

## Article

# High-Commitment Work Practices and the Social Responsibility Issue: Interaction and Benefits

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**Abstract:** Human Resource Management (HRM) has a potentially vital role to play in addressing the new challenges that companies have to face and in delivering initiatives in the framework of corporate sustainability. Our work attempts to shed light on the strategic role of High-Commitment Work Practices (HCWP) as a Corporate Sustainability (CS) partner and, more specifically, to analyze the implications of their integration on the competitiveness of the firm. With this purpose, we apply a qualitative methodology, using a single case study, to explore and explain why and how the interaction between HCWP and CS takes place. The results show how this interaction encourages the formulation and implementation of new socially responsible organizational initiatives that help the firm to improve its competitive position in the market through the development of employees' innovative behavior. HCWP integrate with CS initiatives when CS values form part of the mission and strategy of the firm. Also, HCWP support CS deployment, primarily in its internal dimension. In addition, our work reveals that cultural factors such as organizational values and management style, and structural factors like empowerment and teamwork must be jointly considered when adopting a CS strategy aimed at developing innovative behavior and competitive advantage.

**Keywords:** HCWP; corporate sustainability; social responsibility; innovative behavior



**Citation:** Revuelto-Taboada, L.; Canet-Giner, M.T.; Balbastre-Benavent, F. High-Commitment Work Practices and the Social Responsibility Issue: Interaction and Benefits. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 459. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13020459>

Received: 12 December 2020

Accepted: 3 January 2021

Published: 6 January 2021

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## 1. Introduction

There is undeniably a major crisis of confidence in our institutions and economic systems. Social and environmental problems have increased and, as a consequence, stakeholder activism, regulatory scrutiny and increasing pressure for organizations to contribute to progress in a responsible and sustainable way have emerged. Human Resource Management (HRM) has a potentially vital role to play in addressing the new challenges that companies have to face and in delivering initiatives in the framework of corporate sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) that “go beyond a mere public relations exercise” [1] (p. 2).

Consequently, research linking CSR and HRM has received growing attention in recent years [2]. However, the relationship between them remains under-investigated compared to studies in other areas [3,4]. Specifically, the strategic or operational role of HRM as a CSR partner and, more specifically, the analysis of the implications for CSR initiatives (and results) stemming from the implementation of high-commitment work practices (HCWP) have not yet received the necessary interest.

De Stefano et al. [5] (p. 550) highlighted “the absence of frameworks for articulating and classifying the HR role in CSR and sustainability, the substantial separation between HRM and CSR/CS studies and academic communities, and the lack of integration between HR and CSR managers” as the causes of this reality. Moreover, Shen and Benson [6] (p. 1724) pointed out that whether and how socially responsible HRM influences employees' direct work behaviours remain conceptually and empirically unexplored. Although CS and CSR have been used as interchangeable terms, there is a consensus in the

literature that CS includes CSR. In particular, various authors have pointed out that CSR is a subfield within CS [7]. Looking for greater specificity and a better adjustment to business reality in this research, we focused on the concept of CSR.

Consequently, the aim of this research is twofold. First, our aim is to identify how HRM and CSR interact to generate internal and external impacts. Second, we are interested in studying the role of innovative behaviour in this framework. This role could prove to be particularly relevant when employees' innovative behaviour leads to innovations and ideas that promote or facilitate social responsibility initiatives and the achievement of competitive advantages.

To achieve our aims, following Aguinis [8] (p. 855), we define CSR initiatives as "context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance." The objectives of these initiatives are to improve social performance, gain institutional legitimacy and increase organizational performance and long-term competitiveness, thus attracting customers and motivating employees [6].

Our research follows a systemic approach in terms of human resource practices. The influence of a bundle of practices on desired employee behaviours is more significant when they are internally consistent and reinforce each other in a synergistic way [9,10]. Our approach also focuses on employee involvement and, consequently, we understand HCWP as a system that encourages employees' commitment to the organizational objectives, taking the arguments of Baron and Kreps [11] and Walton [12] as a starting point. As a result, we consider HCWP as a system of human resource practices aimed at achieving competitive advantages through people, adopting a soft, humanistic perspective [13–15].

It is a fact that management decisions about human resource management policies and practices have an impact on organizational results through employees' behaviours and actions. This highlights the need to pay more attention to employee perceptions when studying the relationship between HRM practices and innovation performance, given that perceptions determine the attitudes that lead to behaviour [16–19].

Our paper aims to shed light on the analysis of how HCWP and CSR interact and how this interaction can encourage the emergence of new initiatives aligned with socially responsible objectives which, in turn, will help the firm to improve its innovation results through the development of innovative behaviour. The qualitative analysis performed shows that HCWP and CSR develop together, reinforce one another and contribute to create a climate of confidence, cooperation and employee satisfaction. The result is that employees become motivated to innovate, and this innovation, together with the loyalty obtained from customers through the delivery of a high value-added service, contribute to the generation of a competitive advantage in the firm studied.

Taking into account previous terminological and conceptual details, the paper is structured as follows to achieve the goals set out above. First, we define the theoretical framework focusing on the interaction between HCWP and CSR, proposing a theoretical model of relationships. The following section contains the methodology which we use to justify the decision made to select the case study and how we collected and analysed the primary information. Later, the results are shown and discussed. Finally, in the Discussion and Conclusions section, practical implications and future research lines are presented.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *The Interaction between HCWP and CSR Strategy: The Role of Socially Responsible HRM Practices*

HRM can perform different roles in strategy formulation and implementation that range from proactive leadership to reactive operational support [20]. The particular role played will depend on different factors, including the range or level of strategic influence granted by senior management to HRM, as well as the competence and motivation of the HRM professionals.

As a strategic partner, HRM can help in the process of formulating the CSR strategy by providing insights into the needs, expectations and potential of human resources, both

at the organizational level, and externally, at the level of the supply chain or society at large. When HRM is involved in the implementation process, it can contribute to a social responsibility strategy by raising employee awareness about CSR issues, promoting employee involvement in CSR initiatives, facilitating CSR-related change in the organization and providing administrative support [21–25].

Regarding the role of HRM in CSR, Sarvaiya et al. [24] posited that HRM involvement in CSR is conditioned by contextual factors, such as the CSR structure within the organization and the scope of the CSR strategy, which are, in turn, influenced by the type of sector, resources and overall profile of the company. According to the cited authors, HRM plays an essential strategic role, both in the decision-making process and in the implementation of internal CSR practices, that is, the implementation by the organization of socially responsible behaviour toward its own employees [26]. Conversely, in the case of external CSR (i.e., the CSR dimension that attempts to address the interests of external stakeholders), the role of HRM can be considered less relevant. HRM sometimes represents a marginal contribution in decision-making processes and can play an operational and supporting role in terms of external CSR implementation of initiatives.

CSR and HRM have a complex, mutually dependent and interactive relationship. In this vein, Xiao et al. [4] established that CSR and HRM are connected in a two-way direction. One direction flows from CSR to HRM through Socially Responsible HRM practices (SRHRMP), which include legal compliance HRM practices and employee-oriented HRM practices that go beyond legal compliance. In this direction, CSR is the starting point and HRM is the outcome of CSR actions. According to the authors, CSR-HRM tends to be driven from the top down, and employee outcomes (e.g., commitment, labour satisfaction) may be a side effect. The other direction flows from HRM to CSR through CSR facilitation HRM practices, which contribute to achieving organizations' CSR goals [27]. In this direction, CSR-oriented HRM practices are the means, and achieving CSR goals is the intended outcome. The HRM-CSR direction tends to be bottom-up, where employee involvement and voice may be more readily accommodated in the system, thus yielding more employee-oriented outcomes.

We disagree with the abovementioned authors' statement in relation to the CSR-HRM bidirectional relationship and its varying effects on employee (attitudinal and behavioural) outcomes. First of all, given that employees are substantial organizational stakeholders, we believe that employee outcomes should be pursued as a priority objective of the "top-down" strategy. This socially responsible orientation, when integrated into strategy, has direct effects on employees' positive attitudes and behaviours. As Stahl et al. [28] stated, CSR can contribute to HRM in different ways, such as creating a strong employer brand, making selection procedures more inclusive and introducing standards of decent work. From our point of view, CSR strategy has an influence in HRM practices through strategic values, that is, when HRM strategy is oriented to values related to sustainability, some of the HR practices deployed by the firm will contribute to facilitate the CSR strategy and objectives. This way, CSR facilitation HRM practices are aimed at fostering employees' CSR participation and at facilitating the implementation of external CSR. Consequently, these practices are closely related to external stakeholder outcomes without detracting from their internal indirect effects. HRM can contribute to CSR by creating employee engagement with it, building CSR capabilities and integrating CSR principles throughout the organization [1]. In our opinion, when HRMP are influenced by CSR values, they facilitate the development of SRHRMP which, in turn, will act as a driver of CSR initiatives.

Stahl et al. [1] argued that despite the obvious connection between CSR and HRM, the results of multiple surveys reveal that HRM specialists and departments have failed to be recognized as relevant partners in influencing CSR strategies and do not count as key implementers of CSR programs. Apart from the widely documented lack of strategic influence of HRM, the authors pointed to different reasons for their secondary role in relation to CSR. In many cases, CSR efforts are only symbolic or self-serving, in which organizations try to "appear" to be committed to CSR to placate various stakeholder groups

or avoid legal or other consequences [28,29]. Contrary to substantive or cause-serving CSR efforts, these scarce and vacuous symbolic efforts do not require high levels of employee commitment and engagement and, thus, HRM involvement.

Stahl et al. [1] (p. 4) also blamed the actual HRM practitioners themselves who, in many cases, have ignored their role as a relevant CSR partner and “have bought-in to the notion of CS/CSR as a public relations exercise.” Finally, the authors contended that part of the failure should be assumed by researchers who have failed to offer guidance and evidence-based solutions to practitioners who wanted to take on challenges and achieve results in the field of CSR. Moreover, many scholars and senior HRM executives have focused on organizational performance and shareholder value as the main objective of HRM systems rather than adopting a broader and more enriching multidimensional, multi-stakeholder approach.

Following Mostafa et al. [30], we can establish that HCWP are oriented to long-term relationships based on trust and empathy, referring to a HRM system that tries to increase organizational employees’ commitment and, as a result, some desirable work behaviours and outcomes. When organizations invest in HCWP, they are establishing long-term objectives for employees, which will have clear positive implications for internal social responsibility. In general, empirical evidence suggests that HCWP are positively related to desirable behavioural outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to remain, lower employee turnover, citizenship behaviours, work engagement, extra-role behaviours, higher productivity and better decision-making processes, ultimately leading to higher levels of performance [30–33]. In our case, as we will see later, we are especially interested in analysing how this bundle of practices facilitates SRHRMP that, in turn, will promote CSR strategy and innovative behaviour oriented to sustainability. Under the framework of a CSR strategy, these innovations can lead to better environmental and social performance at the community level while maintaining and even improving a company’s economic performance.

SRHRMP refers to a set of human resource management practices aimed at implementing corporate social responsibility values [31,34]. These practices underpin the successful implementation of CSR, that is, they constitute the mechanism through which the firm encourages its employees to become actively involved in socially responsible activities within the framework of the company.

Shen and Benson [6] (p. 1724) argued that SRHRMP differs from the generic concept of HRM, “as it is CSR specific and facilitates the implementation of CSR that mainly addresses the interests of external stakeholders.” This means that although SRHRMP can have an effect on internal CSR, these actions are actually focused on getting employees to support the organization’s external initiatives in CSR rather than enhancing this responsibility internally. As a consequence, they consider that SRHRMP “may influence employee work behaviors above and beyond the impact of general HRM.” In turn, Kramar [35] also raised a clear difference between HRM and SRHRMP, mainly due to the different nature (economic and organizational vs. social and environmental) of the goals to which each one is oriented to.

SRHRMP include recruiting, selecting and retaining socially responsible employees; providing CSR training; and considering employees’ social performance in promotion, performance appraisal and remuneration [27,31,36]. A comprehensive review of SRHRMP was conducted by Barrena-Martínez et al. [37] (pp. 2568–2569), who offered a broad definition of what SRHRMP encompasses. After a literature review and following recommendations from related international standards (i.e., Global Reporting Initiative, ISO 26000) and the guidelines provided by CSR professionals in IBEX company reports, the authors used a Delphi (three rounds) to identify practices encompassed in eight corresponding policies that suitably reflect CSR-HRM. These policies were training and development, communication, compensation and social benefits, health and safety at work, management of employment relations, diversity and equal opportunity, recruitment and selection and work-life balance.

There is also evidence in the literature of potentially negative spillovers of high-performance work systems on employees, in terms of emotional exhaustion, anxiety and role overload, which has led to a stream of research about the “dark side of HRM” [38,39]. In this respect, Xiao et al. [4] suggested researchers should focus more on the “dark side of CSR–HRM.” This last consideration diminishes one of the initial differences pointed out as, in both cases, the principle that “even good things can lead to bad outcomes” is fulfilled [40].

However, some authors have established that there is not a clear difference between HCWP and SRHRMP. In this vein, De Stefano et al. [5] indicated that a partial overlap between HCWP and SRHRMP exists, though there are also certain differences. In their opinion, only a subset of high-performance practices is socially sustainable and pro-employee, and not all high-performing work practices are connected to the firm’s CSR. Other HRM practices that are consistent with CSR ambition are left out of the HCWP framework.

In this respect, our argument follows a dissimilar viewpoint and considers that HCWP and SRHRMP are different but interrelated concepts. When CSR values and philosophy are embedded in the organizational mission and vision, HCWP (not so much oriented to effectiveness but instead to commitment and motivation) will include CSR orientation in their strategic objectives because of the alignment between HRM strategy and organizational strategic goals. As a result, the recruitment and selection of employees will take on individuals that share values and principles with the socially responsible objectives of the firm, and motivation practices will encourage employees to drive their behaviour toward sustainability. Thus, HCWP become a facilitator of SRHRMP. This idea has been already stated by Kramar [35] on recognizing that the inclusion of the stakeholder dimension into the strategic perspective of the HRM would allow it to achieve, at the same time, organizational and socially oriented goals. In this vein, the author of [35] (p. 1074) claimed that “adopting a broader focus to measuring organizational performance,” through the inclusion of sustainable-oriented aspects, would facilitate the attainment of both organizational and sustainable-oriented objectives, eliminating the potential conflict of interests or contradictions. Later, as argued above, the implementation of SRHRMP would act as a driver of CSR strategy.

## 2.2. *The HCWP-SRHRMP—Innovative Behavior Link*

Two main theoretical frameworks, the AMO (Ability-Motivation-Opportunity) framework and the Social Exchange Theory, support the HCWP-SRHRMP-Innovative Behaviour link, which enables us to set out the specific relationships that will later be proposed in our initial model. These frameworks also serve as a reference in the qualitative study carried out to explore the true nature of existing relationships, which obliges us to briefly review their fundamentals. It must be noted that both theories, the AMO [41,42] and the Social Exchange Theory [31,43,44], have already been used in the CSR research field to answer different research questions which are similar to those raised here.

The AMO framework understands that employees’ behaviour and, consequently, performance, is based on three components: The possession of the appropriate skills, the necessary motivation to carry out the work and the opportunity for individuals to participate [45,46]. The AMO model assumes that the achievement of an organization’s strategic goals is based on employees’ ability, motivation and opportunity to perform specific tasks and roles [32]. It suggests that these three components are essential to effectively take advantage of employees’ discretionary efforts that are associated with “going the extra mile,” that is, working beyond the basic requirements [47].

Jiang et al. [48], based on the model by Lepak et al. [49], described the HRM system as a composition of three dimensions: Skill-enhancing HRM practices, motivation-enhancing HRM practices and opportunity-enhancing HRM practices. Similarly, Stankevičiūtė et al. [50] took the AMO framework to explain the relationship between SRHRMP and innovative behaviour. These authors employed the ROC model (i.e., Respect, Openness and Continuity), originally developed by De Prins et al. [51], to sustain this relationship.



However, it is easy (and these authors did it) to link the different elements of the ROC model to the AMO framework. Particularly, they related practices as health and safety at work, work-life balance and career planning to motivation; employee participation to opportunity; and employee development to ability. In so doing, the basic dimensions of the AMO framework are at the basis of the development of employees' innovative behaviour. As Stankevičiūtė et al. [50] (p. 9) stated, "successful fulfilment of work and family demands provides psychological motivation to the employees, which enables them to think about new ways of performance and generate and implement the ideas."

In turn, the Social Exchange Theory [52–54] is one of the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behaviour [55]. It states that employees who perceive their organizational environment as being supportive will feel obliged to reciprocate with behaviours that are beneficial to the organization. The relationship between parties (employees and organization through supervisors and coworkers) can evolve over time, acquiring higher levels of trust, loyalty and mutual commitment when employers "take care of employees." However, although the norm of reciprocity may be a universally accepted principle [56], "the degree to which people and cultures apply reciprocity principles varies" [55] (p. 878).

In any case, the role of HRM policies and practices is central when a firm wants to increase employee' commitment [57] and show organizational support [58] in order to promote a desired behaviour. In this vein, Zhang & Jia [59] (p. 747) stated that there is substantial evidence to support that HCWP "foster employees' shared perceptions of a supportive organizational environment," which makes employees feel compelled to reciprocate with behaviours that are beneficial to the organization. Mostafa et al. [30] suggested that investments in high-commitment HRM practices signal the organization's desire to engage employees in mutually beneficial exchanges and establish trusting, long-lasting relations, increasing the probability of enhanced positive work-related outcomes and a desire to engage in further exchange cycles.

Bos-Nehles & Meijerink [60] emphasized the relevance of the correct implementation of HRM practices and analysed social exchange relationships between HRM actors. Their results showed that employees' perceptions about support from their line managers are positively related to their perception of HRM practices. In turn, line manager perceptions of their organization's support for HRMP are positively related to their motivation to deploy these practices.

From the SRHRMP perspective and following Stankevičiūtė et al. [50], employees perceive that, through these practices, the firm is committed with them and, consequently, they will feel in debt to the company. This feeling leads them to orient their behaviour to the organizational objectives in the particular area of innovation and creativity. This reciprocal behaviour is clearly explained by the SET. As an example, training in values and contents related to sustainability will lead employees to perceive the organizational support and, as a result, they feel the need to reciprocate through sustainable innovative behaviour.

In addition to and based on the SET arguments, the more employees trust in the firm, the more oriented to organizational goals their behaviour will be [61]. As seen before, SRHRMP tend to develop trust and commitment in employees. Consequently, organizational trust will facilitate the development of innovative behaviour, as Yu et al. [61] established.

Finally, we would like to highlight the fact that there are other theoretical approaches, though they are complementary rather than concurrent, which can help us to analyse and understand the phenomenon under study. We will also marginally base our analysis on these arguments. Specifically, we refer to the stakeholder perspective [62–64] and to the Social Identity Theory [65,66]. The first is a key theoretical influence within the framework of CSR that aims to guide company activities so that the interests of internal and external stakeholders are taken into account and protected. This also helps us to understand the role that HRM plays in these processes. Several authors have also posited the integration of the Social Identity Theory with the Social Exchange Theory [30,67]. Greater identification with the organization leads employees to incorporate organizational values, norms and

interests, making their organization's success their own. This fosters cooperation and the adoption of discretionary behaviours not only directly, but also indirectly by facilitating exchange mechanisms.

### 2.3. *The Interdependencies between Innovative Behavior, Innovation Performance and CSR*

Multiple studies have suggested that HRM which fosters a high-quality employee-organization relationship motivates employees to contribute innovative ideas to the organization [68,69]. More specifically, Bos-Nehles et al. [70], after a detailed literature review, confirmed that HRM practices, especially HCWP, positively affect innovative work behaviour. In the same vein, Sanz-Valle and Jiménez-Jiménez [71] stated that high-performance work systems and committed-oriented HRM practices have a positive relationship with innovative work behaviour. Thus, it can be said that there is major consensus in the literature about this topic.

Prior research has also established a direct link between CSR and innovation [72–74] through employees' innovative behaviour. Companies must apply the principles of corporate responsibility to their products, processes and production practices, and this fact requires them to be open to change and innovation. In this situation, SRHRMP can have a positive effect on innovative behaviour [50,75] and, particularly, on employee socially responsible innovative behaviour.

When conceptualizing employee socially responsible innovative behaviour, there is not a consensus in the specialized literature, probably because it is a novel concept. To this respect, Yi et al. [76] (p. 3) considered sustainable innovative behaviour "in the sense that these innovative behaviours must be maintained at a certain level or continue over a long period of time to become competitive." Other authors, such as Duradoni and Di Fabio [77], have linked innovative behaviour to sustainability, because innovation is one of the challenges related to the Sustainable Development Goals promoted by the United Nations. These authors [77] (p. 2) considered, introducing a psychological perspective, that a socially responsible innovative behaviour meets "sustainable project goals, as well as to achieve workers' growth and enrichment." Taking these ideas as a starting point, we define a socially responsible innovative behaviour as an individual behaviour leading to innovation and creativity which are inspired and embedded in the values and goals of sustainability of the firm, for instance, innovations oriented to the development of sustainable products or services, improvements in processes oriented to increase work-life balance and achieve better organizational climate or the development of new solutions to reduce environmental impacts. This socially responsible innovative behaviour can be considered a particular type of innovative behaviour and, consequently, it is included in the latter.

As a consequence of employees' innovative behaviour, innovation performance of the firm is developed [78,79]. From a longitudinal perspective, innovation, and especially sustainability-oriented innovations, can foster CSR, integrating socially responsible economic, social and ecological objectives into the design of new products, processes and organizational structures [80]. This therefore makes encouraging and facilitating innovation an "indispensable tool to the implementation of CSR" [81] (p. 2380) and has important positive implications for organizational reputation. In this vein, Mishra [82] found that more innovative firms demonstrated high CSR performance after successful innovation.

Based on the arguments set out above, we developed a theoretical model (see Figure 1). This model was later used to guide the data-gathering process in our fieldwork and was our main input to analyse the collected data. As Figure 1 shows, the adoption of CSR values and goals becomes easier in organizations with HCWP, as these practices cover a large part of the primary aspects of CSR (i.e., legal compliance and employee orientation), facilitating, as a result, the incorporation of CSR goals and values. In our opinion, the result of this integration is what the specialist literature has considered as SRHRMP. These practices, in turn, are deployed through specific CSR initiatives and actions, both internally and externally. Thus, HCWP do not only have an effect on individual innovative behaviour

but also facilitate the adoption of socially responsible innovative employee behaviours through SRHRMP. Finally, these behaviours will translate into innovation performance at organizational level.

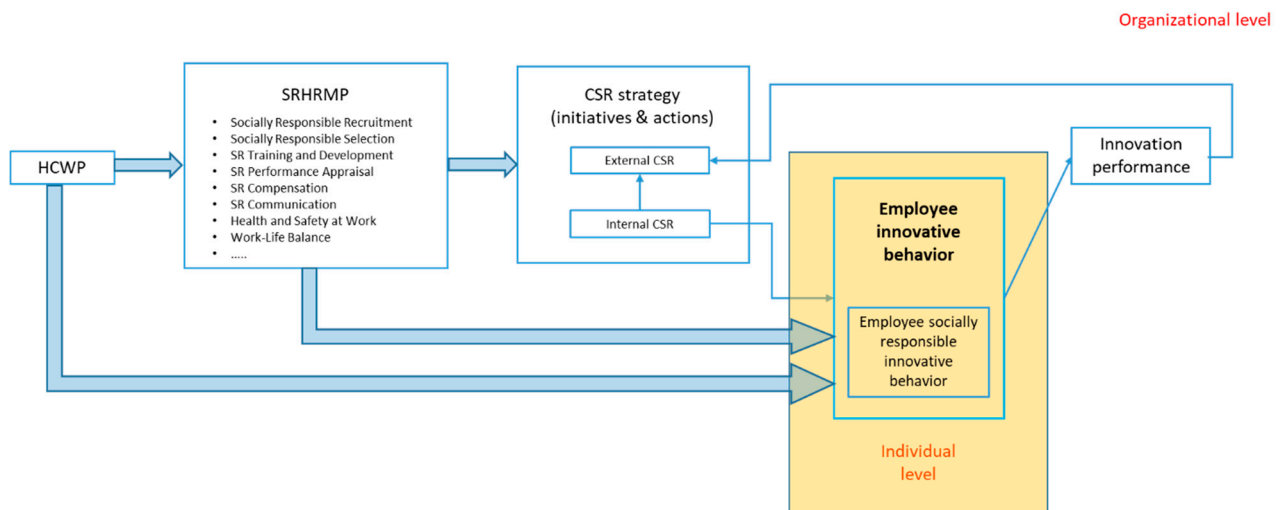


Figure 1. Theoretical model.

### 3. Materials and Methods

We employed a single case study to explore and explain why and how the interaction between HCWP and CSR encourages the formulation and implementation of new socially responsible organizational initiatives that help the firm to improve its competitive position in the market through the development of employees' innovative behaviour. Runfola et al. [83] recognized that the use of case studies in business and management research has increased recently, and this research strategy is particularly suitable to analyse dynamic phenomena with intangible elements and, when it becomes difficult (and not desirable), to set aside the relevant contextual conditions that affect the case [84–86].

Our unit of analysis (i.e., the case) was the organization as a whole, given that the phenomenon we intended to study takes place at the organizational level and is affected by organizational factors and variables. In addition, we applied some tactics to increase the rigor and quality of the research [86,87]. In this vein, we defined the codes at the beginning and during the process of analysis: We transcribed the interviews, and the transcripts were checked by the interviewees; we employed literal quotations made by interviewees to facilitate the understanding of how we moved from primary data to results; we triangulated the data through different sources of evidence and used consensus during interpretation and analysis; and our final report was reviewed by the interviewees. In sum, we tried to give a detailed explanation of how data were gathered and analysed [88,89], as “case research must be made transparent by demonstration of what one has done, not by declaration that a formalized process was followed” [90] (p. 233).

#### 3.1. Case Selection and Description

One important condition for our study was to find a company that applied a set of commitment-oriented HRM practices (i.e., HCWP). This firm also needed to have a social responsibility orientation that generated socially oriented initiatives and actions. Additionally, the case under study had to compete in a context where knowledge was a strategic resource for organizational success, where employees were autonomous and innovative behaviour was required to survive. Finally, proximity to the firm's facilities and ease of access were also important criteria to consider as this would facilitate the achievement of abundant and accurate primary information and the chance of gathering more information in the future if required.



The organization we selected fitted all of these requirements. AA is a small (i.e., less than 50 employees) knowledge-intensive firm with a regional scope of activity, located in the east of Spain, a dynamic, competitive Mediterranean area with a supportive institutional context and developed infrastructures. The company's origins were linked to the cooperative sector. We named it AA to preserve the anonymity of the real company.

The firm's main customers are concentrated in the food and logistics industry. This sector is highly internationalized, and AA has to deal with large amounts of uncertainty. In this context, the qualification and specialization of the workforce, as well as the ability to create new solutions to problems, may become important sources for the creation and sustainability of a competitive advantage. AA delivers a holistic, high added-value service that is based on the involvement of its employees, with this commitment being the result of the systemic application of a set of HRM practices. Therefore, employees are highly qualified and empowered with significant autonomy to make decisions and contribute ideas to change and improve services and processes given that innovation is a fundamental organizational capability in this particular industry.

Although the company deployed a formal CSR strategy some years ago, through regular sustainability reports, it does not publish any formal CSR or sustainability report at present. Nevertheless, it has a clear socially responsible orientation and objectives and deploys several CSR actions, both internally and externally.

### 3.2. Data Collection

Data collection took place at different points in time. Initially, data collection started and was carried out in February 2020. We had a large amount of previous knowledge about the selected firm, as it had participated in a previous research project with our team in which we studied the relationship between HCWP and innovative behaviour using a quantitative approach, based on the application of a questionnaire. Hence, semi-structured interviews were scheduled and rolled out to obtain detailed information about the basic topic of interest in this study.

We held 4 interviews at different organizational levels with the following individuals: The General Manager, the Head of HR and 2 senior employees belonging to 2 key service areas. With this, we intended to facilitate triangulation during data collection in order to increase the internal validity of the research [88,89]. The interviews were based on a script that covered the following areas: (a) Contextualization of the firm, (b) HCWP, (c) CSR initiatives, (d) interaction between HCWP and CSR values and actions, (e) relationship between CSR values and initiatives and innovative behaviour.

All the interviews took place on the company's premises, which facilitated the collection of additional information about the context. Field notes were taken for this purpose. In addition, all the interviews were carried out face-to-face and by 2 members of the research team. This facilitated the annotation of additional interesting comments that came up during the process, as 1 of the researchers was more focused on guiding the conversation while the other was in charge of taking additional notes. Interviewees were asked about the same topics and all the interviews were digitally recorded using smartphones/laptops and transcribed. Table 1 summarizes this information. Later, other interactions were added via email or over the phone with some of the interviewees in order to obtain more information about the topic or to clarify some of the data gathered through the interviews. All this information was also analysed.

**Table 1.** Interviews carried out in AA.

Job Position	Interview Duration (Minutes)	Transcription (Pages)
General Manager	49	12
Head of HR	23	8
Senior employee A	32	10
Senior employee B	31	13
TOTAL	135	43

We also collected several kinds of archival data that helped us to better understand the phenomenon under study and, at the same time, triangulate the information from the interviews and field notes. We gathered internal data (e.g., databases, strategic plans, work procedures and internal presentations), as well as publicly available external data, such as information contained on the company's website and the old CSR report, which is also available online.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Atlas.ti8 software was used to analyse the qualitative information gathered. From the primary data collected, we identified 229 text extracts that were considered relevant according to our research goal. Our case study fits what Ketokivi and Choi [90] labelled as theory elaboration case research, in which the consideration of a general theoretical framework and the empirical context are equally important to carry out the analysis, and "the researcher has identified a general theory that can be used to approach the empirical context" [90] (p. 236). Consequently, we started the analysis from an initial set of codes based on the theoretical framework used to approach the study of the phenomenon (see Figure 1 at the end of Section 2). These codes were defined according to the specialized literature. However, our coding process was neither deductive nor inductive in a pure sense. We combined elements from both coding methods and used the initial codes as a starting point for the analysis. In addition, the coding structure changed constantly because of the inductive interpretation of the primary data (our initial code list had 26 codes and the final analysis had over 100). In this sense, we applied a theme analysis approach and followed the process suggested by the literature [88,89,91–93].

Two of the researchers jointly carried out the coding process. All the issues that were considered as ambiguous or interpreted differently were resolved by reaching a consensus between the authors. When a new piece of primary data was analysed, the coding structure was updated if this was necessary and new codes were defined when they came up to facilitate the reliability of the process. As an example, '*paternalistic*' is a code defined as 'A feature of management style that tends to protect, sometimes excessively, AA employees.' Iterating between data and analytical elements, we constantly sought to find similarities and differences between the many existing codes, and through a process of concentration, we grouped the analytical elements into first-order concepts, second-order themes and aggregate dimensions [94], as shown in Figure 2. Thus, we could present our data structure in a visual way, and this also helped us to represent how we progressed from raw data to upper-level analytical elements, therefore increasing the rigor of our qualitative analysis.

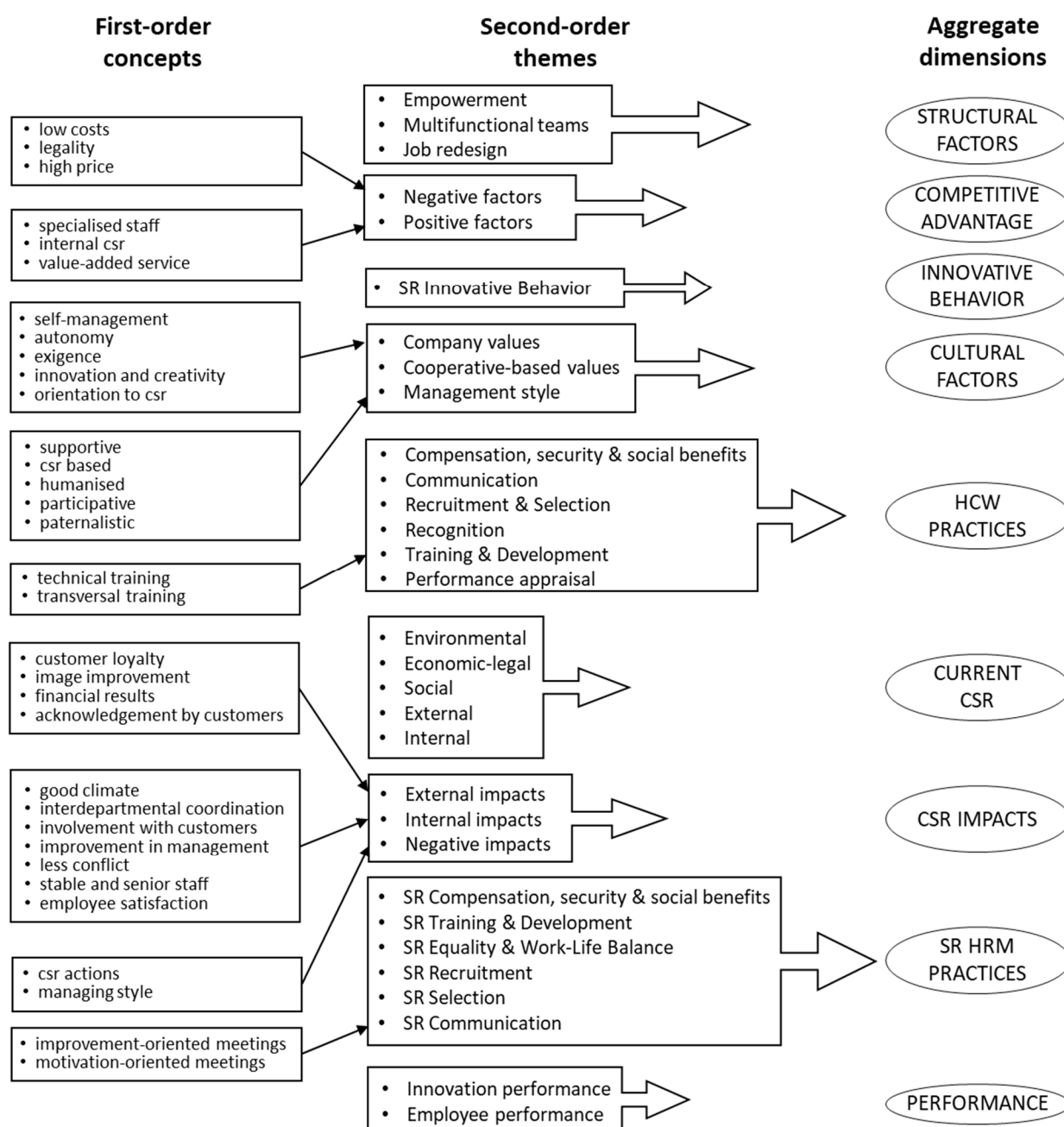


Figure 2. Data structure.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. HCW PRACTICES, SR HRM PRACTICES, CULTURAL and STRUCTURAL FACTORS

As commented above, the firm has developed a set of practices that are clearly oriented to commitment. These practices are, in turn, affected by a set of cultural and structural factors. With respect to cultural factors, the firm has developed values (i.e., self-management, autonomy, self-imposed high standards, innovation, creativity, and orientation to CSR) that encourage employees' commitment and development. In addition, the General Manager comes from a cooperative environment, given that some years ago, AA belonged to a cooperative group. Consequently, her management style (i.e., humanized, CSR-based, participative, supportive and paternalistic) is based on cooperative values. As senior employee A recognized:

“... you realize that it (the management style) is a bit more [ . . . ] Everything is warmer, with more kindness.”

In this same vein, the General Manager stated the following:

“... fostering a bit of, you know, ‘if you think and consider that it (a project) may function, the firm supports it. Always, of course, within the criteria, that is, it has to be viable to a minimum level. With a minimum level, we start.”

This particular leadership style and orientation to people contributed to the development of a clear set of high-commitment work practices, focusing mainly on training and development, a fluent internal communication policy and a compensation system that includes fair wages, job stability and social benefits. In addition, other practices are also fundamental to create a working environment based on socially responsible principles and oriented to innovation, as we explain below.

Employees receive broad-based training, both in technical and transversal competences. However, training is mainly oriented to the development of employees, providing them with new career opportunities inside the firm or training them in the skills required to generate new services. In this sense, the firm dedicates resources to the organization of meetings and outdoor training sessions focused on the development of skills such as negotiation, creativity and teambuilding, thus strengthening relationships based on trust among employees. As senior employee B stated:

“We do it to bring us together and improve the good atmosphere within working teams. Sessions are organized, in June usually. [ . . . ] That day we all have a meeting and work on getting to know each other better, to having more contact between us, to making us work in high-tension environments, though the sessions are essentially relaxing and fun.”

With respect to performance appraisal, the firm developed a 360° evaluation for managers to assess different key competencies (including innovation and initiative). In addition, a coaching process was proposed to carry out the action plan derived from that evaluation. Recently, another 360° assessment was carried out with all the employees, and the results were shared with the General Manager to ascertain the expectations, strengths and areas for improvement for each employee. Consequently, performance appraisal in AA is clearly oriented to the development and engagement of employees, at all hierarchical levels.

With respect to compensation, the firm pays a fair wage under the umbrella of the sector’s collective labour agreement. AA does not pay overtime but, as employees have a very flexible timetable, they can take time off to compensate any extra hours they have put in (always with authorization of the General Manager, but this process is simple and quick due to the fluent communication existing in the company). The firm has always implemented a positive compensation policy (e.g., school fees for children, vacation packages...). Employees affirmed that they feel fairly treated, and that the firm does not only recognize employees’ efforts and commitment but also rewards them economically or considers them for future development. Additionally, the firm offers different social benefits. Together with job stability, the firm has organized access to English classes (not only for workers but also for families), and the company subsidizes 50% of the cost of these classes. In recent years, the HR department has also tried to foster aspects to achieve the company’s objectives, not so much through economic retribution but through other benefits instead. For example, the company wanted to encourage employees’ use of social networks. With this goal in mind, a specific training program was developed and a special initiative (i.e., the “digital ambassador” awards) was created. This initiative consisted of an extra day of vacation for the people who made the most intensive use of networks and digital applications.

In addition, the firm focuses on communication. In this sense, managers try to maintain fluent and quick communication processes, which are top-down (presenting guidelines, goals and plans to employees in biannual meetings), bottom-up (giving quick answers to employees’ suggestions and ideas) and cross-cutting (organizing internal events

in which people from different departments create multifunctional groups to generate ideas or solve particular problems).

Finally, selection and recruitment are also impregnated with this orientation to employee engagement. When the firm is involved in a selection process, three key competences are included in the profile: The ability to work in teams, versatility and the capacity to innovate, understood as the ability that the employee has to contribute new ideas, services or working methodologies, with enough initiative so as to be able to implement them in the organization. This fact implies that the employee also needs considerable autonomy to organize their tasks. In terms of recruitment, AA not only takes on its workforce from universities, job sites and professional associations but also from contacts (with customers or partners) and social networks. These recruitment sources enable them to ascertain not only the technical aspects of the candidate but also their abilities and values. Consequently, it is easier to assess how well the employee will fit in with the values and strategic orientation of the firm.

The application of these high-commitment work practices leads to the application of important structural mechanisms that underlie the existence of a positive, friendly organizational climate and the subsequent development of innovative behaviours in AA's employees. In this regard, empowerment, multifunctional teams and job redesign become important structural elements. As the Head of HR affirmed:

“Then, except the people who work with an office timetable where it is more controlled somehow, employees who are in more technical positions, who are in closer contact with the customer for example, everyone can self-organize their own work to a certain extent.”

As commented above, cooperative values and a clear social orientation are embedded in the culture of the analysed firm. This culture includes many principles that make up a CSR culture: Orientation and cooperation with society and the community that the firm is a part of, respect for the environment and a clear orientation to stakeholders (mainly employees, customers, partners and the regional environment). Hence, the HR practices formulated by the firm are impregnated with all these social values and, as a result, can be considered as Socially Responsible HRM practices. Their application mainly develops the internal CSR dimension.

In the past, when the firm belonged to the cooperative group, specific training was designed and implemented as it had an explicit CSR strategy and reported its actions and initiatives through a report following the GRI standards. However, the firm does not perform explicit CSR-oriented training actions at present. Instead, from a social perspective, the firm uses training not only to improve employees' abilities but also to reposition people in other departments. When there is a crisis and the workload of an area decreases or greater qualification is required to offer a new service or product, AA uses internal recruitment together with training rather than dismissing employees and resorting to external recruitment of new profiles.

With respect to compensation, the company rewards the generation of ideas and projects that are clearly oriented to sustainability, not only in the internal social dimension (the most common initiatives) but also by giving support and recognition to environmental initiatives (internal or related to customers or society in general). All these initiatives are focused on flexibility, work-life balance and gender equality. In addition, fair wages and long-term contracts that contribute to generate job security feature among the economic aspects of CSR in this organization.

With respect to communication, internal events, multifunctional groups and global meetings that are organized biannually are used not only for improving efficiency, creativity and transmitting strategy-related topics (improvement-oriented meetings) but are also designed to increase intrinsic motivation, engagement and higher commitment (motivation-oriented meetings). For example, AA organizes a party in which employees improve their interaction and generate affective links, increasing their sense of belonging. As a result,



the firm facilitates internal communication in all directions through these mechanisms. The Head of HR stated the following:

“But in the other meeting the goal is totally . . . . It is a session for the employees. In fact, when we have occasionally considered the idea of talking about an organizational topic or introducing something related to the situation of the company, we have discarded it because we don’t want the message to be diluted. We don’t want the employee to think: ‘ok, they have given us a cool session but have introduced a topic about company objectives.’ We don’t want everything to be about work. It is a session for us, for the organization, for people.”

Finally, recruitment and selection are also based on the firm’s socially responsible orientation. When executing these processes, the firm bears in mind that candidates are aligned with the company in the values and principles (e.g., teamwork) that underlie the implementation of CSR initiatives. Hence, the contribution of recruitment and selection to the socially responsible orientation of the firm takes places indirectly through values and principles.

In short, as we have explained above, the firm carries out active policies to maintain health and safety at work, manages employment relations through the collective labour agreement, supports equal opportunities in the firm and encourages good work-life balance through their socially responsible practices. All these policies are translated into CSR actions.

#### 4.2. CURRENT CSR in AA

All these Socially Responsible HRM practices are implemented and deployed through specific CSR actions. Currently, AA does not have an explicit or formal CSR strategy and does not produce a CSR report as it did some years ago. However, this orientation toward CSR is still alive today, given that many of the people who were in charge of CSR actions in the past continue to implement these types of initiatives in the company. Consequently, CSR is embedded in the firm’s culture, and actions are carried out in a natural way. These initiatives mainly affect the internal orientation of CSR, covering the three basic dimensions (i.e., economic, social and environmental).

In terms of economic dimension actions, and from an internal perspective, the firm offers salaries above the guaranteed minimum wage and social benefits. In addition, employees come under the collective legal agreement of the sector, and the firm has improved economic results by expanding its services to the cooperatives it works for (this last action is oriented to the external CSR perspective).

In the social dimension, actions and initiatives are mainly oriented to the internal perspective of CSR. In this sense, the firm advocates diversity and equality, applies long-term contracts that give job security to employees and offers other social benefits (e.g., training extended to families, vacation packages, school fees) to improve the employees’ family and social life. This social dimension is deployed through specific actions such as timetable flexibility oriented to obtaining a good work-life balance and the development of a gender equality plan. Therefore, all these practices clearly increase employees’ commitment as they feel that their efforts or demands are taken into account. Vacation days are flexible, and people can organize them according to their family circumstances. The meetings arranged to strengthen social relationships between employees (i.e., motivation-oriented meetings) are also initiatives related to the CSR social dimension. A recent example of this social orientation, bearing in mind the particular circumstances that the COVID-19 pandemic has generated, is that the firm has given its employees free afternoons off as a way of compensating the extra efforts made during lockdown. Additionally, the General Manager has explicitly acknowledged and thanked employees for their commitment.

Another social dimension aspect, though this time from an external perspective, is that the firm collaborates with nonprofit associations such as the Red Cross and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through solidarity actions and economic donations.

Additionally, AA has worked with other firms on initiatives to improve employability. As an example, the Head of HR said:

“In the city’s HR Club, initiatives to foster employment and improve people’s employability in the area are promoted. For instance, last year, I was mentoring a group of people who were unemployed. Our firm volunteered to assist these people so they had a greater chance of getting a job.”

Finally, the firm implements different actions related to the environmental CSR dimension with a clear external orientation. In this respect, AA has initiatives for the control and reduction of energy consumption (i.e., heating, air-conditioning, etc.). In one of the branches, the firm uses solar energy. Additionally, the company is sensitive toward recycling (paper, plastics, toners . . . ), and this issue is considered when selecting office material suppliers. It has also offered recycled glasses and bottles to employees. In addition, as most of the employees have to visit customers, gas consumption is high, but they try to pollute less and become more efficient by grouping people in one only vehicle when employees have to move to places that are close to each other. As one of the interviewed employees said:

“At an environmental level, we do everything we can to reduce and recycle waste: cardboard, paper, toner, light fixtures, etc., especially in the headquarters. Here (in another facility), we don’t do as much, but we also try to recycle.”

#### 4.3. INOVATIVE BEHAVIOR and SR INNOVATIVE BEHAVIOR

All of the members of the company interviewed, particularly the General Manager and the Head of HR, stated that innovation and creativity are present in all areas of the company. In fact, innovative behaviour is encouraged at all levels, starting with the General Manager, who is constantly encouraging employees to put forward new ideas and methods and welcomes these contributions. As senior employee A stated:

“Through the different actions developed with the Head of HR, it is true that we are encouraged to innovate. She tells you: ‘Come on. Let’s do it that way. Let’s look for applications. Let’s sell it.’ She is our referent in training and human resources and helps us to see that we can develop new ideas and innovate.”

In addition, creativity and innovation are cornerstones of the business in AA. As the General Manager said:

“Nobody is more creative than us. Employees are creative, even the engineers, who normally do things by the book. In fact, one of the most creative individuals is an engineer, surprisingly ( . . . ) The initiatives she proposes are incredible. She is often the one who follows through with this type of initiatives. That is: ‘We have thought that’ . . . ‘And what about if . . . ’. Sometimes, I have to tell her: ‘That is enough. You just can’t stop.’”

In the conducted interviews, employees and managers both linked the high-commitment practices implemented to the promotion of innovative behaviour in employees, starting from when they were selected. As senior employee A stated:

“We cannot simply keep to our routines. We have loyal customers, but they can change because the market is dynamic. So, we have to adapt [ . . . ]. It is true that all the human resource practices deployed give you an insight into how you can manage new customers, new markets, and the like. So yes, you could say that these practices encourage innovative behavior.

In addition, the Head of HR and the General Manager, who are in charge of the recruitment and selection policies, include the ability to innovate as one of the criteria in these processes. Although technical competences are relevant, the ability to generate new ideas, new working processes and identify new sector trends are more important. Consequently, the firm has hired people with little experience and knowledge but high levels of versatility and creativity.

In addition, the organizational structure is horizontal to encourage participation, and internal promotion processes include innovation and initiative. As we explained above, the firm has developed a performance appraisal system that includes innovation and initiative as key competences for the firm and has proposed a coaching process to improve innovation skills (in fact, an innovation committee made up of people from different areas has been created to develop projects). In addition, new collaborations have emerged between departments, and changes in the content of jobs or organizational areas have been suggested as a result of the meetings organized to analyse the results of employees' performance appraisals. Consequently, three new work areas have been set up in recent years and another is being created.

People's participation, also supported by the flat structure, is considered and acknowledged by the firm. Therefore, the sharing of new ideas and proposals for improvement is encouraged and supported, and individuals are more open to raising them. As an example of this, AA carried out a specific initiative to generate ideas for the Business School area, an area in which the firm actively participates. As the Head of HR stated:

“We organized an event, an Ideas Lunch, and performed different dynamics to encourage people to be creative; the result was many proposals that were implemented during the year. It was great fun and had a very positive effect on the team.”

In AA, innovative behaviour is constantly boosted through managerial support. During the interviews, employees stated that they are encouraged to make suggestions and generate ideas for implementing new services. In addition, and because of the fluent communication mechanisms existing in the firm, there is a quick answer to obtain the “ok” from managers if the project is soundly based and viable. In sum, employees recognize that, in all of the meetings, in all of the messages that are transmitted by the company, in the day-to-day and in the decisions adopted, the importance of innovation to the firm is clear and fundamental.

In terms of SR innovative behaviour, some of the initiatives are related to assessment and support in the development of organic products and projects for the firm's customers. Some of these ideas have emerged from the creativity of the teams. Managers are also continuously thinking about new ideas and social actions that can turn into new ways of organizing internal processes, including new opportunities and social benefits aimed at satisfying and motivating employees. These changes can be deemed to be the result of managers' socially responsible innovative behaviour. Finally, timetable flexibility, which is mainly aimed at achieving a good work-life balance (a clear social CSR measure), is the result of proposals and ideas that came from employees' SR innovative behaviour.

#### 4.4. CSR IMPACTS and PERFORMANCE

These two aggregate dimensions refer to two different constructs. The first dimension related to the results of the implementation of CSR initiatives and actions (CSR impacts). Second, the 'performance' dimension considers the results of innovation as well as the job performance of employees. We describe them together, as both dimensions have in common that their elements (i.e., second-order themes) are related to something that happens or exists because of something else that has happened before (i.e., they are results). However, from an analytical viewpoint, these components have a different nature. In this sense, some elements (CSR internal, external and negative impacts and employee performance) have emerged from the inductive analysis of the case, while 'innovation performance' was already considered in the theoretical model represented in Figure 1. Next, we describe these dimensions and their elements.

With regard to the impact that CSR actions have generated in AA (CSR impacts), all the interviewees stated that AA has loyal customers, with whom they have a long-term relationship and trust-based links. This means clients can get involved in organizational projects and, in turn, company members acquire a clear orientation to the customer and their demands. However, the sector has gone through a recent crisis as a result of factors

such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to some customers going under, coupled with the entry of new competitors (big companies, basically) into the market. This situation has led some existing customers to choose cheaper services and, consequently, leave AA's high value-added proposal on the backburner. Therefore, the company recognizes that, at present, its CSR initiatives provide it with more sources of competitive advantage internally than externally, though both are the basis of AA's differentiation strategy.

Externally (i.e., external impacts), the interviewees claimed that they clearly perceive recognition from their clients and suppliers. As an example, this recognition became apparent during a 360° performance appraisal process carried out by an external consultancy firm. In this exercise, AA obtained very high scores and comments from clients and suppliers. In the words of the General Manager:

"[ . . . ] the consultancy firm was extremely surprised at how well the results (of the appraisal) turned out. When you carry out a 360° assessment, your customer usually takes the opportunity to make a criticism or complaint because these end up being diluted across the exercise. Moreover, one of the things we were told is that we had been one of the firms with the highest scores, both externally and internally. [ . . . ] but especially externally, with the recognition of our practices, our way of doing things, our commitment (because many times we literally identify with the customer) [ . . . ]. As a result, we always say that we do a customized consultancy, and have a very intense relationship with the customer [ . . . ]. Last week, during the planning session, most of our employees said that they feel like psychologists to some extent as they are constantly listening to the customer; the customer shares things about the work itself but also about other internal issues or topics that are not directly linked to the professional relationship between the customer and AA."

Internally, CSR initiatives have also generated important impacts (i.e., internal impacts) inside the company. In this sense, interviewees stated that AA has created a very positive working atmosphere (this impact was also highlighted in the performance appraisal) and that the number of conflicts has clearly gone down. Consequently, workers feel comfortable as there is more teamwork and less competition. This collaborative climate and the reduction of conflict has subsequently improved productivity. In addition, employees have observed an improvement in internal HRM. The practices and changes deployed over the last few years in this department have been positively valued to a great extent. Together with this, flexible working hours, a humanized management style and the quick management response to workers' demands have led to employee satisfaction. In relation to holidays and flexibility, senior employee A stated the following:

"At present, we have a flexible timetable and the truth is that it is fantastic! [ . . . ] If employees are happier, they work with more enthusiasm; that is obvious. If you have a flexible timetable, if you can have time off to compensate some overtime you have done, then you go to work more relaxed."

Additionally, job stability (which is at the core of the motivation to participate) brings security and shows the firm's commitment to employees. This also enables workers to acquire greater work experience and knowledge about the industry as they do not wish to leave the firm. Consequently, employee satisfaction is greater.

Finally, the high degree of employee engagement with company customers is also a result of the values encouraged by the firm through its culture (i.e., self-management, setting oneself high standards, innovation and creativity . . . ), in addition to being an effect of organizational social CSR initiatives. In the end, this engagement increases the firm's reputation and, consequently, becomes the key to AA's competitive advantage. In this sense, the Head of HR stated the following:

"We think that it (employee involvement with customers) does influence the reputation of the company and the brand image, especially in the case of customers who already know us, and in general in the agri-food sector. Our customers are

very loyal because we give quick responses and reinvent our services to adapt to their demands, and we create new services every year. However, we believe that it does not have as much impact outside of the sector. Perhaps due to our level of specialization, our target is highly segmented.”

The analysis performed here also revealed that the implementation of CSR actions has generated some negative impacts in AA. For example, customers expect the firm to be ready to meet their demands at any time and under any circumstance, as they have established personal links and trust-based relationships with employees. This occasionally means that employees are phoned or asked for advice by customers during their free time. In addition, all the actions aimed at generating team spirit, as well as the global meetings organized regularly, are intended to increase socialization between employees. However, there are some people that do not enjoy these initiatives and for whom these meetings do not make them more effective at work. Instead, they have the opposite effect and generate negative feelings. Fortunately, these employees are a minority in the firm.

Another negative impact of CSR initiatives is linked to AA's competitiveness. AA applies a competitive strategy based on ethical values, involvement with customers and a personalized and specialized service, which is supported by a set of internal CSR initiatives that facilitate its implementation. As seen above, these actions mean that employees are paid salaries above the average in the industry, which makes them motivated at work. However, these salaries imply that the cost of the service provided is higher than the low-price strategy used by some of its competitors. This makes it very difficult for AA to compete on occasion. This fact has become hugely important in the recent economic crisis, where many relevant consultancy firms oriented not only to big companies but also to medium and small firms which have started to offer services at a lower price than before. AA cannot match these prices.

Lastly, excessive involvement with customers and sensitiveness toward their needs and individual circumstances have permeated the way of managing the firm in AA and has sometimes had a negative effect on the firm's competitiveness. For instance, when there is a difficult financial situation or a negative context affects some of AA's main customers and they have economic problems, AA shows too much empathy and gives them longer terms to pay for the services they receive. Yet, at the same time, AA has to make payments as normal. As the General Manager recognizes:

“[This occurs] in particular cases when we see problems and do not terminate the services we offer. We don't do it because we know that we would be helping to finish them off (though we guess that, in the long run, they are going to get into trouble anyway). In these cases, we have been swept along with them and have ended up building up major debts. That's where our paternalism comes in.”

In terms of performance, as we have explained throughout the case study, the firm has created multiple projects and services for customers (innovation results). These projects have emerged from ideas generated in the different multifunctional teams or by individuals with high levels of initiative and creativity. These projects (e.g., the development of organic products for customers, biodynamic products . . . ) are new activities that have been encouraged by managers and sustained by innovation-oriented HR policies. In addition, new flexible timetables, introduced to cater for the varying demands and needs of firm employees, are a clear example of an innovation result that has been generated in AA. Some of these initiatives were included as CSR actions but are also innovation results, as they are the consequence of employees' creativity with an internal social perspective.

Additionally, the firm has developed major projects for customers based on the work of multifunctional teams. These projects have facilitated customers in the sector joining forces to support a specific, well-known local and national product. The initiative supports the commercialization of this product based on a differentiation strategy, through a high-quality marketing campaign, in a sector where differentiation is difficult to achieve. Finally, HCWP and managerial support have encouraged employees to develop new ways of offering traditional training services. For example, learning through playing has been



developed and offered as a new learning methodology. These innovations in the training process will lead to better perception and acceptance of training activities (i.e., the product) by AA's customers.

Lastly, CSR initiatives and the subsequent positive impacts on the internal company atmosphere (e.g., good working climate, better interdepartmental coordination, greater perceived improvements in management, less conflict and employee dissatisfaction) have created the conditions for employees to increase their levels of performance.

All these elements described in this section interact and have multiple effects on the context under study. We have attempted to represent them graphically in the following figure (see Figure 3). This model is grounded in the data collected and induced through our analysis. We describe it in the following section, as it becomes the basic output of the research presented here.

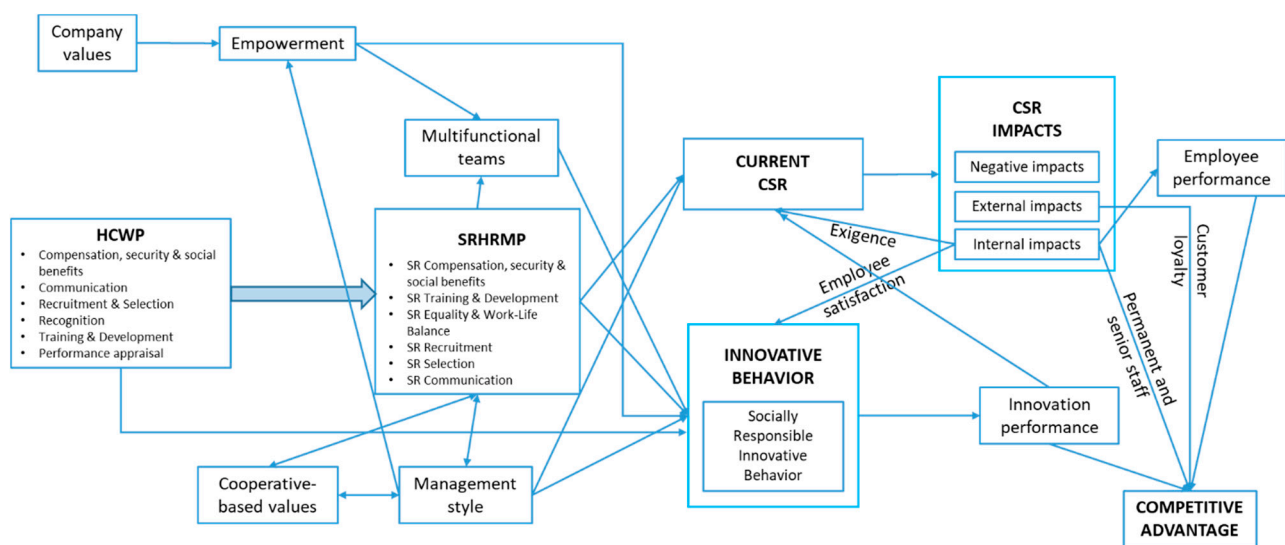


Figure 3. Final induced model.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of our analysis show that HCWP clearly contribute to encouraging innovative behaviour among employees (also in terms of new CSR initiatives) and, at the same time, promote CSR, primarily in its internal dimension. This result is in line with the proposals of the authors of [37,95], who have affirmed that policies and practices developed with a socially responsible orientation are linked to commitment.

Our analysis has also revealed that SRHRMP are a holistic part of the set of HRM practices designed by the company, in which social responsibility issues are part of its values and culture. In this particular case, this culture is also infused with the cooperative spirit and values due to the origins of the company. Along with this, there is also a management style partly rooted in these cooperative-based values, which explains, to some extent, why and how the General Manager leads the company. The General Manager deliberately exercises transactional and participatory leadership, since she thinks that this is the best way to obtain the maximum effort and engagement from AA's employees. This style is based on the use of structural mechanisms (i.e., empowerment and multifunctional teams) which foster innovative behaviour (see Figure 3 above). This result is in line with the arguments derived from the SET application and its relationship to innovative behaviour, which were exposed by the specialized literature [50,61] in Section 2.2.

Additionally, the case illustrates the fact that HCWP embrace SRHRMP due to the influence of basic cultural factors such as deep-rooted cooperative-based values and the existence of a participatory management style. The analysed firm's culture is infused with

CSR values, as the final organizational intention is to improve employees' commitment and satisfaction and includes values such as participation and egalitarianism. Together with this, its cooperative-based values aim to develop a social orientation to customers and the local community. Consequently, the firm is aware that its competitive strategy is based on the commitment of its employees and the loyalty of its customers. In the end, HRM practices, CSR actions and competitive strategy are clearly aligned in AA.

The results of the case studied with regard to the relationship between SRHRMP and HCWP are in line with the specialist literature [37]. As shown in Figure 3, SRHRMP and HCWP encourage employees' innovative behaviour, as it was anticipated by Bos-Nehles et al. [70] and Sanz-Valle and Jiménez-Jiménez [71]. This is also true when innovation is oriented to the company's social responsibility. In addition, SRHRMP are turned into CSR actions and initiatives, and when they are implemented, they generate a highly positive climate in the firm that fosters innovative behaviour through employee satisfaction, as the literature suggested [61]. However, our analysis has not revealed any special relationship between internal and external CSR actions, especially with regard to environmental aspects. Only internal CSR actions oriented to the social dimension (e.g., work-life balance, flexibility, motivation) have an effect on external CSR impacts, but this influence takes place through internal CSR impacts, that is, employee satisfaction and commitment (internal CSR impacts) which generate greater employee involvement with customers (external CSR impacts). It is also worth mentioning that the positive atmosphere generated in AA as a result of internal CSR actions and subsequent employee satisfaction make the latter highly demanding as they expect the company to constantly offer them new CSR initiatives to maintain this good working climate and atmosphere.

Consequently, in terms of variables, our analysis contributes to the separation between CSR actions and the results or impacts of these actions. Additionally, our model shows that the dimension of 'internal CSR impacts' primarily affects employees as individuals, influencing both their individual behaviour and their job performance (i.e., a better working environment affects commitment and leads to higher worker performance [96]). As we have stated, these internal CSR impacts will improve the external impacts of CSR (e.g., increasing customer loyalty). Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out the individual dimension or nature of these internal CSR results.

Another important element in our model is innovative behaviour. As commented above, satisfied employees tend to exhibit greater innovative behaviour as they are much more motivated to generate ideas, which may eventually improve organizational results. Thus, our model shows that innovative behaviour is encouraged, on the one hand, by individual internal CSR impacts. On the other hand, other factors, such as HCWP, SRHRMP and structural (i.e., empowerment and teamwork) and cultural (i.e., management style) elements, also affect the innovative behaviour of employees in AA. These results are coherent with the theoretical foundations exposed in Section 2.2. related to the AMO framework [50]. Particularly, the SRHRMP implemented in AA (i.e., training, teamwork, participation, work-life balance, etc.) have provided employees with the necessary abilities, motivation and opportunities to develop an innovative behaviour. Later, this behaviour turns into innovation performance, thus contributing to increase the firm's competitive advantage (e.g., innovation results facilitate the adaptation of AA to contextual and society changes, ultimately increasing its ability to become more competitive). Comparatively, our proposed theoretical model (see Figure 1 at the end of Section 2) shows innovation results linked to the external CSR dimension, that is, related to actions toward customers and the environment and affecting society in general. However, the study shows that AA's main innovation results are new services and methods for customers as well as new policies for the company. Hence, there is not a direct relationship of innovation performance with environmental aspects. The opposite is in fact true: Innovation performance contributes to the development of new CSR initiatives in AA, probably because the internal dimension is fundamental in the company's current CSR.

Last, a new important area (i.e., strategy) has emerged from our analysis. As stated before, external CSR impacts, mainly through customer loyalty, together with internal CSR impacts related to workforce capabilities (i.e., experience and high specialization), make the company more competitive. In other words, the company has a source of sustainable competitive advantage based on its workforce competences. These competences are based on its stock of knowledge and experience in the sector, as well as its involvement with customers, resulting of the application of sustainability initiatives by AA. Therefore, people knowledge and skills are a cornerstone in AA's differentiation strategy. This result is aligned with the specialized literature [97–99].

Conversely, this competitive advantage is sometimes eroded by what we call the “negative impacts of CSR” and other external factors. One of these conditioning factors is economic crises (i.e., at the moment, the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic). Other factors are more intrinsic to the industry (i.e., fierce rivalry in the sector as a result of the appearance of new strategic, technological consultancy firms who are less specialized but cheaper). Finally, the case analysis shows that investing in CSR, business ethics and sustainability may often bring fewer financial rewards than expected. Although in the medium and long term, a CSR strategy generates greater recognition from customers, this argument may become insufficient in sectors where rivalry intensity is very high. As shown in the research presented here, some of AA's customers do not prioritize differentiation and good service in a crisis context. Instead, they prefer lower prices and a more generic service. Consequently, these findings are in line with the recommendation made by Xiao et al. [4] to focus more on the “dark side of (the) CSR-HRM” relationship.

This research has implications for both academics and practitioners. Theoretically, our proposal reinforces our main thesis and sheds light on other factors that are different but closely related to HCWP as drivers of CSR. In this sense, management style becomes fundamental to guide and foster CSR initiatives and actions, particularly if cooperative values and a socially responsible orientation are integrated. In the case presented here, the recent history of the firm in a formal CSR venture contributed to infuse these values not only to managers but also to key employees that, today, form part of the firm and contribute to spread CSR values throughout the entire company. Thus, researchers studying management and leadership styles as antecedents of the application of a CSR strategy may find interesting results in this manuscript.

In addition, our work has revealed that cultural factors, such as organizational values and management style, and structural factors, such as empowerment and teamwork, must be jointly considered when adopting a CSR strategy aimed at developing innovative behaviour. In this regard, the internal impacts generated, mainly by the internal dimension of a CSR policy, are the cornerstone of facilitating innovative behaviour in the company, together with cultural and structural factors. Academics studying the link between CSR and innovation may find an interesting starting point in our research.

For practitioners, our results show that HCWP are push factors that facilitate CSR deployment. It is difficult for a CSR strategy to succeed without high-commitment practices that support it, and without a culture, structure, values and management style aimed at engaging people. Consequently, managers should implement both policies via a coordinated strategy. If the firm wants to implement a CSR strategy, socially responsible values must be present in the organization's mission, vision and values, and the HRM strategy will consider these values in selection, training, development, performance appraisal and other practices. Additionally, internal CSR impacts (particularly employee satisfaction and well-being) contribute to fostering creativity and innovative employee behaviour, together with HCWP and other structural and cultural factors. Hence, if innovation is to be encouraged in the firm, the joint application of CSR initiatives aimed at the internal dimension and SRHRMP may become of utmost importance due to the achievement of positive synergies in this interaction.

Despite the tactics employed to increase the rigor of this qualitative research, our work is not free from limitations. First of all, our results are based only on one organization,

making it impossible to generalize them. However, it is important to note that the goal of our research was not statistical generalization. Instead, we were looking for a context where the phenomenon under study takes place throughout an organization, and relevance was the main criterion when selecting the firm. We could also have resorted to additional informants to improve the triangulation of the primary data. In this sense, the testimonies of customers and suppliers would have increased the internal validity of our study. Finally, the cooperative nature of the studied case is an important factor to explain the success of CSR implementation and its effect on innovative behaviour. The absence of another context featuring a noncooperative firm to contrast the results obtained could limit the scope of our findings.

Finally, the work presented here opens up new lines for future research. The replication of the study in a broader sample of cases seems to be a natural way of doing this. We need firms from other sectors and characteristics (i.e., noncooperative organizations) to compare the results obtained here. In addition, it would be interesting to take the basic results of this research as a starting point to develop ideas that could be tested quantitatively in a future study. Last, our findings raise some questions that deserve closer attention: Is it worth it for firms to invest in CSR initiatives in poor economic times? Are the loyal customers of a firm applying CSR actions really loyal when negative financial winds are blowing? Is a CSR strategy capable of ensuring that a firm maintains its customers in poor contextual conditions? These topics also open up avenues for future research in this field.

**Author Contributions:** Individual contributions to the research are as follows: Conceptualization, L.R.-T. and M.T.C.-G.; methodology, F.B.-B.; software, M.T.C.-G. and F.B.-B.; formal analysis, L.R.-T., M.T.C.-G. and F.B.-B.; data curation, M.T.C.-G. and F.B.-B.; writing—original draft preparation, L.R.-T., M.T.C.-G. and F.B.-B.; writing—review and editing, L.R.-T., M.T.C.-G. and F.B.-B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded by the UNIVERSITY of VALENCIA, grant number UV-INV-AE19-1200085.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy reasons.

**Acknowledgments:** We want to thank the time and materials that AA has facilitated for our research. Particularly, we are really grateful to all AA members that have cooperated with the research team to carry out the study.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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