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Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility and Talent Stability in a Large Chinese Enterprise Group: The Mediating Role of Employee Career Planning Support

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates how employees' perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) influence talent stability (TS) in large Chinese enterprise groups. Specifically, it examines whether CSR affects TS directly and indirectly through employee career planning support (ECP), drawing on social exchange and signalling perspectives.

Methodology: Survey data were collected from 632 employees within a diversified enterprise group in Henan, China. The study employed covariance-based structural equation modelling using AMOS 29, with bootstrapping techniques to test mediation effects. Measurement validity and reliability were confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis (RMSEA = .011; CFI = .995; CR = .884–.901; HTMT ≤ .779).

Results: Findings show that CSR significantly and positively predicts both employee career planning support ($\beta = .735$) and talent stability ($\beta = .512$). Employee career planning support also positively influences talent stability ($\beta = .373$). Mediation analysis confirms a significant indirect effect of CSR on TS via ECP (indirect = .283; 95% CI [.200, .372]), indicating partial mediation, with approximately 34.9% of the effect transmitted through ECP.

Novelty and Contribution: This study contributes to the micro-CSR literature by introducing employee career planning support as a key mediating mechanism linking CSR to talent stability. It shifts the focus from traditional attitudinal outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, commitment) to a structural, career-oriented pathway. Additionally, it conceptualises talent stability as a positive organisational capability rather than merely the absence of turnover intention, offering a more strategic perspective on employee retention.

Theoretical and Practical Implications: The study addresses a gap in the literature by incorporating career-related mechanisms into the CSR–employee outcomes relationship. For managers, the findings highlight that CSR initiatives can strengthen employee perceptions of career support, even when not directly career-focused. Organisations should therefore communicate CSR efforts effectively to employees.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; employee career planning support; talent stability; mediation

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1 Introduction

In an era of intensifying global competition for human capital, retaining talented employees has become one of the most strategically consequential challenges facing large organisations, particularly in emerging-market economies. Chinese enterprise groups occupy a distinctive position in this landscape: they employ millions of knowledge workers, operate under increasing stakeholder expectations for social and environmental accountability, and simultaneously contend with rapid workforce diversification as younger generations bring new expectations regarding employer values and career investment (Lu et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). Against this backdrop, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has moved from a peripheral reputational concern to a core element of human resource strategy.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), defined as "context-specific organisational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance" (Aguinis, 2011, p. 855), has emerged as a critical lever in this talent competition. Historically, CSR research concentrated on macro- and firm-level outcomes: reputational benefits, investor relations, financial performance, and regulatory compliance (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Over the past decade, however, the field has undergone a decisive micro-level turn, increasingly examining how CSR is experienced, interpreted, and acted upon by individual employees as internal stakeholders (Rupp & Mallory, 2015; Xie & Jain, 2024). This micro-CSR perspective, defined by Manzoor et al. (2023) as the study of how employees perceive, assess, and react to their organisation's CSR practices, has generated a rich body of evidence linking employee CSR perceptions to organisational commitment, job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), employee engagement, and turnover intention (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Parzel et al., 2021; Yassin & Beckmann, 2025). A meta-analysis by Parzel et al. (2021) encompassing $N = 89,396$ participants found that the effect sizes of relationships between perceived CSR and employee attitudinal and behavioural outcomes are consistently medium to large, establishing a robust empirical base for treating CSR as a genuine antecedent of employee behaviour rather than merely a reputational or PR instrument.

Scholarly interest in the micro-level consequences of CSR, that is, its impact on individual employees rather than firm-level performance, has grown substantially over the past decade. Systematic reviews confirm that employees who perceive their organisation as socially responsible demonstrate higher organisational commitment, lower turnover intention, greater job satisfaction, and enhanced engagement (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Chatzopoulou et al., 2022; Yassin & Beckmann, 2025). However, most studies have focused on attitudinal outcomes such as commitment and satisfaction, leaving underexplored the structural and career-related mechanisms that translate CSR perceptions into workforce stability, particularly in the Chinese institutional context, where career progression norms are deeply shaped by relational and hierarchical dynamics (Xie & Jain, 2024).

This study addresses this gap by investigating how perceived CSR influences talent stability (TS) among employees in a large Chinese enterprise group and whether employee career planning support (ECP) — defined as the degree to which employees perceive the organisation as actively facilitating their career growth, skill development, and internal mobility — mediates this relationship. Drawing on social exchange theory (Blau, 2017; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), the study argues that CSR initiatives constitute high-quality organisational investments that generate reciprocity obligations and strengthen career-linked psychological bonds with the firm. Career planning support, in turn, represents a proximate and tangible mechanism through which CSR commitments are operationalised into individualised development resources, and thus serves as a critical pathway through which macro-level CSR values are translated into micro-level retention outcomes.

Theoretically, this study extends the micro-CSR literature by identifying ECP as a development-relevant mediating mechanism, a conceptual contribution that bridges the broader organisational behaviour literature on career growth (Wang & Abu Hasan, 2024) with the growing body of work on CSR and employee behaviour in Chinese contexts (Lu et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). Practically, the findings offer actionable guidance for managers in large Chinese enterprises seeking to leverage CSR investments to build workforce stability and reduce costly voluntary turnover.

2 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Micro-level CSR and employee interpretations

Corporate social responsibility has been defined as "context-specific organisational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance"

(Aguinis, 2011, p. 855). While CSR research historically focused on firm-level outcomes, reputational gains, financial performance, and investor relations, the past decade has seen a decisive turn toward understanding how CSR is experienced, interpreted, and responded to by employees as internal stakeholders (Xie & Jain, 2024; Yassin & Beckmann, 2025). This micro-level perspective recognises that employees are not passive recipients of CSR messaging; rather, they actively make sense of CSR policies through the lens of their own values, career needs, and organisational experiences (Rupp & Mallory, 2015).

Social exchange theory (Blau, 2017) provides the dominant theoretical framework for understanding these micro-level dynamics. Under SET, organisations and employees are embedded in reciprocal exchange relationships governed by norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). When employees perceive their employer as investing in social and developmental resources, whether through environmental sustainability programmes, employee wellness initiatives, or community engagement, they experience a psychological obligation to reciprocate through positive attitudes and behaviours toward the organisation. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) distinguish economic exchange from social exchange, arguing that social exchange generates diffuse obligations and affective bonds that are more durable than purely transactional arrangements. CSR, by signalling that the organisation values its stakeholders beyond the economic contract, activates precisely these social exchange dynamics (Chatzopoulou et al., 2022).

Empirically, perceived CSR has been linked to a broad array of favourable employee outcomes. Gullifor et al. (2023) demonstrated, in a multi-source, multi-industry sample, that perceived CSR increases organisational citizenship behaviours through organisational identification, an effect strengthened in more ethical organisational environments. Schaefer et al. (2024) found that CSR authenticity generates organisational pride and trust, producing higher retention, with one CSR-committed firm reporting a 4% turnover rate, well below industry norms. A systematic review by Yassin and Beckmann (2025) confirmed that organisational commitment is the most frequently examined outcome of CSR, followed by OCB and job satisfaction. In the Chinese context specifically, Lu et al. (2023) showed that employee-oriented social responsibility reduces turnover intention of new-generation employees by enhancing belonging and restraining burnout, with organisational commitment as a key mediating mechanism. Zhang et al. (2024) demonstrated that CSR conformity and differentiation strategies generate distinct behavioural effects among Chinese employees, underscoring the importance of examining CSR in culturally specific settings.

A growing stream of research further emphasises that the effects of CSR on employees are not direct but are mediated by psychological and relational mechanisms. Chatzopoulou et al. (2022) reported that both external and internal CSR orientations increase job satisfaction and organisational commitment, with the latter generating stronger effects. Cen et al. (2023) provided direct evidence using US Census administrative data that CSR-conscious employees exhibit significantly lower separation rates when their employer's CSR policies align with their values, suggesting that the mechanism is one of value alignment rather than mere perception. The present study builds on and extends this literature by focusing on career planning support as a specific, development-relevant mechanism that has received insufficient attention in the micro-CSR literature.

Employee career planning support (ECP) as a development-relevant mechanism

Employee career planning support refers to the extent to which employees perceive their organisation as actively facilitating career growth through structured guidance, development resources, skill-building opportunities, and internal mobility pathways (Wang & Abu Hasan, 2024; Jing & Yan, 2022). It is distinct from general perceived organisational support (POS) in that it is specifically indexed to career development rather than to diffuse organisational care. This distinction is theoretically important: while POS captures a broad sense of organisational investment, ECP captures whether employees perceive the organisation as a credible partner in their professional trajectories, a perception that is particularly salient for knowledge workers in Chinese enterprise contexts where career progression is a central occupational concern (Lu et al., 2023).

A systematic literature review by Wang and Abu Hasan (2024), synthesising empirical articles on organisational career growth (OCG), identified career planning support as both a consequence of workplace support and an antecedent of work attitudes and behavioural intentions. The review confirmed that workplace support exerts a positive impact on career growth, with both psychological capital and work-life balance serving as key facilitating factors, and that career growth mediates the relationship between work support and turnover intention. These findings are consistent with Sartori et al. (2023), who demonstrated that perceived organisational support reduces

turnover intention through motivation and organisational commitment, underscoring the central role of employer-provided developmental resources in retention dynamics. Organisational career growth initiatives, including training, mentoring, and transparent promotion pathways, are increasingly documented as long-term retention levers. Xuecheng et al. (2022), in a study of SME employees in northern China grounded in social exchange theory, found that training and development exhibited significant positive relationships with employee retention, consistent with earlier findings from Chinese multinational enterprises. A 2022 Amazon and Workplace Intelligence survey found that nearly 90% of respondents rated career advancement opportunities, strong skills development programmes, and paths to different career tracks as important factors in job choice, suggesting that ECP is not merely a retention tool but a key component of employer attractiveness for talent. Among Chinese public university teachers, Li et al. (2025) found that career and job security, a dimension closely related to career planning support, was among the dimensions of high-performance HR practices most strongly associated with reduced turnover intention, mediated by organisational commitment.

CSR and career planning support are linked conceptually through signaling theory (Spence, 1978) and the organisational support literature. When organisations demonstrate CSR, investing in employees' well-being, communities, and environments, they send signals about the quality of the organisational citizenship norms and the firm's commitment to stakeholder development. Employees who receive these signals as credible are more likely to perceive the organisation as similarly invested in their individual career trajectories. Loo-Zambrano et al. (2022) found that CSR positively influences employee commitment through internal motivation and trust, mechanisms that are conceptually adjacent to the career support perceptions examined in this study. Rosa et al. (2025) documented that organisations failing to align CSR commitments with career-related identity factors, such as flexibility, career advancement, and meaningful work, are perceived as less attractive to talent, further supporting the link between CSR and career planning support.

Talent stability (TS)

Talent stability, as used in this study, refers to employees' tendency to maintain their organisational membership and resist voluntary turnover, encompassing intentions to stay, organisational embeddedness, and behavioural stability in the employment relationship (Dhoopar et al., 2026; Cen et al., 2023). This construct extends beyond turnover intention, which primarily reflects cognitive withdrawal, by capturing a positive orientation toward continual organisational tenure rather than merely the absence of intentions to exit. Within the context of a large Chinese enterprise group, TS encompasses not only reduced separation intentions but also sustained contribution, engagement, and behavioural continuity that supports organisational performance.

The literature identifies a range of antecedents of talent stability. Compensation remains foundational (Sartori et al., 2023), but contemporary research consistently highlights career development as a critical driver: an O.C. Tanner 2024 Global Culture Survey found that employees whose organisations support skill building are four times more likely to remain one year later. Among Chinese employees specifically, organisational support, psychological ownership, and career growth have all been shown to reduce turnover intention through embeddedness and commitment mechanisms (Jing & Yan, 2022; Li et al., 2025). Dhoopar et al. (2026), in a comprehensive review of turnover intention research from 1989 to 2024, identified job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and career concerns as the primary predictors of intent to leave.

CSR has an increasingly well-documented negative relationship with turnover intention and a positive relationship with retention behaviours. Ta'amneh (2024) found that CSR initiatives significantly improve employee retention in private hospitals through employee trust as a mediator. Cen et al. (2023) provided quasi-experimental evidence that negative shocks to firm CSR policies increase separation rates among CSR-conscious employees, while improvements in CSR reduce them, suggesting a causal link between CSR provision and talent stability. In the Chinese manufacturing context, corporate social responsibility has been shown to reduce turnover intention through organisational identification and moral identity (Jones et al., 2017) and through psychological ownership in Chinese firms (Jing & Yan, 2022). The present study extends this line of inquiry by examining talent stability rather than turnover intention, using positive rather than negative framing, and incorporating ECP as a mediating mechanism.

Hypotheses

Social exchange theory predicts that employees who perceive their organisation as socially responsible will reciprocate with enhanced relational investments. Career planning support represents a specific and organisationally proximate form of such investment: when employees attribute high CSR to their organisation, they form positive inferences about the organisation's general orientation toward employee welfare, and specifically toward their career development. This attribution-based mechanism is supported by the signalling literature (Rosa et al., 2025) and by evidence that internal CSR, encompassing employee-oriented initiatives, reliably predicts employees' perceptions of the organisation as a caring and developmental employer (Chatzopoulou et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2023).

Loor-Zambrano et al. (2022) demonstrated that CSR activates internal motivation and trust, which in turn drive employee commitment, a pathway consistent with the idea that CSR shapes employees' career-related perceptions by signalling organisational investment in human development. Cen et al. (2023) further showed that values alignment, a key feature of CSR, constitutes a non-financial job benefit that enhances the employee-organization relationship. Rosa et al. (2025) specifically documented that organisations whose CSR practices align with career-development-related identity factors are perceived as more attractive and supportive, whereas organisations that fail to integrate career priorities into their CSR models tend to generate lower levels of employee attachment. Based on these findings, this study formulates the following hypothesis.

H1: Perceived CSR positively predicts employee career planning support (CSR → ECP).

Career planning support is positioned in the literature as a key antecedent of employee retention behaviours. Yee et al. (2024) confirmed that OCG mediates the relationship between work support and turnover intention, with employees who perceive high levels of career growth support exhibiting lower withdrawal cognition and greater organisational embeddedness. Xuecheng et al. (2022) showed that training and development, a component of career planning support, exhibits a significant positive relationship with retention among Chinese SME employees, applying social exchange theory as the explanatory framework. The Amazon and Workplace Intelligence (2022) survey documented that skills development programmes are among the most important factors in both job acceptance and retention decisions, with 76% of employees more likely to remain with companies offering continuous training (Edeh et al., 2022).

From a social exchange perspective, employees who perceive high career planning support view the organisation as investing in their long-term human capital. This investment generates reciprocity obligations that manifest as reduced exit intentions and greater affective commitment (Sartori et al., 2023). In Chinese enterprise contexts specifically, career and job security dimensions of organisational practices are among the strongest predictors of reduced turnover intention (Li et al., 2025), suggesting that ECP is especially potent in this cultural setting where career stability carries particular salience. Li et al. (2025) found that career development and job security reduced turnover intention through organisational commitment, and that employees who perceived organisational investment in their professional growth exhibited stronger positive work attitudes.

H2: Employee career planning support positively predicts talent stability (ECP → TS).

Beyond its indirect effect through ECP, perceived CSR is expected to exert a direct positive influence on talent stability. Multiple theoretical mechanisms support this prediction. Under social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), employees who identify with a socially responsible organisation derive self-esteem from organisational membership, strengthening their attachment and reducing the psychological appeal of exit. Jones et al. (2017) demonstrated that perceived CSR reduces turnover intention through organisational identification among Chinese manufacturing employee-supervisor dyads, an effect amplified when employees have high moral identity. Lu et al. (2023), in a large-sample study of Chinese new-generation employees, found that employee-oriented CSR reduces turnover intention by enhancing a sense of belonging and restraining burnout.

Empirically, Ta'amneh (2024) showed that CSR initiatives significantly improve retention in hospitals through trust as a mediator. Cen et al. (2023) provided quasi-experimental evidence that CSR investments reduce employee separation rates, particularly among CSR-conscious employees who exhibit lower turnover tendencies in response to CSR initiatives. Similarly, Schaefer et al. (2024) documented that authentic CSR fosters organisational pride, which in

turn enhances employee loyalty and retention, with CSR-committed firms reporting turnover rates substantially below industry averages. Corporate social responsibility in Chinese enterprises has been similarly associated with reduced turnover intention through psychological contract fulfillment (Wang et al., 2021) and organisational justice mechanisms (Zhang et al., 2024).

H3: Perceived CSR positively predicts talent stability (CSR → TS).

Building on H1, H2, and H3, we hypothesise that ECP mediates the relationship between perceived CSR and talent stability. This mediation hypothesis reflects the theoretical proposition that while CSR creates diffuse positive perceptions of the organisation, it is the concretisation of CSR commitments into career-relevant support structures that most directly drives employee stability outcomes. Career planning support represents a tangible, individualised expression of organisational investment, a development resource that employees can directly experience and attribute to the organisation's CSR-aligned commitment to employee welfare.

The mediation hypothesis is supported by the broader literature on the mechanisms linking CSR to employee outcomes. Yassin and Beckmann (2025) documented numerous mediators in the CSR-commitment relationship, including job satisfaction, psychological capital, and organisational identification. Wang and Abu Hasan (2024) indicated that career growth mediates the work support-turnover intention relationship. The specific pathway from CSR through career planning support to retention behaviours is consistent with Rosa et al.'s (2025) finding that CSR effects on employee attraction and stability are channelled through career-relevant identity factors. Xuecheng et al. (2022) demonstrated in Chinese SMEs that training and development, a key component of ECP, mediates the relationship between organisational support and retention. We therefore expect that ECP will partially mediate the CSR-TS relationship, with a significant indirect effect alongside a residual direct effect of CSR on talent stability.

H4: Employee career planning support mediates the relationship between perceived CSR and talent stability (CSR → ECP → TS).

3 Methodology

Research setting and sample

The empirical context is a diversified enterprise group in Henan Province, China. A stratified random sampling approach was employed to ensure representation across business divisions and job levels. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed; 729 were returned; after data-quality screening, 632 valid responses were retained for analyses.

Procedure and ethics

Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Respondents were informed of study purpose, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw without penalty. No personally identifying information was collected, and the data were analysed in aggregate form. Ethical approval was obtained, and the consent statement is provided in Appendix A.

Measures

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was measured using an 8-item short form adapted from the perceived CSR scale (Turker, 2009). Employee Career Planning Support (ECP) was measured using eight items reflecting organisational career management practices (Sturges et al., 2002). Talent Stability (TS) was operationalised using eight affective commitment items (Allen & Meyer, 1990). All focal constructs were operationalised as reflective measures using a 5-point Likert response format, and reverse-coded items were recoded prior to analysis. The full wording of the focal measures is provided in supplementary material.

Data-quality control and common method bias

Responses were screened for data quality prior to model estimation. Following common survey-quality practice, cases with excessive missing data, implausibly rapid completion, or patterned responding (e.g., straight-lining) were removed, yielding 632 usable questionnaires for analysis. Given the single-source, self-report design, common method bias (CMB) was mitigated through several procedural remedies, including ensuring anonymity, guaranteeing

voluntary participation, using neutral wording with both positively and negatively keyed items, and introducing construct-level separation within the questionnaire. As a post hoc diagnostic, the well-fitting multi-factor Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and evidence of discriminant validity further reduce concerns that a single common factor dominates the covariance structure, with HTMT values falling below conservative thresholds and latent construct correlations remaining below 0.85 (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Henseler et al., 2015; Kline, 2023).

Analytical strategy

Analyses were conducted using SPSS 27 and AMOS 29. Descriptive statistics were computed in SPSS, while confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) were estimated in AMOS using maximum likelihood. Because multivariate normality was violated, Bollen–Stine bootstrapping was applied to obtain corrected model-fit inferences (Bollen & Stine, 1992; Kline, 2023). Mediation was evaluated using bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals with 5,000 resamples.

4 Results

Global model fit

Following the two-step SEM procedure, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the measurement model prior to structural-path interpretation. Model adequacy was evaluated using complementary fit indices (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Brown, 2015; Kline, 2023).

The CFA measurement model showed excellent fit: $\chi^2(730) = 790.509$ ($p = .059$), $\chi^2/df = 1.083$, RMSEA = .011 (90% CI [.000, .017], PCLOSE = 1.000), CFI = .995, TLI = .995, IFI = .995, NFI = .939, GFI = .942, AGFI = .935, with small residual misfit (RMR = .037; SRMR = .031). Because multivariate kurtosis indicated non-normality (c.r. = 237.259), the Bollen–Stine bootstrap was applied; the corrected test did not reject the model (bootstrap $p = .247$; 2,000 resamples), supporting robustness under distributional violations (Bollen & Stine, 1992; Kline, 2023).

Table 1 Model fit indices for CFA and structural models

Fit index	Measurement model (CFA)	Structural model (SEM)
χ^2 (df)	790.509 (730)	819.323 (734)
p-value	.059	.015
χ^2/df	1.083	1.116
RMSEA	0.011	0.014
RMSEA 90% CI	[.000, .017]	[0.006, 0.019]
PCLOSE	1.000	1.000
CFI	0.995	0.993
TLI	0.995	0.993
IFI	0.995	0.993
NFI	0.939	0.936
GFI	0.942	0.940
AGFI	0.935	0.933
RMR	0.037	0.049
SRMR	0.031	—
Bollen–Stine bootstrap p	0.247 (2,000)	0.143 (5,000)

Note. SRMR was computed from correlation residuals for the CFA model. Fit heuristics (e.g., RMSEA < .06; CFI/TLI \geq .95; SRMR < .08) are reported for interpretive transparency and were not treated as strict pass–fail rules.

Convergent validity and reliability

Standardised factor loadings were all statistically significant and exceeded 0.66, indicating adequate item–construct linkage. Composite reliability (CR) ranged from 0.884 to 0.902 and average variance extracted (AVE) ranged from 0.505 to 0.539, meeting common criteria for internal consistency and convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Kline, 2023). Table 2 summarises CR and AVE evidence.

Table 2 Convergent validity and reliability evidence (CFA)

Construct	Items	Loading range	AVE	CR
CSR	8	0.666–0.741	0.509	0.892
ECP	8	0.705–0.799	0.534	0.901
TS	8	0.675–0.723	0.505	0.890

Note. AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability. Loading ranges reflect standardized CFA loadings.

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). The Fornell–Larcker test was largely supportive, although the CSR–TS correlation (0.782) exceeded the square root of AVE for both CSR (0.713) and TS (0.711), indicating partial overlap between these theoretically proximate constructs. Given the known limitations of Fornell–Larcker in detecting discriminant validity problems and the conceptual relatedness of exchange-based perceptions and stability outcomes, we therefore relied on HTMT as an additional, more sensitive diagnostic (Henseler et al., 2015). All HTMT values were below 0.85 (maximum = 0.779), and all latent correlations were below 0.85, supporting an interpretation of related but empirically distinguishable constructs (Kline, 2023).

Table 3 Discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker). Diagonal entries are $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$; off-diagonals are latent correlations

	CSR	ECP	TS
CSR	0.713		
ECP	0.722	0.731	
TS	0.782	0.668	0.711

Note. $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ = square root of average variance extracted.

Table 4 Discriminant validity (HTMT)

	CSR	ECP	TS
CSR	—		
ECP	0.761	—	
TS	0.779	0.698	—

Note. Values below 0.85 are commonly interpreted as supportive of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Structural model evaluation and hypothesis tests

Structural model fit

The hypothesised structural model (including the direct CSR→TS path) also demonstrated very good fit (Table 1): $\chi^2(734) = 819.323$ ($p = .015$), $\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.116$, RMSEA = .014 (90% CI [0.006, 0.019], PCLOSE = 1.000), CFI = .993, TLI = .993, IFI = .993, NFI = .936, GFI = .940, AGFI = .933, RMR = .049. The Bollen–Stine bootstrap results again did not indicate model rejection (bootstrap $p = .143$; 5,000 resamples), thereby supporting the stability of the model inference under conditions of multivariate non-normality (Bollen & Stine, 1992; Kline, 2023).

Direct effects and explained variance

Consistent with the proposed mechanism, perceived CSR strongly predicted ECP ($\beta = .735$, $p < .001$), supporting H1. CSR also directly predicted TS ($\beta = .512$, $p < .001$), supporting H2, while ECP predicted TS ($\beta = .373$, $p < .001$), supporting H3. The model explained a substantial proportion of variance in both ECP ($R^2 = .541$) and TS ($R^2 = .660$), indicating strong explanatory power for a micro-level CSR mechanism.

Table 5 Structural path estimates and hypothesis tests (SEM).

Hypothesis	Path	Standardised estimate (β)	p-value	Decision
H1	CSR → ECP	0.735	< .001	Supported
H2	ECP → TS	0.373	< .001	Supported
H3	CSR → TS	0.512	< .001	Supported
	R ² (ECP)	0.541	—	—
	R ² (TS)	0.660	—	—

Note. β denotes standardised regression weights from AMOS. R² values are squared multiple correlations

Mediation test (CSR → ECP → TS)

Mediation (H4) was tested using bias-corrected bootstrapping (5,000 resamples). The indirect effect of CSR on TS through ECP was positive and statistically significant (indirect = 0.283; 95% CI [0.200, 0.372]). The direct effect remained significant (0.528; 95% CI [0.392, 0.663]), indicating partial mediation. The proportion mediated was approximately 0.349, suggesting that a meaningful share of CSR's association with stability operates through perceived career planning support.

Table 6 Bootstrapped decomposition of CSR effects on talent stability (mediation).

Effect	Estimate	95% CI (lower)	95% CI (upper)	Inference
Direct effect (CSR → TS)	0.528	0.392	0.663	Significant
Indirect effect (CSR → ECP → TS)	0.283	0.200	0.372	Significant
Total effect	0.811	0.690	0.932	Significant
Proportion mediated	0.349	0.257	0.441	—

Note. Estimates are from bias-corrected bootstrap (5,000 resamples). Effects are reported in the metric produced by AMOS bootstrapping.

5 Discussion

This study examined how perceived CSR influences talent stability in a large Chinese enterprise group, and whether employee career planning support mediates this relationship. The results support all four hypotheses and provide robust SEM-based evidence for a partial mediation model in which CSR exerts both a direct effect on talent stability and an indirect effect through career planning support. These findings make several contributions to the micro-CSR and human resource management literatures.

The strong positive effect of perceived CSR on ECP ($\beta = .735$) aligns with and extends prior research demonstrating that employees respond to CSR with heightened perceptions of organisational investment. Rosa et al. (2025) documented that organisations aligning CSR with career-relevant identity factors generate greater employee attachment, while Looi-Zambrano et al. (2022) showed that CSR activates internal motivation and trust, precursors of

career support perceptions. Our findings advance the literature by quantifying the CSR–ECP pathway within a structural equation modelling (SEM) framework, confirming that CSR is not merely an external branding tool but a meaningful predictor of employees' perceived organisational support for career development. This is particularly significant in the Chinese context, where career progression is deeply embedded in organisational identity and hierarchical expectation (Lu et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024).

The significant positive effect of ECP on TS ($\beta = .373$) is consistent with evidence that career development investments are among the most potent retention levers available to employers (Xuecheng et al., 2022; Wang & Abu Hasan, 2024). Li et al. (2025) found that career and job security dimensions of HR practices reduced turnover intention through organisational commitment in Chinese university contexts, and the Amazon and Workplace Intelligence survey documented that development-oriented employer commitments strongly predict employee intent to stay. The current findings extend this literature to the large enterprise group setting and provide structural equation evidence linking career planning support directly to a positive stability orientation rather than merely the absence of withdrawal cognition.

The direct effect of CSR on TS ($\beta = .512$) suggests that, beyond the career pathway, CSR activates multiple simultaneous psychological mechanisms linking organisational identity, trust, and belonging to stability outcomes. This is consistent with Lu et al. (2023), who found that employee-oriented CSR reduces new-generation employee turnover through multiple parallel pathways, including belonging and burnout suppression, and with Schaefer et al. (2024), who documented that CSR authenticity generates pride and trust simultaneously. The partial mediation pattern, with ECP accounting for approximately 35% of the total CSR-to-TS effect, suggests that career planning support is an important but not exhaustive channel. Other mechanisms, such as organisational identification, perceived justice, and psychological ownership (Jing & Yan, 2022), likely account for the residual direct path.

The strong overall model fit (CFI = .993; RMSEA = .014) and the high explained variance in TS ($R^2 = .660$) indicate that the proposed theoretical model provides a compelling account of talent stability in this organisational context. The Bollen–Stine corrected bootstrap further validates these inferences under non-normality conditions, addressing a common methodological limitation in CSR survey research (Kline, 2023). Together, the findings suggest that CSR, career planning support, and talent stability form a coherent micro-level system in which organisational investments in social responsibility and career development compound to produce durable workforce stability outcomes.

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that perceived CSR positively influences talent stability in a large Chinese enterprise group, and that employee career planning support partially mediates this relationship. Drawing on social exchange theory and a robust SEM framework, we find that CSR both directly promotes stability and indirectly does so through the career planning support pathway. The findings advance the micro-CSR literature by identifying a specific career-focused mechanism, contribute to theory by framing talent stability as a positive organisational outcome, and offer actionable guidance for managers seeking to leverage CSR and career investment strategies to build durable, stable workforces in the Chinese enterprise context.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study makes three primary theoretical contributions. First, it introduces employee career planning support as a development-relevant mediating mechanism in the CSR–retention relationship, extending the micro-CSR literature beyond attitudinal outcomes (commitment, satisfaction) to a structural career pathway that bridges organisational investment with individual stability outcomes. The systematic review by Yassin & Beckmann (2025) identified career-related mechanisms as underrepresented in the CSR–employee outcomes literature, and the current findings address this gap directly.

Second, by focusing on talent stability as an outcome, framed positively rather than as the absence of turnover intention, this study contributes to a growing literature that treats workforce stability as a strategic organisational capability rather than merely a human resource cost avoidance problem. This framing is particularly appropriate in

the context of large Chinese enterprise groups, where talent stability is linked not only to individual retention but to knowledge transfer, institutional continuity, and competitive advantage (Lu et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024).

Third, the study extends social exchange theory's application in the micro-CSR domain by demonstrating that CSR's effects on talent outcomes are partially channelled through a specific, career-focused reciprocity mechanism rather than purely through diffuse organisational identification. This specificity contributes to theoretical precision in understanding how and why CSR influences employee behaviour, consistent with calls in the literature for more mechanism-focused micro-CSR research (Rupp & Mallory, 2015; Xie & Jain, 2024).

Practical Implications

The findings carry important practical implications for human resource and CSR managers in large Chinese enterprise groups. The strong CSR → ECP path ($\beta = .735$) suggests that employees' perceptions of career planning support are, to a substantial degree, a function of how they perceive their organisation's broader social responsibility. This means that CSR investments in environmental sustainability, community engagement, and employee welfare programmes can generate positive spillovers to career perceptions even when those investments are not directly career-focused. Communicating CSR commitments effectively to employees is, therefore, not merely a PR exercise but a mechanism for strengthening career-relevant organisational attachment.

The ECP → TS path ($\beta = .373$) and the significant indirect effect of CSR through ECP (indirect = 0.283; 95% CI [0.200, 0.372]) together suggest that organisations wishing to leverage CSR for retention outcomes should invest in tangible career planning structures, including mentoring programmes, transparent promotion pathways, skills development initiatives, and personalised development planning, alongside their broader CSR activities. The O.C. Tanner (2024) data, which documents a ninefold increase in one-year retention probability when both leaders and organisations support skill building, underscores the amplifying effect of organisational-level investment in employee career development. In the Chinese enterprise context specifically, where career progression is a central employee concern (Li et al., 2025), such investments are likely to yield disproportionate retention returns.

The partial mediation finding, with a significant residual direct CSR effect on TS (0.528), further implies that organisations should not treat career planning support as a substitute for genuine CSR commitment. Employees appear to distinguish between authentic organisational responsibility and instrumental development offerings; both CSR authenticity and developmental investment make independent contributions to talent stability.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, the study was conducted within a single Chinese enterprise group, which, while enabling deep organisational context, limits the generalisability of findings to other national and organisational settings. Future research should replicate this model in diverse organisational contexts, including SMEs, state-owned enterprises, and cross-national comparative settings.

Second, the cross-sectional survey design precludes strong causal inference. While SEM with bootstrapped mediation testing provides robust indirect effect estimates, longitudinal designs would strengthen causal claims. Future studies could employ panel data or experience sampling methods to track how changes in CSR perceptions over time influence career support perceptions and ultimately talent stability.

Finally, this study focused on ECP as the sole mediator. The partial mediation finding suggests that other mechanisms, organisational identification, trust, psychological ownership, and justice perceptions, account for a substantial portion of the direct CSR-to-stability effect. Future research could incorporate these mediators in a more comprehensive parallel or sequential mediation model, drawing on the broader micro-CSR literature.

Data Availability

The anonymised dataset can be made available by the authors on reasonable request. This study is approved with an ethical clearance number 2025-0938-01 by human research ethics committee of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Perak, Malaysia.

Conflict of Interest Statement

Authors declare no conflicts of interest in this manuscript.

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Declaration of Use of Generative AI

Under the publication ethics policy of Elicit Publishing Limited, the author(s) state that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used only to improve language clarity and formatting. These tools were not involved in the study's conception, research design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation. The author(s) take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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APPENDIX A. CONSENT STATEMENT AND QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

For transparency and replication, the full questionnaire instrument (all items and response anchors) is provided as supplementary material. Where instruments are proprietary, only adapted items are reproduced in accordance with scholarly fair-use practice; original instruments remain the property of their respective copyright holders.

Construct	Items (n)	Reverse-coded items	Core domain(s)	Example item (paraphrase)	Primary source(s)
CSR	8	CSR8R	Stakeholder-oriented responsibility; employee-focused responsibility; compliance/ethics	The organisation acts responsibly toward key stakeholders and treats employees fairly.	Turker (2009); Carroll (1991)
ECP	8	ECP8R	Career planning support; development opportunities; guidance and feedback	The organisation supports my long-term career planning and development.	Sturges et al. (2002)
TS	8	TS8R	Intent to stay; affective attachment; stability orientation	I intend to remain with this organisation for the foreseeable future.	Hom et al. (2017); Allen & Meyer (1990)