The power of words

Leadership communication in practice

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Master's Thesis

June 2018

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Abstract

In the past two years, leadership communication as a way of expressing the views of corporate leaders has become more visible for the audiences. This was made by a number of open letters published by the founders, presidents, and CEOs of companies around the globe. Open letters are not an innovative or unusual way of leaders to express their point of view in front of a wider public. However, from 2016 onwards, an interesting trend is observed. Corporate leaders started to raise their voices about controversies that concern the society. They did this in such way that their opinions will reach not only their employees or customers, but other people as well. They started using open letters as an arena where burning topics and crucial subjects are brought in the foreground.

Although open letters have been discussed in previous research, this type of leadership communication has not yet been looked at through the lenses of CEO activism. Neither has the language of CEO open letters related to societal issues been examined. Thus, three main research questions were formulated: *what are the defining characteristics of CEO open letters; how do CEOs frame the purpose of writing open letters*; and *what are the rhetorical strategies used in CEO open letters*?

Considering the aim of the study, a qualitative research approach was selected. Qualitative content analysis of 50 open letters written and published by corporate leaders in the period January 1st, 2016 – December 31st, 2017 was conducted. A deductive approach was used to create a coding frame in accordance with the underlying concepts and analyze the data.

Findings showed that, indeed, CEO open letters related to societal issues possess common features such as short length, topics related to recent issues, types of audiences, common geographical location and communication elements. The open letters also utilized a variety of frames for presenting their purpose of communication in a specific way. Finally, the language of CEOs was filled with appeals of ethos, logos, and pathos, which proved institutional rhetoric as the type of rhetoric used in CEO open letters. Overall, this study complements leadership research by drawing a link between framing and purposes for writing an open letter, by showing the open letters as a new way of CEO activism, and by highlighting the importance of language for corporate leaders and their credibility.

Keywords: Leadership; Leadership Communication; CEO Activism; CEO Language; Open

Letters; Societal Issues; Framing; Rhetorical Analysis; Rhetorical Strategies

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1. Introduction

"The art of communication is the language of leadership"

James Humes

In December 2015 in San Bernardino, California, 28-year-old Syed Rizwan Faroon and his 27-year-old wife Tashfeen Malik killed 14 people and wounded 21 more in a shooting at a Christmas party in the Inland Regional Centre (San Bernardino shooting, 2015). The incident was classified as a mass shooting and a terrorist attack, after which the police and the attackers were involved in gunfire. This resulted in both suspects being shot dead. Two mobile phones were found in the trash near the attackers' home and were utilized by the investigators in order to extract and analyze as much data as possible. This showed some telephonic connections to other suspects (San Bernardino shooting, 2015). Therefore the investigators demanded full access to the iPhones of the attackers. Although Apple provided the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) with data from the phones that was also available to them, the company rejected the FBI's request for writing a new code in order to crack the iPhone operation system (Cook, 2016).

In May 2017 United States president Donald Trump announced the withdrawal of the country from the Paris Climate Agreement (Shear, 2017). According to president Trump this agreement did not offer the best "deal" for the United States and its citizens, however the country will remain committed to environmental protection efforts (Shear, 2017).

Then, in August 2017 software engineer James Damore was fired from Google for publishing a document that criticized the company's diversity efforts, explaining that the imbalance between men and women in the tech industry was attributed to biological differences between both genders (Wong, 2017). Although the 10-page document circulated only among the company, it was later leaked to the media, resulting in a scrutiny of the state of diversity in the technology sector.

The common thread among these three cases is the way leaders, specifically CEOs, reacted to the respective situations, and the way they communicated their standpoint to the public. Apple's CEO Tim Cook published an open letter to the company's customers explaining the decision for not writing a new program to crack the attackers' phones, as well as emphasizing the importance of data encryption (Cook, 2016). The same strategy was used by several leaders in response to president Trump's decision on the Paris Climate Agreement, where 30 major

companies signed against his reasoning (Cargill, 2017). Moreover Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google, also wrote an open letter to company employees to address the issue of the anti-diversity memo (Gajanan, 2017).

1.1. Research Questions

The abovementioned cases, as well as many others, mark the last two years as the 'years of open letters'. Open letters are not a novel way of communication; however they are a way of expressing thoughts and values, addressing specific groups, and taking stand on (social) issues. They are not only interesting fragments of written communication, but also proof of the willingness of leaders to express their thoughts openly and demonstrate the values they believe in.

The language used in companies' open letters is crucial with regard to shaping and portraying the reality of a particular corporation (Jonäll, & Rimmel, 2010). What is more, such letters could be examined as a way for businesses to explain their decisions, actions, and responses. This leads one to contemplate the role of open letters as a specific form of leadership communication in publicly expressing an organization's standpoint. Thus the following research questions are posed:

1. *What are the defining characteristics of CEO open letters?*
2. *How do CEOs frame the purpose of writing open letters?*
3. *What are the rhetorical strategies used in CEO open letters?*

To answer these research questions, it is important to mention the main concepts that will be utilized in this thesis. Leadership, referred to as a process that involves influence from a person to other people (Vroom & Jago, 2007), and leadership communication are central concepts to the current research. The emphasis here is on a specific type of leaders, namely chief executive officers (CEOs). Attention will be paid on the obligations of CEOs regarding internal and external communication, all in the context of a recent resurgence in the use of open letters.

1.2. Academic and Social Relevance of the Topic

While the role of annual reports has been examined in academic literature (Davis, 2001; Kohut & Segars, 1992; Stanton & Stanton, 2002), open letters have not been a subject of much attention. Moreover, existing studies that focus on CEO open letters examine issues such as the way

financial statements are explained in open letters (Jonäll & Rimmel, 2010), provide comparison between key topics, writing styles, and cultural dimensions in letters originating from different countries (Conaway & Wardrope, 2010), or more specifically aim at uncovering patterns of communication strategies in presidential letters (Kohut & Segars, 1992). However, previous academic research has not examined the way open letters frame organizations, their decisions and policies.

As already mentioned, open letters have become especially salient in the last two years, since 2016. This suggests that specific characteristics (such as types of rhetorical strategies) can be discerned from the sample of open letters. The results of this research can be beneficial in terms of filling these knowledge gaps in scholarship. It is presumed that the analysis of the selected data will provide this research with findings related to the diverse characteristics of open letters. Moreover, such findings can be novel in terms of determining what the most typical aspects of CEO open letters are. This can be advantageous in providing a knowhow related to constructing a framework of CEO open letters.

What is especially worthy of analysis are the rhetorical strategies that are utilized in open letters. Previous studies have focused on the rhetorical theory and strategies (Bazerman & Prior, 2003; Foss, 2017) and on examining their utilization in different settings. For instance, Hyland (1998) examined the metadiscourse as a component of rhetoric in CEO letters in annual reports and the way it is used for creating a positive image of the corporation; Marais (2012) focused on CEO's use of rhetoric with regard to corporate social responsibility (CSR) in various CEO discourses; and Winton (2013) at rhetorical analysis as a tool for critical policy analysis. These examples show that studying rhetoric and rhetorical strategies is not new to academic research, however there are no previous studies examining the rhetorical strategies utilized in CEO open letters.

At the same time, this research has important societal relevance due to several reasons. First, CEOs have power and influence and thus serve as opinion leaders. They are people who not only set the company's agenda, but could also potentially influence societal agenda by drawing attention to the issues at stake and influence corresponding actions and policies. Also, drawing attention to the frequent occurrence of open letters will provide the reader with better insight and could trigger their curiosity and consciousness regarding the diverse ways open letters are used by CEOs. Finally, the study could create more awareness and understanding about leadership

communication through open letters, and point out an emerging trend in the use of open letters, namely as a way of communication to the wide public.

2. Theoretical framework

In order to distinguish the defining characteristics of CEO open letters, find the frames used to exemplify the purpose of writing the letters, as well as the rhetorical strategies used in these letters, it is crucial to explain the main concepts in this research. Therefore this chapter will elaborate on what is leadership and how leadership communication is defined. Examples of leaders and leadership, main characteristics of leadership, the purposes and strategies for successful verbal and nonverbal leadership communication is provided in order to better exemplify the importance and depth of such communication. Arguably, since leadership and communication are linked, and open letters are a specific type of written communication recently gaining popularity among CEOs, the concept of open letters becomes central to this research. Looking at open letters as a type of activism exercised by leaders also needs close attention. It is suggested that rhetoric and framing play a crucial role in CEO open letters and are part of their characteristics.

2.1. Leadership and Leadership Communication

Communication is part of people's everyday life. However, the ability to communicate is not as simple as perceived, and encompasses a number of competencies (Baldoni, 2004). The latter include speaking, listening, but also the ability to understand and continue a clear dialogue (Baldoni, 2004). Therefore, such abilities are crucial for leaders, in order to communicate successfully.

On the other hand stands the concept of leadership which is widely examined in the academic literature. What is more, different academics have looked at leadership through different perspectives. First, leadership studies are the fundaments of many other studies, including studies about organizations and businesses (Christensen, Mackey, & Whetten, 2014). Leadership literature can be mainly classified into three categories, namely the *individual as a leader*, which encompasses also personality, skills, charisma, individuality, etc.; the *processes at play*, meaning the leader-follower interactions observed in the leader behavior; and the *shared leadership*, discussing leader behaviors emerging at any level in an organization (Christensen, Mackey, & Whetten, 2014). A leader, as explained by Collinson (2005), is often viewed as either a "savior" or a "villain" depending on the role they fulfil in organizations. Other academic sources explain followership as the biggest determinant for a person to be proclaimed a leader

(Bjerke, 1999; Kelley, 2004; Grint, 2000). This means that leaders exist only in the relationship to people who are led by them (Collinson, 2005). It is also suggested that leaders are powerful, in control, and capable of inspiring others. They possess qualities such as openness and trustworthiness. Moreover, they are characterized by their dominance, self-confidence, and high moral righteousness (Armenic, Craig & Tourich, 2007). Thus, a leader is an influential person with a number of characteristics and qualities.

Not only people on top are entitled to leadership, but any person who can "develop leadership in those below them" (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leadership may be transactional and/or transformational. The former are usually people who "lead through social exchange" (Bass & Riggio, 2006): they exchange one thing for another (politicians, business leaders, etc.). On the other hand, transformational leaders have the ability to stimulate, inspire, and encourage not only outcomes in a specific process, but also other people to develop their own leadership skills. Transformational leadership is crucial for every sector (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The already described characteristics of leaders and leadership suggest that in order to communicate successfully, a leader should possess these virtues. Armenic, Craig, and Tourich, (2007) on the other hand emphasize the importance of the language for leaders by suggesting that language should be variously used in order to inspire, stimulate action, and portray the person as charismatic. Moreover, it is argued that leadership messages can be constructed in a way to support main aspirations of leaders, such as transforming attitudes, values, and behaviors. Also, the effectiveness of leadership communication is built on the character of the leader, the beliefs and values of the corporation (Baldoni, 2004). Such communication should focus on creating trust and addressing current issues.

Baldoni (2004) suggests five purposes of leadership communication. Messages by leaders should confirm the vision and the mission of the organization; drive transformational change; call for action; reinforce organizational capability; and create a motivational environment. These purposes are linked to fulfilling one of the four main goals of leadership communication: to inform, to involve, to ignite, and to invite.

But what counts as successful communication? Academic and non-academic sources outline a diversity of strategies. For instance the five main strategies for aiding leaders in sustaining active communication include linking the message to the initial values of the organization, being clear in the expectations, being repetitive in order to foster better

understanding and sense of importance regarding the communicated leadership messages, listening in order to show people that they are part of the process, but also asking for feedback (Baldoni, 2004). Encouraging open communication and getting feedback in any possible way creates dialogue between leaders and teams, but also a friendly and positive environment (Beslin & Reddin, 2004). This could be done in various ways, such as e-mail, personal conversations, group discussions, focus groups, surveys, and the like.

More recently, scholars argue for an expanded conception of leadership (Alton, 2016). A leader should not only be an active listener, but also be available for the team and stay proactive. A careful selection of the medium where the message is spread should be taken in account. Tone of voice, wording of the message, staying concise and focused in the message are other strategies applicable to verbal and written leadership communication (Alton, 2016). CEOs as communicators have the obligation to establish both internal and external relationships (Men, 2014). Leadership, communication, and the blurred hierarchies of contemporary corporations allow CEOs to interact with their subordinates with ease. Externally, the role of a CEO is intertwined with being a "spokesperson" of the organization, and creating its image in front of the public (Men, 2014).

2.2. Open Letters: Leadership Communication in Practice

Previous research (e.g. Kohut & Segars, 1992) suggests that letters from company presidents are the most read part of annual reports. These statements are used to make on the one hand claims about the company, its successes and failures; and on the other hand the beliefs about the company and its relationship with the world. Open letters however have a slightly different meaning and purpose.

Definitions of what an open letter is are easy to find in the dictionaries. According to Cambridge Dictionary, an open letter is a letter which carries the main intent to be read not only by the addressee of the letter, but by a wider public (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d). Collins Dictionary (n.d.) suggests that one of the main aims of open letters is to protest and provide a standpoint on a particular issue. An open letter is a representation of public conversation with the stakeholders (Weyrauch, 2014).

Although in the past open letters were mainly part of corporate annual reports and their aim was to inform about earnings of the company, finances (Rutherford, 2005), corporate strategies,

and the like (Forman & Argenti, 2005), there has been a shift and corporate communications are no longer limited to financial reports (Conaway & Wardrope, 2010). Open letters serve a variety of purposes. They are often used in order to create argumentation, pose an issue to the public , demonstrate stand regarding certain problem by providing facts and interpretations, suggest actions, introduce ideas to stakeholders outside an organization, and call for public attention. Open letters usually try to communicate shared ideas and values, related to challenging, refusing, or expanding policy arguments (Weyrauch, 2014). Weyrauch (2014) argues further that open letters are a public form of communication that could be considered beneficial in terms of exposing ideas to a wider audience, and pushing forward dialogue and shared actions, thus providing an arena where voices can be heard.

It is also argued that CEO open letters to shareholders fulfil a variety of needs. On the one hand, open letters are used as a mechanism for managing the company's identity and the public's perception of it, while on the other they also serve as protectors for a corporation's legitimacy (David, 2001). The success of such letters depends on the question how efficiently they engage with the beliefs and ideas of the audience (Prasad & Mir, 2002). It is suggested that wording in open letters is important in order to "create an influential ideology" with stakeholders (Conaway & Wardrope, 2010, p. 141-142).

Previous research on corporate communication, however, is not specifically focused on open letters as a main way of communication to stakeholders. Moreover, existing research on open letters is found to be too specific and focused on only one industry (e.g., the oil industry in the mid-1970's to the mid-1980's in the work of Prasad & Mir, 2002), examine the cultural differences in writing open letters (Conaway & Wardrope, 2010), design features of company's reports where open letters from the CEOs are included (David, 2001), or patterns in presidents' communication strategies (Kohut & Segars, 1992). Thus, open letters' research had been experiencing several gaps. Therefore, including a broader category of open letters, written to diverse audiences, in a rapidly transforming business environment, has the potential to contribute to previous scholarship while examining the use of open letters as a contemporary form of leadership communication. Also, previous research has not examined the way these letters help in framing an organization, or what are the rhetorical strategies used when constructing an open letter. These knowledge gaps are the main purpose for conducting this research. Moreover, they call for utilizing rhetoric and framing in order to make sense of CEO open letters.

2.3. Rhetoric and Framing: Making Sense of Language in CEO Open Letters

In order to understand what stays behind the purpose of CEOs for writing open letters, one can examine the rhetorical strategies and the frames that fit in the context of an open letter.

Rhetoric can be referred to as "the human use of symbols to communicate" (Foss, 2017, p.3) and is applicable to speech, written discourse, graphic novels, comic books, architecture, music, advertisements, and many others. It involves symbols that are created and utilized by people. A symbol can be explained as something that is representing something else by diverse relationships, and that is related indirectly to the referent (Foss, 2017). It is also argued that symbols are commonly utilized by people in their everyday communication in a conscious way. The intentional use of symbols is what distinguished them from signs. This, moreover, determines symbols as part of the rhetoric (Foss, 2017).

The main aim of rhetoric is communication which is made possible in different ways. Rhetoric can be utilized with purposes of persuasion, understanding by suggesting a person's own perspectives to an issue, self-knowledge and discovery by vocalizing or writing thoughts and feelings (Foss, 2017). A crucial function of rhetoric is construction of reality. This means that reality is not static but shaped and altered in and through symbolic forms of communication (Foss, 2017).

Rhetorical analysis aims at understanding how are particular rhetorical items persuasive, what are the beliefs and values behind these items (Bazerman & Prior, 2003). It can be considered as a critical point of view on the selected item, and also a careful examination of the specific symbolic action. To sum up, rhetorical analysis includes an interpretative reading of a selected item, with emphasis on the understanding the messages and the way these messages are created in order to provoke a specific response (Bazerman & Prior, 2003).

At the center of rhetoric analysis sit Aristotle's main rhetorical elements ethos, logos, and pathos (Higgins & Walker, 2012). Ethos can be referred to a speaker, their character, trustworthiness, and ability to persuade. Categories exemplifying ethos appeals are similitude (meaning the similarity between the author and his audiences that becomes evident with the utilization of the pronouns "we", "you", and "I"), ingratiation (establishing an impression of harmony and cohesion), expertise (background, first-hand knowledge, judgement, and adequacy of the speaker), deference (demonstrating respect for the audiences' feelings and rights), self-criticism (being honest and admitting mistakes), consistency (arguments are organized logically

and are easy to follow), and inclination to succeed (where previous successes or predictions for future one are highlighted) (Higgins & Walker, 2012). Logos puts emphasis on the clarity of a statement, the underlying logic and appeals. In a text, elements that represent the logos are those "suggestive of argumentation and systems of reasoning" (Higgins & Walker, 2012, p. 198): justifications, warrants and claims, attributions, data, evidence or examples, and the like. Lastly, pathos is related to the feelings of the audiences and aims at triggering diverse emotions such as happiness, fear, sadness, satisfaction, and the like (Higgins & Walker, 2012). Pathos appeals are metaphors (non-literal language expressions) and identifications (expressions of "a sense of understanding" and references to the desires, necessities, and values of an audience) (Higgins & Walker, 2012, p. 198). It must be mentioned that the latter can be specific for the very culture, or institution.

The above discussed aspects of rhetoric are fundamental for examining the rhetorical strategies of CEO open letters. However, one can argue that rhetoric can be examined on deeper levels.

In an organization context, rhetoric serves the purpose of inviting and fostering identification (with the organization and/ or the speaker) (Cheney, 1983). Identification, as explained by Burke and cited by Cheney (1983), is related to "self- or other- inducement" (Cheney, 1983, p. 146). It is suggested that this tactic is often used by businesses through diverse communications ways in order to express the organizational goals and values, as well as information. Thus, identification in corporate context may be fostered in different ways. First, the common ground approach suggests similarity between different units in an explicit manner. This approach can be recognized within expression of concern for an individual; recognizing one's contributions; expressing the same values; advocating benefits and activities; encouraging identification with the organization; and inclusion of quotes that demonstrate dedication and commitment to the enterprise. Secondly, identification as a rhetorical strategy can be shown with the means of antithesis where people are stimulated to unite by having a common enemy. Another and more evident way of identification in a text is the use of pronouns such as "we" and "they", where parties who have less commonalities are able to relate to each other by the use of such words. Lastly, symbols such as names, logos, trademarks, and the like urge identification by unification (Cheney, 1983).

Rhetorical strategies can be found in different forms, as argued by Castelló and Lozano (2011). Such forms are the enthymemes, or in other words – argumentation structures where the premises are determined by the audiences. It is important to add that these are not necessarily true by default, but can be truthful in a specific context, dependent on the public (Castelló and Lozano, 2011). Thus, rhetoric types can include three main branches that can be related to corporate social responsibility. *Strategic rhetoric* refers to themes such as reputation, innovation, governance, and operationalization. This type of rhetoric tries to "explain observable phenomena" (Castelló and Lozano, 2011, p. 17) by measurements, circumstantial conditions, data, and the like, where the discourse is rather descriptive and explanatory. Logos appeals are most commonly used. *Institutional rhetoric* addresses stakeholder dialogue sustainability and CSR. It can be recognized by the use of enthymemes such as sustainability and corporate social responsibility. Here, ethos appeals have the highest prominence. *Dialectic rhetoric* combines themes such as global agenda, global standards, citizenship, partnership, accountability, social contribution, focus on an issue, and inclusivity. These enthymemes can be read as attempts from the company for association with its stakeholders based on the justification about the enterprise's societal contributions and/or dialogue. Dialectic rhetoric includes pathos appeals (Castelló and Lozano, 2011).

In relation to Aristotle's main rhetoric elements discussed above (ethos, pathos, and logos), scholars (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) argue that rhetoric can also be viewed as teleological, ontological, and cosmological. Teleological rhetoric is associated with the purposeful occurrence of events with relation to a bigger plan or objective. Ontological rhetoric encompasses arguments regarding the preconditions for what can or cannot exist based on logics. Cosmological rhetoric focuses on changes as natural processes and their inevitability. These categories are further expanded by adding the historical theorization of rhetoric, where history and traditions are strongly emphasized; and value-based rhetoric, appealed to emotions and values based on wider belief systems (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005).

Another important for this research concept is the concept of framing. According to Entman (1993), framing can be explained as the process of selecting specific aspects and making them more salient in text with the aim of emphasizing a problem, evaluation, interpretation, and the like. Frames define issues and the underlying causes, make judgements about agendas and their effects, and propose outcomes for the detected issues. Frames define or limit the meanings of

messages by shaping the conclusions people draw from these messages (Hallahan, 1999). They also present events as meaningful, aspects of reality as simplistic and compressed, and thus "organize experience and guide action" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614).

There are diverse types of framing such as valence framing (presenting information either negatively or positively), semantic framing (phrasing terms in an alternative way), and story framing (storytelling that encompasses choosing specific ideas focused on the message and utilizing narrative methods to support the selected idea) (Hallahan, 1999).

Furthermore, Hallahan (1999) argues that framing can be applied in a various communication situations and thus distinguishes seven models of framing. First, framing of situations is utilized to describe how language and communication between people construct reality. Second comes the framing of attributes, where specific characteristics of people, events, or objects are emphasized, while others are ignored, which creates a bias in the received information. Third, in the framing of risky choices, suggesting alternative decisions in positive and negative terms can incline choices in different situations. Actions that people take in order to pursue aims and goals reflects the essence of framing of actions. Then, issue framing presents alternative views on the existing social reality. When individuals associate events with either environmental (external) or personal (internal) factors, it can be talked about framing of responsibility. Finally, framing of news deals with the ways news stories are presented by the media with the aim to be explained in a familiar and understandable manner (Hallahan, 1999).

Framing literature goes further by discussing the main characteristics of framing. As Benford and Snow (2000) argue, the core framing tasks are amongst the main characteristics of framing. These encompass diagnostic framing, where problems and victims are identified, and blame and responsibility are suggested; prognostic framing, where different ways of addressing an issue are presented, a plan or a solution to the problem are suggested; and motivational framing, which provides a reason for following actions, and prepares these actions (Benford & Snow, 2000; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014). It can also be argued that frames are elaborated by different processes taking place in a frame. Discursive processes include frame articulation, where events and experiences are interconnected, and frame amplification, where certain events or issues are highlighted more than others. Strategic processes are related to the specific goals of a frame, such as bridging, amplification, extension and transformation of frames. Lastly, contested processes aid the development and elaboration of new frames (Benford & Snow, 2000).

It is crucial to mention that there are different framing devices that can be utilized, for instance syntactical structures (the way words and phrases are ordered in a sentence), thematic structures (a main theme surrounded by many subthemes), rhetorical structures (use of metaphors, catchphrases, examples, etc.), and the like (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Finally, rhetorical analysis, as well as framing, are crucial for this research. Rhetorical analysis is utilized to distinguish the rhetoric appeals used in CEO language, and thus determine the rhetoric type of the open letters. Reveling what kinds of appeals are utilized by the corporate leaders is helpful in terms of finding the persuasive language CEOs use to present their positions regarding the issues. Framing, on the other hand, is useful in terms of looking at CEO communication through the lenses the authors of the letters have used. That way the main purposes rooted in the open letters will be discovered.

2.4. CEO Open Letters as a Form of Activism?

CEOs have a crucial role in today's corporations and businesses. As already mentioned, they establish relationships, both internally and externally (Men, 2014). They decide on corporate policies, define the main values, culture, mission, and goals of the company. The Institute of PR points out that efficient internal CEO communication has a number of advantages with regard to the leader and the company (Men, 2014): improved perception of the very person – the leader's credibility and reliability become higher; an open and two-way communication also improves the engagement and loyalty of the employees; and lastly, communicating efficiently within the organization makes CEOs better leaders (Men, 2014). Externally, CEOs are considered spokespersons who manage the perceptions of the organization, which can be executed in various ways. Being socially active and taking stand on social issues is one of these ways.

It is argued that with the arrival of the digital age, communication has undergone plenty of changes, including users shifting from passive to a more involved and seeking for content type of behavior (Orihuela, 2017), and being in control on their information preferences. Arguably, due to the digitalization and easy information access, stakeholders presume that every type of information can be found with ease, thus putting pressure on business visibility and transparency (Alton, 2017). Thus, in order to have better customer engagement, businesses need more visibility and engagement, for instance in social media.

In the past business leaders have avoided involvement in social issues, due to the understanding that such behavior is a distraction from the goals of a company (Weinzimmer & Esken, 2016). Although companies tried to stay neutral with regard to social issues (Davis, 2016), the growing attention to corporate social responsibility (CSR) compels them to reconsider their roles as societal actors. Despite the assertion that an enterprise's main aim is to make money (Gelles, 2017), there is a different trend that emerges in contemporary society. It is found that corporations are expected to engage in social issues and demonstrate responsible actions (Šontaitė-Petkevičienė, 2015). Indeed, some have argued that it is no longer a question "whether" businesses should engage in CSR, but "how" (Dodd, 2016). Although CSR is variously described, from being a committed way for companies to improve the well-being of a community through business practices and resources (Kotler and Lee, 2005) to simply being a process of "doing well by doing good" (Rawlins, 2005), it draws attention to a broader role of business in society. As Aguinis (2012) describes it, organizational actions and policies need to consider social, economic, and environmental issues beyond the narrow scope of profit making. It is suggested that stakeholders relate engagement in corporate social responsibility with a better image and positive reputation of a company (Šontaitė-Petkevičienė, 2015).

The growing importance of CSR has a decisive influence on business ability to remain neutral, and leadership communication to being a more proactive corporate practice (Dodd, 2016). Arguably, CEOs are facing demands from different stakeholders in terms of speaking up and taking a position on burning societal topics (Gelles, 2017). For instance 84% of Americans state the opinion that organizations are institutions responsible for fostering change with regard to social issues, and 88% consider business actually capable of influencing such changes (Global Strategy Group, 2016). Thus business engage in different social-political issues in order to promote and/ or raise their voice against problems such as "climate change, health care reform, gun control, race relations, LGBTQ discrimination, gender and marriage equity, and reproductive rights" (Dodd, 2016), income fairness, immigration, gun control (Weber Shandwick & KRC Research, 2017). Some have labeled these contemporary communication practices as manifestation of CEO activism. This form of communication is called CEO activism.

It is observed that in the past few years CEOs have started to publicly state positions regarding disputed problems from either environmental, social, or political character (Weber Shandwick & KRC Research, 2017), or in other words – be socially active. Chatterji and Toffel

(2016; also Heskett, 2017) define CEO activism as corporate leaders taking stand on the abovementioned, or similar, issues not related to the company's core business. Then how can CEOs take position regarding issues driven by internal, external, or personal interests? Chatterji and Toffel (2018) argue that by utilizing two main types of tactics CEOs may present their opinions. First, raising awareness could be linked to making public statements in news media, Twitter, etc. Such an approach could be useful in gaining support regarding social movements, initiating change, calling for collective action, and the like. Secondly, scholars suggest that leveraging economic power, or pressuring states, could lead to rejecting or changing legislations (Chatterji & Toffel, 2018).

Arguably, CEO open letters belong to the first group. They may be used to raise awareness of a specific issue by reaching multiple publics at the same time. By doing so, CEOs do not only become recognized with their personal views regarding the issue, but also frame the public discourse and thus shape the public opinion. That way, audiences become aware of the leader's/ company's opinion regarding a current issue, thus leading to support and positive perception of the company (Chatterji & Toffel, 2016). A recent survey found that 31% of Americans have a preference for CEOs who take a public stance on burning societal issues (Weber Shandwick & KRC Research, n.d.). Moreover, the belief that CEOs should take a stand on social and political issues is allegedly to be an influencing factor among Millennials' purchasing behavior (Chatterji & Toffel, 2018).

CEO activism however is not limitless. Although it is argued that raising their voice is a must for CEOs in contemporary society, this brings a number of risks, such as offended audiences, call to resignation from governments, isolation of coworkers, public relation scandals, damaged relationships, and the like (Gelles, 2017). In case of people not supporting the stands of the CEO, a company's reputation could be threatened (Heskett, 2017). This could result in changing the economic stability of a company – consumers might either increase their use of the company's products and/ or services, or stop using them at all. Moreover, CEOs taking open stand on particular issues could affect investments in the company in an unpredictable way. However, all of these are possible if, of course, depending on the limits that the board of a company puts to CEOs (Heskett, 2017).

2.5. Concluding Remarks

This chapter described the main theoretical concepts of this research. It was found that leadership communication serves a number of purposes and entails strategies to make the very act of communicating successful. Leaders often communicate to a wider public, thus making open letters a successful tool for both internal and external communication. The rising need for CEOs as leaders to take stand on problems from great social importance, calls for higher CEO involvement in public debates. Thus, CEO activism becomes part of the corporate agenda where open letters server the purpose of proclaiming a company's stand. Despite previous research on open letters, rhetorical strategies and frames within such letters have not been studied. This makes rhetoric and framing from utmost importance for this research.

The following chapter outlines the methodology that is utilized for this study.

3. Methodology

The methodology used for this thesis is aligned with the already stated three research questions:

1. *What are the defining characteristics of CEO open letters?*
2. *How do CEOs frame the purpose of writing open letters?*
3. *What are the rhetorical strategies used in CEO open letters?*

First, an explanation of the research design and the sampling method is provided. A crucial point here also the data analysis, therefore the reader will be presented to the concept of qualitative content analysis. A small introduction to the validity and the reliability of this research is also addressed in the current section.

3.1. Research Design and Sampling

Given the focus of this research, the researcher collected open letters published in the period January 1st, 2016 to December 31st, 2017. The aim of this project is to examine leadership communication, but also to address a knowledge gap in this type of communication, namely the utilization of open letters as way of communication to stakeholders. Therefore, opting for a qualitative approach is useful in several terms. First, qualitative methods are used in order to study specific issues, cases, events, and the like, in detail. This helps in terms of conducting in depth descriptions with regard to the selected issues (Patton, 1987), but also creating categories from different passages of text (Flick, 2013), which allowed the construction of an elaborate coding frame. Qualitative approach focuses, documents, and interprets the process of creating meanings, that are originally constructed and attached to a situation. It also involves interpretations of the meanings, which includes finding patterns and themes in the selected data (Patton, 2015). This leads to the implication that a qualitative approach is the best option for this project.

To make this project as focused as possible, specific criteria was applied when gathering the data. This means that criterion sampling (Patton, 1990) was utilized: the data was selected with relation to predetermined criteria. The following criteria were applied in the selection of open letters:

Table 1. Criteria for selecting the data

№	Criteria	Explanation
1	Type of data	Open letters
2	Time frame	January 1st, 2016 – December 31st, 2017
3	Data collection procedures	The following Google search queries were utilized when collecting the data: • "open letters 2016"; • "open letters from ceos 2016"; • "companies' open letters 2016"; • "ceo open letters 2016"; • "open letters 2017"; • "open letters from ceos 2017"; • "companies' open letters 2017"; • "ceo open letters 2017".
4	Language	Only letters that are originally written in English
5	Geographical location	Only letters from Europe and North America
6	Authorship	Taking in account the already examined theory, letters written by corporate leaders were subject of this research.
7	Audiences	The letters are directed to shareholders and stakeholders. These are employees, customers, political actors, and the like.
8	Categories	Social-political letters were utilized in this research.

The research was not limited to a specific number of letters, but aimed at including all open letters that were published during the period January 1st, 2016 to December 31st, 2017. Moreover, the research was not limited to including open letters in accordance to their length. Thus, open letters of various length were found and included in the analysis.

3.2. Selection Criteria

A total of 76 open letters fitting in the predetermined criteria was found in the period January 2018 – March 2018. 29 of them were published in the year 2016, and 47 in 2017. In order to make the research and the analysis as focused as possible, several letters were removed from the data.

The predominant part of the letters in the data are related to a societal issue (60 open letters). Thus it can be argued that the main drive for CEOs to write and publish these letters is the very issue. On the other hand, a minority (16) of the open letters represent a corporate issue at stake. In order to achieve a consistent and consecutive analysis, these 16 letters were removed from the data. To make the analysis even more focused, letters that were not related to a specific issue, were not written by a corporate leader, or had a different format (for instance voice mail) were also removed from the analyzed data. Thus, overall 26 letters in the selected time frame did not match the purposes of the research and were removed. This leaves the final data set with 50 open letters to be analyzed in this study (see Appendix A).

For the purpose of answering the aforementioned three research questions, qualitative content analysis of the selected open letters was utilized. The open letters were broken down into segments that were coded according to the coding frame. In the data a paragraph was considered a segment. The data was coded by utilizing qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti. By coding the data, rhetorical strategies utilized by the CEOs in their open letters became evident. Moreover, the coding revealed the purposes for writing a letter, the rhetoric of the letter, and the frame that were utilized by the author.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

As stated above, the data was collected with the aid of Google search queries (see Table 1).

For the purposes of this research, qualitative content analysis was used. Qualitative approaches provide a diversity of ways for analyzing qualitative data (Holloway & Todres, 2003). In this thesis, thematic analysis as a foundational method for qualitative content analysis was taken in account. The essence of thematic analysis is to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the examined data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was necessary for the conducted research, since the research aims at discovering what common features the selected texts have. Thematic analysis as a way of conducting qualitative content analysis describes the data "in rich detail", and allows interpretation of several aspects of the selected topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme here is considered to be something that encompasses crucial aspects of the data, that are also related to the research question and that show a pattern within the meaning of the data set. Themes do not necessarily appear in big quantities, but capture important meanings. Another feature of the thematic analysis is that it is possible to present a rich

description of the entire data set, or a more detailed one of a specific theme or group of themes discovered in the data. What is more, there are two possible ways to identify patterns within the data: by selecting an inductive approach (identified patterns have a strong link to the data itself), or by opting for deductive approach (also described as a more theoretical way of identifying themes) (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this research themes emerged from the theoretical framework, meaning that a deductive approach was taken. In order to execute the qualitative content analysis in this thesis, a coding frame was created by the researcher before starting the process of coding.

Codes are labels that attach specific meaning to data units in a study (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). As explained by Ryan and Bernard (2003), and cited by DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch (2011), there are several ways to establish codes. On the one hand, codes can arise from the raw data, which means they are data-driven. This way of determining codes includes five steps: information reduction, identification of themes, followed by comparison between these themes in the data, creation of the very codes, and determining their reliability (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). On the other hand, codes can be theory-driven which means they emerge from already existing theory. This approach follows three main steps, namely creating codes that emerge from the theory, revising the codes in the context of the utilized data and giving them clear labels, and determining the trustworthiness of the code. Lastly, codes can also emerge from the goals and questions of the particular research (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). In this study, codes have arisen from the theory, which means that a more deductive approach is taken.

Codes are crucial for the creation of a codebook. A codebook (or a coding frame) encompasses the different codes used for coding the data and definitions of those codes (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). The coding frame utilized for this thesis can be seen in Appendix B. The codebook includes all five major themes and the 38 codes, and the underlying definitions. Examples of the codes are provided in the Findings and Interpretations chapter of the research.

The very process of coding includes assigning the predetermined codes to the raw data, which in the case of this research are the open letters. By coding, the data is being shortened, simplified and transformed "into meaningful units" (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011, p. 138). Moreover, coding the data allows making connections between concepts and ideas,

confirming or rejecting the theoretical foundations of a research, or even building up the research literature.

The length of a coded data unit is also from great importance. It is possible to code the data either sentence by sentence, or paragraph by paragraph, which is also determined as coding on the "level of meaning" (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011, p.145). As already mentioned, the data was coded by paragraphs. Coding on the sentence level was not meaningful for the analysis, therefore coding on the paragraph level was chosen.

After the data collection was completed, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by reading carefully the open letters. Initial codes were created by utilizing concepts from the theoretical framework and conducting initial coding of the first 20 open letters from the data. This analysis left room for the creation of additional codes that were not covered in the initial coding frame. These codes are part of two themes – Purpose for the communication and Elements of the communication. They are explained further in the next chapter..

Since the approach to this project is deductive, all themes, and the predominant part of the codes were determined before the preliminary coding. After the initial coding was conducted and the codes were reviewed, the final coding frame was created. The coding frame encompasses five themes and a total of 38 codes (see Appendix B). The meaning of each code was explicitly identified. Finally, the data was coded according to the final coding frame.

Although a deductive approach was taken towards the data, one must remember the main focus of this research, namely the language used in the open letters. Therefore, the identified strategies and frames are not only illustrated by numbers, but examples are included in the Findings and Interpretations chapter in order to showcase the use of specific frames, of rhetoric strategies.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

Since qualitative research leaves more space for interpretation and suppositions, this research does not pretend to be perfectly precise. The research addresses the issue of CEOs open letters as a way of leadership communication and also the way leaders present their motivation for writing such letters. The limited two-year time frame of the research however could be considered a hindrance to the results, since the selected time reflects the most recent values and events.

4. Findings and Interpretation

This chapter presents the findings of the in-depth content analysis of the open letters found for the selected period January 1st, 2016 – December 31st, 2017. The chapter is structured according to the three research questions of this study. This means that first the findings related to the *defining characteristics of CEO open letters* will be discussed. This section is followed by the findings regarding the way *CEOs frame the purpose of writing open letters*, where key frames utilized in the data are discussed. Finally, the focus on the language in the data will be stressed even more by presenting the *rhetorical strategies used in CEO open letters*.

4.1. What are the Defining Characteristics of CEO Open Letters?

When carefully examining the open letters, several common characteristics emerged. While some characteristics are related to the technical features of the letters (length, purpose, and target audience), others arise from the coding frame of the data. This is the case with the strategies for effective communication.

4.1.1. Length of the letters.

The open letters vary in length, with the shortest being 103 words (the open letter from Morgan Stanley's CEO James Gorman to his employees on January 30th, 2017), and the longest being 1248 words (the open letter from Starbucks' CEO Howard Schultz to his employees on January 29th, 2017) (see Appendix A). Despite this range, most letters have an average length between 200 and 500 words. This can be easily observed when looking at the data. Only seven letters from the data have a length over 500 words (letters from February 16th, 2016; February 22nd, 2016; January 28th, 2017; January 29th, 2017; January 30th, 2017; and September 5th, 2017). The other 43 letters of the data remain under 500 words: for instance the open letters from March 29th, 2016 (224 words), November 6th, 2016 (478 words), January 27th, 2017 (334 words), January 30th, 2017 (127 words), August 31st, 2017 (417 words), and many others. The length of the open letters is an important characteristic, since it reveals that open letters from corporate leaders related to specific social issues are kept relatively short. This suggests a concise message portrayed in the letters.

4.1.2. Topics of the letters.

The reason for writing the letter is always explicitly stated at the beginning of the letter and thus sets the agenda of this form of CEO communication. Seven main topics (reasons) were covered by the majority of the letters: Immigration ban from Donald Trump (20 letters), Charlottesville incident (6 letters), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) immigration policy changes (6 letters), Paris climate agreement exit (4 letters), Donald Trump being elected for president of the United States (3 letters), House Bill 2 (3 letters), and San Bernardino shooting (2 letters). Other issues targeted in the data are Black Lives Matter movement (1 letter), Forthcoming presidential election in the United States (1 letter), Brexit (1 letter), the Anti-diversity memo from Google employee (1 letter), Hurricane Harvey crisis in the United States (1 letter), and the Dallas police shooting (1 letter). An overview of the topics in the letters can be seen in Appendix B.

This outline of the main topic of the open letters is important in terms of showcasing the issues CEOs take a stand on. These are all social or social-political problems. It can be argued that publishing open letters that respond to these issues is a form of CEO activism.

4.1.3. Target audience.

The open letters can be divided according to their intended audience, i.e. customers, employees and team members, public figures such as the president, the governor, and/ or the government. The majority of the letters are addressed to the employees and team members of a company (overall 26 letters). Seven letters address the open public, while other seven aim at reaching public figures such as Donald Trump, Governor Pat MacCrory, and others. Four letters have two types of addressees: political institutions, for instance the Canadian federal government, the US government, or parties related to the Paris climate agreement, and the open public at the same time. Two letters are explicitly addressed to the community of the corporation, thus including both employees and customers. Two other letters are directed explicitly to customers, while one letter is addressed to the Times newspaper. However, one must take in account the main purpose of open letters which, as explained earlier, is to be read not only by the addressee, but by wider audience. This presumes that despite the fact that some open letters are targeted at one person, or specific audience, the speaker still speaks to many and diverse audiences.

4.1.4. Geographical location of the letters.

The initial selection criteria encompassed open letters sent by business leaders in Europe and North America. When carefully looking at the senders of the open letters, it becomes clear that the majority of the letters are sent by CEOs and leaders from American companies. 25 companies from the United States of America are taking a stand regarding a societal issue. These are: Airbnb, AnitaB.org, Apple, Autodesk, Blizzard, Citi, Computer & Communication Industry Association, Expedia, Facebook, Google, Grail, GrubHub, IBM, Intel, JP Morgan, Microsoft, Morgan Stanley, Nike, PayPal, Reddit, Red Ventures, Starbucks, Uber, Walmart, and Wingz. Other seven letters are signed and represented by US CEOs and leaders. One open letter is sent by the Canadian company BetaKit, and one more is signed by 197 business leaders from the United Kingdom. This shows inequality in the geographical location of the open letters with a strong majority in the United States.

4.1.5. Elements of communication.

Effective communication is a feature of the language, described in the theoretical framework of the study. Several scholars (Alton, 2016; Baldoni, 2004; Beslin & Reddin, 2004) argue that there are various strategies that aid in making the communication successful. These features were also found in the data. According to the theoretical chapter, effective communication can be marked by eight main strategies, namely referring to the initial values of the organization, repetitiveness, listening, asking for feedback, using appropriate tone of voice, wording of the message, and conciseness and focus of the message (see chapter 2. Theoretical Framework). From these eight main strategies, six were found in the data units of the open letters. The most frequently occurring code is Conciseness and focus of the data unit (252 time in the whole data set), followed by Wording (183 times). Conciseness and focus is a strategy that can be utilized by leaders in both their verbal and written communication. This strategy suggests that the writer should present as much information possible in less space, while avoiding scattered thoughts and communicating only significant information (Alton, 2016). Examples of this strategy can be found throughout the data. For instance the statement from Tim Cook from February 16th, 2016: "***Compromising the security*** *of our personal information can ultimately put our personal safety at risk. That is why* ***encryption has become so important*** *to all of us.*"; or the opening paragraph of Jeff Huber's letter from January 29th, 2017:

*An **executive order** signed by **President Trump Friday afternoon** is blocking citizens of*
*seven countries from entering the United States for at least the next **90 days**. We are*
reaching out to affected GRAIL-ers, and encourage anyone believing they are impacted to
contact {a specific person} in our PeopleOps team.

These two examples illustrate how CEOs use less space for their utterances, but still include crucial points. In the former example this is the importance of encryption and the harmful effects of endangering the confidentiality of the personal information. The latter example is even more specific: the problem is stated (the executive order and its consequences for people), details about the event are given ("*signed by President Trump*", "*Friday afternoon*"), and the actions taken by the company ("*reaching out to affected GRAIL-ers and encourage*"). By these and many other examples of this strategy, one can argue that messages coded as concise and focus are not only relatively short, but also straight to the point and can also act as a summary of the CEOs position regarding the issue at stake.

The wording of the messages is also occurring frequently in the analyzed data. As explained by Conaway and Wardrope (2010), words are from utmost importance, especially when used in a strategic manner by leaders. Moreover, appropriate wording aids in achieving the goal of the message (Alton, 2016).The theory also suggests that wording in corporate documents "may not exist as objective reality" but as an attempt to make sense by the authors who aim at gaining support for diverse organizational processes (Conaway & Wardrope, 2010, p. 142). The frequent occurrence of the wording strategy in the data suggests that CEOs intend to gain supporters of their views among the readers of the letters. Thus the example of Tim Cook's open letter from February 22nd, 2016 exemplifies his strive for gaining more upholders of his view regarding the importance of privacy:

*This case is about **much more than a single phone or a single investigation**, so when we*
received the government's order we knew we had to speak out. At stake is the data security
*of **hundreds of millions of law-abiding people**, and setting a **dangerous precedent that***
***threatens everyone's civil liberties**.*

Here, he uses expressions such as "*hundreds of millions of law-abiding people*" to describe the importance of the issue and persuade people that their personal security is threatened. Emphasizing that this is "*much more than a single phone or a single investigation*" that sets "*a dangerous precedent that threatens everyone's civil liberties*" is another example of proper

wording in this paragraph that aids in achieving the goal of the message – to provide the reader with reasoning regarding the importance of taking a position and not remaining silent.

In the process of the initial coding, other four elements that can contribute to effective CEO communication were distinguished. These are namely utilization of motivational speech, references, personal values, and simplicity of an utterance. Although these are not necessarily the most commonly occurring elements, they are important to the current chapter. Therefore, an overview of these elements is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Elements of effective communication

Element	Explanation	Example
Motivational speech	When the author utilizes motivational appeals and urges a call for action in his audiences.	"***Start today*** *by recognizing the power we have to walk in someone else's shoes, to demonstrate understanding, and to strip away the differences that divide us.* ***Let's each embrace the universal virtues of respect and dignity,*** *refusing to allow the hatred on cable news, the ugliness of our politics, and the lack of political role models for our kids to define us and to dictate how we treat each other.* ***Rise above this moment to be the person that makes a positive difference*** *in your neighborhood and community.* ***Be the person who makes your family proud. Be the person who embodies the promise of America*** *so others may see and feel the possibilities that come with being an American—today, tomorrow, and long after this Tuesday.*" (Schultz, H., 2016, November 6)
Referencing	When the author of the letter refers to stories, events, people, or utterances outside of the context of the letter.	"*Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter." So, we will continue to speak up.*" (Cook, T., 2017, August 16)
Simplicity	When the author utilizes simple and familiar words and sentence constructions in his utterance, in order to present his standpoint in	"*This has been a* ***very difficult time****. **I wanted to provide an update on the memo that was circulated over this past week.***" (Pichai, S., August 8, 2017); "*As a CEO,* ***I see each day the direct contributions*** *that talented employees from around the world bring to our company, our customers and to the broader economy.* ***We care deeply about the DREAMers who work at Microsoft and fully support them.*** *We will always stand for diversity and economic opportunity for everyone. It*

	a simple and understandable manner.	*is core to who we are at Microsoft and I believe it is core to what America is.*" (Nadella, S., 2017, August 31)
Personal values	When the author refers to his own values in order to support his position.	"*I strongly disagree with President Trump's reaction to the events that took place in Charlottesville over the past several days. **Racism, intolerance and violence are always wrong.** The **equal treatment of all people** is one of our nation's bedrock principles. There is no room for equivocation here: the evil on display by these perpetrators of hate should be condemned and has no place in a country that draws strength from our diversity and humanity.*" (Dimon, J., 2017, August 16)

It must be noted that simplicity is another commonly used element found 177 times in the data. As already briefly mentioned, in their letters, leaders also used simplicity as a way to communicate successfully to their audiences. Units carrying this code can be distinguished by straightforwardness and use of simple language and explanations. An example can be found in Table 2.

Less common but still relevant techniques to nurture effective communication are referencing and repetitiveness within a message. Rarely used techniques are setting clear expectations, recalling personal or organizational values, and using motivational speech.

The tone of voice is another category that marks effective communication according to the theoretical framework of the study. Since it is not possible for an utterance to have no tone of voice, this category was found in each open letter. Several different tones of voice were distinguished. Some open letters (29 open letters) are marked by serious and formal tone of voice. These letters present factual information such as data and numbers: *800,000 DACA recipients; our economy would lose $460.3 billion from the national GDP; more than 97 percent are in school or in the workforce*… (Leaders of American industries, 2017, September 20); *76 Microsoft employees* (Smith, B., 2017, January 28), and suggest that the discussed issues are important: "*The United States government has demanded that Apple take an unprecedented step which threatens the security of our customers.*" (Cook, T., 2016, February 16); "*The new law perpetuates discrimination and it violates the values and principles that are at the core of PayPal's mission and culture. As a result, PayPal will not move forward with our planned expansion into Charlotte.*" (Schulman, D., 2016, April 5).

Other letters keep a more informal tone of voice. Such letters can be distinguished by the use of personal examples ("*Last night, **like so many of you**, I watched the election returns with family and friends. And **like so many of our fellow Americans** – both Democrats and Republicans – I am stunned.*" (Schultz, H., 2016, November 9), or by using storytelling techniques when addressing the audience ("*It's a rainy Sunday morning in Seattle, we've turned the clocks back an hour, and I'm enjoying a French Press of my favorite coffee, Aged Sumatra. I woke up this morning feeling a bit anxious about Tuesday's election. Regardless of the outcome, our nation will feel divided.*" (Schultz, H., 2016, November 6).

It can be noticed that the different letters keep a different tone of voice depending on the discussed issue and the audience. Thus, for instance letters that have a company's employees or team as addressees are characterized with a more informal tone of voice, while letters targeted at public figures, such as U.S. president Donald Trump or the open publics are written as formal messages. The issue at stake is also detrimental for the tone of voice. Since the tone of voice is not considered as a separate concept, but as a way for successful communication, it is only briefly mentioned and will not be further developed in this research.

4.2. How do CEOs Frame the Purpose of Writing Open Letters?
4.2.1. Overarching purposes of the letters.

Drawing back on the theory, acts of leadership communication can be related to five main purposes (Baldoni, 2004), namely confirming the vision and mission of the organization, driving transformational change, making a call for action, reinforcing organizational capability, and creating a motivational environment (see chapter Theoretical framework), while six more were distinguished during the initial coding of the data. These are framing an issue, advocating position, exemplification, expressing gratitude, making an announcement, and raising awareness. From these 11 purposes, framing an issue and advocating a position are the most common purposes in the data units.

Framing an issue can be distinguished in paragraphs where the issue is explicitly brought on the foreground and the leaders mark it as an important topic of the agenda. Examples of this are the letter of Tim Cook where he addresses the president's bail from the Paris climate agreement on 5th June 2017: "*Climate change is real and we all share a responsibility to fight*

it."; or the statement from 400 American executives regarding the consequences of the changes in the DACA program:

> *The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which allows nearly 800,000 Dreamers the basic opportunity to work and study without the threat of deportation, is in jeopardy. All DACA recipients grew up in America, registered with our government, submitted to extensive background checks, and are diligently giving back to our communities and paying income taxes. More than 97 percent are in school or in the workforce, 5 percent started their own business, 65 percent have purchased a vehicle, and 16 percent have purchased their first home. At least 72 percent of the top 25 Fortune 500 companies count DACA recipients among their employees.* (400 American executives, 2017, August 31)

These examples showcase that framing an issue as a purpose of communication can be recognized by bringing the issue in the spotlight (namely the threat of climate change for society, and the effect of DACA changes on the Dreamers), and creating identification with the audience (by the utilization of the transcendent "we" in the former example, and the common ground technique in the latter).

Advocating a position is widely used in the data, where 143 quotations have this purpose of communication. Supporting a standpoint includes providing a reason for the CEO's standpoint or actions. Thus, by exemplifying the outcomes for people protected by the DACA program, Brad Smith defends his opinion against the changes: "*Ending DACA will **drastically disrupt the lives of these individuals** who willingly came forward to register with the federal government. They could **lose their jobs** and **risk deportation**. This repeal will also have **significant economic consequences**.*" (Smith, B., 2017, August 31). In his statement, Microsoft's president explicitly states his personal reasoning for his position against ending DACA. Terminating the program will affect lives of people on several levels. The risk of losing their jobs or being deported is only a part of the problems that will follow, including jeopardizing the American economy.

From the strategies found during the initial coding, rarely used are making an announcement, raising awareness, exemplification, and expression of gratitude. Although they are utilized seldom, they are still important to mention in order to provide the reader with an explanation of what stays behind these codes.

Making an announcement can be recognized by the new information provided by the author, the revelation of his intentions or actions, or simply by explicitly stating that the writer has to declare something. An example is the statement from Brian Krzanich, CEO of Intel, where he announces his resignation: "***Earlier today, I tendered my resignation*** *from the American Manufacturing Council.*" (Krzanich, B., 2017, August 14); and Howard Schultz's statement regarding the company's activities after Donald Trump's travel ban: "*I also want to take this **opportunity to announce specific actions we are taking** to reinforce our belief in our partners around the world and to ensure you are clear that we will neither stand by, nor stand silent, as the uncertainty around the new Administration's actions grows with each passing day*" (Schultz, H., 2017, January 29). These statements show that the strategy is marked by the straightforwardness of the messages. The leaders use the very beginning of their statements to bring the announcements in the spotlight.

Raising awareness is linked to providing explicit information about already existing data or evidence that is from importance for the readers of the letter:

> ***In December 2015 in Paris,*** *world leaders signed **the first global commitment to fight climate change**. The landmark agreement **succeeded where past attempts failed** because it **allowed each country to set its own emission reduction targets** and adopt its own strategies for reaching them. In addition, nations - inspired by the actions of local and regional governments, along with businesses - came to recognize that **fighting climate change brings significant economic and public health benefits**.* (American state, local, and business leaders, 2016, February 22).

Climate change is part of the societal agenda and is concerning every individual. Thus, presumably, the audiences already have some prior knowledge about the essence of climate change and the importance to fight it. The leaders use the open letter as an arena for giving more information about the Paris climate agreement and its benefits, thus advocating their position against exiting the agreement.

Exemplification is related to providing examples from one's personal experience or history ("*My great grandfather didn't speak much English, but he worked hard, and was able to get a job at Endicott-Johnson Shoe Company in Binghamton, NY*", Ohanian, A., January 30, 2017), in order to strengthen his position and support the argumentation in the letter. Lastly, expressing gratitude is referred to utterances that are relatively short and their aim is to explicitly show

appreciation for deeds of the audience towards the CEO ("*You do an incredible job protecting them with the features we design into our products. **Thank you***" (Cook, T., 2016, February 22).

The purposes of communication form the diverse ways in which leaders formulate their motivation for writing an open letter. Since the data was analyzed by coding the paragraphs of the letters, several communication purposes can be found in the prevailing part of the letters. This also suggests that some purposes overlap others, such as advocating a position and framing an issue, which are found together in 36 open letters.

Despite the presence of various purposes of communication within the open letters, one overarching purpose can be discerned for each letter. Thus, 28 of the analyzed 50 open letters show position advocacy as their core purpose, seven more frame an issue, three letters make an announcement, and one letter has a main aim to confirm the mission and vision of the organization. The other 12 letters serve more than one communication purpose, for instance advocating a position and making a call for action, or framing an issue and raising awareness at the same time.

It can be argued that despite the diversity of objectives for communication found in the different paragraphs of the letters, the overarching purpose of communication of the letters is usually one.

4.2.2. Manifestations of the communication purposes.

In articulating their motivation for writing open letters, corporate leaders draw on specific framing mechanisms. These mechanisms can easily be distinguished in the paragraphs of the open letters. Frames can be seen in each unit.

Overall 11 from the 13 frames distinguished in the theoretical chapter of the thesis were found in the data, which shows that CEOs make use of variety of ways to introduce their intentions for writing open letters. The most prominent frames are motivational framing and story framing. The former addresses underlying reasoning for taking specific actions and prepares the actions, while the latter uses specific ideas of the message and supports these ideas with narrative methods (Benford & Snow, 2000; Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Hallahan, 1999). These are followed by diagnostic frames, prognostic frames, semantic frames, and framing of attributes. Utterances were least framed with issue framing, framing of actions, framing of situations, valence framing, and framing of responsibility.

The excerpt from Dan Schulman, CEO of PayPal, is an example of how motivational frames are utilized in the data: "*The new law **perpetuates discrimination** and it **violates the values and principles** that are at the core of PayPal's mission and culture. As a result, PayPal will **not move forward with our planned expansion** into Charlotte*." (Schulman, D., 2016, April 5). First he pays attention to the drawbacks of the new law – proclaiming discrimination and disregarding the company's values. These become the motivation for the upcoming actions prepared by the CEO: discontinuing the company's further enlargement in the particular city. Moreover, this example illustrates how the lens of a motivational frame is used by the author to make an announcement in this utterance. By stating the contradiction of the new law with the company's core principles, Dan Schulman announces the termination of PayPal's further development in Charlotte, thus making the company's further actions explicit.

The prism of a motivational frame is also used by corporate leaders when advocating their position. "*We stand for **diversity, inclusion, and openness** at Autodesk. **We** will **stand with our employees,** regardless of where they were born, or how they worship. And **we do not support President Trump's stance on immigration**.*" (Bass, C., 2017, January 30).In the quote from the CEO of Autodesk Carl Bass, the leader explicitly states his motivation, illustrated by the values of the company ("*diversity, inclusion, and openness*"), and gives a general description of what his actions will be targeted at: unconditional support of his employees. Moreover, this is established by the use of the common ground technique, illustrated in the example by the multiple use of the pronoun "we". These elements frame the purpose of this paragraph, and of the whole open letter – to defend Bass's stance as a non-upholder of Donald Trump's position on immigration. The frame emphasizes the company's values and only briefly mentions Donald Trump. This portrays him as the different one who does not fit in the status quo. It can be argued that by utilizing the motivational frame, the essence of the statement is explicated and brought closer to the audience. This makes the purpose of the paragraph clear and easy to recognize by the reader.

Examining other abstracts from the data shows further utilization of framing for revealing different communication purposes. Story frames, for instance, are sometimes used in paragraphs that present examples to strengthen the author's argument. Alexis Ohanian, co-founder of Reddit, builds his whole open letter through storytelling:

> *A **little over a century ago**, a Turkish soldier **decided** my great grandfather was too young to kill after cutting down his parents in front of him; instead of turning the sword on the*

*boy, the soldier **sent** him to an orphanage. Many Armenians, including my great*

*grandmother, **found** sanctuary in Aleppo, Syria—before the two **reconnected** and found*

their way to Ellis Island. (Ohanian, A., 2017, January 30)

In this paragraph he begins telling the story of his great grandfather's life and describes the misfortunes the man has gone through. In the context of the whole letter, this excerpt is utilized as a personal example to build his argument Donald Trump's immigration ban. The expression "*a little over a century ago*" refers to the usual beginning of a story ('Once upon a time') and prepares the readers for the upcoming narrative. Verbs in past tense ("*decided*", "*sent*", "*found*", "*reconnected*") are easily recognizable signs that a story frame is utilized. Since Alexis Ohanian states his viewpoint at the beginning of the letter ("*President Trump's recent executive order is not only potentially unconstitutional, but deeply un-American. We are a nation of immigrants, after all.*"), story framing is a useful way to provide examples from the CEO's background, and hence strengthen the argument. Thus, by using the story frame, Alexis Ohanian presents reality through his own worldview.

Other extracts throughout the data show instances of utilization of diagnostic framing used to construct the different communication purposes. In its very foundation, diagnostic frames focus on identifying problems and victims, and assigning blame and responsibility. Therefore, these frames are utilized in abstracts where the aim of the author is to frame the issue at stake. The following extract clarifies this:

*As connected economies, **decisions by the United States** can directly impact **every business north of the border**. The recently signed **Executive Order** to block entry of **citizens from seven countries** has already impacted several in our community. As a **community**, we are all affected.* (Betakit, 2017, January 29).

In the example from The Canadian Tech Community, the issue is presented through the perspective of a diagnostic frame. The problem is the Executive Order that impacts *"every business north of the border*", citizens from several countries, and the whole community. These become the victims in the utterance. The blame, although not explicitly pointed out, is assigned to the United States, since this is the country responsible for the decision regarding the travel ban. Making these aspects of the utterance salient provides a full idea of the issue, and, moreover, accentuates the scope and the significance of the problem, and makes it part of the societal agenda.

Not only do CEOs use framing to present the issues, but to also make a call for action to their audiences. Prognostic framing becomes useful here, since it emphasizes ways of approaching the problems, or suggests solutions to them. Howard Schutz provides an example of this:

> *Start today by **recognizing the power** we have to walk in someone else's shoes, to **demonstrate understanding**, and to **strip away the differences** that divide us. Let's each **embrace the universal virtues of respect and dignity**, **refusing to allow the hatred** on cable news, the ugliness of our politics, and the lack of political role models for our kids to define us and to dictate how we treat each other. **Rise above this moment** to be the person that **makes a positive difference** in your neighborhood and community. Be the person who **makes your family proud**. Be the person who **embodies the promise of America** so others may see and feel the possibilities that come with being an American—today, tomorrow, and long after this Tuesday.* (Schultz, H., 2016, November 6).

This excerpt shows how by proposing small steps that each of the readers of this letter could take the author frames the way of addressing the issue. The CEO of Starbucks suggests that embracing initial values such as understanding, respect and dignity, staying away from hatred, and striving for a positive change are the ways for Americans to stay united even after the forthcoming elections. The use of imperative verbs such as "*start*", "*be*", "*rise*", marks a motivational tone of voice in this abstract. The suggested steps aim at initiating these actions in the readers. Thus the perspective of the prognostic frame serves as a useful way for the CEO to make a call for action to his audiences.

4.3. What are the Rhetorical Strategies used in CEO Open Letters?

The three types of rhetorical appeals, ethos, logos, and pathos, as explained before, have a series of manifestation in pieces of written communication. Ethos appeals are related to the credibility and trustworthiness of the author, and can be distinguished in utterances where the author demonstrates expertise, respect for the audiences, similitude, ingratiation, consistency, honesty, and inclination to succeed. Logos appeals are used to make a statement as clear as possible. This can be done by providing claims, data, examples, and warrants. Pathos appeals are metaphors and identifications, aiming at influencing the feelings of the readers. These are usually different for the different cultures, and even for the different enterprises. Instances of the three rhetorical

strategies and their manifestations were found throughout the data. Thus it can be argued that utterances from corporate leaders aim at assigning trustworthiness to the speaker, making the statement as clear as possible, while at the same time targeting the audiences' emotions.

4.3.1. Credibility of the authors.

Starting off with ethos, expressions of this strategy are the most frequently observed in the open letters. Ethos appeals are dominating in the data. The CEOs are framing themselves as credible in front of the readers by utilizing different representations of ethos.

The whole data relies extensively on the persuasive technique of similitude where the authors aim at pointing out the resemblance between them and their audience. By utilizing pronouns such as "I", "you", "we", "our", etc., the public is brought closer to the CEO and to the company. Utterances using these pronouns include the reader as part of the organization, its agenda, and its standpoint on different issues: "**We** *cannot know what the precise impact will be on* **our** *country and the rest of the world.* **I** *am hopeful that* **we** *will overcome the vitriol and division of this unprecedented election season.*" (Schultz, H., 2016, November 9). In the preceding example the CEO of Starbucks aims at evoking a sense of belonging to the company's community by utilizing the pronoun "*we*". This is further emphasized by the possessive "*our*" which does not only create a sense of belonging to the Starbucks' community, but to a bigger one – the one of the "*country*". The utilization of pronouns correlates further with another rhetorical technique distinguished in the theory – the Transcendent "we". The repetition of the pronoun "we" encourages identification with the position of the company's CEO, and thus with him, despite the few commonalities between the two parties (author and audience).

This combination of strategies is also exemplified by the letter of the CEO of Expedia. In his extensive utterance[1] Dara Khosrowshahi makes use of the possessive pronoun "*our*" (used seven times in only one paragraph) and the transcendent "*we*" (used five times in the same

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[1] *As* **you** *know, the rallying cry for* **our** *company this year is to Go Global.* **We** *believe that, in becoming a company that is satisfying travel demand all over the world,* **we** **become a stronger, better, smarter company**. **Our** *assets in this growth,* **our** *winning formula, is in* **our** *people,* **you**. *And* **we** *believe that, in order to Go Global, to provide that magical travel research, booking and fulfillment experience to a customer in Milwaukee or Newcastle or Penang or Fortaleza or Tunis,* **we** *have to understand* **their** *needs and wants,* **we** *have to understand* **THEM**. *This requires* **us** *to have a perspective that is broad and balanced, one that considers the near term benefit of serving* **our** *core customer, but one that also plays the long game, that brings in new customers into* **our** *global marketplace, stretches* **our** *services a bit, creates a bit of complexity, but ultimately makes* **us** *so much better as a wholistic entity. This requires* **us** *to have an employee base which is broad, compassionate, entrepreneurial, and always seeking out different ways of getting things done. (Khosrowshahi, D., 2017, February 2)*

paragraph). Again, expressions such as "***our** global marketplace*", or "***we** have to understand*" persuade employees to be a big part of Expedia and its community. The interesting thing here is the gradation Dara Khosrowshahi uses to help the readers relate to Expedia on a deeper level. By starting with "*our company*" and continuing with references to their beliefs ("*we believe*") and assets ("*our assets*", "*our winning formula*", "*our people*"), he makes a strong point that exactly these beliefs and assets are the employees of Expedia ("*you*"). He manages to bring his team together one more time with the aid of the pronouns "*their*" and "*them*" attributed to Expedia's customers. By distinguishing the clients from the team the CEO creates a feeling of two contrasting parties – "*them*" and "*us*". This explicit distinction between the two groups provides the corporate leader with the opportunity to bring Expedia's employees together under the company's umbrella.

In the same example the CEO gains further credibility by making use of the appeals to the inclination to success. "*We become a stronger, better, smarter company*" is a clearly drawn forecast for the enterprise's future accomplishments. Expertise is also demonstrated by the author in drawing attention to the company's judgements about the most necessary things to be considered in its future development:

> *And we believe that, in order to Go Global, to provide that magical travel research, booking and fulfillment experience to a customer… we have to understand their needs and wants, we have to understand THEM. This requires us to have a perspective that is broad and balanced… that brings in new customers into our global marketplace… This requires us to have an employee base which is broad, compassionate, entrepreneurial, and always seeking out different ways of getting things done.*" (Khosrowshahi, D., 2017, February 2).

Such statement assigns authority to the writer in front of his audience.

Credibility is also reinforced by the appeal of consistency of the statements. The open letter from Brad Smith regarding the DACA legislation (2017, September 5) is a good example of how corporate leaders construct consistent messages. As a starting point of his letter, the CEO announces the issue and the position of Microsoft ("***We** are deeply disappointed by the administration's decision today to rescind protection under the program for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). As **we** said last week, **we** believe this is a big step back for **our** entire country.*"). Again, the transcendent "we" and the possessive pronoun "our" help in relating the management of the company and the employees with the same viewpoint regarding the stated

issue. This statement is followed by an explicit query: "*The question for individuals, employers and the country is what we do now*". The following paragraphs[2] unfold logically by stating the two opposing outcomes of the situation. Originating from these points, the president of Microsoft proposes a logical follow up in his letter, namely the actions of the company:

> "*If Congress fails to act, our company will exercise its legal rights properly to help protect our employees. If the government seeks to deport any one of them, we will provide and pay for their legal counsel. We will also file an amicus brief and explore whether we can directly intervene in any such case. **In short, if Dreamers who are our employees are in court, we will be by their side.***"

The last sentence of Brad Smith's statement is a clear and unambiguous summary that serves as a declaration and concluding point of his opinion regarding the injustice in the legislation changes.

These examples are important since they demonstrate that Brad Smith is making a logical and easy to follow argument: the problem is presented at the beginning, alongside with Microsoft's position, followed by the two possible outcomes, the actions that the company could undertake, and a conclusion. This structure is easily understandable and makes the argument clear thus assigning reliability to the CEO. The example demonstrates how the appeal of consistency is spread throughout the whole open letter and is not limited to a single paragraph. Thus one can argue that the understanding of the appeal of consistency is accomplished in the totality of a message (open letter).

4.3.2. The emotional trigger.

Rather than maintaining language that only focuses on the author's trustworthiness, the open letters provide numerous examples of appeals that aim at triggering the readers' emotions. Pathos

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[2] *For Microsoft, the first step is clear… Congress should adopt legislation on DACA before it tries to adopt a tax reform bill. This is the only way, given the number of legislative days Congress has scheduled over the next six months, we realistically can expect Congress to complete DACA legislation in time.*
A second point is also fundamental. Although we should all ask Congress to act within six months, we should be prepared for the possibility that it will not do so. Such a failure would not relieve anyone else in the country of the responsibility to act thoughtfully and wisely. (Smith, B., 2017, September 5)

appeals are the second most recurring strategy in the data, expressed by identifications and metaphors.

Arousing emotions in the readers is often done by referring to a story, either from the personal experience of the CEO, from the life of another person, or a group of people. By using identification in such way the corporate leaders foster diverse emotional reactions in the readers. An example is the story of Sir Mo Farah, told by Nike's CEO:

*Today, I'm thinking of everyone who is impacted, like Sir Mo Farah. Mo, **four-time Olympic gold medalist**, now **lives in Oregon with his family**. He was **born in Somalia** and **moved to Britain** when he was eight. He has **dedicated his life to competing for his adopted country**. And yet, Mo fears he may not be allowed to return from his training camp in Ethiopia **to see his wife and children in Portland**.* (Parker, M., 2017, January 30)

This statement strongly relies on emotional appeals. The story portrays a "*four-time Olympic gold medalist*" as a regular American person: he lives in the state of Oregon with his family, and has struggled ("*born in Somalia and moved to Britain when he was eight*") and strived ("*dedicated his life to competing for his adopted country*") for accomplishing what he has today. By referring to initial American values such as family and diligence, Mark Parker evokes recognition in both Native Americans, and immigrants, who can all relate to the case of Sir Mo Farah. Mentioning that a lot of people are affected ("*everyone who is impacted*") at the beginning of the statement makes the utterance even more powerful: the CEO tells the story of a single person, but this is the story of thousands of others. The use of such an approach helps Mark Parker to support his viewpoint against discrimination and against Donald Trump's travel ban.

Another strategy that refers to identification becomes evident in the preceding example. The very reference to the Olympic gold medalist by utilizing his name calls for identification with the help of a symbol. Symbols, as explained earlier, are names, trademarks, logos, and the like, that create unification in the readers (Cheney, 1983). This strategy is extensively used in the open letters, since corporate leaders often mention the very name of the company. Thus, Apple, Microsoft, Starbucks, PayPal, IBM, and many others are used in the letters by the respective CEOs to provoke unification between the readers and the company. As mentioned above, names of famous and easily recognizable people are also symbols. Thus Dr. Martin Luther King is utilized in three letters by Tim Cook to support his utterances by using an appeal that calls recognition: "*In the words of **Dr. Martin Luther King**, "We may have all come on different*

ships, but we are in the same boat now." (Cook, T., 2017, January 28). The reference to a well-known activist urges the audience to adopt Martin Luther King's virtues and worldview. This is further accomplished by the selected quote, where the transcendent "we" calls for identification between all people. Donald Trump also appears as a symbol in the data, but unlike the reference to Martin Luther King, he is not provoking unification. The open letters show that Donald Trump is portrayed as the other, and identification is not drawn between him and the audience. Instead of using the transcendent "we", or similitude (for instance by referring to '*our President*'), the utterances present him as distant to the readers. The CEOs talk about "*the **Trump** administration*" (U.S. state, local, and business leaders, 2016, November), "*the nationalist, anti-immigrant and hateful politics of **Donald Trump***" (Maloney, M., 2016, November 10), "*the Executive Order that **President Trump** issued*" (Schultz, H., 2017, January 29) or "***President Trump**'s stance on immigration*" (Bass, C., 2017, January 30) and thus distinguish themselves from the decisions and policies of the president. By talking about 'his' administration and verdicts they use attribution appeal (logos) and assign to him responsibility about the issues at stake.

Identification can further be exemplified by the following statement from the Computer and Communication Industry Association concerning again Donald Trump's travel ban:

> *Many of **our industry's most successful companies were founded by immigrants**.*
> ***Immigrants help our industry** to export goods and services around the world while creating jobs here at home. Targeting lawful U.S. residents and visa holders for discriminatory treatment based on their national origin or faith is not in **our national interest**. It is not in **our economic interest**. It is not who **we** are.* (CCIA, 2017, January 30).

Unlike the preceding example, this abstract does not explicitly refer to values of the audience. Here the identification is accomplished by targeting the necessities of Americans. This is attained by first pointing out the advantages the United States have gained through the work of immigrants (foundation of prosperous companies and stimulation of worldwide exportation), and indicating the possibility of risks on the nation and its economy due to pursuing immigrants. By explicitly recognizing the contributions of immigrants for society, the CCIA make use of the common ground technique, which is another way to encourage identification. Furthermore, the use of similitude ("*our industry*", "*our national interest*", "*our economic interest*") urges correlation between the CCIA and the readers, but also strengthens the emotional appeal: immigrants are important for every business and for the whole country. The transcendent "we" in

the last sentence makes a strong ending of the statement and establishes the position of CCIA as non-approvers of the travel ban.

Emphasis on the audience's feelings is also manifested by several metaphors found in the data. Expressions such as "*turning back the clock on that progress*" (Cook, T., 2016, February 22), "*our democracy is manipulated*" (Elias, R., 2016, April 5), "*paralyzing our country*" (Schultz, H., 2016, July 8), "*Lady Liberty's lamp is dimming*" (Ohanian, A., 2017, January 30), and many others, are utilized by the CEOs in order to illustrate their standpoint to their public by creating a specific feeling. In these cases this could be a feeling of anger for rejecting technological progress and exploiting the modern government systems, or a sense of being powerless due to the inevitability of the occurrence. It is important to notice that metaphors such as "*Lady Liberty's lamp is dimming*" or "*turning back the clock on that progress*" are related to the specific context of the respective open letters and events. This showcases the ability of some metaphors to be recognized and to fulfill their purpose only when placed in the relevant context.

Metaphors are also appearing as whole sentences: "*I recall something Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said 50 years ago: "If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward*" (Cook, T., 2016, November 10); or "*The doors to America shall remain open, and any that are locked will not be for long*" (Chesky, B., 2017, January 29). These manifestations of pathos do not only trigger emotions like hope, but also serve as suasive appeals to support claims made in the open letters. Therefore one can argue that presenting whole sentences in the form of non-literal language presumes the importance of the author's claim and the necessity to be illustrated by emotional appeals.

4.3.3. Lucidity of the letters.

CEO language does not deplete with rhetorical elements that portray leaders as credible and set up emotional triggers for the audiences. Strategies portraying reason are also found in the open letters. This witnesses the presence of logos appeals in the CEO language.

The whole data set is marked by claims as a persuasive appeal to logos. A typical feature of the claims is the lack of proof about the truthfulness of the statement. This is the case in the open letter by Sundar Pichai concerning the anti-diversity memo, where he states that "*the memo has clearly impacted our co-workers, some of whom are hurting and feel judged based on their*

gender" (Pichai, S., 2017, August 8). The readers of the letter are faced with the assertion about the way the memo has influenced Googlers, but are not presented with a case of a "*hurting*" person. This lack of identification or exemplification leaves space for speculation about other types of reactions or lack of such from the employees. Instead, the effects of the memo are emphasized by the adjective "*clearly*". This suggests that the results of such a memo are conspicuous and do not need further illustrations to be considered truthful. The similitude appeal (ethos) is again present ("*our co-workers*") thus bringing impacted employees and other audiences closer to the writer.

The example of Tim Cook (2017, June 5) is structured in a similar way: "***Climate change is real** and **we** all share a responsibility to fight it*". Here the author refers to common knowledge about the existence of climate change and intertwines his claim with the transcendent "we" to assign responsibility to every person reading his letter.

CEO statements make use of further systems of reasoning such as examples and evidence. Examples in the form of whole statements are utilized to expose personal stories of the leaders and thus support the stance they are taking: "*My great grandparents came from Germany, Austria and Poland. Priscilla's parents were refugees from China and Vietnam*" (Zuckerberg, M., 2017, January 27). These statements from Mark Zuckerberg emphasize two things. First, they show the normality of immigration in the United States, and second he makes an allusion to the importance of immigrants for his own life, and to the country. Had his great grandparents not moved to the States, Facebook might not have been created, and had his wife's parents opted for a different country to immigrate to he wouldn't have met her. This example also prepares the reader for the following claim that "*the United States is a nation of immigrants, and we should be proud of that*". Unlike the aforementioned illustrations, this claim is supported by the personal examples as a way to establish its truthfulness. These appeals are utilized to provide reasons and logic for the argument defended in the open letter – immigration is crucial for the country and Donald Trump's travel ban is not something to be supported.

Examples are also found as parts of statements: "*Dreamers who work at Apple may have been born in **Canada** or **Mexico**, **Kenya** or **Mongolia**, but America is the only home they've ever known*" (Cook, T., 2017, September 5). Here, the aim of the utterance is more than obvious. By acknowledging the countries of origin of his co-workers, Tim Cook makes it clear for the readers that Apple, and America, are places where diversity is and will continue to be embraced. The

reference to countries of Apple employees can also be considered as an appeal of evidence, since the CEO refers to his company and to his employees. Another instance of evidence is provided by Brad Smith (2017, August 31) who is also referring to information from his company: "*Today we know of **27 employees** who are beneficiaries of DACA*". By acknowledging the number of Microsoft employees affected by the changes in the immigration legislation, he provides evidence of real life cases of people experiencing difficulties due to the aforementioned changes. This evidence brings the issue closer to the audience. Dreamers are no longer a distant conception. They are closer than someone would actually think, and the 27 Microsoft employees proof this.

Enhancing the clarity of CEO utterances is also done by acknowledging the rationale behind specific actions. Thus, justification appeals are also occurring in the data. The announcement of the resignation of Brian Krzanich is followed by such an explanation: "*I resigned **to call attention to the serious harm** our **divided** political climate is causing to **critical** issues, including the serious need to address the decline of American manufacturing*" (Krzanich, B., 2017, August 14). In his statement, the CEO provides a clear and unambiguous reason for his resignation: this is a personal act of calling attention to the political division and the issues it is causing. The significance of the problem is further emphasized by adjectives such as "*serious*", "*divided*", and "*critical*" that support the justification about the leader's resignation.

Another appeal to logos is the utilization of data. This is mainly represented by numbers portraying, for instance, an approximate amount of people ("*more than **140,000** employees in the United States*", Dimon, J, 2017, January 30), amount of money ("*more than $1 million*", Cook, T., 2017, August 31), or percentage ("*16 percent have purchased their first home*", 400 American executives, 2017, August 31). Data is used not only to make a statement clear and focused, but to also support the underlying argument and point of the CEO about the issue at stake. By indicating precise numbers, the leaders make a clear and integral argument about the scope of possible consequences in changes of the DACA legislation. Numbers serve as a proof about the negative repercussions on a serious amount of working or studying Americans, as well as on the American economy. This does not only make the statements clear about the readers, but assigns a certain amount of expertise (ethos) to the CEOs. By utilizing data to support their argumentation they prove themselves as competent and having an in depth understanding of the discussed societal problems. Thus corporate leaders are portrayed as adequate and trustworthy sources of information. Using logos appeals in their statements shows that CEOs do not rely extensively on

their self-presentation as truthful leaders, or on influencing the audience's emotions. They are aware of the issues they are addressing, thus making their opinion and arguments reasonable.

5. Conclusion and Limitations

5.1. Implications of the Research

This research offered an exploratory study of CEO open letters as a form of leadership communication and activism. The study aimed at answering the three research questions stated at the beginning. First, the research was focused at revealing the characteristics the open letters had in common and thus uncovering several defining characteristics of CEO open letters. Second, this research tried to distinguish the purposes of writing open letters and find the frames used for presenting these purposes. Last, but not least, the research aimed at revealing the rhetorical strategies utilized by corporate leaders in their open letters.

The analysis showed that despite the diverse reasons for writing and publishing the CEO open letters, they indeed possess several common features such as similar length, target audience, and elements of communication. Thus one can conclude that corporate open letters adopt similar characteristics which help in distinguishing them from other types of open letters. It also became evident that US CEOs are more active in terms of taking a stand, in comparison to CEOs from other North American and European countries. However, this is disputable, since the analysis also showed that the prevailing part of the open letters is related to issues in the USA.

All open letters in the data are written in response to a problematic, recently occurred event. Furthermore, the letters are published right after the specific case, and present the position of the authors towards the issue. Publishing these letters in short term proposes a sense of urgency and an expected reply or explicitly taken position by the CEOs. Thus, the leaders not only bring the events in the corporate and societal spotlight, but also execute actions that presume criticality of the situation. Taking a stand on societal issues by writing and publishing open letters portrays these letters as symbols of CEO activism.

The analysis showed that corporate leaders utilize framing devices to introduce the purposes for writing a letter. Giving a reason and preparing their further actions, or telling a story, are common ways to present the leaders' motivation. That motivation is namely the endeavor for advocating the personal stance on the issue. Therefore it can be concluded that CEOs take the role of important societal actors and advocates of justice. This role and the frames they utilize allow them to construct a specific vision of the reality through their personal lens. Moreover, using open letters for this aim allows them to reach diverse audiences and thus display their understandings to the world.

Since the research was focused on CEO language, the rhetorical strategies and underlying appeals were crucial for the analysis. The prevailing appeals in the data are the ethos appeals. This leads to the conclusion that CEOs use institutional rhetoric as a core rhetoric type in their open letters related to societal issues. By using pronouns in plural form intertwined with identification, demonstration of past and future successes, and remaining consistent in their stories, corporate leaders depict themselves as credible and rely extensively on this credibility to gain upholders for their understanding of reality. They use this credibility to express disagreement of the status quo and attract like-minded people to support their worldview, and eventually bring about change. Their credibility is further supported by emotional statements of non-literal language and identifications, and logical appeals of claims, data, examples, and the like, which are also prominent in the open letters. The diversity of rhetoric appeals pinpoints the richness of leadership language and portrays CEO open letters as a non-neutral form of leadership communication – leadership activism exercised by a leader's most powerful weapon: words!

5.2. Limitations

Although this research was conducted with high precision and attention, and is based on solid theoretical foundation, one must take in account the nature of the type of analysis. It is presumed that in qualitative research the researcher cannot be completely detached from the process and thus the study can be put in jeopardy (Horsburgh, 2003). This is a limitation that can cause biases in the coding of the data, the analysis, the results, and the conclusions of the thesis. One must always take this in account when it comes to qualitative approach.

The scope of this study must also be considered. The research aimed at analyzing open letters from Europe and the North America. This can cause bias due to several reasons. First, analyzing only open letters from companies based on these continents suggests that a number of open letters from other countries is omitted from the study. Thus the results from the research can be considered credible for Europe and North America, but not for companies from other parts of the world. A broader geographical location of the examined open letters could result in increased generalizability and thus a more reliable study. Moreover, the data showed majority in the open letters from the United States, which, to some extent, excludes Europe from the scope of the research.

Furthermore, opting only for these continents presumes a more narrow scope of issues addressed in the CEO open letters, and even a one-sided view on these issues. One can speculate with the following example: in case open letters from the companies with headquarters in the Muslim-majority countries mentioned in Donald Trump's travel ban are included in the data sample, a broader perspective on the issue could be seen and more viewpoints of CEOs heard. Hence, for instance, a higher variety of frames, or rhetorical strategies could be discovered, or a more complete set of overarching characteristics of CEO open letters could be found.

Another limitation distinguished in the thesis is related to the coding of the data. As already explained, the coding frame consists of five overarching themes and 38 codes. The researcher coded each data segment (each paragraph of the data) by searching for the most relevant code within three of the overarching themes: Purpose of communication, Recognition, and Frames. The other two codes, namely Rhetorical elements and Elements of communication allowed the researcher to discover a variety of the codes in a single data unit. However, one can speculate that this could also be the case for the frames, since one paragraph in the data proved that two frames can co-exist in the same data unit. Although initial coding of the data was conducted beforehand, this does not exclude the possibility for more than one code to be discovered in the units. This, again, could be the case due to the essence of the qualitative approach.

5.3. Further Research

Since the field of open letters, and moreover open letters from corporate leaders, has not been explored enough, there are plenty of possibilities for future research. Taking in account the current research, the conclusions, and the limitations, several suggestions for further exploration of the field of CEO open letters are made.

This research aimed at distinguishing the main characteristics of CEO open letters, the rhetorical strategies, and the frames utilized in the letters. This makes the study more explanatory and thus leaves space for further research of the extent to which open letters from corporate leaders communicate successfully to their audience. The code of Elements of communication was present in the coding frame; however these elements were not explored in terms of their actual success in communicating to the public. Thus, future research can focus on this feature of CEO open letters and explore the exact successfulness of those strategies among the addressees of the

letters. This will provide the study with practical implications and recommendations to corporate leaders.

Since this analysis was focused only on CEO open letters, it will be interesting to interview the authors of those letters and, overall, corporate leaders in order to gain a better and deeper insight into the motivations behind writing an open letter. Future research can focus on the CEO perspective on the open letters by interviewing CEOs and thus delving into their point of view on the issues discussed.

Finally, it will also be interesting to conduct the same study on other geographical locations, or by including open letters written in other languages. This will allow a broader scope on the research in two different directions. On the one hand, expanding the study outside North America and Europe will allow an extensive scope of the issues addressed by CEOs and thus a wider range of common characteristics of the open letters, purposes for the communication, frames, and rhetorical strategies could be found. On the other hand, including more locations, as well as languages will allow looking at a specific issue through several perspectives. This will be advantageous in terms of avoiding a one-sided perspective of the issues discussed in the open letters.

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fires-author-anti-diversity-memo

Appendix A. Open letters

Date	Case	Author	Audience	Length (words)	Link to the letter
February 16, 2016	San Bernardino shooting	CEO of Apple, Tim Cook	Apple customers	1119	https://www.apple.com/customer-letter/
February 22, 2016	San Bernardino shooting	CEO of Apple, Tim Cook	Apple employees	533	https://www.theverge.com/2016/2/22/11092028/apple-tim-cook-fbi-encryption-internal-memo
February 25, 2016	Black lives matter	Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg	Facebook employees	221	https://techcrunch.com/2016/02/25/mark-zuckerberg-asks-employees-to-stop-crossing-out-black-lives-matter-on-facebooks-walls/
February 23, 2016	Brexit	197 UK business leaders	The Times newspaper	131	http://www.itv.com/news/2016-02-23/business-leaders-letter-to-the-times-in-full/
March 29, 2016	House Bill 2	More than 130 leading US CEOs and business leaders	Governor Pat McCrory and the North Carolina General Assembly	224	https://www.hrc.org/blog/breaking-more-than-80-major-ceos-business-leaders-demand-north-carolina-rep
April 5, 2016	House Bill 2	CEO of Red Ventures, Ric Elias	Governor Pat McCrory	328	http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/business/article70026277.html
April 5, 2016	House Bill 2	President and CEO of PayPal Dan Schulman	Open public	328	https://www.paypal.com/stories/us/paypal-withdraws-plan-for-charlotte-expansion
July 8, 2016	Dallas police shooting	CEO of Starbucks, Howard Schultz	Employees	141	https://news.starbucks.com/views/a-message-from-howard-schultz-on-choosing-compassion-and-courage
November 6, 2016	Forthcoming presidential elections	CEO of Starbucks, Howard Schultz	Starbucks employees in the USA	478	https://www.eater.com/2016/11/6/13542868/starbucks-ceo-election-letter
November 9, 2016	Trump's election for US president	CEO of Starbucks, Howard Schultz	Starbucks employees in the USA	280	https://news.starbucks.com/news/onward-together
November 10, 2016	Trump's election for US president	GrubHub's CEO Matt Maloney	GrubHub employees	295	https://media.grubhub.com/media/press-releases/press-release-details/2016/inclusion-and-tolerance-in-the-workplace/default.aspx
November 10, 2016	Trump's election for US president	CEO of Apple, Tim Cook	Apple employees	253	https://mashable.com/2016/11/10/apple-tim-cook-trump-letter/#00wnpXYQ6Eqs
November 2016	Trump exits the Paris climate agreement	U.S. state, local, and business leaders	The international community and parties to the Paris Agreement	334	https://www.wearestillin.com/we-are-still-declaration

January 27, 2017	Travel ban from Donald Trump	CEO of Facebook Mark Zuckerberg	Facebook community	334	https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10103460278231481?pnref=story
January 28, 2017	Travel ban/ DACA	President of Microsoft, Brad Smith	Open public	578	https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/yesterdays-us-executive-order-immigration-satya-nadella/
January 28, 2017	Travel ban	CEO of Uber, Travis Kalanick	Uber employees	564	https://www.businessinsider.nl/uber-ceo-travis-kalanick-will-talk-to-trump-about-immigration-order-2017-1/?international=true&r=US
January 28, 2017	Travel ban	CEO of Apple, Tim Cook	Apple employees	284	https://techcrunch.com/2017/01/28/apple-ceo-tim-cook-sent-an-email-to-employees-about-the-immigration-ban/
January 29, 2017	DACA	CEO of Starbucks, Howard Schultz	Starbucks employees	1248	https://news.starbucks.com/news/living-our-values-in-uncertain-times
January 29, 2017	Travel ban	CEO of Airbnb, Brian Chesky	Airbnb team	465	https://www.cnet.com/news/tech-apple-google-facebook-uber-amazon-airbnb-tesla-microsoft-trump-immigration-ban/
January 29, 2017	Travel ban	BetaKit	Open public	387	https://betakit.com/an-open-letter-from-the-canadian-tech-community-diversity-is-our-strength/
January 29, 2017	Travel ban	Founding CEO & Vice Chairman of GRAIL, Jeff Huber	GRAIL team	458	https://medium.com/@jhuber/standup-on-immigration-executive-order-66e119e6f13c
January 30, 2017	Travel ban	Citi CEO Michael Corbat	His colleagues	127	https://www.businessinsider.nl/citigroup-ceo-corbat-on-trump-immigration-ban-2017-1/?international=true&r=US
January 30, 2017	Travel ban	CEO of Morgan Stanley, James Gorman	Morgan Stanley's employees	103	https://www.businessinsider.nl/morgan-stanley-gorman-memo-on-trump-immigration-ban-2017-1/?international=true&r=US
January 30, 2017	Travel ban	Carl Bass, president and CEO of Autodesk	Employees	236	https://medium.com/@autodesk/standing-with-our-employees-and-immigrants-everywhere-c8cc966cec26
January 30, 2017	Travel ban	CEO of Nike, Mark Parker	Nike employees	288	https://twitter.com/germanotes/status/825873119705497601/photo/1?tfw_creator=danieltpearson&tfw_site=highsnobiety&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.highsnobiety.com%2F2017%2F01%2F30%2Ftrump-muslim-ban-nike-ceo-mark-parker%2F

January 30, 2017	Travel ban	CEO of JP Morgan	Employees	192	https://www.businessinsider.nl/jpmorgan-jpm-memo-on-donald-trumps-travel-ban-policy-2017-1/?international=true&r=US
January 30, 2017	Travel ban	Computer & Communications Industry Association	Open public	195	http://www.ccianet.org/2017/01/ccia-concerned-about-details-broader-message-of-immigration-order/
January 30, 2017	Travel ban	Tech:NYC (more than 400 tech leaders)	President Donald Trump	360	https://www.technyc.org/trumpeo
January 30, 2017	Travel ban	Co-founder of Reddit Alexis Ohanian	Reddit community	728	https://www.theverge.com/2017/1/30/14446470/reddit-alexis-ohanian-donald-trump-immigration-ban-response
January 30, 2017	Travel ban	AnitaB.org Institute	Open public	342	https://anitab.org/blog/abi-opposes-executive-order-immigration/
February 1, 2017	Travel ban	Blizzard president Mike Morhaime	Blizzard employees	217	https://www.polygon.com/2017/2/2/14486022/blizzard-statement-muslim-ban-email-speaks-out-mike-morhaime-president-co-founder
February 2, 2017	Travel ban	Wingz	Wingz customers	165	https://joshtrips.com/2017/02/02/airport-ride-sharing-app-wingz-offers-free-rides-to-those-directly-affected-by-u-s-travel-ban/
February 2, 2017	Travel ban	CEO of Expedia, Dara Khosrowshahi	Employees	460	https://www.cnet.com/news/tech-apple-google-facebook-uber-amazon-airbnb-tesla-microsoft-trump-immigration-ban/
May 10, 2017	Trump exits the Paris climate agreement	CEOs of American companies	Donald Trump	297	https://www.cargill.com/doc/1432087840652/ceo-open-letter-on-paris-agreement.pdf
May 2017	Trump exits the Paris climate agreement	CEOs of 25 American companies	Donald Trump	278	https://www.c2es.org/content/business-support-for-the-paris-agreement/
June 5, 2017	Trump exits the Paris climate agreement	CEO of Apple, Tim Cook	Apple employees	239	https://www.news18.com/news/tech/apple-ceo-tim-cooks-letter-to-employees-on-us-quitting-paris-climate-deal-full-text-1422831.html
August 8, 2017	Anti-diversity memo	CEO of Google, Sundar Pichai	Google employees	466	http://fortune.com/2017/08/08/google-anti-diversity-memo-sundar-pichai-letter/
August 14, 2017	Resignation, Charlottesville	Intel CEO Brian Krzanich	Open public; politicians	255	https://blogs.intel.com/policy/2017/08/14/intel-ceo-leaves-manufacturing-council/
August 14, 2017	Charlottesville incident	CEO of Microsoft, Satya Nadella	Microsoft employees	251	https://qz.com/1053788/satya-nadellas-message-to-microsoft-msft-after-the-attack-in-charlottesville-virginia/
August 15, 2017	Charlottesville incident	CEO of Wal-Mart, Doug McMillon	Open public	229	https://www.cnbc.com/2017/08/15/trump-missed-critical-opportunity-to-bring-

					america-together-wal-mart-ceo.html
August 16, 2017	Charlottesville incident	CEO of Apple, Tim Cook	Apple employees	413	https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/29898 18
August 16, 2017	Charlottesville incident	CEO of JP Morgan, Jamie Dimon	JP Morgan employees	273	http://fortune.com/2017/08/16/jp-morgan-ceo-jamie-dimon-trump-charlottesville/
August 17, 2017	Charlottesville incident	CEO of IBM, Ginni Rometty	IBM team	244	https://regmedia.co.uk/2017/08/16/ginni_ro metty_letter_to_staff_re_trump.jpg
August 31, 2017	DACA	Leaders of American Industries	Donald Trump; Paul Ryan; Nancy Pelosi; Mitch McConnell; Charles E. Schumer	254	https://www.cnbc.com/2017/09/01/the-letter-us-executives-signed-asking-trump-to-save-daca.html
August 31, 2017	DACA	President of Microsoft Brad Smith	Open public	445	https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2017/08/31/dreamers-make-country-communities-stronger/
August 31, 2017	DACA	CEO of Microsoft, Satya Nadella	Open public	253	https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/dreamers-make-our-country-communities-stronger-satya-nadella/
August 31, 2017	Hurricane Harvey Crisis	CEO of Apple, Tim Cook	Apple employees	417	https://www.inc.com/michael-schneider/apple-ceo-tim-cooks-email-to-employees-displays-hi.html
September 5, 2017	DACA	CEO of Apple, Tim Cook	Apple employees	472	https://www.macrumors.com/2017/09/05/ti m-cook-apple-support-daca-employees/
September 5, 2017	DACA	President of Microsoft Brad Smith	Open public	587	https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2017/09/05/urgent-daca-legislation-economic-imperative-humanitarian-necessity/
September 20, 2017	DACA	Leaders of American Industries	Paul Ryan; Nancy Pelosi; Mitch McConnell; Charles E. Schumer	268	https://www.businessleadersdreamletter.co m/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=soc ial&utm_campaign=bizletter

Appendix B. Topics of the open letters

Incident	Explanation	Number of letters	Authors
Immigration ban	On January 27, 2017, President Donald Trump signed an executive order forbidding admission to the US of people from seven Muslim-majority countries: Syria, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Sudan, Yemen, and Somalia thus banning travelers with nationality of those countries to enter the US for 90 days, and threatening Green Card holders of the same restriction (Trump's executive order, 2017).	20	• Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook; • Brad Smith, president of Microsoft; • Travis Kalanick, CEO of Uber; • Tim Cook, CEO of Apple; • Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks; • Brian Chesky, CEO of Airbnb; • Jeff Huber, CEO and vice chairman of Grail; • Michael Corbat, CEO of Citi; • James Gorman, CEO of Morgan Stanley; • The Canadian Tech Community (Betakit); • Carl Bass, president and CEO of Autodesk; • Mark Parker, CEO of Nike; • Operating committee of JP Morgan; • The Computer & Communication Industry Association; • Tech: NYC; • Alexis Ohanian, co-founder of Reddit; • AnitaB.org Institute; • Mike Morhaime, President of Blizzard; • Wingz; • Dara Khosrowshahi, CEO of Expedia.
Charlottesville incident	On August 12, 2017 in Charlottesville, nationalists protested against the removal of Confederate general Robert E Lee's statue. After attacks between protesters and counter-demonstrators, a car rammed into the protesters, killed a 32-year-old woman and injured 19 people (What is the Charlottesville incident, 2017).	6	• Brian Krzanich, CEO of Intel; • Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft • Doug McMillon, CEO of Wal-Mart; • Tim Cook, CEO of Apple; • Jamie Dimon, CEO of JP Morgan; • Ginni Rometty, CEO of IBM.
Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) immigration policy changes	President Donald Trump has decided to end the DACA program that grants work permits to undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children (Somin, 2017).	6	• Leaders of American Industrъ; • Brad Smith, President of Microsoft; • Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft; • Tim Cook, CEO of Apple.
Paris climate agreement exit	In May 2017 United States president Donald Trump announced the withdrawal of the country from the Paris Climate Agreement	4	• Tim Cook, CEO of Apple; • CEOs of large American companies;

	(Shear, 2017).		• CEOs of 25 large American companies; • Over 2,600 leaders from America's city halls, state houses.
Donald Trump elected for president	Donald Trump wins the US presidential elections on November 8, 2016 (Presidential Election Results, 2017).	3	• Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks; • Matt Maloney, CEO of GrubHub; • Tim Cook, CEO of Apple.
House Bill 2	North Carolina's legislature signed a law that reverses previous laws extending rights of gay or transgender citizens (Gordon, Price, and Peralta, 2016).	3	• Over 130 leading US CEOs and business leaders; • CEO of Red Ventures, Ric Elias; • Dan Schulman, President & CEO of PayPal.
San Bernardino shooting	In December 2015 in San Bernardino, California, 28-year-old Syed Rizwan Faroon and his 27-year-old wife Tashfeen Malik killed 14 people and wounded 21 more in a shooting at a Christmas party in the Inland Regional Centre (San Bernardino shooting, 2015).	2	• Tim Cook, CEO of Apple.
Black lives matter	In 2013 the #BlackLivesMatter movement was created as a response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin;s murder, George Zimmerman (Black Lives Matter, n.d.)	1	• Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook
Forthcoming presidential election in the United States	The 58th presidential Elections in the United States, held on Tuesday, November 8th, 2016 (2016 Presidential Elections, n.d.).	1	• Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks
Brexit	On Thursday, 23rd June, 2016, people voted on the British referendum for British exit of the European union (Foster, 2017).	1	• 197 UK business leaders
Anti-diversity memo	In August 2017 software engineer James Damore was fired from Google for publishing a document that criticized the company's diversity efforts, explaining that the imbalance between men and women in the tech industry was attributed to biological differences between both genders (Wong, 2017).	1	• Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google.
Hurricane Harvey	In September 2017, the state of Texas experienced a disastrous flooding due to Hurricane Harvey (Historic disaster response to Hurricane Harvey, 2017).	1	• Tim Cook, CEO of Apple.
Dallas police shooting	On July 7th, 2016, five police officers were shot dead and seven others were wounded in a shooting during an anti-violence protest in Dallas (Grierson, Swaine, and Laughland, 2016).	1	• Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks

Appendix C. Coding frame

Purpose for the communication	Elements of communication	Rhetorical elements	Recognition	Frames: This theme
Purpose for the communication This theme includes the purpose for writing the open letter.	**Elements of communication** This theme present the eight main strategies leaders can use to communicate their messages actively.	**Rhetorical elements** This theme includes the three main rhetorical elements ethos, logos, and pathos.	**Recognition** This theme presents identification as a commonly used rhetoric tactic with the aid of which business with the aim of expressing organizational goals, values, information. This tactic is presented by four categories.	**Frames:** This theme presents the diverse frames used in the data.
Confirm vision and mission of the organization	**Initial values of the organization**: Organizational values	**Ethos** is referred to a speaker, his character, and persuasion abilities. Appeals are: •similitude; •ingratiation; •expertise; •deference; •consistency; •inclination to succeed.	**The common ground technique** where similarity between different units is expressed by referring to contributions, recognizing values, advocating benefits and activities, encouraging identification with the organization, or including quotes that demonstrate commitment.	**Valence framing**: presenting information either negatively or positively.
Drive transformational change	**Clear expectations**	**Logos** puts emphasis on the clarity of a statement, the underlying logic and appeals. Appeals that represent the logos are related to reasoning and argumentation, such as: •justifications, •claims; •data; •evidence; •examples; •attributions.	**Transcendent "we"**, where parties who have less commonalities are able to relate to each other.	**Story framing**: storytelling that encompasses choosing specific ideas focused on the message and utilizing narrative methods to support the selected idea.
Call for action	**Repetitiveness**	**Pathos** is related to the feelings of the audiences and aims at triggering diverse emotions. Pathos appeals are: •metaphors; •identifications.	**Symbols** (names, logos, trademarks)	**Semantic framing**: phrasing terms in alternative way.
Reinforce organizational capability	**Tone of voice**			**Diagnostic framing**: problems and victims are identified; blame and

				responsibility are suggested.
Create motivational environment	**Wording**: careful and strategic utilization of words in order to achieve the goal of the message.			**Prognostic framing**: different ways of addressing an issue are presented, a plan or a solution to the problem are suggested
Framing an issue: an issue is explicitly brought on the foreground and is marked as crucial part of the agenda.	**Conciseness and focus of the message**: the author uses less space to provide big amounts of information.			**Motivational framing**: provides a reason for following actions, and prepares these actions.
Advocating position: supporting a standpoint and providing a reason.	**Motivational speech**: using motivational appeals and urging a call for action.			**Framing of situations**: how language and communication between people construct reality
Exemplification: providing examples from one's personal experience or history.	**Referencing** to stories, events, people, or utterances outside the context of the letter.			**Framing of attributes**: specific characteristics of people, events, or objects are emphasized, while others are ignored, which creates a bias in the received information.
Expressing gratitude: showing appreciation.	**Simplicity**: use of simple and familiar words and sentence constructions.			**Framing of actions**: actions that people take in order to pursue aims and goals
Making an announcement: declaring something.	**Personal values**: the author's own values.			**Issue framing**: alternative views on existing reality
Raising awareness: providing explicit information about already existing data or evidence that is from importance for the audiences.				**Framing of responsibility**: when individuals associate events with either environmental (external) or personal (internal) factors