

# On the relationship of hope and gratitude to corporate social responsibility

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**ABSTRACT.** A longitudinal study of 308 white-collar U.S. employees revealed that feelings of hope and gratitude increase concern for corporate social responsibility (CSR). In particular, employees with stronger hope and gratitude were found to have a greater sense of responsibility toward employee and societal issues; interestingly, employee hope and gratitude did not affect sense of responsibility toward economic and safety/quality issues. These findings offer an extension of research by Giacalone, Paul, and Jurkiewicz (2005, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 58, 295–305).

**KEY WORDS:** corporate social responsibility, hope, gratitude

## Introduction

With the ongoing scandals in business and government, organizational scholars continue to struggle to

understand the reasons for a recurrence of socially irresponsible organizational behavior. Two divergent approaches, one which posits that the primary corporate responsibility is financial performance (Friedman, 1970/1983; Marcoux, 2003), and another which regards financial performance as but one aspect of the corporation's responsibility, have focused on understanding the goals of socially responsible organizational behavior. Within the latter approach, sensitivity to other constituencies such as employees, customers, the community, generally referred to as "stakeholder management" (Freeman, 1984; Clarkson Centre for Business Ethics, 1999) or "multi-fiduciary management" (Freeman, 1994) has directed the dialogue toward a more expansive collective forum.

But when all is considered, the question of what constitutes socially responsible behavior is seemingly embedded within the individual level, where each person's perceptions of social responsibility will drive his/her sensitivity to the myriad concerns that arise in organizational life (Hemingway and Maclagan, 2004). What is considered a worthwhile individual and collective outcome thus potentially emanates both from one's socialization (Inglehart, 1997) as well as one's dispositions (see Snyder and Lopez, 2004).

Within the dispositional tradition, the study of positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship has focused on attributes and traits that constitute strengths and improve the quality and meaning of life (see Seligman, 1999a, b; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The expansiveness of this perspective is best understood in three volumes that focus on the various aspects of positive psychology from both a psychological (Lopez and Snyder, 2003; Snyder and Lopez, 2002) and an organizational perspective (Cameron et al., 2003),

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along with concept-specific volumes on areas such as hope (Snyder, 2000) and generativity (McAdams et al., 1998).

Recent work has shown a relationship between positive psychological constructs of gratitude and hope and concerns for social responsibility within the context of consumer reactions to corporate social performance. McCullough et al. (2001) conceptualize gratitude as a moral affect that serves to motivate individuals to engage in prosocial behavior and acts as a moral barometer providing an affective “readout” (Emmons, 2003). Emmons and McCullough (2003) found that grateful persons not only demonstrate more positive mental states (e.g. enthusiastic, determined, and attentive), but also are more generous, caring, and helpful to others. Even when independent assessors rated them, grateful individuals were found to be more prosocial (McCullough et al., 2002).

Hope has been defined as a “positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (Snyder et al., 1991, p. 287). The emotional state of hope is thus forward-looking and action-oriented. Higher levels of hope have been associated with higher problem-solving expectations (Schwartz and Post, 2002) and greater social problem-solving abilities (Chang, 1998).

Giacalone et al. (2005) hypothesized that the prosocial inclinations of grateful individuals require high levels of hope to translate into social responsibility concerns. Grateful individuals who do not perceive that their prosocial actions can accomplish a goal (e.g., are low in hope) should be less likely to be concerned with prosocial behaviors. Indeed, using a measure of consumer sensitivity, the Consumer Sensitivity to Corporate Social Performance Scale (CSCSP), Giacalone and colleagues found that when hope is high, increasing levels of gratitude result in increases on the CSCSP score. However, when hope was low, there was no impact of gratitude on the CSCSP score.

But as Giacalone and colleagues (2005) noted, the effects of hope and gratitude on consumer sensitivity to social responsibility may or may not generalize to social responsibility concerns more broadly, particularly from the standpoint of employee concerns for social responsibility. They recommended that other social responsibility measures should be assessed to

determine whether the interactive impact of hope and gratitude generalized to these measures as well. The present study seeks to extend previous findings by employing other measures of corporate social responsibility (CSR). In order to test whether the effect is robust, two different measures of social responsibility concern are used: Boal and Peery’s (1985) and Singhapakdi et al.’s, (1996) measures.

If gratitude is associated with greater prosocial behavior, grateful individuals should demonstrate more concern with CSR than less grateful individuals. Additionally, because hope is associated with both agency to accomplish a goal and pathways for achieving that goal (Snyder et al., 1991), hopeful individuals should feel a greater ability to impact CSR and increased confidence in the pathways to do so. However, consistent with previous results (Giacalone et al., 2005), we predict that the impact of gratitude on social responsibility will be moderated by individual level of hope, since individuals who do not perceive that their prosocial actions can accomplish a goal (support of socially responsible companies or punishment of socially responsible companies) would be less likely to engage in prosocial behaviors. Thus, the following hypotheses are offered:

*Hypothesis 1a:* When hope is high, increasing levels of gratitude will result in increasing levels of corporate social responsibility concerns.

*Hypothesis 1b:* When hope is low, there will be no impact of gratitude on levels of corporate social responsibility concerns.

## Methods

### *Sample and procedure*

The data was collected at two points in time. At Time 1 (T1), business school graduate students at a large, public university in the southeastern U.S. each volunteered to provide the e-mails of adults living in the U.S. who were working full-time and held managerial or technical/professional positions (white-collar employees). Students secured permission from the potential participants prior to

submitting their e-mail addresses to the researchers. An e-mail cover letter with an attached survey was then sent to the 603 solicited participants. The cover letter explained that the focus of the attached survey was to learn more about workers and their values. In addition, the cover letter guaranteed the potential participants confidentiality and advised them that a second survey would be sent to them in 3 weeks. Three days following the original e-mail, a reminder e-mail was sent.

At Time 2 (T2), 3 weeks following the administration of the first survey, a second survey was sent to respondents who had completed the first one. A total of 308 second surveys were returned, for a response rate of 51%. Of the individuals who completed both surveys, 40% were between the ages of 26–35, 67% females and 45% had been working for their organizations for 1–5 years. A comparison of early and late responders revealed no differences.

#### *T1 Measures*

T1 measures assessed respondents' hope and gratitude, as well as demographic variables. Respondents were administered the 12-item Adult Dispositional Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1996). Respondents rated each item on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (definitely false) to 4 (definitely true). Four items are distracters and not used for scoring. Four items are summed to create the Pathways subscale score; the remaining four items are summed to create the Agency subscale. Hope is the sum of the four Pathways and four Agency items.

Respondents were administered the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) (McCullough et al., 2002), a 6-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess individual differences in inclination to experience gratitude in daily life. Respondents rated each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), and their ratings were averaged. Previous studies have shown acceptable Cronbach's alpha estimates (McCullough et al., 2002). Representative items include "I have so much in life to be thankful for" and "If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list."

#### *T2 Measures*

At T2, we assessed one measure of ethics and two measures of social responsibility.

*Boal and Peery CSR outcome measure.* Respondents were administered the 16 items from Boal and Peery's (1985) outcome measures of CSR, which describes four socially responsible outcomes for each of four categories (organizational, employee, consumer, societal). Using a Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (not at all important to me) to 5 (extremely important to me), respondents were asked to rate the extent to which each of the outcomes was personally important to them.

*Perceived Role of Ethics and Social Responsibility (PRESOR) scale.* Respondents were administered the PRESOR scale (Singhapakdi et al., 1996) – a 13-item measure that assessed respondents' perceptions of ethics and social responsibility. Responses were obtained using 1 (very strongly disagree) to 9 (very strongly agree).

## **Analyses and results**

### *Descriptive statistics*

Table I summarizes the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables.

### *Factor analysis and regression on the PRESOR scales*

The 13 items comprising the PRESOR scale were subjected to a principle components factor analysis with varimax rotation. Using a 0.45 loading as a criterion value for inclusion (Cook and Campbell, 1979), the factor analysis revealed one distinct factor having an eigenvalue of greater than 1.0 accounting for 40% of the variance. The results of this analysis can be found in Table II. The single factor is characterized as focusing on the *interconnection of profitability to social responsibility and ethics* to the functioning of business, and includes items such as "Business ethics and social responsibility are critical to the survival of a business enterprise," "Business has a social responsibility beyond making profits," and "The ethics and social responsibility of a firm is essential to its long-term profitability." A single variable was constructed, based on the items which loaded on this single factor.

The PRESOR score was analyzed by regressing it on gender (Step 1), on hope and gratitude (Step 2), and on the interaction term of hope and

TABLE I  
Means, standard deviations, and correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	1.33	0.47							
2. Gratitude	38.50	3.67	-0.15**	(0.67)					
3. Hope	25.48	2.92	0.01	0.20***	(0.74)				
4. PRESOR	68.19	12.24	-0.13**	0.41***	0.16**	(0.86)			
5. Boal economic responsibility	19.94	3.17	0.06	0.27***	0.09	0.05	(0.81)		
6. Boal responsibility toward employees and society	24.93	3.61	-0.25***	0.12***	0.17***	0.55***	0.12*	(0.80)	
7. Boal safety and quality	22.57	2.38	-0.12*	0.19***	0.04	0.40***	0.36***	0.55***	(0.77)

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; Coefficient Alphas are on the diagonal, in parentheses.

gratitude (Step 3). Table III shows that gender has a small but significant negative relationship to the PRESOR score in the first step alone. In the second step, gratitude alone was significantly related to the PRESOR score, accounting for 16% of the variance. In the third step, a significant interaction was found, albeit not entirely consistent with Giacalone and colleagues' (2005) results. As Figure 1 shows, although high hope and increasing levels of gratitude are associated with increasing

levels of social responsibility concerns, low levels of hope and increasing levels of gratitude also are associated with increasing levels of social responsibility. What is different is that high hope and increasing levels of gratitude bring about a more precipitous increase in social responsibility concern.

We probed the effect further by doing two additional analyses. In these analyses, we performed the identical analysis above, except that we used

TABLE II  
Factor loadings for Perceived Role of Ethics and Social Responsibility (PRESOR) scale

Item	Loading
Being ethical and socially responsible is the most important thing a firm can do	0.69
The most important concern for a firm is making a profit, even if it means bending or breaking the rules (R)	0.44
The ethics and social responsibility of a firm is essential to its long-term profitability	0.76
The overall effectiveness of a business can be determined to a great extent by the degree to which it is ethical and socially responsible	0.76
To remain competitive in a global environment, business firms will have to disregard ethics and social responsibility (R)	0.43
Social responsibility and profitability can be compatible	0.61
Business ethics and social responsibility are critical to the survival of a business enterprise	0.80
A firm's first priority should be to employee morale	0.61
Business has a social responsibility beyond making profits	0.79
If survival of a business enterprise is at stake, then you must forget about ethics and social responsibility (R)	0.48
Efficiency is much more important to a firm than whether or not the firm is seen as ethical or socially responsible (R)	0.52
Good ethics is often good business	0.72
If the stockholders are unhappy, nothing else matters (R)	0.36

R indicates items that are reverse scored.

TABLE III  
Multiple regression results for PRESOR

	PRESOR		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step3
Gender	-0.14**	-0.09	-0.09
Gratitude		0.40***	0.40***
Hope		0.07	0.08
Hope × Gratitude interaction			0.13*
Df	(1,304)	(3,302)	(4,301)
F	6.29**	21.59***	17.94***
$\Delta R^2$	0.02**	0.16***	0.01**

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .  
Tabled values are standardized regression weights.

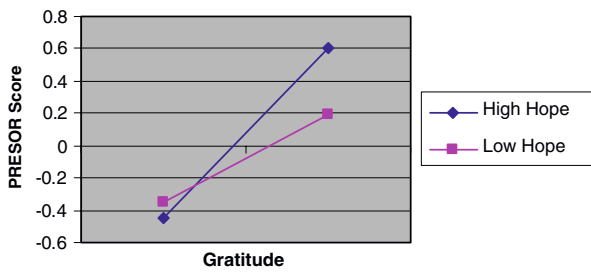


Figure 1. Interaction of Hope and Gratitude: PRESOR score.

the agency and pathways components hope in each analysis, instead of the total hope. What we found was that the interaction was a function of the pathways component, not the agency component, which was not significant ( $p > 0.07$ ). The plotted pathways × gratitude interaction (see Figure 2) was identical to the hope × gratitude interaction.

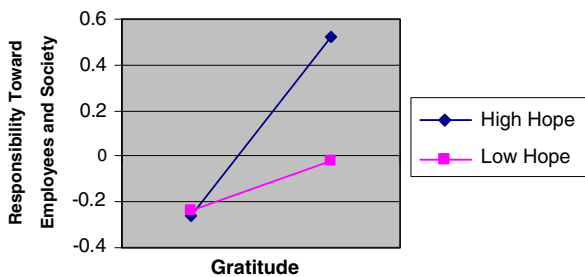


Figure 2. Interaction of Agency and Gratitude: responsibility toward employees and society.

Factor analysis and regressions on the Boal and Peery CSR outcome scale

The 16 items comprising the CSR outcome scale were subjected to a factor analysis with varimax rotation. Using a 0.45 loading as a criterion value for inclusion (Cook and Campbell, 1979), the factor analysis revealed three distinct factors having eigenvalues of greater than 1.0 accounting for 57% of the variance. The results of this analysis can be found in Table IV. Factor 1 is characterized as a factor focusing on *responsibility toward employees and society* and includes items such as “promotes employee rights” and “promotes social justice.” Factor 2 is characterized as a factor focusing on *economic responsibility* such as “promotes economic interests of the business,” and “maintains high levels of productivity.” Factor 3 is characterized as a factor focusing on *safety and quality* and includes items such as “safe working conditions” and “produces safe products.” Three variables were constructed, one for each of the three factors, based on the items that loaded for each factor.

The score for each of the three factors was analyzed as follows. First, the score was regressed on gender (Step 1), on hope and gratitude (Step 2), and on the interaction term of hope and gratitude (Step 3). Table V shows that for the responsibility toward employees and society score, gender was a significant predictor in all steps. In the second step, hope and gratitude were both positively related to responsibility toward employees and society, accounting for 8% of the variance. Finally, in the third step, the interaction was significant, accounting for an additional 1% of the variance. As Figure 3 shows, the pattern of results mirror those found previously: when hope is high, increasing levels of gratitude result in greater responsibility toward employees and society concerns. But when hope is low, there is no impact of gratitude on responsibility toward employees and society.

As we did for the PRESOR analysis, we probed the effect further by conducting the two additional analyses. In these analyses, we did the identical analysis above, except that we used the agency and pathways components hope in each analysis, instead of the total hope. What we found was that the interaction was a function of the agency component, not the pathways component, which was not

TABLE IV  
Factor loadings for Boal and Peery CSR items

Item	Responsibility toward employees and society	Economic Responsibility	Safety and quality responsibility
Jobs that allow employees to use valued skills and abilities	0.56		
Does not degrade the environment	0.62		
Job security for employees	0.67		
Supports social and cultural activities	0.70		
Promotes social justice	0.73		
Promotes employee rights	0.80		
Promotes economic interests of the business		0.84	
Maintains high levels of productivity		0.83	
Promotes long-range survival of business		0.80	
Promotes interests of stockholders		0.70	
Produce products desired by customers		0.47	
Company prices products fairly			0.67
Maintains high quality of products and services			0.73
Produces safe products			0.81
Company obeys the law			0.59
Safe working conditions			0.47

significant ( $p > 0.10$ ). The plotted agency  $\times$  gratitude interaction (see Figure 4) was identical to the hope  $\times$  gratitude interaction.

The results for economic responsibility, however, were not consistent. Gender was not significant in any of the steps. More importantly, only gratitude was positively related to economic responsibility, and no significant interaction was found. Overall, the Model  $R^2$  was not significant for any of the three steps. The results for safety and quality resulted in a significant gender impact and a significant positive relationship with gratitude (accounting for 3% of the variance), but there was no impact of hope or an interaction.

## Discussion

Our results were not entirely consistent with previous research. Although the pattern for responsibility to employees and society were consistent with those found by Giacalone and colleagues (2005) and the results for the PRESOR measure were similar, the results for economic responsibility and safety and quality responsibility were not significant.

The results indicate that, when dealing with a measure of social responsibility focusing on employees and societal concerns, the pattern is consistent with the results for consumer sensitivity to corporate social performance. The likely reason is that in both measures, the foci are ethical and/or philanthropic responsibilities. But when economic and legal responsibilities are assessed (as in economic responsibility and safety and quality responsibility), no significant results were obtained. Thus, it appears that hope and gratitude effects cannot be generalized to economic and legal responsibilities.

The results for the PRESOR measure show a sensitivity to what the measure is assessing: the relationship of profitability and social responsibility. As a result, unlike the Giacalone and colleagues' (2005) study, where the relationship of hope and gratitude was driven by agency component of hope, the relationship between hope and gratitude was driven by the pathways component. This tells us that impact of hope and gratitude on PRESOR scores is a function of whether individuals are able to see that planning to meet these goals (pathways) is possible. Subjects need not have the goal-directed energy (agency) to achieve profitability within the

TABLE V  
Multiple regression results for economic responsibility, safety and quality responsibility

	Responsibility toward employees and society			Economic responsibility			Safety and quality responsibility		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step3	Step 1	Step 2	Step3	Step 1	Step 2	Step3
Gender	-0.25***	-0.22***	-0.23***	0.05	0.06	0.06	-0.13**	-0.10	-0.10
Gratitude		0.22***	0.24***		0.12	0.11**		0.17***	0.18***
Hope		0.13*	0.13*		0.06	0.05		0.00	0.00
Hope × Gratitude interaction			0.14**			-0.05			0.02
Df	(1,304)	(3,302)	(4,301)	(1,304)	(3,302)	(4,301)	(1,304)	(3,302)	(4,301)
F	20.59***	16.69***	13.60***	0.064	2.12	1.76	4.82*	4.96**	3.73**
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	0.06***	0.08***	0.01**	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.03**	0.00

\*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001. Tabled values are standardized regression weights.

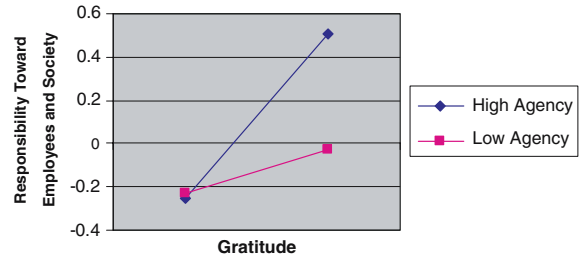


Figure 3. Interaction of Hope and Gratitude: responsibility toward employees and society.

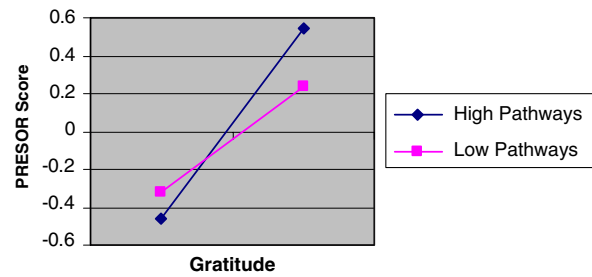


Figure 4. Interaction of Pathways and Gratitude: PRESOR score.

context of socially responsible acts – only an ability to see that such a goal could be planned and achieved.

The data demonstrates that the importance of socially responsible actions can be impacted by an interaction of hope and gratitude when dealing with issues of ethics and philanthropy, but not when economic and legal responsibilities are concerned. Conversely, the acceptability of a socially responsible direction (as measured by the PRESOR) is a function of both gratitude and pathways – respondents who were more grateful and see that that planning can meet such goals were more likely to be in agreement with social responsibility, regardless of their agency.

Future directions

Overall, the results must be considered in terms of limitations in the study. As with the Giacalone and colleagues (2005) study, we used self-report data, and, as such, our findings are subject to potential biases and problems with common method variance when measures come from the same source (e.g. Podsakoff

and Organ, 1986). Independent ratings of social responsibility or behavioral measures will be needed to determine whether this relationship is robust.

Second, while the results were significant, the  $R^2$  in the analyses were relatively low. The low  $R^2$  indicates that these positive psychological constructs play a small role and that considerable amount of variance remains unaccounted. Particularly in the case of social responsibility, when a few within the hierarchy can have a significant impact on the organization's socially responsible decision making, even small effect sizes may have a meaningful practical consequence (Endler, 1973).

Third, actual behaviors were not measured in our study, and thus it is not possible to say that positive psychological dispositions are associated with socially responsible behaviors. While previous studies demonstrate significant positive relationships between positive psychological measures and behaviors that reflect the concepts (McAdams et al., 1998; McCullough et al., 2002), future research must make this link to socially responsible behaviors.

Future research should build on these limitations. Experimental studies (e.g. Emmons and McCullough, 2003) manipulating participants' experiences of hope and gratitude could be performed that would allow researchers to witness actual behavioral outcomes such as socially responsible behaviors. On the other hand, employee feelings of hope and gratitude may manifest in more subtle ways than can be captured via survey methodology; qualitative methods of inquiry such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews may enhance the researcher's ability to understand hope and gratitude in some of the many ways (i.e. via imagination, metaphor, and dramatization) they may exist within organizational life. No doubt, positive workplace emotions such as hope and gratitude seem highly worthy of further investigation as the powerful effects of positive psychology on organizational life continue to be uncovered (Cameron et al., 2003).

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