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Understanding Corporate Social Responsibility from Within:
Employee Sensemaking and Its Implications for Person-
Organization Fit Across Countries

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Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an increasingly important part of organizational strategies, yet employees from different subsidiaries of a multinational organization may interpret and experience CSR in various ways depending on their personal values and contextual environments. By drawing on sensemaking theory, this study explores how employees make sense of global CSR initiatives, and how these interpretations shape their perceived person-organization fit (P-O fit). Using a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews with employees across different country contexts were conducted. The study identified key factors shaping employees' sensemaking of CSR, including leadership behavior, organizational communication, and various societal, regulatory, and cultural aspects. The findings highlight the importance of subjective interpretation of CSR and value alignment in shaping perceived P-O fit. By linking CSR sensemaking to P-O fit, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the micro-level processes through which CSR shapes employees' perspectives. The findings also offer recommendations for organizations on how to design and communicate CSR initiatives in ways that resonate with all employees across countries and contexts.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; sensemaking; person-organization fit; cross-country differences; employee perceptions; qualitative research

Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) ist zu einem immer wichtigeren Bestandteil von Organisationsstrategien geworden. Dennoch interpretieren und erleben Mitarbeitende in verschiedenen Niederlassungen eines multinationalen Unternehmens CSR auf unterschiedliche Weise, abhängig von ihren persönlichen Werten und ihrem jeweiligen Umfeld. Unter Rückgriff auf die Sensemaking-Theorie untersucht diese Studie, wie Mitarbeitende globale CSR-Initiativen interpretieren und wie diese Deutungen ihre wahrgenommene Passung zum Unternehmen (Person-Organization Fit, P-O Fit) beeinflussen. Im Rahmen eines qualitativen Forschungsdesigns wurden leitfadengestützte Interviews mit Mitarbeitenden aus verschiedenen Länderkontexten geführt. Die Studie identifizierte zentrale Faktoren, die den Sinnstiftungsprozess der Mitarbeitenden in Bezug auf CSR prägen, darunter das Führungsverhalten, die Unternehmenskommunikation sowie verschiedene gesellschaftliche, regulatorische und kulturelle Aspekte. Die Ergebnisse unterstreichen die Bedeutung der subjektiven Interpretation von CSR und der Werteübereinstimmung für den wahrgenommenen P-O Fit. Durch die Verknüpfung von CSR-Sensemaking mit dem P-O Fit trägt diese Studie zu einem tieferen Verständnis der Prozesse auf der Mikroebene bei, durch die CSR die Perspektiven der Mitarbeitenden formt. Zudem bieten die Ergebnisse Empfehlungen für Organisationen, wie CSR-Initiativen so gestaltet und kommuniziert werden können, dass sie bei allen Mitarbeitenden über Ländergrenzen hinweg Resonanz erzeugen.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; sensemaking; person-organization fit; länderübergreifende Unterschiede; Wahrnehmungen der Mitarbeitenden; qualitative Forschung

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1 Introduction

Over the recent years corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an increasingly prominent component of how organizations express their values, react to societal expectations, and improve organizational culture. Many companies now invest their efforts in developing efficient social and environmental strategies, incentivize volunteering, and offer several benefits for employees and opportunities for them to participate and connect with causes they care about. Combined approaches appear to be particularly effective: The integration of both giving and volunteering programs in organizations seem to have a significantly higher employee engagement than offering only one type of program, which is further enhanced by incorporating incentive-based tools (Lahiry, 2025). These developments show that CSR is becoming more strategically aligned with organizational values and connected to internal culture and practices.

Yet, despite this increasing involvement of CSR in operations, employees' understanding and experience with CSR remains fragmented. While the majority of employees state that they're familiar with the concept, there is still quite a big part that does not actually know what CSR entails in practice. However, the awareness of CSR's importance is increasing. Some employees associate it with social impact, ethics or quality of life at work, whereas environmental performance and quality of life at work are seen as key benefits of organizational commitment. Unfortunately, this conceptual awareness does not translate into meaningful involvement. A lot of employees still hardly participate in CSR. Some only inform themselves about CSR actions without becoming engaged, while others do not get involved at all, especially older employees and those in larger organizations. A significant part also perceives CSR as "forced" commitment driven by economic pressures, regulatory requirements, or employee-attractiveness concerns rather than intrinsic values (Cegos, 2023).

A central reason for this limited engagement might be that information about CSR is not clearly or consistently communicated. This disconnect is frequently linked to limited efforts of supervisors to translate CSR into team-level practices, which leaves employees with an abstract view of CSR rather than a lived sense of what CSR means in their organizational context (Cegos, 2023). Recognizing these dynamics, it becomes crucial for organizations to actively involve their employees in the design, execution, and monitoring of CSR initiatives.

Accordingly, it's necessary to examine how employees make sense of CSR in their organization. Sensemaking theory suggests that, amongst others, individuals actively interpret organizational cues and construct meaning based on their identity, past experiences

or interaction with others to make sense of an event in complex contexts (Weick, 1995). Since CSR is wide-ranging and value-driven, sensemaking becomes especially crucial here. How employees understand it, what they believe it stands for, how they see it enacted, and whether they view it as authentic, shapes whether they see it as credible or relevant. These considerations lead to the central research question: *How do employees in multinational organizations make sense of global CSR initiatives in their local context?*

Sensemaking is closely intertwined with the employees' perceived person-organization fit (P-O fit), which reflects how the organizational members' values align with their organization's values (Chatman, 1989). As Jeroen van der Veer, former CEO of Royal Dutch Shell, observed:

“The successful companies of the future will be those that integrate business and employees' personal values. The best people want to do work that contributes to society with a company whose values they share, where their actions count and their views matter.”(Treasure, 2022)

This insight captures the growing expectation that work should be meaningful to employees and aligned with their personal values and beliefs. CSR can play a key role in supporting this alignment when employees perceive it as genuine and reflective of their own values (Glavas & Piderit, 2009). Conversely, when it is not communicated right or seen as self-serving, it can weaken employees' alignment and commitment (Lin et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024).

Therefore, this thesis investigates how employees interpret CSR within multinational organizations, and how these sensemaking processes shape their perceptions of P-O fit. By exploring how the employees construct meaning, what cues they rely on, and the conditions that impact their interpretation of the global initiatives, this study examines how CSR becomes embedded in daily work experiences and practices. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how CSR can evolve from an organizational initiative into a meaningful aspect of employees' everyday work experience and their purpose and fit within the company.

2 Theoretical Background

To understand how employees make sense of corporate social responsibility and how these interpretations relate to their perceived P-O fit, requires an interdisciplinary theoretical foundation. In the beginning decades, research on CSR has mostly been conducted on the macro-level, which concentrated on analyzing the firms' perspectives and external stakeholder expectations. In recent years, research has directed their focus increasingly on micro-level studies through which employees interpret CSR within their work environment. This chapter begins with outlining the concept of CSR, by defining it based on the CSR Pyramid established by Archie B. Carroll (Carroll, 1991, 1999) and demonstrating different interpretations of CSR. The chapter then turns to sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) as a central lens for understanding how employees' construct meaning around CSR strategies, focusing on certain cues and interactions. Building on this, the chapter integrates the theory of person-organization fit (Chatman, 1989; Kristof, 1996; A. L. Kristof-Brown et al., 2005) to explore how employees' alignment with the organization is mediated by its CSR strategies and actions. Further, the chapter combines all three theoretical domains to emphasize the relevance of understanding sensemaking of CSR in a multinational organization and how these sensemaking processes may shape the employees' perceived value congruence with the company.

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility: Definition & Interpretation

Corporate social responsibility has been a widely discussed concept since the early 1950s (Carroll, 1999). It has evolved from a discretionary philanthropic practice to a strategic, multi-dimensional concept that is embedded in today's corporate governance (Carroll, 1999; Matten & Moon, 2008). However, there is no universal definition of the concept of CSR since it is often biased and focused on specific interests (Dahlsrud, 2008). Its scope, priorities, and legitimacy are often shaped by the sociocultural and institutional environment in which a firm operates (Ling, 2019; Tilt, 2016).

In the academic literature, CSR is generally defined as the organization's responsibility to operate in ways that positively contribute, not only to legal compliance and economic objectives, but also to society and the environment (Carroll, 1999; Dahlsrud, 2008). From a managerial view, CSR is mostly framed more strategically, focusing more on stakeholder relationships, brand reputation, and gaining a competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer,

2006). Given this diversity CSR remains highly fragmented as scholars look at CSR from different disciplinary and conceptual perspectives (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Beyond these traditional definitions, CSR is also articulated in international frameworks like the United Nations Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs), corporate CSR, or sustainability reports.

Amid this diverse definitional background, Carroll's CSR Pyramid (Carroll, 1991, 1999) stands out as one of the most widely cited



Figure 1: The pyramid of CSR

Source: Screenshot from Carroll, 2016, p. 5

integrative frameworks. By conceptualizing CSR as a layered set of responsibilities, Carroll provides a structured model that captures the multidimensionality of CSR while remaining accessible for both academics and practitioners. The pyramid serves as a central reference point for organizing and comparing different understandings of CSR across contexts and provides a practical foundation for analyzing how employees interpret CSR initiatives in multinational companies.

2.1.1 The CSR Pyramid by Archie B. Carroll as a Core Framework

Although discussions of CSR are often linked to sustainability, environmental, social, and governance (ESG), or purpose-driven business, Carroll's CSR Pyramid remains one of the most well-known conceptual frameworks to date (Visser, 2006). In various publications (Carroll, 1979, 1991, 1999), Carroll articulated CSR as a layered construct, comprising economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities, which will be explained in more detail in the next sections. Rather than simply treating these as discrete categories, Carroll framed them as interrelated units that together define the obligations of a firm to society. The model gained recognition because it was the first model to visualize a concept that has been widely debated, and it seemed appealing to scholars, managers, and policymakers. Yet, with its popularity came the critique: some scholars question whether the hierarchical structure of the pyramid is reasonable since the ethical and philanthropic aspects have become more important for firms (Visser, 2006), while others argue that the pyramid cannot clearly depict the overlapping of the categories (Schwartz & Carroll, 2003). Nonetheless, Carroll's

framework endures as a touchstone, in part because it offers both a foundation about what businesses should do and a practical tool for evaluating corporate behavior.

2.1.1.1 Economic Responsibilities

Economic responsibilities are the base of the pyramid because they are fundamental to a firm's survival. Society creates and sustains corporations with the expectation that they will be profitable and produce goods and services (Carroll, 1991). Without profitability, a business cannot endure, draw investment, or fulfill its other social responsibilities. This includes implementing strategies to maximize revenues, control costs, invest strategically, market effectively, and ensure long-term financial success. While early conceptions focused on the profit motive, Carroll notes that this evolved into the notion of maximizing profits as a central business goal (Carroll, 1991; Carroll & Shabana, 2010).

2.1.1.2 Legal Responsibilities

The second category represents the “codified ethics” of society, which are laws and regulations that firms must follow (Carroll, 1991). These responsibilities include performing in a manner that is coherent with legal expectations, fulfilling all regulatory obligations, and providing goods and services that meet at least minimum legal standards. Businesses are expected to act as corporate citizens that respect the laws and comply with federal, state, and local regulations (Carroll, 1979, 1991). The legal responsibilities are the second tier of the pyramid as it is important for an organization to have a stable legal foundation to grow its business in a way that is consistent with the laws and regulations (Carroll, 2016).

2.1.1.3 Ethical Responsibilities

Ethical responsibilities go beyond mere legal compliance. They comprise behaviors and practices that are expected or prohibited by societal members, even though they may not be codified into law. This involves respecting evolving moral norms, protecting stakeholders' moral rights, and preventing ethical standards from being compromised to achieve business goals (Carroll, 1991). Ethical responsibilities are dynamic and interact with the other three responsibilities. In the economic category the pyramid assumes a capitalist system where it is ethically appropriate that owners or shareholders earn a return on the money they invest. In the legal unit it is important to recognize that most laws and regulations were created

because of ethical reasoning that justifies their appropriateness. Philanthropic responsibilities are driven by ethically motivated decisions since some organizations undertake those activities because they view them as inherently virtuous (Carroll, 2016; Schwartz & Carroll, 2003).

2.1.1.4 Philanthropic Responsibilities

At the top of the pyramid are philanthropic (or discretionary) responsibilities. These are voluntary activities aimed at promoting human welfare or goodwill, such as charitable donations, community programs, employee volunteerism, and other contributions to social causes. Unlike ethical responsibilities, philanthropy is not morally or ethically expected but is highly desired by society. Carroll argues that, while important, philanthropic responsibilities are less critical than the other three categories because they are not essential to a business (Carroll, 1991).

2.1.1.5 Interrelationships and Tensions between the Responsibilities

The four components are interrelated rather than entirely mutually exclusive. A socially responsible firm addresses all four dimensions simultaneously. However, tensions inevitably arise, mostly between economic and legal, economic and ethical, and economic and philanthropic responsibilities since there might be a conflict between the concern for profits or for society. Effective CSR requires managing these tensions and looking at the model as a whole to create an effective corporate strategy (Carroll, 1991).

2.1.1.6 CSR and Stakeholder Orientation

The word “social” in CSR has always been discussed as it wasn’t clear who it was directed to. This calls for an action from businesses to identify to whom they should be responsible, which are essentially those groups that have an interest in the firm’s operations and success, like shareholders, customers, employees, local communities, and society at large. The challenge is that the management needs to decide whose claims are legitimate and how important or urgent those claims are (Carroll, 1991). So in order to manage those decisions about the firm’s stakeholders, Carroll suggests five questions for the management:

1. Who are your stakeholders?

2. What are their stakes?
3. What opportunities and challenges are presented by your stakeholders?
4. What corporate social responsibilities (economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic) do you have to your stakeholders?
5. What strategies, actions, or decisions should you take to best deal with these responsibilities?

These might guide the managers to organize their thoughts and ideas about what the firm should do and is useful for developing priorities and making long-term as well as short-term decisions (Carroll, 1991).

2.1.2 Academic vs. Managerial Framing of CSR

One of the stakeholders that the leadership needs to take into consideration when developing useful strategies, are the employees themselves. How CSR is introduced to the employees might lead to a certain degree of ambiguity since the overlapping dimensions of the CSR construct can generate interpretive tensions. Economic and legal responsibilities are mostly formal and non-negotiable, whereas ethical and philanthropic responsibilities are more optional and context-specific (Carroll, 1991). Employees may therefore differ in how they assess the authenticity, relevance, or importance of CSR initiatives.

Another source of ambiguity or unclarity of CSR for employees stems from the contrast between academic and managerial perspectives. In the academic literature, CSR is often approached from a normative standpoint, which emphasizes the ethical and societal obligations of organizations. Scholars highlight the moral responsibility of businesses to contribute to the well-being of society, protect the environment, and respect the rights of the stakeholder groups beyond what is legally required or economically necessary (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Carroll, 1999; Schwartz & Carroll, 2003).

In contrast, managerial interpretations of CSR tend to adopt a more strategic orientation and use CSR as a tool to reach their corporate goals. In this view, CSR is closely tied to competitive advantage, brand reputation, and stakeholder management (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Porter & Kramer, 2006). Rather than emphasizing what firms should do, managers often decide on how CSR can be integrated into their business operations in ways that enhance profitability, reduce risk, or open new markets.

These divergent perspectives – normative versus strategic, external obligations versus business integration – highlight the tension between CSR as a matter of ethical responsibility and CSR as a business opportunity, which in turn can create uncertainty in employees regarding the underlying motives of CSR. This tension highlights the importance of understanding how employees interpret CSR rather than assuming a shared organizational understanding.

2.1.3 Cultural and Contextual Factors Shaping CSR Meaning

CSR meanings are also highly dependent on cultural and contextual factors. As Matten and Moon (2008) argue, CSR manifests differently across countries and regions, shaped by institutional structures, societal expectations, and historical traditions. Their distinction between explicit CSR and implicit CSR illustrates how national contexts fundamentally shape CSR practices. Companies that practice explicit CSR develop initiatives because of societal interests like raising money for special causes, which can be seen in the United States. Implicit CSR activities, on the other side, are less obvious as they're mostly incorporated in the companies' norms, values, and rules, potentially making it more challenging for employees to identify CSR commitments. This CSR strategy is mainly practiced by coordinated market economies in Europe.

Similarly, cross-cultural research shows that CSR activities depend on the social and economic development of a country. For instance, in Asian contexts CSR is less important when a country is highly developed because of strong state welfare and environmental policies and more adopted in emerging economies because it sends a stronger positive signal to stakeholders (Chapple & Moon, 2005; Su et al., 2016).

This suggests that CSR is not a universal model but rather a socially constructed concept that adapts to local environments (Tilt, 2016) and might be interpreted and enacted by employees based on local norms and social needs.

2.2 CSR Implementation in Multinational Companies (MNCs)

Having considered the cultural and contextual interpretations of CSR, it is also important to examine how firms communicate and define CSR in their own terms. Exploring these organizational definitions provides insights into how companies position themselves in

relation to broader societal expectations and how they actually put those together into concrete practices.

Procter & Gamble (P&G), a multinational producer of consumer goods, is a good example since they established a fundamental concept for their approach to CSR. The company has set its goal on contributing to society that goes beyond profit-making.

The focus is on four key areas (Procter & Gamble, 2023):

- **Community impact:** P&G supports communities by providing essential products during disasters, promoting hygiene education and partnering with organizations like Save the Children or Global Medic.
- **Equality & inclusion:** P&G values every contribution of all its employees, aiming to reflect the diversity of their consumers. This includes creating a culture of inclusion and inclusively serving consumers with unique brand experiences.
- **Environmental sustainability:** The firm has set its goal to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions across its supply chain and operations by 2040. It focuses on reducing its footprint, investing in renewable energy, waste reduction, water conservation, and nature preservation.
- **Ethics & responsibility:** P&G emphasizes strong ethics, compliance, and quality standards in its operations. The firm maintains a commitment to transparency and accountability, ensuring that its business practices align with its values.



*Figure 2: P&G Citizenship Model
Source: Screenshot from P&G 2023
Citizenship Report*

The facility of Procter & Gamble in India, however, has released its own Corporate Citizenship Report, showing how they adapt and implement the global initiatives in their country. They took note of the global strategies and aligned them with their local needs, which indicates that employees perceive the need to adapt global initiatives to the specific conditions of their country. As shown in Figure 3, Procter & Gamble India has launched various programs that are tailored to their local context, such as the flagship program, which aims to support underprivileged children with their education (Procter & Gamble India, 2023).



Figure 3: Citizenship at P&G India
Source: Screenshot from P&G India 2023 Citizenship Report

The implementation of CSR in multinational companies is particularly complex due to the global scope of their operations and the diversity of institutional, cultural, and regulatory environments they encounter. As Husted and Allen (2006) argue, MNCs face the strategic challenge of how they want to direct their organizational strategies. This approach goes back to the framework created by Bartlett and Ghoshal (2002) where they introduce four strategies for firms to grow internationally. This dilemma between global consistency and local responsiveness still remains for CSR in international business and Husted and Allen (2006) suggest that managers should handle it more strategically and not copy other firms' strategies or rely on old routines.

The distinction between explicit and implicit CSR provides an important concept for understanding this complexity, also on the individual level (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Matten & Moon, 2008). While firms headquartered in liberal market economies often articulate explicit CSR strategies that are globally communicated and branded, those operating in coordinated or emerging economies may rely more on implicit CSR practices that are embedded in institutional and cultural traditions. MNCs must therefore balance headquarters-driven policies with locally embedded practices to maintain legitimacy across different contexts (Jamali, 2010; Matten & Moon, 2008; Muller, 2006).

Companies are also faced with the challenges of the pressure to comply with global standards, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while simultaneously aligning CSR initiatives with geographical, societal, political, and economic circumstances (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Rasche, 2010). For instance, while a company may adopt a global human rights or environmental policy, its local subsidiaries often have to adapt these commitments to country-specific legal frameworks, cultural norms, and resource constraints. This interplay between global frameworks and local adaptation shows the diversity of CSR in MNCs, which often results in glocalized CSR strategies (Husted & Allen, 2006; Jamali, 2010).

Furthermore, CSR implementation in MNCs is increasingly influenced by stakeholder pressures, such as the employees themselves (Aguilera et al., 2007). When firms apply frameworks, such as the SDGs, it provides employees with a clear sense of direction. Additionally, when those initiatives provide tangible benefits, the employees experience positive effects first-hand. However, if those commitments don't reach members in subsidiaries of the firm, they might feel excluded and create a psychological distance to the firm (Kallmuenzer et al., 2023). Therefore, while the power of stakeholder pressures might sometimes not be sufficient for a MNC to actually change a part of their CSR strategy, firms are nonetheless advised to continuously invest in the building and improvement of stakeholder relationships and ensure that CSR is embedded, not only in corporate communication, but also in organizational routines and supply chain practices (Bondy et al., 2012).

2.3 Sensemaking

Sensemaking offers a central theoretical lens for understanding employees' interpretations of CSR initiatives within their organization. It happens especially when individuals notice that reality doesn't match what they expected or when they don't know how to respond to a situation. In these ambiguous moments, things feel confusing and the normal flow of activities is disrupted (Weick, 2009). The concept of sensemaking has therefore become an essential lens in organizational research as it addresses how individuals and groups cope with the unexpected, make meaning of unfolding events, and establish a basis for a coordinated activity (Weick et al., 2005).

Scholars have shown that sensemaking is particularly significant during moments of disruption, such as crises, accidents, or strategic change, where established routines and assumptions may no longer provide sufficient guidance (Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1993). At the same time, sensemaking is not limited to extraordinary situations but is also present in the day-to-day life of organizations, influencing how members interpret their organization's actions and how it affects their daily practices (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

Since CSR has clear prosocial goals, studying how people make sense of it helps to better understand how they experience meaningfulness at work, beyond just their individual tasks. So looking at CSR through the idea of sensemaking – where motivation for CSR is just one part of it – positions CSR as an integral part of a company's overall character. This gives a stronger foundation for understanding CSR than only examining the specific actions a company takes in a certain situation or time frame (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Basu & Palazzo, 2008).

In the following section, the concept of sensemaking will be defined more precisely before turning to its key characteristics and implications for organizational research and CSR practice.

2.3.1 Sensemaking: Definition and Core Assumptions

Sensemaking is a foundational process of organizing through which individuals and groups continuously interpret and give meaning to their experiences, especially when confronted with ambiguity, surprise, or disruption (Weick et al., 2005). It is best understood not as a linear act of decision-making, but as a repeated cycle of noticing, interpreting, and acting in which meaning and action mutually reinforce one another (Weick, 2009). In this view, people do not simply take in information in a passive way. Instead, they actively build their own reality by acting within their environment and then looking back to interpret the results of their actions (Weick, 2009; Weick et al., 2005).

Sensemaking is typically triggered by certain events, like strategic changes, when individuals are trying to interpret a situation and figuring out how to act on it (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Such moments move individuals from being fully immersed in their activities to taking a step back and reflecting on them, forcing them to ask: "What's the story here?" and "What should I do next?" (Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1995). To answer these questions, actors draw upon cues from their environment – rules, routines, cultural traditions,

institutional logics, or professional knowledge – which they set aside, make sense of them, and fit them into a reasonable explanation that enables them to continue their activities (Weick, 2009).

The process of sensemaking is characterized by seven key properties (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005):

- Identity construction: Interpretations are inseparable from identity. Who organizational members believe they are (and who others perceive them to be) shapes what they notice, how they interpret, and how their accounts are validated or challenged.
- Retrospection: Meaning is made retrospectively, as actors look back at past events and fit them into coherent stories that rationalize what has happened and what should follow.
- Enactment: People enact the environments they later interpret by taking actions that create cues, constraints, and opportunities for themselves and others.
- Extracted cues: Sensemaking depends on focusing selectively on specific signals from a stream of ongoing experience, while ignoring others, to build a workable narrative.
- Social embeddedness: Meanings are co-created through communication, interaction, and negotiation; sensemaking is inherently a collective process even when undertaken individually.
- Ongoing nature: Organizational life is a continuous flow of events and actors isolate moments to interpret when disruptions demand attention.
- Plausibility over accuracy: The goal is not to find objective truth but to create interpretations that are coherent, credible, and actionable enough to sustain activity.

Scholars have further elaborated the social and relational dimensions of sensemaking. Maitlis (2005) emphasizes that sensemaking is shaped by both leader sensegiving – the attempts of organizational leaders to frame issues and guide interpretation – and stakeholder sensegiving in which different individuals bring in their own perspectives, which can either strengthen the process or make it more divided. Helms Mills, Thurlow and Mills (2010) stress that sensemaking is critical and situated in power dynamics where authority, routines, and organizational shocks influence whose interpretations become accepted. More recent work also highlights the role of emotion as both a trigger and a driver: disruptions evoke

emotional responses that motivate people to engage in sensemaking and accounts must align not only cognitively but also emotionally to feel compelling (Maitlis et al., 2013).

Taken together, sensemaking is not merely about “making sense” in the abstract but about constructing realities that allow coordinated action under conditions of ambiguity. It explains how organizational members transform experiences into coherent narratives, how they construct meaning across different identities and power positions, and how these narratives become enduring practices, routines, and even institutionalized structures (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick et al., 2005).

2.3.2 Sensemaking and CSR

CSR can be more deeply understood through the lens of organizational sensemaking, which emphasizes how employees and organizations interpret their relationships with stakeholders and the broader social and environmental context. Since Aguinis and Glavas (2012) noted that CSR research is rather understudied on the individual level, a rising body of literature has been published in that field (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). However, the process of sensemaking of CSR initiatives on the individual level still remains unexplored (Sendlhofer & Tolstoy, 2022).

Aguinis and Glavas (2019) analyze the link between sensemaking and CSR based on three factors: intraindividual (within individuals), organizational (organizational level), and extraorganizational (outside of the organization and the interplay between internal and external stakeholders). This analysis should exhibit why and how individuals in an organization experience CSR differently. On the intraindividual level the authors argue that work orientation, moral identity, environmental, ecological, and communal values are factors that show how organizational members experience CSR and meaningfulness differently through work. For example, individuals with a strong calling orientation – where employees have a sense of higher purpose for their work (Cardador et al., 2011) – are more likely to have a greater positive experience with CSR than employees with other orientations. For the intraorganizational sensemaking factors, the authors introduced four elements: embedded and peripheral CSR, top-down implementation of CSR and bottom-up implementation of CSR. Embedded CSR is characterized by being incorporated into the organization’s overall strategy, whereas peripheral CSR is defined as initiatives that are not part of the core strategies and are mostly philanthropic activities. Top-down or bottom-up

CSR respectively, are described as strategies that are being implemented either by the top management or suggested by the employees (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). However, if top-down CSR is implemented, the employees might see CSR as an extrarole behavior which might be the reason why a lot of CSR initiatives don't have the intended effect (Glavas, 2016).

Further, Aguinis and Glavas (2019) state that family, external stakeholders, and national culture influence the employees' sensemaking of CSR as well. How and where an individual lives could impact their way of thinking both at work and privately, a factor that also needs further investigation (Koch et al., 2019). For example, employees that live in collectivistic countries might have a different view on CSR than employees that live in individualistic countries (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Hofstede, 1983). External stakeholders, however, could be influenced by the employees and vice versa as they interact not only with the organization but also with the employees working there (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019).

Basu and Palazzo (2008), however, offer a framework for organizational sensemaking that refers to understanding CSR as a process where it is seen as a part of the organization's identity which can set one organization apart from others that interpret and enact their responsibilities differently. This framework includes the analysis of three processes: cognitive, linguistic, and conative.

Cognitive processes explore the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders. In this case the organization is not only thinking about making profit but also about how its actions affect the wider society. Hence, they invest in CSR activities to strengthen relationships. Linguistic processes describe the way as to why organizations engage in CSR and how they communicate that to their stakeholders. Finally, conative processes include the organization's positioning towards stakeholders and whether it demonstrates genuine, consistent commitment through its CSR activities in ways that meaningfully affect those relationships. In this case, the authors offer three dimensions to analyze the conative processes: posture, consistency and commitment. Posture describes the way a company responds, which reveals its character and approach to its stakeholder relationships (Wood, 1991). Consistency and commitment are factors that should be considered when approaching CSR activities. Managers should act in a steady, disciplined way (Porter & Kramer, 2002) and include CSR activities in their daily work patterns to ensure stability.

2.3.3 Implications of Sensemaking for CSR and Perceived Fit

By focusing on how meaning is constructed, sensemaking shifts its attention to how employees experience CSR (Weick, 1995). These interpretations have important implications for how employees evaluate their perceived alignment with the organization. They assess CSR initiatives introduced by the company based on their own values and beliefs and in turn feel like their work is either more or less meaningful (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). Perceived fit can therefore be understood as an outcome of the sensemaking processes of organizational members, as value alignment is based on employees' interpretation of organizational cues (Aguinis et al., 2024; Kristof, 1996).

2.4 Person-Organization Fit

The concept of person-organization fit has become an important lens for scholars in organizational behavior research and managers in organizations, as it is of great value to employ individuals that are committed to the company (Kristof, 1996). Multiple managers in higher positions have stated that their success was partly related to their fit for the organization and highlighted the importance to hire someone who can resonate with the culture and the people in the organization (A. Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). As Schneider (1987) describes it, the people that get selected, determine the organizational behavior – the employees are the core. If the organization needs a change, then the people working there need to change first.

The higher the level of P-O fit, the more likely it is to have reduced turnover as well as greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment (A. L. Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). In the context of CSR, P-O fit offers a particularly useful perspective because employees' engagement and creative involvement significantly increase the more socially responsible a company is (Glavas & Piderit, 2009). But not only employees of the organization are influenced by its CSR actions. Job seekers also interpret an organization's corporate social performance (CSP) as a signal of its underlying values. When job seekers perceive a strong alignment between their own values and the values of the organization, they report higher organizational attractiveness, partly because of the sense of fit this creates. Conversely, when they don't feel their values align with the ones of the company, individuals may question the authenticity of the organization's motives and respond with skepticism. In other words, it is not only the presence of socially responsible practices that matters, but also whether potential employees view those activities as consistent with their own values and as genuinely

motivated (Jones et al., 2014). Thus, examining P-O fit provides a valuable theoretical contribution for understanding how CSR activities are perceived internally and how they can be embedded effectively within multinational organizations.

2.4.1 Person-Organization Fit: Definition and Core Assumptions

P-O fit is a central concept in organizational behavior research. It is one of the five domains of person-environment fit (P-E fit) which, in general, describes the compatibility between a person and their work environment, occurring when the individual and the environment match well. Since P-E fit has a very simplistic definition, there are several distinct types of P-E fit to describe it a bit more in detail – person-vocation fit, person-job fit, person-group fit, person-supervisor fit, and lastly person-organization fit. (A. L. Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

P-O fit has been widely discussed not only by scholars but also by managers. It is empirically proven that it functions as a predictor of job satisfaction, intentions to leave, and commitment, no matter the age, gender, or tenure. The higher the P-O fit score, the more likely it is for an individual to stay in the company for a longer period (O'Reilly III et al., 1991). The concept refers to the alignment between individual values and organizational values (Chatman, 1989). Kristof (1996, p. 4) defines it as “the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs, or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics, or (c) both.”

2.4.2 The Link between P-O Fit and CSR

Even though analyses of CSR on the individual level seem rather scarce in academic literature compared to the institutional and organizational level, these studies give quite interesting insights into how individuals interact with CSR (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Sendlhofer & Tolstoy, 2022).

Research consistently shows that firms with higher levels of corporate social responsibility efforts receive a higher employee engagement and support towards CSR (e.g. Glavas and Piderit, 2009; Ferreira and Real De Oliveira, 2014).

But not only current employees value an organization's CSR activities. Potential applicants, too, are attentive to companies' social performance and the fact that organizations with

stronger corporate social performance (CSP) may gain competitive advantages by attracting a larger and more qualified applicant pool. Such findings highlight not only the moral and ethical rationale for proactive CSR, but also its instrumental value as a driver of organizational competitiveness. Indeed, CSP serves as a signal of an organization's value system, shaping how potential applicants perceive working conditions and influencing their attraction to the firm. Specific dimensions of CSP, such as fair treatment of women and minorities or positive employee relations, tend to be particularly salient for applicants as they are more directly interpreted as signals about internal work environments compared to dimensions, such as environmental concern or product quality (Rupp & Mallory, 2015). Therefore, job seekers see CSR records also as an important determinant of perceived P-O fit. Some tend to see companies with strong CSR records as offering a better ethical fit, even if their own ethical perceptions of corporations are relatively low. Moreover, CSR can enhance attractiveness regardless of a firm's financial performance, although the combination of strong CSR and strong corporate ability (CA) appears to yield the highest levels of perceived fit and attractiveness (Kim & Park, 2011).

Beyond influencing attraction, CSR plays a key role in shaping employees' perceptions of justice within the organization. Employees' judgments of their firm's external CSR are a critical aspect of their fairness perceptions, which in turn affect well-being, job satisfaction, commitment, performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors. When fairness is perceived, employees tend to thrive and work harder, whereas perceptions of injustice often lead to reduced performance or retaliatory behaviors. Importantly, employee interpretations of CSR are socially constructed and tend to spread within organizations, shaping the overall CSR climate and contributing to the firm's broader social reputation (Aguilera et al., 2007). This dynamic underscores how employee morality-based motives can drive pressure for CSR.

The internal benefits of CSR are equally significant. CSR has been shown to strengthen employees' identification with their organizations and boost perceptions of external prestige, both of which are crucial for shaping work-related attitudes and behaviors (Hameed et al., 2016). However, the impact of CSR is not uniform: individual differences, such as employees' sense of calling, shape how strongly they respond to CSR initiatives (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). Similarly, Glavas (2016) demonstrates that employee engagement is positively influenced by CSR when it shows authenticity, enabling employees to express their "whole selves" at work, whereas CSR linked to perceptions of organizational support (i.e. direct benefits for employees) may even have a negative effect. These findings highlight

the importance of embedding CSR into core organizational practices and strategies rather than relying solely on peripheral initiatives or extra-role behaviors, which employees may resist.

Finally, recent evidence suggests that CSR influences employees' organizational commitment through complex mediating mechanisms. CSR initiatives foster a positive organizational climate for CSR which shapes employees' attributions about the motives behind CSR adoption. Intrinsic attributions – perceptions that CSR is genuinely value-driven – enhance commitment while extrinsic attributions – perceptions that CSR is self-serving – diminish it (Lin et al., 2022). This suggests that employees' beliefs about CSR motives significantly determine their willingness to remain in the organization.

Taken together, this body of research demonstrates that CSR not only enhances external reputation and applicant attraction but also shapes internal employee perceptions, identification, engagement, and commitment.

2.5 Influence of Leaderships' Behavior and Communication on Employee Sensemaking

Managers are not only responsible for implementing strategic changes but also for shaping how employees make sense of them. They themselves interpret the strategic change, work on developing a plan and a guide for the vision and promote it to the stakeholders. In doing so, they want to convince the stakeholders to accept the plan and overcome possible differences. Through this process of influencing the stakeholders to agree with the new change, the management team acts as a sensegiver who actively guides employees' interpretations (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

Research consistently demonstrates that management's views on CSR and its implementation in the organization has a statistically significant influence on employees' attitudes and behaviors towards CSR (Glavas & Piderit, 2009). Further, the leadership's style in handling CSR can shape employees' perspectives concerning CSR. Implicit CSR, for instance, is driven more by personal values and encourages discussions and independent thinking. Therefore, the employees see it as a more authentic behavior by their management team. Explicit CSR, on the other hand, can be treated in a more autocratic way by setting targets and writing up reports about progress. In this way, to some individuals it might seem a bit less authentic and suspicions about greenwashing can arise (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010).

Managers who are perceived as visionary – in the sense of being more value-driven – motivate employees to be more active and increase their efforts (De Luque et al., 2008). If they act as moral managers but fail to embody moral integrity, they risk losing the trust of both internal and external stakeholders and may be perceived as hypocritical. Conversely, leaders who are moral individuals but do not actively promote ethical standards in their managerial role, become “ethically silent” and are often met with cynicism. Leaders who lack both personal morality and ethical managerial conduct are regarded as unethical (Collier & Esteban, 2007).

Ethical leadership encourages employees to move beyond self-interest and consider the broader social interests of stakeholders, within which CSR values are embedded. It shapes employees’ attitudes toward social issues, such as CSR, by fostering a perceived ethical work climate. Such a climate motivates individuals to engage in morally grounded work practices, commit to the well-being of the organization and, under the guidance of ethical leaders, strengthen CSR initiatives. To achieve this, ethical leaders should highlight value-based training and implement initiatives that promote an ethical, organizational culture. By doing so, managers can inspire employees to develop a sense of collectivity, prioritize group interests and pursue the organization’s vision. Moreover, leaders can encourage employees to adopt positive attitudes toward both organizational and stakeholder welfare, while also motivating them to think and act independently on the basis of moral values. Ultimately, employees’ perception of an ethical work climate is essential for embedding CSR values throughout the organization (Choi et al., 2015).

How an organization communicates CSR to their employees also plays a critical role in their understanding of CSR activities (Zhang et al., 2024). However, those effects of CSR communication on employee understanding and engagement remain rather unexplored in the field (Jiang & Luo, 2024).

When companies fail to clearly communicate their CSR strategies, guidelines, and activities, employees struggle to understand what the company is actually doing in this area, which makes it difficult for them to engage in CSR activities (Zhang et al., 2024). If the company uses well-designed internal communication, it enhances employees’ willingness to participate in CSR initiatives. But this strategic communication needs to go two ways. On the one hand, it has to be consistent, informative, personally relevant, and transparent, but it also needs to incorporate employees’ inputs, emotions, and feedback (Dong et al., 2024). By actively inviting employees to raise their concerns or give feedback and organizing

discussions and meetings, leaders can better recognize what the employees' opinions are and work with them to find suitable solutions. By showing the meaningfulness of employees' contributions, organizations can provide concrete guidance on how employees can get involved in the CSR development (Zhang et al., 2024). Additionally, leaders' language also plays an important part in strengthening employees' motivation to engage in CSR activities. If leaders help employees make better sense of CSR initiatives, they will more likely develop an emotional attachment to CSR, form clearer cognitive understandings of its value and participate in the organization's CSR activities. Moreover, if employees are more aware of those CSR initiatives and participate in them, they will realize that there are also benefits that come with it, such as emotional benefits (e.g. pride and satisfaction) and functional benefits (e.g. skill development) (Zhang et al., 2021).

This highlights the importance of leadership communication that not only enhances employees' participation but also supports and encourages them to speak up about their opinions and beliefs.

2.6 The Link between CSR, P-O Fit and Sensemaking

As seen in the chapters above, a valuable body of literature already exists on the topic about how and to what extent individuals identify with the organization based on its views and actions towards CSR and how employees make sense of those actions. This section outlines the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of how organizational members make sense of the CSR initiatives of the company and how they evaluate the alignment between their own values and those of the organization. Sensemaking highlights the process through which organizations and their members interpret CSR initiatives, reduce ambiguity and embed them into their organizational practices (Weick, 1995). P-O fit provides an individual-level perspective, emphasizing how employees evaluate the compatibility of their personal values and the organization's CSR values (Kristof, 1996). Integrating these two perspectives enables a multi-level understanding of CSR. On the one hand it's a collective process of meaning construction, on the other hand it's an individual-level evaluation that shapes employee commitment and behavior. This framework thus conceptualizes CSR as a dynamic process in which organizational sensemaking and individual identification are reinforcing each other.

As seen in Figure 4, this process of sensemaking starts with the communication and implementation of the CSR initiatives. In multinational organizations, global CSR initiatives, introduced at the headquarters, require interpretation at the subsidiary level. Rather than being uniformly adopted, these initiatives might be subject to local sensemaking processes in which managers and employees reinterpret CSR in line with their cultural and institutional context (Weick, 1995). This localized sensemaking shapes how CSR is communicated and enacted in the subsidiaries. Employees then evaluate the extent to which these CSR meanings align with their personal values, drawing on P-O fit as an evaluative lens (Kristof, 1996). Where high fit is perceived, employees identify and engage more with CSR activities (Glavas & Piderit, 2009); where alignment is weak, CSR may be confronted with skepticism (Jones et al., 2014). Crucially, these responses feed back into organizational sensemaking, highlighting CSR as a dynamic and iterative process that is shaped across multiple levels of the multinational organization. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to explore how employees across different subsidiaries make sense of CSR initiatives introduced at the organizational, global level. The research aims to investigate whether and how these employees adapt CSR practices to their local contexts and how they evaluate the legitimacy and relevance of such initiatives. By examining these dynamics, the thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of how global CSR strategies are interpreted, negotiated and enacted in diverse organizational settings.

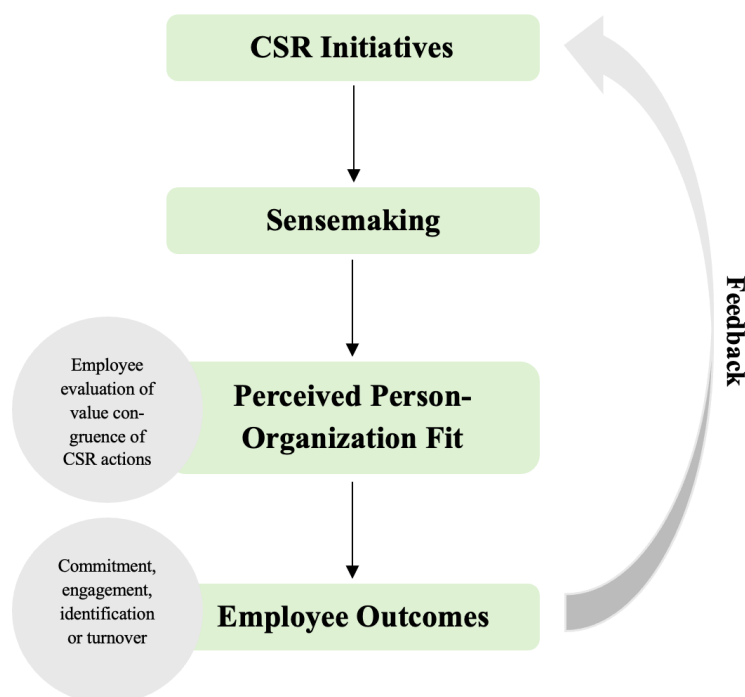


Figure 4: Theoretical framework of CSR, sensemaking and P-O fit

3 Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to investigate how organizational members in multinational firms make sense of CSR. The research design was guided by the aim to explore individual interpretations, perceived legitimacy, and potential adaptation of global CSR initiatives within local contexts. This chapter first presents the overall research design and theoretical orientation, before describing the research context, sampling strategy, and data collection methods. It then explains the procedures for data analysis of the secondary and primary data. Finally, ethical considerations and methodological limitations are addressed to provide a transparent account of the research process.

3.1 Research Design

Given the focus that sensemaking of CSR is an ongoing process through lived experiences, a qualitative, interpretive research design was chosen (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Stake, 1995; Welch et al., 2011). Qualitative research is very well suited here since the goal of this study is to find out more about the “who”, “how”, and “why” (Doz, 2011). Who is in the focus? Who is affected? How are they making sense of it? Why do they make sense of it and why is that important? Working with people face-to-face, observing their behavior and seeing them interact in the real, natural world is a crucial part of qualitative research. So rather than measuring or predicting specific outcomes in artificial settings, this research aims to understand the employees’ real-life experiences of CSR within their organization and how they make sense of it (Rossman & Rallis, 2011).

The exploratory nature of the study is particularly relevant given the limited amount of micro-level CSR research focusing on employees’ interpretations (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). By investigating multiple subsidiaries within a multinational organization, the design also shows comparison across contexts, highlighting whether and how global CSR initiatives are perceived, adapted, or legitimized differently depending on local environments and organizational structures.

This research design is further guided by the sensemaking theory as it concludes how employees interpret, enact, and construct shared understanding (Weick, 1995). Accordingly, the design emphasizes the collection of rich, qualitative data through semi-structured interviews, complemented by CSR reports. This combination allows for capturing both employees’ subjective interpretations and the organizational practices of CSR.

Overall, the chosen research design provides the flexibility to account for diverse perspectives, ensures depth of insight into CSR sensemaking, and aligns with the philosophical assumptions outlined above.

3.2 Qualitative Method of the Study

To analyze employees' sensemaking and perceptions of CSR across different establishments, the use of an embedded, single case study is appropriate (Fletcher et al., 2018). For this case study a German family-owned company was chosen. The firm was founded in 1965 and has developed from a small family business into one of Europe's leading Electronics Manufacturing Services (EMS) provider, employing more than 13,000 people across 26 international locations. As a globally operating yet family-owned company, it combines strong regional roots with a diverse international workforce and customer base. As it operates across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas, the company is particularly relevant for research that examines how employees in different cultural and organizational contexts interpret and make sense of corporate initiatives such as CSR. CSR has become increasingly central to the firm's corporate strategy, reflected in its commitment to sustainable production, innovation and regional talent development, while also addressing global challenges such as digitalization, climate change and responsible supply chain management. This international orientation provides a unique setting to investigate how CSR is communicated and perceived across subsidiaries and whether employees interpret these initiatives consistently or adapt them according to local, cultural, and organizational contexts. At the same time, the company's identity as a family-owned firm with a strong corporate culture – which they are trying to implement more in their subsidiaries – is great for exploring perceived P-O fit (Company A, 2025). The employees may align differently with the company's values depending on local practices, management approaches, and CSR approaches. Therefore, the firm is ideal for the case study and for analyzing how global CSR strategies are translated into local contexts, how employees construct meaning around them and how this process influences their sense of belonging and value congruence within the organization.

3.3 Data Collection

For this study two kinds of data were collected: historical, secondary data and as a primary qualitative data source, interviews. The secondary data consists of corporate responsibility

reports from 2019, when the company first released a report, to 2023. The primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 11 employees from various departments and countries.

3.3.1 Corporate Responsibility (CR) Reports

The first data source consisted of the company's publicly available corporate responsibility reports. The reports are helpful to understand how the company first started to develop its CSR strategies, what the focus is on and if and how they implement it in their subsidiaries. They outline key priorities such as environmental sustainability, social responsibility and ethical business conduct, while also highlighting major achievements, initiatives and performance indicators (Company A, 2020, 2022, 2024). Additionally, the reports are useful to see how those CSR activities were communicated to the firm's stakeholders over the years. By analyzing these reports, it was possible to follow the evolution of the company's CSR initiatives, identity, recurring themes, and how the organization presents itself to external stakeholders. The reports primarily target an external audience, providing insights into how the organization constructs and portrays itself to the outside world. This external communication served as an important point of comparison for the employee interviews, since it helped to examine whether and how the company's official CSR narrative aligns with the employees' internal perceptions and interpretations.

The longitudinal perspective helped to compare priorities, language use, and framing of CSR activities, which offered essential background information for following and interpreting the employee interviews.

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The second and primary data source consisted of 9 semi-structured interviews conducted with 11 employees from different departments and countries. The participants' diverse roles and hierarchical levels allowed for a good view of how CSR initiatives are perceived and interpreted within the organization. The international focus was a crucial part of the study as it helps to understand how the employees of the company interpret the CSR initiatives based on their role and country, how they are implemented in their subsidiary, and if their personal values regarding CSR align with the organization's CSR values.

The interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and lasted between 20-61 minutes. They followed a semi-structured format, allowing the participants to express their experiences and opinions but simultaneously giving them some guidance and direction. Therefore, an interview guide was developed based on prior literature research (e.g. Weick, 1995; Hameed *et al.*, 2016) and included questions about the employees' understanding of CSR, their experiences with CSR initiatives, and their alignment with organizational values based on CSR. However, if one person didn't have an answer to one question, e.g. *"How does your manager communicate the CSR initiatives to you, if at all?"*, naturally it wouldn't make sense to raise the question *"Can you recall a time when management's view of CSR shaped how you thought about it?"* since the conversation about CSR between manager and employee didn't happen at all, whereby the employee's view of CSR couldn't be influenced by the manager's opinion on CSR. Therefore, the interviews were based on the interview guide, but if one topic wasn't relevant for the interviewee, the questions were asked based on the issues that were important to the participant.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to increase the validity of the research. The interviews were held in German and in English, whereas the German interviews were transcribed in German and then translated to English. Further analysis, such as the coding process of the interviews, was also done in English. The transcripts of the interviews are attached in the Appendix C. The answers of the participants were anonymized to ensure protection of the employees' identities and all interviewees gave their consent prior to the interview.

Interview #	Date	Role	Country	Details
1	07.10.2025	Division Manager/Vice President	Germany	In person, male, 31:50
2	21.10.2025	Controller	Germany	Online video meeting, male, 23:50
3	21.10.2025	Quality Manager	Romania	Online video meeting, male, 27:55

4	21.10.2025	Project Coordinator, Team Lead Production Management	Costa Rica	Online video meeting, 2 males, 44:27
5	23.10.2025	HR Manager, Plant Director	China	Online video meeting, female and male, 43:03
6	23.10.2025	HR Manager	United States	Online video meeting, female, 45:16
7	24.10.2025	HR Manager	United States	Online video meeting, female, 24:12
8	30.10.2025	Product Quality Manager	Germany	Online video meeting, male, 1:01:15
9	12.11.2025	Vice President of Quality	United States	Online video meeting, male, 19:55

Table 1: Overview of the participants

3.3.3 Integration of Data Sources

Combining the analysis of CR reports with employee interviews provided a collective understanding of CSR in the organization. While the CR reports reflected how the company defines and communicates responsibility to external audiences, they don't show how it is interpreted and challenged internally. The interviews effectively offer insights into lived experiences and understanding across different countries, departments, and hierarchical levels. So connecting archival data with primary data presents an overall perspective of the CSR strategies and initiatives and how they are interpreted internally.

3.4 Sampling

To analyze how the employees make sense of CSR in their cultural and contextual environment and what role the managers play in that, it is crucial to interview individuals

from different countries where the company has establishments as well as from various hierarchical levels. Therefore, a purposive sampling – more specifically the maximum variation sampling – was used to get a great variability of participants and their sensemaking processes (Etikan, 2016).

The respondents represented five different countries – Germany, Romania, China, Costa Rica, and the United States – and a variety of departments, including Human Resources, Product Quality, Electrical Engineering, Controlling, Project Coordination, and Production Management. This diversity allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how CSR is interpreted across different functional areas and cultural contexts. The participants also differed in their hierarchical positions, ranging from employees without managerial responsibilities to team leads, a director of the plant, and two division managers and vice presidents.

3.5 Data Analysis

This section outlines the data analysis methods applied in this research, beginning with the analysis of the corporate responsibility reports, followed by a discussion of the analysis of the primary data.

3.5.1 Analysis of the Secondary Data

The first step was to analyze the corporate responsibility reports that were published between 2019 and 2023. The aim was to see how the organization's CSR communication developed over time and how certain themes were emphasized or changed. Comparing the reports helped identify recurring themes, such as responsible business, sustainability, and social responsibility (Company A, 2020, 2022, 2024). Additionally, key events as well as new topics that emerged over the years provided valuable insights into what the company prioritizes and accomplished in those years. Through this comparison, a better understanding of how the official initiatives influenced employees' interpretations or differed from them was gained. Analyzing those reports helped with comprehending and interpreting the participants' answers.

3.5.2 Analysis of the Primary Data

The next step was to conduct and analyze the interviews. As for the analysis, existing literature on sensemaking and P-O fit informed the identification of relevant concepts and relationships by asking questions explicitly on how the interviewees interpret CSR within their environment and how it is connected to their own values. This enabled a systematic coding process of the responses, allowing for a categorization to uncover the main patterns and ideas. Thereby the grounded theory methods of data collection, interpretation, and verification were applied, since they help balance theoretically informed interpretations with systematic re-examination of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

After transcribing the interviews, reviewing them provided a general understanding of how employees discussed CSR and their personal involvement in it. By using the data analysis software ATLAS.ti for coding the transcripts, 36 codes were developed to capture key ideas, such as how employees interpret CSR in different countries, how they make sense of it, and how aspects of P-O fit shape their engagement with CSR activities. The first order codes were developed based on direct quotes. Through the axial coding process, the open codes were refined and grouped into broader themes that reflected recurring patterns and variations across the interviews which were then clustered to define aggregate dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Gioia et al., 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The aggregate dimensions were formed based on the research question and the experiences and perception of the participants. The data structure is shown in Figure 5 below.

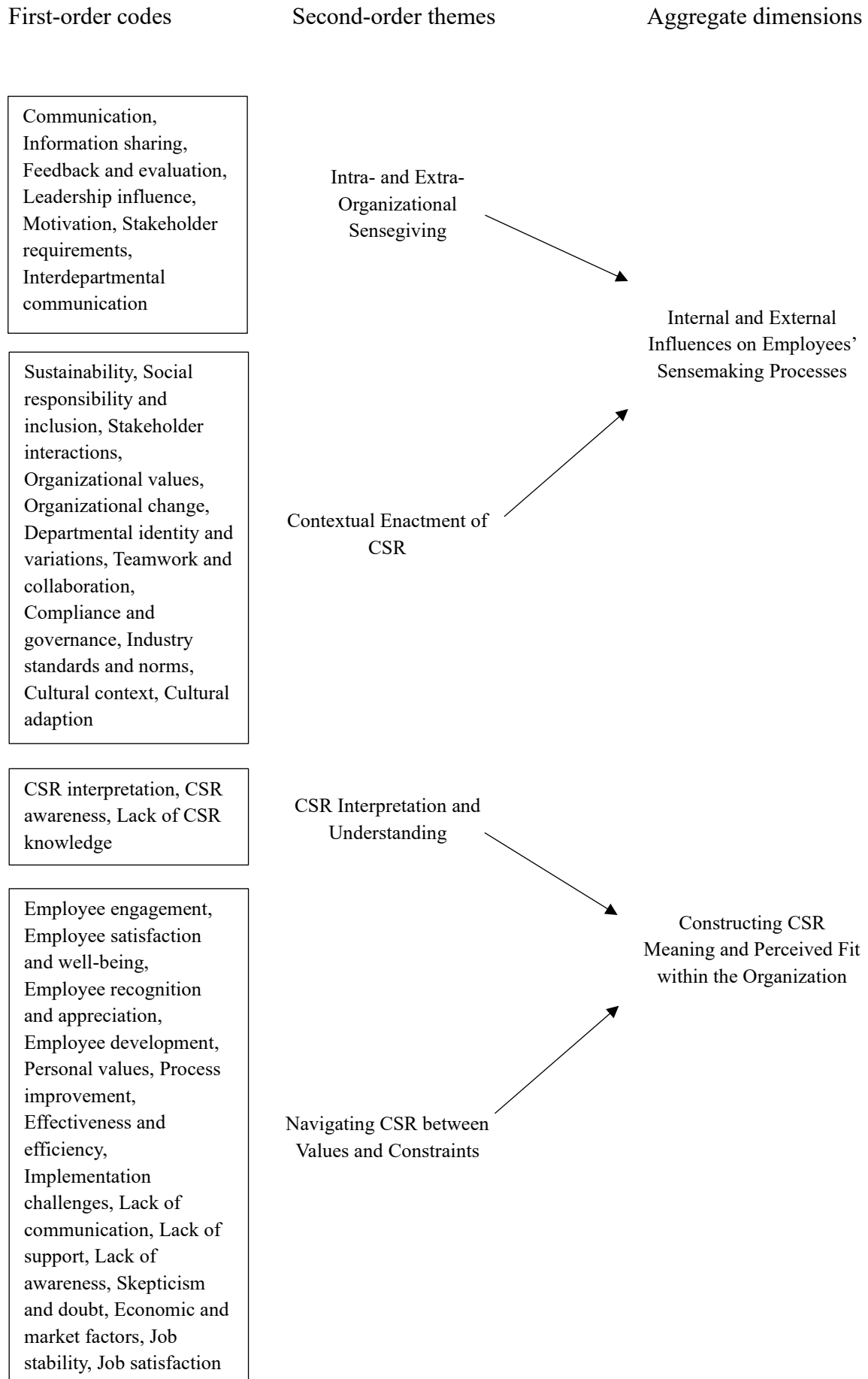


Figure 5: Data Structure

3.7 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

This study will be conducted with ethical principles in mind. All participants will receive detailed information about the purpose of the study and the type of data collected, which ensures that they know how and for what their information will be processed. To protect participants' identities, anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly maintained. The names of the participants will not be named in the study, and all data will be stored securely and accessible only to the researcher. The participation will be entirely voluntary, and respondents will be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. It is also important to mention that the interviews will be a safe environment for the participants so they can speak freely. This includes emphasizing confidentiality during interviews and not discussing the answers from one participant with others. These measures ensure that everyone will be treated fairly and respectfully.

Despite trying to take everything into consideration, several limitations of the study must be acknowledged. First, the qualitative design relies heavily on self-reported data from employees and managers, which may be subjective or unreliable because of blurred memories or social desirability bias. Second, the study is limited to a small number of subsidiaries and participants, so it may be that the findings cannot be projected onto the whole organization. Third, cultural and linguistic differences across subsidiaries might make it a bit more complicated to compare responses of CSR as it is expressed and interpreted differently. Fourth, as the company has not released its newest CR report, the information and numbers in the 2022-2023 CR report might not be up-to-date and therefore might not align as closely with the employees' perceptions. Finally, practical constraints such as time, access and available resources limited the extent of data collection and analysis. These limitations, however, are recognized as such and show the importance of interpreting the findings within their specific organizational and cultural context.

4 Findings

This chapter presents the main findings of the study, which aimed to understand how employees perceive and make sense of the company's CSR initiatives. The interviews were analyzed using a thematic approach guided by the research question. The chapter is structured around four key themes that evolved during the analysis: Intra- and extra-organizational sensegiving, contextual enactment of CSR, CSR interpretation and understanding, and navigating CSR between values and constraints. To get a better understanding of the company's approach to and involvement of CSR and the respective activities, three Corporate Responsibility reports dated from 2019 to 2023 were analyzed and will be presented in this chapter as well.

4.1 Corporate Responsibility (CR) Reports from 2019-2023

The company first published its CR report in 2019. Since then, it has released two more reports in a biennial rhythm. The firm's corporate responsibility is broken down into three key themes in the reports: responsible business, ecological sustainability and social responsibility.

Responsible business is defined as the company's way of doing business with their partners in order to generate profit for financial stability and continuous growth. The firm mentions several examples such as winning an award as most innovative company in Hungary, producing components for sustainable systems and medical technologies or new production facilities in its subsidiaries. To do business responsibly also includes acting in an equitable way, which is why the company specifies its fair business practices, mentioning the zero-tolerance policy toward bribery, corruption, extortion, and embezzlement. To emphasize this statement the firm developed an internal, corporate-wide guideline, which enumerates the behaviors that are allowed or permitted. Another guideline the firm rolled out is the Information Security Guideline, specifying the rules of conduct for handling information regarding improving availability, integrity, and confidentiality.

Ecological sustainability encompasses the responsible use and handling of energy, water, emissions, and waste. The company set itself a goal to protect the environment by implementing energy saving measures, minimizing water consumption and pollution, reducing CO₂ emissions, and improving waste recycling. To ensure the implementation of those measures, the company introduced the Environment, Health & Safety Guidelines and

the Code of Conduct, which will also be forwarded to suppliers and partners. Additionally, the firm has received multiple certifications for monitoring and improving its environmental activities.

Alongside acting responsibly towards business and the environment, the firm assured to make appreciable contributions both internally as well as externally. Treating its employees respectfully and protecting their rights is the basis for providing them the best possible work environment and supporting their growth. The company established several principles in the Code of Conduct including free choice of employment, ban of child labor, diversity, non-discrimination, and many more in order to give the employees the certainty of a fair and respectful workplace. By ensuring that the employees can grow professionally, but also individually, the firm also established various trainings and study programs like the work-study training in Hungary, the apprenticeship program in Germany, or the internship program in Romania. Occupational health and safety are managed within the broader Environment, Health & Safety framework, assuring standardized risk assessments, safety audits, and preventive health measures across all sites. The company hereby focusses on well-being initiatives and long-term employee engagement programs. Beyond the firm's internal focus, it remains engaged in local corporate citizenship activities, including educational projects, donations, and community partnerships.

In general, all three reports are quite similar, having only slight differences in content information about events or changes and numbers in the diagrams. In the 2022-2023 report, the company changed its Code of Conduct slightly, as they added the topic 'climate protection' to the environmental chapter. Therefore, the organization added the subtopics 'conserving resources and recycling economy', 'animal protection', and 'biodiversity, land use, deforestation and soil quality'.

In the reports, the company emphasizes that some of the initiatives go beyond the company's headquarters in Germany, to some extent, and are implemented across its international locations. All the reports present a globally coordinated approach to CSR, which can be adapted locally, as seen in some examples, reflecting the organization's ambition to ensure consistent responsibility standards across all sites while allowing for contextual flexibility. For example, in 2019, the plant in Costa Rica worked together with the "Corredores Biológicos", a governmental organization, to plant 60 new trees. Additionally, the team organized Christmas celebrations at an orphanage and a hospital. In 2022/23, the team in Costa Rica was also the first international plant that introduced the Social and Health

Management concept in their subsidiary, which is closely aligned with the German Health Management. In 2022 and 2023, one of the plants in Romania participated in donation campaigns, such as collecting materials for school children or donating bikes to the school.

Through these examples, it shows that the subsidiaries are encouraged to align with the three pillars of the CR concept, but also to design initiatives that respond to local needs, stakeholder expectations, and cultural contexts. The company portrays itself as a globally integrated yet socially responsive organization that recognizes the importance of local engagement as part of its global identity.

However, when examining these initiatives more closely, it is apparent that they are still predominantly globally structured and centrally guided. While there are some indications of locally adapted activities, the reports provide limited insights into how or whether the international locations interpret and operationalize the three CSR pillars differently according to their local environments. The descriptions remain largely standardized and reflect a top-down implementation of the CR concept rather than strong local differentiation. This observation is highly relevant for this research, as it shows a potential gap between formal CSR communication and the actual sensemaking processes of the employees in the different locations. By exploring how employees perceive and understand these globally standardized CSR initiatives, the interviews conducted with the employees uncover whether and how local interpretations evolve in this multinational setting (Company A, 2020, 2022, 2024).

4.2 Results of the Primary Data

This chapter presents the results of this research that emerged from the interviews with the employees. Representative quotations from participants are included in the sections and Appendix A to illustrate the insights. Several findings emerged from the interviews, whereas this chapter presents those most relevant to addressing the research question: *“How do employees of multinational organizations make sense of global CSR initiatives in their local context?”*. The chapter is structured into two sections: The first outlines the internal and external influences on employees’ sensemaking of CSR, the second the construction of CSR meaning and the perceived fit within the organization.

4.2.1 Internal and External Influences on Employees' Sensemaking Processes

This section presents the findings that show how employees' understanding of CSR can be affected by various factors. First, employees' engagement with CSR can be impacted by their leaders' perspective on CSR and how they handle CSR initiatives. But not only leaders can function as sensegivers to the employees. For instance, their customers' views on CSR-related topics can also shape how they understand CSR. Moreover, the employees' cultural backgrounds, as well as their specific roles and departmental contexts within the organization significantly impact how they make sense of CSR. The way CSR initiatives are communicated to employees further affects how they make sense of CSR and the extent to which they engage with these initiatives.

4.2.1.1 Intra- and Extra-Organizational Sensegiving

During the interview process it became clear that leadership was a significant factor in communicating activities and employees' engagement with CSR. Some participants described how managers and supervisors were the key roles in how CSR initiatives would be implemented in the plants. The employees noted that, typically, CSR initiatives will be discussed between the headquarters and the plant directors, and they would communicate it to the employees and decide how the initiatives will be realized in the subsidiary:

"So it would be something that would kind of be up to [Director] cause he's the one who talks to them and implements their direction here." (Transcript 7)

"Typically, it is a flow down, similar to our customers, they'll be a flow down from our president and the board of directors, down through the management team, and so on. So typically, it's a flow down of different requirements, policies that are flown down to the employees." (Transcript 9)

From a sensemaking perspective, these quotes highlight how leaders can act as sensegivers to the employees, signaling what aspects of CSR are legitimate or important. Since the decision of the implementation of CSR initiatives is up to the directors, their view and compliance towards CSR eventually affects employees' perspectives and behaviors when engaging with CSR. The directors ultimately have to act as role models and positively influence employees, as one of the respondents stated:

“Yes, definitely, I haven't seen any issues when it comes to following the standards and compliance. I think when it comes to that, though, it really comes down to our leadership exhibiting like, you know, their role model for the people.” (Transcript 7)

However, managers are not the only influence when it comes to CSR compliance and engagement. Participants also highlighted that customer expectations and requirements also shape how they approach CSR topics in their work environment. As stated in the section above, employees noted that several customers demand adherence to specific social and environmental standards. These pressures often emphasize the importance of responsible behavior, which sometimes even serve as a trigger for developing certain internal practices. As one respondent said:

“It's also something our customers demand – without fulfilling corporate social responsibility standards, you wouldn't even get larger contracts.” (Transcript 1)

This statement can also be reflected in another employee's answer on requirements from the customer, where you can see that employees' understanding of CSR is not only influenced by their own company but also by the companies, they manufacture their products for:

“That's the term [Customer] uses and kind of pushes onto us and we usually adopt that term and speak that language, too.” (Transcript 8)

These statements suggest that employees made sense of CSR mainly through a practical, business-related perspective, showing that meeting customer requirements was the central mission. This helped employees understand CSR, but reduced the broader meaning of the concept, making it harder for them to personally connect with it.

In some subsidiaries, this ambiguity was further reinforced by weak communication structures. Communicating CSR strategies and activities through various channels can strengthen employees' engagement with CSR and actively connect activities with the concept of CSR (Zhang et al., 2024). However, some of the participants either have never heard of the term CSR or were not quite aware of what is included in this concept. One interviewee noted that they are informed about certain activities, but *“often [...] don't directly associate it with CSR [...]”* (Transcript 2). Another employee from Germany, who is not working at the headquarters, explained how communication remains largely centralized and is not transferred to other locations:

That deviates in theory a bit and isn't carried down to [Location], so we simply don't have a sustainability expert with us or someone who primarily takes care of it, but

it's all people from the central area and so information is lost on the way.” (Transcript 8)

This statement illustrates that from a sensemaking perspective the absence of local sensegivers can weaken the construction of CSR meaning. Although CR reports and formal documents exist, they were not always actively promoted or connected to employees' daily work. The interviewee also stated that social media channels are also not overly used to promote activities, although this would be a good opportunity for the company to make employees and external stakeholders aware of their initiatives.

Hence, the company's CSR communication is present, but not strongly emphasized in everyday work. While some thought that information was generally available, they noted that the employees sometimes need to take the initiative to access the information. As one interviewee described:

“Employees just need to be proactive and look for the information, for example on the website.” (Transcript 3)

This perspective reflects how CSR is treated as optional rather than integral, which potentially limits its effect on collective sensemaking and perceived fit.

One respondent also expressed that both internal and external communication about CSR remains limited even though it would benefit employees and could be a good promotion for employer branding:

“Yeah, our external impact is definitely improvable, and you can basically reflect the same onto the internal side. We already do cool things, but we don't always get it out there [...]. Yes, for example, further education, like master support and so on, that is all excellent and it is shown way too weakly.” (Transcript 8)

Another participant also pointed out that they rarely talk about CSR in meetings or team exchanges (Transcript 7), indicating that CSR struggled to become a shared framework through which employees interpret organizational decisions together.

However, most of the interviewees were satisfied with the way the company communicates strategies and initiatives. The employees from the different subsidiaries generally received any updates or changes through meetings with their counterparts or the department in charge in Germany. For example, in the United States, one interviewee described that the president

of the plant has regular meetings with the headquarters where initiatives are discussed and then communicated to the employees through the president (Transcript 9).

In China, on the other hand, they have a whole department that is in charge of adapting and implementing CSR guidelines and activities. Those are generally communicated via a dashboard accessible to every employee (Transcript 5).

Social Responsibility Taicang Inclusion Factory

if inclusion factory 中德融創工場 Inclusion Factory is a social enterprise providing employment opportunities to People with Disabilities (PWD).



Figure 6: Screenshot of the dashboard of the facility in China

Source: Sent via e-mail from one of the interviewees

At the plant in Costa Rica, the HR department handles the initiating and adopting of activities, informing employees through various channels:

“Human Resources also sends information through different channels like WhatsApp, email, or banners to promote activities.” (Transcript 4)

Taken together, these examples suggest that CSR communication, and therefore CSR sensemaking, is highly dependent on local structures and actors rather than a company-wide communication strategy. This indicates that CSR sensemaking is unevenly distributed across subsidiaries. Where communication is fragmented or implicit, CSR remains unimportant, limiting its abilities to function as a basis for assessment of perceived P-O fit.

4.2.1.2 Contextual Enactment of CSR

When thinking about what CSR is and how it applies to work, many responses of the interviewees were further shaped by broader contexts. Beyond leadership and customers, participants described their understanding of CSR often based on societal expectations, governmental regulations, and local working cultures. Particularly interesting was that in a country where social and economic structures are still developing, like Costa Rica, CSR was much more present and relevant (World Bank Group, 2025). They emphasized the importance of community engagement and the overall implementation of initiatives based on local and social needs. Therefore, they were quite aware that every country needs adapted strategies for CSR. This is exemplified in the following quotes from the two participants based in Costa Rica:

“If you have a good team inside the company, you can extend that to the community. We can share knowledge and do activities not only within [Company] but also outside, for people who need help [...].” (Transcript 4)

“Sometimes it’s about spending time with people, for example those who don’t get visits from family. Spending even one or two hours with them can make them happy. This also has an impact on our community.” (Transcript 4)

This community spirit is also shown in action at the plant in Costa Rica. The two employees from the plant mentioned that they have started a campaign to collect milk bottles for unfortunate families, an initiative that emerged through employees’ own observations of local needs. In addition, they planted trees together a couple of years ago and took care of them by watering them from time to time and monitoring their growth (Transcript 4). These initiatives by the employees in Costa Rica illustrate well how employees adopt CSR activities at the local level that benefit both the community and the environment.

At the same time, the plant in China is already undertaking considerable efforts to support local communities and people in need as well. The director of the plant explained that they have a special campaign in collaboration with inclusion factories, which provide employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities:

“Another example is that we support the [Location] Inclusion Factories. Since 2009, we have provided lunch boxes for them. They have about 43 or 45 people with different kinds of issues, but we support them with lunch boxes and sometimes teach them simple work for small projects.” (Transcript 5)

Through this partnership, the plant helps the factories not only through donations but also with purchasing services directly from these factories, making sure that the workers there have a stable income. They also noted that those voluntary responsibilities show how the company's actions are not only for gaining economic success but also supporting the society and the social system. *"That's really our mindset here in China"* (Transcript 5), they stated, indicating that their initiatives are closely tied to their own beliefs and values.

In these instances, sensemaking was closely tied to local contexts, especially the community, enabling employees to adapt CSR initiatives much more based on what local actions need to be taken. This local enactment helped employees form a better alignment with the organization's purpose and their personal values.

In contrast, employees in Germany tended to focus more on formalized and compliance-oriented CSR, including environmental management systems and standardized reporting requirements, which can be identified in the following quotes:

"Things like renewable energies, recycling are topics that exist at our company, but they're not listed under this term but rather under "sustainability" [...]. So we talk about sustainability measures and that's also, for example, a topic in an audit." (Transcript 8)

"Our company has a policy that we must both demonstrate and live by and it's certified annually by an external institute." (Transcript 1)

European employees frequently highlighted the importance of adhering to legal requirements and the company's own Code of Conduct. They repeatedly emphasized that responsible behavior is not only guided by personal values or voluntary initiatives, but also by clearly defined rules and standards, which are mentioned in the CR reports. One recurring topic was the contact with hazardous materials. Several participants mentioned that there are some requirements from customers regarding the use of specific materials that can be harmful to the employees in the manufacturing process, the consumers of the products and ultimately the environment. Therefore, a lot of hazardous materials are not allowed to be contained in the products. This importance of complying with customer requirements for specific materials is represented in these quotes:

"Yes, we have some requirements from our customers regarding the origin of materials and hazardous substances." (Transcript 3)

“There are certain countries from which we are not allowed to buy materials, and we have restrictions regarding which hazardous materials can be used in our products. We strictly follow these restrictions.” (Transcript 3)

One of the participants also mentioned ethical sourcing and responsible supply chain management. They emphasized that responsible business goes beyond internal practices to the selection of suppliers:

“For instance, we only buy from suppliers whose products are made without child labor. That’s one of the requirements in our contracts.” (Transcript 1)

These examples illustrate that the sensemaking processes of European employees were closely tied to economic and legal responsibilities of CSR, suggesting that CSR was primarily understood through regulatory compliance and organizational obligations.

Similarly, in the United States, CSR sensemaking was strongly shaped by national regulations and industry-specific requirements, such as the government regulation ITAR:

“What ITAR is, it is a US government regulation that prohibits non-US persons from having any access to any product that we would export outside the country. So we are actually right now just going back to make sure we’re being compliant with ITAR and verifying that all of our employees are US persons.” (Transcript 6)

In addition to the interpretation of CSR based on local environments, employees’ understanding of CSR also varied notably across departments. Respondents explained that each department faces different challenges and responsibilities, which shape how CSR becomes a part in their daily work. For instance, employees that worked in a quality-related department engage more with compliance-related topics and environmental aspects, such as safety regulations:

“It’s also important to ensure that workplaces are safe and appropriate for employees’ age and needs. Basic things like lighting, office equipment, or ergonomic assembly workstations should be tailored to employees as much as possible. And for hazardous materials, precautions must be taken so employees aren’t exposed to risks. They must be provided with proper safety equipment like glasses, gloves, protective clothing, masks, and air extraction systems. Or ideally, such substances should be avoided altogether, which is called substitution. You first check whether there’s a safer alternative before using hazardous materials.” (Transcript 1)

On the other hand, employees in HR tended to focus more on employee well-being and social initiatives. They mentioned how they want to motivate their employees and strengthen team spirit through joint events:

“Another angle of social responsibility internally at [Company] might be engaging my employees. We do employee engagement events every month, which is new for us. We’ve just started in the last six months as a pilot program to see how we can engage the employees, increase morale and get more buy-in so that they feel connected within the organization.” (Transcript 6)

Another HR manager noted that they implemented a specific HR services platform, Insperity, which supports employees when they need advice or just want tips for a better work-life balance (Insperity, 2025):

“And they also provide us with resources for hardships through Insperity. I don't know if you guys have that, but Insperity, they have like continuous training classes for us there. So we can go on anytime and we can learn more like through videos. And then, also, they have a section for us where, you know, if we are going through a difficult time then we can get a free counseling session. We can get a free lawyer. They offer resources when it comes to teaching us how to take care of ourselves emotionally and physically.” (Transcript 7)

However, another notable finding was that respondents with managerial responsibilities tended to have a broader view on CSR, including all areas, such as sustainability aspects, compliance-related regulations but also employee health and safety. They emphasized that they have both external and internal responsibilities, highlighting the importance of looking at the bigger picture.

These quotes suggest that sensemaking of CSR is not uniformly interpreted in the organization. Instead, it is enacted through context-specific perspectives, depending on their functional position or location. Theoretically, this indicates that employees construct meaning around CSR by aligning global narratives with either their local realities or their role within the company and everyday practices.

4.2.2 Constructing CSR Meaning and Perceived Fit within the Organization

The preceding sections highlighted how employees' sensemaking is shaped by contextual, organizational and communicative factors. Building on this, the focus of the following findings in this segment is on how the employees interpreted CSR based on those factors and how these interpretations shaped their personal alignment with the company's values. The section is divided into two parts: CSR interpretation and understanding and navigating CSR between values and constraints.

4.2.2.1 CSR Interpretation and Understanding

CSR interpretations varied widely in depth, salience, and scope. This variation reflects the differences in what employees considered as relevant to their specific role and backgrounds. CSR was not interpreted as a fixed concept, but more as variable framework that respondents formed based on their work experiences.

The responses ranged from limited awareness to a pronounced understanding of CSR. When asking the question *"How would you define or interpret CSR?"*, some expressed their uncertainty on how to answer this question because they haven't really paid close attention to the term CSR up until now, which shows that its relevance might be comparably low for them. For example, one participant said:

"Yes, I'm familiar with the term. But what [Company] specifically does in the field of CSR is hard to say. I know that the topic was introduced about one and a half to two years ago. I believe there are working groups that deal with it intensively. As far as I know, CSR has a very broad scope, you can initiate projects in many areas [...]. However, I don't really know what is currently being implemented. You sometimes hear about something, but often you don't directly associate it with CSR." (Transcript 2)

Another participant stated:

"So I did have to look it up and I read about it [...]. So I'm gonna be very candid with you and tell you that I don't think in terms of CSR and all." (Transcript 6)

Others articulated a broader understanding of CSR that was shaped by their professional experiences, company communication, and personal values. While some associated CSR with environmental aspects or community engagement, others referred to ethical conduct or

employee well-being. These different interpretations of CSR showcase its variety in which it touches different parts of organizational and individual life:

“[...] it means that we live social fairness in all aspects of business life and we pass it on to our suppliers so that they act according to these guidelines. Naturally, we also have to pass it on to our employees, led by example and expect them to act accordingly. How we treat our employees is also part of our social responsibility.” (Transcript 1)

“It means that a company helps people and that its strategy is not only to make money but also to think about the community and the environment. That is what corporate social responsibility means to me.” (Transcript 4)

“I feel like CSR is very closely intertwined with that when it comes to our responsibility to treat people in our company, ethically and externally as well, like in our community and also the planet. That will not harm the planet more, of course it can be difficult with the industries that we have, but it's our responsibility to also make sure that we're not causing any sort of excessive damage. This is the planet we all live on. And then also, you know, giving back when we can to our community and kind of finding like meaning connecting meaning between the company to the community and to our planet.” (Transcript 7)

These quotes show that CSR can be understood as an internal as well as an external responsibility, caring for employees, external stakeholders, communities, and the environment in general. Internally, CSR is often associated with employee well-being, career growth opportunities, and fair working treatment, while externally, CSR is linked to community engagement, compliance with regulations, or environmental stewardship.

These distinctions point to the fact that employees interpreted CSR based on what is most significant in their everyday work and personal aspects. As a result, CSR only became a meaningful reference point when it resonated with the employee's lived experiences.

4.2.2.2 Navigating CSR between Values and Constraints

The findings of the interviews indicate that the employees' engagement with CSR and their understanding of it was closely tied to whether they have a strong alignment with the

company's values and their own. For many, this alignment was a way of judging whether the organization felt like a good fit. As one of the interviewees explained:

"Yes. For me, the most important thing when choosing a company is values, not money. If the company shares your values, you can work happily and do a great job."

(Transcript 4)

This sense of alignment was particularly evident in the Costa Rican subsidiary, where the employees described that their personal beliefs strongly resonated with the company's strategic values, such as respect, integrity and commitment (Transcript 4). Here, CSR was not seen as an additional program that the company applies, but rather as a value framework that felt authentic and consistent. Through everyday practices and interactions, the employees perceived those values as genuinely lived, which made it easier for them to understand CSR and engage with those initiatives.

Also, in another case, an employee recalled that when they applied and started at the company, they were very impressed with the environmental, health, and safety strategies at that time, which was ultimately one of the reasons why they chose this company (Transcript 3). Hence, social responsibilities functioned as signals for evaluating if personal values and beliefs match the company's purpose and strategies. Similarly, employees in China used strong organizational culture and stability as an indicator of increased value alignment, pointing out that more than 50% have stayed with the company for more than five years, which is not typical in China (Transcript 5).

Employees across different locations also associated CSR with their experience with working conditions, organizational culture, and the company's approach to social responsibility in general. Some expressed a strong sense of pride, saying: *"We are socially responsible. Honestly, no one has it as good as they do with us."* (Transcript 1)

Thus, the participants used CSR as a way of evaluating what the company actually stands for. In this regard, CSR became a part of how they made sense of their congruence with the company.

However, not all employees felt strong connections with the company. During periods of restructuring, job security was a greater concern than CSR or value alignment. In moments like these, interpretation of CSR lost its relevance, showing that employees' engagement with it relied highly on situational priorities. Also, instances where organizational practices did not meet employees' expectations seemed to have weakened the value alignment, such

as in the case for one respondent, whose application to work in a newly acquired company in Thailand fell through:

“I would have gotten the position, but the way it was ultimately structured and organized was not so optimal.” (Transcript 8)

Taken together, these instances show that employees’ engagement with CSR relates to whether they feel their own values and beliefs align with the organization’s practices, culture, and long-term commitment.

Employees also navigated CSR through various implementation challenges, which consequently put their perceived fit with the company into question. While most of them supported the CSR initiatives, some raised concerns about how realistic those global initiatives really are or if they would be of value within their subsidiary. One of the interviewees that works in the HR department in the United States explained that some of the activities the German HR department organizes, can be difficult to implement in their facility because it’s not an important issue in the States:

“But we – I also have to report on how far they commute every day and it's just very different because that's not a measurable that we look at in the States. So in terms of environmental, I know that we don't align with what [Company] does in that sense – I report on it, of course, but it's not something that makes any impact on any decisions that I make.” (Transcript 6)

This statement illustrates that certain actions or guidelines introduced by the headquarters may not be feasible for every subsidiary, as the implementation might be constrained by governmental contexts or cultural expectations.

Another participant, the division manager, who is also overseeing plants in Romania and Tunisia, pointed out that the realization of producing CO₂-neutral is a challenge that they face in Romania and Tunisia but also in Germany:

“Yes, there have been such situations. For example, being “CO₂-neutral by 2030.” Our products are supposed to be CO₂-neutral, but how can we actually prove that? You’d have to trace every single material used and ask how it was produced, what happens at the supplier’s global production sites, and so on. That’s practically impossible these days. You can always find ways to calculate something, but the credibility of those calculations is highly questionable.” (Transcript 1)

Here, the sensemaking processes became more reflective and critical. When global CSR initiatives seemed to be symbolic and unrealistic, either in local contexts or in general, employees seemed to question their credibility, which affected how serious they were taken in their daily work. This proposition also indicates that skepticism towards certain strategies weakens the employees' perceived fit, as they might experience a disconnection between the initiatives that are promoted and what they perceive as authentic in practice. As a result, CSR initiatives that are seen as symbolic instead of meaningful can reduce employees' identification with the company's values and purposes and limit their willingness to engage with them.

Despite these constraints, the respondents also engaged in a forward-looking sensemaking, suggesting how the company could improve and extend its CSR strategies and activities for it to be more beneficial for the facilities, the environment, and the community. One respondent from the United States, a HR manager, noted that they wished to support external communities more:

“I think we could possibly incentivize volunteering [...]. I think we could do donations [...] and I also think that we could possibly try to connect our mission to our community or to the planet more as opposed to the industry.” (Transcript 7)

Since the legal entity that the company acquired in the U.S. focusses mostly on internal incentives, they suggested to also help local communities, expanding their social responsibilities also to external stakeholders.

Another interviewee mentioned that additional financial support for their partnership with NGOs would enhance their ability to develop and expand local activities for environmental protection. They also noted that investing in green technology would also benefit their plant and help in meeting their sustainability goals (Transcript 3). Another employee in Germany mentioned that as well. They suggested to invest in solar panels as it would be a more sustainable way to generate electricity:

“Yes, for example, photovoltaic systems. We don't have any on our roofs [...]. But we have no solar panels because, according to facility management, it's not profitable. Still, I wonder why we're not using solar energy, considering how many roofs we have.” (Transcript 1)

These examples illustrate that the employees actively gave thought about how their personal beliefs and values could be translated into the organizational context, which would make them feel more aligned.

Overall, this section highlighted how employees navigated CSR between shared values and constraints within the organization. CSR initiatives seemed to strengthen perceived P-O fit when they appeared to be credible and realistic and aligned with the employee's own beliefs. When CSR felt disconnected within their local environments or when it was overshadowed by other matters, it lost its relevance, which could create a distance between personal values and organizational values, potentially diminishing the identification with the company. This shows that CSR sensemaking was also about judging whether those principles are plausible and fit into the employees' specific contexts and daily work.

5 Discussion

The company's CSR approach is structured in a way that aligns strongly with Carroll's CSR Pyramid, addressing economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities (Carroll, 1991, 1999). It also mirrors the thematic approach of Procter & Gamble's Citizenship, particularly in how it communicates its commitments to environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and ethical business conduct. This highlights the combination of using theoretical tools, such as the CSR Pyramid, as well as CSR actions for strategic purposes to be more competitive and enhance brand reputation (Carroll, 1991, 1999; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Porter & Kramer, 2006). This thesis investigates how employees interpret those strategic initiatives, what role leadership plays in understanding and engaging with CSR, and how it is connected to the individual's personal fit with the company. This section of the thesis compares the results with existing literature, if they are consistent with prior findings, and how they contribute to micro-level CSR and sensemaking research.

5.1 Sensemaking of CSR on the Individual Level

The findings derived from the interviews with employees from different subsidiaries present how employees from various cultural contexts make sense of the organization's CSR initiatives that were introduced on the global level. This micro-level research of CSR – although becoming more explored in recent years – is still the least studied in CSR research (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Sendlhofer & Tolstoy, 2022). The findings from this study give interesting insights into this particular research stream. For one, employees did not merely reproduce corporate CSR narratives but interpreted CSR through the lens of their own beliefs, work orientations, and personal priorities. For instance, participants who described how they like to learn and grow professionally and valued trainings and talent mentoring, framed employee growth and training as one of the pillars of CSR. Another respondent foregrounded environmental practices due to their strong personal commitment to recycling. These findings are consistent with prior research, indicating that perceptions of meaningfulness of CSR is impacted by the employees' work orientation, moral identity, and personal values (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019).

Second, the findings imply that employees' interpretations of CSR are shaped not only by individual beliefs, but also by their surrounding as well as the national culture, thereby empirically supporting existing propositions that private and socio-cultural environments

shape in what way employees experience CSR (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). This pattern also resonates with the concept of implicit and explicit CSR, introduced by Matten and Moon (2008). Even though they applied this concept on the macro-level, the results suggest that similar dynamics may operate on the micro-level of employee sensemaking. This is highly apparent in the case of the respondents from the Costa Rican facility. Since Costa Rica is a collective country (Hofstede, n.d.), where they greatly value the family life and try to maintain harmony in their environment (Hofstede, 2011), the two interviewees described CSR as a responsibility to care for the community and the environment. A similar mindset emerged in the Chinese context, where one of the participants highlighted engagements in cultural events and support for Inclusion Factories by donating lunch boxes and teaching them small work tasks.

In contrast, the German participants understood CSR as being sustainable and compliant with guidelines and requirements from customers. Notably, two of them were unsure about what CSR specifically involved in the company, highlighting the argument by Matten and Moon (2008) that European countries integrate those practices directly into their values rather than promoting it as such. Taken together, these findings extend existing theory by pointing out that implicit and explicit CSR also shape employees' understanding of CSR in their daily work.

5.2 Employees' Sensemaking of CSR and its Connection to Their Perceived P-O Fit

This section examines how employees make sense of their organization's global CSR initiatives by connecting the empirical findings with key properties of sensemaking as introduced by Karl Weick. It highlights how employees' interpretations of CSR reflect characteristics, such as enactment, social embeddedness, or ongoing nature (Weick, 1995). The first sub-section analyzes the employees' sensemaking of CSR through the lens of these properties. The second sub-section then explores how this sensemaking process intersects with employees' perceived P-O fit, illustrating how sensemaking shapes feelings of alignment with the company.

5.2.1 Employees' Sensemaking Processes of CSR Initiatives

The results strengthen the notion that sensemaking happens through meaning-making of experiences and employees actively shape their reality through their actions and by reflecting

on the results (Weick, 2009; Weick et al., 2005). When the organization introduced a CSR initiative, in most cases the employees tried to figure out how it fits into their daily work by drawing upon cues from their rules, cultural contexts, or professional knowledge (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). For instance, although the company defined community support in broad terms, respondents from Costa Rica referred to collecting bottles for families needing support. This example suggests that the employees adapt the global CSR initiatives based on what their local needs are. Moreover, when employees were unsure what the company is doing in regard to CSR, when they are confronted with ambiguity, they constructed meaning through their daily work and local cues (Weick et al., 2005). One respondent from Germany stated that they are not familiar with the company's CSR strategies. However, through their daily tasks and routines they constructed a definition of CSR and how they implement it at work. Similarly, another interviewee from the United States experienced this situation of uncertainty and interpreted CSR by drawing upon cues from their responsibilities as an HR manager and local contexts. This indicates that ambiguity does not prevent CSR sensemaking. Instead, it encourages employees to rely more on their work environment when defining CSR.

The findings also largely confirm that sensemaking happens through communication and interaction with other colleagues or stakeholders (Weick, 1995). Most of the interpretations didn't happen individually, but instead, meanings were constructed through conversations with the team, customers, or other departments. In many instances, employees looked to other business units or talked with their managers about activities to understand what CSR actually means in their context. In one case, the customer was the main driver of their understanding of CSR as they required them to work in more sustainable ways. Therefore, the team had to think about how they can adapt to meet the customer's requirements. Leaders further shaped these collective interpretations as they were the decision-makers and touchpoint with other departments and facilities. While sensemaking theory emphasizes those interactions broadly, these findings nuance it by highlighting the influence of different actors within the employee's environment.

Furthermore, the results support the idea that sensemaking is an ongoing process (Weick, 1995). The employees' own interpretations made them enact their environment, which then became new cues forming the sensemaking processes. For example, the interviewees in Costa Rica interpreted CSR as company's responsibility to care for the community and the environment based on their local contexts. Therefore, they initiated or highlighted community-based activities, which in return functioned as an interpretation for others and

led to more involvement from colleagues. In Germany or Romania, on the other hand, they fixated more on regulations and requirements from the company or the customers, leading to the enactment of mostly formally routines, which served as cues for a compliance-based understanding of CSR. These patterns show that CSR is not interpreted based on individual judgment but is essentially understood through certain cues from everyday routines and interactions, which can stabilize interpretations of CSR over time.

5.2.2 Interplay Between Sensemaking Processes and Perceived P-O Fit

Prior literature suggests that a company's CSR actions play a critical role in how an employee perceives the company and how they perform within the organization. Employees experiencing CSR initiatives as fair tend to work harder and perform better (Aguilera et al., 2007). Similarly, when they perceive the CSR actions as authentic or value-driven, they show more engagement with CSR activities. However, when they view CSR as mainly self-serving or instrumental, their commitment tends to decrease (Glavas, 2016; Lin et al., 2022). Despite this, the role of employees' sensemaking processes in shaping perceived P-O fit has not been widely explored.

The findings of this study indicate that there is a connection between the extent of the sensemaking processes and the perceived alignment with the organization. Participants who showed a more distinctive sensemaking process for the CSR initiatives or CSR in general, seemed to feel more aligned with the company and the company's values. For example, one respondent from Costa Rica explained how salary wasn't the primary reason why they decided to join the company; instead, the organization's established CSR activities and values were the key factors. This participant also demonstrated one of the most advanced and distinctive sensemaking processes regarding the CSR initiatives. A similar pattern emerged in China. The interviewees described that their plant is highly proactive in adapting and implementing the global CSR initiatives, suggesting a more developed sensemaking process. They also emphasized that employees tend to stay with the company for longer periods – something relatively uncommon in China – which implies a stronger perceived alignment with the organization.

In contrast, employees who demonstrated a less developed sensemaking process also appeared to experience a weaker alignment with the organization. For instance, one employee from Germany explained that they are not familiar with the term CSR or the

corresponding documents at their company. They also expressed dissatisfaction with the talent management practices and limited opportunities for transfers to other subsidiaries – concerns that indicate a weaker perceived P-O fit. Similarly, another German employee, who was also less informed about the company's CSR initiatives, expressed concerns about keeping their job and noted that CSR activities and participation were not a priority for them presently due to these job worries. These examples extend existing research on CSR and P-O fit by suggesting that the employees' absence of clarity or information is not the only reason why their engagement with CSR and their overall sense of alignment with the organization may be diminished. How actively they make sense of CSR in relation to their work and own values also shapes their perceived fit within the organization. This highlights sensemaking as a key process of evaluating congruence, while also suggesting that unclear or weak CSR sensemaking may limit its positive effects.

5.3 Role of Leadership Behavior and Communication in CSR Translation

As noted in the theoretical review, prior research suggests that leadership behavior towards CSR can have an influence on how employees understand and perceive CSR. This process of sensegiving, introduced by Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), shapes how organizational members behave towards CSR and implement it in their daily routines. If leaders act in an ethical manner, it encourages employees to respect social issues or interests of stakeholders and to engage more in socially responsible practices (Choi et al., 2015). Additionally, how leaders or the organization as a whole communicate CSR is proven to have a significant impact on employees' understanding of CSR (Zhang et al., 2024). If the company strategically communicates CSR initiatives and incorporates employees' inputs and feedback, the organizational members will be more aware of what the company interprets as CSR and be more willing to engage in those initiatives (Dong et al., 2024).

The findings of this study partially support these assumptions about the role of leaders and communication in employee sensemaking and participation. Some results from the interviews suggest that employees' understanding was influenced by their managers' opinions and beliefs. In Costa Rica, for example, the respondents mentioned that they discuss CSR activities with their manager which shaped their understanding of CSR. One respondent from China, who is also the plant director there, described how they have already implemented several CSR measures and that this is one of the reasons why the team there

engages in activities, suggesting that the plant director is one of the main drivers of those CSR initiatives.

However, across most subsidiaries, leadership did not emerge as the primary source through which employees construct meaning. Instead, the participants consistently based their understanding of CSR and their engagement on their daily tasks, work surrounding, and personal interests rather than their managers' interpretations and actions. In production, HR or quality management, CSR was often interpreted through their work routines and demands. Cues, such as regulatory requirements, customer audits, or sustainability standards were the reference points for CSR understanding in most of the interviews. In the United States, one of the respondents explained how they sometimes have conversations with the HR team in Germany regarding the implementation of actions in their facility. However, some of the initiatives that the HR team pushed to be implemented in the United States didn't really translate to their local context. Thus, the interviewee faced those initiatives with skepticism, highlighting the importance of evaluating how global CSR initiatives can be introduced in the subsidiaries. This challenges the assumption that leadership shapes employees' views and understandings and instead highlights the influence of departmental and functional contexts.

Communicating CSR initiatives properly and letting subsidiaries adapt them based on their local environment is significant for employees' understanding and engagement with CSR. If organizations fail to clearly communicate strategies, it might become difficult for organizational members to understand what the company is doing in that regard (Zhang et al., 2024). Therefore, organizations must structure their communication strategies in order to reach more employee participation with CSR (Dong et al., 2024).

The data of this study supports those propositions. The findings indicate that an absence of effective communication results in employees not having a clear understanding of CSR and therefore cannot participate properly. The global CSR documents were rarely mentioned in the interviews and did not appear to serve as reference points of the interpretations. One of the interviewees from Germany pointed out that they have an internal platform where news is published but noted that it is not well-organized and you have to actively look up information. Similarly, in the United States, the HR managers haven't really heard of the available CSR documents, one of them even suggested to develop one where the employees can inform themselves about the organization's activities.

In contrast, the employees from Costa Rica explained how they are informed of any activities outside of work through all-hands meetings or channels, such as WhatsApp or emails. Hence, the participants had a better understanding of their CSR activities and were also a lot more engaged. In China, the employees were informed via a dashboard where they publish news or current figures from waste or energy management. Following that, the employees in the facility have some knowledge about what the company's CSR strategies are and are "*happy to get involved*" (Transcript 5). These cases support and extend existing theories by showing that communication must be embedded in various channels to support effective sensemaking.

One possible explanation for employees' limited understanding of the company's CSR activities can be found in the framework of implicit and explicit CSR (Matten and Moon, 2008). The authors argue how European companies tend to practice implicit CSR, meaning that they integrate CSR actions into their norms, values, and regulatory frameworks rather than communicating them as such. This aligns with the pattern in the data: although the company implements socially responsible actions, they are rarely labelled or presented to employees as 'CSR', which might explain why several interviewees struggled to describe what the company is doing in this area. Hence, employees may participate or benefit from CSR actions without even knowing that they are a part of a broader corporate responsibility strategy. However, even if implicit CSR aligns with the European context, the results indicate that a more explicit communication of these initiatives would be valuable. Making CSR actions more visible could help employees understand them, make better sense of them, and identify opportunities to get involved.

6 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore how employees in a multinational organization make sense of their company's global CSR initiatives. It examined how the employees from subsidiaries in different countries interpret and adapt them based on their local needs. The findings show if and how leadership plays a role in this process of interpretation and implementation and what other factors shaped the sensemaking. Additionally, it investigated if those sensemaking processes were connected to the employees' perceived person-organization fit. The findings revealed several noteworthy insights. They indicated that the sensemaking processes of the employees were shaped by various factors, such as national background, departmental context, and their specific role within the organization rather than the official CR documents published by the company. Leadership also played a part in the sensemaking, although its impact appeared less pronounced compared to these contextual factors. The results further imply a connection between employees' sensemaking processes and their perceived P-O fit: individuals with a more advanced sensemaking process tended to feel more aligned with the organization.

This chapter discusses how the findings of this study contribute to the existing literature and outlines practical implications for organizations and managers. In particular, it highlights strategies for enhancing CSR understanding within the company and leveraging this understanding to strengthen employees' perceived alignment with the organization.

6.1 Implications for Theory

The contribution to theory of this study is threefold. First, the results contribute the micro-level research of CSR by interviewing employees about their sensemaking processes and perceptions of CSR within their company (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). While CSR has often been examined on the macro-level, i.e. from the perspective of firms (e.g. Matten and Moon, 2008), this study shows that employees themselves construct meaning of the CSR initiatives. The results highlight that CSR is not automatically meaningful to employees simply because it exists, instead, it becomes meaningful through their own interpretations, their cultural context, interactions with colleagues, and how they apply it in their daily work routines.

Second, the findings connect the sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) to the theory of person-organization fit (Chatman, 1989; Kristof, 1996) by showing that the more advanced the sensemaking process is, the more the employee feels aligned with the

organization. Very little research exists on the connection of those two theories, even though both are relevant for understanding how employees engage with CSR. The findings show that employees follow a two-step process: First, they interpret the CSR initiatives and make sense of what they mean in their subsidiary, relying on various factors such as cultural norms, local leadership, and organizational communication. Then they evaluate whether those CSR meanings align with their own values, beliefs, and professional identity. This contributes to the research by Hameed *et al.* (2016) or Aguinis and Glavas (2019) that CSR strengthens employees' identification with the organization. However, this research adds nuance by demonstrating that sensemaking acts as a mediator between CSR structures and employee outcomes.

Third, the findings show that – contrary to the sensegiving theory (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Glavas & Piderit, 2009) – leaders and managers are not the sole factor that guides employees' sensemaking processes. Instead, multiple factors, such as cultural and national background, the role within the company, and their departmental context shape the individual's sensemaking process of CSR initiatives. However, the results suggest that managers play a role in employees' engagement with CSR activities, motivating them to participate and making it more meaningful to them.

The results further emphasize the need for well-designed, strategic communication to help employees understand what CSR in their organizational context means, how they can engage with it and make it more approachable. This supports the research by Dong, Zhang and Ao, (2024) and Zhang *et al.* (2024), which highlights the importance of including employees' opinions and feedback into their communication design to show meaningfulness and actively involve them in the CSR developments. The findings strengthen and extend this research by showing that effective communication would improve employees' understanding and sensemaking of their organization's CSR work and engagement with their activities.

6.2 Implications for Practice

The findings of this study also provide several implications for practice. The results suggest that there is a need for a more consistent and visible communication. Many employees either did not know about the company's CSR initiatives or did not link the company's actions to CSR. Therefore, the organization should directly communicate its CSR strategies and activities to all employees for a better understanding of what the company is doing in that

regard. The company should also effectively include employees' feedback about initiatives in their communication strategy, so the employees can actively contribute to their development and improvement. Even though the organization operates mostly in an implicit CSR context, offering a more explicit communication, without losing the value-driven European approach, would be beneficial, since employees can recognize existing efforts and identify opportunities to participate. Further, the company should communicate their internal benefits more effectively, not only to support employees interested in career growth, but also to position itself as an attractive employer for potential candidates. Additionally, the company could train their managers to deliver CSR initiatives efficiently. Even though leadership was not the dominant sensegiving factor across subsidiaries, they still play a crucial part in strengthening CSR messages. Through targeted training and practical resources, leaders can serve as CSR multipliers to communicate CSR actions more clearly, tailor them to the local needs and team contexts, and act as role models to their employees.

Also, since the employees primarily make sense of CSR through their specific role, departmental routines, and local context, the company should actively support a more flexible adaptation of global CSR initiatives. As one interviewee suggested, the company could introduce two or three indicators for every subsidiary to help them structure their CSR activities more effectively. Moreover, the company could integrate CSR directly into HR processes and daily work practices to embed them more into its organizational culture. Including them into the employer branding, onboarding, internal communication strategies, performance, and development discussions or workshops could help employees encounter CSR directly in their work environment.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into how employees make sense of their organization's CSR initiatives, what factors shape this process and how it is connected to their perceived P-O fit, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the qualitative design and small sample size limit the generalizability of the findings and cannot be projected onto other organizations as it is specifically tailored to the company of the case study. Second, the interviews relied on personal experiences and self-reported perceptions, making it prone to social desirability or cognitive biases. Additionally, interviewing employees from specific roles and departments limit the breadth of perspectives on CSR.

Accordingly, future research could increase the number of participants, expand the sample to more departments, and include more sites and countries. Furthermore, it could compare two or more organizations to better understand the sensemaking processes of companies in different industries or sectors. By integrating quantitative methods, future researchers could test the relationships between the sensemaking processes and the perceived P-O fit more precisely. Longitudinal studies – especially studies that focus on the implementation of a specific CSR initiative – may also provide insights into the evolvement of employees' sensemaking processes while the organization adapts to their CSR strategies.

In addition, future research could examine different communication styles and strategies more comprehensively to understand how companies can more effectively convey their CSR actions to their employees. Such insights would help identify, which communication approaches would enhance employees' interpretations of CSR within their organization. Furthermore, they would help increase engagement and ultimately motivate them to participate more in the CSR activities. Finally, future studies could explore the contextual influences, such as customers, interactions with team members, or national changes, in greater depth and compare them to the sensegiving by managers. This would allow researchers and companies to understand the extent to which various contextual factors shape employees' sensemaking in comparison to their managers' sensegiving efforts.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Second-order Themes and Corresponding Quotes

Second-order themes	Corresponding quotes
Intra- and Extra-Organizational Sensegiving	“So it would be something that would kind of be up to [Director] cause he's the one who talks to them and implements their direction here.” (Transcript 7) “Typically, it is a flow down, similar to our customers, they'll be a flow down from our president and the board of directors, down through the management team, and so on. So typically, it's a flow down of different requirements, policies that are flown down to the employees.” (Transcript 9) “Yes, definitely, I haven't seen any issues when it comes to following the standards and compliance. I think when it comes to that, though, it really comes down to our leadership exhibiting like, you know, their role model for the people.” (Transcript 7) “It's also something our customers demand – without fulfilling corporate social responsibility standards, you wouldn't even get larger contracts.” (Transcript 1) “That's the term [Customer] uses and kind of pushes onto us and we usually adopt that term and speak that language, too.” (Transcript 8) “That deviates in theory a bit and isn't carried down to [Location], so we simply don't have a sustainability expert with us or someone who primarily takes care of it, but it's all people from the central area and so information is lost on the way.” (Transcript 8) “Employees just need to be proactive and look for the information, for example on the website.” (Transcript 3) “Yeah, our external impact is definitely improvable, and you can basically reflect the same onto the internal side. We already do cool things, but we don't always get it out there [...]. Yes, for example, further education, like master support and so on, that is all excellent and it is shown way too weakly.” (Transcript 8) “Human Resources also sends information through different channels like WhatsApp, email, or banners to promote activities.” (Transcript 4)

Contextual Enactment of CSR	“If you have a good team inside the company, you can extend that to the community. We can share knowledge and do activities not only within [Company] but also outside, for people who need help [...]” (Transcript 4) “Sometimes it’s about spending time with people, for example those who don’t get visits from family. Spending even one or two hours with them can make them happy. This also has an impact on our community.” (Transcript 4) “When families participate, it’s a great example for children and strengthens the community.” (Transcript 4) “Another example is that we support the [Location] Inclusion Factories. Since 2009, we have provided lunch boxes for them. They have about 43 or 45 people with different kinds of issues, but we support them with lunch boxes and sometimes teach them simple work for small projects.” (Transcript 5) “Things like renewable energies, recycling are topics that exist at our company, but they’re not listed under this term but rather under “sustainability” [...]. So we talk about sustainability measures and that’s also, for example, a topic in an audit.” (Transcript 8) “Our company has a policy that we must both demonstrate and live by and it’s certified annually by an external institute.” (Transcript 1) “Yes, we have some requirements from our customers regarding the origin of materials and hazardous substances.” (Transcript 3) “There are certain countries from which we are not allowed to buy materials, and we have restrictions regarding which hazardous materials can be used in our products. We strictly follow these restrictions.” (Transcript 3) “For instance, we only buy from suppliers whose products are made without child labor. That’s one of the requirements in our contracts.” (Transcript 1) “What ITAR is, it is a US government regulation that prohibits non-US persons from having any access to any product that we would export outside the country. So we are actually right now just going back to make sure we’re being compliant with ITAR and verifying that all of our employees are US persons.” (Transcript 6) “It’s also important to ensure that workplaces are safe and appropriate for employees’ age and needs. Basic things like lighting, office equipment, or ergonomic assembly workstations should be tailored to employees as much as possible. And for
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	hazardous materials, precautions must be taken so employees aren't exposed to risks. They must be provided with proper safety equipment like glasses, gloves, protective clothing, masks, and air extraction systems. Or ideally, such substances should be avoided altogether, which is called substitution. You first check whether there's a safer alternative before using hazardous materials." (Transcript 1) "Another angle of social responsibility internally at [Company] might be engaging my employees. We do employee engagement events every month, which is new for us. We've just started in the last six months as a pilot program to see how we can engage the employees, increase morale and get more buy-in so that they feel connected within the organization." (Transcript 6) "And they also provide us with resources for hardships through Insperity. I don't know if you guys have that, but Insperity, they have like continuous training classes for us there. So we can go on anytime and we can learn more like through videos. And then, also, they have a section for us where, you know, if we are going through a difficult time then we can get a free counseling session. We can get a free lawyer. They offer resources when it comes to teaching us how to take care of ourselves emotionally and physically." (Transcript 7)
CSR Interpretation and Understanding	"Yes, I'm familiar with the term. But what [Company] specifically does in the field of CSR is hard to say. I know that the topic was introduced about one and a half to two years ago. I believe there are working groups that deal with it intensively. As far as I know, CSR has a very broad scope, you can initiate projects in many areas [...]. However, I don't really know what is currently being implemented. You sometimes hear about something, but often you don't directly associate it with CSR." (Transcript 2) "So I did have to look it up and I read about it [...]. So I'm gonna be very candid with you and tell you that I don't think in terms of CSR and all." (Transcript 6) "[...] it means that we live social fairness in all aspects of business life and we pass it on to our suppliers so that they act according to these guidelines. Naturally, we also have to pass it on to our employees, led by example and expect them to act accordingly. How we treat our employees is also part of our social responsibility." (Transcript 1) "It means that a company helps people and that its strategy is not only to make money but also to think about the community and the environment. That is what corporate social responsibility means to me." (Transcript 4) "I feel like CSR is very closely intertwined with that when it comes to our responsibility to treat people in our company,

	ethically and externally as well, like in our community and also the planet. That will not harm the planet more, of course it can be difficult with the industries that we have, but it's our responsibility to also make sure that we're not causing any sort of excessive damage. This is the planet we all live on. And then also, you know, giving back when we can to our community and kind of finding like meaning connecting meaning between the company to the community and to our planet.” (Transcript 7)
Navigating CSR between Values and Constraints	“Yes. For me, the most important thing when choosing a company is values, not money. If the company shares your values, you can work happily and do a great job.” (Transcript 4) “We are socially responsible. Honestly, no one has it as good as they do with us.” (Transcript 1) “I would have gotten the position, but the way it was ultimately structured and organized was not so optimal.” (Transcript 8) “But we – I also have to report on how far they commute every day and it's just very different because that's not a measurable that we look at in the States. So in terms of environmental, I know that we don't align with what [Company] does in that sense – I report on it, of course, but it's not something that makes any impact on any decisions that I make.” (Transcript 6) “Yes, there have been such situations. For example, being “CO₂-neutral by 2030.” Our products are supposed to be CO₂-neutral, but how can we actually prove that? You’d have to trace every single material used and ask how it was produced, what happens at the supplier’s global production sites, and so on. That’s practically impossible these days. You can always find ways to calculate something, but the credibility of those calculations is highly questionable.” (Transcript 1) “I think we could possibly incentivize volunteering [...]. I think we could do donations [...] and I also think that we could possibly try to connect our mission to our community or to the planet more as opposed to the industry.” (Transcript 7) “Yes, for example, photovoltaic systems. We don’t have any on our roofs [...]. But we have no solar panels because, according to facility management, it’s not profitable. Still, I wonder why we’re not using solar energy, considering how many roofs we have.” (Transcript 1)

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Intro

Questions:

- *“What is your role in the company? Do you have managerial responsibilities?”*

General understanding of CSR

Questions:

- *“When you hear the term ‘corporate social responsibility,’ what does that mean to you?”*
- *“Can you recall a specific moment when you first heard or noticed something about CSR in this company?”*
- *“What exactly happened? Who was involved? What did you think about it at that time?”*
- *“How did others around you make sense of what CSR meant back then?”*
- *“Can you give me an example of a CSR activity that you know your company does? Do you think it shaped how you see CSR here?”*

Local interpretation and relevance

Questions:

- *“Do you think CSR is important here in your country/subsidiary – why or why not?”*
- *“Can you describe a situation where people here acted on CSR in a way that reflected local culture?”*
- *“How do people around you make sense of what CSR means locally?”*
- *“Can you describe a specific CSR initiative that took place here locally?”*
- *“How did people in your team react at first (before)? How did that evolve as it unfolded (during)? What do people say about it now (after)?”*
- *“Were there moments when you or your team adapted CSR ideas to make them fit better with local culture or everyday work?”*

Hierarchy & influence

Questions:

- *“How does your manager communicate the CSR initiatives to you, if at all?”*
- *“Can you recall a time when management’s view of CSR shaped how you thought about it?”*

Communication & sensemaking

Questions:

- *“How does the company communicate CSR initiatives to you?”*
- *“Do you think this communication is clear and meaningful?”*
- *“Can you think of a time when a CSR message was misunderstood or not accepted here?”*
- *“Thinking back, how did this experience affect how you see the company’s values?”*
- *“Which CSR messages ‘stick’ with you and why do you think those ones do?”*
- *“Have you ever seen colleagues interpret a CSR message differently than you? What happened?”*

Personal fit & values

Questions:

- *Can you think of a CSR experience or initiative that made you feel particularly aligned (or misaligned) with the company’s values?”*
- *“What happened? How did you feel during and after that experience?”*
- *“How did colleagues react – did others feel the same way?”*
- *“Looking back, what did that incident tell you about your place or fit in the organization?”*
- *“Has CSR ever challenged how you see yourself as an employee?”*
- *“What CSR activities feel like ‘you’, and which don’t?”*
- *“When you first joined, what helped you figure out whether this company was a good match for you?”*

Employees’ recommendations for the company

Questions:

- *“What do you think the company could do to make CSR more meaningful for employees here?”*
- *“If you could advise HQ on how to communicate CSR better, what would you say?”*
- *“What kinds of actions would help you and your colleagues make better sense of CSR in daily work?”*
- *“Looking back on everything you’ve mentioned, how do you now make sense of CSR in this company?”*
- *“Has your view of your own fit or alignment changed over time? How?”*

Appendix C: Interview Transcripts

1. Interview, 07.10.2025: Division Manager/Vice President, Germany, in person, male, duration: 31:50

Interviewer: What is your role in the company, and do you have managerial responsibilities?

Respondent: Yes, I'm a division manager with leadership responsibilities.

I: In which area?

R: In the electronics sector, specifically in component manufacturing.

I: And how would you describe yourself at work? How do you work, are you...?

R: I'd say I'm very committed, fair, attentive, a good listener, and demanding when necessary.

I: Would you describe yourself as decisive?

R: Well, partly. That's decreased a bit over the years as I'm getting closer to retirement, the drive isn't quite the same anymore.

I: How many employees are you responsible for?

R: At our peak, we had around 870-880 employees, but due to the current situation, we've had a significant decline to about 550 employees.

I: Is your role as division manager connected to CSR in any way?

R: Yes, absolutely, all of us are involved in that.

I: How exactly?

R: Our company has a policy that we must both demonstrate and live by and it's certified

annually by an external institute. It's also something our customers demand, without fulfilling corporate social responsibility standards, you wouldn't even get larger contracts. And of course, we require the same from our suppliers.

I: So would you say you deal with it daily or weekly?

R: Yes, or at least indirectly.

I: When you hear the term "social responsibility," how would you define it?

R: It's all written down in that agreement. It means that we live social fairness in all aspects of business life and we pass it on to our suppliers so that they act according to these guidelines. Naturally, we also have to pass it on to our employees, led by example and expect them to act accordingly. How we treat our employees is also part of our social responsibility.

I: Can you give an example from those guidelines?

R: For instance, we only buy from suppliers whose products are made without child labor. That's one of the requirements in our contracts. Another example is fair wages, ensuring our employees stay healthy, implementing health management measures, and providing training in that area and so on.

I: Do you think it's important that the company promotes these things?

R: Yes, of course, I think it's important but only up to a certain point. It shouldn't get out of hand. Just because an employee has an injured finger doesn't mean they should automatically go through a dozen programs. Measures should be applied sensibly, where they truly matter, for example when someone has physical complaints. It's also important to ensure that workplaces are safe and appropriate for employees' age and needs. Basic things like lighting, office equipment, or ergonomic assembly workstations should be tailored to employees as much as possible. And for hazardous materials, precautions must be taken, so employees aren't exposed to risks. They must be provided with proper safety equipment like glasses, gloves, protective clothing, masks, and air extraction systems. Or ideally, such

substances should be avoided altogether, this is called substitution. You first check whether there's a safer alternative before using hazardous materials.

I: I can tell employee safety is very important to you. But when you think about other company sites, do you notice any differences compared to Germany?

R: No, as far as I can tell, it's consistent across the company. We want to apply the same standards worldwide, even though local regulations must of course be taken into account.

I: That's a good point. Can you think of an example where something would have to be adapted in another country?

R: I'm not entirely sure, but from my experience, China also has strict regulations and takes these issues very seriously. Generally speaking, their standards are quite similar to ours.

I: Have you heard colleagues talk about social responsibility, or do you know what they focus on?

R: Yes, there are probably different opinions, but what I've just explained reflects the general attitude in my environment.

I: Have you ever wanted to change one of the company's CSR guidelines?

R: Yes, as I said earlier, I think it should be practiced within reason. For example, we have two wheelchair users in our company, and a lot has been invested to accommodate them, partly supported by the government. But it's also important to question whether certain health issues are related to the workplace.

I: Can you think of another example, perhaps related to the environment, something the company has done well or not so well?

R: Yes, for example, photovoltaic systems. We don't have any on our roofs. This year we did install a wood-chip heating system at our main site and it's being implemented in Hungary as well, to meet sustainability goals. But we have no solar panels because,

according to facility management, it's not profitable. Still, I wonder why we're not using solar energy, considering how many roofs we have.

I: Do you talk to your superior about such topics, or do they come up in your meetings?

R: We have regular meetings, including one-on-one sessions, but to be honest, social responsibility isn't discussed very often.

I: So your manager doesn't usually approach you about these topics?

R: Actually, that's not entirely true. Sometimes we discuss topics like temporary contracts or agency workers, how socially responsible it is if we decide not to renew their contracts. Of course, that depends on the situation. If there's less work, temporary contracts make sense. But we do talk about whether we can continue employing them or not. Our company generally takes a very socially responsible approach in such cases.

I: So there's never been a situation where your manager directly addressed CSR with you?

R: No, because we live it sensibly. We are socially responsible. Honestly, no one has it as good as they do with us.

I: Has the management team ever influenced you in terms of CSR?

R: No, I can't think of a direct example at the moment.

I: Do you think the management has a strong influence on employees when it comes to CSR? For instance, if a manager leads by example, does it affect others?

R: Yes, of course, but it always depends on how it's done.

I: Have you ever felt that one of the company's CSR goals wasn't credible or realistic?

R: Yes, there have been such situations. For example, being "CO₂-neutral by 2030." Our products are supposed to be CO₂-neutral, but how can we actually prove that? You'd have

to trace every single material used and ask how it was produced, what happens at the supplier's global production sites, and so on. That's practically impossible these days. You can always find ways to calculate something, but the credibility of those calculations is highly questionable.

I: Do you feel that CSR topics also influence your private life, for instance, waste separation?

R: Yes, definitely. I separate my waste very thoroughly.

I: Or has there been something at work that you adopted at home, like using electric cars?

R: Yes, of course. Since we manufacture many components for e-mobility, an electric car isn't far-fetched for me. But being technically minded, I'm also skeptical about how climate-neutral such cars really are. The emissions might just be shifted elsewhere to power plants or disposal processes, for example. Still, you're also influenced by things like car brands, especially if they're big customers of ours.

I: Have you ever had doubts as a manager about whether you could actually implement the company's CSR requirements?

R: Yes. For example, with the substitution of hazardous materials. It's very difficult to implement, especially when certain materials are explicitly required by the customer.

I: Is there anything else regarding CSR that you wish the company would support more?

R: No, I can honestly say that we already have many measures and programs in place, there's nothing I'm missing.

2. Interview, 21.10.2025: Controller, Germany, online video meeting, male, duration: 23:50

Interviewer: OK, then let's get started. What is your role in the company, so what exactly is your job at [Company]?

Respondent: Mhm. I've been with [Company] for almost six years now, working in central controlling. Among my tasks is, for example, the business planning for the following year. We're organized into different business units, which are then divided into various profit centers. One of the responsibilities of operational corporate management is to prepare the business planning for the upcoming year at the profit-center level. This usually takes place between September and December in terms of workload. Then, at the beginning of the year or during the year, it's basically about conducting various plan-actual comparisons, essentially checking whether we deviate from our plan, how strongly we deviate, and what the underlying causes are and defining measures if necessary. And then there are also many special topics that come in through my supervisor, just ad-hoc evaluations or one-time analyses. It's actually very varied and often involves unique tasks.

I: Do you also have any leadership responsibilities?

R: No, I don't have any disciplinary leadership responsibilities. [Company] is divided into several business areas, for example, we have an automotive division, an electronics division (which is further divided into Electronics 1 to Electronics 5), and a mechanics division. For each of these areas, there is a controller responsible for oversight.

I: Okay.

R: In this context, I do have technical leadership responsibility. That means I guide the departments through their respective topics on a professional level.

I: Okay.

R: Basically, it's nothing other than business support that we provide for the divisions.

I: Okay. When you hear the term corporate social responsibility, do you have any particular idea of what that means, or do you know what [Company] does in that area?

R: Yes, I'm familiar with the term. But what [Company] specifically does in the field of CSR is hard to say. I know that the topic was introduced about one and a half to two years ago. I believe there are working groups that deal with it intensively. As far as I know, CSR has a very broad scope, you can initiate projects in many areas. I think right now they are evaluating which topics are relevant and feasible for [Company] and what is possible in terms of costs and resources. However, I don't really know what is currently being implemented. You sometimes hear about something, but often you don't directly associate it with CSR, for example, when local clubs are supported or charity events are organized.

I: Mhm.

R: You don't necessarily connect those things immediately with CSR.

I: Yes, that's true. So you wouldn't say that you can easily tell when something is a CSR initiative from [Company]?

R: Exactly. For example, you often hear in the media about gender quotas for leadership positions. If a management position at [Company] is filled by a woman, I wouldn't automatically associate that with CSR. My first thought would be that she got the position because of her qualifications, not because of a quota.

I: So for you, it's just natural that such things happen?

R: Yes, absolutely.

I: Okay. When you look specifically at the [Location] site or Germany in general, do you think it's important that [Company] supports topics like fair working conditions or environmental initiatives?

R: Yes, definitely. [Company] is the largest employer in the region, so these things are important especially for employee motivation and retention.

I: Mhm.

R: It's also important for reputation and competitiveness. If [Company] shows social engagement, that's also perceived positively by customers. But I think one shouldn't forget the local connection. For example, if [Company] were to launch a campaign in Hamburg, I

think it would lack regional relevance and appear less credible. Local initiatives make much more sense to me.

I: So you think it's important that CSR activities focus on the region?

R: Yes, exactly.

I: Have you ever noticed colleagues talking about CSR?

R: At the moment, it's not a topic of discussion at all. I only know that one or two colleagues are part of a company-wide CSR working group that deals with an extensive catalogue of topics, which I haven't seen myself. They decide step by step which topics fit [Company] and can be implemented. But in our department, CSR is not something people talk about.

I: Would you find it important to know more about what's happening in that area?

R: Good question. I think communication at [Company] is generally good. On social media like Instagram or, in the past, Facebook, you regularly see updates about initiatives, for example, donation drives, blood donations, or DKMS registrations. I think that's great, but I don't necessarily connect it directly with CSR. For me, it's simply normal nowadays that companies participate in such things.

I: Yes.

R: At the moment, the economic situation is challenging. That affects many companies, not just us. Market prospects are weak and the main focus is to stay economically stable.

I: Yes.

R: Many companies lay off employees when orders decline, that's something that doesn't really happen at [Company]. [Company] stands for stability and responsibility towards its employees. So, right now, economic issues clearly take priority over CSR.

I: So the most important thing right now is to get through this period?

R: Yes, I would say so. When you read that big companies like Samsung, Bosch, or the gear factory in Passau are planning layoffs, you naturally start to think about your own job security. That's why economic interests are currently much more in focus than CSR topics.

Of course, we notice that [Company] engages in social or environmental topics, but it's just not a major focus at the moment.

I: Yes, I understand. It's the same at the company where I'm currently working.

R: Exactly. I think CSR just doesn't have that high of a priority at the moment. But the topic is becoming more important. Many companies are already doing something, probably still too little, otherwise it wouldn't be a topic for your master's thesis.

I: That's true.

R: I think in the last one or two years, the topic has lost some momentum because the market has become more difficult. Still, it's important to continue working on it. It's always a question of cost and resources, though. Many companies want to be part of the CSR movement, but they're doing it on a small scale for now.

I: Yes, what I've heard is that customers increasingly demand that products be manufactured CO₂-neutrally. That's not really a voluntary CSR initiative anymore, but more of a requirement.

R: Exactly.

I: But that would still fall under CSR, right?

R: Yes, if it's a specific requirement, it automatically gains importance. If a contract depends on it, it becomes relevant right away. Everything that's more of a "nice to have" is currently being reconsidered or postponed.

I: So would you say that once the economic situation improves, CSR will become more important again? For example, to enhance reputation or employer attractiveness?

R: Yes, absolutely. Employer attractiveness is a key factor. We're still facing a shortage of skilled workers and CSR can help to attract and retain employees. [Company] is well prepared for the current situation but also wants to position itself for the future. At the moment, job security is the top priority, but in the long run, CSR will certainly regain importance.

I: Yes.

R: CSR topics are still an essential part of a company's responsibility and should continue to be pursued.

I: Yes, exactly. Right now, everything is just a bit more difficult.

3. Interview, 21.10.2025: Quality Manager, Romania, online video meeting, male, duration: 27:55

Interviewer: OK, perfect. Thank you. So, first question: What is your role in the company, and do you have any managerial responsibilities?

Respondent: Yes, I am the Quality Manager for Business Unit E5 in Romania. I do have managerial responsibilities. I manage a team of seven colleagues.

I: Okay.

R: My main responsibility is to maintain quality in our business department.

I: OK, OK. When you think about the quality of products, for example, is there anything that you associate with corporate social responsibility in that context?

R: Um...

I: For example, some customers expect products to be produced in a CO₂-neutral way. Is that something you have to follow, or are there any specific guidelines related to that?

R: Yes, we have some requirements from our customers regarding the origin of materials and hazardous substances. The ecological footprint of the products is not strongly regulated by customers, but we must always follow the legal requirements.

I: Yeah, okay.

R: There are certain countries from which we are not allowed to buy materials, and we have restrictions regarding which hazardous materials can be used in our products. We strictly follow these restrictions. These are the general requirements from our customers.

I: Is there also something from [Company]'s side, internal requirements or guidelines, that you have to follow, even if customers don't require them?

R: I'm not sure. In general, here in Romania and I think in all countries where [Company] is active, all legal requirements are fully respected. There might be some initiatives from [Company]'s side to go beyond the minimum legal requirements, but in general, the most important thing is compliance with the law. Since Romania is part of the European Union, the legislation is quite similar to Germany or Hungary.

I: Okay, interesting.

R: So apart from that, I cannot really say that there's something additional beyond legal compliance.

I: When [Company] introduces new CSR initiatives, are those directly implemented in Romania as well, or do you adapt them due to local or economic circumstances?

R: Everything related to social or environmental responsibility that [Company] introduces applies equally to Romania. I haven't found anything that doesn't fit our local context. Of course, every society has its particularities, but Romania is not that different from Germany. Maybe in other locations like Tunisia, there might be differences, for example regarding gender equality, but here, that's not really an issue. So, no, I don't see anything that doesn't fit our culture here in Romania.

I: OK, so you think that everything [Company] introduces is also well suited for Romania?

R: Yes, exactly.

I: OK. Do you and your colleagues talk about these kinds of CSR-related issues, or is that not really a topic in your subsidiary?

R: Yes and no. We do have some activities related to social responsibility, for example blood donation campaigns.

I: That's nice.

R: These are organized at the [Company] site. Sometimes a mobile laboratory comes here, and employees go there to donate blood. Some colleagues from my team also donate regularly. We also have donation initiatives when the school year starts, where colleagues give donations to students. These are the main CSR-related topics we talk about in our team. So overall, these are the main social responsibility activities we see from [Company], which are aimed at supporting our local community.

I: OK, so the activities you mentioned, are they organized locally by employees in Romania, or are they encouraged by the management in Germany?

R: These activities are planned and organized by the Human Resources department. The management board in Germany knows about and approves them. We simply participate and support these initiatives. Another example, we have a medical office here with a doctor and employees receive regular health checks. This is also related to CSR. It's something we really notice, and it shows that [Company] takes care of employees' health. This is also related to

this topic, and we can feel that it is working and it's good that [Company] takes care of the employees' health.

I: So you feel that these CSR activities are beneficial for employees and maybe also for the company's reputation?

R: Yes, definitely. I think the way [Company] handles these issues is a good example for our region. Not many companies here have such good conditions, for example in cleanliness, safety, and healthcare.

I: Did you ever think that any CSR activity from [Company] didn't fit Romania, something that wasn't really needed or relevant?

R: No, I think all activities were chosen after analyzing whether they were needed and all of them have been helpful and beneficial for our community. I can't recall any that didn't fit.

I: Do you think [Company] should do more in some areas, maybe for the environment or working conditions?

R: OK...

I: Especially in Romania, is there something you think [Company] could support more?

R: Regarding the environment and working conditions, yes, there's always room for improvement. But I know my colleague's responsible for environmental topics, and I can say that all legal requirements are fully respected. That's already an important step. Not all Romanian companies manage to do that. Investing in green technologies would of course be great, but that depends on economic decisions and priorities set by the management board. For now, maintaining compliance and good standards is already a positive achievement. In the future, when the situation allows, there could be more opportunities to introduce greener technologies.

I: OK, so at the moment it's fine, but maybe in the future [Company] could support more initiatives.

R: Yes, exactly. For example, I have some colleagues who work with local NGOs focused on environmental protection. I'm not sure whether [Company] currently supports these NGOs financially, but it would be great if the company could do so, as they have the resources and it would help strengthen environmental activities in our region. That could be one way to further improve CSR activities.

I: Mhm. OK. Do you think [Company] should communicate more about what they're doing in CSR, or is the communication already good?

R: I think the communication is good. We receive the CSR reports annually and all the information is available. Employees just need to be proactive and look for the information, for example on the website. Communication can always be improved, but from my point of view, it's fine.

I: OK. When you first joined [Company], did you already pay attention to CSR or sustainability topics, like environmental or working conditions, or was that not really important to you at the time?

R: When I joined [Company] about 15 years ago, I immediately noticed that the standards were higher than at the companies I'd worked for before. Especially regarding environmental standards and health and safety, it was a completely different level. I was very happy with those conditions at that time. And since then, I've seen continuous improvement every year. Things keep getting better and I think [Company] is heading in a very good direction regarding these issues.

I: OK, so in general, you're very satisfied with what [Company] does in CSR?

R: Yes, absolutely.

4. Interview, 21.10.2025: Project Coordinator, Team Lead Production Management, Costa Rica, online video meeting, 2 males, duration: 44:27

Interviewer: Oh, perfect. Yeah, great. OK, so my first question is what your role in the company is and if you have managerial responsibilities.

Respondent 1: You go first, [R 2].

I: For both of you.

Respondent 2: OK. I am responsible for the Toolship or MBT Costa Rica department. I currently coordinate or lead initiatives focused on tooling, manufacturing, test adapter process improvement, and the implementation of innovative solutions for the production area. These are my main functions.

I: And do you also have managerial responsibilities? Are you responsible for employees?

R 2: Yes, I am in charge of around eight people in my team. There are different disciplines: electronics, precision mechanics, and also logistics.

I: OK.

R 2: We also do manual assemblies. There are different functions in my team.

I: OK, OK.

R 1: In my case, [R 2] is my boss. I don't have any managerial responsibilities. I deal with raw materials, logistics, quotations, coordination of project-related materials, and administrative tasks, such as internal orders. I don't have people under my supervision.

R 2: I can add that he also helps with other functions like social activities, 5S, and safety. He helps with all these activities.

R 1: Yes.

R 2: That is important for us.

I: OK. That's great. So regarding that, when you hear the term corporate social responsibility, what does that mean to you or how would you define it, especially at [Company]?

R 2: Sorry, what was the question?

I: When you hear the term corporate social responsibility, what does that mean to you or how would you define it?

R 2: It means that a company helps people and that its strategy is not only to make money but also to think about the community and the environment. That is what corporate social responsibility means to me.

I: Yeah, OK. Can you also recall a specific moment when you first came into contact with CSR at [Company]?

R 1: Yes, from the beginning there were some activities, but at first people didn't realize how important they were for the community. About eight years ago we started some activities, but few people believed in their importance. Now everybody is involved and understands the huge impact we have in our community through different kinds of activities, not only for people but also for the environment, for training, and for sharing knowledge. In the past, there were people who didn't have support from the government or their families. We started campaigns to collect milk bottles, since they consume a lot each week. Later, the company focused on environmental activities, like planting trees in our community. We take care of them afterwards. All these activities come from people who want to help; there is no pressure from the company. No one forces us to participate. It's voluntary and we enjoy helping.

I: And is that something that comes from the employees, or is it initiated by management, HR, or headquarters?

R 1: Usually, Human Resources makes the first call. They manage the activities and then everyone goes to help. Sometimes the activities are very big, sometimes smaller, but HR gives us the opportunity to make a difference in our community.

I: That's the Human Resources department in Costa Rica, right?

R 1: Yes, we have our own HR department here.

I: OK, OK. Do you think CSR is important in your country or subsidiary, or is it more of a "nice to have"?

R 2: I think [Company] is a socially responsible company. For example, they care about employees and ensure good working conditions. A few months ago, [Company] Costa Rica received the “Great Place to Work” certification for the second time. That shows the company values people and employees and that’s very nice.

I: So you would say that it’s personally important for you that [Company] supports CSR activities?

R 2: Yes.

R 1: Yes, definitely. If you have a good team inside the company, you can extend that to the community. We can share knowledge and do activities not only within [Company] but also outside, for people who need help or for environmental initiatives like recycling. It’s like a circle, if you do good things inside the company, why not outside as well?

I: Yeah. So you’re already doing CSR activities adapted to your local culture.

R 1: Yes, Human Resources focuses on activities that fit our values and people. Every country has different needs, so HR selects activities accordingly. It’s not just about donations. Sometimes it’s about spending time with people, for example those who don’t get visits from family. Spending even one or two hours with them can make them happy. This also has an impact on our community.

I: OK. [R 2], since you’re [R 1]’s manager, do you two talk about CSR in your daily work? How do you communicate about it?

R 2: We talk about internal activities in meetings, for example when we coordinate help for colleagues in other departments. Our team is very cooperative and proactive in social activities. That’s very good for us.

R 1: Human Resources also sends information through different channels like WhatsApp, email, or banners to promote activities. Participation is voluntary, but many people want to help.

R 2: Yes. In general, activities are communicated during all-hands meetings, where managers also speak about them.

I: Mhm.

R 2: For example, we had a family event where we planted trees near [Company]. It was a great opportunity to spend time with family and help the environment.

I: So you think [Company] has a clear communication about CSR activities?

R 1: Yes.

R 2: Yes, by email and meetings.

R 1: All activities align with [Company]'s values. For example, when we collect money to buy meals, these activities are organized under HR management and focus on areas of need, like after floods. It's important because we help where it's needed most.

I: So in your opinion, [Company] is already doing a lot of good CSR work. Was there ever a CSR initiative that didn't fit your local context?

R 1: I think it's OK, but there's always room for improvement. Each site has its own policies because every country has different needs. Maybe we could involve more people from the community, but overall it's very good.

R 2: Yes, I agree. We can improve, but [Company] is doing well and making a difference.

I: OK, so you think [Company] is doing great work, but there's room for small improvements.

R 2: Yes.

I: Do you think [Company]'s values also align with your personal values? Was that a reason you joined the company?

R 2: Yes. For example, in [Company] Costa Rica there are eight values in the strategic plan, like respect, integrity, and commitment. I think our past activities have been aligned with these values. For example, we plant trees and recycle. [Company] also supports employees when they need help and that makes me proud.

I: So you would say [Company] is a great fit for you as a workplace?

R 2: Yes.

R 1: Yes. For me, the most important thing when choosing a company is values, not money. If the company shares your values, you can work happily and do a great job. Everything else, like salary or job description, is secondary.

I: OK, maybe one last question. Is there anything you wish [Company] would do more of regarding CSR?

R 2: I think it's important to organize activities that reflect the culture of employees and include their families. When families participate, it's a great example for children and strengthens the community.

R 1: Maybe we could have indicators for each site around the world, for example two or three CSR activities per year. Right now, participation is voluntary, but if there were a goal per quarter or year, it could help structure activities better, whether for the environment, recycling, or supporting people in need.

I: OK, great. That's a very good example. Thank you, both. It was very helpful to learn how you approach CSR in Costa Rica.

R 1: Sure. One important thing is that these activities are not just for employees. Managers also participate. For example, two months ago our HR manager joined us to deliver packages to people in need. That's important because it sets an example for everyone.

I: So HR is really great at initiating activities and being a role model for you?

R 1: Yes, sure. Also, [General Manager] supports all these activities. He might not be directly involved, but he approves everything related to community support.

R 2: Yes, [General Manager] is the General Manager at [Company] Costa Rica.

I: OK. Are these activities also supported by headquarters, or are they mainly local initiatives?

R 2: I'm not completely sure.

R 1: I believe that the headquarters supports these kinds of initiatives because sometimes in the internal Impulse magazine I see activities from other sites. It seems to be part of a global company policy, even though each country focuses on its local needs.

5. Interview, 23.10.2025: HR Manager, Plant Director, China, online video meeting, female and male, duration: 43:03

Interviewer: I think you have to approve it. Yes, great. Thank you.

Respondent 1: Yeah. So even though we are located in China, we still want to keep and implement the culture of a German company in China. That's the reason why we focus on many things similar to Germany. First, we always want to build up the company culture for our employees and the work and life balance, right? That is the guideline.

Second, we focus on caring for the kids, and we provide flexible working time for our employees. We also provide a lot of, how to say...

I: Mhm, mhm.

R 1: Sports or team walking and participation in many cultural events in [Location]. Football or table tennis and also other events. We really take care of employee development and life-work balance.

Since we are located in China, we are also responsible for adapting to China's social system. And we take care of the environmental requirements from the government side, for example regarding the carbon system, where we have KPIs from the global level.

I: Ah, okay.

R 1: We also break this down to China and follow such processes. Another example is that we support the [Location] Inclusion Factories. Since 2009, we have provided lunch boxes for them. They have about 43 or 45 people with different kinds of issues, but we support them with lunch boxes and sometimes teach them simple work for small projects. That's what I would say are three main points from [Location]. Many people say CSR for one company always seems too high because it takes a lot of effort and money and maybe the return on investment is not so high. But that's not my thinking or our team's thinking.

I: That's good.

R 1: We are located in China; we do a lot of government business and CSR is part of our social responsibility. It shows that our company supports not only economic success but also the environment and society and the whole social system. That's really our mindset here in China. I think there's no big difference between our German and [Location] plants.

I: OK.

R 1: So I think that's the general background. What are your questions? I wanted to give you some input from my side.

I: So you are already adapting the global guidelines from [Company], especially to your plant in China, right? You have the global CSR guideline and then think about how to adapt it to your local environment?

R 1: Yeah, normally globally we have the CSR targets, systems, and guidelines. Then we have the QM, the Quality Management department, to assist. They are responsible for CSR and also for EHS, for example. Then we break this down for China and adapt it to our plant and even each department.

I: OK. And who is the main initiator for that? Do you have a special CSR department, or is it you and the HR department, where [R 2] works?

R 1: Yeah, normally CSR is coordinated by the Quality Management team. They have four people in the department, but CSR tasks involve teamwork across departments, for example HR, Facility, Quality, and Logistics. Every department plays a part in CSR.

I: Mhm. OK. And do you think all of your employees in the China plant accept those CSR activities or are actively involved in them?

R 1: Yeah, sure. If we compare with 50 or 100 years ago, China has already adapted a lot of international practices. Over the last 30 or 40 years, we have changed a lot in mindset and in understanding that CSR is everyone's responsibility. People understand that supporting CSR is about protecting our environment and community and they are happy to be involved.

I: And was there ever a time you thought that a global guideline from [Company] was not useful for China?

R 1: No, it's valuable for us. As I mentioned, we do a lot of government business, and the government really checks whether companies are trustworthy and environmentally responsible. So it's very good for us. The processes to protect the environment, protect the people, protect the employee. That is really very – how to say – very good to describe something to our customer, yeah. Of course we have a lot of local culture. The local culture we will find is another way to balance. We have the global guidelines and how to adapt to the local cultures. We also need another way to do that.

I: So you think the global guidelines are already very established?

R 1: Yes, yes, yes.

I: OK. Do you think there's anything that could be improved or supported more?

R 1: The global guidelines support us. For example, with green power, solar panels on buildings, and employee health checks.

I: And do you personally feel like that those CSR initiatives maybe align with your own values so that you think, OK, [Company] is a really good fit for me as a workplace or as an employer?

R 1: Sure. That's the reason I worked for [Company] already 20 years, 21 years, right? 21 years, yeah. So I think that if we look at the whole picture of our employees in [Location], to get the correct information, I think more than 50% of people have worked for us for more than five years and that is not normal in China.

I: Oh, OK. So they usually switch jobs very often in China?

R 1: Yeah, very often two or three years they change their job. Yeah, that's the reason I would say, yeah, that is the good base to support us, to keep the people here and that they are really happy working for [Company] in China.

I: OK. And when you both first joined [Company], was that something that was important to you, what they're doing in the sense of CSR?

R 1: Yeah, to be honest, 21 years ago I think the CSR processes were not really implemented in [Location] during that time because in that time we were a very small team and in that time, we rented one building in one industrial park and a lot of things. And since 2012 we have their own building and we're slowly implementing a lot of CSR processes.

I: But right now, you don't really think in this department they should maybe improve a bit more or support us a bit more?

R 1: Yeah, I was thinking maybe digitalization could be faster. We have guidelines and goals, but employees would benefit from more visible dashboards showing what's ongoing. From the global side, development of such dashboards could be quicker.

I: OK. How do you coordinate CSR activities in your plant?

R 1: Training is a very efficient way. When new employees join, we have onboarding sessions where we share information about working conditions, safety, and environmental protection. We also collect figures from waste and energy management into one dashboard

that we display in the building. Employees and visitors can see the daily and monthly results. [R 2] can provide you a screenshot later.

I: Mhm. That would be great. How does the headquarters communicate CSR updates to you?

R 1: They have a monthly process with specific forms. We provide information from our side, and they summarize data from all plants. They give us guidelines on what to improve. We or the QM team have regular communication every two weeks.

I: OK. And is this communication adequate?

R 1: Yes, it works very well. They also use the ZIP platform to share information, and our employees can access updates there.

I: And do other employees in China know about those CSR activities?

R 1: Sure, sure.

I: Do they also value them and get active themselves, or do you have to initiate everything?

R 1: We get global goals, then break them down to departments and employees. They understand CSR is not only the company's responsibility but everyone's. For example, we analyze and support work-life balance and health, especially for initiatives like X-ray control. CSR activities are also about personal behavior and our employees understand that.

I: And [R 2], from an HR perspective, are CSR activities also used for employer branding?

R 2: Of course, it's a great way to attract candidates. A good working environment and respect for employees really enhance the company's image.

I: Do candidates also ask about these topics during interviews?

R 2: Of course. They ask about working hours, environment, salary, training, and opportunities for improvement.

I: So, to summarize again, you think [Company] has well-established CSR guidelines and you're free to adapt them locally. Is the headquarters also supporting you financially?

R 2: We don't get direct financial support from Germany, but implementing CSR helps us win more local business or government business, which brings business and allows us to reinvest. It's a healthy cycle.

I: OK. I think you've answered everything.

R 1: If you have more questions later, you can email me or [R 2].

I: That would be great.

R 1: I'll ask [R 2] to send you the dashboard and inclusion factory pictures.

I: Yeah, that would be nice.

R 1: That should help you understand our local process better.

I: Mhm. Are there examples of what you do in China shown on the dashboard?

R 1: Yes, sure. It's a long dashboard. So far, the headquarters doesn't have one like it, only we do in China.

I: That's very nice.

R 1: Yes.

I: OK. You've really given me a lot of helpful information about how you implement CSR locally.

R 1: We try our best to keep a good CSR level in [Location]. Of course, we learn from the German side and adapt it to local culture.

I: And that adaptation was very important for you, right?

R 1: Yes, sure. It's also important to help us win more local business.

6. Interview, 23.10.2025: HR Manager, United States, online video meeting, female, duration: 45:16

Interviewer: So we've already covered the questions about what your role is in the company so I would ask you if you already know what the term corporate social responsibility is or how you would define it maybe also especially at [Legal Entity] how your company defines it.

Respondent: So I did have to look it up and I read about it, but I wanna hear from you first like when you are saying social, corporate social, what are you like? What is your approach, what are you looking for now and then that will help guide my answers.

I: As I would define it or as I defined it in my thesis, it's more like a responsibility of the company to act in a responsible way, in the department of like – or maybe in economics or in the legal sense but also in the environmental sense, ecological sense. And also, if the company is doing some voluntary work for the environment, for the people that work at the company. Um, just doing something positive for the society so that's how I would define it. So working responsibly and doing good for the society and the country and yes, so that's how I would define it. Yes, exactly so it covers both economical areas, legal areas, but also the people and the society.

R: So is it more the impact that [Legal Entity] has on the community that we're in not so much the impact that [Legal Entity] has within itself on its own employees, right?

I: I would say both. I would say the impact that it has on the employees but also, for example, when it comes to employer branding, how would I position myself as a company, how I would advertise our activities for potential candidates. So how could I attract potential candidates? How would I be more attractive to them in terms of CSR so I would say it's both for the community and for the people that work at the company, so that they maybe also learn a little bit more about CSR and also maybe do a bit more activities and in the CSR areas so just a little bit of...how do I say it? A little bit more action to motivate the employees, for example. So was there ever like a situation where you thought, OK that's a CSR activity that [Company] does. Did you ever have like a moment where you're like 'Oh OK that's really interesting. That's like a really nice CSR initiative that they introduced'?

R: So I will be, I'm gonna be very candid with you and tell you that I don't think in terms of CSR and all. Yeah, and I've noticed the differences between [Legal Entity] and [Company] and talking about the environment piece of it first. I'm not sure if sustainability is a huge

initiative in the EU. It is in the US, but I don't know that it is as big of a focus for example, when I hire a new employee. [Company] wants me to report on what type of car they drive; do they drive an electric vehicle. Or as my counterpart says, “fossil fuel”, which we don't even say in the States, we don't say fossil fuel. So that is very different. And not something that we really take into consideration, not saying that there aren't organizations in the US that wouldn't take that type of sustainability into account or environmental impact. But we – I also have to report on how far they commute every day and it's just very different because that's not a measurable that we look at in the States. So in terms of environmental, I know that we don't align with what [Company] does in that sense – I report on it, of course, but it's not something that makes any impact on any decisions that I make. I think out of 189 employees right now I might have three that drive electric vehicles. So even that kind of gives you a picture of if it's not huge right now, in terms of environmental, like output from our manufacturing, we do have awareness around that. For example, I just bought a new toaster oven for our break room and for our employees because they were really old, really dirty, disgusting, and I had told my facility to throw the old ones in the trash and my plant manager was like ‘Oh no, wait, we have to pull out’, you know, the circuit boards in there and any electronics because they need to be disposed of separately in a different way. So in terms of our waste, we are managing that on an environmental standpoint. However, HR doesn't have any. I don't touch that at all, so I can't give you any specifics. So there is some environmental consideration.

Ahm, when I first saw CSR and I started thinking about what you would probably ask me about, I was thinking more about like discrimination, like that social responsibility. Because that is a very big deal in the states, ahm, and I have to do a lot of government reporting throughout the year on what our hiring trends look like. Have I hired protective veterans and how many? Protective veteran is defined as someone that has served in the military, US military, who has either gotten out of the service within the last three years or they were injured in combat and then they're considered a protected vet for the rest of their working years. So we do have a lot of initiatives like that.

I just started an affirmative action plan with an outside organization, so I have to do all the reporting on gender and race and disabilities, what promotions people got, what their title changes were. So in that sense in social responsibility, that's a big thing for us in the States and [Legal Entity] is making sure that we are making responsibilities. We are making decisions on hiring that is discrimination free. Another angle of social responsibility internally at [Legal Entity] might be engaging my employees. We do employee engagement

events every month, which is new for us. We've just started in the last six months as a pilot program to see how we can engage the employees, increase morale, and get more buy-in so that they feel connected within the organization. An example of something that we're doing right now: For the month of October, we're doing a pumpkin decorating contest for Halloween. Employees can sign up and we'll give them a pumpkin. We'll buy the pumpkins, they'll decorate them, and then we'll bring all the employees together and they're going to vote. There's going to be a prize. It's very small and little, but it's just creating that camaraderie. So that I think about with social responsibility. But if I look at CSR from a hiring standpoint, when I'm hiring someone new, it doesn't come into the conversation. It's not something that I discuss, like the discrimination laws – that is very well known here, so I don't even need to discuss that. And I don't talk about action steps with the environment or how we do waste disposal during an interview process either.

I: So no candidate will ask you questions about topics like that?

R: No. You know what though, I did have one person once and it was very unusual for me. I've been at [Legal Entity] for just about two years now and when I started at [Legal Entity] I was only on the recruiting side of HR. I did have one candidate ask me about ITAR. I'm not sure if you're familiar with ITAR, but we are an ITAR facility. ITAR is an abbreviation. What ITAR is, it is a US government regulation that prohibits non-US persons from having any access to any product that we would export outside of the US. So we are actually right now just going back to make sure we're being compliant with ITAR and verifying that all of our employees are US persons.

A "US person" is defined as someone that was born in the US, so they either have a US birth certificate, or they could have a US passport, meaning they naturalized to become a US citizen, or they have a green card which allows them to work in the States. If they have one of those three items, they are considered a US person.

For example, when our [Company] colleagues come to [Legal Entity] and they're on-site with us, they're not allowed to wander through the building unsupervised because they're not US persons. They have to always be escorted and wear a special badge that says that they are a non-US person. It's interesting because [Company] owns us and yet when [Colleague 1] or [Colleague 2] are here on-site, they can't just go onto the production floor. That's part of being compliant. And just a little context: that's actually the reason why [Company] wanted to acquire [Legal Entity]: we have ITAR status, so we can do US government contracts. Of course, they saw the potential in that for business.

So, back to my story. The only time a person questioned us from a CSR standpoint was a woman who was very concerned because her question was: Are you building defense items that could be used in a war situation? Would these be used in war with another country? She had a lot of personal conflict with that. I had to tell her, 'If your personal values don't align with the fact that we potentially manufacture something that the government puts into a nuclear missile' – and I'm just using that as an example – 'then this probably isn't the right place for you to work, because I can't promise you that we won't ever have a contract like that'. So we decided not to move forward with her in the interview process because her values didn't align with what we might potentially manufacture.

I: When you interview candidates – just reverting back to the topic about, for example, genders – if you have two candidates with the same qualifications, do you then maybe move forward with the woman rather than the man, because maybe you have a quota or something like that?

R: That's a very good question and my answer might have been different a couple of years ago. With the new administration in the US, with Trump being president right now, he did away with affirmative action regulations in the country. It used to be highly focused on gender, mostly women and on individuals with disabilities getting the same opportunities as others. Trump has sidelined that for now, so it doesn't have to be a focus or a quota that's met. I wasn't working in HR when that might've been more of a focus, so I can't speak to whether they literally had to hire six women a year or something like that. But I'm sure you're familiar with DEI – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – it's the new terminology now that embraces all of this to make sure people have equal opportunities.

If I had two candidates with equal qualifications, one a man and one a woman, would I pick the woman just to fill a need? I would say no. I always go by the qualifications and if they really were equal, then I look at who's going to be the better culture fit, who's going to fit in with who we already have here. I don't look at them as a man or a woman. There are biases that come into our minds, right? We all have them. You probably notice this too in recruiting: you see someone has a degree from a school you like, and you might want to give them preference. We always go through our own biases in our head, but I really wouldn't pick someone just to fill a quota. I go by qualifications first and then culture fit.

I: Yeah, that's true. Candidates should match the values and fit into the company and the team. That's important, because then they'll also stay longer and be happy there. You

mentioned the employee engagement activities. Is that something that you feel employees appreciate? Are they active and participating?

R: Yes, it's a new initiative. We started in June and we're treating it as a test pilot. We've tried different activities like lunches, contests, things like that. One of the things we did was a "Guess Who" board where employees brought in a childhood photo and everyone guessed who it was. At the end of the month, we revealed the names. It's simple but fun and the responses have been very positive. We also did a cornhole tournament, I'm not sure if you know it, but two teams toss beanbags onto boards. They loved it! We did it out on the production floor and people gathered, cheered; it was great. I had no idea if it would work, but it really did. I'm going to do a pulse survey at the beginning of 2026 to see if they like it or not. Because it's not just about having fun. There's a bigger picture here that we're trying to retain talent, make sure employees feel valued, engaged, and satisfied. I get a lot of inspiration from [Company]. For example, their Impulse magazine shows amazing things they do for employees in Germany, and we've been modeling some of that.

I: That's nice. You said you get inspiration from [Company] in Germany. Are there guidelines you have to follow from them, like CO2-neutral production or sustainability targets?

R: I can't answer that from experience because HR doesn't touch quality. You might want to talk to someone in our quality department. They could give a different perspective. I know we get audited and pass those audits, so we're clearly doing something right, but it's not part of HR.

I: Do you have your own internal guidelines at [Legal Entity], for example flexible work hours or part-time options for parents?

R: For production employees, it's different. They're hourly, so their shifts are fixed because the manufacturing line depends on everyone being there. They do have PTO – personal time off – which they can use for doctor appointments, family issues, etc., so there's flexibility in that sense. For our professional teams like engineers, accounting, HR, purchasing, they have more flexibility, especially post-COVID. Most are back in the office now, but I still work from home every other Friday. There's flexibility for personal needs like appointments, family and that's valued here.

I: Do you wish [Company] would guide you more on CSR?

R: I would say that if [Company] dictated something, we would do it. But right now, they let us operate as an US organization, which is good because some things might not translate

culturally. I'd love more vacation time like in Germany, but that's just not part of US work culture. We have implemented some changes from [Company] though. For example, [Colleague 1], our controller, suggested we start anniversary bonuses for employees at 5, 10, 15, 20, and 25 years. Before, we just gave small gifts like pens, which weren't very meaningful. Now we give monetary bonuses and employees love it. [Colleague 1] also suggested giving everyone a gift card during the holidays, which [Company] does and we've adopted that, too. So we're always open to changes that come from them. But there's a good balance. They respect our culture and what will be best received here. On the production side, we align closely with their processes, but on the people side, we have more flexibility.

I: Do employees appreciate these things?

R: Yes, very much. They're happy with the actions [Company] introduces, especially when it benefits them.

I: Do you wish [Company] would do more in terms of CSR?

R: No, I'm happy with it as it is. It's not something I've been very mindful of before, but after talking to you, I'm more aware that what we're doing does fall under CSR. I think our level of interaction with [Company] from a CSR standpoint is appropriate. I don't feel I need more guidance from them.

I: That's really nice. I think these are exactly the kinds of examples I was hoping for, where you can see how CSR connects to both company culture and employee engagement.

7. Interview, 24.10.2025: HR Manager, United States, online video meeting, female, duration: 24:12

Interviewer: OK, so first of all what is your role in the company?

Respondent: HR coordinator in the [Location] plant so I do like a mix of receptionist work and HR administration work.

I: And you're in [Location], that is in...?

R: [State in the US].

I: OK OK. And did you ever come across the term corporate social responsibility in your company, or do you have like maybe your own idea on how to define it?

R: I just got my bachelor's in business administration, and we went over CSR actually recently like in my last trimester, so that's exciting. And also, I did study one of my classes with people to planet profit. I feel like CSR is very closely intertwined with that when it comes to our responsibility to treat people in our company, ethically and externally as well, like in our community and also the planet. That will not harm the planet more, of course it can be difficult with the industries that we have, but it's our responsibility to also make sure that we're not causing any sort of excessive damage. This is the planet we all live on. And then also, you know, giving back when we can to our community and kind of finding like meaning or connecting meaning between the company to the community and to our planet.

I: Was there ever like a specific moment where you first came across CSR at [Legal Entity] or is it a topic in your team or in your company?

R: Here it's not something that – like, you know, we don't have meetings. We don't talk about it or anything like that. I think it could be beneficial. I think we are exercising some things like I had written. I've written down a list for you. As far as CSR goes, however I think it could also be better, so if you wanna hear the things I think are going well right now. I think that our employees get three breaks a day, their shifts are reasonable hours. They seem happy, they're not burnt out, so that's good. We have a good, healthy retention rate, we have high turnover. Employee satisfaction, we do good quality work and like they have inspections and all that kind of stuff which I think relates to consumers and what they're bringing into their homes. With our quality processes, I think that that helps with CSR customer satisfaction. We ensure that the customers I kind of – sorry I kinda just said that.

And then I would say with our compliance, like when it comes to ESD and when it comes to ITAR, that's a responsibility that is larger than, you know, just us. That's a responsibility that connects to the country's mission and in greater goals when it comes to our customers and their satisfaction, making sure that equipment doesn't fail, etc. So I think that they are very responsible. We also do employee engagement events, which, I know, a lot of these things are internal. And then they offer us tuition reimbursement, which is good that allows employees to continue their education. And they also provide us with resources for hardships through Insperity. I don't know if you guys have that, but Insperity, they have like continuous training classes for us there. So we can go on anytime and we can learn more like through videos. And then, also, they have a section for us where, you know, if we are going through a difficult time then we can get a free counseling session. We can get a free lawyer. They offer resources when it comes to teaching us how to take care of ourselves emotionally and physically. And just kind of help with our work life balance. So I think that those are things that were doing well and, like I said, most of it is internal and I think we could probably expand to external. But it's a good start.

I: Sounds very interesting, yeah. Do you think that the people at your company accept those initiatives? So, for example, they go to the counseling sessions or something like that or acting ethically or supporting the fair working condition, so do you think that your employees are really active and supportive of it?

R: Yes, definitely I haven't seen any issues when it comes to following the standards and compliance. I think when it comes to that, though, it really comes down to our leadership exhibiting like, you know, their role model for the people. Leaders are acting the way that they want to see the employees and the employees will follow. You know what I mean. So I definitely don't see any issues when it comes to engaging or being willing to work it in compliance with [Legal Entity] and things like that, they definitely seem to understand. Ahh, there was one other thing you had asked, yes, the counseling. I don't know how many people take advantage of it but I do know if someone is in that direction, you can go over to this page when it comes to taking care of your emotional health so it's a good resource to provide them, but I don't follow up, yeah.

I: Of course, and are you responsible for initiating those activities or is it different departments that maybe control or initiate those guidelines or activities?

R: For activities do you mean like the counseling, or do you mean our employee engagement activities?

I: Both?

R: So I would say yes because as the HR coordinator, someone comes to you with a hard time, so it depends on what they're going through like if it's something that is what I can provide then I usually send them to [Participant 6] who you talked to yesterday, but I guess that is part of CSR as well, right? Like it's not really our job to fix their life but to provide them, like let them know that we hear them, we empathize with them and we have some resources that can help you through this time even though it's not – like I'm not a professional counselor, but I think it's more about just them feeling respected and having a chance to vent and let us know that like they're going through a tough time, they may need more extra empathy at that time, you know. And then when it comes to employee engagement events that's something that HR designed so I've had a large say in it, but also [Participant 6] in [Location] and then there's also one other HR person named [Colleague 3] in [Location] and so the three of us usually collaborate to come up with activities for the employees. We've had a lot of fun with that. We had Office Olympics last month and a few other things for the employees to be able to take a break from work and engage with each other, connect to, you know, each other through activities that aren't necessarily work related. Yeah, they had so much fun with that, so it was nice to be able to get back to them that way where we appreciate it, we respect them. We're doing a pumpkin decorating contest, so they're gonna be decorating them at home over the weekend. So we're offering rewards as well like a gift card and a candle to the people who put a lot of effort and get voted on having one of the best pumpkins.

I: That's so nice because it's so fun to do activities outside of work, but it also just supports like the team spirit at work, and you might also grow a little bit closer with each other and that really helps working as a team.

R: I don't know, but sometimes during the day I'll hit like a lump where my energy feels low and I do think that when you start getting your body moving, the competitive adrenaline, you're more excited to get back, yeah, it's true.

I: It's so nice. So all those initiatives that you mentioned – is it something that you at [Legal Entity] introduced or are there also some guidelines from [Company] that you have to follow?

R: I'm not sure about that. I started here in April, so I have no idea about the changes that they went through in the beginning when [Company] came on and started implementing

some guidelines for [Legal Entity], that was before I came on so I can't really speak on that one.

I: But do you ever get like, maybe, or do they communicate changes with you through email or through dashboards or something like that?

R: Communicate changes with us or who do you mean?

I: Both [Legal Entity] and [Company], if there's anything that changes, how do they communicate it to you?

R: If we need to change, [Company] will communicate with like [Director] and the VPs. And then they'll think it through, think about how they're gonna implement the changes into [Legal Entity] and then tell us. It depends on what it is, like sometimes we'll have a hands-on meeting about it if it's something that people might have questions about and want to address it all at once. It depends on what it is though, like I said other times it might be appropriate to send out a letter, but I think, for changes, I think face-to-face is best.

I: And do you think this is OK how they I do it now or do you wish that maybe they could improve a little bit?

R: I think that it's good. I've been studying – sorry I'm like having a little bit of stuffy nose – a bit of change management right now. I think we could probably relate back to the employees, what's in it for me more because I think oftentimes, we're saying that, you know, 'This is the change. This is the reason for the change.' We probably don't connect it back to them as much as they would like from an employee. If we wanted it to be more effective then we could have it relate back to them, so that they feel more like 'This benefits me', you know what I mean? It's easier to stick to changes that way.

I: So you mentioned that you started in April. When you like first got to know the company, were those initiatives that you mentioned a topic or reason why you started at [Legal Entity]?

R: Actually, I really love learning and improving myself. The fact that we can do the continuous learning was huge for me. I was telling you about with the videos, I enroll in those classes all the time. I really enjoy learning new topics so that's a big one for me. In addition to that the tuition reimbursement is big. I finished my bachelor's recently, so it's not like they do the whole thing. They only do \$1500 but it still is helpful. You know that's easily like one or two terms so. And then also we got every other Friday off because we are on a schedule called a 980, so that was a big consideration. For my interview, especially, I felt

that there was a lot of professionalism. There's a lot of respect. Every business has things that they can work on, but I feel like this business, it was more prepared and more professional than other places I've worked at, which made me feel excited because I felt like that was my next step. You know I wanted to polish myself up professionally.

I: So you think that the company values also kind of aligned with your own values in a sense? And do you think that maybe [Legal Entity] could do something to make CSR more meaningful for the employees there or do you think that they're already doing great work?

R: They are doing great. We can always improve, right? So I would say that. I did write down a couple things. I think we could do something called the CSR report, which is kind of, you know, that we are doing well when it comes to giving back to the community, giving back to the planet and outlining the benefits that we give to the employees that they have access to. I think that that would be great and it would be something that if it was on paper, it would give us more focus on those topics if that makes sense. So I think that that could be good and it just makes it exciting. And then also I think we could possibly incentivize volunteering. There was a company I worked for in the past. They gave you like eight volunteer hours that were time off. It was called VTO, so it was volunteering time off, so you still got paid for that time, but you also were giving back to the community for like eight hours a year. I think we could do donations like – I just didn't even think about this – but we could do like a drive or something like that, where canned goods are donated or something and we give them back to like a local shelter or something. And I also think that we could possibly try to connect our mission to our community or to the planet more as opposed to the industry. Those are the things I have thought of, but I don't think they're doing a bad job by any means, but if we had to improve it, I guess those are some ideas I would have yeah.

I: OK so you do think that they maybe could improve and doing a little bit more work externally, for the community?

R: Yeah definitely.

I: OK, and you mentioned the CSR report. Is it something that would help the employees make better sense of the term CSR and how you approach it at the company?

R: Definitely, because it's not something we talk about here and it's honestly not really something that is talked about in the country. Like I have never heard of it before, only in like one of my recent classes. So it's not something that is discussed, so I think it gives a visual of what we're doing, like kind of like almost like they see the things that are going on

and that they could feel inspired by that and that they could feel that they're connected to something bigger than themselves than just a typical 9-to-5 you know.

I: Mhm yeah. And last question, so do you think that maybe, or do you wish that maybe [Company] should do more work in communicating CSR guidelines to you or do you think it's OK or do you think that it's good that you as [Legal Entity] can work freely and then that you can do your own thing and that [Company] maybe also supports you?

R: So it would be something that would kind of be up to [Director] cause he's the one who talks to them and implements their direction here. I mean, I know it's something that we are working on in America because of the classes that I've taken, you know, so I know that it's something that has been researched or studied. They know that this leads to more. Also, more like better retention and things like that. I think it is the right thing to do and I'm sure if they had inspiration from [Company] to do it and like if [Company] pitch it in a way that showed [Director] how it benefits the company, benefits the people who work there. And I don't know if it's gonna be at the top of his list or on the list over the next couple of years to implement it more. I think that could inspire and help to show him the importance of it because I think of course for some companies, it's already something that they established there but for other companies, I mean it's still an ongoing process and how they wanna do it and how they wanna communicate through their employees. So I'm always interested in how a company communicates it to their employees and how they approach, so yeah. I haven't worked for, I mean there was just one company I worked for which was a college, so it makes sense that they were implementing more CSR when it came to external stakeholders like, you know, that was incentivizing us to go out and get back to community. So I think that they had good CSR there but otherwise it's not something that a lot of companies in America, or at least at the companies I've worked for, it's not a common thing to hear or talk about, so I think America as a whole, you know, that's something we can all work on. But I think these conversations and inspiration from, you know, [Company] would help at least on [Legal Entity]'s side.

8. Interview, 30.10.2025: Product Quality Manager, Germany, online video meeting, male, duration: 1:01:15

Interviewer: So, when you hear the term corporate social responsibility, what do you understand by it?

Respondent: Mhm. Uh. Should I tell that from my company's perspective, or is it ultimately also what I've kind of learned from my studies?

I: Yeah, both. So, what you know from [Company] now, but also from your studies, both fit, yeah.

R: Well, I have to honestly say, at [Company], we don't really use this term specifically here in [Location] and I also wouldn't have heard it. In my dual studies, where I went through different departments, in general, from the studies, it does mean something to me, because we've had more and more focus in that direction, especially also in lectures and so on. But honestly, our customer brings that up more and more. So we have a kind of customer evaluation that's reflected back to us and that includes things like, for example, quality topics, cost topics, but of course also sustainability. And that's where I'd kind of place the whole thing. And from the studies, it's basically topics that tell me it's kind of ecological responsibility, but you can also call it social responsibility that we generally have and then also topics like how we structure our business itself and those are basically the topics that touched on this term in my studies. But I don't have in-depth technical knowledge about it and it's not my area of expertise, not at work either. But kind of ecological, social, and also ethical topics like having responsibility. And that's kind of what I understand by it. But, as I said, to sum up: at [Company] in [Location], this term that you mentioned in your question isn't really used.

I: But are there any, let's say, specific topics that could somehow be related to that that are relevant for you in [Location]? Where you think, 'Okay yeah, that would fall under that.' Do you have an example that could fall under that?

R: In the ecological direction? For example, we now have photovoltaic panels on the roof, so we produce our own electricity here. And what's also currently being discussed is a woodchip heating system. So we still have an oil heating system, and the idea is to use our own resources from the Bavarian Forest – which is of course wood – to heat with that. And that's currently in discussion that something like that could be implemented. But the photovoltaic system, for example, that's already on the roof. So, [Company] itself started

this initiative, also at our site in [Headquarter] and so on. Basically, all the large industrial roofs were covered with photovoltaic systems.

Also, this whole recycling topic and waste management, I think, we do that very intensively. And then, for example, in [Headquarter], at the headquarters, everything is collected and of course, we also separate waste like plastic films, organic waste and it's all collected separately and brought to our headquarters. So, that's definitely taken seriously and it's basically essential that such things are actually practiced. So, those are definitely things we carry out. But of course, one also has to say quite honestly, when we package our products, we use about two to five layers of plastic film and this entire packaging process is of course very, very resource-intensive. We make sure that a lot of packaging waste is generated. And our customer, on the other hand, can actually use reusable packaging like wooden boxes, but still, the products are vacuum packed and sealed and for that you need two to three layers and those are plastic film layers, like when you wrap a gift. We do that here and that's, of course, an extreme amount of packaging effort. For large cabinets, several hundred square meters of film go through per day, just for packing, and of course, those are also things where we think: how can we change that? There are approaches, like reusing it at [Customer], but currently, as I said, a lot of that still ends up in the trash. And of course, the same happens when [Customer] sends things back to us, for repair or upgrade, we have that packaging again and it ends up in our plastic waste. Of course, it's disposed of properly, but it's not really sustainable. And those are basically topics that we deal with under the supplier evaluation as I said at the beginning: costs, quality, delivery reliability, and so on. And now, sustainability has been added as another factor, where we, as a supplier, are also evaluated. So that's in the ecological or economic area. Things like renewable energies, recycling are topics that exist at our company, but they're not listed under this term but rather under "sustainability". That's the term [Customer] uses and kind of pushes onto us and we usually adopt that term and speak that language, too. So we talk about sustainability measures and that's also, for example, a topic in an audit. So, when the customer audits us, such topics are also considered.

I: But do you now have specific requirements from [Customer], or is it just included in the evaluation, so to speak?

R: That is currently in development and one really has to say honestly, until about a year ago [Customer] didn't really think much about it and in all these big Supplier Days like the one I was at, where we won this award in the direction of Quality, that wasn't so important,

because [Customer] had so many requests and simply focused primarily on that. And [Customer] has customers like [Customer's Customer 1], [Customer's Customer 2] and so on, who then order all these materials and those are basically topics that then came from [Customer's Customer 1] and also from [Customer's Customer 2], who kind of push that onto [Customer] and [Customer] pushes that onto us, that's how the whole thing comes about.

Also, [Company] itself has topics in the direction of sustainability that it develops. That's why, for example, this topic of photovoltaics on the roof, that didn't come from [Customer], but that was an initiative from [Company]. And just like [Customer] is slowly waking up there, the family business is also slowly waking up. But we're not yet where our customer would like us to be, I have to say honestly, there are topics that are in the sustainability contract you sign, that you, for example, commit to certain emission reductions and CO₂ topics but that hasn't yet been signed by [Company], which, for example, is a thorn in the customer's side.

I: Yeah, okay. You mentioned sustainability a lot now. Do you also know anything that [Company] does in other areas, like do you somehow, let's say, have any points of contact, are you somehow informed about that, or is it more of a background activity?

R: Yeah. In the direction of sustainability?

I: No, in the other areas, for example, when it comes to working conditions or, like, voluntary things that [Company] does?

R: Mhm. Mhm yeah.

I: Like voluntary engagement, I'd say.

R: Yeah. I have to say, very, very honestly, there's in a certain way something through ZIP – that's our [Company] information portal – where, so to speak, information is passed on, but one really has to say and I keep saying that, the problem is that at [Company] we don't have our own product. It's kind of a problem that you identify with [Company] and have something to hold onto because if I work for [Customer 2], then the car drives around out there and I can say, for example, I contributed to that.

I: Yeah, true.

R: With us – we're an EMS service provider and we supply, so to speak, [Customer 2] and all these big Level 1 players – and we're kind of a bit in the shadow and we also behave that

way, partly. So I think our external impact is quite low. It has gotten a bit better and we could still do much more. I have to say honestly, a nice example would be [Competitor].

I: Mhm.

R: Here in our district who posts some sustainability topics on Instagram or made some funny sustainability catalog. So they are on a completely different level and we as a big player here in the district are really not as well positioned as, for example, a [Competitor] and so on, who, for example, says with building materials and so on we want to counteract somehow and work sustainably, or topics like paying for driver's licenses for apprentices.

I: Okay.

R: And those are also things that [Competitor] does and also communicates outwardly. And we at [Company] always kind of hide a bit, although we actually wouldn't have to hide at all. And also regarding topics that we offer additionally – and this whole topic, what we have in the direction of salary structures, vacation and Christmas pay and so on – that's also something that in theory isn't common everywhere. In big companies, yes, but if you look here in our district, less so, and I think [Company] has done a lot there in the last years. Also this external appearance has gotten a bit better, for example with Instagram. We've now, funnily enough, got that, too.

I: Yeah, I've already seen that.

R: Those are all topics where [Company] was always about 5 to 10 years behind. I don't know whether it'll now develop at that speed, if we do it, then I think we're on a good path but honestly, the impact could definitely be better and that's why for many it simply doesn't come across, because I might hear it at some management meetings where such things are discussed. But that it's really broken down and, so to speak, sold every day like the "jack-of-all-trades pig," and here you get [Company] socks and so on, that's simply a bit difficult. But that also hasn't been the company philosophy for a long time and simply because we don't have our own real product that we can identify with and for that reason, for example, our marketing department is also weakly positioned, because actually we don't need a marketing department. And at [Customer 2] and so on those are all huge departments and then they also have time and capacity to break it down with some funny store where you can buy [Customer 2] jackets and so on. All those things are simply still a bit behind with us.

I: I understand, but I think one could also, I mean, you also think that communication could definitely be improved, right? Because I also think, of course it's a bit difficult, but basically

you don't only do advertising for customers, but also for potential new employees and I think in that regard it's also important to know what the company actually does – that it's communicated better both externally and internally?

R: Yeah. Yeah, our external impact is definitely improvable, and you can basically reflect the same onto the internal side. We already do cool things, but we don't always get it out there.

I: Yeah, okay.

R: And not without reason our HR was reorganized and so on, yeah.

I: But do you somehow notice in your environment that someone is a bit more engaged, now for example also, I say, local initiatives. That someone is involved, like what I've heard, for example DKMS registrations or blood donations or something? Is there anyone in your team or environment who is really behind it, or is everyone more like 'Yeah OK that something is done, but I'm not really interested'?

R: Rather less, I wouldn't say we have a kind of multiplier with us who is extremely committed. That is also due to the fact that until, as I said, half a year ago, we didn't know where up and down was.

I: Mhm.

R: And the focus was simply on other topics and that was of course extremely exhausting, so in [Location] we had for good reason an extreme fluctuation, you have to be honest and we had days beyond 8 hours where you came in the morning and actually only left at night and the focus was on other topics. You have to say that we are a bit isolated in [Location], a bit like a Gaulish village, you are simply not infiltrated by the central area that is in [Headquarter].

R: That gives any information or, so to speak, via grapevine, as they say nicely. That deviates in theory a bit and isn't carried down to [Location], so we simply don't have a sustainability expert with us or someone who primarily takes care of it, but it's all people from the central area and so information is lost on the way.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah, but of course DKMS and so on exist, there are round mails and so on, you are informed but that it is somehow massively teased, that is not the case with us.

I: So the employees in [Location] are then more influenced by the customer on such topics, like how [Customer] addresses and defines such topics. But other things are rather not discussed, right?

R: Yes, we are very infiltrated, ultimately, by our customer if, for example, he says we need some funny idea now then of course we take care of it, but own initiative is currently rather low.

I: OK. And nothing comes, I say, from the managers or from [Director] or something, that he initiates something because I mean you had, yes, for example – where you can also classify the topic of employee retention – events or something, you once had that, do you still have it?

R: Yes, we still have that, so employee events and so on. That is still done and is primarily done in summer and is promoted. But you can ultimately equate it with a Christmas party, so we can theoretically decide for summer party or Christmas party and in that sense, it is ultimately standard because the Christmas party is, yes, included and of course we have team events that we organize ourselves. But it's not like, for example, at some big player like [Customer] where you have a monthly budget to go somewhere. That is not much but you can work with it a bit. As I heard from [Customer] if you were satisfied with some support or performance from an employee from another area you can give them a kind of value voucher. You have a budget and this value voucher you can then redeem somewhere in the [Customer] store and so on.

I: Oh wow. Very crazy.

R: And there we are – I have to admit – far away, yes.

I: But would you say something like that would be really cool now also for employees or do you think it is over the top?

R: I don't think it's over the top, you spend a lot of time at work, for example at [Customer] coffee is free and so on. Those are of course things, yes, they have a nice taste. It comes across a bit appreciative. [Company] also does that, for example through development programs like now, for example, for me. I did my master's through [Company]. It is ultimately active there, too, but not so interested in putting itself in the spotlight and saying 'Yes, we can do this super well' because we can do many things super well, but we don't sell that. But there is definitely room for improvement, like for example, what I just said regarding coffee machines or what [Customer] has now implemented, which is of course a

positive factor. Our cafeteria – you have to be honest – in [Headquarter], we can buy very, very high-quality food for very, very little money. So initiatives like that exist, and we are already behind it. The problem is that [Company] cannot implement it in [Location] because we simply don't have a cafeteria. Those are things you can look at and improve on, but in [Location] we are partially restricted in that regard, yes.

I: Yeah, I remember when I was in GP, everyone said 'Oh, I don't go to the cafeteria, it's so bad' but apparently, it's getting better, that's great.

R: Exactly, yes, and everyone really says that and it has also been confirmed again by survey, that many are very, very satisfied and it's really a lot going on. Compared to now, they do it really well and for little money and many also take it home.

I: Yeah.

R: Because you get really great goods for little money and these are of course things that are promoted. The job bike, for example, comes to mind, that is something they also do.

I: What is that?

R: Job bike, that you can lease through [Company]. And [Company] also supports topics regarding health insurance and so on. They are very supportive there, yes, of course also as the main sponsor of sports clubs, team events are also organized, I've used that myself, it's all possible and doable. But as it is often the case at [Company], you need the contacts and it's not massively teased, yes.

I: So what I'm getting is, they actually do quite a lot, but it has to be communicated better, right?

R: Yes. It has to be communicated better, yes.

I: Because I know there are also certain guidelines now specifically for CSR and also the CSR report. Do you think they should communicate that better, so that people know it exists or can read up on it or do you think it's not that relevant?

R: For example, CSR tells us nothing in [Location].

I: Ah, okay, interesting.

R: Yes, I've never heard CSR in [Location] and any guidelines.

I: But do you think they should present it better, like just say ‘Hey, we have this, you can read it and see what we do’ or do you think it’s not so relevant?

R: I think it is relevant because it is ultimately also many benefits and so on, whether it’s for the environment or for you personally, I think it makes sense to visualize it again. But it also has to be lived, and I think we are not there yet. Because we are simply very production-oriented and focus on that and we are not some fancy software company where everyone loves each other and hugs each other, but we are more of a manufacturing business. And so the work is ultimately structured, we don’t have, for example, foosball tables standing around and you can play foosball all day, or like at [Customer], because I’m often at [Customer], or have huge cafeterias where you can sit on fun sofas and chill with others all day. I am very performance-oriented. Maybe that works too, but yes, work is still work. Of course, it’s not bad that maybe in the evening you play foosball together and so on and I think that is not used that much and I am a bit read up on it personally and according to statistics and so on, it is actually more productive if you have that. And then employees stay longer and it seems to work, otherwise Microsoft and Co wouldn’t do it, so there must be a reason.

I: Yeah, I think there should be a balance, it shouldn’t be too much, but I think it’s still good to have something like that, for team building or something, but as I said, it should be in moderation.

R: Exactly, yes.

I: When you started at [Company], what was most important to you? Apart from salary.

R: For me personally, salary was not that important. I have to be honest, I have other priorities, also because I don’t have to build a house or feed children. I’m primarily interested in the task, and I am someone who is very agile and unlikely to do the same thing for 2 years. And my half-life is now over again. At some point it will continue for me because I currently want to see the corporate world, look out at different areas. And that’s why it was important for me to see a lot, and I have to be completely honest, [Company] does that excellently because you ultimately see everything. Whether medical technology, semiconductor industry, automotive, you can look everywhere and that was the decisive point for me, like ‘Hey, yes, I think that is a solid employer’. It is broadly positioned and you could also see it in the past. 2009, for example, in the economic crisis, [Company] came through very well. Yes, of course it was not a nice time, but we survived and actually learned from it and grew bigger. And the growth of this company was always upwards. Of course, there are peaks upwards but also

peaks downwards, I think currently it's just a bit of a downward trend. That was simply due to the whole industry currently, but I think you come out of it and come out stronger. [Company] has always been good at that and especially in this diversity, I found very interesting. For example, if I had gone to Aldi, it would have been logistics, yes, and with us it's like we can do logistics, but we can also produce. But also somehow in the direction of consulting, to further develop something, topics like training other companies but also consulting other companies, we also do that partially. We support [Customer] in some designs and do consultant activities, but also in further development topics, supporting externally in training and so on, that is all possible with us, you can really go through everything, whether HR or even if you want to become a janitor. You can also become that with us. Everything is there, under one roof and that was primarily decisive for choosing this company. I also have to say that we are still a family company, and I noticed that especially in my Thailand position. [Company] is not that far yet. We can somehow do that, but don't think much about it, for example, there is no one in HR at [Company] who has an idea how to send people abroad and that ultimately shows that we partially drive strategy, so this globalization is nice, but we lack the communication and also the back office and these are traces you still find based on this family company. We were founded in a garage, and we are partially still like that, and I noticed that, for example, with my application for Thailand. I would have gotten the position, but the way it was ultimately structured and organized was not so optimal.

I: So you think regarding further education and generally seeing many areas, [Company] is good at it but in many topics they are simply behind.

R: Yes, for example, further education, like master support and so on, that is all excellent and it is shown way too weakly, my whole master is paid by [Company] and that is actually a really cool thing.

I: Yes. Yes, definitely.

9. Interview, 12.11.2025: Vice President of Quality, United States, online video meeting, male, duration: 19:55

Interviewer: OK, so I don't know if you're already familiar with the term corporate social responsibility, but do you have an opinion on that or do you know – how would you exactly define the term corporate social responsibility?

Respondent: So I define it as kind of several steps. I define it as, you know, how we – how the company, [Legal Entity]/[Company], how we are treating our employees, what kind of culture we've put in place, the rules, from a social but also from an environmental standpoint. So when I think of social, I'm thinking of the social environmental and social and psychology of business and of our employees. In the United States we have a lot of regulations similar to Germany in Europe. A lot of the individual personnel requirements of, you know, of labor laws of, you know, security laws, of safety laws and environmental laws. So within [State in the US] and within United States there's a lot of laws we have to follow, but it's all about the laws and guidelines. It's really how we want our environment to be, how we want a positive environment for our employees from a culture standpoint. For me it's all about culture, it's really important.

All of our employees we want them to be, you know, from a labor standpoint, paid well, you know, good benefits, but also from my work environment standpoint they need to be safe. You know, that's all of the inputs that we're inputting into in our product, what we're building the equipment and such. And following all the – in the United States, we have the OSHA, the occupational safety health administration. We have the environmental protection agency EPA. So it's a lot of inputs into kind of social responsibility but also for our – ahm, you know, – I've worked at many companies in 33 years and a lot of public companies, [Company] being private but also to you know our, you know ahm, the companies around us, the environments, the community around us that we want to follow from an environmental standpoint, you know, for our customers. So there are a lot of requirements that our customers have for social responsibility and also community responsibility that we have to make sure we follow those environmental rules.

I: And I don't know if you're like, if you also get some guidelines from [Company], from the headquarters, is there anything that they implement and you have to kind of follow but also maybe adapt to your local environment, is there like some specific guideline that comes to mind?

R: You know, most of the guidelines are really business practices, common business practices and follow, you know, typical industry law, you know, in the United States or Europe. Is there one particular? I think from, you know, environmental standpoint, for me it's following our environmental rules for hazardous waste. [State in the US] has a very strict hazardous waste rule process and training as such, but it goes back to social responsibility that we don't – we wanna make sure we're handling any waste we have. Because we're electronics, so we work with lead and we wanna make sure that we're following those and being responsible from a social standpoint, from a company standpoint, but also for our neighbors. You know, we wanna make sure we're following all the hazardous waste rules and disposal properly and such. So that's really important. That's one flow down from [Company], but there's others, too, from a labor standpoint, a culture standpoint, all of our benefit packages and such are really employee responsibility and how we treat our employees and such.

I: Mhm okay. So those guidelines, were they like always kind of there or is that kind of like a new thing that was implemented? Like, for example, the hazardous waste or something like that. Is that something that's very new or was that always kind of a big thing at [Legal Entity] or [Company]?

R: Yeah, always a big thing. We use lead and solder and at [Legal Entity]/[Company] we have military, US military, customers, department, defense customers and they prefer lead to be used. So for us it's always been an existing process in policy that we followed over the years and it's a very important one also.

I: But is it hard for you to follow those guidelines or...?

R: No, it's common policy. It's really state regulations and EPA federal regulations in the USA. But it's common similar with the whole lead-free movement. Are you familiar with the lead-free movement?

I: No, I'm not.

R: So years ago, because of the lead, they switched to lead-free electronics, which uses a different solder type. So years ago, it probably started about 20 years ago. I actually wrote a book on it. So it's in many, many articles, too. So it's been a movement the last 20 years to go away from lead because lead is a carcinogen and environmentally it's really bad. That's why we have to have to dispose it properly because if it gets into the landfills, the water source, that's really bad, especially the wells and such. So the industry started to move away

from that. There are still some industries that use lead, mostly in the US military, DOD – department of defense – customers.

So yeah, we changed that years ago and a lot of the electronic manufacturing companies like [Company] and our competitors have changed that years ago. So it's been a big movement for us. So it's been good that the industry has changed for the better and it goes back to social responsibility. So that change from a regulatory standpoint has really helped out the environment. It's helped out our customers. Again, it goes back to social responsibility. And our employees, too, cause they're not working as much with lead and lead is a carcinogen which we have to follow, and we have to monitor for employees.

I: So do you think that maybe other people in your environment or at [Legal Entity] maybe also would define CSR differently? Do you have like – do you talk about this topic in your team or in your like kind of work environment or is it something that you think it's not really that relevant for you?

R: No, we actually talk about it at the management staff level. We have procedures, we have some handbook procedures in place. We're talking about, especially next year, we're going to talk about ISO 14001. Are you familiar with that?

I: Not quite, no.

R: It's an ISO certification for environmental management system.

I: Ahh, yeah, I know it.

R: It kind of ties all the environmental practices. We're doing that already, a lot of it, but we're not officially certified. So we're actually working on that at the management level. A part of that is looking at all of our aspects and environmental, but we're working on that at the management staff level, at the social level. We have meetings with [Participant 6], who you talked to, about our social responsibility and also our, you know, our culture. The big one for internally is our culture, workplace culture, which is very important to all of us.

I: And does [Company] – so you mentioned that you have like management meetings. Does it also include [Company] employees from the headquarters or is it only a management meeting at [Legal Entity]?

R: Typically, only from [Legal Entity], our management staff, we report to our president. I'm not sure if [Participant 6] does it, I do not. I know our president, he'll have meetings with the other general managers, talk to the board directors, so yeah, so at my level I'll talk to some

of the board members, but I don't talk to him regarding social responsibility, but we do have meetings with them regarding various topics.

I: So the guidelines from [Company], so are those then communicated with the president, and he then communicates it to you?

R: Yes, that's correct.

I: OK so it's not like that you have like some kind of dashboard where they publish new information about those kinds of topics or how exactly do they communicate those CSR topics to you?

R: Typically, it is a flow down, similar to our customers, they'll be a flow down from our president and the board of directors, down through the management team, and so on. So typically, it's a flow down of different requirements, policies that are flow down to the employees.

I: So do you think that this communication is appropriate or do you think that they need to maybe improve it a little bit?

R: Ahm no, I think it's appropriate. It's very open with the team. I'm somewhat new to the company, so I started in April. So it's been six months, somewhat new, but typically, I thought it was appropriate. The flow down through the various channels, typically down through the president or [Participant 6] or the VPs down through the entire [Legal Entity] organization.

I: So since you mentioned that you started in April, were those topics also maybe like a reason why you started at [Legal Entity]? Like I would say fair working conditions or nice benefits for employees or that they also support the environment or something like that. Was that something that you thought 'OK maybe those are great things that they're doing and that's why I wanna work there'?

R: Great question. There were many different reasons why I came to work for [Company]. The management team, the company, the, you know, the location, the opportunity for me to come. I'm also working with my daughter. I've always wanted to work with my children, really close to all my children, and I have, you know, my daughter working here. So it's – there are many different reasons, but I was overall impressed with the company and the team and the management team and such, so many different reasons why I started and changed job to come here.

I: And do you think that like [Legal Entity]/[Company] values maybe also match your own values a little bit in some sense?

R: Yes, they do. Very family focused. And I aligned a lot with the principles of [Company] and also the principles of the management team here.

I: And did you ever have like the feeling ‘OK what [Legal Entity]/[Company] is doing is not something that I really appreciate’? Did you ever have a feeling that those initiatives from [Legal Entity]/[Company] were not really meaningful to you or also other employees?

R: Nothing that comes to mind. There are only a couple of policies – I’m trying to remember which ones – but yeah, nothing, all policies that make sense have been established already so, no, everything made sense. I haven't really had any adverse questions regarding them.

I: And did you think that maybe [Company] could do something that will make these a bit more meaningful to you or maybe that they could improve a little bit in that sense, in those areas? Do you think that they are also lacking something in some areas, for example environment or employee health and safety? Is there something that you think they could improve?

R: Well yeah, we’re kind of working on that. So one of my roles is to establish the environmental management system, so the ISO 14001 one. And we’re doing that a lot already but officially put the process together and get certified. That's kind of one of the goals for 2026, probably 2027, to start working on that to tie that in, but some of that is the safety side, the occupational safety side and health for employees. We just hired a new quality engineering tech to help out with some of those initiatives because that's important for our employees, so we're working on that, too. Yeah, no improvement just two of these opportunities to improve and so it’s very exciting for the future.

I: The environment management system, is it some kind of global standard or is it also country specific?

R: Yeah, this is standard. The quality management system is called ISO 9001, but the environmental one is ISO 14001, that's a standard that every company all over the world uses in their own language.

I: So it's not like something that you have to think about how you can implement it in your country?

R: Correct. It's a standard that's across the entire world that companies adopt, and address through their procedures, how they will follow the standard and employ and execute the standard.

I: And when you think about your colleagues, do you think that their values also align with the values at [Company] or do you think that they're more like 'OK this is not really my thing or I don't really align with that,' or do you think that they're all like generally happy with the initiatives that [Company] introduces?

R: No, everybody is very happy. I know the people I've talked to myself, all of our values align with [Company] and given that family business, you know, the private family feel, it's been great for me. It's been excellent so far, those six months, but it aligns very well with my background. And the people I've talked to, it's the same thing, they're very happy about the working environment, what [Company] brings and so, so very happy.

I: OK that's nice. [Participant 6] mentioned that you have – or I don't know if you have those in [Location] – but like some kind of employee events that you're doing I think once a month, she mentioned.

R: Yeah, we had a few events. We had the office Olympics, one of our board members, [Colleague 2], he helped.