

# Corporate social responsibility and individual behaviour

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Corporate social responsibility (CSR) research can help to address some of society's grand challenges (for example, climate change, energy sustainability and social inequality). Historically, CSR research has focused on organizational-level factors that address environmental and social issues and the firm's resulting financial performance, with much less focus on individual-level factors. In response to research calls to consider the individual level of analysis, we provide a narrative review to improve our understanding of the interconnections between CSR and individual behaviour. We organize existing research around three individual-level categories: CSR perceptions, CSR attitudes and CSR behaviours. We summarize research elucidating how perceptions and attitudes influence behaviours and how organization and higher-level CSR context and individual-level CSR readiness moderate perceptions–behaviours and attitudes–behaviours relationships. We offer a conceptual model that organizes the diverse, conflicting and multidisciplinary research on the CSR–individual behaviour link and that can be used to guide future research.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has a long history in business research, dating back to the 1953 book by economist Howard Bowen titled *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*. In this pioneering book, Bowen noted that organizational leaders have an obligation to make decisions and implement actions that are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society. CSR can take many forms, including those peripheral to a company's daily practices, such as employee volunteering programmes and corporate philanthropy<sup>1</sup>. In addition, CSR initiatives can be embedded directly into an organization's operational decision-making<sup>2</sup>, goal setting (for example, performance metrics<sup>3</sup>), environmental strategy<sup>4</sup> and sourcing (that is, the upstream management of the supply chain)<sup>5</sup>. As we elaborate later, CSR is fundamentally about the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental performance. Accordingly, CSR research can potentially address some of society's grand challenges, including climate change, water scarcity, energy sustainability and social inequality.

Historically, CSR research has been carried out at the organizational level of analysis. In other words, conceptual and empirical research has mainly focused on firms' socially responsible or irresponsible actions and how such actions influence firm outcomes (for example,

financial performance<sup>6,7</sup>). However, a newer stream of research has considered how individual-level variables (that is, individual behaviour) influence and are influenced by CSR. Most individual-level CSR research, often called 'micro-CSR' research, considers employees as the individuals of interest by examining, for example, how CSR practices may positively impact employee recruitment. However, the emergence of this body of work comes from the realization that the actual creation and implementation as well as results of CSR initiatives are directly affected by how individuals not only inside but also outside the organization perceive, engage with and react to CSR.

Our review focuses on the individual behavioural aspects of CSR. As a result, we offer an overarching conceptual model that helps to organize the diverse, conflicting and multidisciplinary literature on the CSR–individual behaviour link. Consistent with but also building on recent micro-CSR work<sup>8,9</sup>, our model allows us to summarize existing research, subsume relevant theories and provide clear directions to guide future research efforts.

Next, we briefly review the nature of CSR as a dynamic and evolving construct. We then explain three distinctive challenges faced by research on the CSR–individual behaviour link and introduce our

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**Table 1 | Commonly used definitions of CSR**

"Refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" <sup>76</sup> (p. 6)
"The firm's consideration of, and response to, issues beyond the narrow economic, technical, and legal requirements of the firm" <sup>77</sup> (p. 312)
"The economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" <sup>78</sup> (p. 500)
"A business organization's configuration of principles of social responsibility, processes of social responsiveness, and policies, programmes, and observable outcomes as they relate to the firm's societal relationships" <sup>79</sup> (p. 693)
"Actions that appear to further some social and/or environmental good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law" <sup>80</sup> (p. 117)
"Actions on the part of the firm that further the needs or goals of an identifiable stakeholder group, or a larger societal collective ... [and the authors] further delineate CSR as actions that go beyond the immediate legal requirements of the firm ... [and] include shareholders or other owners as constituting a stakeholder group relevant to CSR, along with broader stakeholder groups" <sup>81</sup> (p. 824)
"Clearly articulated and communicated policies and practices of corporations that reflect business responsibility for some of the wider social good. Yet the precise manifestation and direction of the responsibility lie at the discretion of the corporation" <sup>82</sup> (p. 405)
"Context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance" <sup>83</sup> (p. 855)

integrative model, including (1) the direct effects of CSR perceptions and CSR attitudes on CSR behaviours and (2) the moderating effects of CSR readiness and CSR context on the perceptions-behaviours and attitudes-behaviours relationships. Finally, we offer specific directions for future research.

### CSR is a dynamic and evolving construct

Given the increasing importance of CSR for organizations and society and its potential to help to address some of the twenty-first century's grand challenges, it is unsurprising that the topic has received substantial research attention. As a result, CSR has been defined in several ways by researchers exploring the concept from different disciplinary backgrounds. One review<sup>10</sup> identified and analysed 37 different definitions of CSR and extracted five dimensions that were mentioned across the various conceptualizations: environmental (that is, the natural environment), social (that is, the relationship between business and society), economic (that is, socio-economic or financial aspects, including describing CSR in terms of business operations), stakeholders (that is, groups that have an interest in or are impacted by the firm) and voluntariness (that is, actions not prescribed by law). More recently, 110 definitions of CSR have been indexed from research published between 1953 and 2014 (ref.11). Using co-word analysis, this study identified six dimensions of CSR: economic, social, ethical, stakeholders, sustainability and voluntary.

In the most recent effort to reconcile CSR definitions, one study<sup>12</sup> focused on the evolution of the CSR construct over time. A longitudinal analysis of 144 definitions showed definitional shifts reflecting historical changes in societal expectations, regulation and legislation, and the wider business environment. Specifically, during the 1950s and 1960s, when CSR research was nascent, there was ambiguity and uncertainty about the goals and beneficiaries of CSR and little mention of public pressure for any particular set of responsibilities or priorities. For example, the environmental dimension was absent. During the 1980s and 1990s, more consensus began to form around the dimensions of CSR as described above. During the 2000s, given widespread information about organizations' actions available through the internet and social media, as well as pressures from regulators and activists, definitions began to include distinct beneficiaries and stakeholders as targets

of CSR (for example, members of the surrounding community). In addition, the conceptualization of CSR evolved to reflect societal and business changes such as globalization, technological developments and climate change<sup>12</sup>. To illustrate the evolution of CSR definitions over time, Table 1 includes a subset of those cited frequently, constituting some of the most influential definitions in the literature.

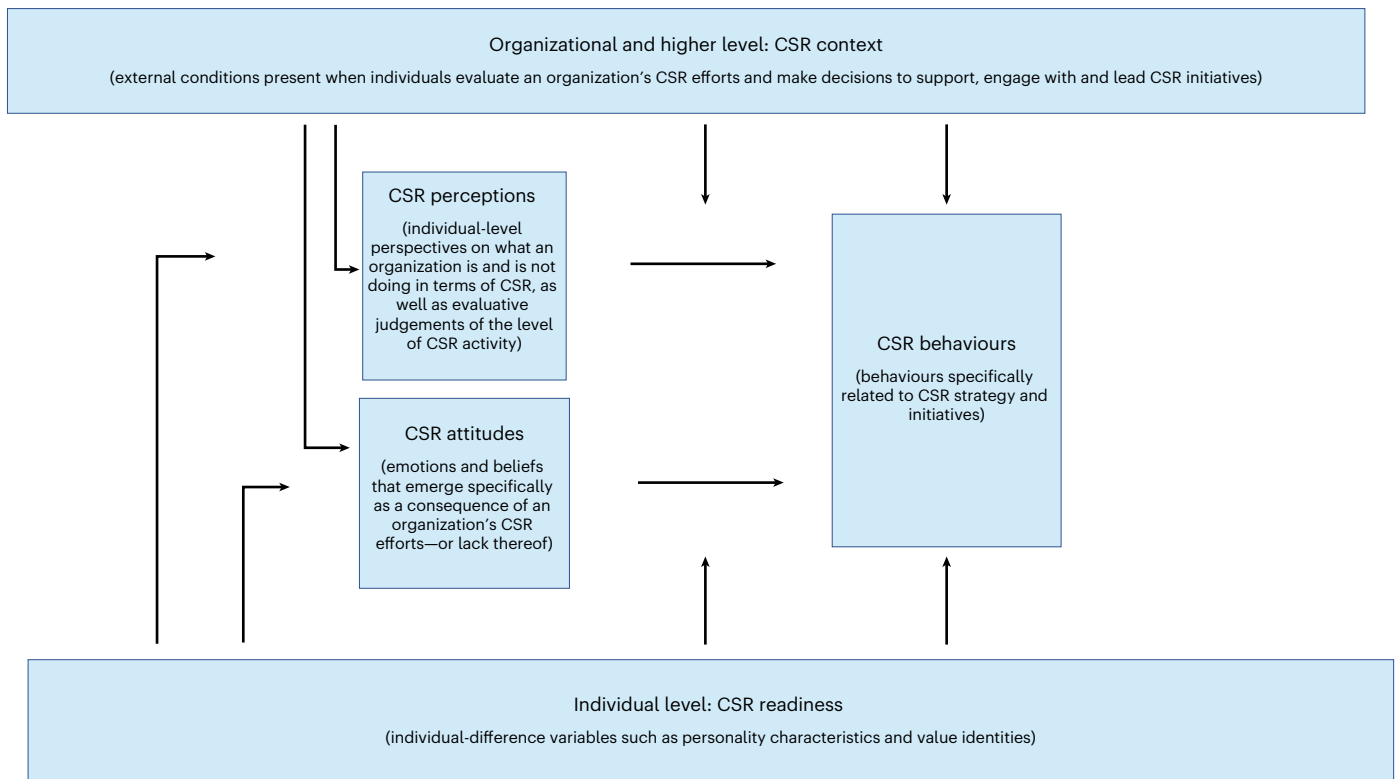
For our review, we use the following definition: "context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance"<sup>83</sup> (p. 855). Our choice is driven by the fact that this definition was offered in the *American Psychological Association Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, and it is therefore particularly suitable given the individual behaviour lens we apply to understanding how individuals perceive, interact with and enact CSR (that is, a micro-CSR approach). In this definition, 'context-specific' refers to the fact that CSR actions may vary from industry to industry and from firm to firm within a specific industry. For example, firms in the hospitality and tourism industries would naturally take a unique approach to addressing environmental impact (for example, collaborating with associates, hotel owners, franchisees, brands, suppliers, business partners and guests to actively reduce the environmental impact by designing and operating sustainable hotels), whereas a firm in the chip manufacturing industry might strive instead to achieve net-positive water and zero waste to landfills. In addition, this definition is consistent with and subsumes most of the definitions in Table 1 in that it relates to the consideration of values, stakeholder expectations and business responsibility that extends what is required by law.

### Unique challenges in research on the CSR-individual behaviour link

Research on the individual behaviour aspects of CSR faces distinct challenges. First, CSR includes inherent tensions and, in some cases, apparent zero-sum scenarios<sup>13</sup>. Specifically, all organizations have finite resources to invest in economic, social and environmental performance. Thus, those firms investing more resources in addressing external societal issues (for example, via corporate philanthropy) may have fewer resources available to serve their fiduciary responsibilities to investors (for example, via research and development). Also, more resources invested in internal CSR directed at employees (for example, employee wellness or diversity, equity and inclusion) may result in less resources available for external CSR directed at environmental issues (for example, reduction of the organization's carbon footprint). These multiple tensions often result in conflicting and contradictory empirical results about CSR's positive and negative effects on people, profit and the planet. Firms, their members and their stakeholders can thus face a paradox in light of seemingly competing business versus social logics. Consequently, there is a need for an integrative review of the individual-level variables that contribute to the complex dynamics underlying these tensions.

A second unique challenge is the apparently counterintuitive evidence that CSR might not always detract from profits, such as when firms have the opportunity to positively impact society and the environment while also positively affecting financial and other bottom-line outcomes<sup>14</sup>. Employees are essential drivers of these social and sustainable innovations, and relationships have been found between CSR, employee motivation and such innovation<sup>15</sup>. That being said, the literature is inconsistent regarding the predictors of CSR innovation<sup>16</sup>, highlighting the need for an integrative model that clarifies the drivers of individual-level CSR behaviour.

Third, CSR is a multi-disciplinary research domain. Indeed, research on individual behaviour aspects of CSR stems from many social and behavioural science disciplines, including economics<sup>17</sup>, environmental sciences, law<sup>18</sup>, management, marketing<sup>19,20</sup>, public policy, psychology, sociology and strategic management<sup>21</sup>, among



**Fig. 1 | Integrative conceptual model of CSR and individual behaviour.** The model shows the direct effects of CSR perceptions and attitudes on CSR behaviours, as well as the moderating effects of CSR readiness and CSR context

on the CSR perceptions–behaviours and CSR attitudes–behaviours relations. See Table 2 for more detailed information on CSR perceptions, attitudes, behaviours, readiness and context.

others. The CSR literature is therefore quite disjointed, existing in disparate academic fields. Thus, there is an opportunity to bring together different perspectives and build on shared knowledge. An integrative model allows for a more comprehensive and integrated understanding of CSR's individual behaviour aspects that can inspire future collaborative and interdisciplinary research.

We organize our review around three broad categories of constructs particularly pertinent to the individual level of analysis: CSR perceptions, CSR attitudes and CSR behaviours. We present a model in Fig. 1 that shows that CSR perceptions and CSR attitudes influence CSR behaviours. Furthermore, all three constructs are directly affected by two additional categories of variables: organizational and higher-level CSR context and individual-level CSR readiness. Finally, context and readiness also moderate the perceptions–behaviours and attitudes–behaviours relationships. Table 2 provides samples of the types of variables falling within each category, and in the following sections we review research pertinent to each.

## CSR perceptions, attitudes and behaviours

### CSR perceptions

CSR perception formation involves “cognitively encoded sensory inputs” that individuals use to assess various aspects of a firm's CSR, and CSR perceptions are individuals' “psychological representation[s] of the types and extent of an organization's CSR practices”<sup>22</sup> (p. 22). Thus, CSR perceptions involve individual-level perspectives on what an organization is and is not doing in terms of CSR and evaluative judgements of the level of CSR activity. These latter judgements are sometimes called ‘CSR appraisals’ and involve individuals evaluating an organization's effort, resources allocated to CSR, opportunities for participation in CSR initiatives and the firm's authenticity in carrying out activities in the name of social responsibility (as opposed to covertly serving its self-interest)<sup>22</sup>. CSR perceptions also involve cognitions

## BOX 1

### Examples of the effects of CSR perceptions

One study<sup>83</sup> showed that employee perceptions of whether their employer's CSR efforts were substantive (that is, cause-serving) or symbolic (that is, self-serving) influenced their subsequent behaviours. Specifically, higher perceptions of substantive CSR were found to sequentially influence different facets of employee performance, including task performance, citizenship behaviours and refraining from counterproductive work behaviours. Another study<sup>38</sup> provided evidence across three datasets that employees' CSR perceptions influenced their organizational commitment, job performance and engagement in CSR initiatives. Consistent with our conceptual model summarized in Fig. 1, several aspects of the CSR context (for example, managers' CSR-specific perceptions and performance) were also found to moderate these relationships.

surrounding how fairly an organization treats both its internal and external stakeholders<sup>23</sup>, as well as individual assumptions about an organization's motives for engaging in CSR, such as profit-seeking, corporate relations or ethicality<sup>24</sup>. In addition, individuals form perceptions about several dimensions of CSR, including responsibility in social, economic, legal and ethical matters; discretionary citizenship; and responsibility towards specific stakeholders, including community, environment, consumers/customers, suppliers and government<sup>25</sup> (see Box 1 for examples of the effects of CSR perceptions and Table 2 for more detailed information).

**Table 2 | Illustrations of variables in the five broad construct categories included in the integrative conceptual model of CSR and individual behaviour**

<b>CSR context (external conditions present when individuals evaluate an organization's CSR efforts and make decisions to support, engage with and lead CSR initiatives)</b>
• Leader and supervisor support/buy-in
• Resources available to support CSR
• Industry norms and pressure
• Cultural norms
• Internal and external CSR communication
• Opportunities to participate and volunteer in CSR initiatives
• CSR involvement of peer and competitor firms
• Performance management systems (for example, incentives for supporting CSR initiatives or achieving CSR results)
<b>CSR readiness (individual-difference variables such as personality characteristics and value identities)</b>
• Prosocial identity
• Conscientiousness
• Trait kindness
• Agreeableness
• Vigilante identity
• Felt responsibility for constructive change
• Moral identity
• Prosocial and pro-environmental values
• Other-orientation
<b>CSR perceptions (individual-level perspectives on what an organization is and is not doing in terms of CSR, as well as evaluative judgements of the level of CSR activity)</b>
• Evaluative judgements (that is, CSR appraisals) of an organization's level of CSR activity (for example, effort, resources allocated, opportunities for participation and authenticity)
• How fairly the organization treats its internal and external stakeholders
• Individual assumptions about an organization's motives for engaging in CSR (for example, profit-seeking, corporate relations and ethicality)
• Perceptions of dimensions of CSR, including social, economic, legal and ethical responsibilities; discretionary citizenship; and responsibility towards specific stakeholders (for example, community, environment, consumers/ customers, suppliers and government)
<b>CSR attitudes (emotions and beliefs that emerge specifically as a consequence of an organization's CSR efforts—or lack thereof)</b>
• Emotions and beliefs that emerge specifically as a consequence of an organization's CSR efforts (or lack thereof)
• Positive attitudes: shared goodwill, distinction from greed and avoidance of shame.
• Negative CSR attitudes: uncertainty, cynicism and displeasure
• Identification with the organization as well as the beneficiaries of CSR efforts with organizational CSR initiatives
• Identification with beneficiaries of the firm's CSR efforts
• Identity protection and restructuring
<b>CSR behaviours (behaviours specifically related to CSR strategy and initiatives)</b>
• Participation in and engagement with CSR initiatives
• Behaviours ranging from passive (that is, individuals do not voluntarily engage in CSR initiatives and exert minimum effort) to proactive (that is, individuals actively create and roll out CSR initiatives)
• In-role (that is, part of one's formal job requirements) and extra-role (that is, outside of one's job description)

**Table 2 (continued) | Illustrations of variables in the five broad construct categories included in the integrative conceptual model of CSR and individual behaviour**

• Activism and social intrapreneurship
• Social-issue selling
• CSR leadership
• CSR dissension and deviance
• CSR decision-making
• Organizational citizenship behaviours

See Fig. 1 for an illustration of the model.

### CSR attitudes

CSR attitudes refer to emotions and beliefs that emerge specifically as a consequence of an organization's CSR efforts or lack thereof. In contrast to CSR perceptions described in the previous section, CSR attitudes are influenced by individual experiences and social norms and values, they are generally stable and influence behaviour over the long term, and they apply to a broad range of CSR issues. Highlighting the unique nature of CSR perceptions compared with CSR attitudes, one study<sup>25</sup> developed and validated a CSR scale that clearly distinguished between these two constructs.

CSR attitudes can be positive (for example, shared goodwill) or negative (for example, cynicism) and can include identification with the organization and CSR beneficiaries (see Table 2 for more detailed information). For example, CSR initiatives can foster positive attitudes in the form of distinction from greed and avoidance of shame and negative attitudes in the form of uncertainty, cynicism and displeasure<sup>26</sup>. As another illustration, consider identification both with one's organization and with the beneficiaries of a firm's CSR efforts. Identification refers to an individual's feelings of belongingness in a social group<sup>27</sup>. Negative attitudes resulting from disingenuous CSR efforts can threaten social identity with the organization<sup>28</sup>. This, in turn, leads to reactions in the form of identity protection (for example, an employee not openly mentioning that they work for a particular organization with family and friends) or identity restructuring (that is, an employee placing more importance in terms of who they are on their affiliation with a religious or community organization than on their affiliation with a particular employer)<sup>29</sup>. By contrast, positive attitudes towards CSR can serve to reinforce organizational identification. For example, one study found that positive attitudes towards an organization's volunteerism programme led to increased organizational identification among employees, further influencing their intentions to remain loyal to the firm (that is, not quit)<sup>30</sup>. Similarly, a three-wave longitudinal study<sup>31</sup> uncovered an interaction between CSR perceptions and self-focused justice perceptions (that is, how fairly one feels treated at work) in sequentially influencing perceived external prestige, organizational pride and organizational identification. The effects were stronger when CSR and self-focused justice were consistent (that is, employees perceived the firm to treat both them and other beneficiaries (un)fairly and (ir)responsibly).

CSR attitudes may also influence several other CSR behaviours, which we discuss in detail in the next section. For example, it has been argued that positive attitudes about the CSR of one's employer can result in higher engagement with CSR efforts<sup>32</sup>.

### CSR behaviours

CSR behaviours refer to behaviours specifically related to CSR strategy and initiatives. As shown in Fig. 1, CSR behaviours are influenced by CSR perceptions and CSR attitudes. CSR behaviours can include participation in and engagement with CSR initiatives<sup>33</sup>, CSR leadership<sup>34</sup>, CSR dissension and deviance (that is, not participating in CSR unless there is a direct benefit for the self<sup>35</sup>), CSR decision-making<sup>36</sup> and organizational citizenship behaviours<sup>37</sup>. As an illustration, one



**BOX 2**

## Examples of the effects of CSR readiness

Consider the following studies that have examined the relationship between CSR readiness and the other components of the model. First, one study<sup>37</sup> found that moral identity interacts with employee perceptions of their organization's CSR in predicting employee citizenship behaviours. Specifically, the positive relationship between CSR perceptions and citizenship behaviours became stronger as employees' moral identity increased. Second, another study<sup>50</sup> found that prospective employees higher in communal orientation and pro-environmental values were more attracted to work at companies stronger in CSR. As a third illustration, researchers<sup>84</sup> found that students higher in prosocial motivation were more likely to seek out involvement in CSR through their work after graduation.

study<sup>38</sup> found that middle managers' active involvement in CSR had a cascading effect on employees throughout the organization, positively influencing them to engage in CSR behaviours not explicitly included in their job descriptions.

CSR behaviours can range from passive (that is, individuals do not voluntarily engage in CSR initiatives and exert only minimum effort to conform to mandated CSR) to proactive (that is, individuals actively create and roll out a CSR initiative)<sup>39,40</sup>. Furthermore, CSR behaviours can be in-role (that is, part of one's formal job requirements) or extra-role (that is, outside of one's job description)<sup>1</sup>. In some cases, when CSR is extra-role, CSR behaviours can include activism<sup>41</sup> and social intrapreneurship<sup>42</sup>, such as when employees engage in social innovation, including strategic decision-making around the activities and intended beneficiaries of a CSR initiative (for example, employees in a bank implementing a financial literacy programme for refugees). In turn, proactive CSR behaviours can positively influence the CSR behaviours of others in the organization. For example, one way for individuals to behaviourally engage with CSR is through social-issue selling, which involves actively promoting CSR initiatives to influence others to also engage with the initiatives<sup>43</sup>.

### The direct and moderating effects of CSR readiness and CSR context

As shown in Fig. 1, individuals have perceptions, attitudes and behaviours regarding CSR. Each of these and their relations are influenced by CSR readiness and the CSR context. In other words, readiness and context have both (1) a direct effect on CSR perceptions, attitudes and behaviours and (2) a moderating effect on the perceptions-behaviours and attitudes-behaviours relationships. Like the other categories in our model, several variables are subsumed within CSR readiness and CSR context, as described below.

#### CSR readiness

CSR readiness refers to individual-difference variables such as personality characteristics and value identities preexisting as individuals form CSR perceptions and attitudes and react accordingly. Examples of CSR readiness variables include prosocial identity<sup>44</sup>, conscientiousness<sup>45</sup>, trait kindness<sup>46</sup>, agreeableness<sup>47</sup>, vigilante identity<sup>48</sup>, felt responsibility for constructive change<sup>49</sup>, moral identity<sup>37</sup>, prosocial and pro-environmental values<sup>50</sup> and other-orientation<sup>51</sup> (see Box 2 for examples of the effects of CSR readiness and Table 2 for more detailed information).

**BOX 3**

## Examples of the effects of CSR context

Consider the following studies examining the relationship between CSR context and the other components in the model. First, leaders' CSR behaviour positively influences their followers' CSR behaviour<sup>38,45</sup>. Second, the external context of the organization matters as well—as shown by empirical evidence<sup>85</sup> that individual concern for CSR and CSR issue salience interacted with the influence of external factors such as stakeholder pressures, legislation and economic opportunities in predicting corporate ecological responsiveness. Such findings illustrate that individual behaviours do not occur in a vacuum and that organizational context certainly matters<sup>86</sup>. Furthermore, variables at both the individual and organizational levels of analysis can influence behaviours at both levels of analysis.

#### CSR context

CSR context refers to the external conditions present when individuals evaluate an organization's CSR efforts and make decisions to support, engage with and lead CSR initiatives. Understanding CSR context variables is thus an important step towards understanding individuals' cognitions and behaviours towards CSR. The reason is that the CSR context directly impacts CSR perceptions, attitudes and behaviours and moderates the relationships between CSR perceptions and behaviours and between CSR attitudes and behaviours.

Examples of CSR context variables include leader and supervisor support/buy-in<sup>52</sup>, resources available to support CSR<sup>7</sup>, industry norms and pressure<sup>53</sup>, cultural norms<sup>54</sup>, internal and external CSR communication<sup>55</sup>, opportunities to participate and volunteer in CSR initiatives<sup>56</sup>, CSR involvement of peer and competitor firms<sup>57</sup>, and performance management systems<sup>3</sup> (for example, incentives for supporting CSR initiatives or achieving CSR results) (see Box 3 for examples of the effects of CSR context and Table 2 for more detailed information).

#### Future directions

By adopting an individual-behaviour (that is, micro-CSR) perspective on CSR, our review opens the door to several research streams, which we summarize in Table 3. We organize suggested future research directions around three main issues prompted by our review and integrative conceptual model shown in Fig. 1: (1) understanding the relative importance of the antecedents of CSR behaviours, (2) disentangling inconsistencies and paradoxical results, and (3) extending the power of interdisciplinary and multi-level research.

#### Understanding the relative importance of the antecedents of CSR behaviours

In considering future research needs, the many antecedents uncovered by our narrative review suggest the need for research to understand their relative relevance for CSR behaviour. As listed in Table 2, many variables fall under the broad categories of CSR readiness, CSR context, CSR perceptions and CSR attitudes. Our model integrates the existing literature, but future research is needed to identify the relative importance of these variables: which ones have the largest effects on CSR behaviours within and across the four broad categories? For example, what CSR contextual variables have the greatest influence on employees, such as leader and supervisor support compared with CSR communication? Are these also the largest moderating effects on the relationship between, for example, CSR perceptions and CSR

**Table 3 | Suggested directions for research on CSR and individual behaviour**

General research direction	Specific recommendations
Understanding the relative importance of the antecedents of CSR behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use experimental methods, behavioural simulation exercises, thought experiments and VR to improve our understanding of which are the most influential predictors of CSR behaviours and under which conditions</li> <li>• Identify which CSR contextual variables have the greatest influence on employees, such as leader and supervisor support compared with CSR communication</li> <li>• Conduct a systematic comparison of pairwise comparisons involving variables included in Table 2 to advance CSR theory by abandoning antecedents that are only weakly related to CSR behaviours</li> </ul>
Disentangling inconsistencies and paradoxical results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solve inconsistencies and paradoxical results, such as the positive and negative effects of an organization's CSR initiatives on CSR perceptions, CSR attitudes and CSR behaviours</li> <li>• Offer more precise construct definitions as well as measures, given that inconsistencies in how CSR constructs are defined affect how they are measured and, in turn, affect the observed relations between variables</li> <li>• Use innovative experimental designs to investigate the impact of individuals' CSR behaviours on societal outcomes and firm performance by opening up the black box of the CSR efforts–firm performance relation by making micro-CSR processes more explicit</li> </ul>
Extending the power of interdisciplinary and multi-level research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate disciplines that focus on different stakeholders such as employees (for example, psychology and management), organizations and communities (for example, environmental studies and economics), consumers/customers (for example, marketing) and governments (for example, political science and public administration)</li> <li>• Conduct multi-level research involving CSR context, which refers primarily to macro variables, while at the same time studying individual-level CSR readiness, CSR perceptions, CSR attitudes and CSR behaviours—as well as organization-level outcomes (for example, firm performance and environmental variables)</li> <li>• Take advantage of the latest developments regarding data availability (for example, archival databases) and methodological tools (for example, behavioural simulation exercises, thought experiments and VR)</li> </ul>

behaviours? A systematic comparison of the variables included in Table 2 would be helpful in terms of advancing CSR theory by abandoning antecedents that are only weakly related to CSR behaviours.

Experimental research would be particularly suitable to understand the relative importance of various antecedents because it can isolate their effects in a more controlled environment. Such studies might involve measuring individuals on CSR readiness variables and providing them with realistic scenarios laying out (and manipulating) CSR context variables—for example, through mocked-up annual reports, CSR reports and other materials. CSR-related attitudes and intentions to engage in specific CSR behaviours could be measured as dependent variables, allowing for the testing of both main and interaction effects including CSR readiness, context and attitudes in influencing CSR behavioural intentions.

This would not be the first use of experimental research in the CSR domain. For example, in a study on job seekers' attraction to socially responsible firms<sup>50</sup>, an experiment was carried out in which participants first completed individual difference measures of communal orientation and pro-environmental attitudes. Then, a week later, ostensibly as part of a different study, the participants viewed company websites and considered their willingness to work for such a firm. The fictitious websites allowed for the experimental manipulation of corporate social performance across both community and environmental issues. The experiment was paired with a field study of active job seekers, which together provided strong evidence that perceived corporate performance positively influences organization attractiveness by signalling pride, prestige, value fit and expected treatment.

In another study<sup>58</sup>, researchers measured participants' ethical predispositions (towards utilitarianism and formalism) and trait Machiavellianism. They then randomly assigned the participants to experimental conditions where they read about organizations that varied in CSR and pay level. The results showed that the economic, legal and ethical aspects of CSR that varied across conditions each had an independent effect on organizational attraction and the likelihood of taking a job with the company. Yet, these effects were moderated by the CSR readiness variables mentioned above, such that individuals with different ethical predispositions responded differently to different forms of CSR.

We see value in further experimental research because it would allow for individual-level research to move beyond employees, applicants and potentially consumers and also tap into community samples of individuals who stand to be impacted by various types of CSR

initiatives. However, given the challenges in conducting experimental CSR research, we advocate for several complementary approaches. The first of these is the use of thought experiments. Thought experiments are judgements about what would happen if an imagined scenario were real and can be useful for conducting micro-CSR experiments because they occur in the “laboratory of the mind”<sup>59</sup>. They can simultaneously include a larger number of manipulated variables, are not limited by resource and logistical constraints, and do not involve human participants, thereby eliminating concerns about possible unethical challenges in conducting CSR research. Specifically, a type IV thought experiment creates imaginary paradoxical situations to disconfirm a more developed theory. For example, Einstein famously imagined himself simultaneously riding a beam of light and observing that same beam of light from a distance. In the area of CSR, a thought experiment might involve choices between investing (versus not) in a particular initiative and evaluating this decision from the perspective of internal (for example, a firm's CFO or employees) versus external (for example, community members) stakeholders.

Second, experimental CSR research could be further enhanced by moving beyond written vignettes and scenarios and thought experiments to measure actual human behaviour in simulated contexts<sup>60</sup>. That is, participants can actively participate in short, simulated contexts, such as a meeting of organizational and community leaders, an ‘inbox’ exercise in which a participant has to prioritize work tasks and respond to requests, or a case study analysis and presentation exercises in which a participant must review information and prepare a proposal or presentation in response to an expressed need. Using behavioural simulation exercises such as these allows for manipulating myriad variables in both the social and organizational context and the perspectives of various stakeholders. It also allows researchers to move beyond the measurement of behavioural intentions and observe and rate behaviours displayed as participants take on the roles of, for example, employee, manager, community leader and community member. Professional standards exist for such behavioural ratings and for training raters to make them<sup>61</sup>.

Finally, a recent innovation regarding simulations is virtual reality (VR) technology, which is much more accessible and affordable today than just a few years ago. Researchers can use VR to immerse participants in a computer-generated environment where they can move in any direction and interact with others. For example, researchers can manipulate different types of CSR initiatives such as developing a socially and environmentally responsible product and volunteering

in the community and measure their direct impacts on participants' CSR attitudes (for example, identification with the organization as well as the beneficiaries of the firm's CSR efforts) and CSR behaviours (for example, job crafting, which is a ripple effect from involvement in CSR initiatives that inspires employees to think of innovative ways to implement CSR into their daily jobs). This is obviously practically impossible in actual organizational settings. The metaverse, which involves multiple persistent and immersive virtual worlds involving high levels of interactivity, is a recent VR development. The prediction is that 25% of people will spend at least one hour per day in the metaverse by 2026 (ref. 62). We thus anticipate that using VR to conduct micro-CSR experimental research will become increasingly feasible for investigating actual rather than hypothetical behaviour as more people participate in VR environments regularly.

### Disentangling inconsistencies and paradoxical results

Our review uncovered several inconsistencies and paradoxical results that need to be disentangled by future research. Salient ones are the positive and negative effects of an organization's CSR efforts on CSR perceptions, CSR attitudes and CSR behaviours. In addition, there are positive and negative effects that are not mutually exclusive; instead, they usually coexist<sup>40</sup>. For example, implementing a CSR programme can result in mixed effects, such as individual stakeholders being committed, indifferent and dissident towards CSR<sup>35</sup>. One study found that implementing CSR into everyday practices can lead to both abdication and activism<sup>39</sup>. As mentioned in the previous section, we need to improve our understanding of causal effects using novel experimental approaches. There is also a need for more precise construct definitions and measures, given that our review uncovered a potentially overwhelming number of variables proposed to explain the CSR–individual behaviour relation<sup>63</sup> (as listed in Table 2). Inconsistencies in how CSR constructs are defined affect how they are measured and, in turn, the observed relationships between variables<sup>63</sup>.

In addition, there is a need for research on the impact of individuals' CSR behaviours on societal outcomes<sup>64</sup>. A call for this type of research was made more than two decades ago<sup>64,65</sup>, but we still lack deeper insight into the societal consequences of CSR initiatives<sup>64</sup>. Mixed results about the relationships between CSR and firm-related outcomes further complicate this situation. Some research suggests a positive relationship between CSR and firm performance<sup>6,65</sup>, while other studies have found a negative or no relationship as well<sup>66–68</sup>. Moreover, other scholars have found mixed and inconclusive findings<sup>69,70</sup>. We anticipate that conducting experimental research would also be helpful in terms of disentangling inconsistencies and paradoxical results.

### Extending the power of interdisciplinary and multi-level research

Our narrative review leads to the conclusion that more interdisciplinary research is needed to improve our understanding of CSR and individual behaviour<sup>71</sup>. For example, psychology and micro-organizational behaviour research usually focus on one CSR stakeholder group: employees. By contrast, fields such as environmental studies focus on other CSR stakeholders—for example, communities that share a geographic space with the organization. Other fields focus on other stakeholders: marketing focuses on consumers/customers, public administration and political science focus on governments and the economics literature focuses on corporations, industries and countries. Combining the approaches by these fields suggests the need to understand, for example, the perception of climate change of individuals in the general population and how that perception is related to individual behaviour<sup>69</sup>. Future research would clearly benefit from integrating these perspectives conceptually and empirically.

Relatedly, research involving multiple stakeholders implies the need to conduct multi-level research. Although CSR research has

traditionally focused on the firm as the primary unit of analysis<sup>72</sup>, our review highlights an increased interest in micro-CSR research within environmental studies, management, marketing and psychology. That said, this research is often conducted without considering macro-level processes and outcomes<sup>73,74</sup>. Accordingly, future research could build on our model by studying CSR context, which refers primarily to macro-level variables (that is, beyond the individual), while at the same time studying individual-level factors such as CSR readiness, CSR perceptions, CSR attitudes and CSR behaviours—as well as outcomes germane to both organizations and potential CSR beneficiaries. Clearly, there are methodological and practical obstacles involved in conducting such research. However, recent developments, including the availability of new data sources (such as databases that are publicly available<sup>75</sup>) as well as the use of experimental research designs involving vignettes, behavioural simulations, thought experiments and VR, as mentioned earlier, may aid in carrying out this research agenda.

### Conclusions

In sum, the integrative conceptual model resulting from our multidisciplinary narrative review allows us to gain new insights into the link between CSR and individual behaviour by considering CSR perceptions, CSR attitudes and CSR behaviours, as well as the direct and moderating effects of CSR readiness and CSR context. Because the model is parsimonious, given that it includes only five broad categories of variables, it allows us to integrate and synthesize a vast body of existing research into a coherent framework. In turn, our conceptual model allows us to provide specific suggestions for future research centred on three goals: understanding the relative importance of the antecedents to CSR behaviours, disentangling inconsistencies and paradoxical results, and extending the power of interdisciplinary and multi-level research. Such a research agenda would be instrumental in gathering evidence on how and why CSR is good for individuals, organizations and society.

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