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INTERNAL CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND WORKPLACE COMMITMENT IN MALAYSIAN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: FINDINGS FROM A PILOT STUDY

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Abstract:

The problem of turnover and decline in organizational performance still exists in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) hence the need for effective employee-oriented management strategies. Although Internal Corporate Social Responsibility (ICSR) has been identified as a strategic tool to improve the employees' well-being and organisational outcomes, empirical evidence in Malaysian PHEIs is still lacking. The purpose of this pilot study is to investigate the associations between ICSR dimensions, employee perception, organisational performance and organisational commitment and to assess the reliability and validity of the proposed research instrument. A quantitative survey was conducted among employees of the Malaysian private higher education institution and 38 valid responses were obtained. Data were analyzed using SPSS 29.0 and SmartPLS 4.1. The measurement model showed good internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity after some minor refinement to several indicators. Preliminary findings indicate that ICSR has a positive relationship with both organisational performance and organisational commitment, with employee perception as a potential mediating mechanism. The results are exploratory given the small sample size, but they provide some initial empirical evidence for the proposed framework and confirm the appropriateness of the measurement instrument for future large scale research. This study contributes to the limited literature on employee-centred CSR in Malaysian higher education, and provides practical insights on how to

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improve organisational sustainability through responsible internal management practices.

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Keyword:

Internal Corporate Social Responsibility; Employee Perception; Organisational Performance; Organisational Commitment; Pilot Study; Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions

Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in developing skilled graduates, advancing research, and contributing to national development. In Malaysia, the rapid growth of Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) has intensified competition for qualified academics while raising expectations for teaching excellence, research productivity, and institutional sustainability. As a result, attracting and retaining talented employees has become an increasingly important priority for university management.

Despite continued growth in the sector, retaining academic staff remains a major challenge. High employee turnover disrupts teaching continuity, reduces research productivity, increases recruitment costs, and ultimately affects institutional performance. Previous studies have associated turnover intention with limited career development opportunities, inadequate organisational support, poor working conditions, and difficulties in maintaining work–life balance. These issues highlight the need for employee-focused strategies that strengthen commitment while supporting institutional success.

One approach receiving increasing attention is Internal Corporate Social Responsibility (ICSR). Unlike external CSR, which focuses on external stakeholders, ICSR emphasises an organisation's responsibility towards its employees through practices such as fair labour relations, employment stability, workplace diversity, health and safety, training and development, work–life balance, supportive working environments, and social dialogue. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), these initiatives encourage employees to respond with greater commitment, stronger engagement, and improved performance.

Although CSR has been widely studied, research on ICSR remains relatively limited. Many studies examine individual HR practices or selected CSR dimensions rather than considering ICSR as a comprehensive employee-centred strategy. In addition, few studies have explored how employee perception explains the relationship between ICSR and organisational outcomes, particularly within Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions.

This pilot study addresses these gaps by proposing an integrated ICSR framework consisting of labour relations, health and safety, working environment, workforce diversity, training and development, social dialogue, employment stability, and work–life balance. Employee perception is examined as the mechanism linking ICSR with organisational performance and organisational commitment. The study also evaluates the reliability and validity of the proposed measurement instrument to support future large-scale research.

Problem Statement

Employee turnover continues to challenge the long-term sustainability of higher education institutions. For Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs), retaining experienced academics is essential to maintaining teaching quality, research productivity, and institutional competitiveness. However, previous studies suggest that turnover intention is higher among academics in private universities than in public institutions, making staff retention an ongoing concern.

The effects of turnover extend beyond recruitment costs. Losing experienced employees interrupts teaching, weakens research output, reduces institutional knowledge, and affects overall organisational performance. These challenges have become even more significant as employee expectations evolve and career mobility increases.

Internal Corporate Social Responsibility (ICSR) offers a practical way to address these issues by promoting responsible employment practices such as fair labour relations, health and safety, work–life balance, workforce diversity, employment stability, training and development, social dialogue, and supportive working environments. While earlier studies have linked CSR with positive employee outcomes, evidence on ICSR as an integrated organisational strategy within Malaysian PHEIs remains limited.

Another important gap concerns employee perception. Most studies focus on direct relationships between CSR and organisational outcomes without examining how employees interpret organisational initiatives. Since employees respond to their perceptions of organisational support rather than organisational actions alone, understanding this psychological mechanism is essential.

Accordingly, this pilot study develops and validates an integrated ICSR framework that examines the influence of ICSR on organisational performance and organisational commitment through the mediating role of employee perception. The findings provide preliminary evidence to support future large-scale studies in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions.

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Research Objectives

This pilot study aims to achieve the following objectives:

i. To examine the relationships between the dimensions of Internal Corporate Social Responsibility (labour relations, health and safety, working environment, workforce diversity, training and development, social dialogue, employment stability, and work-life balance) and organisational performance as well as turnover intention among employees in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions.
ii. To examine the mediating role of employee perception in the relationships between Internal Corporate Social Responsibility dimensions and organisational performance and turnover intention.
iii. To evaluate the reliability and validity of the proposed measurement instrument and conceptual framework for investigating Internal Corporate Social Responsibility in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions through a pilot study.

Literature Review

Internal Social Corporate Responsibility (ICSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved beyond philanthropy to become an important management approach that addresses an organisation's responsibilities to both external and internal stakeholders. While traditional CSR has largely focused on environmental protection, ethical governance, customer welfare, and community engagement, increasing attention has been given to employees as valuable organisational stakeholders. This employee-focused perspective is referred to as Internal Corporate Social Responsibility (ICSR), which includes organisational practices that promote employee well-being through fair labour relations, employment stability, health and safety, training and development, work–life balance, workplace diversity, supportive working environments, and social dialogue (European Commission, 2001; Aguilera et al., 2007; Mory et al., 2016).

Unlike traditional human resource management, ICSR views employees as key organisational stakeholders rather than simply organisational resources. By integrating employee well-being into the organisation's broader social responsibility agenda, ICSR encourages organisations to create ethical, supportive, and inclusive workplaces that improve employee satisfaction, commitment, and organisational performance. As employees increasingly value organisational culture, career development, flexibility, psychological safety, and responsible employment practices alongside financial rewards, ICSR has become an important strategy for attracting, engaging, and retaining talented employees.

The relationship between ICSR and employee outcomes is well explained by Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). The theory suggests that employees respond positively when they perceive genuine organisational support. Organisations that invest in employee well-being through ICSR are therefore more likely to develop a committed and engaged workforce, leading to stronger performance and lower turnover intentions. In this way, ICSR represents a long-term investment that benefits both employees and organisations.

Although previous studies have reported positive relationships between CSR and employee outcomes, several important gaps remain. Many studies continue to treat CSR as a single broad concept without distinguishing internal and external CSR. Others examine individual practices

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such as work–life balance or training and development rather than considering ICSR as a multidimensional construct. Furthermore, research conducted in higher education, particularly within Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs), remains limited despite the sector's growing need to attract and retain qualified employees.

Accordingly, this study conceptualises ICSR as a multidimensional construct consisting of labour relations, employment stability, health and safety, working environment, workforce diversity, training and development, social dialogue, and work–life balance. Examining these dimensions together provides a more comprehensive understanding of how employee-centred CSR influences organisational outcomes within Malaysian PHEIs.

Internal Corporate Social Responsibility and Organisational Performance

Organisational performance refers to an organisation's ability to achieve its objectives through the effective use of financial, operational, and human resources (Richard et al., 2009). Within higher education institutions, performance extends beyond financial outcomes to include teaching quality, research productivity, innovation, institutional reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, and overall organisational effectiveness. Because universities rely heavily on human capital, employee-centred management practices play a critical role in achieving sustainable performance.

ICSR contributes to organisational performance by creating a supportive work environment that encourages employee motivation, engagement, organisational identification, and positive work behaviours. Social Exchange Theory suggests that employees who perceive organisational support are more likely to respond through improved performance and stronger commitment (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Previous studies have similarly shown that employee-oriented CSR strengthens trust, organisational identification, and employee engagement, all of which contribute to better organisational performance (Aguilera et al., 2007; Farooq et al., 2017; Kim & Keane, 2023).

Recent studies also indicate that organisations investing in employee welfare, career development, and supportive workplaces consistently achieve better organisational outcomes. In higher education, these practices can improve teaching quality, research productivity, collaboration, and institutional competitiveness.

Despite these findings, empirical evidence from Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions remains limited. Much of the existing research has focused on sectors such as manufacturing, hospitality, financial services, and multinational corporations, leaving higher education comparatively underexplored. This study therefore extends existing knowledge by examining the influence of integrated ICSR practices on organisational performance within Malaysian PHEIs.

H1a–H1h: Internal Corporate Social Responsibility has a significant relationship with organisational performance among employees in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions.

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Internal Corporate Social Responsibility and Organizational Commitment

Organisational commitment reflects employees' psychological attachment to their organisation and their willingness to contribute to its success (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Within higher education institutions, committed employees support institutional success not only through teaching and research but also through curriculum development, knowledge sharing, community engagement, and university governance.

ICSR strengthens organisational commitment by demonstrating an organisation's concern for employee well-being through fair employment practices, career development, workplace safety, diversity, and employee participation. According to Social Exchange Theory, employees are likely to reciprocate such support by developing stronger emotional attachment and loyalty towards their organisation.

Previous research consistently reports positive relationships between employee-oriented CSR and organisational commitment. Employees who perceive their organisations as socially responsible tend to experience greater trust, stronger organisational identification, higher job satisfaction, and stronger commitment (Brammer et al., 2007; Turker, 2009; Farooq et al., 2017). Meta-analytic evidence also supports the positive contribution of CSR to organisational commitment across different organisational settings.

However, research focusing on Malaysian PHEIs remains scarce. Existing studies have primarily examined leadership, organisational culture, or employee engagement while giving limited attention to ICSR as a comprehensive organisational strategy. Addressing this gap will contribute to both theory and practice by providing a better understanding of how ICSR strengthens employee commitment in higher education.

H2: Internal Corporate Social Responsibility has a positive and significant relationship with organisational commitment among employees in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions.

Employee Perception as the Mediating Mechanism

Employee perception refers to how employees interpret and evaluate organisational practices. Rather than responding directly to organisational policies, employees react to how they perceive those policies in terms of fairness, support, and concern for their well-being. These perceptions influence their attitudes, behaviours, and overall relationship with the organisation. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory, employee perception provides the psychological link between Internal Corporate Social Responsibility (ICSR) and organisational outcomes. Employees who perceive responsible employment practices as genuine expressions of organisational support are more likely to develop stronger commitment, higher motivation, better performance, and positive workplace behaviours.

Previous studies consistently support this mediating role. Positive employee perceptions of CSR have been associated with stronger organisational identification, trust, perceived organisational support, and organisational commitment, which subsequently improve organisational performance (Farooq et al., 2017; Gond et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2022). Nevertheless, limited research has examined employee perception as the underlying mechanism within integrated ICSR models, particularly in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions.

Accordingly, this study positions employee perception as the mediating variable linking ICSR with organisational performance and organisational commitment.

H3: Employee perception mediates the relationship between Internal Corporate Social Responsibility and organisational performance.

H4: Employee perception mediates the relationship between Internal Corporate Social Responsibility and organisational commitment.

Theoretical Foundation

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET), introduced by Blau (1964), provides the theoretical foundation for explaining the relationship between organisations and employees. The theory proposes that social relationships develop through reciprocal exchanges in which individuals respond positively to favourable treatment received from others (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Within organisations, employees continuously assess whether their employer values their contributions and genuinely cares about their well-being. When employees perceive fair and supportive treatment, they are more likely to respond with positive attitudes and behaviours. Conversely, inadequate organisational support may reduce commitment and increase intentions to leave.

SET has been widely applied in organisational behaviour research to explain outcomes such as organisational commitment, work engagement, organisational citizenship behaviour, job performance, and turnover intention. The theory is particularly relevant to Internal Corporate Social Responsibility because ICSR represents an organisational investment in employee well-being that extends beyond formal employment obligations. Practices such as fair labour relations, employment stability, workplace diversity, health and safety, training and development, work–life balance, supportive working environments, and social dialogue reflect this commitment to employees.

From the perspective of SET, employees who perceive these initiatives as sincere organisational support are more likely to reciprocate through stronger commitment, higher performance, and greater organisational loyalty. Consequently, Social Exchange Theory provides an appropriate framework for explaining how ICSR influences employee attitudes and organisational outcomes within Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions.

Application of Social Exchange Theory to Internal Corporate Social Responsibility

The present study applies Social Exchange Theory to explain the relationships among Internal Corporate Social Responsibility, employee perception, organisational performance, and organisational commitment. ICSR initiatives represent organisational investments in employee well-being, whereas employee perception reflects how employees evaluate these initiatives. Employees who perceive organisational practices as fair, supportive, and beneficial are expected to respond with stronger commitment, improved performance, and greater attachment to the organisation.

Accordingly, employee perception is proposed as the mechanism through which ICSR influences organisational outcomes. Rather than responding solely to organisational policies, employees respond to the meaning they attach to those policies. Positive perceptions strengthen reciprocal exchange relationships and encourage behaviours that support organisational effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

Therefore, Social Exchange Theory provides a clear explanation for the proposed conceptual framework by illustrating how employee-centred CSR practices contribute to organisational performance and organisational commitment through employees' perceptions.

Employee Perception as the Mediating Mechanism

Although Social Exchange Theory explains reciprocal relationships between organisations and employees, it also recognises that employee responses depend largely on how organisational actions are perceived rather than on the actions themselves (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Organisational initiatives influence employee behaviour only when employees interpret them as fair, supportive, and beneficial.

This perspective provides the theoretical basis for positioning employee perception as the mediating variable in the present study. While Internal Corporate Social Responsibility represents organisational actions, employee perception reflects employees' cognitive and emotional evaluation of those actions. Positive perceptions are expected to strengthen trust, organisational commitment, and psychological attachment, leading to improved organisational performance and lower turnover intention.

Previous studies support this explanation. Gond et al. (2017) argued that employees' psychological evaluations explain how CSR initiatives influence workplace attitudes and behaviours. Similarly, Mory et al. (2016) reported that Internal CSR enhances organisational commitment because employees perceive employee-oriented practices as evidence of organisational responsibility. Farooq et al. (2017) further demonstrated that positive CSR perceptions strengthen organisational identification, which subsequently improves employee commitment and performance.

More recent studies also reinforce this relationship. Cheng et al. (2022) found that employees' perceptions of CSR influenced turnover intention through organisational distrust and CSR cynicism, while Liu et al. (2022) showed that positive perceptions of embedded CSR initiatives strengthened organisational attachment and reduced turnover intention. Together, these findings suggest that employees' interpretations of organisational practices represent the key psychological mechanism through which Internal CSR influences organisational outcomes.

Accordingly, this study proposes that employee perception explains how Internal Corporate Social Responsibility affects organisational performance and organisational commitment. Employees who perceive Internal CSR initiatives as authentic and supportive are expected to respond with stronger performance, greater commitment, and a lower intention to leave, consistent with the reciprocal principles of Social Exchange Theory.

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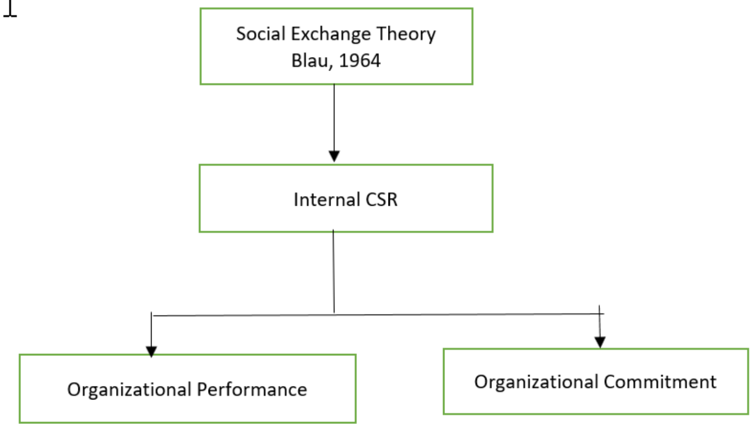

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework
Source: Developed by researcher, 2025

Conceptual Framework

In consideration of the theoretical base and previous research, the present study suggests a comprehensive conceptual model that studies Internal Corporate Social Responsibility (ICSR) as a multi-dimensional construct with components of labour relations, employment stability, health and safety, social dialogue, training and development, diversity in the workplace, workplace environment and work-life balance. Perceived employee perspective is suggested to be used as the mediating variable between ICSR and organizational performance or organizational commitment.

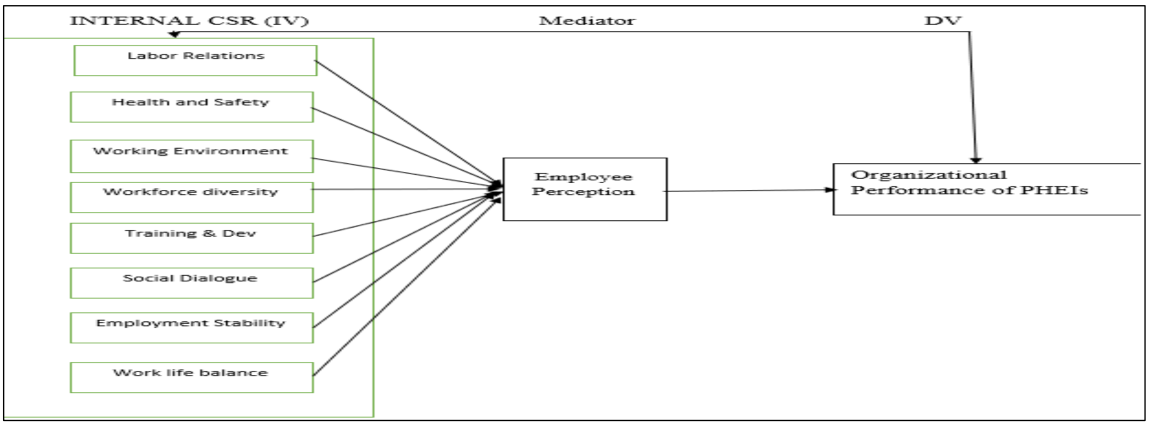

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Developed by the researcher, 2025

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among Internal Corporate Social Responsibility (ICSR), employee perception, organisational performance, and organisational commitment in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs). A quantitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to test

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the proposed relationships and evaluate the psychometric properties of the measurement instrument using statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

As a pilot study, the primary objective was to assess the reliability and validity of the questionnaire before conducting a larger empirical investigation. Pilot studies are widely recommended to identify potential measurement issues, improve questionnaire clarity, and confirm the suitability of the research procedures (Hair et al., 2022; Hertzog, 2008).

Population and Sample

The target population consisted of academic and administrative employees from Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions located in Klang Valley, where the highest concentration of private universities is found. Using convenience sampling, forty questionnaires were distributed, resulting in thirty-eight usable responses, representing a response rate of 95%. This sample size is consistent with commonly accepted recommendations for pilot studies and is sufficient for evaluating the proposed measurement instrument.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms. Before the survey was distributed, the questionnaire was reviewed by subject experts to improve its clarity, wording, and relevance. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that all responses would remain anonymous and confidential in accordance with accepted research ethics.

Measurement Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms. Before the survey was distributed, the questionnaire was reviewed by subject experts to improve its clarity, wording, and relevance. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that all responses would remain anonymous and confidential in accordance with accepted research ethics.

Table 1. Measurement of Constructs

Construct	Dimensions	Source
Internal Corporate Social Responsibility	Labour Relations, Employment Security, Health & Safety, Social Dialogue, Training & Development, Workplace Diversity, Work-Life Balance, Working Environment	Mory et al. (2016)
Employee Perception	Perceived organisational support and employee evaluation of Internal CSR	Rupp et al. (2006)
Organisational Performance	Subjective organisational performance	Delaney & Huselid (1996)
Organisational Commitment	Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ)	Mowday et al. (1979)

Source: Compiled by researcher

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Data Analysis

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29 and SmartPLS Version 4. SPSS was first used to perform data screening, descriptive analysis, and demographic profiling. The measurement model and structural relationships were subsequently assessed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS.

The measurement model was evaluated following the procedures recommended by Hair et al. (2022). The assessment included indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Indicator reliability was assessed through outer loadings, internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability, and rho_A, convergent validity was examined using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. These analyses ensured that the measurement instrument demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity before hypothesis testing.

Assessment of the Measurement Model

Before testing the proposed hypotheses, the measurement model was evaluated to determine whether the constructs were measured reliably and accurately. Following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2022), the assessment focused on indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Indicator reliability was assessed using outer loadings. Indicators with loadings of 0.708 or above were considered satisfactory because they explained at least half of the variance of their respective constructs. Items with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 were retained when they remained theoretically meaningful and their removal did not substantially improve Composite Reliability or Average Variance Extracted. Indicators with loadings below 0.40 were removed due to their limited contribution to construct measurement.

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability. Although Cronbach's alpha is widely reported, Composite Reliability and rho_A are generally preferred in PLS-SEM because they provide more accurate reliability estimates by considering the actual outer loadings of the indicators (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015; Hair et al., 2022). Reliability values above 0.70 were considered satisfactory, while values between 0.60 and 0.70 were regarded as acceptable for pilot studies.

Convergent validity was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). An AVE value of at least 0.50 indicates that a construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In cases where AVE was slightly below the recommended threshold, constructs were retained when supported by acceptable Composite Reliability and strong theoretical justification.

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. HTMT values below 0.85 indicate that the constructs are empirically distinct from one another and therefore demonstrate satisfactory discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). Together, these assessments confirmed that the measurement model was suitable for evaluating the structural relationships proposed in this study.

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Data Analysis, Findings and Discussion

Respondent Profile

The data of thirty-eight valid responses were gathered. The majority of the respondents were females (60.5%), Malaysians (92.1%), and were holders of postgraduate degrees (92.1%). Most of the respondents were academic staff (73.7%), aged between 46 to 55 years old (39.5%) and worked for more than ten years (76.3%). These characteristics show that the respondents have enough experience in professional work and can assess Internal Corporate Social Responsibility practices in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions.

Table 2: Respondent's Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	15	39.5
	Female	23	60.5
Race	Malay	18	47.4
	Chinese	4	10.5
	Indian	14	36.8
	Other	2	5.3
Citizenship	Malaysian	35	92.1
	Non-Malaysian	3	7.9
Education Level	Undergraduate	3	7.9
	Postgraduate	35	92.1
Age Range	26–35 years	8	21.1
	36–45 years	11	28.9
	46–55 years	15	39.5
	Above 55 years	4	10.5
Position	Academic	28	73.7
	Non-academic	10	26.3
Monthly Salary	Below RM3,000	1	2.6
	RM3,000–RM4,500	8	21.1
	RM4,501–RM5,000	7	18.4
	RM5,001–RM8,000	8	21.1
	Above RM8,000	14	36.8
Working Experience	Below 2 years	1	2.6
	2–5 years	1	2.6
	5–10 years	7	18.4
	Above 10 years	29	76.3

Measurement Model Assessment

The evaluation of the measurement model was done according to the guidelines proposed by Hair et al. (2022) where the four aspects of reliability (indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity) were taken into account. Four indicators (ES5, LR2, OC3, and OC5) were eliminated due to their low or negative loadings. The other indicators have shown acceptable reliability, so they were preserved owing to the theoretical significance of the indicators together with the reasonable measurement parameters.

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Indicator Reliability

The outer loading results indicate that most indicators exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.708. Indicators with slightly lower loadings were retained because they remained theoretically important and did not adversely affect construct reliability (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 3: Outer Loadings

	EP	ES	HS	LR	OC	OP	SD	TD	WD	WE	WLB
EP1	0.78										
EP2	0.862										
EP3	0.929										
EP4	0.781										
EP5	0.814										
ES1		0.971									
ES2		0.936									
ES3		0.769									
ES4		0.87									
HS1			0.906								
HS2			0.916								
HS3			0.741								
HS4			0.852								
HS5			0.931								
LR1				0.649							
LR3				0.881							
LR4				0.657							
LR5				0.837							
OC1					0.967						
OC2					0.901						
OC4					0.96						
OP1						0.551					
OP2						0.764					
OP3						0.938					
OP4						0.886					
OP5						0.924					
SD1							0.809				
SD2							0.909				
SD3							0.887				
SD4							0.861				
SD5							0.867				
TD1								0.841			
TD2								0.836			
TD3								0.919			

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TD4								0.872			
TD5								0.92			
TD6								0.895			
TD7								0.826			
WD1									0.934		
WD2									0.899		
WD3									0.922		
WD4									0.78		
WE1										0.88	
WE2										0.957	
WE3										0.948	
WE4										0.942	
WLB 2											0.6
WLB1											0.74
WLB3											0.671
WLB4											0.691
WLB6											0.697

The outer loading results indicate that most indicators exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.708. Indicators with slightly lower loadings were retained because they remained theoretically important and did not adversely affect construct reliability (Hair et al., 2022).

Internal Consistency Reliability and Convergent Validity

The reliability and convergent validity results are presented in Table 4. All constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. The Average Variance Extracted values complied with the requirements except the value for Work-Life Balance that was kept because of the acceptable Composite Reliability. Therefore, the findings substantiate the sufficient construct reliability and convergent validity.

Table 4. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
EP	0.891	0.902	0.92	0.698
ES	0.911	0.939	0.938	0.792
HS	0.92	0.939	0.94	0.76
LR	0.755	0.788	0.846	0.583
OC	0.938	0.963	0.96	0.889
OP	0.875	0.91	0.912	0.681
SD	0.917	0.919	0.938	0.752
TD	0.948	0.95	0.957	0.763

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WD	0.907	0.924	0.935	0.785
WE	0.949	0.951	0.964	0.869
WLB	0.712	0.717	0.812	0.464

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was checked using the HTMT ratio along with the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The findings show that the constructs are empirically different and meet the guidelines for discriminant validity.

Table 5 HTMT Ratio

	EP	ES	HS	LR	OC	OP	SD	TD	WD	WE	WLB
EP											
ES	0.87										
HS	0.774	0.697									
LR	0.781	0.698	0.562								
OC	0.745	0.561	0.399	0.423							
OP	0.97	0.787	0.786	0.662	0.871						
SD	0.722	0.751	0.928	0.698	0.459	0.784					
TD	0.871	0.8	0.845	0.754	0.564	0.827	0.845				
WD	0.823	0.682	0.798	0.505	0.523	0.829	0.613	0.764			
WE	0.882	0.804	0.84	0.584	0.664	0.888	0.683	0.852	0.876		
WLB	0.906	0.738	0.611	0.906	0.757	0.9	0.745	0.821	0.63	0.779	

Table 6 Fornell–Larcker Criterion

	EP	ES	HS	LR	OC	OP	SD	TD	WD	WE	WLB
EP	0.835										
ES	0.794	0.89									
HS	0.726	0.658	0.872								
LR	0.631	0.58	0.48	0.763							
OC	0.699	0.541	0.386	0.354	0.943						
OP	0.872	0.712	0.71	0.522	0.827	0.825					
SD	0.659	0.689	0.855	0.581	0.435	0.686	0.867				
TD	0.805	0.761	0.789	0.635	0.547	0.76	0.787	0.873			
WD	0.76	0.646	0.746	0.431	0.507	0.738	0.576	0.717	0.886		
WE	0.821	0.765	0.799	0.512	0.635	0.815	0.641	0.809	0.822	0.932	
WLB	0.729	0.613	0.512	0.67	0.613	0.714	0.612	0.686	0.531	0.647	0.681

Structural Model Assessment

The collinearity, coefficient of determination (R^2), and effect size (f^2), as well as the mediation and hypothesis testing of the structural model were evaluated using the bootstrapping process.

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Collinearity Assessment

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used to evaluate the collinearity. All VIF values were below the given limit of 5.0, as illustrated in Table 7, which indicates that multicollinearity did not occur in the structural model (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 7 Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

	VIF
EP1	1.814
EP2	4.265
EP3	5.87
EP4	2.363
EP5	2.239
ES1	9.074
ES2	5.035
ES3	2.473
ES4	3.177
HS1	3.556
HS2	4.812
HS3	1.78
HS4	2.575
HS5	5.154
LR1	1.507
LR3	2.265
LR4	1.857
LR5	2.555
OC1	6.674
OC2	3.062
OC4	5.886
OP1	1.247
OP2	1.922
OP3	6.172
OP4	3.421
OP5	6.384
SD1	2.277
SD2	3.957
SD3	3.944
SD4	3.034
SD5	2.59
TD1	4.239
TD2	4.248
TD3	11.789
TD4	9.042

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TD5	8.25
TD6	7.296
TD7	3.905
WD1	3.805
WD2	6.895
WD3	8.046
WD4	1.828
WE1	3.155
WE2	6.998
WE3	7.435
WE4	6.391
WLB 2	1.163
WLB1	1.413
WLB3	1.402
WLB4	1.39
WLB6	1.271

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) has been used to determine the explanatory power of the model. The Employee Perception shows R^2 of 0.820, which indicates that Internal CSR dimensions explained 82.0% of variance in Employee Perception. Then, the Organisational Performance has R^2 value of 0.760, which indicates considerable explanatory power. In turn, the Organisational Commitment has an R^2 value of 0.489, which indicates moderate explanatory power of the model.

Table 8. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

	R-square	R-square adjusted
EP	0.82	0.771
OC	0.489	0.475
OP	0.76	0.753

Table 9. Effect Size (f^2)

	EP	ES	HS	LR	OC	OP	SD	TD	WD	WE	WLB
EP					0.958	3.167					
ES	0.163										
HS	0.049										
LR	0.024										
OC											
OP											
SD	0.052										
TD	0.024										

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WD	0.054
WE	0.001
WLB	0.141

Hypothesis Testing

We utilized the bootstrap method with 5000 resamples for hypothesis testing. The main findings are illustrated in table 9. Employee Perception had a positive and strong impact over Organizational Performance (β=0.872, p<0.001) and Organizational Commitment (β=0.699, p<0.001). Nevertheless, none of the internal CSR dimensions showed statistically significant direct relationship with Employee Perception at the level of 5%.

Table 10 Path Coefficients

	Original sample (O)	**Sample mean (M)**	**Standard deviation (STDEV)**	**T statistics (|O/STDEV|)**	**P values**
EP -> OC	0.699	0.71	0.089	7.883	0
EP -> OP	0.872	0.88	0.026	32.978	0
ES -> EP	0.312	0.322	0.166	1.879	0.06
HS -> EP	0.277	0.292	0.3	0.921	0.357
LR -> EP	0.096	0.108	0.102	0.949	0.343
SD -> EP	-0.255	-0.231	0.253	1.007	0.314
TD -> EP	0.147	0.16	0.215	0.685	0.493
WD -> EP	0.183	0.15	0.177	1.033	0.302
WE -> EP	0.032	-0.003	0.253	0.125	0.9
WLB -> EP	0.269	0.27	0.156	1.725	0.085

Table 11: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1a	LR → EP	0.154	0.949	0.343	Not Supported
H1b	ES → EP	0.386	1.882	0.060	Not Supported
H1c	HS → EP	0.103	0.922	0.357	Not Supported
H1d	SD → EP	-0.123	1.008	0.314	Not Supported
H1e	TD → EP	0.095	0.685	0.493	Not Supported

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H1f	WD → EP	0.106	1.031	0.302	Not Supported
H1g	WE → EP	-0.015	0.126	0.900	Not Supported
H1h	WLB → EP	0.204	1.724	0.085	Not Supported
H2	EP → OP	0.872	12.533	<0.001	Supported
H3	EP → OC	0.699	5.576	<0.001	Supported

Mediation Analysis

The testing of Employee Perception was done through the bootstrapping method. According to Table 10, the indirect effects of the Internal CSR dimensions on Organisational Performance and Organisational Commitment via Employee Perception were not significant. Thus, it can be concluded that Employee Perception did not mediate the proposed relations in the pilot sample. This, however, should be taken cautiously since there are no significant sample size and the studies carried out in the pilot study are exploratory in nature.

Table 11 Specific Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis)

	Original sample (O)	**Sample mean (M)**	**Standard deviation (STD)**	**T statistics (|O/STDEV|)**	**P values**
ES -> EP -> OC	0.218	0.229	0.122	1.793	0.073
ES -> EP -> OP	0.272	0.284	0.147	1.846	0.065
HS -> EP -> OC	0.193	0.204	0.211	0.915	0.36
HS -> EP -> OP	0.241	0.256	0.263	0.917	0.359
LR -> EP -> OC	0.067	0.075	0.072	0.937	0.349
LR -> EP -> OP	0.084	0.095	0.089	0.943	0.346
SD -> EP -> OC	-0.178	-0.165	0.184	0.969	0.333
SD -> EP -> OP	-0.222	-0.204	0.223	0.996	0.319
TD -> EP -> OC	0.103	0.118	0.158	0.655	0.513
TD -> EP -> OP	0.129	0.141	0.19	0.677	0.498
WD -> EP -> OC	0.128	0.105	0.125	1.019	0.308
WD -> EP -> OP	0.159	0.132	0.156	1.022	0.307
WE -> EP -> OC	0.022	-0.002	0.178	0.124	0.901
WE -> EP -> OP	0.028	-0.001	0.222	0.125	0.901
WLB -> EP -> OC	0.188	0.192	0.115	1.639	0.101
WLB -> EP -> OP	0.234	0.237	0.136	1.717	0.086

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Discussion

This pilot study has been conducted with the main goal of assessing the validity and reliability of the proposed measuring tool in addition to gathering initial evidence of connections between Internal CSR, workforce perception, company performance, and organizational commitment. The general results show that the proposed modelling approach has adequate psychometric characteristics, which suggests that the measurement tools can be used successfully in extensive research.

Analyzing the indicator reliability showed that a major part of the measurement instruments used in this study has adequate outer loadings. Four indicators (ES5, LR2, OC3, OC5) were excluded from the study because they had weak and negative loadings. The optimizations made it possible to enhance the reliability of the measuring tool.

Evaluation of internal consistency reliability and convergent validity supports the validity of the measurement model. While Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were above the required levels for all constructs, demonstrating their reliability and convergent validity. The AVE for the Work–Life Balance factor was slightly lower than the recommended values; however, the Composite Reliability values are good enough for a pilot study and are acceptable for a larger study.

The evaluation of discriminant validity with HTMT ratio and Fornell-Larcker criterion showed that the constructs are measuring different theoretical concepts. According to these findings, the developed measurement tool can effectively differentiate the multi-faceted aspects of Internal Corporate Social Responsibility and assess the perception of employees, organisational performance and commitment as well.

Overall, the findings of this pilot research provide initial empirical support for the conceptual framework proposed in the study, which relies on Social Exchange Theory. The results indicate that employees with stronger Internal Corporate Social Responsibility perceptions are more likely to experience positive evaluations of the level of organizational support, hence, increasing organizational performance and commitment. Although the study is not meant to serve as a hypothesis testing exercise, its results provide an adequate foundation for the future research.

Practical Implications

The results indicate various implications for university managers and HR professionals. In the first place, the Internal Corporate Social Responsibility should be treated and understood as a strategic investment rather than an ethical obligation. Employee-centered activities, such as fair employment practices, job security, career development, workplace diversity, work–home life balance, and safety and health measures, make it possible to build favorable working conditions for employees that foster their devotion and effectiveness.

Second, the study highlights the importance of employee perception in determining the effectiveness of Internal CSR initiatives. Organisational policies are unlikely to achieve their intended outcomes unless employees perceive them as genuine demonstrations of organisational support. Consequently, university management should ensure that employee-centred policies are effectively communicated, consistently implemented, and aligned with employees' expectations.

In conclusion, the validated measuring device offers a beneficial basis for evaluating internal Corporate Social Responsibility in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions. Organizations may use the basis to conduct examinations of the current employee-focused practices, find out organizational strengths and weaknesses, and develop human resource strategies based on reliable facts and information.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations ought to be recognized in this study. To begin with, a small sample size of only 38 respondents was used in this study since primarily, it aimed at pilot testing rather than confirming hypotheses. Thus, the results are only preliminary and cannot be generalised across Malaysian private higher education institutions.

Secondly, this study used a cross-sectional research design which did not allow for the assessment of changes in employees' perception and organisational outcomes over time. Longitudinal studies could be used in future to assess the long-term impact of Internal Corporate Social Responsibility on organisational performance and commitment.

Thirdly, data collection was conducted in one institution only with the sample being formed on a convenience basis. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies involve several institutions and larger sample sizes that can be representative.

Conclusion

In this pilot case investigation, the researchers examined the validity and reliability of a holistic Internal Corporate Social Responsibility framework made up of the following elements: labour relations, employment stability, health and safety, working environment, diversity, etc. The results achieved reveal that the proposed instrument has satisfactory psychometric properties and provides initial support for understanding employee perception as a key intermediary between Internal Corporate Social Responsibility and either organisational performance or the level of organisational commitment.

This study contributes to the increasing stock of literature dealing with employee-centered Corporate Social Responsibility by broadening the scope of application of Social Exchange Theory within the Malaysian context. The adjusted framework serves as a reliable basis for future large-scale research and provides recommendations for university administrators on how to improve the well-being of employees by means of responsible internal practices.

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Author contribution statement	all authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. Selvi Narayanan was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, and overall supervision of the study. Anbalagan Krishnan handle data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. Thanga Thurai Vengadasalam contributed to the literature review, drafting and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

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