Article

Investigating How Corporate Social Responsibility Affects Employees' Thriving at Work: A Social Exchange Perspective

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Abstract: Corporate social responsibility (CSR) helps enterprises achieve sustainable development in the current competitive environment. Premised on social exchange theory, we argue that CSR also contributes to employees' sustainable development, which can be gauged by thriving at work. We conducted a three-wave questionnaire survey to examine our hypothesized model. We found that employees' perceived CSR helps employees to build a good social exchange with their company, which in turn contributes to enhanced thriving at work. Further, for employees with higher levels of trait gratitude, CSR is more likely to facilitate their social exchange and subsequent thriving at work. Our findings enrich the nomological network of CSR and thriving, and provide insights for organizations to build a thriving and sustainable workforce.

Keywords: CSR; thriving at work; trait gratitude; social exchange

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), as an important strategy that many companies adopted to enhance corporate sustainability, has become a hot topic among scholars and practitioners [1]. According to the KPMG Survey of Corporate Responsibility Reporting 2020, 80% of the top 100 organizations in 49 countries report their CSR activities, and 96% of the world's 250 largest organizations provide CSR reports for different stakeholders [2]. Brieger et al. (2020) highlighted that the Fortune 500 firms invest over 15 billion dollars every year on CSR practices [3].

The importance of CSR initiatives is also evident in research that found a positive relationship between CSR and several positive organizational outcomes, including organizational reputation and corporate financial performance [4,5]. However, existing research has been dominated by macro-level perspectives. Less attention has been devoted to examining how employees' perception of CSR influences their work outcomes, that is, CSR at the micro-level [1]. Given that employees are significant stakeholders who can both influence and be impacted by CSR activities, examining how they react to CSR helps to unpack the "black box" in organizational behavior and strategic management research [1,6].

Although limited, the extant literature on micro-CSR has made some progress regarding how CSR impacts employee outcomes. For example, prior studies have identified several employee outcomes such as voice and innovative work behavior [7,8]. However, to our knowledge, how CSR impacts employees thriving at work has yet to be theoretically fleshed out or empirically tested. This is surprising because developing a thriving workforce has become almost all companies' pursuit in the highly competitive market environment [9,10]. Thriving at work refers to the joint feelings of learning and vitality at work. Learning refers to growing at work through new knowledge and skills, while vitality is about the sense of being energized at work [11,12]. Thriving at work serves as

a gauge for individuals to sense progress at work. When thriving, individuals are creating resources and can develop continuously [12,13]. Spreitzer, Porath, and Gibson (2012) have highlighted that thriving at work is a considerable mechanism for understanding individual sustainable development [12]. As well, prior empirical research has revealed that thriving at work is highly relevant to employees' performance and health, as well as organizational effectiveness [14]. CSR reflects organizations' sustainable development, while thriving at work reflects employees' sustainable development and contributes to both employees and their company [1,12]. Accordingly, this study aims to examine whether and how organizations' sustainable development (i.e., CSR) relates to employees' sustainable development (i.e., thriving at work).

As this study aims to examine how employees respond to CSR, we focus specifically on internal CSR, that is, CSR to employees. Internal CSR refers to a company's practices that promote employees' wellbeing and welfare. It includes organizational practices and activities such as training and learning opportunities, family friendly policies, organizational justice, and continuing education programs [15,16].

Based on social exchange theory, we aim to unravel the mechanism through which CSR impacts employee thriving. Specifically, as we focus on the interaction among employees and their company, we expect that the social relationship between employees and their company helps to explain the influencing mechanism through which CSR can impact employees' thriving at work. We argue that employees' social exchange with their company can mediate the association between CSR and employee thriving at work. Further, we propose that how much CSR can translate into social exchange and subsequent thriving depends on employees' trait gratitude.

This study contributes to the current literature on CSR and thriving at work in the following ways. Firstly, responding to Bavik's (2019) call for further examining how CSR relates to employee outcomes [17], this study aims to examine whether CSR can impact employee thriving at work. Secondly, although the antecedents of thriving at work have been well documented, limited attention has been paid to how organizational practices impact employee thriving [18]. Our study thus helps to enrich the antecedents of thriving at work. Thirdly, by introducing social exchange as the mediator and trait gratitude as the moderator, this study unravels the mechanism through which CSR can impact employee thriving. Our study also provides guidance for employee and organizational sustainable development.

2. Theory and Hypotheses

2.1. CSR and Thriving at Work

According to Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) socially embedded model of thriving at work, corporate contextual features can impact employees' thriving at work [11]. CSR, as an important organizational strategy and practice, can contribute to employees' thriving at work. For one thing, CSR helps to facilitate employees' sense of learning at work because it encourages employees to develop themselves and provides employees with opportunities and support to learn (e.g., training and additional education opportunities). For another thing, CSR makes employees believe that the company cares about their welfare because it takes employees' needs and wants into consideration, treats them fairly, and provides employees with instrumental and emotional support [19]. Working in such a company, employees' energy is less likely to be depleted, and their personal resources are more likely to be accumulated [20]. As a result, employees are more likely to experience a sense of vitality at work. As thriving at work reflects joint senses of vitality and learning at work [11], we argue that CSR can contribute to employees' thriving at work.

In addition, CSR practices create a satisfying and happy environment for employees [21]. This environment sends a positive signal for employees, making them more likely to recognize organizational culture values, which, in turn, enhances employees' commitment and identification to the organization [21,22]. As such, employees are more likely to establish a good exchange relationship with their company. Spreitzer et al.'s (2005)

socially embedded model of thriving at work notes that personal resource helps to enhance individuals' thriving [11]. Accordingly, as an important personal resource, a good exchange relationship with their company contributes to employees' thriving at work.

Prior empirical studies also provide some evidence for supporting our arguments. For example, Bu et al. (2022) found that CSR is positively related to employees' work engagement [23]. Abdelmotaleb et al. (2018) found that CSR can induce employees' positive affect at work [24]. As work engagement and positive affect have been found to be positively related to thriving at work [14,25], we expect that CSR also relates positively to employees' thriving at work. Thus, we propose the following:

H1. *Employees' CSR perception is positively associated with their thriving at work.*

2.2. The Mediating Effect of Social Exchange

According to social exchange theory, individuals continue to develop social exchange relationships with others (e.g., other individuals and the organization they are working in). If others give favors to individuals, individuals tend to return the favor to them, that is, a reciprocal norm exists [26]. Social exchange refers to the relationship between two parties, in which the positive relationship continues when someone reciprocates and stops when it is not reciprocated [27]. Social exchange plays an essential role in channeling the association between employee CSR perception and thriving at work.

CSR includes practices that reflect the company's caring about employees' welfare and development, which in turn can facilitate employees' social exchange with the company. Specifically, for companies that highly engage in CSR practices, they care about employees' needs and wants, encourage employees to develop their skills, support employees' further learning, provide a work–life balance for employees, and build up an organizational climate of fairness and justice [19]. Working in such companies, employees feel that their company cares about their welfare and provides instrumental and emotional support for them, that is, the company gives favors to its employees [8,17]. As a result, employees are more likely to develop and maintain a good exchange relationship with their company. By contrast, for companies that implement low levels of CSR practices, they care less about their employees and invest less in their employees [1,28]. Working in such companies, employees are less likely to develop and maintain a good exchange relationship with their company. Thus, we argue that CSR is positively associated with employees' social exchange with their company.

Employees are more likely to thrive at work when they have a good social exchange with their company. From the perspective of social exchange theory, individuals tend to return their company if they have a good exchange relationship with their company. When employees thrive at work, they can be more productive, which can contribute to the company's development [9,14]. As well, employees gain sustainable development when they thrive at work. Sustainable employees contribute to a sustainable organization [10,14]. In this vein, employees tend to thrive at work in order to return their company if they have a good exchange relationship with their company.

In addition, according to Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) socially embedded model of thriving at work, personal resource helps to enhance individuals' thriving [11]. A good exchange relationship with their company means that employees enjoy high levels of organizational support, which in turn can facilitate employees' development and growth in the organization [29]. Accordingly, as an important personal resource, a good exchange relationship with their company relates positively to employees' thriving at work. Considered collectively, we propose the following:

H2. *Social exchange mediates the association between CSR perception and employee thriving at work.*

2.3. The Moderating Effect of Employees' Trait Gratitude

Trait gratitude refers to one's general tendency to respond with gratitude to the roles that other parties' benevolence play in the positive individual outcomes that one obtains [30]. Prior studies have found that gratitude is positively associated with several individuals' positive experiences and outcomes, such as employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and job performance [31,32]. As well, employee gratitude contributes to organizational effectiveness such as organizational resilience [33].

Employees who have high levels of trait gratitude tend to examine the work context for grateful cues [34]. For employees who have higher levels of trait gratitude, they are more likely to notice their company's CSR. Thus, these employees are more likely to be influenced by CSR. In other words, employees are more likely to develop and maintain a good social exchange with their company when they have higher levels of trait gratitude. In addition, individuals who have high levels of trait gratitude tend to use positive appraisal and interpretation [35]. For employees who have high levels of trait gratitude, they are more likely to interpret CSR as positive, and believe that CSR really does good to themselves. As such, these employees are more likely to appreciate their company and want to return their company. As a result, CSR is more likely to promote these employees' social exchange relationship with their company.

By contrast, employees with low levels of trait gratitude tend to be indifferent to the favors received from others. As such, these employees are less likely to perceive CSR as positive, appreciate CSR, and return their company. As a result, CSR is less likely to promote these employees' social exchange relationship with their company. Taken together, we propose the following:

H3. *Employees' trait gratitude moderates the association between CSR perception and social exchange, such that the association is stronger when the level of gratitude is higher.*

Based on Hypotheses 2 and 3, we argue that employees' trait gratitude moderates the indirect association between CSR perception and employee thriving at work via social exchange. Specifically, for employees who have higher levels of trait gratitude, CSR is more likely to be positively interpreted and appreciated [35]. In this vein, CSR contributes to greater social exchange between employees and their company. Further, a good social exchange with the company serves as personal sources, which in turn contributes to employees' thriving at work [11]. By contrast, for employees with lower levels of trait gratitude, CSR is less likely to promote the social exchange between employees and their company, which, in turn, contributes to less employee thriving at work. Thus, we propose the following:

H4. *Employees' trait gratitude moderates the indirect association between CSR perception and thriving at work via social exchange, such that the indirect association is stronger when the level of gratitude is higher.*

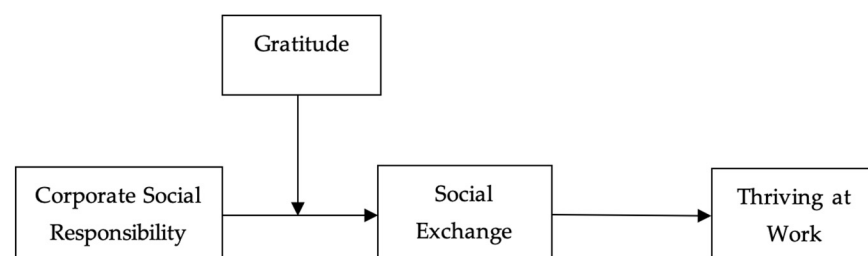Figure 1 shows our theoretical model.

Figure 1. Theoretical model.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Procedures

In order to minimize the impact of CMV, data were collected at three waves online using a professional survey platform. At Time 1, we distributed the first-round survey, in which we measured participants' perceived CSR, trait gratitude, demographic information, and their company's size. We received 460 valid responses. One week later (Time 2), we distributed the second-round survey to these 460 respondents. We asked these 460 respondents to rate their social exchange with their company and received 328 valid responses. At Time 3 (one week after Time 2), we distributed the third-round survey to these 328 respondents. We measured their thriving at work and received 252 valid questionnaires. All the respondents participated in the study voluntarily and anonymously. In each phase, all the respondents were awarded 4 CNY (around 0.6 USD) in return for their participation. The three-wave data were matched using unique identifier codes generated by the survey platform.

The final sample included 144 males (57.1%) and 108 females (42.9%) with a mean age of 32.60 years (SD = 7.14). On average, their work experience in the company was 6.64 years (SD = 5.28). In total, 92.4% of the participants held a bachelor's degree or above. Among these participants, 0.8% were working in a company with fewer than 50 employees, 6% were working in a company with 50 to 299 employees, 43.7% were working in a company with 300 to 999 employees, 36.5% were working in a company with 1000 to 4999 employees, and 13.1% were working in a company with no fewer than 5000 employees.

3.2. Measures

All scales used in our study were initially developed in English. Following Brislin's procedure [36], a meticulous back-translation process was undertaken to ensure the preservation of item meanings. All items were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

We adopted the scale developed by Turker et al. (2009) to measure employee perceived corporate social responsibility [19]. Our research focus is on how employees respond to CSR. Compared with external CSR, internal CSR (i.e., CSR to employees) is more concerned with employees and can be observed by employees more easily. Thus, we only used the internal CSR subscale, which includes 5 items. One sample item is, "My company policies encourage the employees to develop their skills and career." For each item, a higher score means that the participant perceives their company as highly engaging in such CSR activity. Lower scores mean that the participant perceives the level of their company's engagement in such CSR activity as low or even lacking such CSR activity. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.72.

Following Wang et al.'s (2018) practice [37], social exchange was measured with the scale developed by Shore et al. (2006) [27]. This scale consisted of 8 items. One sample item is, "There is a lot of give and take in my relationship with my organization." The Cronbach's alpha was 0.77.

We used the scale developed by McCullough et al. (2002) to measure participants' trait gratitude [30]. This scale included 6 items. One sample item is "I have so much in life to be thankful for." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.88.

We measured thriving using the scale developed by Porath et al. (2012) [25]. This scale included 2 dimensions, namely learning and vitality. This scale consisted of 10 items in total, with 5 items in each dimension. One sample item for the "learning" dimension is "I find myself learning often." One sample item for the "vitality" dimension is "I feel alive and vital". Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.81.

In our study, we controlled for the participants' age, gender, education level, and tenure. We also controlled for an organizational factor, that is, company size. This practice helps to minimize the potential effects of exogenous factors influencing our results.

4. Results

4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) using R software (version 4.1.1) to examine the discriminant validity among CSR, thriving at work, social exchange, and trait gratitude [38]. Four models were developed: the null model (M_0), the baseline four-factor model (M_1), a three-factor model collapsing corporate social responsibility and social exchange (M_2), and a combination of corporate social responsibility, social exchange, and trait gratitude (M_3), and the four constructs combined to represent a single dimension (M_4). Table 1 displays the results, indicating that the hypothesized four-factor model demonstrated a superior fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 525.39$, $df = 371$, CFI = 0.93, NNFI = 0.92, IFI = 0.93, SRMR = 0.06) compared to the alternative models. We found that our hypothesized four-factor model passed the threshold value of model fit and showed the best fit among the above-mentioned models. It confirms the discriminant validity of the four variables.

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analyses of measurement models.

Model Specifications	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	NNFI	IFI	SRMR
Null model (M_0)	2468.88	406	--	--	--	--	--
Baseline four-factor model (M_1)	525.39	371	--	0.93	0.92	0.93	0.06
CSR and SE are combined (M_2)	650.51	374	125.12 **	0.87	0.85	0.87	0.06
Three predictors (CSR + SE + TG) are combined (M_3)	1063.27	376	537.88 **	0.67	0.64	0.67	0.11
Four constructs represent a single dimension (M_4)	1320.89	377	795.50 **	0.54	0.10	0.55	0.51

Note. N = 252. CSR = corporate social responsibility; SE = social exchange; TG = trait gratitude. ** $p < 0.01$.

4.2. Correlation Analysis

We conducted Pearson correlation analysis to test the associations among our research variables. Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations, and correlations among all the variables in this study. Consistent with our predictions, corporate social responsibility is positively related to social exchange ($r = 0.40$, $p < 0.01$) and thriving ($r = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$). These results offer preliminary support for testing our hypotheses.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations between the variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	32.60	7.14	--								
2. Gender	0.43	0.50	0.11	--							
3. Education level	3.02	0.46	−0.09	0.01	--						
4. Tenure	6.64	5.28	0.70 **	0.10	0.00	--					
5. Company size	3.55	0.82	−0.03	−0.05	−0.02	−0.03	--				
6. Corporate social responsibility	3.71	0.66	−0.08	−0.05	0.07	−0.01	0.17 **	--			
7. Social exchange	3.81	0.58	−0.02	−0.03	0.08	0.05	0.09	0.40 **	--		
8. Thriving	4.01	0.47	−0.05	−0.03	0.08	0.03	0.10	0.44 **	0.44 **	--	
9. Trait gratitude	3.56	0.80	−0.03	0.00	−0.11	−0.06	0.12	0.24 **	0.28 **	0.26 **	--

Note. N = 252. ** $p < 0.01$.

4.3. Hypotheses Testing

We used multiple regression analyses to examine our hypotheses. Table 3 shows the results of the regression analyses. Hypothesis 1 proposes that employees' corporate social responsibility is positively related to their thriving at work. As shown in Table 3 (Model 2), the relationship between CSR and thriving is significant and positive ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Table 3. Results of regression analyses.

Variable	Social Exchange				Thriving		
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**	**Model 6**	**Model 7**
Control variables							
Age	−0.08	−0.04	−0.05	−0.06	−0.12	−0.07	−0.06
Gender	−0.02	−0.01	−0.01	0.00	−0.03	−0.01	−0.01
Education level	0.08	0.05	0.08	0.07	0.08	0.05	0.03
Tenure	0.11	0.08	0.10	0.10	0.11	0.08	0.05
Company size	0.09	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.10	0.02	0.01
Independent variable							
Corporate social responsibility		0.39 **	0.34 **	0.34 **		0.43 **	0.30 **
Mediator							
Social exchange							0.32 **
Moderator							
Trait gratitude			0.22 **	0.15 *			
Interaction							
Corporate social responsibility × Trait gratitude				0.26 **			
R^2	0.02	0.17	0.21	0.27	0.03	0.20	0.28
ΔR^2	0.02	0.14	0.04	0.06	0.03	0.17	0.08
F	1.15	8.16 **	9.22 **	11.34 **	1.25	10.10 **	13.64 **

Note. N = 252. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Hypothesis 2 proposes that social exchange mediates the association between CSR and thriving at work. Table 3 reveals that social exchange is positively related to thriving at work ($\beta = 0.32$; $p < 0.05$; Model 7). However, the coefficient of CSR on thriving at work decreased from 0.43 to 0.30 when social exchange was included into the model. Further, we examine the mediating effect of social exchange using bootstrap analysis [39]. The results show that the indirect effect is 0.09 (SE = 0.02, LLCI = 0.05, ULCI = 0.14). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported.

Furthermore, Hypothesis 3 predicted that employees' trait gratitude moderates the association between CSR and social exchange, such that the association is stronger when the level of gratitude is higher. As shown in Model 4, the CSR–gratitude interaction item is significantly and positively related to social exchange ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$). To further examine the moderating effect of gratitude, we conducted simple slope analyses [40]. Figure 2 depicts that CSR is a significant positive predictor of social exchange under the condition of high gratitude ($b = 0.54$, $t = 7.37$, $p < 0.01$) and is not a significant positive predictor of social exchange under the condition of low gratitude ($b = 0.05$, $t = 0.69$, n.s.). Thus, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicts that employees' trait gratitude moderates the indirect association between CSR and thriving at work via social exchange, such that the indirect association is stronger when the level of gratitude is higher. We conducted bootstrap analyses to examine the moderating role of trait gratitude. Table 4 shows the results of moderated mediation results. We found that the index of moderated mediation is 0.08 (SE = 0.03, LLCI = 0.03, ULCI = 0.13). Specifically, the indirect effect is significant when trait gratitude is high (conditional indirect effect = 0.14, SE = 0.03, 95% CI = [0.08, 0.21]) but not significant when trait gratitude is low (conditional indirect effect = 0.01, SE = 0.02, 95% CI = [−0.03, 0.06]). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported.
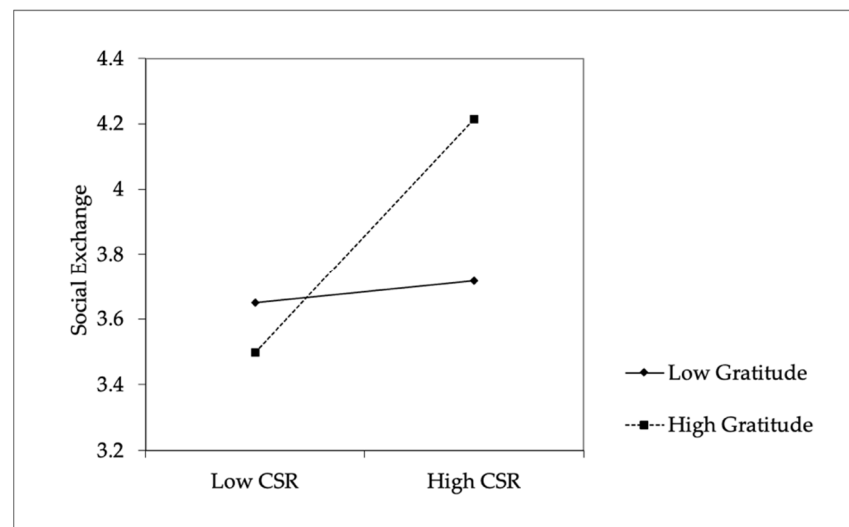
Figure 2. Interaction between corporate social responsibility and trait gratitude on social exchange.

Table 4. Results of moderated mediation analyses.

Predictor	β	SE	t	LLCI	ULCI
Outcome: Social exchange					
Constant	3.50	0.32	10.82 **	2.87	4.14
Corporate social responsibility	0.29	0.05	5.87 **	0.20	0.39
Trait gratitude	0.11	0.04	2.53 *	0.02	0.19
Corporate social responsibility × trait gratitude	0.31	0.07	4.60 **	0.18	0.44
Outcome: Thriving					
Constant	2.99	0.31	9.51 **	2.37	3.61
Corporate social responsibility	0.22	0.04	5.05 **	0.13	0.30
Social exchange	0.26	0.05	5.31 **	0.16	0.35

Conditional bootstrap estimates for social exchange				
Trait gratitude	**Effect**	**Boot SE**	**Boot LLCI**	**Boot ULCI**
−1 *SD*	0.01	0.02	−0.02	0.06
Mean	0.08	0.02	0.04	0.12
+1 *SD*	0.14	0.03	0.08	0.22

Note. N = 252. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

5. Discussion

Through a three-wave survey, we found that CSR is positively related to employee thriving at work. Social exchange mediates the association between CSR and thriving at work. Further, employee gratitude moderates the relationship between CSR perceptions and social exchange; the higher the level of gratitude, the stronger the association between social exchange and CSR perceptions. As well, employee gratitude moderates the indirect relationship between perceived social responsibility and job prosperity through social exchange, and the higher the level of gratitude, the stronger the indirect relationship between CSR and employees' thriving at work via social exchange.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

Our study contributes to the literature on CSR and thriving at work in the following ways.

Firstly, we found that CSR is positively associated with employees' thriving at work. This finding suggests that organizational sustainable strategy and development (i.e., CSR) can contribute to employees' sustainable development (i.e., thriving at work). By identifying employees' thriving at work as a consequence of CSR, this study echoes Bavik's

(2019) call for further examining how CSR relates to employee outcomes [17]. Moreover, our demonstrated association between CSR and employee thriving at work helps to enrich the literature on micro-CSR by extending the nomological network of CSR.

Secondly, our findings also contribute to the extant literature on thriving at work. Specifically, prior studies have identified a number of antecedents of thriving at work, including leadership styles such as transformational leadership and individual differences such as proactive personality [18,41]. However, limited attention has been paid to what kind of organizational practices or processes can impact employees' thriving at work [42]. This research gap makes researchers and practitioners wonder how they can identify and implement organizational practices and strategies in enabling a thriving workforce [42]. By demonstrating the positive association between CSR and employee thriving at work, this study contributes to enriching the antecedents of thriving at work. Our findings serve as a catalyst for future research to examine how organizational practices can impact employee thriving at work. As well, our findings provide theoretical insights for practitioners to leverage organizational practices to build a thriving and sustainable workforce.

Thirdly, we found that employees' social exchange relationship with their company mediates the association between CSR and thriving at work. Prior studies mainly looked into how employees' attitudes toward their company channel the association between CSR and employee work outcomes. As a result, the mediators are centered on variables such as organizational pride, affective commitment, and organizational identification [43–45]. By demonstrating the mediating effect of social exchange, this study provides a new approach to understanding how CSR can impact employee outcomes, that is, the relationship perspective. Social exchange has been found to be positively related to employees' attitudes toward their company (e.g., organizational commitment) [46]. Thus, the relationship perspective can not only capture the exchange relationship quality between employees and their company, but also reflect employees' attitudes toward their company. As such, our demonstrated relationship perspective provides a broader understanding of how employees perceive CSR and react accordingly.

Fourthly, by demonstrating the moderating role of trait gratitude, our study responds to De Roeck and Farooq's (2018) [28] calls for more studies to consider the boundary conditions underlying the mechanism of how CSR functions. Our findings highlight the important role that individual traits play in determining the potency of CSR in influencing employee outcomes. As well, our findings suggest that both organizational factors and individual factors should be considered to fully understand how employees react to organizational contexts.

5.2. Practical Implications

From a pragmatic standpoint, these results underscore the significance of companies putting CSR strategies into practice, as they can facilitate employees' social exchange relationship with their company and boost employees' thriving at work. Additionally, managers can create employee engagement and motivational programs more successfully by combining these programs with CSR activities (e.g., new skills learning opportunities and flexible work schedules). In addition to actively engaging in CSR practices, organizations should manage employees' perception of CSR. For example, organizations could communicate and popularize to employees regarding its CSR practices and how these activities can benefit employees [47].

We found that social exchange mediates the association between CSR and employee thriving at work. Organizations should be aware of encouraging socially exchangeable relationships among employees when implementing CSR. This could entail boosting organizational justice, improving employee engagement, and raising transparency.

Considering that gratitude moderates the relationship between CSR and social exchange, managers of organizations should promote and cultivate a thankful workplace. This can be accomplished through praising and acknowledging the contributions made by staff members, giving them positive feedback, and fostering encouraging environ-

ments [30,48]. As well, employees with high levels of gratitude should be selected, trained, and rewarded.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Our study also has limitations. Firstly, all of our measures were self-reported, which might lead to common method biases. We thus encourage future studies to use other reported measures. Secondly, as our study was conducted only in China, the generalizability might be limited. Future studies could benefit from explicating our research in other countries to see if there are culture differences. Thirdly, although we have controlled for one organizational factor (i.e., company size), other organizational factors (e.g., organizational performance, governance structures, and establishing time) might impact the effectiveness of CSR. Future studies could benefit by including other organizational factors. For example, future studies could investigate how different organizational contexts (e.g., organizational performance, governance structures, and CEO attributes) can impact the company's CSR strategy and employees' perception and reactions to CSR. Case studies and archives data might help to provide more insightful and fine-grained findings. Fourthly, we only considered internal CSR in our study. Future studies can examine whether different kinds of CSR initiatives (such as CSR to employees, customers, environmental, and social) have different impacts on employees' attitudes and performance. Especially, the potential dark side of CSR should be an interesting research direction for future studies to explore. For example, future studies can examine whether and how CSR can lead to employee unethical behaviors, time theft behaviors, and so on. Also, future studies can look into additional mediating and moderating factors that might exist. In addition to gratitude, other possible moderating variables (e.g., emotional intelligence, job stress, etc.) and mediating variables (e.g., organizational commitment, employee engagement, etc.) can be studied [49].

6. Conclusions

In the dynamic economic landscape of today, CSR has emerged as a critical component of company strategy. CSR is the practice of businesses taking on social and environmental responsibilities in addition to profit maximization. Based on social exchange theory, this study identifies CSR as a contributor to employees" good exchange relationships with their company and employees' subsequent thriving at work. Additionally, we highlight that employee trait gratitude serves as a considerable boundary condition underlying when CSR can facilitate greater social exchange among employees and their company, and subsequently lead to higher thriving at work. This study enriches the existing literature by extending the nomological network of CSR and thriving. As well, our findings provide practical insights for organizations to build a thriving and sustainable workforce.

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