Received: 12 March 2021 | Revised: 25 July 2021 | Accepted: 9 August 2021

DOI: 10.1002/csr.2201

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management

WILEY

Linking environmental management and employees' organizational identification: The mediating role of environmental attitude

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Abstract

The fundamental research question in the present study is whether perceived environmental management practices relate to employees' organizational identification. Specifically, it is hypothesized that this relationship is mediated by employees' environmental attitudes. The corresponding research model adopts a multi-theoretical approach that combines two different theoretical lenses. Goal-framing theory is introduced to predict whether perceived environmental management practices affect employees' environmental attitudes, while green-person-organization fit is applied to explain the relationship between employees' environmental attitudes and organizational identification. The research model was tested using a cross-sectional research design with data from 206 employees from tourist service companies in Germany. The results, which largely support the research model, shed light on a thus far unexplored mechanism that mediates individual reactions to organizational practices and contrasts the more established proposition that employees first identify with their organization before they develop attitudes that are in accordance with corresponding ingroup norms. Implications for both research and practice are discussed.

KEYWORDS
corporate sustainability, environmental management, goal-framing theory, green-person-organization fit, micro-CSR, organizational identification

1 | INTRODUCTION

Due to growing stakeholder demands for environmental friendliness, organizations are increasingly implementing environmental management practices (EMP) (Sarkis, Gonzalez-Torre, & Adenso-Diaz, 2010; Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Helmig, Spraul, & Ingenhoff, 2016; Salim, Padfield, Hansen, Mohamad, Yuzir, et al., 2018). A growing body of corporate greening and operational management literature reflects this development. Investigations in this research stream consider how EMP relate to firm-level outcomes, such as corporate or environmental performance (Bacinello, Tontini, & Alberton, 2021; Latan, Jabbour, de Sousa Jabbour, Wamba, & Shahbaz, 2018; Longoni, Luzzini, & Guerci, 2018; Lundgren & Zhou, 2017; Pereira-Moliner, Claver-Cortés, Molina-Azorín, & Tarí, 2012; Song, Zhao, & Zeng, 2017; Wagner, 2007; Zhang & Ouyang, 2021), innovations (Hamdoun, Jabbour, & Othman, 2018; Wagner, 2008; Wu, Liang, & Zhang, 2020), or competitiveness (Lannelongue, Gonzalez-Benito, & Quiroz, 2017; Molina-Azorín, Tarí, Pereira-Moliner, Lopez-Gamero, & Pertusa-Ortega, 2015;

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Yang, Lin, Chan, & Sheu, 2010). Less attention has been paid to intra-organizational processes and factors at the individual level (Andersson, Jackson, & Russell, 2013; Yoon, Jang, & Lee, 2016). A literature review found no specific investigations into the relationship between EMP and employees' organizational identification (OI), which refers to a "perceived oneness with an organization and the experience of the organization's successes and failures as one's own" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 103). This is surprising as OI is an important factor for different employee level outcomes, and accordingly is a topic that frequently gains attention from organizational scholars (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000; Glavas & Godwin, 2013). In this context, investigations have shown that OI is positively associated with employee job satisfaction (De Roeck, Marique, Stinglhamber, & Swaen, 2014; Van Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher, & Christ, 2004), organizational citizenship behavior (Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002; Farooq, Payaud, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2014), or an intention to stay (Cole & Bruch, 2006; Jones, 2010). Furthermore, institutional theorists increasingly incorporate the concept of OI into their work. OI is perceived as a critical source of agency (Dejordy & Creed, 2016; Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011), intentionality (King, Felin, & Whetten, 2010), or resistance to institutional pressure (Schilke, 2018). However, recent research indicates that OI can also lead to lower performance, negative emotions, or reduced well-being (Conroy, Henle, Shore, & Stelman, 2017).

Against this background, scholars have addressed the question of which factors and mechanisms influence OI. Much of this research focuses on corporate social responsibility (CSR) as an important driver of OI (De Roeck, El Akremi, & Swaen, 2016; Glavas & Godwin, 2013; Jones, 2010; Shah, Cheema, Al-Ghazali, Ali, & Rafiq, 2021). However, the work of El Akremi, Gond, Swaen, De Roeck, and Igalens (2018) revealed that employees perceive CSR not as a unidimensional construct but rather as discrete practices (including EMP) that address different stakeholders. Practices that target different stakeholders in turn influence OI to a certain degree via different mechanisms (De Roeck & Maon, 2018; Farooq et al., 2014; Farooq, Rupp, & Farooq, 2017). Unlike multidimensional stakeholder-based CSR constructs (El Akremi et al., 2018; Turker, 2009), EMP only comprises practices targeted at a single stakeholder—the natural environment (Cramer, 1998; El Akremi et al., 2018). Since individuals' attention within an organizational context is cognitively ordered around perceptions of distinct stakeholder groups (Bundy, Shropshire, & Buchholtz, 2013), employees perceive EMP as a unidimensional construct that comprises a coherent set of practices (Rasmus & Steger, 2000). The utilization of a construct with less facets or dimensions can in turn increase the analytical precision of investigations into the underlying mechanisms that mediate the relation between CSR practices and OI (Farooq et al., 2017) and mitigate the risk of confounding effects (Jones & Rupp, 2017).

Based on this reasoning, the fundamental research question in the present study is whether EMP relates to OI. It is expected that an analytical focus on EMP as an antecedent to OI will deliver insights into a thus far overlooked mechanism. Specifically, it is hypothesized that the positive relationship between EMP and OI is mediated by employees' environmental attitude (EA). The corresponding research model adopts a multi-theoretical approach that combines two different theoretical lenses. Goal-framing theory (Lindenberg & Foss, 2011; Steg, Lindenberg, & Keizer, 2015) is introduced to predict that perceived EMP affects employees' EA. Green-person-organization fit (Hicklenton, Hine, & Loi, 2019) in turn is applied to explain the relationship between employees' EA and OI. The model is tested using a cross-sectional, quantitative research design. All participants ($n = 206$) were employees of tourist service companies in Germany. The tourist service sector is especially suitable for research on EMP since work duties in this industry are not particularly specialized and those EMP that do not rely on special technical requirements are similar across different industries (Gil, Jiménez, & Lorente, 2001). Thus, it can be assumed that the results of this study are transferable to other industries.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways and has practical implications. It broadens the agenda of research on EMP by examining relations at the employee level. Such microlevel investigations deepen our understanding of the underlying psychological processes that mediate individual reactions to practices at the organizational level (Gond, El Akremi, Swaen, & Babu, 2017). By empirically illustrating the links between EMP, EA and OI, this study sheds light on a thus far unexplored mechanism across levels of analysis.

Since EMP overlap with practices that are conceptualized as external CSR (De Roeck & Maon, 2018; Farooq et al., 2017), CSR directed at nonsocial stakeholders (Turker, 2009) or CSR directed at the ecological environment (El Akremi et al., 2018), the theoretical and empirical insights from this investigation can also be applied in the growing field of micro-CSR research (Jones, Newman, Shao, & Cooke, 2019). The vast majority of previous studies on the underlying mechanisms that mediate the effects of CSR practices on employees are guided by either social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1985) or social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This study introduces a new theoretical rationale by applying goal-framing theory to explain the relationship between perceived EMP and EA. This enables the conceptualization of a new mechanism, which contrasts the more established proposition that employees first identify with their organization and then develop attitudes that are in accordance with corresponding ingroup norms (De Roeck & Maon, 2018; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Fielding & Hornsey, 2016). By drawing on psychological research, this study proposes a different relationship in which environmental attitudes mediate between organizational practices and employees' OI (Byrka, Hartig, & Kaiser, 2010; Cornelissen, Pandelaere, Warlop, & Dewitte, 2008; Glasman & Albarracin, 2006; Henn, Otto, & Kaiser, 2020; Lacasse, 2015).

Further, the results of this investigation are also relevant for practitioners who are responsible for the implementation of EMP in businesses. Corresponding investments involve both costs and benefits which, for an effective calculation, must been known. However, the calculation of the benefits in particular can be difficult due to a lack of

specific assessment criteria, reference data, or knowledge of the outcome categories (Alberti, Caini, Calabrese, & Rossi, 2000). This in turn can result in a potentially misleading evaluation that EMP incur costs with no feasible benefits (Song et al., 2017). Thus, recent investigations have been motivated to deepen the understanding of how EMP affect organizational outcomes (Arda, Bayraktar, & Tatoglu, 2019; Chen, Ong, & Hsu, 2016; Zhang & Ouyang, 2021). The present study contributes to these research efforts by shedding light on employee level outcomes.

The section below provides the theoretical background and hypotheses and is followed by the methodology and results. Finally, the implications for research and practice are discussed before the study's limitations and the opportunities for future investigation are outlined.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | Goal-framing theory

Goal-framing theory suggests that individuals' cognitive and motivational processes are shaped by three different types of overarching goals (Steg et al., 2015). The hedonic goal represents the desire to improve one's immediate personal wellbeing, the gain goal motivates individuals to expand their resources, and the normative goal increases individual sensibility to normative beliefs and appropriate behavior (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). The goal frame, defined as the relatively strongest goal in a given situation, exercises the strongest influence on individuals' cognitive and motivational processes, making them especially sensitive to goal-related information (Steg et al., 2015). The strength of personal goals in turn is influenced by contextual factors (Steg, Bolderdijk, Keizer, & Perlaviciute, 2014). Within an organizational context, the strategic goals and corresponding management practices of a firm are important factors that shape the overarching goals of employees (Foss & Lindenberg, 2013; Lindenberg & Foss, 2011).

2.2 | Environmental management practices and environmental attitude

Employees are sensible to signals that reveal the normative beliefs of management (Lindenberg, 2000). From their perspective, management practices are examples of normative behavior that illustrate the correct way to behave (Pache & Santos, 2013; Thornton, 2004). EMP, the technical and administrative practices aimed at minimizing polluting externalities (Carmona-Moreno, Céspedes-Lorente, & De Burgos-Jiménez, 2004; Cramer, 1998), correspondingly signal that the organization cares about the environment (Norton, Zacher, & Ashkanasy, 2014). The perception of what others approve of or disapprove of in turn influences individuals' normative goals and beliefs (Farrow, Grolleau, & Ibanez, 2017; Keizer, Lindenberg, & Steg, 2013; Lindenberg & Steg, 2007; Morris, Hong, Chiu, & Liu, 2015; Raineri & Paillé, 2016). Beliefs about the environment are considered to be a person's EA (Bamberg, 2003; Hawcroft & Milfont, 2010), which is defined as a "psychological tendency expressed by evaluating the natural environment with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Hawcroft & Milfont, 2010, p. 143).

Research on the activation of and changes in EA has shown that normative goal strengthening via contextual factors related to environmental protection positively affects individuals' EA (Steg & Vlek, 2009; Thøgersen, 2012). A meta-analysis of Glasman and Albarracin (2006) revealed that signals related to attitude induce a higher personal attitude. Recent investigations confirmed this result by verifying the positive effects of corresponding framing events (Detenber, Ho, Ong, & Lim, 2018), green media content (Trivedi, Patel, & Acharya, 2018), experiences with nature (Byrka et al., 2010), or an involvement in scientific arguments on environmental protection (Faize & Akhtar, 2020) on people's EA.

As employees' goal, frames at work are subject to a contagion process by the strategic goals and management practices of the employing organization (Foss & Lindenberg, 2013), it can be assumed that EMP affects employees' EA (Pellegrini, Rizzi, & Frey, 2018). The congruence between employees' EA and a commitment to environmental protection by the employing organization in turn predicts the green-person-organization fit (Hicklenton et al., 2019).

2.3 | Green-person–organization fit and organizational identification

The extent to which individual characteristics match the characteristics of a specific situational context is described by the concept of a Supplementary person–environment fit (Edwards & Shipp, 2007). This approach is concretized in organizational contexts by a person–organization fit. This refers to the congruence between an employee's personal values and beliefs, and the work climate characterized by management practices and policies (Kristof, 1996). More recent contributions broadened this concept by the extent to which employees' needs for work-specific resources are satisfied by the employing organization (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005).

A subtype of person–organization fit is green-person–organization fit, which "assesses the extent to which an organization's commitment to environmental protection is congruent with its employees' environmental values" (Hicklenton et al., 2019, p. 2). Employees with a strong EA care about the environment (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000) and would therefore experience a high fit with an organization that practices environmental protection (Hicklenton et al., 2019). A high person–organization fit in turn means employees feel involved in the overarching organizational mission (Cable & DeRue, 2002). They perceive themselves as members of a joint social category (Turner, 1984) and define themselves to a certain degree in terms of this social category—the employing organization (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). In line with these thoughts, previous research has shown that a high person–organization fit relates to OI (Cable & DeRue, 2002).

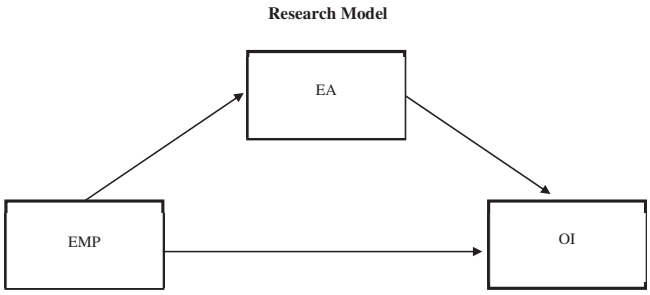


FIGURE 1 Research model

Thus, it can be assumed that employees with a high EA are likely to identify with their employing organization if that organization actually practices environmental protection. Perceived EMP in turn are predicted to relate to employees EA. Accordingly, it is proposed that the environmental protection of an organization shapes the employees' attitudinal preconditions for a high OI. Based on this reasoning, the research model is established as illustrated in Figure 1 and the following hypotheses are postulated:

H1. Perceived EMP relate to employees' OI.

H2. Employees' EA mediates the positive relationship between perceived EMP and employees' OI.

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Participants and procedure

All participants were employees from tourist service companies in Germany, including hotels, commercial tourist attractions, and service agencies. A total of 482 paper-pencil questionnaires were distributed in the participating organizations. An accompanying letter explained the purpose of the study without revealing the hypotheses and assured anonymity and confidentiality. Questionaries were returned in a sealed envelope that did not reveal the respondents' identity. A total of 278 participants responded to all items (response rate of 57.7%). As in previous research on the effects of EMP on employees, only data from subjects who spent a certain amount of time at work were considered suitable for the study purpose (Norton et al., 2014). Thus, the data of subjects who worked 10 h or less per week or who were employed for less than a year were excluded from further analysis, resulting in a final sample of $n = 206$, of which the majority were female (65.3%). To better preserve the participants' anonymity and thereby increase the likelihood of unbiased responses (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), questionnaires did not require any specification of exact figures for age, household income, and duration of employment, but instead used items that reflected a complete range. The mean age was 30–39 years, the mean household income was €2000–€2500 and the mean duration of employment was 4–6 years.

3.2 | Measures

This study followed the recommendations of Flynn, Sakakibara, Schroeder, Bates, and Flynn et al. (1990) by strictly employing well-established measures that have showed high reliability and validity in previous research (e.g., Rasmus & Steger, 2000; Norton, Zacher, Parker, & Ashkanasy, 2017; Bissing-Olson, Iyer, Fielding, & Zacher, 2013; Hicklenton et al., 2019; Dunlap et al., 2000; Molina-Azorín et al., 2008; Teresi, Pietroni, Barattucci, Giannella, & Pagliaro, 2019; De Roeck et al., 2016). A committee approach with two professional translators was applied for the translation of the items from English into German (Sperber, 2004). All items used a five-point Likert-type response scale from 1 for "strongly disagree" to 5 for "strongly agree". A complete list of the items is presented in the Appendix S1.

Perceived EMP was measured using 11 items from the scale of Rasmus and Steger (2000). Cronbach's alpha was calculated at 0.92. Sample items were: "Our company gives priority to purchasing ecological products (biodegradable, reusable, recyclable …)", "Our company reduces the use of toxic and unsustainable products", and "Our company gives priority to utilization of renewable energies like green electricity".

The New Ecological Paradigm Scale (Dunlap et al., 2000; Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978) was used to measure EA. It is one of the most widely used measures for EA in the field of environmental psychology (Hawcroft & Milfont, 2010) and has recently been utilized in research on green-person–organization fit (Hicklenton et al., 2019). As shown by Milfont (2009), social desirability concerns are not a serious problem for people's response to the New Ecological Paradigm Scale. In this study a 10-item version in accordance with the recommendations of Hawcroft and Milfont (2010) was employed. Cronbach's alpha was calculated at 0.72. Sample items were: "Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist", "The earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources", and "The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset".

OI was measured using a six-item scale from Mael and Ashforth (1992). Cronbach's alpha was calculated at 0.84. Sample items were: "When someone criticizes our company, it feels like a personal insult", "I am very interested in what others think about our company", and "Our company's successes are my successes".

3.3 | Common method variance

Research based on same-source data faces concerns about common method variance (Conway & Lance, 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Hence, some scholars employ corresponding post hoc statistical detection and correction techniques (e.g., Raineri & Paillé, 2016; Farooq et al., 2014; Norton et al., 2014) However, the work of Richardson, Simmering, and Sturman (2009) revealed that such statistical techniques can reduce the accuracy of estimates of relationships and tend to incorrectly identify the presence of common method variance. Therefore, the present study followed their recommendation and did not conduct post hoc statistical techniques. Nevertheless, a priori

TABLE 1 Measures of central tendency, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Sex							
2. Age[a]	0.138*						
3. Education[a]	0.0060	0.154*					
4. Household income[a]	0.099	0.128	0.076				
5. OI	0.037	0.234***	0.043	0.210**			
6. EA	0.107	0.346***	−0.013	0.220**	0.291***		
7. EMP	0.114	0.256***	0.108	0.128	0.269***	0.234***	
M/Mdn	–	30–39 years	completed apprenticeship	2000–2500 Euro	3.870	4.185	3.338
SD	–	–	–	–	0.783	0.461	0.887

Note: [a] Ordinal measurement with Spearman rank correlation and median as measure of central tendency. Sex is coded as 0 being female and 1 male.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

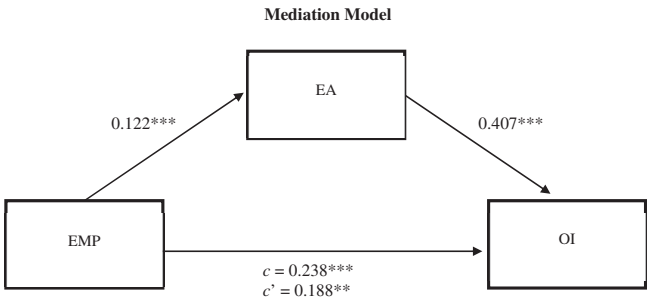


FIGURE 2 Mediation model: employees' EA mediates the relationship between perceived EMP and employees' OI. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported; *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$

procedural precautions to minimize potential common method variance were employed by assuring the respondents' anonymity and confidentiality, by utilizing well-established measures, and by avoiding conceptual overlaps in items of different constructs (Conway & Lance, 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics and correlations between the study variables.

4.2 | Mediation effects

This study hypothesized a positive effect of perceived EMP on employees' OI. Further, it was predicted that perceived EMP would have a significant indirect effect on employees' OI via EA. The corresponding mediation effects were examined using the PROCESS macro for SPSS developed by Hayes (2018), which uses ordinary least squares regression analysis to estimate unstandardized coefficients for all paths, as well as total, direct, and indirect effects. Bootstrapping with 10,000 iterations, which makes no assumptions about the distributional properties of the sample, was used (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007), yielding bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for inferring statistical significance. Mediation results were considered significant if the confidence intervals did not include zero.

Analyses show that the perceived EMP had a positive effect on employees' EA, which subsequently predicted employees' OI (Figure 2). Accordingly, we found that the relationship between perceived EMP and OI is partially mediated by EA, ab = 0.050, 95% CI [0.013, 0.107]. All path coefficients are summarized in Table 2.

5 | DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine whether EMP correlates to OI. Further, it was hypothesized that this relationship is mediated by employees' EA. A multi-theoretical approach was used to test the research model. Goal-framing theory (Lindenberg & Foss, 2011; Steg et al., 2015) was employed to predict that perceived EMP affects employees' EA and a green-person–organization fit (Hicklenton et al., 2019) was applied to explain the relationship between employees' EA and OI. The results of the cross-sectional, quantitative research design revealed that employees' EA partially mediates the relationship between perceived EMP and OI. The theoretical and managerial implications are discussed below.

5.1 | Theoretical implications

In light of exhausted planetary boundaries (Steffen et al., 2015), businesses are increasingly being held responsible for environmental

TABLE 2 Path coefficients for the mediation model

	Path coefficients					
	Path	***b***	***p***	**SE**	**95%-CI**	R^2
EMP → EA	*a*	0.122	<.001	0.036	[0.051, 0.192]	0.05
EA → OI	*b*	0.407	<0.001	0.114	[0.183, 0.631]	0.13
EMP → OI						
Direct effect	*c*′	0.188	0.002	0.060	[0.071, 0.306]	
Indirect effect	*ab*	0.050	–	0.025	[0.013, 0.107]	–
Sum of effects	*c*	0.238	<0.001	0.060	[0.120, 0.356]	0.07

*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < .001$.

problems (Heede, 2014; Porter & Kramer, 2011; Whiteman, Walker, & Perego, 2013). Thus, an especially pressing challenge for organizations today is the need to measure up to increasing stakeholder demands for environmental friendliness (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Bansal, 2019; Helmig et al., 2016). In this context, there is ongoing controversy on the question of whether corporate sustainability is not only beneficial for the natural environment but also for corporate well-being (Song et al., 2017; Xiao, Wang, van der Vaart, & van Donk, 2018). The present study contributes to this debate by highlighting beneficial employee-level reactions to EMP. The current results support the proposition that organizational practices interact with the normative goals and beliefs of employees (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi, 2007; Foss & Lindenberg, 2013) and the empirical verification of the mediating role of employees' EA has shed light on a thus far overlooked mechanism across different levels of analysis.

Since EMP are included in the various activities that are compromised by the "umbrella construct" of CSR (De Roeck et al., 2016, p. 610), insights from the present study are also beneficial for employee-focused, micro-level research on CSR (Jones et al., 2019). In this literature stream, scholars have recently raised concerns that the combination of different CSR practices within the same measure may confound the effects (Jones & Rupp, 2017) and impede the consolidation of knowledge on micro-level reactions to CSR (Rupp & Mallory, 2015). Thus, there is an ongoing debate about the need to pursue conceptual clarity and the refinement of measures. This is considered a major prerequisite for the advancement of the microfoundations of CSR (Gond et al., 2017). Against this background, and for the sake of a more precise analysis, scholars increasingly use separate measures for internal CSR practices relating to employees and external CSR practices directed at external stakeholders (e.g., De Roeck et al., 2014; Farooq et al., 2017; Hur, Moon, & Choi, 2019; Scheidler, Edinger-Schons, Spanjol, & Wieseke, 2019). This approach supports the detection of thus far overlooked mechanisms and the provision of novel theoretical insights (Jones et al., 2019). For instance, the work of Farooq et al. (2017) revealed that internal CSR practices influence employees' OI via perceived respect, whereas external CSR practices influence employees' OI via perceived prestige. The authors explain these separate mechanisms in regard to the different targets of internal and external CSR practices. The same logic can again be applied to external CSR as it also involves different practices that address different targets. On the one hand, external CSR addresses social stakeholders, such as governments, communities, or nongovernmental agencies. On the other hand, it includes practices directed at nonsocial stakeholders, meaning the natural environment (De Roeck et al., 2014).

The current investigation demonstrates the analytical potential of an exclusive focus on the pro-environmental dimension of external CSR practices as an antecedent to microlevel reactions. This approach supports not only the employment of thus far ignored theoretical lenses in microCSR research, such as goal-framing theory, it also enables the detection of unexplored, underlying mechanisms and novel theoretical insights. The present study reveals that the well-established proposition, that is, that employees first identify themselves in terms of their organization before they develop attitudes relating to organizational goals and norms, does not show the complete picture (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Fielding & Hornsey, 2016). It appears that this process is more complex and dialectic. The current results imply that, at least for environment-related issues, a different path of influence also takes place where organizational practices shape employees' attitudes before their OI increases due to a higher person–organization fit.

The goal of this study is not to deny the importance of multidimensional CSR constructs. Such latent constructs comprise different stand-alone variables to measure employees' global perceptions of their organizations' CSR. These are different from merely the sum of perceptions of practices directed at different stakeholders (El Akremi et al., 2018). However, as demonstrated here, an analytical focus on a coherent set of organizational practices comprising a single CSR dimension holds the potential to shed light on very specific relationships that would otherwise have been left in the dark. Such specific findings in turn deliver the building blocks for the enhancement of multidimensional constructs to capture the heterogeneity of higher-order organizational phenomena (Johnson, Rosen, & Chang, 2011).

5.2 | Managerial implications

The results of this investigation also have several implications for practitioners. First, the study highlights a thus far neglected link between EMP and OI. Insights into this relationship are of managerial relevance, since

OI is associated with beneficial employee-level outcomes, such as job satisfaction (De Roeck et al., 2014; Van Dick et al., 2004) or the intention to remain in the job (Cole & Bruch, 2006; Jones, 2010). A recent study by Cheema, Afsar, and Javed (2020) also revealed that OI mediates positive effects of perceived CSR on employees' organizational citizenship behavior towards the environment.

The insights of this study are also beneficial to practitioners in human resource management. Strategies to bind talented employees to an organization are critical for corporate success (Gagné & Panaccio, 2014). Previous research has shown that a firm's commitment to environmental protection increases its attractiveness to jobseekers or employees where those individuals already care about the environment (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014). However, these findings imply that the beneficial employee-level effects of EMP only apply to those individuals that already have a strong EA. Accordingly, it has been suggested that organizations should recruit employees based on green-person–organization fit assessments (Hicklenton et al., 2019). From this perspective, it might appear counterintuitive that EMP at least partially shape employees' attitudinal preconditions for a high OI. Yet, research has shown that effects on attitudes occur most often for individuals with initially weak attitudes (Holland, Verplanken, & Van Knippenberg, 2002). Based on these findings and the results of the present study, it is reasonable to expect that there are positive effects of EMP on employees' OI, even if the employees' baseline EA is relatively weak.

Further, the results of this investigation indicate that EMP increases employees' green-person–organization fit. A high person–organization fit, in turn, positively influences employees' organizational trust and extra-role service behavior (Kerse, 2019). Thus, practitioners who are responsible for sustainability in businesses should consider such beneficial employee-level reactions in their calculations of the costs and benefits of EMP.

The results of the present study are also relevant for organizational leaders who aim to satisfy stakeholders' demands for environmental sustainability, which is increasingly gaining strategic relevance (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011). The success of corporate environmental initiatives depends on employees' pro-environmental behavior (Saeed et al., 2019). Employees' pro-environmental behavior, in turn, is shaped by their EA (Tariq, Yasir, & Majid, 2020). Since the results of the present study revealed a positive relationship between EMP and employees' EA, it is reasonable to expect that the implementation of corporate environmental initiatives strengthens employees' pro-environmental behavior via their EA, which, in turn, increases overall corporate sustainability (Blok, Wesselink, Studynka, & Kemp, 2015). Therefore, practitioners can expect that corporate engagement in environmental protection will fuel a positive dynamic between employees' EA, their pro-environmental behavior and corporate sustainability performance, which, in turn, will help meet corresponding stakeholder's demands.

5.3 | Limitations and future research opportunities

Despite its contributions, the present study has limitations that should be recognized and that could be addressed in future research. First, like the great majority of micro-level research on CSR, this investigation is based on data collected in cross-sectional surveys (Jones et al., 2019). Thus, only correlational data that allows no statement about causality was available. Even though the implied directionality in the research model is based on theory and literature, reverse causation cannot be ruled out. Future research might therefore employ experimental research designs that verify causality (Levitt & List, 2009).

Second, the results presented here reveal only a partial mediation. Thus, one remaining question is how EMP affect OI in other ways than the mediating role of EA. Previous investigations based on social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1985) showed that external CSR practices increase the external image of organizations, which in turn positively affects employees' OI (De Roeck et al., 2016; Farooq et al., 2017; Glavas & Godwin, 2013). This research is rooted in the premise that self-enhancement motives guide individuals to identify themselves with perceived attractive social groups to enhance their self-esteem (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Against a background of increasing stakeholder demands for environmental friendliness (Helmig et al., 2016; Salim et al., 2018), it appears reasonable that EMP also increase the perceived external image of organizations and therefore influence employees' OI via this mechanism. Indeed, other research has shown that CSR affects employees via multiple pathways (Farooq et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the development of an integrative meta-framework that combines all known mediators within a coherent model of microlevel CSR effects is still in its infancy and is thus still an outstanding requirement within this research field (Gond et al., 2017). Future efforts to meet this requirement should integrate the mechanism detected here.

Third, recent research has revealed that inconsistent CSR strategies that favor external over internal stakeholders can increase employees' perceptions of corporate hypocrisy, which in turn is associated with emotional exhaustion and turnover (Scheidler et al., 2019). Future research might therefore investigate whether employee-level effects of EMP depend on internal CSR practices.

6 | CONCLUSION

Even though a growing number of businesses proactively employ strategies to address sustainability in a strategic manner, the present level of corporate environmental protection is still insufficient for remaining within the planetary boundaries (Whiteman et al., 2013). Researchers therefore stress the need to address the question of which factors increase corporate engagement for sustainability (Hörisch, Wulfsberg, & Schaltegger, 2020). By highlighting positive employee-level reactions to EMP, this study sheds lights on the reasons why such an engagement is not only beneficial for the environment but also for corporate well-being. Further, it delivers theoretical insights that deepen our understanding of the psychological processes that mediate individual reactions to organizational practices.

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How to cite this article: Jaich, H. (2022). Linking environmental management and employees' organizational identification: The mediating role of environmental attitude. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *29*(2), 305–315. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2201