

Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee Engagement in French Business Schools

Introduction

Business schools are expected now more than ever to integrate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as part of how they plan and operate, both to meet societal expectations and to comply with international accreditation standards. In France, many *grandes écoles* and university business programs have adopted CSR initiatives—such as community outreach and environmental sustainability policies—as part of their institutional missions. Although there is ample evidence on how CSR affects external stakeholders, little is said about the perception and response of employees in institutions of learning with respect to the activities of CSR.

Job demands among staff and faculty are high in business schools; these demands may be excessive teaching, research pressure of publish-or-perish, and administrative work, which expose the staff and the faculty to the risk of burnout. Meanwhile, it is capable of being more engaging in favourable working conditions and a shared organizational mission.

The current study concentrates on the role of perceptions of institutional CSR among the employees in the working engagement and subsequent burnout, in the framework of French business schools. The research is informed by the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model that addresses CSR perceptions as an organizational resource that improves interactions among employees. The other positive job resource that we consider is the autonomy and supervisor support, which is vital to the welfare of the employees.

A mixed-method study was conducted: a quantitative survey was designed to verify the hypothesized relationships, and the insights into the lived experience of the employees were to be made with the help of qualitative interviews. The results provide factual information to the leadership of business schools about the ways in which they can apply CSR and job resources to enhance employee engagement and reduce burnout.

Literature Review

Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Organizations

Generally, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) defines voluntary activities and practices that a company undertakes to ensure the welfare of society and the environment, not necessarily related to the financial interests of the company. On the micro level, the emphasis is placed on how the employees view CSR, commonly known as perceived CSR. This notion explains the way employees perceive and analyze CSR activities and commitments of their organization. Instead of having an influence on employees' conduct and perceptions through the objective disclosures of CSR, it is these subjective perceptions that shape this.

The Corporate Stakeholder Responsibility (CStR) scale, introduced by El Akremi et al. (2018), determines the perception of employees about the corporate responsibility of their organization to different stakeholder groups. They theorize perceived CSR as a multidimensional concept, which involves initiatives being directed to employees, customers, communities, and the environment.

The existing body of previous literature indicates that employees can find their primary psychological needs to be fulfilled when they feel that their organization is truly socially responsible, and it can lead to the promotion of positive performance outcomes at work. Perceived CSR has been linked with additional organizational pride and identification, job satisfaction, and commitment. More recently, several studies have identified a positive relationship between employee engagement and perceived CSR; for instance, one study reported a strong effect size. ($\beta \approx 0.41$). Employees tend to feel more motivated and find greater meaning in their work when they perceive alignment between organizational values and pro-social principles.

Moreover, perceived CSR was linked to reduced turnover intentions and enhanced job performance and mediated in many cases by such constructs as organizational justice and perceived meaningfulness. These results imply that authentic CSR is perceived by the employees as an organizational support and ethical climate, which subsequently facilitates positive work-related results.

However, CSR perceptions do not always have a positive impact on all dimensions of employee well-being. The mechanisms are seen to work more on greater morale and identification than on the actual reduction of stressors. The current study expands on this literature by exploring the question of whether perceived CSR not only contributes to engagement but also to burnout, which is an understudied outcome in terms of CSR.

Job Engagement

Job engagement (or employee engagement) refers to a positive, affective-motivational job-related wellness defined as the state of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Employees are highly energized, passionate, and deeply focused in their jobs. Earlier, Kahn (1990) also put forward the concept of personal engagement by harnessing the self to work roles so that everyone articulates themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally in their work performance. Engagement thus reflects being fully present and psychologically invested in one's work.

Engaged employees tend to experience a variety of benefits, including better performance, higher levels of innovation, reduced absenteeism, and greater psychological well-being. The JD-R model offers a widely accepted context for interpreting these links. In this model, resources such as autonomy, supportive supervision, and constructive feedback are seen as key drivers of motivation, which in turn foster stronger engagement at work. Conversely, excessive job demands can undermine engagement if not adequately balanced by sufficient resources. Engaged employees also tend to experience a “virtuous cycle” in which engagement facilitates the mobilization of further resources and enhances resilience to stressors.

For this study, we anticipate the employees' views of CSR and the availability of key job resources to be positively associated with their engagement. Employees who perceive their institution as socially responsible may experience greater meaningfulness in their work, which in turn reinforces

dedication—a core component of engagement. Moreover, access to practical job resources, like autonomy in task execution and supportive leadership, is likely to promote enthusiasm and absorption in daily work.

Prior empirical studies support these relationships: perceived CSR has positively predicted employee engagement, while job resources (particularly task significance, autonomy, and social support) are moderately to strongly related to engagement. Accordingly, we anticipate that perceived CSR and job resources will each make a unique contribution to promoting higher levels of engagement among business school employees.

Burnout

Burnout is considered to be a psychological condition that develops because of long-term, untreated stress in the workplace (World Health Organization, 2019). It is traditionally defined as the state of both emotional and physical exhaustion, as well as cynicism or depersonalization, and the loss of professional competence. Maslach and Leiter, in this seminal paper, conceptualize burnout in three main dimensions: exhaustion with its associated overwhelming exhaustion and affective depletion; cynicism or depersonalization, in which they describe burnout as an attitude of detachment or indifference towards work and its stakeholders; and a diminished personal accomplishment, which is a sense of inefficacy and lowered achievement.

Burnout is usually perceived to be the loss of engagement where previously fired-up workers become exhausted and demotivated (Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter, 2001). Nevertheless, modern researchers focus on the idea that the opposite of engagement is not always burnout. Although the two are related, they are two different aspects of occupational well-being that have different antecedents.

In the JD-R model, burnout occurs mainly when there are high job demands (e.g., too much work or role conflict) and these demands are not met by sufficient resources. This disequilibrium triggers a process of strain, which, with time, results in exhaustion and disengagement. Longitudinal studies support this framework, showing that high demands predict increases in burnout, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Burnout has serious implications for both individuals and organizations, including reduced job performance, increased absenteeism, health issues, and higher turnover intentions.

In the academic context, burnout is often linked to specific stressors such as heavy teaching loads, bureaucratic administrative work, pressure to publish, and the emotional demands of student interaction. When unmitigated, these factors can trigger exhaustion and cynicism among faculty and staff.

Like the JD-R model, greater job resources, like autonomy and supervisor support, are expected to lower burnout, as resources enable employees to cope effectively and sustain motivation. Additionally, we explore whether employees' perceptions of CSR relate to burnout. On one hand, a positive ethical climate may reduce burnout by fostering organizational pride and emotional attachment, potentially buffering the impact of stress. On the other hand, if CSR initiatives are perceived as disconnected from employees' day-to-day challenges, their impact on burnout may be limited.

Given the limited prior research directly linking perceived CSR to burnout, this remains an open empirical question. By examining burnout alongside engagement, our study aims to clarify whether perceived CSR contributes primarily to the motivational dimension of well-being or whether it also plays a role in preventing burnout and alleviating stress.

Job Resources: Autonomy and Supervisor Support

Job resources include organizational, social, and structural factors about work that allow employees (a) to make professional accomplishments, (b) to lessen the load of work demands and stress that it causes, and (c) to facilitate the benefits of growth, learning, and development. In essence, these resources serve as the supporting bases of the workplace that maintain motivation as well as safeguard the well-being of employees.

Supervisor support and job autonomy are the two salient job resources, especially in the academic context. The degree of freedom allowed to the workers to plan and execute their tasks is present. It has been known as one of the fundamental resources that facilitates intrinsic motivation and engagement. Meeting the ultimate psychological need of self-determination, autonomy makes employees feel like they own their job, and they can take pride in their success. Empirical studies have continuously related higher autonomy to greater work engagement, improved performance, and reduced stress (Allan et al., 2019; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Academia can use this resource by being flexible in the way it designs course materials, selects research interests, or has a preference for favorite pedagogical approaches, which can boost the enthusiasm and commitment of teachers.

Supervisor support is the extent to which the academic leaders, such as department heads or deans, provide encouragement, guidance, and support to the staff and faculty. It fulfills the relatedness need in the employees as a form of social support and shows that the organization cares about their welfare. Applying the social exchange theory, researchers have found that employees who believe that their supervisors support them will be more inclined to assist more with loyalty, engagement, and discretionary effort. Moreover, the negative impact of job demands may be neutralized in the course of supportive leadership: a supervisor in this case may help redistribute the load, provide counseling, or emotional support in the case of stressful situations, which can lessen the risk of burnout. In the JD-R framework, supervisor support operates as an external resource that protects against strain. Empirical findings consistently link such support to lower levels of exhaustion and cynicism, particularly in high-demand environments.

This research examines autonomy and supervisor support as key job resources due to their relevance in the higher education workplace. We hypothesize that both factors will relate positively to engagement and negatively to burnout, aligning with the core assumptions of JD-R theory. Including these variables allows us to isolate the specific effect of perceived CSR, relative to more immediate work environment factors. In addition, by examining potential interactions or combined effects, we aim to determine whether CSR perceptions enhance the impact of job resources (e.g., by cultivating a more supportive organizational climate) or whether these dimensions operate independently in shaping employee well-being.

Summary of Hypotheses: Drawing on the above literature, we formulated the following expectations. First, employees' positive perceptions of their institution's CSR initiatives were linked to increased work engagement and reduced burnout. Second, key job resources—

namely autonomy and supervisor support—were anticipated to exhibit similar relationships, being positively linked to engagement and inversely associated with burnout. Third, we hypothesized that perceived CSR and job resources may exert joint or interactive effects on employee outcomes; for example, CSR may contribute additional explanatory power for engagement beyond the influence of immediate workplace factors.

To examine these relationships, we employed a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative analyses tested the hypothesized associations between perceived CSR, job resources, engagement, and burnout. In parallel, qualitative interviews provided in-depth insight into how employees experience and interpret these factors in their daily work lives, enriching our understanding of the underlying mechanisms.

Methodology

Research Design and Procedure

We adopted a mixed-methods design that combined a survey (quantitative approach) with interviews (qualitative approach), thereby providing a more holistic perspective on the research problem through methodological triangulation. This approach leverages the respective strengths of each method—breadth from the survey and depth from the interviews—to explore both the general patterns and the underlying experiences of employees.

First, a cross-sectional survey, delivered online, was given to assess employees' perceptions of CSR, perceived job resources, and self-reported outcomes (engagement and burnout). Following the survey, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected group of participants. These interviews aimed to explore emerging themes in greater depth and to uncover contextual nuances not easily captured through quantitative measures.

The study was conducted across several French business schools that had made public commitments to CSR, such as participation in the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) or the adoption of institutional sustainability charters. Data collection took place over a three-month period during the spring semester.

Approval from the institutional review board was obtained prior to data collection. Participants consented to take part and were assured their answers would be kept confidential. Survey data were anonymized, and all interview transcripts were pseudonymized during the coding process to protect participants' identities.

Quantitative Survey

Participants

The survey targeted faculty and administrative staff at French business schools. Participants were recruited via internal email newsletters and staff meetings, and invited to take part in a study

titled “*CSR and Employee Well-Being*.” A total of $N = 120$ responses were received, of which 105 were complete and valid for analysis, yielding an estimated response rate of approximately 35% of those invited.

The sample included a cross-section of roles: approximately 60% were academic staff (e.g., professors, lecturers, researchers), and 40% were administrative or support personnel (e.g., program managers, marketing, library). Respondents ranged in age from 25 to 63 years ($Mdn \approx 40$), and 58% identified as female. The vast majority held at least a master’s degree, which is consistent with the educational context. All participating institutions had visible CSR initiatives (e.g., green campus actions, community projects), ensuring that respondents were aware of CSR efforts and able to evaluate them. Surveys were completed online via a secure platform. The questionnaire was administered in English, as these institutions often use English as a working language, with clarifying examples provided for potentially unfamiliar terms.

Measures

Validated multi-item scales with a 5-point Likert response format (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) were used to measure all constructs, unless indicated differently. Table 1 presents an overview; detailed operationalizations and reliability estimates are described below.

Perceived CSR.

Employees’ perceptions of institutional CSR were measured using an adapted version of the Corporate Stakeholder Responsibility (CStR) scale (El Akremi et al., 2018). This scale assesses CSR across multiple stakeholder domains (e.g., community, employees, environment). We selected 10 items most relevant to the university context (e.g., “My institution is actively involved in improving the well-being of the local community”; “Our school integrates environmental sustainability into its operations”). Higher scores reflect a perception that the organization is socially responsible. The scale demonstrated good reliability in our sample (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.88$), consistent with previous studies reporting $\alpha \approx 0.90$. This measure was chosen for its strong theoretical grounding and content validity in academic settings.

Job Engagement.

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale – Short Form (UWES-9; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) was used to measure engagement. The scale consists of nine items covering vigor, dedication, and absorption. One example is, “I am enthusiastic about my job.” Participants rated how frequently they experienced each state (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*), following UWES conventions. The scale exhibited excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.93$), in line with prior research where α typically ranges from 0.85 to 0.95. The UWES has strong cross-cultural validity and widespread use, supporting comparability with other studies.

Burnout.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey (MBI-GS; Maslach et al., 1996) was used to evaluate burnout, focusing on its two core dimensions: emotional exhaustion and cynicism. We used 8 items (5 for exhaustion, 3 for cynicism). Example items include: “I feel emotionally drained from my work” (exhaustion) and “I have become less enthusiastic about my work” (cynicism). Items were rated on a 5-point frequency scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *very often*). Internal consistency was high ($\alpha = 0.89$), consistent with prior validations (e.g., $\alpha \approx 0.90$ for exhaustion). The MBI-GS remains the gold standard for assessing burnout and is validated across occupational groups.

Job Autonomy.

A 3-item subset of the WDQ autonomy subscale was used to measure perceived autonomy, reflecting employees' freedom and discretion at work. A sample item is: "I have flexibility in how I organize my work and schedule my tasks." The scale showed **acceptable reliability** ($\alpha = 0.78$), consistent with validation studies (typical $\alpha > 0.80$). Autonomy is a key motivational job resource, and even brief measures capture substantial variance. The concise scale helped maintain survey length without sacrificing content validity.

Supervisor Support.

A 4-item version of the Perceived Supervisor Support scale (Eisenberger et al., 2002) was used to assess supervisor support, adapted for academic contexts. Items included: "My supervisor/department head cares about my well-being" and "My supervisor provides me with feedback and guidance when I need it." The scale demonstrated **strong reliability** ($\alpha = 0.85$). Higher scores reflect greater perceived support. This measure draws on perceived organizational support theory and is widely used in studies linking leadership to employee well-being.

Control Variables

To account for alternative explanations in regression models, we included the following controls:

- **Job role** (faculty vs. administrative staff),
- **Tenure** at the institution (in years),
- **Gender**.

We tested models with and without these controls. The results reported below include controls unless otherwise specified. Importantly, the pattern of significant findings remained consistent across specifications.

Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative Component

Following the survey, we conducted qualitative interviews to further explore how employees perceive CSR and how these perceptions relate—or do not relate—to their daily work experiences. **Purposive sampling** was used to select participants from among survey respondents who had indicated a willingness to be interviewed. A total of **n = 15 employees** (10 faculty members and 5 administrative staff) from **three different business schools** participated. This subsample was diverse in terms of **age** (30 to 60 years), **gender** (8 women, 7 men), and **tenure** (ranging from 1 to over 20 years), offering a broad range of perspectives.

Each interview was conducted **one-on-one**, lasted approximately **45 to 60 minutes**, and followed a **semi-structured interview guide**. The protocol included open-ended questions on the following topics:

1. **Perceptions of institutional CSR initiatives**
e.g., "Can you describe any socially responsible or ethical initiatives your school is involved in? How do you feel about them?"

2. **Engagement and motivation at work**

e.g., “What makes you feel enthusiastic or engaged in your job? Can you recall a time you felt particularly engaged or disengaged?”

3. **Sources of stress or burnout**

e.g., “What aspects of your job are most challenging or exhausting for you?”

4. **Work environment factors**

(*e.g., autonomy and supervisor support*)
e.g., “How much freedom do you have in your work? How would you describe your relationship with your supervisor or management?”

Interviewers used **probing questions** to elicit concrete examples and richer reflections. For instance, when a participant mentioned a CSR activity, follow-up questions explored whether and how it impacted their day-to-day experience or feelings toward the organization.

All interviews were conducted in **English**, with occasional clarifications provided in **French** when needed; these were translated back into English by the interviewer. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants’ consent and **transcribed verbatim**.

Analytic Strategy

We employed **thematic analysis** to interpret the qualitative data. The coding process combined **deductive codes**—drawn from our theoretical framework (*e.g.*, CSR perceptions, engagement, burnout, autonomy, supervisor support)—with **inductive codes** that emerged organically from the data. Two researchers independently reviewed all transcripts and generated initial codes. They then met to compare interpretations and collaboratively refine a **codebook**. Key themes were subsequently mapped and compared against the quantitative findings to identify **convergence or divergence** between data sources.

Purpose and Integration

The qualitative component served to add **contextual depth and interpretive nuance** to the survey results. For example, it allowed us to understand why some employees might view CSR efforts as unrelated to their well-being, or how supportive leadership can shape daily experiences of engagement. By **integrating these insights** with the quantitative findings, we aimed to produce a **richer, more holistic interpretation** than would be possible using either method alone.

Results

Quantitative Findings (Survey)

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach’s α), and intercorrelations among the key study variables. Overall, participants reported **moderately high**

levels of job engagement ($M \approx 4.0$, on a 5-point scale) and **moderate levels of burnout** ($M \approx 2.8$). Perceived CSR had a mean score of approximately **3.7**, reflecting generally favorable evaluations of the institutions' CSR initiatives.

As anticipated, **job engagement** was positively correlated with **perceived CSR** ($r \approx .30, p < .01$), as well as with the two job resources: **autonomy** ($r \approx .45$) and **supervisor support** ($r \approx .50$), both significant at $p < .001$. Conversely, **burnout** was negatively associated with each of these predictors: $r \approx -.25$ with CSR, $-.40$ with autonomy, and $-.55$ with supervisor support (all p values $< .05$ to $< .001$). These patterns provide initial empirical support for our hypotheses that both **CSR perceptions** and **job resources** are beneficially associated with employee well-being.

Notably, **supervisor support** exhibited the strongest bivariate correlations with both engagement and burnout (in opposing directions), underscoring its central role in shaping employees' work experiences within academic settings.

Regression Analysis

To assess the unique contributions of **perceived CSR**, **autonomy**, and **supervisor support** on the outcomes of interest—**job engagement** and **burnout**—we conducted multiple linear regression analyses. All models controlled for **job role** (faculty vs. administrative), **tenure** (in years), and **gender**.

Table 3 shows the standardized regression coefficients (β), significance levels, and model statistics. All **Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs)** were below 2, indicating no evidence of multicollinearity despite moderate intercorrelations among the predictors.

The regression models revealed that:

Supervisor support remained a significant predictor of both **higher engagement** and **lower burnout**, even after controlling for other variables.

Job autonomy was significantly associated with **higher engagement** and showed a moderate negative association with **burnout**.

Perceived CSR contributed uniquely to the prediction of **engagement** but showed a weaker, marginal association with **burnout**.

These findings suggest that both **contextual resources (CSR perceptions)** and **proximal work resources (autonomy and support)** play important roles in predicting employee well-being, with supervisor support emerging as particularly influential.

Table 3. Regression results predicting Employee Engagement and Burnout (Standardized β coefficients shown)

Predictor	Job Engagement (β)	Burnout (β)
Perceived CSR	0.24 ($p < .01$)	-0.08 (n.s.)

Predictor	Job Engagement (β)	Burnout (β)
Job Autonomy	0.33 *(p < .001)	-0.25 (p < .01)
Supervisor Support	0.30 *(p < .001)	-0.41 *(p < .001)
Controls:		
– Faculty (vs. Staff)	0.05 (n.s.)	0.02 (n.s.)
– Tenure (years)	0.10 (n.s.)	-0.07 (n.s.)
– Gender (1=Female)	-0.02 (n.s.)	0.04 (n.s.)
Model R²	0.47	0.36
F (df)	F(6,98) = 14.2***	F(6,98) = 9.1***

(n.s. = not significant; $p < .01$; * $p < .001$)

Interpretation of Results

Job Engagement

As shown in Table 3, the regression model predicting job engagement was significant ($F = 14.2$, $p < .001$), explaining approximately 47% of the variance in engagement scores. As hypothesized, perceived CSR had a positive and statistically significant effect on engagement ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$), indicating that employees who viewed their institution as socially responsible tended to be more engaged in their work. This supports the idea that identifying with an organization's ethical and social mission enhances employees' enthusiasm and psychological presence at work. Practically speaking, a one-standard-deviation increase in perceived CSR was associated with a 0.24 SD increase in engagement, controlling for other variables.

Among the job resources, both job autonomy ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$) and supervisor support ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$) emerged as strong positive predictors of engagement. These findings reinforce the motivational role of autonomy—through increased ownership and self-determination—and of social support, particularly from supervisors. Notably, supervisor support had one of the largest beta coefficients, highlighting its powerful role in fostering engagement even in academic contexts where autonomy is traditionally emphasized.

None of the control variables (job role, tenure, gender) was significant in this model, suggesting that the effects of CSR perceptions and job resources were robust across demographic groups.

Burnout

The model predicting burnout was also significant ($F = 9.1$, $p < .001$), accounting for approximately 36% of the variance in burnout scores. A somewhat different pattern emerged here. Supervisor support was the strongest predictor, showing a strong negative relationship with burnout ($\beta = -.41$, $p < .001$). Employees who felt supported by their supervisors reported significantly lower levels of exhaustion and cynicism—consistent with JD-R theory, which identifies social support as a critical buffer against stress.

Job autonomy also showed a significant negative relationship with burnout ($\beta = -.25, p < .01$), indicating that employees with greater freedom and decision-making latitude were less likely to experience burnout. This likely reflects the protective role of control over one's schedule and methods in managing workload and pressure.

Interestingly, perceived CSR had a negative but non-significant association with burnout ($\beta = -.08, p = .20$). Once job resources were accounted for, CSR perceptions did not uniquely predict burnout levels. In practical terms, whether an institution was seen as highly socially responsible did not significantly influence employees' feelings of exhaustion or detachment, after considering the effects of autonomy and support.

This result was somewhat unexpected, given the hypothesis that CSR might reduce burnout by fostering pride, purpose, or alignment with values. The data suggest that CSR may inspire employees (boosting engagement), but not sufficiently mitigate stress to reduce burnout—particularly when immediate working conditions are more salient. Thus, any burnout-reducing effect of CSR might be either indirect, subtle, or context-dependent.

As with engagement, none of the demographic control variables were significant in the burnout model. Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated no concern, with all VIFs < 2 . Perceived CSR and supervisor support were modestly correlated ($r \approx .30$), suggesting that socially responsible institutions may also foster more supportive environments.

We tested for interaction effects (e.g., whether CSR's effect on outcomes depended on levels of autonomy or support), but no significant interactions emerged. This implies that CSR and job resources operated additively rather than interactively in this cross-sectional dataset.

Summary

Together, the quantitative results confirm that job resources are key determinants of employee well-being, in line with the JD-R model. Autonomy and especially supervisor support consistently predicted higher engagement and lower burnout. Perceived CSR was significantly related to engagement, reinforcing the idea that employees respond positively to organizations they perceive as socially responsible. However, CSR did not significantly reduce burnout once other factors were controlled, suggesting that reducing employee strain may require more direct interventions (e.g., improving working conditions, workload management) in addition to promoting CSR.

Qualitative Insights (Interviews)

1. Meaning and Pride from CSR

The qualitative interviews enriched our understanding of why **perceived CSR** is associated with higher engagement. Many participants expressed a sense of **pride** in working for an institution that “stands for something more than just profit.” For instance, one faculty member noted, “*Knowing that my school engages in environmental projects and ethics initiatives makes me proud to be here—it aligns with my personal values.*” This pride often translated into **enhanced motivation and engagement**, especially when employees saw CSR activities as meaningful or value-congruent.

Several interviewees linked CSR to a sense of **organizational identification** and meaningfulness:

“When I see our students and staff volunteering for a cause, I feel more connected and energized in my job.”

Others emphasized that CSR made them feel part of a **positive force**:

“I talk about our school’s community programs to my friends; it makes me feel like I’m part of something good.”

However, not all participants perceived CSR as impactful on their **day-to-day experience**. A few viewed CSR as symbolic or peripheral:

“CSR is nice to have, but it doesn’t change how my job feels on a Monday morning when I’m swamped with work.”

These contrasting views offer insight into the **non-significant effect of CSR on burnout** found in the survey: while CSR boosts engagement through pride and meaning, it may not alleviate **stress** unless it **directly improves working conditions**.

2. Autonomy as a Protective and Motivational Factor

Autonomy emerged as a universally valued theme across both faculty and administrative staff. For academics, it was closely tied to **professional identity**:

“Academic freedom is crucial. I love that I can design my courses the way I think is best. That creative control keeps me engaged.”

Administrative staff likewise appreciated autonomy in managing projects and events. Interviewees who reported high autonomy described greater **satisfaction and energy**, while those who lacked it expressed **frustration** and disengagement.

A lecturer explained:

“Sometimes the administration introduces new policies without consulting us—it makes me disengage. I feel like a cog in a machine.”

Some explicitly linked autonomy to **burnout protection**:

“The only times I felt burnt out were when I had no control—when I had to follow a rigid curriculum I didn’t design.”

These findings **echo the JD-R model**, where autonomy functions as a **motivational resource** that fosters engagement and buffers stress.

3. Supervisor Support and Employee Well-Being

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of **supervisory support**, reinforcing the survey finding that it is a strong predictor of **engagement and burnout**. Supportive leadership was described in both practical and emotional terms:

“My department head checks in on me regularly, asks if I need anything—that makes a huge difference.”

“Last semester I was overwhelmed, and my dean rearranged deadlines and encouraged me to take a few days off. That saved me from burning out.”

These accounts illustrate how **supervisor intervention** can **prevent strain**, aligning with the JD-R’s **buffering pathway**.

Support was also linked to **empowerment and trust**:

“My boss trusts me with big responsibilities and backs me up if issues arise—it motivates me to give my best.”

Some mentioned **complex supervisory structures** in academia (e.g., dual reporting to research directors and program managers), but noted that **informal mentors and colleagues** could also serve as support sources.

Conversely, negative supervisory experiences were tied to disengagement and stress:

“The director was distant and only ever gave criticism—I dreaded going to work and eventually burnt out.”

Overall, the qualitative data confirmed that **support—wherever it comes from—is central to employee well-being**.

4. Workload and Job Demands

Although not the study’s main focus, **workload** emerged as a recurrent theme related to **burnout**. Faculty described a culture of **constant pressure**:

“We’re expected to excel in teaching, publish research, attract funding—it never ends.”

Administrative staff reported **intense peak periods** (e.g., admissions, accreditation), which were emotionally and physically draining.

An interesting nuance emerged regarding CSR’s potential **unintended effects**:

“Our school does a lot of CSR projects—but they often mean extra committee work for us. It can be stressful.”

Others, however, described CSR as a **welcome source of motivation**:

“Organizing sustainability day is busy, but fun—it reminds me why I enjoy working here.”

This divergence suggests that **how CSR is implemented**—whether it **adds to the burden** or **inspires energy**—can shape its impact on employee well-being.

5. Synthesis: Convergence and Nuances

The qualitative findings largely **converge with the quantitative results**:

Theme	Qualitative Insight	Survey Alignment
CSR → Engagement	Pride, meaning, identification	Significant positive effect
CSR → Burnout	Limited stress relief	Non-significant effect
Autonomy	Boosts engagement, buffers burnout	Significant in both models
Supervisor Support	Strongly linked to both outcomes	Strongest predictor overall

In addition, the interviews revealed **boundary conditions** and **nuances**:

- **Personal values** moderate CSR’s motivational impact: those who value social causes feel more engaged by CSR, while others remain indifferent.
- **Authenticity matters**: participants distinguished between genuine and superficial CSR efforts.

“I support our CSR work, but I hope it’s not just marketing. If it’s genuine, it’s inspiring; if not, people see through it.”

These nuances point to **moderating variables**—such as CSR authenticity and individual value alignment—that warrant further exploration in future research.

Conclusion

Taken together, the qualitative findings add depth and explanatory nuance to the survey results. Employees reported the highest levels of engagement—and the lowest levels of burnout—when they experienced **autonomy, supervisory support**, and perceived their institution as **genuinely committed to social responsibility**. In this context, CSR appears to function as a **morale enhancer**: a “*cherry on top*” of a well-resourced and empowering work environment. However, CSR alone was **insufficient to buffer against burnout**, particularly when job demands were high or core resources were lacking.

These insights contribute to both theory—by refining understandings of CSR’s role within the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model**—and practice, by highlighting the importance of **organizational design** and **leadership behavior** in fostering employee well-being. These interpretations are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Discussion

This study explored the relationships between employees' perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR), key job resources (autonomy and supervisor support), and well-being outcomes (engagement and burnout) among staff in French business schools. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, we hypothesized that CSR could function as an additional organizational resource that enhances employee motivation and mitigates strain. The results largely confirmed our expectations for engagement but yielded more nuanced findings regarding burnout.

Consistent with prior JD-R research, both job autonomy and supervisor support emerged as strong and reliable predictors of higher engagement and lower burnout. These findings underscore the fundamental role of classic job resources in sustaining employee well-being—even in academia, where autonomy is often assumed but not guaranteed. Supervisor support, in particular, had the strongest association with reduced burnout, suggesting that leadership behaviors can significantly buffer the impact of high job demands.

Perceived CSR was found to significantly and positively predict employee engagement, supporting the idea that employees draw motivational energy and meaning from working in an institution perceived as socially responsible. Qualitative data highlighted the mechanisms behind this link: CSR enhanced employees' pride, identification with the organization, and sense of purpose—all key drivers of engagement. This finding aligns with social identity theory and confirms that CSR, when perceived as authentic, can be an effective lever for enhancing motivation in knowledge-intensive environments.

However, the expected link between perceived CSR and burnout was not statistically significant once core job resources were accounted for. While some interviewees described CSR as a source of pride or inspiration, many noted that it had little impact on their day-to-day stress. These insights suggest that CSR acts more as a morale enhancer than a protective shield against burnout. Burnout, as JD-R theory predicts, appears to be primarily driven by the absence of tangible job resources and the presence of excessive demands—factors that CSR, unless directly embedded into work design, may not address.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data strengthens the robustness of our findings. Survey results provided empirical validation, while interviews contextualized those findings, illustrating the lived experiences behind the patterns. The qualitative themes also raised important nuances: CSR can sometimes generate additional demands (e.g., committee work), and its impact depends on perceived authenticity and value alignment. Moreover, peer support and personal coping strategies were mentioned as relevant yet unmeasured factors, suggesting possible directions for future research.

In sum, this study extends the JD-R model by demonstrating that perceived CSR can act as a meaningful psychological resource that boosts engagement in higher education contexts. But its impact on burnout is minimal as long as there is no accompanying support structure or sufficient design of jobs. To institutes that intend to boost employee welfare, the message is simple: CSR might be a good addition to, rather than an alternative to, structural and interpersonal resources. Long-term involvement involves intent and encouragement.

Conclusion

In this research paper, we provide a thorough analysis of the relationship between employees' perception of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and key job resources, which are autonomy and supervisor support. These are the determinants of work engagement and burnout in the French business schools. The results relying on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and expanded by the mixed-methods design prove that structural resources, as well as the perceived ethical position of the institution, play a significant role in the well-being of employees in the workplace.

Perceived CSR turned out to be a significant predictor of engagement: employees who perceived their institution as socially responsible reported higher levels of pride, purpose, and motivation in their jobs. This motivational gain, however, was not directly related to burnout. In line with the JD-R framework, the results indicate that burnout is highly influenced by the absence of direct job resources, such as low levels of supervisor support and lack of autonomy, compared to the impact of general organizational values. This difference supports the perception that engagement and burnout, although related, are distinct constructs and can be influenced in different ways and thus require specific strategies in order to be effectively handled.

The study contributes theoretically by integrating CSR perceptions into the JD-R framework, reinforcing CSR's role as a psychological resource that supports engagement. It also encourages more nuanced theorizing about the limits of CSR's influence, especially regarding emotional exhaustion. Methodologically, the mixed-methods approach added valuable depth: the qualitative data illuminated how and why CSR matters to employees, revealing the importance of authenticity, voluntary involvement, and alignment with personal values.

The findings offer clear guidance for organizational leaders—particularly in academic institutions. Promoting genuine CSR initiatives can foster engagement, but these efforts must be complemented by fundamental HR practices that ensure employees have the autonomy, support, and manageable workloads necessary to thrive. CSR should not be viewed as a substitute for workplace well-being measures, but rather as a complementary force that enhances meaning and morale when the basics are in place.

While this study offers important insights, limitations such as its cross-sectional design and sector-specific sample call for cautious generalization. Future research should adopt longitudinal and experimental approaches to clarify causality, examine the role of CSR authenticity and personal values, and extend the model to other sectors and cultural contexts. Expanding the focus to include performance outcomes, turnover, and personal resources would further advance our understanding of how CSR and work design shape the employee experience.

Ultimately, our findings underscore that fostering employee well-being in academic institutions requires more than symbolic commitments to social values—it requires aligning those values with tangible support for the people who bring them to life. Employees become more engaged as well as more resilient, committed as well as empowered to make contributions relevant to the mission of the institution when they believe that their organization is being responsible and considerate of their working conditions.

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