



# How Corporate Social (Ir)Responsibility Influences Employees' Private Prosocial Behavior: An Experimental Study

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## Abstract

The micro-level corporate social responsibility (CSR) literature has broadly demonstrated the effects of CSR on employees' behavior but has mostly been limited to employees' behavior within the work domain. This business-centered focus overlooks the potential of organizations to change employees' private social and environmental behavior and thus to address grand societal challenges. Based on the social psychology literature on moral consistency and moral balancing, we conduct three experiments to investigate whether employees' private prosocial behavior is consistent with their organization's corporate social (ir)responsibility or whether employees aim to balance their private prosocial behavior, e.g., by compensating for their organization's CSR activities with a reduced willingness to contribute outside the work domain. Our results provide support for a consistency effect such that employers' environmental CSR activities increase employees' donations and willingness to volunteer outside work. Environmental corporate social irresponsibility activities, on the contrary, reduce employees' private donations and willingness to volunteer. We further find that the positive effects of environmental CSR are partly explained by the strengthening of employees' environmental self-identity. Our findings highlight that organizational activities have consequences for employees' moral behavior outside the work domain and thus have important implications for research and practice.

**Keywords** Corporate social responsibility · Corporate social irresponsibility · Employees · Moral consistency · Environmental self-identity

## Introduction

Previous research has comprehensively demonstrated that corporate social responsibility (CSR) affects the attitudes and behaviors of employees within organizations (Zhao et al., 2022). Empirical findings have indicated that CSR activities influence the social behavior of employees at work, such as their workplace pro-environmental behavior or ethical decision-making (Beaudoin et al., 2019; Tian & Robertson, 2019). This literature has provided a variety of theoretical explanations for the effects of CSR on employees' behavior in the work domain (for a recent review, see

Gond et al., 2017). Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), for instance, suggests that individuals return resources and reciprocate for favorable treatment by their organizations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). According to this theory, employees benefit from CSR and thus engage in positive behavior toward the employing organization. While previous theoretical perspectives build upon employers' and employees' reciprocal, interpersonal, or intergroup relationships within organizations (Zhao et al., 2022) and explain how CSR affects employees' behavior in the work domain, our knowledge regarding whether and how CSR relates to employees' behavior in the nonwork domain remains limited.

This knowledge gap is surprising since an improved understanding of whether and how CSR affects employees' private behavior has far-reaching implications for both research and practice. Accordingly, researchers have called for a more society-centered focus of CSR research (Barnett et al., 2020; Du et al., 2022). Broadening the scope of such research to include employees' private behavior is

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highly relevant because this approach can help us explore CSR's ultimate implications for society. If employers' CSR or corporate social irresponsibility (CSIR) activities either positively or negatively influence employees personally and their social and environmental behavior beyond the work domain, organizations could play an even greater role in ethical issues such as climate change.

Thus, our study aims to investigate whether and how CSR and CSIR activities affect employees and their behavior beyond the four walls of the company. The literature on work-nonwork interferences has proposed two opposing perspectives (Staines, 1980). According to the spillover perspective, employees' behavior at work is carried over into nonwork life, thus creating similarities between these two domains. According to the compensation perspective, employees balance a lack of experience at work with their own private choices. This literature has consistently shown that the work and nonwork domains are closely interrelated (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) but has usually considered only the individual's own experiences or behavior. A few micro-level CSR studies have also considered employees' behavior outside the work domain (e.g., De Roeck & Farooq, 2018; Paillé et al., 2019). This research has shown that CSR activities or specific subdimensions thereof, such as green training (Usman et al., 2022) or corporate volunteering programs (Rodell et al., 2017), positively affect employees' pro-environmental behavior outside work or personal volunteering intentions. However, this work has mostly assumed that CSR activities target employees directly or that employees are involved in CSR activities to a certain degree.

We challenge these assumptions and investigate the two opposing effects that environmental CSR and CSIR (i.e., ECSR and ECSIR), activities that have a clear external focus and lack any direct involvement on the part of or benefit for employees, might have on employees' behavior outside the work domain. In social psychology, moral consistency and moral balancing theories were developed to explain individuals' moral behavior and have explored whether individuals behave in a morally consistent manner or balance their own moral behavior across situations (Mullen & Monin, 2016). We expand this reasoning to study the effect of an organization's moral activity on the moral behavior of its employees in a different context. Specifically, we identify ECSR and ECSIR as the moral and immoral activities of organizations that employees vicariously consider when making their own moral decisions. We regard employees' prosocial behavior as a special type of moral behavior frequently used in social psychology to test for moral consistency versus moral balancing effects (Merritt et al., 2010). Prosocial behavior captures voluntary actions that aim to benefit others, including subsequent generations, other species, and our ecosystem; these actions often take the form of giving money or time (Gneezy et al., 2012).

We theorize that ECSR is a relevant corporate activity for employees that shapes employees' moral self-perceptions and leads to a moral consistency effect, i.e., it increases employees' prosocial behavior. In contrast, we expect that ECSIR lowers employees' moral self-regard and leads to a moral balancing effect, i.e., employees cleanse themselves by acting in a prosocial manner.

We provide a deeper understanding of these mechanisms by investigating employees' environmental self-identity (ESI), a special form of moral self-perception, and their emotions of guilt, which is a central moral emotion, as potential explanations of moral consistency and moral balancing effects, respectively (Ding et al., 2016; Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010). Based on a vicarious self-perception perspective and in line with moral consistency arguments, we theorize that ECSR strengthens employees' ESI because employees internalize the behaviors of relevant others, including their organizations. ESI, in turn, reinforces their private prosocial behavior toward the environment. In accordance with a moral balancing perspective, we theorize that employees experience vicarious guilt when their employer engages in ECSIR. This situation, in turn, motivates employees to cleanse themselves by acting in a more prosocial manner. Taking into account employees' self-identities and emotions broadens the impact of CSR research because it has important implications for employees' wellbeing.

We test our hypotheses by conducting three experiments. Whereas previous research on the relationship between CSR and employee-level outcomes has, to a large extent, employed cross-sectional survey studies (Jones et al., 2019), we used experimental designs and assessed the actual behavior of employees. This approach is essential to control for possible self-selection and common method biases and, ultimately, to address causation methodologically. In all studies, we manipulated ECSR and ECSIR information before we assessed different types of employees' private prosocial behavior (i.e., their willingness to volunteer or their donations) or measured employees' ESI and guilt.

Our work makes important contributions to the literature. First, our manuscript contributes to the micro-level CSR literature on the effects of CSR on employees. We respond directly to the recent call for a more society-centered focus in CSR research (Barnett et al., 2020). More specifically, we account for the societal and environmental impacts of ECSR and ECSIR (Du et al., 2022) by investigating the effects on employees' ESI, emotions of guilt, and private prosocial behavior. We substantially enrich the micro-level CSR literature by introducing a vicarious moral consistency mechanism and challenging this mechanism from a vicarious moral balancing perspective. These theoretical lenses help us explain how CS(IR) activities, which lack any involvement on the part of or direct benefit for employees,

nevertheless affect employees and their private behavior. Furthermore, we contrast the effects of CSR and CSIR, while most previous work has focused only on the effects of CSR on employees (Gond et al., 2017). We believe that this approach is important because CSR and CSIR have been proposed to have asymmetrical effects (Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013). Our vicarious moral consistency perspective enriches the business ethics and environmental literature and provides a basis on which researchers can explore how organizations' moral, immoral, and environmental activities shape employees' attitudes and behavior. Our work is also meaningful for practitioners and policy-makers since we derive relevant implications for business ethics.

## Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

### Environmental CSR and CSIR

We define CSR as a company's "context-specific actions and policies that aim to enhance the welfare of stakeholders by accounting for the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance" (El Akremi et al., 2018, p. 5, based on the definition provided by Aguinis, 2011). We define CSIR as context-specific activities performed by the organization that can disadvantage or harm other stakeholders (Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013). While these broad definitions of CSR and CSIR highlight the welfare of or harm to other stakeholders, we focus on ECSR and ECSIR, subdimensions of these notions in which the natural environment is viewed as the beneficiary or victim, respectively. This focus is crucial for our research question since we are interested in exploring employees' reactions to companies' activities that target benefits for societal stakeholders and aim to exclude the effects of other CSR practices, such as employee benefit programs, that provide direct benefits to employees. Several aspects of these definitions, their underlying assumptions, and their relationships are noteworthy. First, CSR ("doing the right thing") goes beyond the prevention of CSIR ("not doing harm," Aguinis, 2011, p. 858; Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013). Specific actions associated with ECSR include not only reducing pollution and saving resources (to reduce harm) but also the planting of trees (to do the right thing). Examples of ECSIR range from the employment of inexpensive but harmful production methods or the production of massive amounts of waste to the explosion of a power plant. Second, our conceptualizations of ECSR and ECSIR subsume the concept of ethics given that organizational responsibility and irresponsibility result in actions that are more ethical and more unethical, respectively (Aguinis, 2011). Ferry (1962, p. 66) noted that responsibility refers to the "capability to distinguish right from wrong, and also accountability, both

legal and moral, for actions taken and actions not taken." However, irresponsibility "is characterized by unethical and morally distasteful behavior" (Ferry, 1962, p. 66). Accordingly, we assume that ECSR and ECSIR reflect organizations' moral and immoral actions, respectively. Observing a morally neutral behavior of organizations (instead of ECSR or ECSIR) serves as a baseline condition in our study as recommended (Mullen & Monin, 2016).

### Moral Consistency and Moral Balancing

We build on theories drawn from social psychology to explain why and how ECSR and ECSIR affect the private prosocial behavior of employees. The literature has proposed two highly contested perspectives on the question of whether individuals behave in a morally consistent manner or balance their moral behavior over time and across situations. The first such stream of research has predicted *moral consistency* in terms of attitudes, values, and behavior. This perspective builds on self-perception theory, which claims that individuals derive self-attributions and inferences regarding their inner states from their own overt behavior if internal cues concerning such attitudes and values are ambivalent or vague (Bem, 1972). These apparent attitudes and values then lead to future behavior that is consistent with the observed behavior. Empirical research has provided ample evidence to support the notion of moral consistency, as based on past moral acts, individuals infer that they are moral beings and thus engage in more moral behavior in their subsequent decisions (for an overview, see Mullen & Monin, 2016). In consumer research, for example, the encouragement to purchase green products spilled over to other pro-environmental behaviors, such as using public transportation, recycling, or saving water and electricity (Lanzini & Thøgersen, 2014).

In direct contrast to the aforementioned theory and findings, the second stream of research has provided arguments supporting the existence of *moral balancing* effects of human behavior, i.e., situations in which one behavior induces the opposite behavior (for an overview, see Merritt et al., 2010). The mechanism underlying this situation is drawn from Nisan's (1991) moral balance model. The basic assumption of this model is that individuals possess a threshold level of moral self-regard and balance their decisions to ensure that their perceived moral self-regard remains as close as possible to the threshold level. The individual's perceived moral standing can rise above (after good deeds) or fall below (after bad deeds) the threshold level. If previous good deeds have raised one's moral self-regard above one's threshold, the individual in question builds moral credits. Accumulated moral credits subsequently allow the individual to engage in morally problematic behavior (Merritt et al., 2010). This effect is

known as moral licensing. Conversely, moral cleansing occurs when individuals fall below their threshold level of self-regard after engaging in bad deeds and, in turn, reaffirm their values by acting in a moral manner to compensate for these transgressions (Mullen & Monin, 2016). Moral balancing effects have been investigated in laboratory settings in many different contexts. For instance, Sachdeva et al. (2009) found that participants who were asked to write about their negative traits donated more to a charity than did participants who wrote about their own positive traits. In studies on environmental behavior, Thøgersen and Ölander (2003) found not only consistency effects, but also a few balancing effects that indicated that environmentally friendly behavior in one category reduces environmentally friendly behavior in other categories.

### The Effects of CSR and CSIR on Employees' Prosocial Behavior

Whereas consistency and balancing effects have mainly been tested in settings in which individuals' prior (im)moral behavior was highlighted, we extend this view by predicting that the company's actions spill over to employees' private behavior. Goldstein and Cialdini (2007) expanded self-perception theory to include a vicarious self-perception model. According to this model, people can also incorporate the observed actions of close others into their self-concepts and, in turn, behave in line with the observed behavior. In direct contrast, previous research has also proposed that the moral behavior of close others can lead to vicarious moral balancing (Kouchaki, 2011). We further expand this theorizing by predicting that observing the (im)moral activities of the employing organization affects employees.

From a vicarious moral consistency perspective, we theorize that the moral behavior of organizations leads to the moral behavior of employees. In our specific context, this claim entails that when employees notice (compared to when they do not notice) the CSR activities of their own employer, they are more likely to engage in private prosocial behavior. We argue that one's own organization is one of the relevant others with which employees identify. Individuals tend to build their social identities based on their self-categorization into social groups, such as organizational membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This tendency can be observed even if interaction and interpersonal cohesion are missing (Turner, 1985), and especially if organizations are prestigious or have a positive image, for example, due to engaging in CSR (De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012). When employees observe the ECSR activities of their own organization, they may thus incorporate these moral activities into their self-perceptions, and in line with the moral consistency perspective, they then engage in moral behavior themselves. Since most individuals consider

sustainability to be important and advocate for ECSR activities, we do not expect ECSR to be above the moral threshold of most employees. Hence, we do not assume that ECSR leads to moral credits and ultimately a licensing effect.

However, we believe that a vicarious moral balancing perspective is relevant when considering the immoral behavior of organizations. We theorize that employees cleanse themselves by engaging in more prosocial behavior when they are confronted with the CSIR activity of their employers (compared to when they are not confronted with such acts). We propose that employees perceive the ECSR activities of their own employer as immoral activities that are below their moral threshold. Such a view has been supported by research showing that CSIR is usually regarded as a moral transgression and thus induces moral outrage (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016). When employees witness the ECSR activities of their employer, they internalize this immoral behavior in such a way that their own moral self-regard falls below their threshold. Based on the moral balancing model, employees thus cleanse themselves by engaging in moral behavior.

**Hypothesis 1** ECSR has a consistency effect on employees' private prosocial behavior; i.e., witnessing ECSR from one's own employer leads to higher levels of prosocial behavior than not witnessing ECSR from one's own employer.

**Hypothesis 2** ECSR has a cleansing effect on employees' private prosocial behavior; i.e., witnessing ECSR from one's own employer leads to higher levels of prosocial behavior than not witnessing ECSR from one's own employer.

### The Role of Environmental Self-Identity

We further theorize that ESI plays an important role in the relationship between ECSR and employees' private prosocial behavior. Above, based on the existence of vicarious self-perceptions, we theorized that ECSR leads to private prosocial behavior. Self-identity refers to a prominent aspect of people's self-perceptions (Sparks & Shepherd, 1992), especially those that pertain to a specific social context or a particular behavior (Conner & Armitage, 1998). Most relevant to our context is ESI, which refers to the extent to which an individual regards himself or herself as a person who behaves in an environmentally friendly manner.

Based on self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) and in line with the moral consistency perspective, previous research has hypothesized and shown that reminding people of their own pro-environmental behavior strengthens their ESI, which, in turn, reinforces their subsequent pro-environmental behavior (Van der Werff et al., 2014).

We advance this perspective and argue that the social environments and the various roles that one performs can also shape ESI (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Companies play a crucial role in employees' lives and have the potential to shape their identities strongly (Miscenko & Day, 2016). ECSR is a central characteristic of organizations with which employees identify (Tian & Robertson, 2019). In line with the vicarious self-perception mechanism outlined above, we propose that ECSR activities increase employees' ESI (e.g., "I work for an environmentally friendly company, so I must be an environmentally friendly person"). Previous work has further asserted that ESI increases prosocial behavior toward the environment (Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010). Consequently, we expect that employees with higher ESI engage more in private prosocial behaviors.

**Hypothesis 3** (a) ECSR enhances employees' ESI, which, in turn, (b) increases employees' private prosocial behavior.

### The Role of Guilt

We expect that emotions of guilt explain why ECSIR leads to cleansing behavior. Prior research on moral balancing has shown that recalling one's own immoral acts leads to a cleansing effect through emotions of guilt (Ding et al., 2016). As outlined above, moral cleansing builds on a process of moral self-evaluation. Guilt is one of the most prominent self-conscious emotions, i.e., the set of emotions that are aroused by self-evaluation (Tangney et al., 2007). Usually, when people fail to meet their own moral standards during this self-evaluation process, self-conscious emotions arise. Guilt emerges when people evaluate their own behavior as morally wrong or when they believe they have caused harm to others (Tangney et al., 2007). Moreover, people experience emotions of guilt in response to moral transgressions committed by other group members with whom they identify (Li et al., 2020). Based on the premise that employees identify with the organization that employs them, we theorize that they vicariously experience guilt when they witness the ECSIR activities of their own employer.

Guilt is most effective in motivating individuals to take reparative action after transgressions and to foster a lifelong pattern of moral behavior (for a review, see Tangney et al., 2007). Even vicariously internalized emotions have the potential to influence employee behavior and can be transferred to behavior outside work (Rodell et al., 2017). Hericher and Bridoux (2023) hypothesized the existence of such an effect against the background of deonance theory. These authors claimed that vicarious emotions of guilt cause employees to compensate the

victim of CSIR with the goal of restoring the victims' wellbeing; however, they found only limited support for the indirect effect. Overall, we postulate that the ECSIR of the employee's own organization can invoke vicarious guilt. This guilt, in turn, motivates employees to cleanse themselves by acting in a more prosocial manner.

**Hypothesis 4** (a) ECSIR enhances employees' emotions of guilt, which, in turn, (b) increase employees' private prosocial behavior.

### Overview of Studies

We designed three experiments to test our hypotheses. Online Appendix A provides an overview of these studies. In Study 1, we provided workers at a single crowdsourcing company with real ECSR, ECSIR, or neutral information about their employer before measuring their willingness to volunteer for another project. This field experiment served to test the general effects of ECSR and ECSIR on employees' private prosocial behavior (H1 and H2). In Study 2, we chose a physical setting and altered our outcome measure to provide further support for the main effects. In this study, we investigated whether students were more or less likely to donate money to a charity with an environmental mission versus a charity with a broader social mission when they believed that they worked for a start-up that engaged in ECSR versus ECSIR activities. We designed Study 3 as a recall-based experiment to test whether ECSR influences ESI (H3a), whether ECSIR induces emotions of guilt (H4a), and whether ESI and guilt, in turn, influence volunteering behavior (H3b and H4b). This study further aimed to ensure ecological validity by measuring the ECSR and ECSIR perceptions of full-time employees from a variety of organizations (at time 1) and observing their willingness to volunteer (at time 2). Furthermore, we distinguished between recalling the activities of one's own company and recalling the activities of any other company to rule out alternative explanations.

### Study 1

#### Sample and Procedures

#### Participants

We conducted an online experiment using an established crowdsourcing platform (Horton et al., 2011). Participants needed to meet the following requirements: (1) having completed at least 1000 tasks on the platform to ensure that they had sufficient experience with their employer,



(2) having a 98% approval rate or better, and (3) being located in the US to increase the likelihood of participants' proficiency in English (Feitosa et al., 2015). The study included four attention checks to enhance the final sample's data quality (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). Participants who did not pass these attention checks were excluded from the analyses. The final sample consisted of 142 participants (50% female; mean age = 41.08;  $SD$  age = 13.37). Workers in our sample spent 19.40 h per week ( $SD$  = 12.38) on the crowdsourcing platform on average.

## Procedure

We told participants that we were interested in their work on the crowdsourcing platform and their perceptions of the company operating the platform as their employer. We embedded our study into this broader survey because it was essential that workers reflect on their work and employer; in addition, we wanted to conceal the true purpose of the study to reduce the effect of potential demand characteristics. Participants first answered several questions about their work on the platform (e.g., year of entry, average weekly income, total number of tasks completed). Next, we asked several knowledge questions about the company running the platform (size, year of foundation, products). Therefore, we told participants that we were interested in how familiar they were with their employer. Our manipulation of ECS(IR) was included in this part. We subsequently asked participants about their perceptions of their employer and themselves. Finally, we measured workers' private prosocial behavior by offering participants the option to volunteer.

## Manipulation of ECS(IR)

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. In the *ECSR condition*, participants received some information about their employer's real environmental sustainability projects. This information was drawn from the organization's sustainability web page but was adapted slightly to reflect our definition of ECSR. For example, participants read about the organization's climate pledge, sustainable operations, or packaging. In the *ECSIR condition*, we presented an environmental scandal about the organization (destruction of massive amounts of as-new and returned goods). This information was drawn from a newspaper article and adapted slightly according to our definition. In the *control condition*, participants received neutral information about the announcement of a new product. Full descriptions of all conditions are included in Online

Appendix B. Participants were asked, "Have you ever heard of any of these or similar environmental corporate social responsibility [*ECSR condition*]/these or similar environmental corporate social irresponsibility [*ECSIR condition*]/these or similar [*control condition*] activities of [name of the organization]?" We used this question to embed our manipulations within the knowledge questions.

## Measures

### Private Prosocial Behavior

We told participants that we were currently conducting another study for a nonprofit organization that supports communities in need and protects our environment. Participants answered the following question: "Would you be willing to help communities in need and protect our environment by taking part in an unpaid study (max. 5 min)?" Our measure of *volunteering* was coded as 1 if participants chose "yes" and 0 if they chose "no."

### Manipulation Checks

We measured workers' ECSR perceptions using seven items that assessed the natural environment-oriented CSR dimension of El Akremi et al.'s (2018) multidimensional corporate stakeholder responsibility scale. This measure (*ECSR manipulation check*) was scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Cronbach's alpha was 0.97. In line with our ECSIR manipulation, we asked whether "[name of the organization] produces extensive amounts of waste" (*ECSIR manipulation check*).

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics and Manipulation Checks

Online Appendix C displays means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for all the variables included in Study 1. We tested whether our manipulations were effective by conducting an analysis of variance (ANOVA) and examining planned contrast effects. As expected, ratings for the *ECSR manipulation check* differed significantly across groups, with significantly higher values being observed in the ECSR group ( $M = 5.04$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) than in the other groups ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ;  $F(1, 139) = 13.00$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Ratings for the *ECSIR manipulation check* (i.e., about extensive amounts of waste) were significantly higher in the ECSIR condition ( $M = 5.11$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ) than in the other conditions ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ;  $F(1, 139) = 3.97$ ,  $p = 0.048$ ).

## Main Results

We assessed the effects of our ECSR and ECSIR manipulations on employees' private prosocial behavior (H1 and H2). Therefore, we performed Fisher's exact test to compare the likelihood of *volunteering* across conditions. Fisher's exact test is an appropriate alternative to a chi-square test when at least one of the cells has an expected frequency of five or less. In our study, 32.61% of participants in the *ECSR condition*, 9.09% in the *ECSIR condition* and 23.08% in the *control condition* indicated that they were willing to volunteer; this difference was statistically significant (*Fisher's exact*  $p=0.022$ ). This result supports the consistency effect of ECSR hypothesized in H1 and suggests a consistency effect of ECSIR, in contrast to H2.

## Additional Analyses

We did not include control variables in the initial set of analyses because our experimental design allowed us to randomly allocate individuals to the experimental conditions. To test the robustness of our findings, we ran additional analyses controlling for several variables that relate to employees' prosocial behavior. Previous research has shown that organizational identification relates to employees' socially responsible behaviors, especially in the context of CSR (De Roeck & Farooq, 2018). This relationship exists because employees are more likely to identify with a company that engages in positive behavior, such as CSR (Ashforth & Mael, 1989); organizational identification, in turn, leads to more positive attitudes and behaviors at work. We included a measure for *organizational identification* to rule out whether this variable also serves as a predictor of employees' prosocial behavior outside work. Therefore, we used the single-item graphic scale developed by Shamir and Kark (2004). We also assessed participants' demographic variables that relate to volunteering behavior (Rodell et al., 2016), specifically, *female*, *age*, and *degree*. As theory explains, female, older, and more educated employees are more likely to volunteer because they have (accumulated) a higher sense of obligation (Wilson & Musick, 1997). In additional logit regressions that included this set of control variables, *ECS(IR)* remained a significant predictor of *volunteering*, thereby supporting the main results reported above. Notably, *organizational identification* was not significantly related to *volunteering*. Detailed results of these analyses are available from the authors upon request.

## Study 2

### Sample and Procedures

#### Participants

We recruited 118 undergraduate and graduate students on campus of a large university in Germany. We used flyers and posters on which we posed as a start-up company that invited students to participate in a company event. Students were required to sign in and select a free spot for the event using a QR code or by following a link to a webpage. Students participated in exchange for money equivalent to an average hourly wage (10€). This compensation was necessary to ensure that the setting (working for a company) was realistic and to measure participants' donation behavior. After excluding two participants (one student was below the age of 18, while another student refused to sign the confidentiality and participation agreement), we analyzed the data collected from 116 participants (57% female; mean age = 22.46, *SD* age = 2.66; 44% German).

#### Procedure

We told participants that we were a start-up company that produced innovative and precious teak furniture. Throughout the entire process, students were not aware that they were participating in an experiment since it was important that they believed they were working for a real company. The event took approximately 60 min. At the beginning of the event, the alleged founder of the company, accompanied by another colleague, welcomed the students, explained the procedure, and highlighted the importance of the students' input for the company. Students then worked on some marketing tasks, participated in product testing, and made some recommendations for human resource decisions related to the launch of the start-up in another country. We used this part of the experiment for our ECS(IR) manipulation and to strengthen the work setting. Next, participants completed several short questionnaires regarding their perceptions of the company and work and entered their demographics. After participants were paid for their work, they were offered the chance to donate money.

#### Manipulation of ECS(IR)

Participants read a newspaper article about the start-up company. This newspaper article was part of the first assignment, which asked the participants to work on some marketing tasks. We randomly assigned participants to one of two conditions. In the *ECSR condition*, the descriptions highlighted the sustainable and environmentally friendly

business concept of the start-up, specifically, the usage of recycled teak to help reduce overfelling and the start-up's reinvestments in sustainable and controlled plantations. In the *ECSIR condition*, we noted that the start-up had been criticized for its sourcing policy (e.g., using teak from a country that contributed to wood clearing and overfelling). The newspaper articles are displayed in Online Appendix D.

## Measures

### Private Prosocial Behavior

In this study, we wanted to determine whether our manipulation had different effects on donations to charities that served different purposes. We measured actual donation behavior in a manner that was similar to that used in previous experimental research (Mulder & Aquino, 2013). We chose one organization with a clear vision related to protecting the environment (Greenpeace). We further selected one organization with a broader social mission (UNICEF). When participants were paid for their work, they received an envelope with 10€. Each participant received one 5€ bill as well as two 2€ and one 1€ coins to ensure that they could donate in specific increments. Participants were required to sign a confirmation of payment that also asked them to indicate whether they wished to donate, how much of the 10€ they wished to donate, and to which of the two charities they would like to donate. All participants handed back their envelopes, including the confirmation of payment and (if applicable) the amount of money they chose to donate. We used a dummy variable for *donating* money, the total *amount donated*, and the amounts donated to *Greenpeace* and *UNICEF*.

### Manipulation Checks

Participants were asked to indicate whether they perceived the company to be very sustainable and to care about the environment (*ECSR manipulation check*) on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all” to “very much.”

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics and Manipulation Checks

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for all variables are included in Online Appendix E. To test whether our manipulation was effective, we performed independent Welch's *t* tests (Welch, 1938) because the two samples had unequal variances. Ratings for the *ECSR manipulation check* were significantly higher in the *ECSR condition* ( $M = 6.34$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) than in the *ECSIR condition* ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ;  $t = -11.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

## Main Results

We tested the effects of ECS(I)R on employees' donation behavior. First, we performed a chi-squared test to compare the likelihood of *donating* across conditions; 70.69% of participants in the *ECSR condition* donated money to either one or both charities, while 46.55% of participants in the *ECSIR condition* did so; this difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 6.97$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ). Second, we performed independent (Welch's) *t* tests to determine whether donation amounts differed across conditions. We found that the mean *amount donated* was significantly higher in the *ECSR condition* ( $M = 2.19$ ,  $SD = 2.67$ ) than in the *ECSIR condition* ( $M = 1.21$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ;  $t = -2.29$ ,  $p = 0.024$ ). Third, we investigated whether participants' donation amounts to charities with an environmental versus a social focus differed across groups. Donations to *Greenpeace* were significantly higher in the *ECSR condition* ( $M = 0.94$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ) than in the *ECSIR condition* ( $M = 0.25$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ;  $t = -3.29$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, donations to *UNICEF* did not differ significantly across groups (*ECSR condition*:  $M = 1.25$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ; *ECSIR condition*:  $M = 0.96$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ ;  $t = -0.81$ ,  $p = 0.417$ ). These findings support the claim that ECSR has a consistency effect on private prosocial behavior toward the environment.

### Additional Analyses

For additional analyses, the study included the same measures of *organizational identification*, *female*, *age*, and *degree* that we used in the additional analyses of Study 1. In (logit) regression analyses, we found that *ECSR* information significantly increased the likelihood of *donating* money and the *amount donated* but that *organizational identification* was not significantly related to *donating* or to the *amount donated*. Overall, these additional results are in line with the main results of this study that we reported above. Detailed results are available from the authors upon request.

## Study 3

### Sample and Procedures

#### Participants

We recruited participants via Prolific, a platform that provides the option to use prescreening criteria to collect high-quality data from a customized sample (Palan & Schitter, 2018). We used full-time employment status as a prescreening criterion to collect a sample of employees from diverse organizations. To increase data quality, we also chose a minimum approval rate of 95 and location in



the US. In total, 600 participants were invited to complete two waves of the study with a time lag of a minimum of one to a maximum of two weeks. In each of the two waves, we included one attention check. After the exclusion of participants who failed at least one attention check or who dropped out of the study after the first wave, we were able to analyze the data provided by 524 participants (32.44% female; mean age = 39.37, *SD* age = 19.14).

### Procedure

In the first wave of the study, we assessed participants' ECSR and ECSIR perceptions, general levels of ESI, and controls. One week later, participants were invited to complete the second wave of the study. In this wave, we used a 3×2 design and asked participants to recall an ECSR, an ECSIR, or a business-as-usual activity of their own company versus that of any other company. Afterward, we measured employees' ESI, emotions, including guilt, and willingness to volunteer.

### Recalling ECS(I)R

We followed the recall procedure developed by Hericher and Bridoux (2023) but changed the descriptions to suit our definition of ECSIR; we also included a scenario for ECSR. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions and asked to recall an action performed by the company for which they worked “that aimed to enhance the welfare of the natural environment such as reducing pollution, saving resources etc. [*ECSR of the own organization condition*]/that resulted in (potential) disadvantages and/or harm to the natural environment such as causing pollution, wasting resources etc. [*ECSIR of the own organization condition*]/that is business as usual [*neutral activity of the own organization condition*].” Participants were then asked to describe this activity as vividly as possible (including what precisely the company did, the manner in which this activity affected the natural environment [in the ECSR and ECSIR conditions] or other stakeholders [in the neutral condition], and how they thought/felt about this activity).

### Recalling One's Own or Another Company

Participants were also randomly assigned to different groups and were asked either to recall an activity in which their own company engaged or to recall an activity in which any other company engaged. The descriptions provided above reflect the *own company* condition. The corresponding section of the description in the *other company* condition was “that

any company you are familiar with (but not the company you work for) did...”.

### Measures

For all survey items, we used a 7-point Likert scale with response options ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” unless specified otherwise.

### Perceived ECSR

We used the seven items developed by El Akremi et al. (2018) to measure *perceived ECSR*. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.94.

### Perceived ECSIR

We measured *perceived ECSIR* using three items targeting the natural environment drawn from the CSIR scale developed by Wagner et al. (2008). Cronbach's alpha was 0.89.

### Private Prosocial Behavior

As in Study 1, participants were asked whether they would be willing to *volunteer*. We specified that we were conducting another study for a nonprofit organization that protects our environment and that we would appreciate it if participants could spend up to 10 min to support us by participating voluntarily in this study. Participants thought that they would receive additional questions for that specific study. Response options included “no,” “yes, 1 more page (approx. 1 min)” to “yes, another 10 pages (approx. 10 min).”

### ESI

In both waves of the study, we used the 3-item scale developed by van der Werff et al. (2013) to measure *ESI*. Cronbach's alpha was 0.96 in the first wave and 0.95 in the second wave. We computed *ESI changes* as the difference in ESI between the two waves.

### Guilt

We measured several emotional states using the positive and negative affect schedule—expanded (PANAS-X) by Watson and Clark (1999). Therefore, participants indicated the extent to which they felt regarding the items using response options ranging from “not at all” to “extremely.” *Guilt* consisted of six items (e.g., “guilty” or “ashamed”),

and Cronbach's alpha was 0.92. We also included filler items that measured other emotions: hostility, joviality, and self-assurance.

### Manipulation Checks

We asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the following statements: "The action that I recalled... aimed to enhance the welfare of the natural environment [*ECSR manipulation check*]/resulted in (potential) disadvantages and/or harm to the natural environment [*ECSIR manipulation check*]/was taken by the company I work for [*own company manipulation check*]."

### Control Variables

While Study 1 and Study 2 presented the same company information to all participants in the same experimental condition, participants in Study 3 were asked about their ECS(I)R perceptions and instructed to recall activities of their own or another company. Thus, it is possible that *ECS(I)R* relates to participants' willingness to *volunteer* not because ECS(I)R changes employees' self-identities and emotions, as our theorizing suggests, but rather because other characteristics of the employees or their organizations influence participants' perceptions and behavior simultaneously. Therefore, we included several relevant control variables for ruling out alternative explanations and to demonstrate the unique contributions of ECS(I)R perceptions on private prosocial behavior (Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016). Literature suggests that demographics not only predict prosocial behavior as argued above, but also influence the interpretation of organizational actions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). As such, ECS(I)R perceptions might be contingent on individual characteristics (e.g., gender, age, or education). We used the same demographic variables that we assessed in Studies 1 and 2, specifically including *female*, *age*, and *degree*. Following moral consistency and moral balancing arguments, individuals' prior prosocial behavior relates to future prosocial behavior. Therefore, we asked for *donations* and *hours volunteered* during the past 12 months in the first wave. As outlined above, theoretical and empirical research supports that employees' perceptions of their organization (e.g., organizational identification) and work (e.g., job satisfaction) relate to their behavior, especially in the context of CSR. Given these relationships, it is possible that organizational identification and job satisfaction serve as potential alternative explanations for why CSR relates to employees' private prosocial behavior. We measured *organizational identification* with the six items developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). Cronbach's alpha was 0.93. We used a single item to measure *job satisfaction* (Wanous et al.,

1997). Participants were asked to respond to the question "Overall, how satisfied are you with your job?" with answers ranging from "totally unhappy" (1) to "totally happy" (7). Employees in our sample worked for different companies. Since the type and amount of ECS(I)R activities are contingent on company *size* and *industry* (Scheidler et al., 2019), we controlled for these organizational characteristics.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics and Manipulation Checks

Online Appendix F displays the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for all variables included in Study 3. We tested whether our manipulations were effective. An ANOVA with planned contrast effects revealed that the ratings for the *ECSR manipulation check* differed significantly across groups ( $F(2, 521) = 345.49, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.57$ ), with significantly higher values being observed in the *ECSR* group ( $M = 5.95, SD = 1.03$ ) than in the other groups ( $M = 2.30, SD = 1.71; F(1, 521) = 684.90, p < 0.001$ ). Ratings for the *ECSIR manipulation check* also exhibited significant differences across groups ( $F(2, 521) = 414.22, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.61$ ) and were significantly higher in the *ECSIR condition* ( $M = 6.13, SD = 1.19$ ) than in the other conditions ( $M = 2.33, SD = 1.55; F(1, 521) = 818.61, p < 0.001$ ). For the *own company manipulation check*, we used independent Welch's *t* tests (Welch, 1938) because the samples exhibited unequal variances. We found significant differences in the expected direction, with higher mean values being observed in the *own company* condition ( $M = 6.00, SD = 1.37$ ) than in the *other company* condition ( $M = 1.97, SD = 1.75; t(498.57) = -29.35, p < 0.001$ ).

### Main Results

We tested whether ECSR and ECSIR perceptions influenced employees' volunteering behavior (H1 and H2) via ESI (H3) and guilt (H4) by conducting regression analyses. The results are displayed in Table 1. In support of H1, we found a positive and significant effect of *perceived ECSR* on *volunteering*. H2 was not supported because we did not find a significant effect of *perceived ECSIR* on *volunteering* ( $p = 0.649$ ). *Perceived ECSR* significantly increased *ESI*, as predicted by H3a. *ESI*, in turn, positively and significantly predicted volunteering, thus supporting H3b. As hypothesized in H4a, *perceived ECSIR* was significantly and positively related to *guilt*. However, *guilt* was not significantly related to *volunteering* ( $p = 0.400$ ). Hence, H4b was not supported by our results.

In addition, we investigated whether ESI and guilt mediate the relationships between perceived ECS(I)R and volunteering. We computed bootstrap confidence intervals with

**Table 1** Regression analyses, Study 3

Predictors	Volunteering b (SE)	ESI b (SE)	Guilt b (SE)	Volunteering b (SE)
Perceived ECSR	0.12* (0.05)	0.22*** (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)	0.08 (0.05)
Perceived ECSIR	0.02 (0.04)	0.05 (0.03)	0.10*** (0.03)	0.01 (0.04)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Degree	0.09 (0.06)	0.07 (0.05)	0.02 (0.04)	0.07 (0.06)
Female	0.50*** (0.13)	0.13 (0.11)	-0.08 (0.08)	0.47*** (0.13)
Donations	0.11*** (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.10*** (0.02)
Hours volunteered	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Organizational identification	-0.02 (0.05)	0.05 (0.04)	0.09*** (0.03)	-0.03 (0.05)
Job satisfaction	0.04 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.15*** (0.03)	0.05 (0.05)
Size	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.04)
Industry dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
ESI				0.20*** (0.05)
Guilt				-0.06 (0.07)
Constant	0.37 (0.36)	3.86*** (0.30)	1.47*** (0.23)	-0.31 (0.42)
$R^2$	0.14	0.13	0.12	0.16

$N = 524$

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

1,000 resamplings and assessed the effects using two separate analyses. The indirect effect of *perceived ECSR* on *volunteering* through *ESI* was  $ab = 0.05$  (95% confidence interval (CI) [lower limit (*LL*) = 0.02, upper limit (*UL*) = 0.07]), thus supporting H3. We did not find any evidence to support an indirect effect of *perceived ECSIR* on *volunteering* via *guilt* ( $ab = -0.01$  (95% CI [*LL* = -0.03, *UL* = 0.01])). Hence, H4 was not supported.

We tested the effects of recalling the ECSR and ECSIR activities of one's own organization on employees' changes in *ESI*, emotions of *guilt*, and willingness to volunteer. Among the subsample of participants who recalled activities in which their own organization engaged, *ESI changes* varied significantly across groups ( $F(2,257) = 4.17$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ ). As hypothesized, recalling an ECSR activity led to significant increases in *ESI* ( $M = 0.57$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ,  $F(1,257) = 6.88$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ) compared to recalling a neutral activity ( $M = 0.23$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ), whereas recalling an ECSIR activity did not lead to changes in *ESI* ( $M = 0.27$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ;  $F(1,257) = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.771$ ). In this sample, *guilt* also differed significantly across groups ( $F(2,257) = 3.50$ ,  $p = 0.032$ ,

$\eta^2 = 0.03$ ). As expected, employees who recalled an ECSIR activity reported higher levels of *guilt* ( $M = 1.70$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ;  $F(1, 257) = 4.72$ ,  $p = 0.031$ ) than did employees in the control group ( $M = 1.39$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ). However, *volunteering* did not differ significantly across groups ( $F(2, 257) = 0.19$ ,  $p = 0.826$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.00$ ).

#### Additional Analyses

To rule out priming as an alternative explanation, we tested for the effects of ECSR and ECSIR when participants recalled the activities of other organizations. In this subsample, *guilt* and *volunteering* did not differ significantly across groups (*guilt*:  $F(2,261) = 2.11$ ,  $p = 0.124$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ; *volunteering*:  $F(2, 261) = 0.02$ ,  $p = 0.978$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.00$ ). Differences in *ESI changes* across groups were marginally significant ( $F(2,261) = 2.81$ ;  $p = 0.061$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ). Increases in *ESI* were not higher when participants reflected on ECSR activities ( $M = 0.26$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) than on neutral activities ( $M = 0.11$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ;  $F(1,261) = 1.44$ ,  $p = 0.231$ ). These results show that the effects found in our previous analyses

cannot be explained by reference to a mere priming effect. Interestingly, recalling an ECSIR activity associated with another organization led to increases in *ESI* ( $M=0.40$ ,  $SD=0.80$ ;  $F(1, 261)=5.62$ ,  $p=0.018$ ).

The regression analyses displayed in Table 1 further demonstrate that *organizational identification* and *job satisfaction* were not related to *volunteering* or *ESI* and thus cannot explain the positive effects on employees.

## Discussion

We postulated that CSR and CSIR affect employees' prosocial behaviors in the nonwork domain. In support of the consistency hypothesis, the results of Study 1 demonstrated that ECSR enhanced workers' likelihood of volunteering and donating money to a charity. In contrast to our expectations, we also found a consistency effect of ECSIR in this study, i.e., ECSIR decreased workers' willingness to volunteer. Study 2 provided additional support for the consistency hypothesis, as working for a company that engages in ECSR (opposed to a company involved in ECSIR) increased employees' likelihood of donating money to a charity as well as the total amount that employees donated. Notably, ECSR affected the amount donated to a charity with a clear environmental focus, whereas the amount donated to a charity with a broader community-oriented vision was unaffected. Study 3 further showed that employees' ECSR perceptions were positively related to their willingness to volunteer for a project with an environmental mission and that this effect was mediated by employees' *ESI*. As expected, perceived ECSIR was positively related to employees' emotion of guilt. However, neither perceived ECSIR nor guilt was related to volunteering behavior. Recalling the ECSR or ECSIR activities of one's own employer was not directly related to volunteering behavior in this study. It is possible that employees' ECSR and ECSIR perceptions were too stable or that our recall manipulations in Study 3 were too weak to change employees' behavior. In Studies 1 and 2, we chose extreme examples of ECSR and especially ECSIR activities, whereas many participants in Study 3 reflected on less extreme instances of ECSR or ECSIR (e.g., recycling behavior). However, as expected, recalling the ECSR or ECSIR activities of one's employer did enhance employees' *ESI* or affect their emotions of guilt, respectively.

Participants' *ESI* was not enhanced when they recalled an ECSR activity in which another organization engaged. Participants also did not report higher levels of guilt when they recalled an ECSIR activity associated with another organization. These findings are important because they provide further support for our hypothesized mechanism (i.e., ECSR leads to changes in employees'

self-identities) and rule out some alternative explanations (e.g., the possibility that ECSR has a mere priming effect on participants). Surprisingly, *ESI* increased when individuals recalled an ECSIR activity associated with another organization. This finding might indicate that reflecting on the transgressions of unrelated others leads to positive self-evaluations because individuals distance themselves from the act in question.

## Theoretical Implications

We make important contributions to the literature. First, we respond to the recent call for more society-centered CSR research (Barnett et al., 2020; Du et al., 2022). While most previous research has legitimized CSR investments on financial grounds, as CSR pays off both internally and externally, we consider the ethical dimension of CSR and its ultimate impact on society. On the one hand, we demonstrate that the ethical responsibility of organizations toward the environment in the form of ECS(I)R also has indirect impacts on the environment through the behavior of employees. On the other hand, we highlight that ECSR and ECSIR affect employees' wellbeing because they shape employees' self-identities and emotions. These findings significantly broaden the scope of CSR and CSIR activities. While CSR has greater potential to impact employees and the environment, CSIR can cause even greater harm to these stakeholders.

We thus add to the few micro-level CSR studies that have considered the effects of CSR on employees' nonwork behavior. Most such research has assumed that employees are directly affected by or involved in CSR activities such as in green training or corporate volunteering programs or theorized that a volunteering climate affects the behavior of even nonvolunteering employees (Rodell et al., 2017; Usman et al., 2022). We challenge these assumptions and claim that external CSR activities, even those that lack any involvement on the part of or benefit for employees, have the potential to affect employees' private behavior. Similarly, De Roeck and Farooq (2018) studied the effects of ECSR perceptions on the social behavior of employees based on information processing and organizational identification theories. In contrast, we focused on ECSR and ECSIR *activities* instead of ECSR *perceptions* and found a direct effect of ECSR on employees' prosocial behavior and an indirect effect via *ESI* instead of an indirect effect via organizational identification. Our additional results further highlight that employees' attitudes toward their organizations (organizational identification) or work (job satisfaction) do not explain prosocial behavior outside the work setting.

Most importantly, we adopted a new theoretical perspective drawn from social psychology to advance this debate. We applied vicarious moral consistency theory



and expanded this perspective (from a focus on one's own prior moral behavior and that of close others) to encompass the moral behavior of organizations. We contribute to the literature by showing that ECSR is indeed a relevant moral behavior that employees take into account when making their own moral choices. We investigated this theoretical perspective more deeply to reveal the mechanism underlying the relationship between external CSR and employees' private prosocial behavior. We identified employees' ESI as a relevant mediator in this context, thus providing evidence indicating that organizational activities can shape employees' self-perceptions. This reasoning lays a foundation for future CSR research and invites researchers to study whether and how other external (e.g., community-related) activities influence employees' self-perceptions and private moral or immoral behaviors.

Furthermore, we contrasted the effects of CSR with the effects of CSIR and particularly emphasized the different mechanisms associated with these effects. Micro-level CSR researchers have criticized the fact that the important role of CSIR has often been neglected in CSR research (Gond et al., 2017). Recent research has started to consider the effects of CSIR on employees (e.g., Hericher & Bridoux, 2023), but research on this topic remains scarce, and we are not aware of studies that have assessed the effects of CSR and CSIR on employees simultaneously. We show that CSR and CSIR evoke different emotional reactions and self-perceptions. Hence, we recommend that future research should investigate CSR and CSIR simultaneously but should nevertheless view them as different constructs.

Many studies on employees' responses to CSR practices have been criticized for their cross-sectional designs that lack the ability to support strong causal inferences (Jones et al., 2019). In contrast, we manipulated CS(D)R information, and our volunteering and donation measures captured not only intentions but also actual behavior. This approach is an essential contribution of our research since effects found in the field might be driven by the attraction, selection, and attrition (ASA) paradigm (Schneider, 1987), which suggests homogeneity among organizational members because they are attracted to, selected by, and retained within companies if the organization's values match employees' traits, preferences, and characteristics. Accordingly, responsible individuals might be more likely to work for responsible companies rather than necessarily becoming more responsible through their work. Since we focused on ECS(D)R, we also did not confound the effects of external and internal CS(D)R activities, such as employee benefit programs.

Moreover, we make important contributions to the broader business ethics literature and the literature on environmental behavior. Moral consistency effects have mainly been used in social psychology to examine individuals' behaviors

following their own (im)moral actions. We adopted a vicarious self-perception perspective and extended the focus of such research to the behavioral consequences following (im)moral actions on the part of the employing company. In our study, ECSR and ECSIR serve as examples of the moral and immoral behavior of organizations. This approach lays a foundation for theory-building and empirical investigations in organizational contexts with the goal of assessing other relevant ethical yet unresolved questions in business ethics research (Islam & Greenwood, 2021). For example, our research provides a good starting point for exploring how employers' (im)moral behaviors (e.g., ethics programs, diversity statements, and financial fraud) affect employees' private (im)moral behaviors. Similarly, the extant literature on environmental behavior has considered mainly the effects of one's own values and previous pro-environmental behavior on peoples' ESI and future pro-environmental behaviors. One exception is the work of Meijers et al. (2019). Those authors found evidence for vicarious licensing effects but not cleansing effects on the part of close others in the environmental domain. The vicarious environmental consistency perspective thus provides an explanation for our findings and might be a fruitful avenue for environmental research to investigate when and how the environmental behavior of organizations affects employees and other stakeholders.

## Practical Implications

Our studies uniformly revealed that companies not only contribute to environmental protection and harm directly through their own activities but also contribute to environmental issues by stimulating their employees to behave consistently. Moreover, our studies disclose that the environmental behavior of organizations affects employees' psychological self and emotions. From a utilitarian perspective, it follows that the welfare associated with CSR and the harm pertaining to CSIR are larger than previously expected; thus, the promotion of CSR and the prevention of CSIR become even more significant. These findings highlight the importance of business ethics and have important ethical implications for practitioners and policy-makers.

Organizations must be well aware of the ethical responsibility that they bear toward both the environment and their employees. Companies that have not already done so should implement ECSR practices to influence ESI and the private behavior of their employees positively. Companies should also disclose ECSR information internally because it is beneficial for employees and, through those employees, for broader society.

Our work should further encourage policy-makers to establish the appropriate conditions and to consider the

provision of incentives that can motivate organizations to act in an environmentally friendly manner. Politicians and legislators must set boundaries and stipulate rules and regulations to force organizations to refrain from environmental transgressions. In this way, such rules can reach decision-makers both within and outside organizations.

## Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our work has several limitations that offer avenues for future research. First, the ecological validity of our experimental studies is limited. In Studies 1 and 3, employees were either reminded of or asked to recall a specific ECS(I)R activity. In Study 2, students believed themselves to be working for a start-up that engaged in ECS(I)R but only for an hour. Thus, the time between our manipulations and outcome measures was quite short, while it is likely that ECS(I)R activities have either stronger or weaker effects in the long term. In Study 2, we were unable to include a control condition that would allow us to make comparisons between either ECSR or ECSIR exposure and a neutral setting. To alleviate these shortcomings, we also measured ECSR and ECSIR perceptions in Study 3. The findings resulting from these analyses provide further support for the consistency effect of ECSR. However, we encourage future research to study the long-term effects of CSR on employees' self, emotions, and private prosocial behavior in the field.

Some alternative explanations can be proposed for the consistency effects found in Studies 1 and 2. Research on social norms has demonstrated that one's own behavior can be influenced by the behaviors of other individuals or institutions because their behaviors communicate a descriptive norm (Cialdini et al., 1990). While we cannot fully rule out this possibility, the results of Study 3 provide evidence indicating that ESI can explain the consistency effect of ECSR. It is also likely that organizations influence the development of employees' ethical minds (Gardner, 2007). We believe that studying other mediators represents a promising avenue for further research endeavors.

## Conclusion

Our research revealed that companies not only contribute to societal issues through their own activities but also contribute by stimulating their employees to behave consistently. In this way, CSR can protect and CSIR can harm the environment both directly and indirectly through their employees' private behavior.

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**Data availability** All study materials and data will be shared upon reasonable request.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interests** The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

**Ethical approval** Approval was obtained from the ethics committee of University of Mannheim. The procedures used in this study adhere to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki or comparable ethical standards.

**Consent to participate** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in this study.

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