

Article

Responsible Leadership and Salespeople's Creativity: The Mediating Effects of CSR Perceptions

Sandra Castro-González ^{1,*}, Belén Bande ^{1,2} and Pilar Fernández-Ferrín ³

¹ School of Business Administration, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 27002 Lugo, Spain; belen.bande@usc.es

² Business and Communication School, Universidad Internacional de la Rioja, 26006 Logroño, Spain

³ Facultad de Economía y Empresa, University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), 01006 Victoria-Gasteiz, Spain; pilar.fernandezf@ehu.eus

* Correspondence: sandra.castro@usc.es

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Abstract: Although sales tasks require creative thinking, salespeople's creativity has been identified as one of the most under-researched topics in the sales literature. This study contributes to filling this gap by understanding how responsible leadership and corporate social responsibility (CSR) perceptions can contribute to fostering salespeople's creativity. This study's empirical analysis is based on information provided by 176 supervisor–salesperson dyads from 96 companies, and the results indicate that responsible leadership is positively related to salespeople's creativity. Furthermore, our findings confirm that the relationship between responsible leadership and salespeople's creativity is mediated by salespeople's CSR perception, their job satisfaction, and their identification with the organization. Sales leaders should recognize that by practicing responsible leadership behavior, they can create this type of work environment for their subordinates.

Keywords: responsible leadership; corporate social responsibility; job satisfaction; identification; creativity

1. Introduction

Creativity significantly influences employee performance [1], particularly salespeople's performance [2]. The dynamic, competitive, and changing nature of the environment where salespeople perform their role makes creative effort especially significant in developing their work [3]. Notably in turbulent environments, individual and organizational success relies on supplying useful and innovative solutions for customers [4]. As Groza, Locander, and Howlett [5] (p. 4185) state, “exploring creativity in the domain of personal selling provides insights into gaining competitive advantage by building stronger customer relationships”. Hence, it is important to expand our understanding of the way salespeople's creativity develops. Guided by social learning theory [6] and social identity theory [7], we propose a model of salespeople's creativity driven by responsible leadership and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Specifically, we propose that leaders who practice a responsible leadership style (i.e., leadership based on the values and principles of social responsibility and sustainable value creation [8]) play a fundamental role in developing salespeople's creativity. Moreover, we explore how this relationship manifests.

Previous research has focused on the contribution of leadership—such as ethical leadership, authentic leadership, or transformational leadership—to employee creativity [9,10]. However, there is a lack of evidence of responsible leadership, a concept that is particularly important in the new sustainable and responsible business context. The corporate scandals of recent years due to a lack of ethical and moral behavior have led to calls for responsible leaders within organizations [11].

As Newman–Storen [12] says, “sustainability requires change, and change requires leadership” (p. 5957). Concerns regarding these scandals, together with concerns over environmental, social, and economic issues, indicate that society in general is demanding this type of leadership from those who can exercise it [13]. Leaders are capable of promoting and influencing employee perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, and can involve their subordinates in creating social good [14]. Thus, they can also impact employees’ CSR perception [15,16]. Gambetti, Melewar, and Matin [17] recognize the role of corporate leaders in achieving ethical balance in the day-to-day running of organizations. Prior research on CSR has underlined the importance of different leadership styles—such as transformational or ethical leadership—on CSR perception [18,19]. In this sense, a leader’s motivations and values should align with their organization’s CSR practices and subsequently their agreement with these practices will be high. This will allow a leader to better relay the CSR practices to their subordinates and encourage their participation.

In this way, we argue that responsible leaders contribute to a positive perception of salespeople’s CSR, which increases both their job satisfaction and identification with their organization, making them more likely to develop creative behaviors.

CSR can be understood as “context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders’ expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance” [20] (p. 855). Competing in a globalized market and responding to stakeholders’ increasing demands (those of customers, employees, suppliers, administrations, and the local community, among others) helps organizations work under behavioral guidelines that aim to benefit society. Evidence reflects the influence of employees’ CSR perception on important organizational outcomes, such as employee job satisfaction [21,22], organizational identification [23–25], trust [26], organizational citizenship behaviors [27], and employee retention [28].

Furthermore, previous studies have shown that CSR influences employees’ creative behavior [29]. However, as Glavas [15] notes, it is necessary to better understand how this relationship is produced and which CSR drivers are used to produce this relationship. To address this gap, we focus on salespeople’s attitudes as mediating variables in this process. More concretely, we examine salespeople’s job satisfaction and identification with an organization. This approach is in line with Shin, Hur, and Kang’s [30] suggestion to examine the influence of CSR perception and attitudes on various behavioral outcomes, such as employee creativity. Furthermore, we respond to the call by Glavas [15] to consider multiple mediators in the relationship between CSR perception and outcome variables.

The main reason for considering these two organizational attitudes, job satisfaction and identification with an organization, rather than other factors, lies in the relevance of these variables in an organizational context. First, it is widely accepted that organizations with more satisfied employees tend to be more effective than organizations with less satisfied employees [31]. This is because employees who perceive their organization’s performance in a positive and favorable way are more satisfied with the organization for which they work [21]. Second, prior studies confirm that employees’ identification with an organization is a valuable antecedent to many significant organizational outcomes [32]. These studies suggest that CSR perceptions influence employees’ identification with their company either directly [24] or through other variables [25]. Furthermore, organizational identification is strongly tied to individual job satisfaction. However, recent studies [33,34] highlight the need to better understand the impact of CSR initiatives on these variables.

The present study contributes to the CSR and creativity literature in several important ways. First, we explore the drivers of creative performance among salespeople by analyzing the role of an emerging leadership style—responsible leadership—on this outcome. Based on the assumption that creativity involves a high level of risk and that employees therefore need support from their leaders [9], we examine the mechanisms through which a responsible leader can impact salespeople’s creative performance. In the current turbulent and changing environment, supplying useful and innovative solutions for customers is essential for individual and organizational success [4]; however, research on the antecedents of creative behavior in a sales domain are very scarce (see [5,35] for exceptions).

Second, our study examines how responsible leadership relates to salespeople's perception of CSR practices. Despite the general consensus regarding the relevance of leadership styles for building a positive perception of CSR practices, the significance of leadership models that provide a connection between CSR and leader performances, particularly responsible leadership, cannot be overlooked [36]. The present paper responds to the call for research to provide empirical confirmation of the assumption that "CSR activities may be predicted by, and depend on, the responsibility orientation of leaders" [36] (p. 173). In addition, our findings contribute to improving the lack of studies on CSR drivers that have been highlighted by recent literature [37].

Third, this paper aims to answer recent calls to understand why and how CSR unleashes creative potential [15]. Although previous studies have confirmed that CSR practices can influence employees' creative efforts [29], in this study, we explore the "black box" of how CSR impacts this organizational outcome by overcoming some of the methodological limitations of previous research. Specifically, we use a measure of creative behavior, rated by direct supervisors instead of a self-reported measure; we incorporate several firms from different sectors in our sample to enhance the external validity of our findings; and we operationalize CSR by considering its multidimensional nature.

In addition to the major contributions mentioned above, the results obtained in this study have several practical implications that drive knowledge and understanding of responsible leadership and CSR practices within an organization. First, the results demonstrate that a responsible leader is the type of person who should both represent and convey the importance of socially responsible actions in a company. This provides companies with a tool to properly manage and communicate their practices. Second, the study demonstrates a clear impact of CSR on salespeople's attitudes and behaviors. This contribution to the previous literature provides persuasive arguments to managers regarding third parties, the importance of encouraging leadership, and the implementation of CSR practices.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model, based on the hierarchy-of-effects model [38], which proposes three stages: cognitive, active, and behavior. These phases are aligned in our study with the sequence: perception, attitude, and behavior.

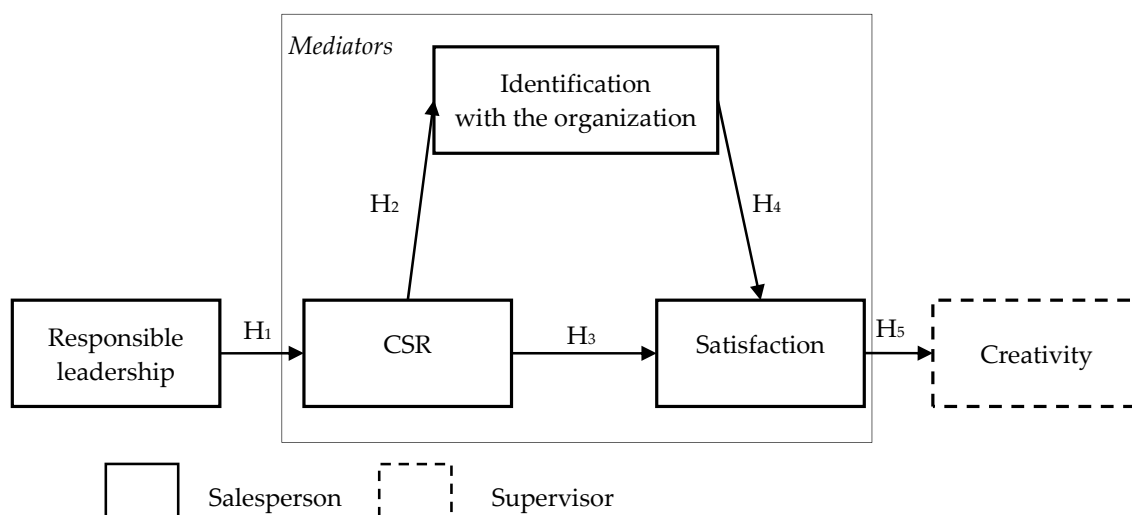


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Responsible Leadership and CSR

Currently, organizations are encouraged to work under the umbrella of CSR. There is a general consensus that companies need to make profits and operate under legal guidelines while simultaneously working to high ethical and moral standards and engaging in discretionary activities [39]. However, it is not easy to understand what CSR is because of the different underlying concept meanings in

diverse cultural contexts. Murphy and Schlegelmilch [40] provide an extensive revision of CSR until this decade.

Previous studies suggest that CSR generates positive results in terms of corporate image and reputation and influences a wide variety of attitudes and behaviors within an organization [41]. This fact requires CSR to be taken into account in a company's competitive strategy. It is therefore important that people, such as managers, supervisors, and leaders, integrate CSR into their strategic decisions [42]. In other words, it is important for organizations to have individuals with a knowledge of and a good predisposition toward ethical business and CSR, and who can incorporate these characteristics into the daily running of an organization [13].

Traditionally, leaders have been responsible for changes in organizations and, to a large extent, for organizations' success. In this context, the exercise of responsible leadership should be considered. Responsible leadership arises from the overlap of ethics, leadership, and CSR [43], and as defined by Voegtlin [44], refers to the "awareness and consideration of the consequences of one's actions for all stakeholders, as well as the exertion of influence by enabling the involvement of the affected stakeholders and by engaging in an active stakeholder dialogue. There in responsible leaders strive to weigh and balance the interests of the forwarded claims" (p. 59). Thus, responsible leadership is a broader social phenomenon far removed from the traditional leader-follower hierarchy [45]. Correspondingly, a responsible leader attempts to balance the complexity of stakeholder interests and seeks to reach agreement using arguments that emphasize an organization's viewpoint [44].

Responsible leaders, driven by moral principles and ethical values [46,47], play an awareness role for their followers by informing them of the consequences of their organization's actions in environmental or social matters and by encouraging them to participate.

According to social learning theory [6], individuals have the ability to learn specific behaviors through a process of observation and imitation so that they can incorporate them into their behavior. Learning arises from the social environment and can take place both directly (using one's own experience) and indirectly (by observing others). In this regard, leaders' behavior can impact their followers' behavior, attitudes, and perceptions because leaders have the characteristics and the power to exert influence [14].

Based on these arguments, it can be observed that supervisors' behavior influences their salespeople's CSR judgements. Responsible leaders focus their attention on their organization's responsible aspects; they cultivate this type of behavior and coordinate responsible actions to achieve a commonly shared CSR vision with their subordinates, who in turn imitate their supervisors [48]. In other words, the responsible leadership behavior of supervisors can have a direct influence on subordinates' CSR perceptions [13,15,16]. Therefore, supervisors' behavior in terms of CSR defines how individuals in an organization will proceed with respect to such practices. Manifestations of socially responsible behavior by supervisors guide the CSR perceptions and behavior of those who observe them [49] (in this case, salespeople). Their discourse and, especially, their behavior, shape the thinking of subordinates when assessing CSR.

Consequently, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Responsible leadership has a positive and significant effect on salespeople's CSR perception.*

2.2. Salespeople's CSR Perception and Organizational Identification

In a broad sense, organizational identification can be understood as a specific form of social identification [50]. It is recognized as one of the main variables that explains employees' psychological attachment to their company [51,52] and thus has been of great academic interest over the last three decades [53]. Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail [54] (p. 242) conceptualize organizational identification as the "psychological attachment that occurs when members adopt the defining characteristics of the organization as defining the characteristics of themselves." Organizational identification contributes to employee work motivation and work performance. In particular, previous research has shown that

organizational identification has a positive influence on job satisfaction [55], organizational citizenship behaviors, and a negative influence on turnover intention and burnout [56]. In this sense, it is important to determine which factors affect an employee's organizational identification.

Organizational identification is based on social identity theory, which states individuals identify with groups that enhance their self-esteem [7], in this case, with the organizations for which they work.

Employees can use organizational characteristics to evaluate their organization, similar to the way they evaluate a person [57]. They identify with the company when they feel that it has a good image or behaves in an engaging and desirable manner. In this regard, the literature suggests that employees usually judge their organization based on its commitment to CSR practices [58]. As Cha, Chang, Kim [59], and Grant [60] state, when an organization behaves properly and seeks to do good (i.e., demonstrates prosocial behavior), employees will feel proud to belong to such a company, and their organizational identification will increase. In other words, CSR perception relies on how employees perceive the company. A firm's image and reputation improves when it engages in CSR practices [61], and employees like to work for organizations that are well perceived and valued because, according to social identity theory [7], these factors enhance their self-concept.

Although there is no evidence in the sales field, Shen and Benson [58] empirically confirm the relationship between CSR directed at employees and organizational identification.

Based on these arguments, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *CSR perception has a positive and significant effect on salespeople's organizational identification.*

2.3. Salespeople's CSR Perception, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Identification

Job satisfaction is commonly defined [62] as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the assessment of one's own work or employment experience" [63] (p. 1300), that is, it is a combination of job characteristics and workplace environment. Previous research confirms the role of job satisfaction as an antecedent of important employee attitudes and behaviors. As Whitman et al. [31] note, the extent to which workers are satisfied with their work determines their effort to achieve an organization's goals.

Valentine, Fleischman, and Godkin [64] suggest that when individuals perceive their experience at work to be positive, they are more satisfied. Work experience is conditioned, to a large extent, by aspects of a subjective nature, such as the degree of fulfillment or non-compliance with expectations established by the employee. Employees usually establish expectations about their organization's behaviors. These behaviors transcend the purely economic by giving more importance to companies' ethical and legal behavior, which means that compliance or non-compliance with these standards influences employee job satisfaction [65]. The literature has shown that organizational ethics increase employee job satisfaction and that job satisfaction is positively affected by the perception of a fair and ethical work environment [66].

Based on these arguments, it has been suggested that CSR practices signal to employees that their company contributes to society and maintains ethical and legally acceptable standards of behavior [26], which influences employees' attitudes toward an organization, particularly their job satisfaction. Social identity theory further supports the CSR–job satisfaction link. Employees are proud to belong to companies that are recognized by their stakeholders for good practices. This is one of the main reasons why employees experience job satisfaction; they feel more satisfied with their job when their firm is well recognized.

Therefore, this leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *CSR perception has a positive and significant effect on salespeople's job satisfaction.*

The positive characteristics and behaviors of an organization make individuals consider it as their own [7]. This creates a cognitive link between a company and an employee [54]. As it grows,

this cognitive link converts an organization's goals into personal goals for individuals. According to previous literature, when an employee achieves this cognitive link with an organization and feels that a company's objectives are his or her own, an employee's job satisfaction increases [67].

Moreover, the cognitive link with an organization that is generated by identification with it has an important emotional component. Employees tend to identify with their company when they perceive that working conditions are optimal and that they are performing their work in a favorable working environment. When this occurs, employees value their jobs more positively [68], which leads them to experience greater job satisfaction [55].

In accordance with this reasoning, previous empirical research has found that organizational identification positively influences job satisfaction [30,55].

Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Organizational identification has a positive and significant effect on salespeople's job satisfaction.*

2.4. Salespeople's Creativity

Beyond people's inventive capacity, creativity is an incipient area of research in the sales context that can be understood as "a behavior resulting from particular constellations of personal characteristics, cognitive abilities, and social environments" [69] (p. 358).

Creativity can be considered the result of a multiplicity of components influenced both by the process where it is developed and the environment [70]. Some researchers suggest that the main factors that influence individuals' creative effort include task-relevant skills, a feeling of comfort at work [69], a positive work climate, and supervisor support [71].

Recently, a new line of research has emerged, according to which job satisfaction positively influences creative effort [72]. Previous studies have shown that employees are more likely to be creative if they are satisfied with their salary level, that is, pay satisfaction positively influences employee creativity [73]. However, it can also extend to job satisfaction in general. Job satisfaction drives employees to view their work from a broader and more dynamic perspective, which drives them to try new solutions. In other words, when employees feel satisfied with their job, they are willing to make additional efforts in their workplace [74]. In the same sense, the literature shows that employees with a low level of satisfaction or clear dissatisfaction are reluctant to collaborate in activities beyond the minimum requirements of their job.

Consequently, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *Job satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on salespeople's creativity.*

When sales supervisors perform their work in a company under the exercise of leadership, they influence the mental CSR framework of the salespeople under their supervision [15,16]. As a result, it can be expected that when supervisors behave well as responsible leaders, they will positively influence salespeople's CSR perceptions. This strengthens individuals' bonds with their organization; consequently, employees will develop attitudes and behaviors that are beneficial to their company. This phenomenon is explained by the theoretical framework of social identity theory [7]. Employees develop a sense of belonging to a company when they perceive that it behaves in a socially responsible way, that is, they identify with the company [58–60]. In addition, the more employees identify with their organization, the more satisfied they are with their work [30,55], which increases their desire to make efforts to go beyond what their task requires [74]. Currently, one of the most important aspects for organizations is their employee's creative effort [1,2]. It is expected that the most satisfied workers will be more inclined to develop this type of effort [72].

The literature mentioned in the above hypotheses provides the basis for establishing the following mediation hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6 (H6). *CSR perception, organizational identification, and salespeople's job satisfaction mediate the relationship between responsible leadership and creativity.*

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

We contacted 227 firms in 11 different sectors (financial service industry, food and beverage sector, automotive industry, etc.). Of the businesses contacted, 96 agreed to participate and data was provided by 176 salesperson–supervisor dyads (105 supervisors and 176 salespeople) at those companies. The sample size is in line with previous studies in the sales field [75–80] and meets the requirements for the study methodology used. Furthermore, from a dyad point of view, it has a good composition because it has a ratio of almost 1:1 with respect to supervisors and salespeople.

We personally contacted, by telephone and/or e-mail, the organizations' sales managers who were responsible for CSR or, failing that, those who were responsible for human resources (HR). We explained the study's objectives to the contact person and, for the companies that agreed to participate, the contact person distributed questionnaires to supervisors and subordinates. In each firm, we obtained data from the salespeople and their supervisors. With the support of our contact person within the organization, we invited as many supervisor–salesperson pairs per company as wanted to participate.

The supervisor sample was predominantly male (67.6%). Their mean age was 43 years old, their sales experience was 11 years on average, and their organizational experience was 15 years. Among the salespeople, most were women (55.1%) with a mean age of 41 years, 14 years of sales experience, and 10 years of organizational tenure.

Most people answered a personal questionnaire (68.18%), but a small portion of respondents (31.82%) decided to complete the online survey due to time and convenience reasons.

Salespeople provided scores for their supervisor's responsible leadership, CSR perceptions, job satisfaction, extent of organizational identification, and control variables. Supervisors were asked to rate the creativity effort of each subordinate.

3.2. Measures

Variables were measured via seven-point scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Brislin's [81] methodology was used to translate original English scales to Spanish.

Responsible leadership was measured with a 5-item scale proposed by Voegtlin [44], which was selected because of the high internal consistency manifested in previous studies and the general support it has received in other studies [44,82,83]. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.96.

Turker's [84] scale was used to measure CSR perception. It has 3 dimensions with 14-items: 6 items in the social/environmental/NGO dimension (Cronbach's alpha value was 0.94), 5 items in the employee dimension (Cronbach's alpha was 0.90), and 3 items in the customer dimension (Cronbach's alpha value was 0.70). The Cronbach's alpha value for the overall CSR scale was 0.79.

Job satisfaction was measured with a 5-item scale created by Brown and Peterson [85]. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.93. To measure organizational identification, a 6-item scale was adopted from the Mael and Ashforth study [86]. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.92.

Salespeople's creativity as valued by the supervisor was measured with a 13-item scale developed by Zhou and George [87]. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.97.

The analyses included three control variables: gender, respondents' seniority in the company, and their sales experience. Research on business and management has shown that these variables can explain ethical perceptions and creativity behaviors [9,72].

3.3. Measurement Model

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) confirmed that all indicators loaded substantially (>0.5) and significantly ($p < 0.05$) on their respective constructs, which confirmed the existence of convergent validity. As an exception, two items were eliminated due to their low factor loadings: one item corresponding to one dimension of CSR and another item corresponding to organizational identification. After purifying the scales, the model fit presented acceptable values ($\chi^2 = 1524.44$, d.f. = 907, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.92, IFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06, RMSR = 0.07).

In addition, composite reliability and extracted variance indexes were above the critical values of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively [88].

To assess discriminant validity, Fornell and Larcker's [88] approach was used. The confidence intervals for the correlations between pairs of variables were calculated [89]. None of the intervals included the value one; therefore, discriminant validity between the constructs was confirmed. In addition, we compared the AVE for each construct with the shared variance between the latent variables. The AVE for each construct was greater than its shared variance with any other construct.

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations of all constructs used in the conceptual model.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables.

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. RL	5.77	1.18										
2. CSR (social)	4.93	1.33	0.37 **									
3. CSR (employees)	5.17	1.22	0.59 **	0.60 **								
4. CSR (customers)	6.05	0.92	0.44 **	0.49 **	0.61 **							
5. Job satisfaction	5.44	1.18	0.47 **	0.42 **	0.64 **	0.44 **						
6. Identification	5.45	1.18	0.43 **	0.39 **	0.46 **	0.39 **	0.61 **					
7. Creativity	4.99	1.29	0.18 *	0.19 *	0.12	0.10	0.30 **	0.10				
8. Gender	1.55	0.50	−0.05	−0.03	−0.04	−0.08	−0.10	−0.13	0.03			
9. Sales experience	13.87	8.74	−0.10	−0.02	−0.06	0.04	0.06	0.17 *	−0.10	−0.30 *		
10. Respondents' seniority in the company	9.98	8.81	−0.14	−0.02	−0.17	−0.05	−0.10	0.03	−0.13	−0.10	0.65 **	

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

To determine the presence of potential common method variance (CMV) bias, we employed a combination of ex-ante and ex-post approaches. The ex-ante remedies involved the application of procedural methods [90] related to the questionnaire. As for the ex-post remedies, we used a CFA approach to Harman's one-factor test to assess whether a single latent factor accounted for all manifest variables [90]. The results of a single-factor CFA model were compared to a multi-factor measurement model in which all indicators loaded on their respective constructs. The results suggest that CMV was not a serious threat in this study.

Multicollinearity among variables was evaluated using the variance inflation factor (VIF). The results show that the VIFs ranged from 1.52 to 1.99, providing evidence that there was no problem related to multicollinearity.

Furthermore, although our conceptual model is based on the hierarchy-of-effects model [38]—which proposes three stages (cognitive, active, and behavior) that are aligned with the sequence: perception, attitude and behavior in our model—it appears that CSR perception could also be affected by salespersons' creativity. Moreover, CSR perception, responsible leadership, and creativity could also be affected by characteristics such as firm size or industry. As a consequence, we tested for the presence of endogeneity, a problem that "arises when the explanatory variables and the error term are correlated in a regression model, leading to biased and inconsistent parameter estimates" [91] (p. 149). To diagnose the existence of this potential problem, we used the Hausman test [92], following research using a similar methodology (e.g., [93]). This test's results [92] ($\chi^2(4) = 4.1619$; $p = 0.384$) show that endogeneity is not a serious problem in our model. In addition, to allay doubts about the direction of relationships, we also tested alternative models; however, these alternatives did not significantly improve the fit of the model. Additionally, we used the Akaike Information Criterion

(AIC) and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), following Burnham and Anderson [94]. The results indicate that the proposed model has the best fit to the data relative to the alternative models, since the AIC and BIC values are the lowest.

4. Results

To test the proposed hypotheses, SEM with AMOS 24 software (IBM SPSS Amos, IBM España S.A., Madrid, Spain) was used. The proposed model presented an acceptable fit ($X^2 = 1552.59$, d.f. = 924, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, IFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06, RMSR = 0.07). The R2 values are as follows: CSR = 0.42, Organizational Identification = 0.43, Job Satisfaction = 0.66, Creativity = 0.09.

H1 examined the impact of responsible leadership on CSR perception. The results ($\beta = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$) reveal that the relationship is significant and in the expected direction (direct and positive relation); therefore, H1 is accepted. Likewise, H2 and H3 are confirmed ($\beta = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, CSR perception is directly and positively related to salespeople's identification and job satisfaction. Correspondingly, the results show that identification with an organization has a direct and positive effect on salespeople's job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$), which supports H4. Likewise, H5, which explores the relationship between job satisfaction and creativity, is significant ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$); once again, a direct and positive relationship is confirmed.

To test the mediating effects (H6), we used SEM. The results show that there is no direct link between responsible leadership and creativity. However, by constructing bootstrap confidence intervals for the indirect effects, and considering that the intervals do not include the zero value, a series of indirect relationships are confirmed, thus supporting hypothesis 6. As shown in Table 2, responsible leadership influences salespeople's creativity through three indirect paths, including two mediators (identification and satisfaction, or CSR and satisfaction) or three mediators (CSR, identification, and satisfaction). Although it is demonstrated that the three proposed variables are indeed mediators, the results show the importance of salespeople's job satisfaction. All indirect effects include salespeople's job satisfaction, which means that the three indirect effects necessarily occur through job satisfaction.

Table 2. Direct and indirect effects of CSR perception on creativity.

Direct Effect	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	P
RL->Creativity	0.09	0.15	-0.15	0.33	
Indirect Effect	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	P
RL->CSR->Creativity	-0.16	0.16	-0.42	0.08	0.28
RL->CSR->Identification->Creativity	-0.09	0.06	-0.20	-0.00	0.08
RL->CSR->Satisfaction->Creativity	0.23	0.11	0.10	0.43	0.00
RL->CSR>Identification->Satisfaction->Creativity	0.10	0.04	0.04	0.18	0.00
RL->Identification->Creativity	-0.06	0.05	-0.15	0.00	0.13
RL->Identification->Satisfaction->Creativity	0.07	0.04	0.01	0.15	0.05
RL->Satisfaction->Creativity	-0.01	0.07	-0.13	0.10	0.92
Total Effect	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	P
RL->Creativity	0.18	0.10	0.01	0.35	

The three control variables do not show any effects on the model. The relationships between the model's variables are not influenced by gender, length of time employed by a company, or amount of sales experience. These results are in line with other studies [9,72].

5. Discussion

The overall results provide strong support for the positive relationship between responsible leadership and salespeople's creativity. However, we tested whether the influence of responsible leadership on salespeople's creativity was mediated. Our findings confirm that this relationship is indirect because the responsible leadership effect on salespeople's creativity occurs through their CSR

perception, job satisfaction and organizational identification. Therefore, we confirm that leaders who exercise a responsible leadership style can influence the variables of salespeople's creative behavior. The study therefore contributes to the development of an integrated model that strengthens responsible leadership, CSR perceptions, and salespeople's attitudes and behaviors.

Our findings complement the evidence found in previous studies that verifies the relationship between other leadership styles and employee creativity [1,71]. On the one hand, these findings respond to the objective to examine the mechanisms through which a responsible leader can impact salespeople's creative performance. On the other hand, they respond to the need to research creative behavior antecedents in a sales field. These studies have shown that creativity is influenced by leadership styles, such as transformational, authentic, and empowerment leadership. In these studies, the relationship is also mediated by other variables, such as self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and psychological empowerment. Therefore, considering the evidence and our results, it would be interesting to analyze other variables. Future research should analyze the mediating role that other variables, such as organizational commitment, company reputation, and pride and emotions exert on the leadership–creativity relationship.

The findings extend the existing literature in an important way. In our study, the results demonstrate the existence of a positive and significant relationship between responsible leadership and the perception of socially responsible practices on the part of salespeople. With these conclusions we have achieved our goal of increasing studies on CSR determinants. Supervisors who are also responsible leaders encourage their salespeople to envision the organization as more responsible. It is important to emphasize that the relevance of the work measures a real individual's responsible leadership and does not measure the concept in the abstract. This fact lends truthfulness to the measurement because salespeople are forced to focus on the exercise of that leadership style by their direct supervisor [16]. Supervisors influence salespeople's expectations of an organization by modeling socially responsible behaviors. When employees perceive such socially responsible behavior, they experience a variety of positive attitudes and behaviors toward an organization.

Furthermore, the results show that salespeople's CSR perceptions also influence other attitudes, such as organizational identification and job satisfaction. This is in line with the social identity theory, which proposes that individuals are more likely to identify with an organization when they are performing actions that improve their self-concept. Such actions may be their degree of involvement with socially responsible actions. When salespeople have a good perception of their company's CSR, they identify with it, which in turn improves their job satisfaction. This combination improves their intention to make creative efforts within the company. These results are consistent with previous literature [29], which demonstrates that organizational identification mediates the relationship between perceived CSR and employee creativity. However, our results provide evidence of the need to consider job satisfaction in this relationship. Previous studies have found support for a relationship between CSR and employee satisfaction [22,30]. However, our results show that job satisfaction positively influences salespeople's creativity, which confirms that satisfied workers are more willing to exert effort that exceeds their task requirements [95]. In this way we explain why and how CSR leads to the unleashing of creative potential.

This work responds to a recent call for an analysis of the mechanisms that explain the relationship between CSR perception and how employees react to CSR practices [37]. CSR perceptions influence certain employee behaviors and attitudes; however, it remains largely unknown what causes employees to perceive these practices in one form or another as more or less positive. The role of leaders comes into play here.

Finally, it is important to highlight one of this study's most important strengths in terms of the data collection design. As discussed in the methodology section, the study uses paired data; so each variable is measured based on the most relevant source. However, we must recognize that all the measures used are personal perceptions or subjective assessments of either the salespeople or their direct supervisors. CSR is particularly problematic. Unfortunately, we do not have the actual CSR

activity information of the 96 companies in the sample. In addition, we do not know the extent to which salespeople can distinguish activities associated with CSR. Thus, future studies should consider introducing more objective CSR measurement elements. This would eliminate the bias introduced by measurements using perceptions, which are clearly affected by differences between what is expected and what is considered to be received.

Additionally, our findings have several managerial implications. The study clearly demonstrates a chain of positive effects on salespeople's attitudes and behaviors based on the perception of favorable CSR practices. Therefore, managers must encourage positive CSR perceptions. First, organizations should have supervisors who are leaders, especially leaders who follow a responsible leadership style. Responsible leaders can influence salespeople's perception of CSR practices. In this manner, the results show the need for HR managers to consider CSR in the management of their strategy, when selecting staff, when placing them in job positions, and especially when training them. Managers should attempt to select salespeople who demonstrate the values of the CSR company strategy. In this sense, they should select people with certain moral principles directly related to socially responsible behavior [96]. For example, we are referring to people who are honest, trustworthy, and ethical; however, sales or human resources managers may not easily select salespeople who meet these requirements. In this sense, managers should be aware that both conscious reasoning and the subconscious or intuition play important roles in these decisions [97]. In other words, selecting salespeople with a profile that complies with moral CSR principles involves more than a rational decision-making process. From our perspective, this process is more intuitive.

Second, it is important to manage CSR as a communication tool and coordinate it with employee attitudes. Furthermore, it is vital that organizations not only attempt to include CSR in their strategy and execute important communication campaigns about their practices, but also to have appropriate communication channels with salespeople so that they can learn about those practices.

According to social identity theory, individuals (in this case, salespeople) want to be involved in groups that demonstrate good behavior, such as responsible organizations; if this occurs, they will identify with these groups. Consequently, salespeople who positively perceive an organization's responsible practices, and therefore imitate the leader, will more closely identify with that organization, which will directly and positively affect these employees' attitudes and behaviors. Further concretely, salespeople will be more satisfied with the company, which will positively influence their creative effort.

In a marketplace where change is constant, salespeople must confront and address many different sales situations while engaging in creative problem-solving activities. There is evidence that creativity not only has positive consequences for individual salespeople but also contributes to an organization's success [98]. Our findings highlight the role of responsible leaders in fostering salespeople's creative behavior by improving their CSR perception.

In summary, marketing managers and sales managers should be aware of the positive influence of responsible leadership and CSR perceptions on salespeople's creativity. Our findings highlight the importance of these variables in improving salespeople's predisposition to generate pioneering and useful ideas in the sales context, to create new ways to sell products or services, and to respond to customer challenges in innovative ways. Additionally, our results confirm that salespeople who are highly satisfied and have strong organizational identification tend to be more creative because they feel a stronger connection with a company. When salespeople share values or agree with their supervisors and organizational behaviors, they perceive their organization in a more positive way and become excited about being part of an organization that demonstrates environmental, social, and economic responsibility. Thus, salespeople feel that they should give something back to the company, which can be achieved by displaying positive behaviors, such as making extra efforts in the sales process.

However, to produce these results, sales managers and supervisors should have good knowledge of their company's CSR practices as well as how and to whom these activities are directed. Interest in CSR practices and motivation to become deeply involved in responsible leadership can come from incentives. This is a measure that, in other contexts, has already been analyzed by authors such as

Hong, Li, and Minor [99]. These authors have been among the first to document the prevalence of executive compensation contracts for CSR and to demonstrate their effectiveness among managers. Our study can support their arguments and extend this type of incentive to supervisors and salespeople. If supervisors have a good perception of monetary or non-monetary compensation linked to CSR practices, they could pay more attention to them. In this way, they will be more interested in motivating their subordinates (in this case, salespeople) to be involved in socially responsible practices.

On the other hand, supervisors will be able to communicate the CSR strategy widely and appropriately, and in turn, salespeople can learn about the strategy. This opportunity is important because the adaptive selling that salespeople face today requires them to have a good understanding of customer needs, the resources available to them, and the company's strategy [100]. Additionally, salespeople may feel that CSR practices hinder their daily tasks because they may believe that the company spends its marketing budget on those CSR activities, which may complicate their relationship with customers. To perform their work well, salespeople must be provided with the necessary budget allocation in terms of both work force and advertising and merchandising actions [101]. However, when salespeople feel that the budget that should have gone directly to their activities is instead dedicated to CSR actions, they may understand it as a loss of sales opportunities. This perception could lead to a loss of quality in customer service with a consequent loss of customer service. Therefore, managers should be careful to convey that CSR spending does not interfere with their sales spending.

6. Limitations and Future Lines of Research

Despite its contributions, this work is not free from limitations. First, the data is cross-sectional and was obtained at a single moment in time; thus, it is difficult to extract the conclusions about the nature of the causal relations raised in the model [102]. A longitudinal study design would offer more evidence regarding how changes in salespeople's creativity effort can be triggered by changes in responsible leadership and CSR perceptions.

On the other hand, there is evidence that firm size can influence various organizational outcomes and can have implications for corporate finances [103], and marketing and organizational issues. As a consequence, recent research (i.e., [103]) has underlined the need to give more attention to firm size in the empirical literature. According to these authors, there are several firm size measures (they use three, but there are many others) which capture this variable's different characteristics; so, it could be used in any field of study at an organizational level. Unfortunately, our database does not include information about the analyzed companies' firm sizes. However, future studies could benefit from considering the impact of this variable on the proposed relationships. For example, firm size, measured as the number of employees, has been found to be related to job satisfaction. In fact, Tansel et al. [104] suggest that it can negatively influence employees' job satisfaction. On the other hand, according to Lange et al. [105], company size can be used to know how much employees consider an organization to be a good place to belong and work, concluding that firm size can be also related to organizational identification. In relation to CSR, however, studies do not agree on the importance of firm size. Blombäck and Wigren [106], for example, strictly conclude in their study that "firm size should not be a feasible main criterion when trying to understand or predict CSR behavior" (p. 255). This may be because the evidence shows that there is no difference between small and large companies' motivation to participate in CSR activities [107]. Moreover, some authors even consider small businesses to be socially responsible by nature [108], whereas other authors underline the need to recognize an increase in costs in relation to CSR with the increase in the size of the company [109].

Additionally, it would be interesting to consider potential moderating variables in the proposed relationships. In this case, it would be important to examine the moderating role of salespeople's personality traits or virtues. Such factors could influence the extent to which salespeople exhibit creativity efforts. Moreover, we must acknowledge a limitation related to the sample because the study was conducted in a single country and in a limited number of sectors. Thus, the model should be replicated in other contexts with different social, cultural and economic characteristics.

Furthermore, regarding the sample's composition, although efforts were made to include different companies belonging to various industries, some industries are not represented, and some industries are represented by only one company. However, the companies had to have a relatively consolidated sales force, and the selected sellers had to perform numerous sales activities.

Finally, we must acknowledge that although the response rate was fairly high, we were unable to determine whether our study's respondents differed from those who did not respond. Therefore, we were unable to check for nonresponse bias.

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