulness is the value of a work goal or purpose, judged by the ideals or standards of an individual (May, Gilson and Harter, 2004). Rosso et al (2010) stated work

meaningfulness as the positive and important contribution of the job to the meaning of individual life, as well as the satisfaction that a person receives from his or her job.

According to Steger and Dik (2010), work meaningfulness refers to a sense of work understanding, meaning that employees have a clear understanding of their role in the organization and a sense of purpose which means that they serve the greater social good. Different cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and economic benefits can be achieved when work becomes more meaningful for individuals (Steger, Dik, and Duffy, 2012). Further, meaningfulness of work encompasses the degree to which employees consider their job as essential (Luoh, Tsaur, and Tang, 2014). Meaningful work offers individuals the ability to overcome themselves and connect with something greater (Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, and Dunn, 2014). It is considered important and purposeful. Thus, it contributes to the positive view of people about their jobs (Jiang and Johnson, 2018).

Work Engagement
According to Iddagoda, Opatha, and Gunawardana (2016), employee engagement is the extent to which an employee gets involved in the job and the organization cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally. Employee engagement is vital to organizational performance and provides multiple benefits, such as increased productivity, decreased turnover, and enhanced internal reputation (Jiang and Men, 2017). Such workers are happier, more energetic, and healthier than employees who are not engaged in the workplace; they build and utilize their personal and work resources and express and transfer their commitment to others (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). Kahn (1990), who first conceptualized engagement, defined it as harnessing the members of the organization to their work roles; people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during the performance of roles in engagement. Further, Saks (2006) has defined engagement as a distinct and unique structure composed of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements correlated with the performance of individual roles. Further, employee work engagement is viewed as a positive, fulfilling, and work-related mental state characterized by vigor, and dedication and is associated with constructive behaviour (Petrou, Demerouti, Peeters, Schaufeli, and Hetland, 2012).

Three dimensions of employee work engagement have been identified by Soane, Truss, Alfes, Shantz, Rees, and Gatenby (2012) as cognitive, emotional, and social. The cognitive dimension of employee engagement is intellectual engagement, the extent to which one is intellectually absorbed. The emotional dimension of engagement has been viewed as affective engagement, the extent to which one experiences a state of positive affect relating to work role and the physical dimension of engagement has been identified as social engagement, the extent to which one is socially attached to the working environment and shares common values with colleagues. Therefore, employees are motivated to engage in proactive and risk-taking behaviours that are induced by enhanced work engagement to overcome the challenging problems of social and organizational issues (Hur, Moon, and Ko, 2018).

Internal CSR Perception and Employee Creative Behaviour
According to Pandey and Gupta (2008), as organizations engage in CSR initiatives and provide a caring and supportive environment that helps others in a community, they create a spiritual awareness that allows workers to generate creative ideas about the company's products, facilities, processes, and practices. Further, it has been found that socially responsible companies are more likely to promote a free and innovative work environment in order to develop new products and services for both companies and society and enable employees to take part in creative tasks (Brammer, He, and Mellahi, 2015). Organizations actively involved in CSR are likely to foster a safe and unrestricted environment that increases employees' willingness to take risks and experiment with new ideas to produce better goods and services for stakeholders (Hur et al, 2018). Employee perceptions of CSR are positively associated with employee creativity (Glavas and Piderit, 2009; Hur et al, 2018; Dung, 2020; Giana and Dung, 2022). The study hypothesizes that internal CSR practices by creating a motivating and unconstrained environment in organizations encourage employee creative behaviour. Therefore, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H_1: *There is a positive relationship between internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour.*

Internal CSR Perception and Meaningfulness
Brammer et al (2015) stated that when the organization is dedicated to employees, ensures their rights as workers, protects their health and safety, and invests in their professional development, their sentimental attachments and desire to remain in this business get affected positively. When employees find that their organization works in a socially responsible manner, they feel proud of their organization and like to take part in it (Valentine and Fleischman, 2008). According to Cohen-Meitar, Carmeli, and Waldman (2009), if the organizations get involved in CSR practices, the image of the organization gets improved and then leads to a sense of meaning at work. Employees who sense that they are emotionally and socially supported at work are more likely to derive meaning from what they do (Rosso et al, 2010). When employees find that their organization is involved in ethical behaviour, they also start feeling positive, which most likely results in increased meaningfulness in their work (Hansen, Dunford, Boss, Boss, and Angermeier, 2012). Furthermore, employees who work for socially responsible organizations tend to identify more closely with their employing company and view their job as more meaningful which in effect motivates them to think about their work constantly and to work intensely, unable to detach from their work (Caesens, Stinglhamber, and Luypaert, 2014). Based on the above literature, it can be hypothesized that internal CSR perception has a positive impact on meaningfulness. Thus, the second hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H_2: *There is a positive relationship between internal CSR perception and meaningfulness.*

Internal CSR Perception and Work Engagement
Social exchange theory provides a fruitful theoretical basis for explaining the relationships between internal CSR and work engagement (De Roeck and Maon, 2018; Jamali and Karam,

2018). Valentine and Fleischman (2008) stated that social responsibility and corporate ethics are directly related to employee satisfaction and engagement within the organization. Furthermore, when employees perceive that their company conducts business in accordance with morality and ethics beyond the basic legal requirements, the company and its assigned work stimulate them positively, resulting in a positive relationship between ethical citizenship and work engagement (Lin, 2010). Further, Bakker, Albrecht, and Leiter (2011) showed that employee perception of CSR is positively linked with employee engagement and also has a direct relation with CSR and employee engagement. Albdour and Altarawneh (2012) stated that frontline employees who perceive their companies perform good internal CSR practices such as training and education, human rights, health and safety, work-life balance, and work diversity are more likely to exhibit a higher level of engagement in work. According to Park, Lee, and Kim (2018), employee perceptions of CSR have a significant positive impact on work engagement which is in turn positively associated with employee innovative behaviour. Moreover, when organizations provide employees with benefits through CSR, employees feel obliged to repay with greater levels of work engagement for those benefits (Gurlek and Tuna, 2019). Based on the above literature, it is expected that if organizations implement internal CSR activities and policies, its employees come up with higher work engagement. Hence, the third hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H_3: *There is a positive relationship between internal CSR perception and work engagement.*

Meaningfulness and Employee Creative Behaviour
Employees who consider work as meaningful can be inspired internally to handle obstacles and difficulties (Staw, 1990). Optimal experience of meaningful work from individual development will enhance the ability of employees to utilize their skills and energies toward innovation and creative achievements (Kashdan, Rose, and Fincham, 2004). Further, meaningful work stresses the valuable goals of individuals (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009). Experiencing meaning in and at work and being valued and respected by others are likely to make employees feel positive about their ability to produce creative ideas to solve problems and engage in innovative behaviour (Cohen-Meitar et al, 2009). This sense of positive regard, when others believe in one's competence and worthiness, makes individuals feel safe in experimenting with innovative ways to solve organizational problems and hence display higher creativity. Based on the above writing, a positive linkage between meaningfulness and employee creativity is expected to occur. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H_4: *There is a positive relationship between meaningfulness and employee creative behaviour.*

Work Engagement and Employee Creative Behaviour
Engaged employees are able to respond adequately to changes in environmental conditions, rapidly adapt to new conditions and easily switch between activities (Langelaan, Bakker, Van Doornen, and Schaufeli, 2006). Engaged employees have more energy than non-engaged employees to explore innovative paths (Atwater and Carmeli, 2009). Sundaray (2011) considered the engagement of employees as a source of distinct qualities that are difficult to imitate. This also implies that workers who are engaged are passionate about their jobs and

are often fully involved in their jobs. These outcomes will be better ways to do things that put creativity and innovation in a great perspective. According to Gichohi (2014), employee engagement in the workplace seems to play a critical role in creativity and innovation. In addition, engaged employees are the source of creative performance, while disengaged employees are an organization's liability. Furthermore, Demerouti, Bakker, and Gevers (2015) demonstrated a positive association between work engagement and employee creativity in the Netherlands, and Rao (2016) confirms that employee engagement positively impacts employee innovativeness. Based on the above writing, it is expected that work engagement has a positive association with employee creative behaviour. Thus, it puts forward as the fifth hypothesis:

H_5: *There is a positive relationship between work engagement and employee creative behaviour.*

Mediating Role of Meaningfulness in the Relationship between Internal CSR Perception and Employee Creative Behaviour
The empirical study of May et al (2004) found that the organization's performance of CSR may provide a higher sense of meaning in the workplace in the sense that employees will feel that they are not simply working for themselves in the organization; instead, they are part of an organization that also considers other people's well-being. Further, Shalley, Gilson, and Blum (2009) concluded that it is more likely that employees with a deep desire to learn can create, encourage, and realize new ideas. Employees who view their organization favorably because of their CSR behaviour are more likely to show a sense of meaningful work that increases the productivity and innovation of employees (Brammer et al, 2015). Kim, Nurunnabi, Kim, and Jung (2018), used meaningfulness as a mediating factor between corporate social responsibility and organizational commitment. The study by Chaudhary and Panda (2018) used psychological meaningfulness as a mediating factor for their study purpose. Further, Chaudhary and Akhouri (2019) hypothesized that meaningfulness mediates the relationship between CSR perception and employee creativity. As per the above writing, meaningfulness is anticipated to play as a mediating factor in the internal CSR perception - employee creative behaviour linkage. It is believed that the above literature supports this study to use meaningfulness as a mediating factor between internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour. Thus, the sixth hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H_6: *Meaningfulness mediates the relationship between Internal CSR Perception and Employee Creative Behaviour.*

Mediating Role of Work Engagement in the Relationship between Internal CSR Perception and Employee Creative Behaviour
Employee's views of the ethics and social sensitivity of their organization play an important role in encouraging employees to engage in their work (Lin, 2010). Further, employee's engagement behaviour motivates them to do more than their duties and results in organizational creativity and innovation (Gichohi, 2014). Farid, Iqbal, Ma, Castro-González, Khattak, and Khan (2019) argued that when individuals perceive the CSR practices and policies of a firm as fair, they display more engagement in their work and are more likely to go beyond

their formal duties by exhibiting actions that benefit the company as a whole, which may enhance employee creative behaviour in the workplace. Further, the study by Chaudhary and Akhouri (2019) hypothesized that work engagement mediates the relationship between CSR perception and employee creativity. In this study work engagement was anticipated as a mediating factor between internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour. Thus, the seven hypothesis is given below:

H₇: Work Engagement mediates the relationship between Internal CSR Perception and Employee Creative Behaviour.

Conceptual Model

This study proposes to test the model illustrated in Figure 1, which indicates how internal CSR perception has an effect on employee creative behaviour as well as the mediating effect of work engagement and meaningfulness.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model
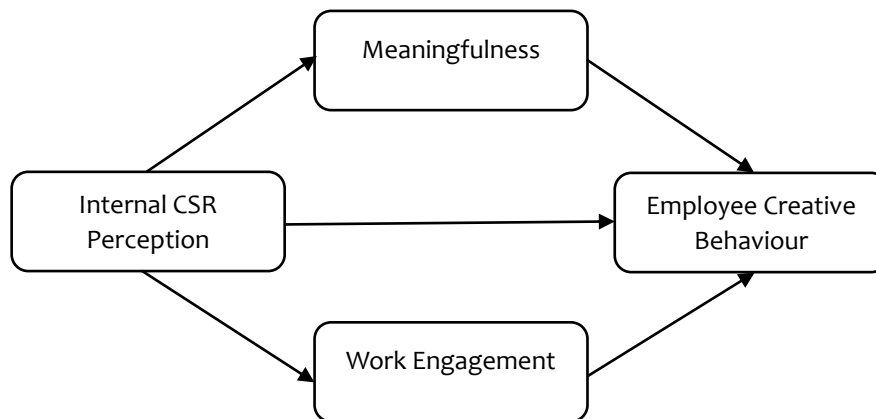
Source: Developed by Authors based on literature review

Theoretical Support for the Conceptual Framework of this Study

Social Exchange Theory
The social exchange theory presented by Blau (1964) provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding employees' attitudes and behaviours in an organization. It suggests that individuals tend to reciprocate those who support them under certain circumstances. When individuals perceive mutual benefit in interacting with a group or individual, they develop positive feelings towards that party, leading to feelings of trust, obligation, and mutual benefit (Blau, 1964). Organizations can foster social exchange with employees through policies, practices, behaviour and organizational integrity, including corporate social responsibility (Rupp and Mallory, 2015).

Social exchange theory can be used to provide a theoretical foundation for explaining the link between internal CSR and work engagement. When the organization supports its employees in a variety of ways, such as economic and socio-emotional, the employees may tend to react in the form of gratitude (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Further, this theory provides a theoretical baseline explaining the reasons why employees feel more or less engaged in their work and organization. According to social exchange theory, when employees are given values by empowerment and training, the employees feel a sense of consideration and they repay the organization by showing engaged behaviour. This engaged behaviour of employees motivates them to perform more than their duties and results in creativity and innovation in the organization (Rao, 2016). This means that when the employees perceive that their organization cares about their well-being, they tend to show gratitude towards their organization. This leads to higher work engagement which results in creative behaviours.

Social Identity Theory

The theory of social identity is often used to describe how individuals conceive of themselves, how they identify with and develop a commitment to specific groups, and their behaviour, particularly with respect to other groups (Ashforth and Meal, 1989). It says individuals have a tendency to differentiate themselves from others in social contexts, and thus have a propensity to pursue groups of attachment that are distinguishable by their values. When, through the behaviour of the company employees consider the values conveyed to be consistent with their own, they respond to it as an extension of their identity.

Hogg and Terry (2000) stated that when employees see that their organization works for the well-being in the form of CSR, consequently, they feel a sense of satisfaction and like to identify themselves with the organization as it enhances their self-esteem and pride and views their work as meaningful. Further, Tench and Jones (2015) indicated that pride in working for a socially responsible organization adds to the self-confidence of employees and improves their self-esteem. As a result, they are likely to feel prouder of their work and find it even more meaningful and thus remain engaged. CSR thus leads to a better employee organizational relationship by helping employees satisfy their self-esteem needs, which ultimately determines how employees get to work. According to the social identity theory, when employees work for a value-driven organization as reflected in its CSR activities, they are likely to strongly identify with it. This feeling with the organization can motivate the employees to exhibit attitudes and behaviours that support organizational interest. Therefore, when employees see their firm's CSR activities favorably, they are likely to bring more energy to work and show a high level of dedication and absorption at work. Therefore, social identity theory also supports the developed conceptual model.

Methodology

The research philosophy of this study is positivism as it is carried out in accordance with social reality and the data have also been collected in a free manner based on the collection of quantitative data. A deductive approach is used to explain the causal relationship between the variables, develop hypotheses, test the hypotheses, and collect quantitative data where

the concepts of this study have been operationalized in such a way as to allow the facts to be measured quantitatively. As this study is a quantitative study using questionnaires to collect the data from the sample and using a deductive approach, the survey strategy has been selected and used as an appropriate research strategy for this study.

The total population of the study is 236 employees working in five selected commercial banks in Manmunai North and Eravur Patru Divisional Secretariat areas in Batticaloa District. The main reason for choosing two specific district secretariat areas in Batticaloa District is the fact that the majority of the bank branches in Batticaloa District are located in these DS regions out of 14 DS divisions. Meanwhile, the population of the study consists of a limited number of employees in selected banks; in order to validate the research and achieve the research objectives, the stratified random sampling technique was employed to represent all hierarchical levels ranging from banking trainees to managerial level people of five selected commercial banks. The unit of analysis was the individual employees of the five selected banks. The details about the study population and sample size are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Study Population and Sample Size

Staff Category	Bank-1		Bank-2		Bank-3		Bank-4		Bank-5		Total Population	Total Sample
	Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample		
Banking Trainee	02	**02**	09	**08**	08	**08**	08	**07**	03	**03**	30	28
Banking Assistant	20	**13**	12	**06**	08	**07**	17	**14**	41	**30**	98	70
Executive	06	**06**	02	**02**	02	**01**	07	**05**	05	**04**	22	18
Officer	04	**02**	03	**02**	04	**02**	16	**14**	06	**05**	33	25
Assistant Manager/Manager	03	**02**	04	**04**	06	**04**	15	**08**	14	**11**	42	29
Others	-	**-**	03	**02**	-	**-**	01	**-**	07	**04**	11	06
Total	35	**25**	33	**24**	28	**22**	64	**47**	76	**57**	**236**	**176**

The primary data was collected through a closed structured questionnaire from 176 respondents. In addition, various other sources such as journal articles and published papers, web sites of the relevant institutions were used to collect secondary data. According to the research objectives of the study, and the characteristics of gathered data through the questionnaire, the quantitative analysis function was facilitated by using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) 22nd version. Here, the data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using Univariate, Bivariate, and Multivariate analysis techniques.

Measures
Measurements used for this study have been adopted from previous studies. Internal CSR includes 5 dimensions adapted from Thang and Fassin (2017) and consists of 18 items. Among the 18 items, the labour relation consists of 5 items which were adapted from Ngo, Lau, and Foley (2008), Work life balance was measured using 4 items out of which 2 items in the scale

were adapted from Mory et al (2016), and other 2 items were adapted from Wong and Ko (2009) and Smith and Gardner (2007). Social dialogue consists of 4 items adapted from Thang and Fassin (2017). The dimension of Health and safety includes 3 items adapted from Sutherland and Cooper (1990) and training and development consists of 2 items adapted from Tsui, Pearce, Porter, and Tripoli (1997).

Further, the nine-item shortened version of the Utrecht work engagement scale by Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006) was used to measure work engagement. The meaningfulness was measured using 5 items adapted from May et al (2004). Employee creative behaviour was measured using 4 self-reported items adapted from Farmer, Tierney, and Kung-McIntyre (2003).

In this study, the reliability and validity of the instrument were tested using internal consistency where Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient was calculated. The recommended value of 0.7 was used as a cut-off of reliability. Table 2 shows the reliability values of the variables suggesting that Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient values for the overall variables are above 0.70. Thus, it is indicated that all items are considered reliable suggesting that the internal reliability of each instrument was satisfactory.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis for Overall Variables and Dimensions

Variables		Number of Question Items	Cronbach's Alpha Value	
Internal CSR Perception	Labour Relation	5	0.751	0.875
	Work-Life Balance	4	0.818	
	Social Dialogue	4	0.757	
	Health and Safety	3	0.702	
	Training and Development	2	0.734	
Work Engagement		9	**0.864**	
Meaningfulness		5	**0.786**	
Employee Creative Behaviour		4	**0.785**	

Results and Discussion

Profile of the Respondents

Table 3 shows the profile of the respondents of the study. Accordingly, out of 176 respondents, 34.7% of respondents are between 18 to 28 years, 48.3% are between 29 to 38 years, 14.2% are between 39 to 48 years and 2.8% are above 49 years old, and among 176 respondents, 47.7% of males and 52.3% of females were contributed for this study. Further, the Table denotes the educational qualifications of the respondents which have been categorized

into six levels. It shows that 27.3% of respondents have GCE A/L, 14.8% have a Diploma, 25.6% have Bachelor's Degree, 6.3% have Master's Degree and 26.1% possess other qualifications such as IABF, DABF, ICASL, CIMA, CMA, ACCA or any other qualification.

Additionally, concerning the job positions, 15.91% of respondents are baking trainees, 39.77% are banking assistants, 14.2% are officers, 16.48% are assistant managers or managers, 10.23% are executives and 3.41% of respondents are in other job positions. Besides, nearly 12.5% of respondents have below two years of experience, 18.2% have 2 to 5 years of experience, 23.9% have 6 to 8 years of experience and 45.5% have more than 8 years of working experience.

Table 3. Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Factor	Classification	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Bank Name	Bank 1	25	14.20
	Bank 2	24	13.64
	Bank 3	22	12.50
	Bank 4	48	27.27
	Bank 5	57	32.39
	Total	**176**	**100**
Age	18-28	61	34.7
	29-38	85	48.3
	39-48	25	14.2
	Over 49	5	2.8
	Total	**176**	**100**
Gender	Male	84	47.7
	Female	92	52.3
	Total	**176**	**100**
Educational Qualification	Ordinary Level	-	-
	Advance Level	48	27.3
	Diploma	26	14.8
	Bachelor's Degree	45	25.6
	Master's Degree	11	6.3
	Others	46	26.1
	Total	**176**	**100**
Job Position	Banking Trainee	28	15.91
	Banking Assistant	70	39.77
	Officer	25	14.20
	Assistant Manager/ Manager	29	16.48
	Executive	18	10.23
	Others	06	3.41
	Total	**176**	**100**
Work Experience	Below 2 years	22	12.5
	2-5 years	32	18.2

6-8 years		42			23.9	
Above 8 years		80			45.5	
Total		**176**			**100**	

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

In order to achieve the first objective of the study Univariate analysis has been utilized and objective two is achieved with bivariate analysis. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations for all the variables tested in this study.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Results of the Study

Variable		Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2	3
1	**Internal CSR Perception**	Labour Relation	4.11	0.498			
		Work-Life Balance	3.38	0.622			
		Social Dialogue	4.03	0.541			
		Health and Safety	4.05	0.596			
		Training and Development	4.08	0.621			
		Overall Internal CSR Perception	**3.92**	**0.412**			
2	**Work Engagement**		**4.16**	**0.493**	0.730**		
3	**Meaningfulness**		**4.17**	**0.493**	0.634**		
4	**Employee Creative Behaviour**		**3.98**	**0.559**	0.705**	0.649**	0.586**
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							

According to Table 4, the mean values of all the variables and dimensions fall between the ranges of 3.40 to 4.20 indicating that Internal CSR perception, work engagement, meaningfulness, and employee creative behaviour are at a high level. In addition, most of the respondents have a common opinion regarding employee creative behaviour as the standard deviations are less than 0.5 except for employee creative behaviour.

The bivariate analysis was used to investigate the relationship among the independent variable, dependent variable and mediating variable in order to achieve the second objective of this study. Further, formulated hypotheses in the Literature review section of this paper were also tested using the correctional analysis. Pearson correlation coefficient indicates the direction, strength, and significance of the bivariate relationship among all the variables that were measured on an interval scale. According to Gogtay and Thatte (2017), the correlation coefficient value (r) ranges from 0.10 to 0.29 which is considered weak, from 0.30 to 0.49 which is considered medium and from 0.50 to 1.0 which is considered strong.

The results revealed that there is a strong and significant relationship between Internal CSR Perception and Employee Creative Behaviour as the correlation coefficient is 0.705 which is significant at a 1% level. Similarly, correlation values between Internal CSR Perception and work engagement and Internal CSR Perception and meaningfulness are 0.730 and 0.634 respectively with significance at 1% showing a strong positive relationship between independent and mediating variables.

Finally, the correlation coefficient between Work Engagement and Employee Creative Behaviour is 0.649, and Meaningfulness and Employee Creative Behaviour is 0.586 and they are significant at a 1% level. This implies that there is a strong positive association between the mediating variables and the dependent variable.

Mediation Analysis
Mediation Analysis – Model One
In order to achieve the third objective, the meditation process of Baron and Kenny (1986) with four steps was adopted. Table 5 shows the summary results of the four-step mediational process for model one.

Table 5. Mediation Analysis of Model One

Step	Path	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R^2	B	Sig.	F-statistic
1	c	Internal CSR Perception	Employee Creative Behaviour	0.497	0.955	0.000	171.970
2	a	Internal CSR Perception	Meaningfulness	0.402	0.758	0.000	117.116
3	b	Meaningfulness	Employee Creative Behaviour	0.344	0.664	0.000	91.097
4	c'	Internal CSR Perception	Employee Creative Behaviour	0.529	0.755	0.000	97.309
		Meaningfulness			0.264	0.001	

According to Table 5, step 1 shows that 49.7% of the variation in the employee creative behaviour is explained by the employee's internal CSR perception and the B coefficient for internal CSR perception is 0.955 at a 5% significance level, which means if the internal CSR perception increased by one unit employee creative behaviour would be induced by 0.955 units. Hence, step one concludes that an employee's internal CSR perception significantly and positively predicts the employee's creative behaviour.

Step 2 indicates that 40.2% of the variation in meaningfulness is explained by employee's internal CSR perception. Further, in Table 5, the B coefficient for internal CSR perception is 0.758, which means when the internal CSR perception increases by one unit meaningfulness

will be improved by 0.758 units. Thus, step two concludes that the internal CSR perception significantly and positively impacts meaningfulness.

Step 3 depicts that 34.4% of the variation in the employee creative behaviour is explained by meaningfulness and when the meaningfulness increases by one unit employee creative behaviour will be improved by 0.664 units. Thus, step three concludes that meaningfulness significantly and positively impacts employee creative behaviour.

In this study, the finding indicates (step 4) that 52.9% of the variation in employee creative behaviour is explained by employees' internal CSR perception and meaningfulness. Also, according to Table 5, the B coefficient for internal CSR perception is 0.755, which means when the internal CSR perception gets increased by one unit, employee creative behaviour will get improved by 0.755 units. Further, the B coefficient for meaningfulness is 0.264, which means when the meaningfulness increases by one unit, the employee creative behaviour will be induced by 0.264 units. Thus, step four concludes that the internal CSR perception and meaningfulness significantly and positively impact employee creative behaviour.

Finally, the results demonstrate the form of mediation, as the effect of Internal CSR perception remains significant when meaningfulness controls the relationship, but the strength of the relationship has reduced from 0.955 to 0.755. Further, the mediating effect is said to be statistically significant.

The study by Chaudhary and Akhouri (2019) found that meaningfulness failed to mediate the relationship between employee's CSR perception and employee creativity. In contrast to that, this study specifically examined the mediating effect of meaningfulness in the relationship between employees' internal CSR perception and creative behaviour and found that meaningfulness partially mediates the relationship between employees' internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour.

Mediation Analysis – Model Two
Table 6 shows the summary results of the four-step mediational process.

Table 6. Mediation Analysis of Model Two

Step	Path	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R^2	B	Sig.	F-statistic
1	c	Internal CSR Perception	Employee Creative Behaviour	0.497	0.955	0.000	171.970
2	a	Internal CSR Perception	Work Engagement	0.532	0.873	0.000	198.007
3	b	Work Engagement	Employee Creative Behaviour	0.421	0.735	0.000	126.490
4	c'	Internal CSR Perception	Employee Creative Behaviour	0.536	0.671	0.000	99.805
		Work Engagement			0.326	0.000	

According to Table 6, step 1 indicates that 49.7% of the variation in the employee creative behaviour is explained by the employee's internal CSR perception and the B coefficient for internal CSR perception is 0.955, which means when the internal CSR perception increased by one unit of employee creative behaviour would be improved by 0.955 units. Thus, step one concludes that the internal CSR perception significantly and positively impacts employee creative behaviour.

Step 2 shows that that employees' internal CSR perception explains 53.2% of the variation in work engagement. Further, in Table 6 B coefficient for internal CSR perception is 0.873, which means when the internal CSR perception increases by one unit work engagement will be improved by 0.873 units. Thus, step two concludes that the internal CSR perception significantly and positively impacts work engagement.

According to step 3, 42.1% of the variation in the employee creative behaviour is explained by work engagement and when the work engagement is increased by one unit employee creative behaviour will be improved by 0.735 units. Thus, step three concludes that work engagement significantly and positively impacts employee creative behaviour.

Finally, step 4 depicts that 53.6% of the variation in the employee creative behaviour is explained by employees' internal CSR perception and work engagement and when the employee's internal CSR perception increases by one unit employee creative behaviour will be improved by 0.671 units. Thus, step four concludes that the internal CSR perception and work engagement significantly and positively impact on employee creative behaviour.

Finally, the results from the four-step analysis demonstrate the form of mediation, as the effect of internal CSR perception remains significant when work engagement controls the relationship, but the strength of the relationship has reduced from 0.955 to 0.671. Therefore, it can be concluded that work engagement partially mediates the relationship between internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour. The study by Chaudhary and Akhouri (2019) found that the relationship between employee's CSR perception and employee creativity is mediated by work engagement. Further, this study specifically examined the mediating effect of work engagement on the relationship between employees' internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour and found that the relationship between employees' internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour is partially mediated by work engagement.

Conclusion

The finding of the study leads to the following conclusions. According to the descriptive analysis results, employees perceive high levels of internal CSR, work engagement, meaningfulness, and employee creative behavior. Further, this study concludes that there is a significant and strong positive relationship between the study variables such as internal CSR perception, employee creative behaviour, meaningfulness, and work engagement. In addition, the four-step mediational analysis concludes that meaningfulness and work

engagement partially mediate the relationship between internal CSR perception and employee creative behaviour.

Contribution and Recommendations of the Study

The findings of the study will be helpful in a competitive dynamic environment as this study has explored the impact of employees' internal perception through the linkage of mediations of meaningfulness and work engagement with employee creative behaviour. The present study has several theoretical contributions to literature. This study extends the literature by advancing the understanding of how employee perspectives regarding internal CSR activities impact employee creative behaviour considering meaningfulness and work engagement as a mediator and extending knowledge regarding the impacts of internal CSR practices on employee creative behaviour in the Sri Lankan context.

In addition to the theoretical contribution, the present study has practical contributions for management. The study suggests that being socially responsible towards employees can boost meaningfulness, employee engagement, and employee creative behaviour, which can provide a competitive advantage to organizations in this highly competitive business environment. Further, this study will be useful for banks that are intended to become competitive and innovative as banks are trying to introduce new innovative practices and processes. Thus, this study may be beneficial to improve employee's creative behaviour by implementing internal CSR practices.

Moreover, the explored mediation mechanism will be helpful for managers, future researchers, and academicians to understand why and how the relationship between perceived internal CSR and employee creative behaviour subsists. The level of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices as internal CSR allows employees to perceive the organizational support and respect the organization. Thus, the results of the study suggest that practicing internal CSR can engender the employee creative behaviour among employees for the management.

Further, the study recommends that organizations should give due importance to key stakeholders and CSR initiatives should be designed to protect their rights and interests. In particular, CSR programs directed at employees can improve productivity and efficiency, as internal CSR creates a strong sense of employee significance and engagement that allows them to engage in innovative behaviour. Internal CSR activities, such as training and development, health, safety, labour relations, and human basic needs, make employees more dedicated and engaged in their work.

Organizations should include the development of stress management policies to identify and eradicate work practices that cause employees to disengage from work as a way of refreshing their minds to induce creative behaviour. Further, organizations should aim at ensuring that there is a work-life balance for all the employees at the organization. This can be achieved through job sharing where two employees share one job, part-time work, and through flexible working arrangements.

The banks should develop specific internal CSR programs and further ensure the successful implementation of these programs. CSR initiatives may focus on treating employees fairly, designing challenging jobs, providing proper feedback, giving autonomy, and rewarding positive behaviours. These initiatives can help stimulate positive psychic energy in employees, which can increase their engagement in positive work behaviours such as work engagement and creative behaviours. The work environment of banks should try to create a supportive, pleasant working environment internally, in order to make the employees engage in innovative behaviours. Further, employees should be trained according to the present content of the environment.

In addition, managers need to give employees a sense of meaning to their jobs, provide positive feedback on the work they have successfully achieved, and offer opportunities for personal growth, which may make employees more interested in their work and make more creative efforts in their work. Therefore, internal CSR can be used as a tool to improve the efficiency of the HR department. Similarly, the HR department may provide better training, safety, and involvement in organizational communication as organizational support for boosting employee work engagement and meaningfulness. Furthermore, internal CSR should be individualized and personal as individuals are unique and they need unique treatment as well.

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