

COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP FOR CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

A qualitative study on Greek employees' perceptions of the CSR initiatives

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ABSTRACT

Now more than ever, organizations increasingly invest in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability. This is due to the pressure that today's organizations receive from the stakeholders. Despite the importance of employees as vital stakeholders for organization, research studies predominantly focus on the external stakeholders of corporations in the context of corporate social responsibility. However, employees, as a key stakeholder group, can benefit from corporate social responsibility activities by developing their skills. In addition to this, employees can work as brand ambassadors and strengthen organizational reputation. Recent studies indicated that employees have different perceptions of corporate social responsibility due to various factors such as individual traits and job attributes. Researchers suggested investigating further which specific drivers explain their motivations for corporate social responsibility initiatives and what is the role of leadership and internal communication in corporate engagement. In order to further develop the employees' understanding of corporate social responsibility, the aim of this research was to study employees' motivations for corporate social responsibility initiatives and the role of internal communication and leadership as organizational factors. By conducting 14 interviews with employees who work in Greece, this research study uncovered the key motivators that encourage corporate social responsibility, the drivers that block corporate social responsibility, and the role of internal communication and leadership in the process of corporate social responsibility initiatives. The findings allowed the researcher to span multiple levels of analysis (micro-meso-macro). The micro level of analysis indicated that intrinsic motivations shape CSR engagement. The meso level of analysis showed that poor internal communication and indifferent leaders block CSR. The macro level of analysis outlined that macro drivers such as bureaucracy and financial crisis constitute barriers to the implementation of corporate social responsibility. The practical implications of this research can help today's organization build effective internal initiatives for their employees. Finally, this research study paves the way for future research in employees' perceptions of CSR and the different levels of motivations.

Key words: corporate social responsibility, employees' perceptions, internal communication, leadership, motivations

of content

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	4
1.Introduction	5
1.1 Research questions	5
1.2 Scientific and societal relevance.....	6
1.3 Structure	7
2.Theoretical Framework.....	9
2.1 Employee heterogeneity towards CSR.....	9
2.2 Internal communication in CSR	12
2.3 Leadership and CSR.....	14
3.Methodology	18
3.1 Research method	18
3.2 Sampling technique and research sample.....	19
3.3 Recruitment process	20
3.4 Operationalization	22
3.5 Data collection & analysis.....	23
4.Results	26
4.1 Greek employees are intrinsically motivated to contribute to CSR	26
4.2 Poor internal communication in CSR.....	29
4.3 Ethical leaders vesus Indifferent leaders	32
4.4 The function of business sector in CSR.....	34
4.5 Macro drivers block CSR engagement.....	35
4.6 Summary.....	36
5. Conclusion.....	37
5.1 Summary.....	37
5.2 Theoretical and practical implications.....	38
5.3 Limitations and Future research	39
References	43
Appendix 1	50
Appendix 2	53
Appendix 3	54

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Questions

Today, there is a growing importance for organizations to implement corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. According to Telford (2021) 88% of people want to know about a corporation's corporate social responsibility efforts. In addition to this, 78% of both internal (employees) and external (consumers) stakeholders want companies to contribute to society. They increasingly expect organizations to embrace sustainable practices and implement corporate social responsibility activities.

Although Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is variously defined, this study follows the definition of Freeman (1984). According to the author Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a process with purpose to embrace responsibility for the organizations' actions and encourage a positive impact through their initiatives on the environment, consumers, employees and different stakeholders. These initiatives aim to contribute to societal or environmental goals (activism, corporate volunteerism, philanthropy, and trainings) According to Chandler (2020) multinational organizations receive a lot of pressure to invest in sustainable practices and act ethically. Under these conditions, companies need to integrate internal and external CSR initiatives into their business plan by considering both internal and external stakeholders. However, most of the academic research predominantly focuses on the external stakeholders of corporations in the context of CSR. As an exception, Ditlev-Simonsen and Wenstøp(2013) emphasized the importance of internal stakeholders and noted that companies should align with their internal stakeholders' needs and perceptions for a successful and impactful CSR project.

Among the different types of internal stakeholders, employees are essential to any discussion of the CSR's effectiveness and impact. According to Stawiski et al. (2020) increasing the awareness about sustainable business practices among internal stakeholders might make employees brand ambassadors and enhance organization's reputation. Furthermore, these authors mentioned that CSR initiatives can increase the commitment to their organizations. However, they considered employees' perceptions of CSR a significant factor that impacts the organizational commitment. Despite the fact that there are several academic recourses that analyze the importance of CSR for businesses (Calabrese et. al, 2013; Hung Chen, 2011; Książak, 2017) researchers have underlined a lack of scientific studies in relation to employees' views and corporate social responsibility(Rodrigo & Arenas, 2017; Slack et al, 2015). Since, internal

stakeholders are vital for corporate reputation (Cravens & Oliver, 2006), this thesis will attempt to bridge the gap by exploring employees' perceptions of CSR.

In addition, studies (Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014; Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018) have highlighted that internal communication significantly affects the way employees perceive CSR initiatives. More specifically, according to Duthler and Dhanesh (2018), internal communication brings awareness of employees about an organization's CSR activities and sustainable performance. Communicating the CSR practices effectively to internal stakeholders can increase employee engagement by encouraging them to get involved in these initiatives (Genç, 2017). Consequently, clear communication about sustainable practices within the company is vital for motivating employees to participate in CSR initiatives.

Next to internal communication, one more essential organizational factor is leadership (Angus-Leppan et al., 2018). Recent studies have recognized a missing link between the role of leadership in CSR and employee's engagement in these initiatives. According to Wisser (2013), different leadership styles have different effects on employees' perceptions of CSR. Du et al. (2012) revealed that corporations with transformational leadership are associated more with institutional CSR activities. Conversely, transactional leadership is not connected with these types of CSR initiatives, leading scholars to argue a more in-depth look at the role of leadership in shaping employee perceptions of CSR.

Consequently, based on the above academic gaps regarding the personal motivations and the organizational factors, the research questions are:

- a) What motivates employees to (not) participate in CSR?
- b) What is the role of internal communication and leadership in encouraging employees to participate in CSR initiatives?

This study aims to investigate employees' perceptions of CSR initiatives. Hence, the researcher will attempt to fill the scientific gaps by answering the above research questions.

1.2 Societal and Scientific relevance

Several studies (Hung Chen, 2011; Rodrigo et al., 2019) have shown that more and more CSR practitioners are interested in how to ingrain CSR initiatives such as corporate volunteering and donations in their internal policies. Notably, according to CSR professionals, there is a need to investigate employees' understandings in order to implement internally effective CSR activities (Forbes, 2020). In addition to this,

exploring the role of internal communication and leadership in CSR under the scope of internal stakeholders will help the decision-makers to understand deeper employees' needs. According to Caneva (2014), most employees want to engage in CSR and sustainable initiatives if their leaders show commitment to sustainability. Despite the importance of societal relevance, this study will attempt to fill a gap in the existing scientific knowledge as well.

Answering the proposed research questions is scientifically relevant due to the lack of academic theory concerning the topic of employees' drivers in engaging in CSR initiatives. Although some academic resources analyze the importance of CSR for businesses (Calabrese et. al, 2013; Hung Chen, 2011; Książak, 2017) researchers have underlined a lack of scientific studies in relation to employees' views and corporate social responsibility (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2017; Slack et al, 2015). According to Rodrigo and Arenas (2007) employees' traits and worldwide views affect their attitudes towards CSR. For instance, people with higher social intelligence tend to appreciate more CSR initiatives. Also, employees who have positive volunteer programs attitudes are likely to feel pride for participating in CSR activities (Shahzadi et. al., 2019). Rodrigo and Arenas (2017) suggested further research in employees' perception towards CSR. Thus, it would be insightful to unfold employees' underlying mechanism in relation to CSR and investigate how they perceive personal traits, values, and interests in the context of CSR.

1.3 Structure

To accomplish the research goals mentioned above, the structure of this study is as follows: Chapter 2 delves into the conceptual framework and theories that are essential to this study. Firstly, theories on employee heterogeneity in CSR are considered to investigate what are the drivers that explain the different perceptions of CSR. This chapter also outlines existing research on internal communication in the context of CSR and internal stakeholders. The last part of this chapter delineates the role of leadership in CSR and how the different styles of leadership are associated with CSR and employees.

Chapter 3 outlines the research approach and method used to answer the research questions. More specifically, in this chapter, the researcher introduces the research method, the sampling technique, the operationalization, the data collection, the data analysis, and the reliability and validity of the methodology.

Finally, the results are presented in the Chapter 4. The last chapter includes this study's limitations, practical and theoretical implications, and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter includes a review of existing literature on employee personal motivations for CSR such as traits, values, interests, career goals, and level of seniority. Relevant literature on what drives employees to (not) engage in CSR is first outlined followed by the role of organizational factors such as internal communication and leadership.

2.1 Employee heterogeneity towards CSR

Now more than ever, employees care about organizations' intentions to contribute to society. Over half of employees do not want to work for a company that does not have strong CSR and sustainability commitments. Furthermore, according to 78% of employees it is highly important their organizations to encourage them to participate in CSR activities (Cone, 2016). Given the high percentage and positivity associated with such initiatives, there is an assumption that all employees care equally about CSR. Limited research on the topic shows that indeed there are differences among employees due to gender (Stawiski et al., 2020), personal traits (Du et al., 2015), career goals (Rodrigo & Arena, 2007), and level of seniority (Hinzmann, 2019).

Gender does not have an important influence on how employees perceive CSR. Stawiski et al. (2020) conducting a survey stated that male and female employees tend to rate sustainable business initiatives about the same. However, they found that female employees tend to appreciate more CSR and be more committed and productive at work through these initiatives compared to male employees. Nevertheless, there are some individual attributes that affect significantly employees' perceptions of CSR.

A second factor identified influencing employee perceptions in CSR relates to personal traits. Existing research (Raja et al., 2004) emphasized that employees' understandings of CSR are personal and self-constructed. According to Du et al. (2015) CSR initiatives induce different emotions and feelings among employees. More specifically, these different views towards CSR come from individual differences in employees' individual characteristics. In addition to these important findings, Hur et al (2016) working with the sample of 250 employees discovered that people with high creativity tend to appreciate more CSR initiatives rather than employees with low level of creativity. Also, these authors suggested for future studies to analyze to what extent employees' personal traits play a critical role in

CSR. Thus, the researchers mentioned above have recognized a missing link between individuals' traits and perceptions of CSR. One question that arises is: how does creativity influence employees' motivations for CSR?

Creativity boosts employee engagement in CSR. In addition to Raja's et al findings (2004) about the personal traits, Chaudhary and Akhouri (2019) outlined that creativity is associated with employee engagement in CSR. Creative people who want to explore their horizons and skills tend to appreciate more sustainable practices and activities within the organization. CSR initiatives can provide competitive advantage to businesses by encouraging employees to explore their creativity and develop their skills. Nevertheless, the researcher suggested that future research should examine creativity as a driver in CSR in different organizational and cultural context to validate and generalize the results.

Next to individual traits and creativity, job attitudes are key drivers for CSR engagement. Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) have categorized three types of orientations related to work: *job orientation*, *career orientation*, and *calling orientation*. The individual with a "job orientation" works principally for monetary benefits. This type of employee tends not to focus on corporations' ethical and environmental actions. More concretely, the financial rewards lead his/her motivation in the workplace. The individual with a "career orientation" invests in developing his/her professional skills and values. This type of employee tends to appreciate more initiatives that can improve their professional skills. Finally, employee with "calling orientation" tends to set ideological needs and ethical initiatives that align with his/her values at higher priority. This type of employee puts greater importance on ideological needs such as social justice. Sarfraz et al. (2018) reinforced these findings by conducting a research among 300 employees. They found that organizational justice partially mediated employee's perceptions of CSR and there is a positive relation between CSR and people with high organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).

Career goals can explain employee heterogeneity in the context of CSR. Rodrigo and Arena (2007) have classified employees into three main types: committed, indifferent, and dissident employees. They measured three types of job needs: economic, developmental, and ideological needs. The economic need was associated with monetary compensation. The developmental need was measured by two items on chances to sharpen skills for career goals. The ideological need related to the positive impact on society.

Committed employees have positive perceptions towards CSR activities by feeling more engaged at work. Indifferent employees do not care about social and environmental initiatives since they focus on their careers. Dissident employees tend to have opposed views towards CSR initiatives as they feel that firms invest in CSR, ignoring their financial needs. Conducting a cluster analysis, these authors emphasized the importance of employee heterogeneity in the CSR context. They recognized that employee heterogeneity towards CSR is affected by employee's different demands, goals and needs (economic, developmental, and ideological needs). Nevertheless, scholars suggested that further research about employees' traits in the context of CSR is needed to improve organizational strategies.

One more factor identified influencing employee perceptions in CSR relates to tenure. Recent research studies (Aguinis&Glava, 2012; Vlachos et al., 2017) investigated the influence of other workplace factors on employees' perceptions of CSR, such as managers' organizational tenure. They found that managers with high tenure (approximately more than 6 years) tend to motivate more employees in participating in CSR activities. However, they suggested that future research needs to investigate whether the type of job is a significant mediator between employees and CSR.

Finally, one more driver that plays a significant role in how employees engage in CSR is the level of seniority. In addition to Vlachos' et al. findings (2017), Stawiski et al. (2010) mentioned that the level of seniority is a crucial factor in employee engagement in CSR. More explicitly, employees at senior-level positions tend to feel more engaged in their work. Subsequently, they are more motivated for CSR initiatives. Conversely, employees at entry level positions are less motivated for this type of activities within their organizations.

To sum up, research studies (Du et al., 2015; Rodrigo & Arena, 2007) have recognized that personal characteristics, traits, job attributes, career goals are associated with employee views on CSR initiatives. They suggested that future research need to investigate the other factors that influence employees' motivations for CSR. Under these theoretical underpinnings, the researcher investigated the employee perceptions towards CSR initiatives and answered the first research question: What motivates employees to participate or not in CSR?

2.1 Internal communication in CSR

Internal communication is considered a tool to convince employees of the importance of CSR initiatives. Researchers (Du et al., 2010; Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Morsing & Schultz, 2006) have argued that internal communication is an essential driver that can increase awareness about CSR among employees and influence their engagement. However, what are the key elements that have a pivotal role in CSR and internal stakeholders?

One essential component of internal communication that affects CSR engagement is the communication channels. Aguinis and Glavas (2012) by conducting a literature review based on 690 academic resources discovered that communication channels such as emails, newsletters, video conferencing software, and intranet pages can increase CSR engagement and raise awareness among employees. The researchers found that communicating internally CSR initiatives can reinforce employees' trust and commitment in the organization. They suggested that future research need to explore which specific drivers lead to an effective internal communication about CSR and how the decision makers can leverage internal communication tools and increase employee engagement.

A second key driver of internal communication is the role of the spokesperson on CSR. Singh (2013) emphasized the importance of spokesperson (e.g., director, HR, and internal community manager) in the internal communication on CSR. People who lead internal communication process need to consider employees' needs when it comes to promoting internally CSR initiatives. More specifically, according to the authors to build an effective internal communication on CSR, top management has to align with levels of seniority. Organizations can leverage internal communication by bridging the chasm among the different types of seniority levels (from entry level employees to directors). Singh's findings were reinforced by Duthler's and Dhanesh's research (2018). According to these authors internal communication and spokespersons can motivate employees in CSR initiatives. The importance of this research underlies in the significant academic inputs for ineffective internal communication in the context of CSR. They found that impersonal communication within the organization is no guarantee for motivating employee engagement in CSR. By conducting a case study, their findings showed that employees appear to be less engaged in CSR if the spokesperson for CSR ignores the individual and collective

sensemaking. In other words, employees need to know through internal communication that CSR initiatives align with their individual and collective values within the organization.

One more essential factor for internal communication on CSR is employees' perceptions of CSR and their needs. When it comes to implementing an internal communication strategy for CSR, organizations need to consider employees. Grossman (2018) stated that practitioners need to ensure that internal stakeholders have a clear view of what the organization is doing and why for sustainability. According to the author, CSR communication can boost internal stakeholder value, employee engagement, and employer brand recognition. Additionally, he mentioned that the following components are essential for internal communication: alignment, transparency, consistency, stakeholder relevance, and organization's network. More specifically, CSR practitioners need to align their CSR strategies with all the different departments within the organization. Also, the key to increase stakeholder value is to communicate openly and honestly their CSR initiatives. Stakeholder relevance refers to the need for organizations to build CSR practices that employees can relate. Building employer ambassadors within the organization can increase employee engagement and participation in CSR activities. In addition to Grossman's five foundations (2018), Brunton et al. (2018) pointed out that there are some key elements that organizations need to have in order to build an effective CSR communication by considering employees' needs and perceptions. Firstly, according to the authors, organizations need to incorporate CSR initiatives that are meaningful for their internal stakeholders. Moreover, CSR practitioners need to leverage the organizational communication tools and channels. Despite the importance of face-to-face communication, managers need to invest in other communication channels to ensure that employees have a clear view of CSR. Finally, the researchers emphasized that internal communication should be transparent and honest.

Employees, as brand ambassadors, incline to promote their employer through positive word-of-mouth. Researchers (Craig & Allen, 2013; Golob et al., 2013; Kataria et al., 2013) have explored benefits that come from internal communication about CSR for employees. According to employees' perceptions (Kataria et al., 2013), internal awareness of CSR initiatives is associated with the belief that organizations' practices are ethical and transparent. Thus, effective internal communication about

CSR initiatives can turn employees into employer brand ambassadors for their organizations. Sukanya (2015) argued that employees should be the main target of CSR communication. The author explained that by keeping employees informed about CSR, organizations can build a strong reputation through word of mouth. Organizations can regard employees as brand ambassadors providing information. Furthermore, CSR communication can reduce employee turnover by showing that organization is responsible. Despite the reciprocal benefits for both companies and employees, other studies focused on the challenges.

In practice, however, many organizations are constrained by ineffective communication channels and difficulties. Dwakings (2004) mentioned that organizations need to overcome some challenges to build an effective clear communication about CSR. More specifically, this author considered the poor communication channels and the language as key challenges that may block CSR. In addition to this, Heija et al. (2018) outlined that organizations that regard internal stakeholders as homogeneous audience cannot build an effective internal communication strategy for CSR since each employee has different needs. Next to the internal communication, recent studies considered leadership a key factor in employee CSR engagement.

To sum up, researchers (Bibri, 2008; Motwani, 2012) considered internal communication a key driver in implementing CSR initiatives. Bibri (2008) explained that an effective internal communication can increase both the employee engagement and boost the reputation. However, research studies (Heija et al., 2018; Shuilu et al., 2011) suggested that future studies need to investigate how employees perceive CSR communication.

2.3 Leadership in CSR engagement

Next to internal communication as an organizational factor that influences CSR engagement, leadership is a crucial driver. According to recent studies (Banks et al., 2016; De Ruitter et al., 2018) argued that CSR cannot be considered without leaders' contributions and efforts. Leaders can make the strategic decision to incorporate CSR initiatives into their businesses. Also, these research studies indicated that managers shape CSR and employees' motivations. Waldman et al. (2020) suggested that future empirical studies should investigate the place of the corporate leader in implementing

CSR leaders. Hence, there is a growing academic interest in how leaders can contribute to CSR initiatives and motivate their employees.

Leaders need to follow a multidimensional approach when it comes to building a CSR strategy. Moskovicz et al. (2009) introduced the following three approaches to CSR: micro-view, macro-view, and long-term view. Micro-view refers to licenses for organizations to operate sustainably. The macro-view approach means a moral organizational commitment to society and the environment. The long-term view approach refers to the long-term overview of organizational sustainable initiatives. Although the differences between these approaches, the researcher argued that leaders need to consider all the above approaches when it comes to implementing a CSR initiative. Next to Moskocicz's et al. approaches (2009), Ute et al. (2012) suggested three key components that are vital for CSR engagement. According to the authors, for a successful CSR initiatives leaders need to consider the following drivers: motivation, capability, and opportunity. More specifically, leaders need to provide motivations to both external and internal stakeholders such as employees in order to implement an effective CSR strategy. Furthermore, leaders need to ensure the necessary resources and leverage the growth opportunities to make a positive impact on employees. This argument is in line with research (e.g., Gorsk, 2017) which finds that employees rely on their managers for motivation to CSR and that ethical leadership is the key to CSR employee engagement. Therefore, leaders need to consider various factors for a CSR strategy. Nonetheless, following the multidimensional approach mentioned above and considering the different drivers is it enough for leaders to implement an effective CSR strategy?

Ethical leaders can build impactful CSR strategies. Recent studies (Min-Seong & Brijesh, 2018; Zhu et al., 2013) emphasized the importance of ethical leadership. Zhu et al. (2013) found a positive effect on CSR when the ethical leadership was strong. The authors investigated leaders' perceptions from 200 tourism firms in southeast China. They defined *ethical leadership* as the type of leadership that allows managers and directors to act according to moral values that serve the common good. More specifically, according to the authors, ethical leaders can encourage employees to volunteer and participate in CSR initiatives such as charitable donations. Min-Seong and Brijesh (2018) reinforced the previous findings by discovering a strong connection between CSR and ethical leaders. These authors

argued that ethical leadership in CSR can benefit both employees and organization's performance by enhancing corporate reputation. The previous research studies emphasized the benefits that come from ethical leadership in CSR, including great corporate reputation and employee engagement. Therefore, ethical leaders can have a significant impact to employees. Despite the importance of ethical leadership, there are other leadership styles that can influence CSR employee engagement.

Different styles of leadership have different effects on CSR. Du et al., 2013 investigated other types of leadership in the context of CSR. More concretely, they investigated the interplay between the institutional CSR initiatives¹ and the two following leadership styles: transformational and transactional. According to Burns (1978), *transformational leader* communicates his/her vision to different stakeholders. This leader motivates intellectually internal stakeholder and look at employees' different needs and perceptions. On the other side, *transactional leader stimulates employees through potential rewards*. The researchers found that organizations with greater transformational leadership can engage more employees in CSR initiatives compared to transactional leaders. Employees need to have leaders than can guide them and provide a vision Kovjanic et al. (2012) reinforced these findings. More specifically, they found that transformational leaders can foster employee engagement by conducting a quantitative research. Christensen et al. (2014) explained that leaders' characteristics and traits shape CSR effectiveness. They strengthened the findings of the previous research studies mentioned above (Du et al., 2013; Kovjanic et al., 2012) about transformational leadership. Therefore, each leadership style has different effects on employees' engagement in CSR.

Concluding, research studies pointed out that leadership is a crucial driver in implementing CSR initiatives. Leaders can inspire and motivate their employees by participating in CSR activities. According to the literature (Min-Seong & Brijesh, 2018; Zhu et al., 2013) ethical leadership is the key to employee engagement. By considering both internal communication and leadership crucial organizational drivers in CSR, the following research question arises: What is the role of internal communication and leadership in encouraging employees to participate in CSR

¹Bradly & Nathan (2018) defined *institutional CSR* as a form of CSR initiatives whereby organizations respond to state and society level antecedents within a developing economy context (p.11). These CSR initiatives are associated with more long-term organizational benefits such as positive image and strong stakeholders' relationships.

initiatives? The next chapter describes the methodology the researcher used to answer the research questions.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research method and the steps that researcher followed to fill the gap in the existing literature. More specifically, this section delves into the following steps: the sampling process, the research sample, the operationalization, and the data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research method

In order to answer the following research questions: a) What motivates employees to (not) participate in CSR b) What is the role of internal communication in CSR initiatives and gain a better understanding of employee perceptions towards CSR, a qualitative research method was chosen. Qualitative research entails collecting and investigating non-numerical data to discover concepts, attitudes, experiences, and views (Gill et al., 2008). According to Patton (2005), the qualitative method is interpretive and theoretical in its nature. It attempts to understand and interpret human relations and behaviors. Furthermore, the qualitative approach investigates the hidden reasons and causes behind behaviors and attitudes. This study's main goal was to investigate the employees' meaning-making process related to CSR activities and identify the drivers that play a crucial role in their CSR engagement. Having this in mind, a quantitative approach was not suitable for this study since the researcher does not aim to confirm a theory or test a hypothesis. Therefore, since this research study examines employees' understanding of CSR activities, a qualitative research was appropriate for the research questions.

Despite the variety of the research methods (case studies, content analysis, and focus group) that the researcher can use in the topic of employees' perceptions of CSR (Gill et al., 2008), an in-depth discussion is needed to gain employees' insights. Due to the interpretive nature of this study, semi structured in-depth interviews were deemed appropriate for the research topic of employees' understandings towards CSR. In-depth interviews are used to delve into individuals' attitudes and thoughts about a specific topic. Moreover, the researcher treats the interview data as a co-production of meaning that the interviewer has an active role (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999). During the interviews, the researcher investigates how the respondent uses common symbols, narratives, and meaning such as experiences and personal opinions. For the conduction of semi-structured interviews, the researcher pre-

establishes themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions, but the conversation is open to changes of themes and forms of questions following up the answers and stories of the participant (Kvale, 2007). As this study aimed to identify the key motivations that play a significant role in encouraging employees to engage in CSR, the researcher explored employees' views through this interactive research method.

Furthermore, it is important to delineate the main advantages of the semi structure in-depth interviews. According to Legard et al. (2003) the in-depth interviews' advantages are the following: the combination of structure and flexibility, this method's interactive nature, the range of probes and different techniques, and the fact that interviews are generative by allowing the respondents to use their own language of understanding. Based on these benefits, it was understood that in-depth interviews were the most suitable data collection method to answer the research questions regarding employees' perspectives and attitudes of ethical and responsible activities in the organizations' context.

3.2 Sampling technique and research sample

This research study focused on employees and not specific groups, companies, or media. Since there is a gap in the academic literature related to employees' attitudes and thoughts about CSR initiatives (Bhattacharya et. al, 2008; Rodrigo & Arenas, 2007), it was deemed suitable to conduct a research based on people and not on companies' contents and reports about CSR.

To answer the research questions, the population of this thesis was defined as ongoing employees who work in Greece. Even though CSR initiatives in Greece are increasing (Costopoulou et al., 2018; Skoloudi et al., 2011), there is still a need for improvement and development since internal stakeholders appear to be ignored. Furthermore, studies (Bichta, 2003; Chymis et al., 2011) stated that some factors block CSR development in Greece. More specifically, these authors mentioned that CSR in Greece is not a priority of the organizations' agenda since there is a lack of financial support. In addition to this, most Greek organizations appear to be resistant to changes and innovative practices that come from CSR. Costopoulou et al. (2018) stressed the need for future research in Greek employees and CSR since there is increasing internal pressure for sustainable corporate initiatives. Therefore, interviewing Greek employees was considered relevant and timely to explore if Greek companies encourage employees in CSR initiatives.

The interviews with the Greek employees allowed the researcher to illustrate which specific drivers are essential in encouraging employees to participate in CSR initiatives and how vital are internal communication and the role of leadership in the specific context of Greece. Furthermore, these interviews showed how important it is for Greek companies to invest in CSR.

The sample in this research was a nonprobability sampling since the units being interviewed were ongoing employees who work in Greece since the existing literature suggests future research to investigate internal stakeholders' perceptions of CSR in Greece (Costopoulou et al., 2018). According to Setia (2016), non-probability includes non-random selection based on specific criteria. This sampling strategy helps the researcher in collecting easily and quickly the data. Conversely, probability sampling allows researchers to gather representative sample by examining larger populations. However, based on the purpose and the requirements of this research, nonprobability sampling was deemed the most suitable for the data collection.

The researcher used both purposive and snowball sampling to approach the interviewees. According to Acharya (2013), the purposive sampling method is selected based on specific criteria of a population and the purpose of the study. For this research study, the researcher selected only ongoing employees who work in Greece. The main advantage of purposive sampling are the velocity and accuracy. This is time and cost-effective method by allowing the researcher to find the appropriate participants in the quickest way (Emmel, 2013). However, this method is open to biases since the recruitment process is based on the researcher's judgment.

In addition to this method, the snowball sampling allowed the researcher to approach participants outside of his network (Naderifar et al., 2013). More specifically, the first interviewees suggested other potential participants with the same characteristics. Therefore, the combination of these methods led the researcher to find the participants easily with the specific criteria mentioned above.

3.3 Recruitment process

As the researcher highlighted the study's sampling criteria, this section focuses on the recruitment process and steps followed to approach the participants.

The researcher recruited the participants through social media platforms. He asked for participants by sharing a post on Instagram and LinkedIn (see Appendix A). According to Sharaburyak et al. (2020), social media platforms can help researchers to find participants easily and increase the research study's awareness. The researcher

asked for ongoing employees who work in Greece. The first participants reacted to these posts and got in touch with the researcher. Afterward, the researcher communicated the purpose of this thesis and the consent form to the participants. Additionally, they were informed for the procedure and duration of the interview. Finally, the interviews were scheduled based on interviewees' availability.

The researcher carried out 14 interviews from April 20th to May 24th. The interviews lasted between 40 to 60 minutes. The sample included 11 female employees and 3 male employees. According to Stawiski et al. (2010) gender is not playing a significant in how employees perceive CSR. Based on this finding, the researcher did not attempt to have a balance between women and men. The interviewees worked in different positions (e.g., sales, tourist agent, learning consultant, secretary and, tutor) for corporations in different industries (e.g., education, telecommunication healthcare, tourism, and hospitality). Also, employees with many years of work experience (approximately more than 5 years) tend to have strongest views and perceptions of their working conditions (Verhofstadt et al., 2017) Having this in mind, 7 out of 14 interviewees had more than 5 years of experience. This helped the researcher to investigate the importance of employment tenure in the way employees perceive CSR. Finally, interviewees' ages span from 24 years to 57 years old. All the interviews were conducted in Greek. The researcher transcribed verbatim all the interviews. Afterwards, he translated all the 14 interviews to English. below table presents interviewees' profiles.

Table 1

Interviewee profile

Name	Age	Positions	Industry	Years of working experience
Stelina	26	Learning Consultant	Construction	4 years
Maria	26	Human Resources Partner	Food Industry	4 years
Andreas	57	Doctor	Healthcare	32 years
Anna	24	Secretary	Transport	3 years
Eleftheria	27	Tutor	Education	5 years

Evita	55	Tutor	Education	30 years
Evelyn	27	Assistant manager	Hospitality	5 years
Anna	27	Call agent	Telecommunication	4 years
Manos*	37	Marketing	Media	12 years
Marion	40	Sales and Learning consultant	Fashion	15 years
Xenia	40	Travel agent	Tourism	18 years
Nikos*	42	HR partner	Shipping company	8 years
Sia	25	Sales	Telecommunication	5 years
Sonia	25	Secretary	Healthcare	4 years

Pseudonym names were created for each participant

* NDA = non-disclosure agreement

3.4 Operationalization

The interview guide was formulated based on the research questions and the existing academic gaps (see Appendix 1). The following topics were emerged: employee personal motivation for CSR, internal communication of CSR, and the role of leadership in CSR. According to Bryman and Bell (2013) semi-structured interviews do not strictly follow a list of questions. The Interviewers asked more open-ended questions by encouraging interactive communication between the researcher and the respondent.

Firstly, the researcher aimed to investigate employees' general perceptions of CSR. According to Farooq and Jasimuddin (2014), employees do not have a common understanding of what CSR is. Having this on mind, it was crucial to ask employees to define CSR and share their initial thoughts about corporate sustainable practices. In addition to this the researcher asked them to share personal experiences regarding their participations in CSR initiatives. Finally, the researcher through some questions examined how the organizations in Greece invest in CSR.

After identifying Greek employees' initial thoughts about CSR, the first topic is the personal motivations. According to Rodrigo and Arenas (2007) employees have different perceptions of CSR initiatives. More specifically, they want to participate in CSR activities for different reasons. Based on the academic resources (Farooq & Jasimuddin, 2014; Rodrigo & Arenas, 2007), the researcher asked the Greek

interviewees how their personal motivations such as personal interests, traits, career goals play a significant role in engaging in CSR activities. The questions were based on Rodrigo's and Arenas' interview guide (2007) since they conducted a similar research about employees' motivations and CSR. Their interview guide helped the researcher to include some sub-topics in the interviews such as personal traits and career goals. However, since the researcher wanted to be flexible and open to new outcomes and unexpected findings (Adams & Cox, 2008) he did not ask how specific traits and motivations such as creativity influence their willingness to participate in a CSR initiative. For instance, the interviewees were asked whether specific individual traits, interests, and worldview shape their willingness to engage in CSR. Finally, the researcher asked the participants what were the factors that block CSR engagement.

Next to the personal motivations, the researcher asked employees about the role of the organizational factor such as internal communication and leadership. According to Duthler & Dhanesh (2018), internal communication is a key driver that motivates employees to participate or not in CSR initiatives. Additionally, Kataria et al. (2013) stated that the effective internal communication can encourage employees to get involved in corporate sustainable initiatives. For example, the researcher asked employees how essential the internal communication in Greek organizations is, how their employers communicated these initiatives, and what communication channels they used in previous CSR initiatives.

The third topic is the role of leadership in encouraging employees to participate in CSR activities. According to Du et al. (2018) there is a link that connects the different leadership styles and the CSR practices. More concretely, these authors outlined that the ethical leadership seems to be the most effective style of leadership in the context of CSR. Based on these findings, the researcher examined employees' perceptions of leadership and CSR. He asked the interviewees about their experiences and views on how their managers communicate their organizations' sustainable practices. For example, he asked whether interviewees' managers are interested in CSR and sustainability.

Despite the significant role of the three topics mentioned above in the interview flow, the researcher followed these steps to ensure a smooth process: The interviewer started the conversation by thanking the participant for their willingness to contribute to this research. Afterward, the participant received some information about the background of this thesis and the consent form. The next step was to ask for

permission to audiotape. According to (Abbe& Brandon, 2014) interviewees need to feel comfortable during the interviews. Throughout the interview, the researcher listened actively to the interviewees 'experiences and opinions to ensure an interactive conversation. During the last part of the interviews, the interviewer asked the participants if they wanted to mention something else that they may miss. Finally, the researcher thanked all the interviewees for their help.

Finally, the researcher followed the methodological guidelines by the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (2020-2021). All the interviewees received a consent form before the interviews. The consent form included information about the topic and the aim of the study. Also, the researcher made clear through this form that there are no risks associated with participating in this study. The participation in this research study was voluntary for all interviewees. The researcher did not provide any compensation (e.g., voucher) to participants.

3.5 Data collection & analysis

The researcher conducted 14 interviews to answer the research questions. Firstly, a pilot interview was conducted to test the interviews' effectiveness. The pilot interview helped the researcher to ensure smooth interviews for all the participants by spotting some mistakes such as overlapping and vague questions. According to Holstein and Gubrium(1999), pilot interviews are essential since they can help the researcher to interview the participants more effectively.

The data collection lasted one month since the in-depth interviews were time-consuming and the researcher needed enough time to conduct them. Due to the current situation with COVID-19, the interviews were be conducted online using online platforms such as ZOOM and Microsoft Teams. To achieve a better understanding of each participant's view, the interviews were conducted with duration between 40' and 60' minutes. Before the interviews, the participation consent form were given to participants in order to inform them about the research, their rights, and the data privacy. The interviewer audiotaped all the interviews by asking participants' permissions. Afterward, the researcher transcribed the interviews and translated them in English.

A thematic analysis was conducted to analyze the interview transcripts. According to Van Dormolen (1986), the thematic analysis is used to describe, interpret, and understand texts. In this way, the researcher delved into the interviewees' understandings and perceptions of CSR. More specifically, the thematic

analysis followed the subsequent steps: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Firstly, the researcher went through all the transcripts before analyzing the individual interviews. During this step, he took initial notes. Afterwards, the researcher generated some initial codes by highlighting some phrases and keywords from the transcripts. Then, he identified key patterns and generated themes by comparing the codes. To ensure that themes represented the data (interview transcripts), the researcher reviewed them. After listing the key themes, he found the appropriate names. Finally, the researcher wrote the analysis based on the themes.

During the process of coding, the researcher followed these steps: a) open coding, b) axial coding c) selective coding. Open coding is the first step to break the interview transcripts into discrete parts and create initial coding (Given, 2008). During the coding process, the researcher will keep notes and lists to identify similarities. The purpose of open coding is to analyze and categorize the raw data systematically. The researcher found connections and relationships between the textual features. The open coding was followed by axial coding.

According to Given (2008), during the axial coding, the researcher found main connections and relationships between the codes. In this stage, further analysis will be carried out to aggregate codes into broader categories. The final step was the selective coding. During this stage, the researcher selected one category to be the core category and attempted to find commonalities to all other categories to this core category.

To sum up, by following the steps mentioned above (sampling, recruitment, interviews, transcripts, thematic analysis), the researcher answered the above research questions: 1) What motivates employees to (not) participate in CSR? 2) What is the role of internal communication and leadership in encouraging employees to participate in CSR initiatives? The next chapter outlines the key themes that emerged from the analysis

Chapter 4

RESULTS

This chapter outlines the results of the analysis of 14 interviews with employees who work in Greece. The purpose of this research is to understand employees' perceptions of CSR and delve into their motivations for CSR initiatives. Additionally, since recent research (Angus-Leppan et al., 2018; Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018) stated that leadership and internal communication are critical drivers for CSR engagement, this research aims to investigate the importance of these two factors for Greek employees. The results allowed the researcher to span multiple levels of analysis, including micro-meso-macro levels. The meso level refers to the following organizational factors: internal communication and leadership. The researcher identified the following themes: 1) Greek employees are intrinsically motivated to contribute to CSR 2) Poor internal communication in CSR 3) Ethical leaders versus Indifferent leaders 4) The function of business sector in CSR 5) Macro drivers block CSR engagement

4.1 Greek employees are intrinsically motivated to contribute to CSR.

The analysis of the interviews indicated that micro factors shape CSR engagement. Micro factors refer to employees' intrinsic motivations such as personal interests, individual attributions, and employee relations.

The analysis of 14 interviews showed that personal drivers such as attributes, interests, and opinions motivate employees to engage in CSR initiatives. More specifically, all 14 interviewees considered the personal factors mentioned above essential motivators to contribute to CSR activities.

Focusing on the individual attributes, the vast majority of the interviewees (13 out of 14) considered compassion a critical motivator for CSR initiatives.. An important remark here is that all interviews, irrespective of their educational background, years of experience, and job position considered compassion a key intrinsic driver. Moreover, interviewees repeatedly used words such as empathy, care, sympathy, and social sensitivity to illustrate compassion as a key driver in participating in CSR initiatives. 7 out of 14 interviewees considered themselves compassionate. They explained that their desire to help others and society, in general, makes them want to engage in CSR activities. For instance, Xenia (40, Travel agent)

explained that she, as an individual, wants to contribute to society and that her ability to recognize others' issues encourages her in CSR. In addition to this example, Sofia (25, Secretary) illustrated her compassion as followed:

I believe that, as an individual, I am very compassionate. I am really interested in social and environmental issues. I am a person with high social sensitivity. For example, during my childhood I got involved in some projects about the recycling. I grew up caring about the environment. So, I do believe that my childhood played an important role in how I understand social and environmental issues.

Next to compassion as an individual attribute, inquisitiveness was cited as an essential driver for CSR engagement. More specifically, they argued that their thirst for knowledge is a crucial motivator for CSR programs. They explained that they, as individuals, want to explore their horizons and knowledge through CSR initiatives. The example of employees' trainings was repeatedly given by interviewees to describe inquisitiveness as a personal motivator. They argued that they are interested in CSR initiatives that include e-learnings and trainings due to their eagerness to learn new things. An important observation is that the majority of those responders (4 out of 5) work in HR department. Marion (40, Sales and learning consultant) explained:

I love exploring new things and learn more things. I love experimenting! My curiosity and inquisitiveness encourage me in participating in CSR initiatives. For instance, I participated in an internal CSR program about employees and customer service since I wanted to develop my skills on this.

Evelyn (26, assistant director) emphasized her eagerness to participate in trainings as part of CSR programs. She explained:

Through CSR initiatives I really want to sharpen my skills. For instance, during the last summer I participated in a CSR initiative that included some e-learnings for employees' hard skills. So, I feel that my thirst for knowledge is important in how I perceive these activities.[...] I feel more engaged when I participate in activities that I personally like.

Personal interests were mentioned by the majority of as a significant intrinsic motivator for CSR engagement. Interviewees stated that their interests influence the way they perceive corporate sustainable practices and engage in CSR. They argued that their personal interests in human rights, women's rights, and environment encouraged them to get involved in CSR initiatives. Anna's (26, call agent) passion about human rights such as LGBTQ+ rights motivated to engage in initiatives about minorities. More concretely, the respondents said that they are more willing to participate in CSR initiatives when these activities align with their personal interests. Evelyn (26, assistant director) ranked personal interests as the most important

motivator for CSR engagement. She explained that she wants to get involved in activities that align with her interests such as arts and sports.

Next to the personal interests, volunteerism and prior experience as volunteer was associated with positive perceptions of CSR. A small minority explained that their experience as a volunteer is associated with their positive perceptions of CSR. 4 interviewees considered volunteerism a motivator to participate in CSR activities. They argued that their experiences at volunteer organizations have made them realize the importance of sustainable corporate practices. Manos (37, Marketeer) explained:

Volunteerism has taught me that we need to care about social issues and problems such as poverty, unemployment, and climate change. Due to my experience in social volunteer activities, I always look how companies invest in CSR and corporate volunteer programs. It is really important to work in a business that promotes authentic CSR programs.

Others mentioned online donations and e-volunteering to illustrate how the personal interests influence their perceptions of CSR activities. Sonia (25, Secretary) argued that she participates often in online donations about environmental issues such as global warming and climate change. Thus, according to the interviewee's personal interests motivate them to engage in CSR activities.

In addition to this, environmental and social initiatives attract employees. 13 out of 14 interviewees mentioned that they are willing to participate in CSR activities that relate to social and environmental issues. Hence, environmental and social activities within the company appear to motivate employees to engage in CSR.

To illustrate the intrinsic motivations, interviewees (4 out of 14 interviewees) gave some examples of some CSR programs that they launched within the organization. They emphasized their personal efforts and attempts to build internal CSR programs. Anna (25, secretary) mentioned that she took the initiative to create a recycling internal program for the organization. She explained that her worries about the paper waste in the organization motivated her to start these initiatives. Another (Marion, 40, Sales & learning consultant) concurred:

Since we did not have recycling bins in our offices, I took the initiative to send a request to the director of our team. I explained him that it would be essential to buy recycling bins at our offices. This encouraged my team members in embracing sustainable practices in their daily lives.

Nonetheless, some interviewees (5 out of 14) expressed their concerns about CSR initiatives. They mentioned that there are some drivers that can block their

willingness to participate in CSR activities.3 interviewees said that when CSR initiatives are not authentic and work as marketing tools, they do not want to engage. The interviewees repeatedly used words such as *unauthentic, dishonest,insincere, hypocritical* to support their arguments against CSR. Evelyn (27, Assistant Director) said:

I am a big supporter of CSR and sustainability. However, sometimes these initiatives are not honest and transparent. As marketing tools, they aim to mislead both customers and employees. [...] I cannot image myself participating in unauthentic CSR activities.

Others considered work pressure a significant blocker in CSR. Interviewees explained that they do not want to participate in a CSR initiative when they feel pressure. Eleftheria (27, Tutor) highlighted:

I really appreciate sustainable projects, activities, innovations. I usually want to engage in these initiatives. However, work pressure discourages sometimes to join in these activities. If my employer pressures me to participate in a CSR activity, I don't want to join this activity. This is hypocritical.

Therefore, all interviews regarded intrinsic motivations as an important factor in CSR engagement. Therefore, the personal drivers mentioned above constitute a key motivator for organizational focus on CSR. Hence, micro-factors have a crucial role in employees' motivations for CSR. Individual attributions, personal interests, experiences (volunteerism) can motivate Greek employees to engage or not in a CSR activity. According to the interviewees, employee relations can be a challenge in CSR engagement since some employees tend to not appreciate CSR.

4.2 Poor internal communication in CSR.

The interviewee's responses allowed the researcher to present the results at the multiple levels. This section refers to the meso level of analysis including the internal communication. All Interviewees considered internal communication a primary factor that influences their perceptions of CSR. Despite the interviewees' demographic and personal differences (the years of working experience, the level of seniority, and the business sector), they mentioned that internal communication is one of the most important organization factors in CSR employee engagement. A significant observation is that the interviewees who work in Human Resources department used specific examples to illustrate the importance of internal communication. Stelina (26, Learning Consultant) explained:

Internal communication is one of the most significant drivers in CSR. My working experience so far has taught me that we cannot consider CSR without clear communication within the organization. [...] If you want your employees to engage in CSR, you need to give them a clear picture of CSR initiatives. As a learning consultant, I try to communicate trainings and e-learnings with employees through some newsletters. I try to leverage all the communication channels.

Maria (26, Human Resources Partner) pointed out that internal communication is a vital driver that can influence employee engagement in CSR. To support her argument, she used an example from her professional working experience. She argued:

I work in HR department. During my career I learned that internal communication is a vital factor for employee engagement. If you want to engage your employees, you need to communicate these initiatives with them. Newsletters, meetings, and intranet pages are important tools that employers can use to promote CSR and sustainability within the organization.

Clear communication is important for employees. The interviewees argued that internal communication about CSR needs to be clear and accurate. They explained that clear messages can communicate more efficiently the purpose of CSR initiatives and ambiguities can be avoided. Marion (40, Sales and Learning) explained:

To build a successful CSR strategy you need to communicate clearly all the details that are relevant to these initiatives. Clear communication is the most important for organizations. Organizations can avoid many misunderstandings by communicating clearly and correctly these initiatives.

These findings strengthened the previous literature (Du et al., 2010; Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Morsing & Schultz, 2006) about the importance of internal communication in CSR. Nonetheless, in practice the majority of the interviewees (9 out of 14) emphasized the poor internal communication for CSR in Greece. Hence, despite that interviewees recognized that internal communication is a key factor in CSR, they raised concerns about the quality of this type of communication (poor channels of communication and vague messages).

Moreover, there is a lack of internal communication channels. About the half of interviewees emphasized their organizations do not use many communication channels for CSR. They explained that their organizations used informal ways of communication for CSR initiatives such as face-to-face communication and phone calls. Adam (57, Doctor) expatiated:

The organization where I work does not leverage any communication tool such as social media or online platforms for CSR. We do not even have an email for our organization.

In addition to Adam's inputs, Sonia (25, Secretary) explained that her organization communicates with its employees only through emails. Some interviewees argued that their organizations do not invest in communication channels for CSR. Furthermore, Anna (24, Secretary) argued:

Unfortunately, my company does not invest in CSR communication. [...] No, we do not have an intranet page. It's a shame that my company do not pay enough attention to sustainability.

In addition to the lack of internal communication, vague communication is a blocker. The interviewees considered ambiguous communication a significant barrier in CSR and employee engagement. They gave some examples from their working experience to delineate how vague communication can discourage and confuse employees in CSR activities. Evita (55, Tutor) highlighted:

I mean unclear communication is an issue. Many colleagues at my organization were being discouraged to engage in some initiatives due to unclear communication.

Interviewer: What do you mean by saying unclear communication?

Evita: Hmmm. Well, the organization where I work organized an initiative about sustainability. It was like training for employees. Unfortunately, the director did not communicate clearly the significance and the purpose of this training. As a result, few employees wanted to join.

Furthermore, Greek organizations need to leverage more the opportunities that come from internal communication for CSR. Interviewees stressed the need for organizations to invest more in CSR. The vast majority argued that Greek organizations need to invest more in CSR communication and use more channels. Maria (26, Human Resources Partner) outlined:

Nowadays, due to the rising necessity for sustainable practices, companies need to invest more in CSR communication. Despite the progress that I observe in my organization, employers should communicate effectively these initiatives by using some tools like social media etc. [...] For instance, my organization needs to be less conservative when it comes to CSR communication and diversity.

Even though that most interviewees considered internal communication an issue in Greek organizations, 5 respondents had opposite views by sharing positive experiences. They supported their arguments by describing some effective internal

communication strategies about CSR. Evelyn (27, Assistant Director) delineated an example from her organization about women's rights at the workplace:

I am really happy to see that my organization support women's rights. Granted that MeToo movement is happening right now in Greece, my organization took the initiative to prevent sexual harassments and gender discrimination at work by implementing new policies. They communicated effectively these policies and initiatives through webinars, newsletters, and meetings.

However, one significant observation is that this interviewee works for an organization that is supported financially by an international philanthropic organization. She explained that her organization is an exception.

Concluding, Greek employees emphasized the poor internal communication in the context of CSR. According to the interviewees, most of the Greek organizations use informal ways of communications for CSR initiatives and sustainability. Nonetheless, the majority of the interviewees viewed internal communication as vital driver. Next to internal communication, interviewees analyzed the importance of ethical leadership in CSR employee engagement.

4.3 Ethical leaders versus Indifferent leaders

All interviewees touched upon the role of leadership in CSR engagement. As the literature review (Macaulay et al., 2017; Sorkin 2017) indicated that there is a strong relationship between CSR and leadership. In fact, the interviewees reinforced the previous literature by considering leadership a key factor in CSR. 6 out of 14 interviewees pointed out that today's Greek leaders should contribute to society through CSR and sustainable business practices. For instance, Sia (25, Sales) argued:

Leaders play an important role in CSR. For example, they, as role models, can encourage employee in living a greener life.[...] If you want to be a leader, you need to know how to encourage your employees to participate in initiatives that promote the common good. Due to the societal and environmental issues, leaders need to step up and help society.

The vast majority of the interviewees emphasized the importance of ethical leadership for CSR. According to the participants ethical leaders are important for Greek organizations since they can inspire and motivate them at their workspaces. Interviewees analyzed ethical leaders' traits in the context of CSR. To illustrate ethical leaders, they repeatedly used words such as authentic, honest, sincere, and transparent. For example, Stelina (25, Learning Consultant) said:

Ethical leadership is vital for today's organizations. Companies need to align their CSR strategies with their leaders' aspirations. [...] Ethical leaders are honest and authentic. They are transparent about their organizations' performance. I feel that employees tend to trust more authentic leaders.

Next to honesty as key trait for ethical leadership, interviewees mentioned that ethical leaders are humane.⁵ Interviewees outlined that today's leaders need to kind and respect their employees. Sonia (25, Secretary) explained that ethical leaders should act in a respectful manner in order to build strong relationships with their employees. In addition to this, she mentioned that ethical leaders need to engage in environmental and societal initiatives. She said:

Ethical leadership is a key driver for CSR. [...] Ethical leaders are polite and kind with their employees. They inspire their colleagues to engage in sustainable projects. Ethical leadership means that your manager is interested in social and environmental issues.

Despite the significance of ethical leadership in CSR, participants highlighted that in practice the situation in Greece is different. According to the interviewees, Greek leaders do not invest in CSR. They associated indifferent leaders with apathy and dishonesty. One interesting observation is that these traits are the opposite traits that participants mentioned for ethical leaders (sincere, honesty, and transparency). According to them, leaders tend to ignore the importance of CSR and sustainability and prefer to invest in other initiatives. 6 out of 14 interviewees described Greek leaders as indifferent when it comes to building a CSR strategy. They expressed their disappointment about Greek leaders' perceptions of CSR. For instance Xenia (40, Travel agent) explained:

No...Not at all. My director does not care about CSR. I don't think that he knows what this term means...Hahahah. It is so sad. He seems kind of indifferent to employees' needs.

In addition to Xenia's inputs, Manos (37, Marketing) argued that his manager is not interested in sustainability. His leader thinks that CSR is a waste of time and money. He mentioned:

It is so sad that my line-manager is not interested in these initiatives. He focuses only on how we can improve our market performance. [...]: Actually, I am disappointed from my leaders' practices and attitudes towards CSR.

Other respondents analyzed the reasons behind Greek leaders' indifference to CSR. They argued that there are some macro factors such as financial difficulties that block Greek leaders to invest in CSR. Others underlined that Greek leaders are not

well educated about CSR. Therefore, the findings indicated a multidimensional approach towards the reasons that explain Greek leaders' indifference. Evita (55, Tutor) explained:

My directors do not invest in CSR as much as I want to invest. However, I know that the financial crisis does not allow organizations to spend some money to trainings, innovation projects, sustainability etc. It's a shame [...]! I think that managers in Greece are not educated about the importance of CSR in organizations. [...] Other leaders believe that CSR is a waste of time.

Nevertheless, there are some exceptions that support Greek leaders' efforts on CSR. One significant observation is that participants who had positive views on internal communication in Greece, they expressed similar opinions for leadership. 2 interviewees explained that despite they work in organization that promote internally CSR, Greek leaders in general seem to ignore CSR activities. For instance, Evelyn (26, Assistant manager) mentioned:

My manager is very supportive. She encourages me to participate in these initiatives such as trainings etc. [...] She always cares about my mental health and wellbeing. I really appreciate her attitude. However, this is not common in Greece.

In conclusion, interviewees emphasized the significance of ethical leadership for CSR engagement. According to them, ethical leader can inspire employees through his/her honesty. Nonetheless, in practice Greek employees mentioned that managers and directors do not care about CSR and sustainability.

4.4 The function of the business sector is a major factor in how employees perceive CSR.

The analysis of the interviewees indicated that the business sector influences the way employees perceive CSR. 6 out of 14 interviewees mentioned that they considered the business sector a critical driver for CSR engagement. More specifically, they used examples from their working experience to delineate this motivator. Adam (55, Doctor) explained that his role in the healthcare industry has shaped his perceptions of CSR an sustainability since he works for the common good. For instance, Eleftheria (27, Tutor) explained:

I feel that my role at my workplace, as a tutor, shapes my interest in sustainable projects, CSR, and volunteerism. Working in the education sector makes me want to engage in CSR activities. [...] The reason is that my role and the purpose of my job is to promote the common good through education. I have

participated in multiple sustainable projects. I do believe that people who work in other sectors like science may have different views towards CSR.

An important observation is that both interviewees who work in the education sector described the function of the job role as an important driver. In addition to this remark, all the 4 interviewees who work in HR departments expressed similar thoughts regarding the function of the job role. For instance, Stelina (25, Learning Consultant) explained:

My job role has influenced the way I perceive CSR. As a learning consultant, one of my main responsibilities is to motivate employees to participate in CSR initiatives such as corporate volunteerism, e-learning programs, trainings etc. Yes, definitely, the type of business section influences me.

Thus, an important number of the interviewees (6 out of 14) mentioned that the nature of the job role and the function of the business sector shape employees' engagement in CSR. According to the interviewees, the role of their job can influence significantly their willingness to participate in a CSR initiative. The interviewees who work in HR departments pointed out that their roles have played an essential role in CSR engagement. Hence, this macro-factor can influence employees' perceptions and participation in CSR.

4.5. Macro factors block CSR engagement in Greece.

Despite the importance of the micro and meso drivers that motivate employees to engage in CSR activities, interviewees mentioned that there are some macro factors that block CSR employee engagement. More specifically, the explained that factors such as lack of resources and facilities and bureaucracy. Most of the interviewees (8 out of 14 the interviewees) mentioned that there are some important macro blockers about CSR in Greece. They explained that these factors create significant barriers for CSR initiatives and discourage them in engaging in these corporate activities. More specifically, Evita (55, Tutor) pointed out:

Unfortunately, we need to overcome some crucial issues, here, in Greece. Despite employees' willingness to engage in these activities, bureaucracy is the main blocker. The implementation of CSR initiatives usually takes many months since you need to align with the government and different stakeholders. [...] This situation demotivates me.

In addition to Evita's inputs, Adam (55, Doctor) explained that delays from federal government agencies, divisions, and departments block CSR initiatives. Next to the bureaucracy, other interviewees mentioned explained that the lack of funds is

an important issue in Greece that organizations need to overcome. Manos (37, Marketing) said:

Greek organizations face financial difficulties. They do not invest in sustainable projects since CSR is not a priority in their agenda. I feel that Greek companies focus on other things as the unemployment is rising. There are some multinational companies that invest in CSR but most of the Greek companies, actually, ignore the importance of CSR.

Poor facilities block CSR engagement. Other interviewees explained that poor working conditions did not allow companies to take CSR initiatives. Anna (25, Secretary) said that her organizations did not have the necessary financial resources to hire an Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practitioner to build CSR strategies. These findings reinforced Costopoulos' et al., (2018) results about bureaucracy in Greece. They considered bureaucracy an important blocker for today's businesses.

Concluding, macro factors play an important role when it comes to implementing a CSR activity. According to interviewees macro factors appear to block and demotivate employee CSR engagement. Therefore, self-motivation seems to be stronger than organizational factors when it comes to engaging in a CSR activity.

4.6 Summary

The findings allowed the researcher to span the results at different level (micro-meso-macro) of analysis. Based on this, it seems that employee motivation for CSR is multidimensional. Various factors play an important role in how employees contribute to CSR activities. Self-motivation is a vital driver that pushes employees to engage in CSR. From the other side, macro factors appear only to block employee engagement. Greek participants explained that financial difficulties, bureaucracy, and governmental decisions appear to hold back CSR employee engagement. Regarding the role of the internal communication, poor internal communication creates troubles in CSR engagement. Most interviewees emphasized the lack of internal communication channels. Therefore, they face difficulties in understanding the importance, relevance, and purpose of CSR initiatives. Finally, according to the interviewees, leadership is a prominent factor that can either encourage them or discourage them to engage in CSR (ethical versus indifferent leaders). Hence, various organizational and personal factors seem to play a primary role regarding the decision of an employee to participate in a CSR initiative.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the results of this research study and indicates the key themes of the analysis. Also, the theoretical and practical implications are presented. This chapter investigates whether the findings reinforced recent studies. Finally, the researcher analyzes this research study's limitations and recommendations for future research.

5.1 Summary

Recent literature review (Chandler, 2020; Ditlev-Simonsen & Wenstøp, 2013) emphasized that there is a rising need to explore internal stakeholders' understandings on CSR initiatives. According to Farooq et al. (2014), organizations need to consider employees as key stakeholders for a CSR strategy. Researchers (Costopoulou et al., 2018; Skoloudi et al., 2011) suggested that future scientific research need to explore Greek employees' views towards CSR. Under these theoretical underpinnings, employees' perceptions of CSR were examined through in-depth interviews.

The purpose of this research study was to investigate Greek employees' views on CSR initiatives. The research questions were the following: a) what motivate employees to participate (not) in CSR? b) What is the role of internal communication and leadership in encouraging employees to participate in CSR? To understand Greek employees of CSR, the researcher conducted 14 interviews. The findings from the interviews allowed the research to present the results through a multidimensional approach (micro-meso-macro levels). The researcher included the intrinsic motivations for CSR in micro level of analysis. Personal drivers such as personal interests, views, and traits tend to motivate employees to engage in CSR. The meso level of analysis indicated that poor internal communication and ethical versus indifferent leaders are key drivers in CSR engagement. Greek employees considered internal communication a key blocker for CSR, since their organizations use ineffective channels and tools to communicate CSR. In addition to this, indifferent managers discourage employees to participate in CSR. Finally, the function of the business sector and blockers such as bureaucracy and financial difficulties were included in the macro level. Therefore, the findings showed that employee motivation for CSR activities is multidimensional as various factors are involved.

Overall, intrinsic motivations such as personal interests (volunteerism), traits (empathy), and general perceptions of CSR tend to encourage employees in CSR. In contrast to micro factors mentioned above, meso (poor internal communication and indifferent leaders) and macro (bureaucracy and financial difficulties) drivers tend to discourage Greek employees. Hence, there is a push from the bottom (employees) to the top of the organizations (managers and directors) for CSR engagement.

5.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this research study indicated that CSR employee engagement is multidimensional. According to the results intrinsic, organizational, and macro factors can encourage or discourage employees' motivations to CSR. This argument strengthens Kunz's results (2020) about employee motivation for CSR. The researcher found that both extrinsic, intrinsic, and extraorganizational factors drivers influence employees' understandings on CSR.

In addition to this, it was found that bureaucracy blocks Greek organizations to invest in CSR. The findings align with the previous research studies about CSR in Greece (Costopoulou et al., 2018; Skoloudi et al., 2011). The research gave a clear picture of CSR initiatives in the Greek context as macro blockers such as financial crisis and governmental policies were uncovered. Hence, some key challenges in Greece were emerged that pause CSR initiatives.

The results strengthen the previous literature about employee heterogeneity. Research studies (Du et al., 2015; Rodrigo & Arenas; 2008) emphasized the importance of the different individual traits in CSR engagement. This study reinforces the previous literature regarding CSR engagement as various individual attributes are involved in CSR engagement according to the interviewees.

Moreover, the findings explained the function of the business section in CSR engagement. Vlachos et al. (2017) suggested to investigate further the role of the business section. The results of this study indicated that business function has a major role in how employees perceive CSR activities. Participants who worked in education sector and healthcare industry considered that their industries affect the way they perceive CSR.

Next to the theoretical implications, the findings provide practical implications as well. The findings of this research study can be useful for CSR practitioners, HR

specialists, leaders, employees, and business students. More specifically, the results of this research can serve as guidelines for Greek companies that want to invest in CSR and engage their employees. This thesis study paves the way to a more holistic approach towards CSR and employee engagement in Greece.

The findings showed that employer needs to deal with the different drivers (micro-meso-macro factors) when it comes to implementing an impactful CSR strategy. To build an effective CSR initiative, organizations need to consider employees' perceptions of CSR, organizational factors such as internal communication and leadership, and macro drivers.

According to the findings, for an impactful CSR activity, Greek companies need to embrace employees' interests in order to increase CSR engagement. Organizations need to make sure that their CSR strategies align with their employees' needs and perceptions. The results showed that drivers such as personal interests, traits, and needs are essential for CSR engagement. Participants felt more engaged when it comes to participating in CSR initiatives that align with their interests. However, today's organizations need to reflect on organizational factors as well.

The results indicated there is a need for Greek organizations to leverage more their communication channels in order to build effective CSR strategies and give a clear picture of these initiatives to their employees. Next to internal communication, Greek leaders can bridge the gap between employees and CSR. By encouraging them to engage in these activities and being ethical role models, leaders can increase CSR engagement. Finally, to reduce the risks of ineffective CSR strategies, organizations in Greece need to mitigate the challenges that come from the macro factors. The results indicated that bureaucracy and governmental decisions can block CSR.

5.3 Limitations and Future research

This research study does not come without limitations. Firstly, a significant limitation is the sample size. A larger number of interviews can help validate the findings of this exploratory research. Secondly, the participants worked in different types of businesses. Some interviewees worked at multinational organizations (5 participants) and others at small or medium enterprises (9 participants). According to Mousiolis et al. (2014), multinational organizations invest more in CSR activities. In addition to this, one limitation refers to the type of industry. Researchers (Dabic et al.

2016) explained that the industry influences the corporate social responsibility practices. The interviewees worked at different business sectors. One more limitation is that, owing the COVID protocols, the researcher conducted online interviews to answer the research questions. The online interviews did not allow the researcher to analyze physical reactions. According to (Guest et al., 2013) online interviews do not allow the researcher to delve into interviewee's body language. Finally, one limitation is that the researcher did not examine decision makers' perceptions (leaders) of CSR and employee engagement.

This research paves the way for future research. Firstly, as mentioned above, it would be useful to investigate decision makers' approach towards CSR. This would give the researchers the opportunity to examine leaders' perceptions of CSR in relation to employee participation in CSR. Also, it would be vital to examine through a quantitative research which of the drivers (micro vs meso vs macro factors) influence most employees' views on CSR. Finally, as Greece faces challenges in the context of CSR, it would be critical for the further researchers to delve into the causes of these issues.

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Appendix 1: Interview questions guide

The researcher asked the below interview questions to collect the data and answer the research questions. Sometimes interviewees' answers and reactions led in different directions, but this was vital to get new insights and consider other things we may ignore.

Interview Protocol (semi-structured interview)

Icebreaker & Introduction

1. Thank you for your time and effort during these crazy times.
2. Informed consent.
3. Goal: understanding of employees' perceptions of CSR initiatives
4. Questions: your perceptions, experiences, and views on CSR. We are going to discuss about the key drivers that influence your perceptions of CSR
5. Permission to audiotape
6. Interviewer's rights: throughout the interview decide to withdraw or refuse to answer questions.
7. No compensation

Warm-up/Introduction questions

- What's your position in the organization?
- How many years of working experience do you have in total?
- What are your first thoughts when you hear CSR/ How do you define CSR?/ Do you know what it means?
- How do you see/perceive/view the importance of CSR in your organization? In the business world, more generally?
- Do you think that CSR actions are important? Could you tell me how do you react to these actions?
- Have you ever (NOT) participated in a CSR?
- If yes, can you describe your participation in this initiative?
- Can you tell me about it? what was the initiative/issue? What made you participate?
- Have you ever participated in a corporate volunteer program? If yes, can you describe it?

Research question 1: What motivations employees to (not) participate in CSR?

Personal factors

- What are the key factors that motivate you to (not) participate?
- What would be the top 2 or 3? Can you explain? Other factors?
- What kind of personal interests influence the way you perceive CSR?
- What kind of personal traits influence the way you perceive CSR? Can you give me an example?
- How important is that your individual values go hand in with the organization's values? How does it affect your perceptions of CSR?

Organizational factors?

Research question 2: What is the role of internal communication and leadership in enabling/encouraging/facilitating employees to participate in CSR?

- Thinking about your organization, how important is it for your org to encourage employee participation in CSR?
- How has the information regarding CSR been received by the employees? Can you share examples of how this participation is encouraged? In other words, how does your org invite participation?
- Who takes the lead in such communication (i.e, spokesperson)?
- What channels of communication does your organization use to invite participation?
- Is internal comm a key driver for (lack of) participation in CSR?
- Can you give me some examples of good/effective and not-so-effective internal CSR-focused communication? Internal communication
- Does your manager communicate CSR initiatives with you? And If yes, how?
- Do you spend time with your leader/manager/supervisor discussing CSR?
- Having an ethical leader/manager/supervisor is an important factor for you to engage in CSR initiatives?
- If your employer shows responsibility for the environment and the well-being of others, how would it affect your perception of the organizations' sustainable efforts?

Wrap-up

I found our conversation very interesting and I think I got a good understanding of your views, and thoughts, feelings behind it.

- Is there anything you would like to add that I might have missed?
- I would like to ask you some few questions about your back ground:
 - In which country do you work/live?
 - What is the highest education you followed?
 - How many years of (professional) working experience do you have in total?

- If I have further questions, is it okay that I send you an e-mail? Here is my e-mail, if there is anything you would like to mention or ask as well, feel free to contact me.
- Are there other people within your network you think might be helpful for my research? Can I have their names and contact details? Or could you ask them to contact me?

Thank you again for your time and effort, it is very helpful! Take care and stay healthy!

Appendix 2: Consent form

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a Master's Thesis research project about employees' perceptions towards CSR initiatives. The purpose of the study is to understand the key drivers and motivations that encourage employees to participate (or not) in CSR initiatives.

For any questions about the study, please contact:

Ioannis Sykianakis, 579825is@eur.nl, and +30 6981522552. Additionally, you can contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Vidhi Chaudhri at chaudhri@eshcc.eur.nl

RISKS AND BENEFITS: As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. I will not keep any information that may lead to the identification of those involved in the study. I will only use pseudonyms to identify participants. I will use the material from the interviews exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT and COMPENSATION: Your participation in this study will take approximately 45-60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

Please indicate your preference regarding the following:

I give consent to be audiotaped or videotaped during this study. The recordings are purely to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data
Yes/No

I would like to keep my personal identity anonymous:
Yes/No

I would like to keep the identity of my organisation/employer anonymous
Yes/No

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

Please sign this consent form as proof of your voluntary participation and responses to the questions above. Please retain a copy of the signed form for your record.

Name

Signature

Date

Appendix 3: Call for participation:

Linkedin

Dear network,

I am currently writing my master's thesis regarding Corporate Social Responsibility and sustainable business practices. I need participants who are willing to share their thoughts and experiences about the topic, in an interview which will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

If you are:

- **Greek** and
- **Ongoingemployee**

then you are the perfect candidate for me!

Please help me graduate by contacting me to schedule an interview. But even if you don't feel like participating, please help me spread it via sharing it.