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THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN DRIVING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INNOVATION: INSIGHTS FROM SERBIAN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of transformational and transactional leadership styles on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Organizational Innovation (OI) within Serbian organizations. Using responses from 204 employees across small and medium, domestic and foreign companies, the research explores how leadership behaviors influence CSR initiatives and innovative practices. Data were collected through an online survey using a structured questionnaire and analyzed in SPSS with descriptive statistics, reliability testing, and multiple regression to examine relationships. Stratified sampling was applied to ensure representation across company size and origin. Two hypotheses were tested and proven highlighting significant differences of this influence based on organizational size and origin, with transformational leadership proving more effective than transactional leadership as a predictor of CSR and OI outcomes. The research findings point to the importance of culturally aligned leadership approaches in fostering sustainable and innovative practices, offering valuable insights for leadership development in transitional economies.

Key words: leadership, CSR, innovation, size, origin

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a cornerstone of organizational success, shaping the strategies and practices that drive sustainable and innovative business operations. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Organizational Innovation (OI) have become

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pivotal areas of focus, reflecting the growing importance of ethical engagement and adaptability in the modern business environment. CSR initiatives not only align organizations with societal expectations but also build stakeholder trust (Farooq et al., 2014), while OI enables firms to remain competitive in dynamic markets through creativity and adaptability (Chen et al., 2016). Joseph (2023) highlights that CSR initiatives are instrumental in driving employee engagement, as they align individual values with organizational objectives and cultivate a sense of shared purpose. This enhanced engagement not only supports ethical practices but also contributes to improved organizational performance, pointing to the strategic importance of CSR in fostering sustainable growth. Christensen, Mackey, and Whetten (2014) highlight that leaders' characteristics and behaviors are pivotal in shaping the development and implementation of CSR initiatives, influencing how firms embrace socially responsible practices. The research findings of Bahta et al., (2021) demonstrate that CSR significantly enhances both financial performance and innovation capacity in SMEs in Eritrean companies, while innovation capability plays a critical role in boosting business performance. This study also identifies that innovation capability partially mediates the relationship between CSR and overall firm performance, highlighting its pivotal role in this dynamic.

Amir, Siddique, and Ali (2022) argue that responsible leadership plays a critical role in advancing business sustainability by enhancing CSR practices and guiding managerial decisions to ensure compliance with ethical and sustainable standards. Within this framework, leadership styles play a critical role in influencing CSR and OI outcomes. Transformational leadership, known for its emphasis on vision, inspiration, and individualized consideration, aligns closely with practices that foster innovation and ethical responsibility (Podsakoff et al., 1990). Conversely, transactional leadership, with its structured approach and focus on performance metrics, offers a pragmatic pathway for achieving measurable outcomes, particularly in resource-intensive or operationally complex contexts (MacKenzie et al., 2001). However, the relative effectiveness of these styles is often moderated by organizational characteristics, including company's size and ownership structure. Furthermore, prior research indicates notable gaps: most CSR studies have been conducted in developed countries, whereas this phenomenon remains insufficiently explored in developing economies, despite the contextual differences in CSR practices. Additionally, existing studies report inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between CSR and firm performance (Javeed & Lefen, 2019).

The Serbian organizational landscape provides a unique opportunity to examine the dynamics of these leadership styles. As a transitional economy, Serbia faces distinct challenges, including evolving institutional structures, diverse organizational origins, and varying company sizes. These factors create a complex interactions between leadership styles and organizational outcomes, necessitating a deeper exploration of how cultural, structural, and economic contexts shape the effectiveness of transformational and transactional leadership (Hofstede, 2001).

Despite this growing body of work, there is still limited empirical evidence on how transformational and transactional leadership

jointly shape CSR and OI outcomes in transitional economies like Serbia. Prior studies have largely focused on developed markets or single leadership dimensions, leaving unanswered questions about how contextual moderators such as company size and ownership origin alter these relationships. This study addresses this gap by examining the interaction between leadership styles, CSR, and OI in a transitional context, where institutional and cultural dynamics may produce unique patterns of influence.

Building on these insights, the conceptual framework positions transformational and transactional leadership as independent variables, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Organizational Innovation (OI) as dependent variables, and organizational size and ownership structure as moderating factors. The framework hypothesizes that leadership style influences CSR and OI outcomes, while the strength and direction of these effects vary depending on company size and origin. Addressing these gaps, this study proposes two hypotheses:

- **H1:** Transformational leadership, significantly influences CSR and OI outcomes across organizations in Serbia.
- **H2:** Transformational leadership's impact on CSR and OI is moderated by organizational size and origin.

By testing these hypotheses, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on leadership's role in fostering sustainable and innovative practices, offering insights for leadership development and strategic planning in Serbian organizations. By analyzing the moderating effects of company's size and origin, this research offers insights into how contextual variables influence the adoption and impact of leadership practices. These research findings aim to contribute to the broader knowledge base on leadership, CSR, and innovation, providing practical implications for organizations operating in Serbia, and possibly other transitional economies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between leadership styles, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and Organizational Innovation (OI) has been extensively studied, revealing complex interactions influenced by contextual factors such as company size, organizational origin, and cultural dimensions. Transformational leadership, characterized by intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation, is often highlighted for its ability to foster ethical behavior and engage employees in meaningful CSR initiatives. Podsakoff et al. (1990) demonstrated its role in enhancing trust and commitment, while Chen et al. (2016) emphasized its capacity to inspire creativity and knowledge sharing.

Recent studies further illuminate the mediating role of CSR in connecting transformational leadership with organizational performance. For instance, Khaddage-Soboh et al. (2024) shows that transformational leadership enhances firm competitiveness through CSR-driven strategies. Similarly, Ganesh and Srivastava (2024) argue that collective organizational engagement, fostered by transformational leadership, strengthens CSR's integration into business operations, particularly in collectivist cultures like Serbia. This cultural compatibility aligns with Hofstede's (2001) framework, which classifies Serbia as a collectivist society that prioritizes group

cohesion and shared values. In such contexts, transformational leaders effectively drive CSR initiatives focused on community welfare and employee engagement, reflecting the cultural emphasis on collective well-being.

While transactional leadership, with its focus on structured performance metrics and contingent rewards, is often contrasted with transformational approaches, it is also with complex influence. Critics, including MacKenzie et al. (2001), argue that transactional leadership's rigid structures may hinder creativity and ethical engagement. However, under certain conditions, transactional leadership can complement transformational approaches. Changar and Atan (2021) demonstrate that transactional leadership, through well-defined effort-reward systems, facilitates the implementation of CSR initiatives, particularly in larger organizations where scalability is critical. Javeed et al. (2021) also highlight how transactional mechanisms align with incremental innovations, suggesting that combining transformational and transactional elements can yield holistic CSR and innovation outcomes.

The size and origin of an organization emerge as significant moderators in these dynamics. Mubeen et al. (2021) emphasize that small firms, due to their flexibility and direct leadership influence, respond more dynamically to transformational leadership. Conversely, larger firms rely on the structured processes enabled by transactional leadership to integrate CSR across their operations. Javeed and Lefen (2019) further explore the role of organizational origin, noting that foreign-led firms often demonstrate stronger CSR commitments due to alignment with global ethical standards and regulatory expectations. Kong et al. (2023) extend this perspective by showing that cultural diversity and market characteristics amplify the effectiveness of transformational leadership in multinational contexts, where adaptability and inclusivity are essential.

Cultural dimensions play a pivotal role in shaping leadership's effectiveness in CSR and OI. Hofstede's (2001) dimensions of individualism versus collectivism and uncertainty avoidance provide a lens to understand Serbia's cultural context, which favors group-oriented leadership styles. Farooq et al. (2014) reinforce this by illustrating how collectivist cultures prioritize CSR initiatives that focus on internal stakeholders, such as employees, over external stakeholders. Recent findings by Kong et al. (2023) and Javeed et al. (2021) suggest that culturally adaptive leadership approaches, particularly transformational styles, enhance CSR and innovation outcomes by aligning with both local and international values.

The integration of CSR and OI further highlights the importance of leadership adaptability. Transformational leadership consistently emerges as a critical driver of innovation by fostering environments conducive to experimentation and knowledge exchange. Chen et al. (2016) argue that intellectual stimulation promotes a culture of innovation, aligning with CSR's emphasis on sustainability and ethical practices. Khan, Rehman, and Fatima (2009) demonstrate that organizational size moderates the relationship between transformational leadership dimensions—such as attributed charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—and organizational innovation, with the exception of idealized influence. Their

findings also confirm a positive and significant impact of transformational leadership on fostering innovation within organizations. Conversely, transactional leadership's role in innovation remains contingent on context, with structured approaches being more effective for incremental improvements than disruptive innovations.

In summary, the literature reveals consistent conclusions that transformational leadership is a powerful enabler of CSR and OI, particularly in culturally aligned settings such as Serbia. However, understanding the role of company size and origin, linked to cultural diversity require integrating both transformational and transactional elements. The research presented in this study builds on these insights by exploring these dynamics within Serbian organizations, contributing to the growing body of knowledge on leadership's role in fostering sustainable and innovative practices.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. A questionnaire was administered to employees in organizations operating in Serbia, with the aim of examining the relationships between organizational characteristics and employee perceptions.

3.1. Data collection

Data were collected using a structured survey methodology, yielding 204 valid responses from employees in domestic (144) and foreign (60) organizations in Serbia. Respondents were classified into small (73), medium (112), and large (19) organizations. This classification follows the criteria outlined in the European Commission's definition of enterprise categories, which considers both the number of employees and organizational structure. Such categorization is commonly used in research to capture variations in resources, decision-making processes, and managerial practices across different organizational sizes, thereby providing a theoretically grounded framework for sampling and analysis.

3.2. Research instruments

In this research, leadership behavior was measured based on the following scales: Core transformational leader behavior, High performance expectations, Supportive leader behavior, Intellectual stimulation (Podsakoff et al., 1990; MacKenzie et al., 2001), Contingent reward behavior (Podsakoff et al., 1984; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; MacKenzie et al., 2001) and the Contingent punishment behavior (Podsakoff et al., 1984). To measure Corporate social responsibility, we used four scale instrument (Farooq et al., 2014): CSR to environment, CSR to community, CSR to consumers, and CSR to empoyees. Organizational innovation was measured by the one scale instrument containing six items (Chen, L., et al., 2016). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

3.3. Data analysis

The data collected in the research were processed in accordance with the applied instruments. The data was processed in the IBM SPSS Statistics 22 program. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of the relationship between independent variables, dimensions of Leadership behavior

and dependents Corporate social responsibility, and Organizational innovation were used. Regression analysis is used to determine the predictive influence of independent variables on dependent variables. For statistical differences between sub-samples of Origin and Size, we used The independent T-test. We used a hierarchical regression analysis to investigate the moderating effect of Origin and Size on the regression between Leadership, CSR, and Organizational innovation.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. General sample

In Table 1. descriptive statistics is shown with the full name of the used scales, abbreviations, mean value, standard deviation and Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha values vary in the range from α = 0.808 (CSR_con) to α = 0.950 (L_3).

The correlation coefficients between the independent leadership dimensions and the dependent variables, CSR and OI, are presented in Table 2. A statistically significant influence of leadership dimensions on most dependent variables was confirmed, except for L_2, which has a significant relationship with CSR_com and OI, and L_6, which has a statistically significant impact on OI but does not significantly affect CSR. Additionally, although not statistically significant, an increase in employees' perception of L_6 is associated with a decrease in the perception of CSR_con and CSR_emp. The presented results of correlation analysis confirm H1.

We applied multiple regression analysis to evaluate the contribution of independent variables to the total R-square in regressions where CSR and OI were dependent variables. Leadership dimensions were identified as the best predictors of CSR_con (R^2 = 0.936), indicating that 94% of the variance in CSR toward consumers can be predicted based on leadership behavior. Leadership also accounts for 17% of the variance in CSR_com and 19% in OI. L_4 significantly influences CSR_env, CSR_com, and CSR_emp. Additionally, L_1, L_3, and L_5 contribute to CSR_emp, with beta coefficients ranging from 0.180 to 0.209. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 3 and illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Name	Abbrev.	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Alpha
Core transformational leader behavior	L_1	204	1.00	7.00	4.7402	1.60920	.908
High performance expectations	L_2	204	1.00	7.00	4.9886	1.47052	.796
Supportive leader behavior	L_3	204	1.00	7.00	3.9473	1.84280	.950
Intellectual stimulation	L_4	204	1.00	7.00	4.2635	1.75048	.935
Contingent reward behaviour	L_5	204	1.00	7.00	4.3260	1.88421	.930
Contingent punishment behavior	L_6	204	1.00	7.00	4.6454	1.57779	.892
CSR to environment	CSR_env	204	1.00	7.00	3.9142	1.71256	.941
CSR to community	CSR_com	204	1.00	7.00	3.6977	1.71908	.884
CSR to consumers	CSR_con	204	1.00	7.00	4.2157	1.75428	.808
CSR to employees	CSR_emp	204	1.00	7.00	4.3342	1.58559	.923
Organizational innovation	OI	204	1.00	7.00	4.2639	1.43808	.938
	Valid N (listwise)	204					

Table 2. Correlation analysis

	L_1	L_2	L_3	L_4	L_5	L_6
CSR_env	.384**	.108	.362**	.425**	.375**	.020
CSR_com	.348**	.145*	.344**	.370**	.352**	.042
CSR_con	.700**	.116	.780**	.814**	.935**	-.061
CSR_emp	.604**	.109	.631**	.628**	.605**	-.059
OI	.379**	.230**	.297**	.377**	.284**	.164*

Table 3. The predictive influence of leadership on Corporate Social Responsibility and Organizational Innovation

Dependent	Independent	β	t	Sig.	R^2	F
CSR_env	L_1	.114	1.071	.285	.200	.000
	L_2	-.005	-.063	.950		
	L_3	.014	.119	.906		
	L_4	.243	2.131	.034		
	L_5	.129	1.315	.190		
	L_6	.029	.364	.716		
CSR_com	L_1	.079	.728	.467	.168	.000
	L_2	.063	.741	.459		
	L_3	.095	.814	.417		
	L_4	.127	1.095	.275		
	L_5	.143	1.428	.155		
	L_6	.030	.370	.711		
CSR_con	L_1	-.021	-.713	.477	.936	.000
	L_2	.002	.090	.928		
	L_3	.055	1.688	.093		
	L_4	.318	9.846	.000		
	L_5	.692	24.938	.000		
	L_6	-.024	-1.047	.296		
CSR_emp	L_1	.180	2.119	.035	.489	.000
	L_2	-.003	-.046	.963		
	L_3	.209	2.271	.024		
	L_4	.201	2.201	.029		
	L_5	.202	2.589	.010		
	L_6	-.009	-.134	.893		
OI	L_1	.207	1.940	.054	.193	.000
	L_2	.055	.654	.514		
	L_3	.046	.402	.688		
	L_4	.168	1.470	.143		
	L_5	.005	.055	.956		
	L_6	.143	1.776	.077		

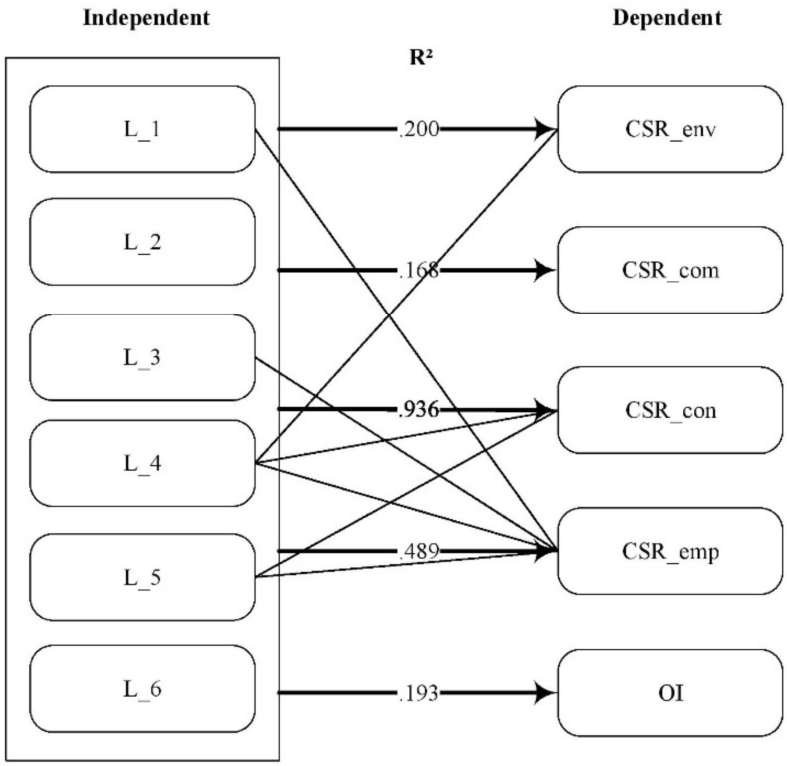

Figure 1. The predictive influence of leadership on Corporate Social Responsibility and Organizational Innovation

4.2. Size

The subsample of small organizations included 73 respondents, medium-sized organizations had 112 respondents, and large organizations had 19 respondents. Due to the size of the subsamples, only small (S) and medium (M) organizations were considered for further analysis. The largest differences in mean values were observed in the dimensions L_3, L_4, L_5, and CSR_con. Descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent dimensions, categorized by organizational size, are presented in Table 4.

Table 5 presents the correlations between leadership dimensions and the dimensions of CSR and OI based on organizational size. The results of the correlation analysis for the S and M subsamples align with the general sample, except for the influence of L_6, which is not significant for any dependent variable in the subsamples, and the influence of L_2, which, consistently with the general sample, has a significant relationship with CSR_con and OI. Additionally, L_2 shows a statistically significant impact on CSR_con in the S subsample. In the M subsample, these relationships are not statistically significant.

The results of the Independent Samples T-Test confirm that there is a statistically significant difference between the S and M subsamples for the dimensions L_3, L_4, L_5, and CSR_con. The results indicate that these dimensions are more significant in the S subsample compared to the M subsample. The results of the differences between the subsamples are presented in Table 6.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics: Size

Size	Minimum		Maximum		Mean		Std. Deviation	
	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M
L_1	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.9772	4.6071	1.61238	1.59781
L_2	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.8995	5.0804	1.48831	1.43964
L_3	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.3733	3.6406	1.96944	1.66806
L_4	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.7329	3.9933	1.83491	1.60533
L_5	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.8082	4.0692	1.82075	1.87300
L_6	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.5936	4.6964	1.56174	1.61794
CSR_env	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	3.9075	3.8795	1.70808	1.73594
CSR_com	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	3.5114	3.7827	1.76128	1.65897
CSR_con	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.6941	3.9435	1.73094	1.70666
CSR_emp	1.17	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.5776	4.2292	1.71596	1.47113
OI	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.0228	4.3780	1.50650	1.38813

Table 5. Correlation analysis: Size

Size	L_1		L_2		L_3		L_4		L_5		L_6	
	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M
CSR_env	.512**	.296**	.169	.079	.507**	.240*	.554**	.333**	.436**	.341**	-.007	.034
CSR_com	.531**	.239*	.261*	.072	.495**	.246**	.520**	.297**	.438**	.349**	.095	-.011
CSR_con	.737**	.667**	.269*	.065	.801**	.733**	.863**	.787**	.931**	.937**	.100	-.123
CSR_emp	.718**	.483**	.213	.052	.776**	.467**	.723**	.527**	.606**	.593**	.039	-.121
OI	.589**	.254**	.338**	.131	.454**	.204*	.520**	.309**	.423**	.242*	.218	.091

Table 6. Independent Samples T-Test: Size

Size	L_1		L_2		L_3		L_4		L_5		L_6	
	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M
CSR_env	.512**	.296**	.169	.079	.507**	.240*	.554**	.333**	.436**	.341**	-.007	.034
CSR_com	.531**	.239*	.261*	.072	.495**	.246**	.520**	.297**	.438**	.349**	.095	-.011
CSR_con	.737**	.667**	.269*	.065	.801**	.733**	.863**	.787**	.931**	.937**	.100	-.123
CSR_emp	.718**	.483**	.213	.052	.776**	.467**	.723**	.527**	.606**	.593**	.039	-.121
OI	.589**	.254**	.338**	.131	.454**	.204*	.520**	.309**	.423**	.242*	.218	.091

Hierarchical regression analysis confirmed the moderating effect of organizational size on the relationship between L_1 and CSR_com, CSR_emp, and OI, as well as the moderating effect of size on the regression coefficients between L_3 and CSR_emp. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 7 (R square and F-change), including only the pairs where the moderating influence of size is confirmed. This confirms one part of H2.

Table 7. Hierarchical regression analysis with Size as a moderator

Independent	Dependent	R square	F-change	Sig F-change
L_1	CSR_com	.142	4.558	.034
	CSR_emp	.372	7.463	.007
	OI	.169	6.367	.012
L_3	CSR_emp	.405	6.738	.010

4.3. Origin

Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent dimensions based on the origin of the organizations. Domestic organizations (D) employed 144 respondents, while foreign organizations (F) employed 60 respondents. The largest differences in mean values between the subsamples were observed for the dimensions OI and CSR_env, which were higher in the F subsample, and CSR_emp, whose mean value was higher in the D subsample.

The correlation analysis between leadership dimensions and CSR and OI dimensions based on the origin of the organizations is presented in Table 9. The relationships between variables are consistent with the general sample, with a few exceptions. Specifically, L_2, in addition to its significant impact on CSR_com and OI (as observed in the general sample), also has a statistically significant relationship with CSR_env and CSR_con in the D subsample. In the F subsample, L_2 does not exhibit a statistically significant impact but shows a negative influence on all CSR dimensions.

Consistent with the general sample, L_6 has a positive and statistically significant impact on OI in the D subsample. However, in the F subsample, L_6 demonstrates a negative influence on all dependent variables and a statistically significant impact on CSR_con and CSR_emp.

Hierarchical regression analysis confirmed the moderating effect of the organization's origin on the relationship between L_6 and CSR_env, CSR_com, and CSR_con. There are no significant correlations between L_6 and CSR_env or CSR_com in either the general sample or the D and F subsamples. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 10 (R square and F-change), including only the pairs where a moderating influence of origin is confirmed. This confirms the second part of H2.

5. DISCUSSION

In Serbian organizations, leaders demonstrate a task-oriented approach, characterized by relatively low consideration for employees' feelings (mean value 3.9), while maintaining high expectations for employee performance (mean value 4.99). Leaders are more inclined to criticize underperformance or results below their expectations (mean value 4.64) than to offer positive feedback or praise (mean value 4.3). This leadership style suggests a prioritization of accountability and results, which can drive organizational performance but may undermine relational dynamics. These findings align with Mubeen et al. (2021),

Table 8. Descriptive statistics: Origin

Origin	Minimum		Maximum		Mean		Std. Deviation	
	D	F	D	F	D	F	D	F
L_1	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.7060	4.8222	1.63513	1.55558
L_2	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	5.0417	4.8611	1.52517	1.33375
L_3	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	3.9566	3.9250	1.83124	1.88566
L_4	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.2066	4.4000	1.81638	1.58729
L_5	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.3559	4.2542	1.87166	1.92799
L_6	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.6505	4.6333	1.62552	1.46998
CSR_env	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	3.8490	4.0708	1.63314	1.89507
CSR_com	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	3.7083	3.6722	1.63151	1.92759
CSR_con	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.2338	4.1722	1.74081	1.80028
CSR_emp	1.00	1.00	7.00	7.00	4.3970	4.1833	1.56123	1.64612
OI	1.00	2.17	7.00	7.00	4.2002	4.4167	1.44527	1.42102

Table 9. Correlation analysis: Origin

Origin	L_1		L_2		L_3		L_4		L_5		L_6	
	D	F	D	F	D	F	D	F	D	F	D	F
CSR_env	.372**	.414**	.185*	-.059	.330**	.434**	.403**	.483**	.366**	.401**	.108	-.182
CSR_com	.349**	.352**	.221**	-.030	.301**	.433**	.337**	.462**	.341**	.378**	.137	-.174
CSR_con	.705**	.694**	.184*	-.070	.811**	.708**	.829**	.791**	.930**	.948**	.036	-.312*
CSR_emp	.592**	.648**	.152	-.015	.604**	.695**	.622**	.671**	.591**	.636**	.021	-.262*
OI	.407**	.300*	.244**	.212	.303**	.285*	.383**	.354**	.270**	.324*	.231**	-.017

Table 10. Hierarchical regression analysis with Origin as a moderator

Independent	Dependent	R square	F-change	Sig F-change
L6	CSR_env	.020	3.919	.049
	CSR_com	.023	4.375	.038
	CSR_con	.031	5.594	.019

who identified that task-oriented leadership enhances accountability yet risks reducing employees' engagement when insufficient attention is given to supportive or relational behaviors. Employees in Serbian organizations report feeling generally valued (mean value 4.3), reflecting an underlying recognition of their contributions. However, organizational engagement in societal well-being projects remains limited. This discrepancy may indicate a disconnect between employee expectations and the broader strategic focus of leadership, particularly regarding CSR.

Nearly all leadership dimensions were found to significantly influence CSR and OI, suggesting that leadership behaviors play a pivotal role in shaping organizational outcomes. High performance expectations, for instance, were shown to have a

statistically significant impact on CSR initiatives directed toward the community and organizational innovation. These findings are consistent with Podsakoff et al. (1990), who emphasized the influence of visionary and performance-driven leadership on organizational innovation. Interestingly, high performance expectations had no significant effect on CSR actions focused on the environment, consumers, or employees. This lack of emphasis could suggest that leaders in Serbian organizations do not prioritize or maintain high expectations regarding CSR activities in these areas. As noted by Farooq et al. (2014), such outcomes may reflect cultural or institutional factors influencing the alignment of leadership behaviors with CSR initiatives. On the other hand, employees are aware of organizational contributions to non-governmental organization (NGO) activities and campaigns promoting societal welfare. This awareness underscores the importance of external CSR initiatives, even when internal CSR activities may lack the same level of focus or leadership support.

Contingent punishment behavior was found to positively and significantly influence employees' perceptions of organizational efforts related to development and improvement, although it did not have a statistically significant impact on CSR actions. This aligns with Changar and Atan (2021), who highlighted that transactional leadership positively influences CSR outcomes, particularly through contingent reward behavior, which facilitates effort-reward relationships and enhances leader-follower interactions. These mechanisms actively promote CSR practices by creating clear incentives and reinforcing organizational goals. It is plausible that leaders in Serbian organizations employ transactional leadership styles with well-structured incentives, contributing to the positive impact of contingent reward behavior on CSR practices. However, the data indicate that punishment behavior, while influencing perceptions of organizational development, is not as effective in driving CSR actions. Notably, higher levels of punishment behavior were associated with a decrease in employees' perceptions of CSR efforts toward consumers and employees. This finding aligns with Javeed et al. (2021), who emphasized that punitive leadership practices, when perceived as inconsistent or excessive, can undermine trust and erode employees' engagement with CSR initiatives. In the Serbian context, where cultural and organizational norms prioritize collective well-being (Hofstede, 2001; Nedeljković et al., 2018), such punitive approaches may clash with employees' expectations of fairness and shared responsibility.

Leadership explained substantial variance in CSR dimensions, particularly those directed toward consumers (94%) and employees (49%). This points to the significant influence of leadership behaviors on shaping CSR practices. However, the predictive influence of leadership was lower for CSR dimensions focused on the environment (20%), community (17%), and Organizational Innovation (19%). These findings suggest that while leadership strongly drives employee- and consumer-related CSR actions, it is less effective in influencing externally focused initiatives. This pattern may reflect a leadership focus on internal stakeholders and organizational goals, consistent with Serbia's collectivist cultural orientation, where employee welfare and immediate organizational needs are

prioritized over broader societal and environmental concerns (Farooq et al., 2014).

A key predictor in the regression model was intellectual stimulation, a dimension of transformational leadership that involves encouraging employees to critically evaluate their work and discover innovative solutions (Podsakoff et al., 1990). Intellectual stimulation significantly enhances employees' perceptions of CSR and OI by fostering creativity and problem-solving. The complexity of intellectual stimulation's effects is well-documented, with MacKenzie et al. (2001) noting that its positive outcomes are more pronounced in environments with a strong orientation toward CSR dimensions, including those aimed at employees, consumers, and the environment. In Serbian organizations, where leadership practices strongly emphasize performance expectations, intellectual stimulation provides a mechanism for aligning organizational goals with sustainable and innovative practices.

These findings confirm hypothesis H1, demonstrating that transformational leadership significantly influences CSR and OI outcomes through all dimensions, except high performance expectations. The role of intellectual stimulation, in particular, was prominent, fostering innovative thinking and aligning employee perceptions with organizational sustainability goals. This is consistent with previous research (Podsakoff et al., 1990; MacKenzie et al., 2001) that highlights transformational leadership as a driver of creativity and ethical practices. The results indicate that transformational leadership behaviors contribute meaningfully across diverse organizational contexts, underscoring their universal relevance.

Additionally, cultural orientations appear to moderate the influence of leadership on CSR. Farooq et al. (2014) observed that individualist employees are more inclined toward environmental and community-related CSR actions, whereas collectivist employees prioritize CSR activities that directly benefit employees. Given Serbia's predominantly collectivist orientation (Hofstede, 2001; Nedeljković et al., 2018), it is unsurprising that leadership behaviors significantly influence employee-related CSR dimensions. However, as individualist tendencies gradually emerge in certain contexts, leadership strategies may need to adapt to address the evolving priorities of employees and stakeholders.

Studies on national culture (Hofstede, 1980, 2001) categorize Serbia as a collectivist society, emphasizing group-oriented values and reflecting a workforce predominantly composed of collectivist employees, with a smaller proportion of individualist employees. However, Serbia has undergone significant political, social, and economic transformations since these initial studies. Recent research by Nedeljković et al. (2018) confirms that in-group collectivism remains high, reflecting strong interpersonal bonds and prioritization of group welfare. In contrast, institutional collectivism—defined as societal practices that encourage collective resource distribution and action (House et al., 2004)—remains relatively low. This discrepancy is likely the result of cultural shifts or cultural shock during Serbia's transitional period (Nedeljković et al., 2018).

These cultural insights provide context for the current findings, suggesting that most respondents can be classified as collectivist employees, with a notable but smaller group of individualist employees. This alignment

explains why almost all leadership dimensions significantly contribute to CSR directed toward employees. Serbian organizations tend to emphasize employee-centric initiatives and group welfare, reflecting the collectivist cultural predisposition. Farooq et al. (2014) similarly observed that collectivist employees prioritize CSR activities benefiting internal stakeholders, such as employees, over external initiatives.

In addition to intellectual stimulation, contingent reward behavior emerged as a significant predictor of CSR directed toward consumers and employees. This dimension represents a structured exchange where leaders reward followers' efforts, fostering trust and engagement (MacKenzie et al., 2001). Changar and Atan (2021) emphasize that transactional leadership facilitates CSR through effort-reward mechanisms and active leader-follower interactions. In the Serbian context, leaders applying contingent reward behavior with appropriate incentives positively influence employee perceptions of CSR directed toward consumers ($\beta = 0.692$) and employees ($\beta = 0.202$). These results highlight the effectiveness of reward-based leadership approaches in reinforcing ethical and employee-focused practices.

Significant differences in the influence of leadership on CSR and OI are evident between small and medium-sized organizations in Serbia. The findings confirm a part of hypothesis H2, illustrating that the impact of transformational leadership on CSR and OI is moderated by organizational size and origin, with stronger effects observed in smaller and domestic organizations. In small organizations, relational leadership dynamics, such as closer leader-employee connections, amplify the influence of transformational leadership on CSR and OI outcomes. Similarly, in domestic organizations, cultural alignment reinforces employee perceptions of leadership's ethical and innovative practices. These results emphasize that the relational and cultural contexts in small and domestic organizations create fertile ground for leadership behaviors to drive sustainability and innovation.

High performance expectations, a dimension that impacts employee attitudes and behavior, involve demands for task quality and adherence to time constraints. In small organizations, these expectations significantly influence CSR directed toward the community and consumers, while in medium-sized organizations, this influence is not statistically significant. Leaders in small organizations emphasize a sense of responsibility toward the natural environment and future generations, aligning with findings by Farooq et al. (2014), which highlight that leadership in collectivist-oriented environments fosters a stronger focus on ethical and community-oriented initiatives.

Leaders in small organizations place significant importance on consumers, fostering an organizational culture where employees understand the critical role of customer satisfaction and actively prioritize the protection of consumer rights. This dynamic reinforces internal stakeholder engagement and positions small organizations as more agile in responding to consumer demands compared to medium-sized enterprises.

Leadership in small organizations also includes setting high expectations for innovation. Employees perceive that their organizations strive to adapt workflows and introduce new products or services rapidly to meet customer needs. These behaviors align

with transformational leadership traits, particularly intellectual stimulation, which encourages employees to reexamine assumptions and develop innovative solutions (Podsakoff et al., 1990; Chen et al., 2016). Additionally, contingent punishment behavior positively influences innovation in small organizations. Given the team-oriented and committed work environment typical of small organizations, employees are less likely to perceive punishment as a personal attack. Instead, they view it as a fair and necessary organizational response, driving accountability and improvement. This supports Javeed et al. (2021), who emphasized that the perception of fairness in punitive actions moderates their impact on organizational outcomes.

Leaders in small organizations are significantly more likely than their counterparts in medium-sized enterprises to consider and respect the feelings of their followers (mean value 4.37 in small organizations compared to 3.64 in medium-sized organizations). They actively encourage employees to find new solutions and critically evaluate their work, fostering creativity and engagement. Furthermore, leaders frequently provide feedback, acknowledge good performance, and recognize employee achievements, which strengthens employee perceptions of organizational support. Employees in small organizations also better recognize and appreciate the importance of consumers to the organization, as compared to employees in medium-sized organizations. These behaviors align with the findings of Mubeen et al. (2021), who highlighted the role of close leader-employee interactions in enhancing organizational responsiveness and commitment to stakeholder needs.

The results of the hierarchical analysis confirmed that organizational size moderates specific relationships between leadership, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and Organizational Innovation (OI). In small Serbian organizations, increases in Core Transformational Leader Behavior are associated with greater growth in employees' perceptions of organizational actions that positively impact society, benefit employees, and contribute to organizational development compared to medium-sized organizations. Leaders in small organizations make deliberate efforts to clarify the organization's vision, model successful behaviors, and provide strong support for employees in achieving organizational goals. These behaviors align with transformational leadership principles, particularly inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, which enhance employee engagement and alignment with organizational values (Podsakoff et al., 1990; Chen et al., 2016).

As leadership efforts intensify, employees perceive an increased organizational commitment to environmental responsibility and the welfare of future generations. This effect supports findings by Farooq et al. (2014), who emphasized the role of transformational leadership in fostering CSR initiatives focused on internal and external stakeholders. Additionally, this leadership behavior influences employees' perceptions that the organization is proactive in seeking new ways to address consumer needs and continuously striving for improvement and development. These results highlight the agility and responsiveness characteristic of small organizations, where leaders' closer interactions with employees foster trust and a shared commitment to innovation and sustainability.

Core Transformational Leader Behavior

and Supportive Leader Behavior also significantly influence employees' perceptions of the organization's contributions to voluntary activities and its focus on employee well-being. Employees in small organizations feel that the organization supports their personal and professional development to a greater extent than in medium-sized organizations. This dynamic underscores the critical role of leadership in creating an organizational culture that prioritizes sustainability, innovation, and employee-centric practices. Leaders in small organizations foster an environment where employees perceive organizational actions as directly benefiting their well-being and aligning with broader ethical and sustainable goals. These findings are consistent with the work of Mubeen et al. (2021), who identified the importance of relational leadership behaviors in enhancing employee engagement and organizational outcomes. By fostering strong leader-employee connections, small organizations exhibit greater flexibility in implementing CSR and OI initiatives, reflecting the transformational leadership's potential to drive employee perceptions of organizational commitment to sustainability and continuous improvement.

The research results reveal significant differences between domestic and foreign organizations in Serbia regarding leadership dimensions and their influence on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Organizational Innovation (OI). Consistent with the general sample, leadership dimensions significantly impact CSR and OI outcomes, with the exceptions of High Performance Expectations and Contingent Punishment Behavior.

In domestic organizations, leaders with high performance expectations positively influence employees' perceptions that the organization invests extra effort to create a positive impact on the natural environment and society. Employees also perceive that their organization prioritizes consumer well-being and demonstrates innovative approaches to work and problem-solving. These findings align with the work of Podsakoff et al. (1990), who emphasized the role of transformational leadership in fostering innovation and ethical organizational practices. Furthermore, contingent punishment behavior influences employees' perceptions of organizational innovation, suggesting that employees in domestic organizations accept negative feedback when it is perceived as fair or moderate. This supports Javeed et al. (2021), who found that fairness in punitive leadership moderates its impact on employee engagement and organizational outcomes. Employees in these organizations associate performance demands with organizational development, reinforcing their perception of leadership's constructive intentions.

In foreign organizations, however, high performance expectations have a markedly different impact. As leaders' expectations for achieving high performance and their disapproval of low productivity increase, employees' perceptions of all CSR activities diminish. Although the influence of high performance expectations is not statistically significant in foreign organizations, these findings hold critical implications. When leaders' expectations exceed employees' capabilities or align poorly with organizational priorities, the effects may become negative, leading to increased stress, dissatisfaction, and a diminished focus on CSR. Wang et al. (2021) similarly observed that excessive performance demands encourage risk-taking behavior among employees, which can undermine long-term

organizational goals. To mitigate these adverse effects, leaders in foreign organizations operating in Serbia should ensure that their performance expectations are appropriately aligned with employees' capacities and organizational objectives.

Contingent punishment behavior significantly impacts employees' perceptions of organizational responsibility toward consumers and employees. Hierarchical regression analysis confirmed that organizational origin moderates the relationship between contingent punishment behavior and CSR dimensions focused on the environment, community, and consumers. In foreign organizations, contingent punishment behavior negatively affects employees' perceptions of CSR toward consumers. Employees perceive that unfulfilled expectations and interventions such as disapproval or criticism are applied inconsistently or excessively, leading them to believe that the organization inadequately respects consumer rights or diminishes the importance of consumers. This is consistent with findings by Farooq et al. (2014), who noted that leadership behaviors perceived as misaligned with stakeholder priorities negatively affect employee engagement and trust.

In domestic organizations, the relationship between contingent punishment behavior and CSR to consumers is positive but not statistically significant. Employees in these organizations may view punishment as a justified response tied to organizational development, further reinforcing the perception of leadership fairness. These differences suggest that cultural and organizational contexts influence how leadership behaviors, particularly punitive actions, are perceived and impact CSR outcomes.

Although consumers are critical to organizational growth and sustainability, foreign organizations in Serbia face challenges in aligning leadership behaviors with consumer-focused CSR initiatives. Employees in these organizations often perceive that task completion is prioritized over quality, negatively affecting organizational responsibility toward consumers and stakeholders. This finding highlights the importance of applying contingent punishment behaviors fairly and consistently to avoid unintended adverse effects on employee and consumer perceptions. Overall, the fundamental difference between leadership in domestic and foreign organizations in Serbia lies in the way performance expectations and contingent punishment behaviors are applied and perceived. In domestic companies, leadership tends to balance high performance expectations with a developmental and supportive approach, which employees interpret as a commitment to organizational growth, ethical practices, and innovation. Punitive actions, when present, are generally perceived as fair and constructive, reinforcing trust in leadership. In contrast, leadership in foreign companies often emphasizes performance targets more rigidly, with punitive measures perceived as inconsistent or overly strict. This approach can weaken employees' perceptions of CSR, particularly toward consumers, as task completion is prioritized over quality and stakeholder well-being. These differences reflect variations in leadership philosophy, feedback practices, and alignment between organizational goals and employee capacities, shaped by the cultural and managerial traditions of domestic versus foreign ownership. These results confirm the second part of H2, what finally proves H2.

6. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the complex ways in which leadership behaviors influence Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Organizational Innovation (OI) within Serbian organizations. The results demonstrate that leadership styles significantly shape employees' perceptions of organizational responsibility and innovation, with variations based on organizational size and origin. These findings highlight the importance of aligning leadership practices with both internal dynamics and external cultural and organizational contexts.

Transformational leadership, particularly intellectual stimulation, fosters an environment where employees are empowered to innovate and align their efforts with ethical and sustainable practices. Transactional leadership, especially through contingent reward behavior, reinforces trust and engagement, positively influencing CSR perceptions. However, contingent punishment behavior showed complex effects, supporting innovation in smaller organizations but negatively affecting CSR in others, particularly foreign organizations. These contradictory impacts suggest that leadership strategies must be tailored to specific organizational and cultural environments.

Smaller organizations in Serbia benefit significantly from relational and adaptable leadership, enabling leaders to foster closer connections with employees and respond effectively to stakeholder needs. In contrast, medium-sized and foreign organizations face challenges when leadership behaviors, such as high performance expectations and punitive approaches, are perceived as excessive or misaligned with employee values. This highlights the need for culturally sensitive and context-specific leadership approaches, particularly in organizations operating in diverse cultural environments.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of how leadership shapes sustainable and innovative practices by integrating leadership behavior, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and organizational innovation (OI) into a unified conceptual framework. The research employs validated measurement scales and provides a novel perspective by empirically examining the interrelationships among these constructs within the context of organizations in Serbia, an underexplored setting in the existing literature. This contextual focus thereby enhances the understanding of leadership and innovation in developing countries.

From a managerial perspective, the findings indicate significant practical implications across various sectors, as they suggest that leadership oriented toward sustainability and innovation represents not only an ethical or reputational advantage but also a strategic factor contributing to long-term competitive sustainability.

Despite these contributions, the study has certain limitations. The data were collected exclusively in Serbia, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other cultural and economic contexts. Furthermore, although the study integrates leadership, CSR, and OI, other potential moderators, such as organizational learning or leader–member exchange (LMX), were not considered and could provide additional insights. Additionally, examining industry-specific factors or other moderating

variables, such as workforce composition or organizational culture, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how leadership shapes sustainable and innovative practices. Future research could address these limitations, and comparative studies across industries and countries would help validate and refine the proposed framework. Also, future studies could investigate longitudinal trends in leadership impact on CSR and OI to better capture evolving dynamics.

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УЛОГА ЛИДЕРСТВА У ОСНАЖИВАЊУ КОРПОРАТИВНЕ ДРУШТВЕНЕ ОДГОВОРНОСТИ И ИНОВАЦИЈА: УВИД ЗАСНОВАН НА ОРГАНИЗАЦИЈАМА У СРБИЈИ

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Извод

Циљ овог истраживања јесте испитивање утицаја трансформационог и трансакционог стила лидерства на корпоративну друштвену одговорност (КДО) и организационе иновације (ОИ) у оквиру организација у Србији. На основу одговора 204 запослена у малим и средњим, домаћим и страним компанијама, истраживање анализира на који начин лидерска понашања утичу на КДО иницијативе и иновативне праксе. Подаци су прикупљени путем онлајн анкете, коришћењем структурисаног упитника, а анализирани су у програму SPSS применом дескриптивне статистике, тестова поузданости и вишеструке регресионе анализе ради испитивања односа између варијабли. Примењено је стратификовано узорковање како би се обезбедила репрезентативност у односу на величину и порекло компанија. Тестиране су две хипотезе, чији резултати указују на значајне разлике у утицају лидерства у зависности од организационе величине и порекла, при чему се трансформационо лидерство показало као ефикаснији предиктор исхода КДО-а и организационих иновација у односу на трансакционо лидерство. Налази истраживања указују на значај културолошки усклађених приступа лидерству у подстицању одрживих и иновативних пракси, пружајући драгоцене увиде за развој лидерства у транзиционим економијама.

Кључне речи: лидерство, друштвена одговорност предузећа, иновације, величина, порекло

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