



To commit or not commit

An examination of employee commitment towards organizational
CSR initiatives

by

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Abstract

Title: To commit or not commit: An examination of employee commitment towards organizational CSR initiatives

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Key Words: Employee's CSR commitment; employee's CSR communication; organizational culture; internal CSR; internal communication; training & education; leadership; IKEA; home furnishing retailer.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine how sales employees who are working in an organization that defines CSR as part of their corporate strategy commit towards CSR and how they communicate CSR messages in the customer interaction on the sales floor. Furthermore, this study intends to explore which particular drivers and barriers affect employee's CSR commitment and their communication with the customers.

Methodology: This study incorporated a social constructionist epistemology and a relativist ontology that allowed a more subjective and interpretative approach, which was needed to gain deeper understanding how and why employees are committed towards CSR and how they communicate CSR on the sales floor. Moreover, this study followed an iterative research approach and a qualitative research strategy as this study is based upon words and understanding rather than numbers and measurements. Finally, the study used a single case study design to answer the research questions.

Theoretical perspective: In order to answer the purpose and research question this study takes into consideration essential theoretical concepts dealing with employee commitment and CSR. More precisely, this study focuses on reviewing literature dealing with internal marketing and particular drivers of employee CSR commitment.

Empirical Data: As this study is based upon a single case study design and follows a subjectivist ontology and interpretative epistemology, semi structured qualitative interviews with 19 sales employees and two managers were used to explore employee's CSR commitment among sales employees and how they communicate CSR in the customer interaction on the sales floor.

Conclusion: The analysis of the empirical data has shown that the chosen drivers have different impact on employee's CSR commitment and how employees incorporate CSR actively in their daily work. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance to separate employee's CSR commitment from employees CSR communication on the sales floor. More precisely, this means that a great level of CSR identification and internalization, which indicates a great level of CSR commitment, not automatically implicates that employees communicate CSR to the customer on the sales floor. The research also identified the recruitment process as a potential additional driver of employee's CSR commitment.

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1 Introduction

The introduction chapter will present the background, problematization, purpose of the study and the outline of the paper. The chapter serves the aim of providing the reader with a fundamental understanding of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the business environment and the importance of employees as a channel for communication. Based upon these concepts a problem formulation is presented as the knowledge gaps are identified in relation to what is unknown in this field of research. This leads to the final part of the chapter where the purpose of the study is presented together with the outline of this paper.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 CSR in business: What is CSR, The importance of CSR in business

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) regards how companies actively strive to do good. Carroll (1979) defines CSR as “the social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time” (p. 500). Thus, these activities go beyond legal boundaries and requirements for the good of society.

Today we live in an ever-changing world where public auditing and channels of communication are constantly increasing, something that put great pressure upon organizations to perform well. This comes with further increased customer demands in regard of organizations contributing to society. Mishra and Nigam (2015) support this by delineating how business and society are now operating in symbiosis to each other rather than being two isolated ecosystems. With this change it is possible to see an increased amount of organizations that define CSR as a part of their corporate strategy today, not only to satisfy the customer demands, but also as a way of strengthening their brand and reputation (Anselmsson & Johansson, 2007; Girod, 2003; Piacentini, MacFadyen & Eadie, 2000).

The importance of incorporating CSR in the corporate strategy is further elaborated on by Hur, Kim and Woo (2014) who argue for how organizations developing a strong CSR presence can build favourable customer awareness and a great reputation in the long run. Moreover, CSR activities have shown to increase profitability by changing the way customers evaluate products (Chernev & Blair, 2015).

The amplified performance gains that organizations can reap from a strong CSR presence can however be absent if CSR activities are not successfully integrated. Mishra and Nigram (2015) elaborate on how lack of CSR strategies can decrease stakeholder engagement. Lack of integrated CSR strategies can potentially eliminate an organization's competitive advantage. Auger, Burke, Devinney and Louviere (2003) and Pomeroy and Dolnicar (2009) argue for the organizational struggles in regard to embracing a strong CSR presence and illuminate the fact that even though many organizations have implemented CSR codes of conducts customers tend to be unaware of these CSR activities.

1.1.2 Employees as communication channel for CSR

When it comes to communicating CSR to customers or other external stakeholders research shows that employees in-store interaction with customers occupies an important role as it can reduce the lack of consumer awareness about CSR significantly. This goes in hand with other studies claiming that the widespread absence of trust in retailers CSR implications from the consumers can be compensated by employees stressing the organizational CSR values in the interaction with customers on the sales floor (Elg & Hultman, 2016). On the other hand, research has also shown that if a company, that defines CSR as key strategic pillar, fails to communicate such values in the direct customer interaction, it will lose credibility (Burmans & Zeplin, 2005). This is in compliance with other studies emphasising the prominent role of sales employees in communicating corporate goals and values directly to the customers on the sales floor (Khan, 2009).

All this underlines the importance of employees and their key role in communicating CSR goals to the customers. This is of particular interest for brick and mortar retailers as personal interaction and the store environment have a major impact on consumers' perceptions of the organization (Grewal & Levy, 2007; Grönroos, 1990; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This implicates that it is of great importance for organizations to create a great level of employee commitment

towards CSR in order to facilitate that employees not only internalize CSR values but also communicate them to the customers on the sales floor.

Kelman (1958) defines and connects organizational commitment to three levels of attitudinal change, compliance, identification and internalization. These refer to employees following instructions (compliance), that they follow and respect the instructions and their values (identification) or that they embrace the organizational values and make them a part of their own value system (Internalization).

1.2 Knowledge gap

As mentioned and elaborated in the previous paragraphs employees that are constantly in contact with customers occupy an essential role in communicating CSR towards the society. In line with this Khan (2009) defines the employee-customer interaction as a “moment of truth” in which an organization needs to deliver its corporate goals and values to the customer. However, even though many organizations are actively engaging in CSR activities it appears that they fail in communicating CSR to enlighten their customers about their social contributions (Auger et al., 2003; Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009). This implicates that CSR communication often fail to address the consumers directly at the point of sales, which entails that employees are often neglected as a communication channel for CSR messages. In particular, this means that many of those organizations that define CSR as a strategic corporate goal often only focus on communicating CSR directly from a corporate level towards external stakeholders. This corresponds with the fact that the majority of the research that have been conducted when it comes to organizational CSR is also more focused on corporate CSR communication towards external stakeholders rather than communicating to customers directly on the sales floor (Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014).

In general, even though there is an increasing amount of literature dealing with CSR commitment among employees there is still a lack of research that particularly investigates the role of employees as an external communication channel of organizations CSR initiatives. More precisely, most of the current studies mainly investigate CSR as a tool to increase employee commitment in general but not how to ensure employee commitment towards CSR. The few studies that are in particular investigating the issue of creating employee

commitment towards CSR are not approaching the issue in consideration of the crucial role of sales employees in communicating CSR towards customers on the sales floor. In addition, these studies are not only lacking sufficient insights about specific drivers and barriers influencing employee commitment but also neglect insights about what sales employees actually communicate towards the customers in regards to CSR. This could possibly be due to the fact that there is to our knowledge no study that focuses in-depth on interviewing sales employees in regards to CSR commitment and what they communicate towards customers.

All this underlines the need and relevance of this study as it contributes to the existing literature dealing with employee commitment towards CSR by approaching the issue from a different angle that takes into consideration the prominent role of sales employees in communicating CSR messages to the customers on the sales floor.

1.3 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this study is to examine how sales employees who are working in an organization that defines CSR as part of their corporate strategy internalize and communicate CSR messages in the customer interaction on the sales floor.

Furthermore, this study will also investigate the organizational perspective on CSR, how employee's CSR commitment is managed on a corporate level and explores which particular drivers and barriers affect employees CSR commitment and their communication with the customers. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research question:

What drivers build employee CSR commitment and how do they contribute to the employee-customer CSR communication?

1.4 Structure of the thesis

In order to answer the purpose and research question of this study the second chapter will review the essential theoretical concepts dealing with employee commitment and CSR. More

precisely, the literature review will introduce five particular drivers of employee CSR commitment that are incorporated in the concept of internal marketing: organizational culture, internal CSR, internal communication, training and education, and leadership. This is followed by the third chapter, methodology. This chapter will elaborate in detail the underlying research process of this study. Finally, the last part of this study will present the empirical findings, analysis and conclusion.

2 Literatur review

The literature review will review different theories about employee commitment. In particular, the aim is to provide the reader with a rich picture of the main concepts dealing with the creation and maintenance of employee commitment within organizations. As this study aims to investigate employee commitment towards organization's CSR initiatives it takes into consideration a more niche approach. However, it is crucial for the general understanding to start broader by introducing the concept of organizational commitment in general before focusing on employee commitment towards CSR.

Before going into detail on the existing literature about organizational commitment, the literature review will look at different conceptualisations and definitions of CSR. Afterwards the concept of organizational commitment will be introduced and its role in creating employee commitment towards CSR. After that the concept of internal marketing will be elucidated and its connection to the organizational commitment theory. Last the literature review will go into greater detail and elaborate on five main drivers of employee commitment that are of particular significance regarding CSR commitment.

2.1 Defining Corporate social responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an area which has developed extensively over the years. Carroll (1999) concluded that Howard Bowen is the father of corporate social responsibility with his book *Social responsibilities of the businessman* (1953). The CSR definition of Bowen (1953, as explained in Carroll, 1999) regards the impact major business have on the lives of citizen at multiple touch points. With this starting point, the definitions evolved and in 1979, Carroll defined CSR as "the social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" (p. 500). This definition entails that CSR is based upon four cornerstones, namely economic, legal, ethical and discretionary responsibility.

The economic responsibilities refer to companies' responsibility to respond to society's demand of products and services and to sell those at a profit. This takes on the assumption that the companies are the basic economic elements of our society. The second cornerstone of Carroll's (1979) definition is the legal responsibilities, which presumes that companies fulfil the the economic responsibilities, within the legal boundaries of society.

This is followed by the ethical responsibilities that are the expectations that society put on companies above and beyond legal requirements. Finally, the fourth aspects of Carroll's (1979) definition is discretionary (or philanthropic) responsibilities. The discretionary responsibilities cover the expectations that society might have and that has not been included in the aforementioned aspects of CSR. These are all voluntary and could be things such as philanthropic contributions.

Carroll's definition of CSR caught ground and is frequently referred to in more recent times (Liu, Wong, Shi, Chu & Brock, 2014; Mandhachitara & Poolthong, 2011; Mohr, Webb & Harris, 2001). However, it is further emphasized that societal issues change with time and differ between industries, thus the four cornerstones of CSR need to be adapted accordingly (Carroll, 1979). Mandhachitara and Poolthong (2011) are aligned with Carroll (1979) in that activities are decided upon by the company's willingness to engage in social contributions beyond what is required by law, but rather that are increasingly strategic.

Both Mohr, Webb and Harris (2001), and Liu et al. (2014) identify CSR in relation to company stakeholders (customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders) as an important aspect of CSR activities. By engaging in such CSR activities, companies can strengthen their relationship with the stakeholders, and reap benefits from the increased engagement in terms of positive word-of-mouth and a willingness to pay a premium price (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007; Pelozo & Shang, 2011). In terms of internal stakeholders, Hameed, Riaz, Ghulam and Farooq (2016) found that the benefits reaped from CSR activities varies depending on the importance that the employees assign to CSR. Thus, employees who put less value into social responsibility will not be positively affected to the same extent as those valuing CSR activities higher.

2.2 Employee commitment

During the last decades there has been an increased awareness within research and practise that employees as internal stakeholders have a great impact on the performance of an organisation. Results from several empirical studies have shown that employee engagement and commitment can not only increase organisational performance but also decrease the turnover rate (Carter et al., 2016; Jha & Kumar, 2016; Lee, Park & Lee, 2013; Wiseto, Hubeis & Sukandar, 2016). Burmann and Zeplin (2005) describe the behaviour of employees as one of the most important factors in brand building, which underlines the importance to ensure committed and engaged employees.

Defining Organizational Commitment

Even though the concept of organizational commitment can be defined as a well studied topic within organizational behaviour research, there is still a predominant ambiguity in terms of meaning, scope and boundaries (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Morrow (1983) criticizes that instead of using existing approaches about organizational commitment many authors try to come up with their own definitions. As a consequence, there is not only an overwhelming amount of different definitions of organizational commitment but also an increasing amount of terms like participation, motivation, engagement or involvement that describe the same phenomena (Adeola & Adebisi, 2016; Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014; Mohr, Troeltsch & Gerhards, 2016; Staw, 1977 cited in O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). This study defines organizational commitment “as a multidimensional concept embracing an employee's desire to remain in an organization, willingness to exert effort on its behalf, and belief in and acceptance of the values and goals of the organization (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979).

When it comes to defining and illustrating the concept of organizational commitment many authors go back to Kelman (1958) who distinguishes between three processes of attitude change: Compliance, Identification and Internalization. Compliance refers to employees who obediently follow instructions from others in the hope that they receive a positive feedback. They neither have an intrinsic believe in the instructions nor do they completely internalise its content. The underlying motivation is solely selfish as these employees either try to avoid punishment because of disobedience or strive for personal reward (Kelman, 1958). Identification, on the other hand, describe employees who respect and follow the instructions

and values of an organization to establish a satisfying relationship with the organization. These employees feel proud to be a part of the organization and respect their values and goals. However, they do not adopt them as their own values (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Internalization, lastly, describe employees who not only respect the organizational values and goals but also internalize them as part of their own value system. These employees perceive the content of the induced behaviour as “intrinsically rewarding” (Kelman, 1958, p. 53).

Citizenship behaviour

Another concept that is closely related to organizational commitment is called citizenship behaviour (Khan, 2009). Citizenship behaviour goes beyond plain obedience and describe altruistic behaviour of an employee that is not triggered by certain orders or demands but by intrinsic motivation caused by high level of identification with the organization (Smith, Organ & Near, 1983). Burmann and Zeplin (2005) describe more in detail the connection between commitment and citizenship behaviour and stress that commitment can be seen as the foundation and key driver for organizational citizenship behaviour. Without organizational citizenship behaviour there is the risk that employees internalize corporate messages and goals only on a superficial level which in turn could lower the quality and external distribution of these messages (Smith, Organ & Near, 1983).

Organizational commitment and CSR

During the previous decades, an increasing amount of literature about organizational commitment takes into consideration the connection between CSR and commitment (Azim, 2015; Im, Chung & Yang, 2017; Kim, Song & Lee, 2016; Sanchez-Hernandez & Grayson, 2012; Thang & Fassin, 2016; Farooq, Payaud, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2014; Ching-Sing, Chun-Chen, Hsien-Bin, Kang-Ni, Chien-Hsiung, & Ji-Shou, 2013). The majority of the research dealing with commitment and CSR defines CSR as an important driver for organizational commitment, which means that there has been discovered a positive relationship between companies CSR engagement and employee commitment (Kim, Song & Lee, 2016). According to Azim (2015) employees feel happy if the organization in which they work is engaged in CSR activities, which in turn lead to higher employee commitment.

Whereas Azim (2015) focuses on the influence of organizations external CSR engagement on employee internal commitment in general, Kim, Song and Lee (2016) adopt a more niche approach by examining how organizations can ensure that their CSR activities are supported

by their employees. Kin, Song and Lee (2016) summarize that employee commitment towards CSR mainly depends on: cultural fit, link to the corporate purpose and the level of employee engagement in the development and implementation of CSR strategies. Other authors dealing with the creation of employee commitment towards CSR emphasize the importance of internal communication (Crane & Glozer, 2016), leadership (Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014), the organization's own CSR engagement (Haski-Leventhal, 2013), education and training (Brunton, Eweje & Taskin, 2017) or welfare and reward system (Kim, Song & Lee, 2016).

As demonstrated above there are a myriad of different concepts dealing with the creation of employee commitment. One concept that is often used in the context of employee commitment and which is also often labelled as internal branding (Buil, Martínez & Matute, 2016; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng, 2010) is called internal marketing (Kim, Song & Lee, 2016; Berry & Parasuraman, 1991; Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993). It seems that internal marketing mainly brings together the different drivers of employee commitment under the wing of one concept. Even though this concept deals with the generation of employee commitment in general, there has been an increasing amount of studies that use the concept of internal marketing to explain directly how organizations can increase employee commitment towards CSR (Kim, Song & Lee, 2016; Sanchez-Hernandez & Grayson, 2012). This study builds upon these studies by using the concept of internal marketing and its commitment drivers to explain how companies can increase employee commitment towards CSR.

Therefore, the following part will introduce the concept of internal marketing and with it the different drivers of employee commitment mentioned in the literature. Afterwards the study will focus on five key drivers that are considered particularly important for the creation of employee commitment towards CSR.

2.3 Internal Marketing

As previous research has shown, the concept of internal marketing can be used to increase employee commitment and organisational performance (Kim, Song & Lee, 2016). Internal marketing, that was first proposed in the 1970s, defines employees as internal customers who deserve closer attention from a managerial perspective (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). This is

in line with Collins and Payne internal marketing definition (1991) that stress that all employees within an organization are both customers and suppliers. As many concepts within marketing and management, there does not exist a unified definition that determines the scope and boundaries of internal marketing. Furthermore, internal marketing is often used interchangeably with the concept of internal branding which Thomson et al. (1999) describe as a process of activities to assure “intellectual and emotional staff buy-in” (p.55). However, this study will use the terminology of internal marketing throughout the entire study to avoid any confusion for the reader. Internal marketing was initially developed to ensure that employees in the service industry deliver high quality in the direct customer interaction and meet the needs of increasingly demanding customers (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993). The creation of the term internal marketing refers to an internal market of employees within the company in which the management of a company first needs to ensure that all employees internalize and accept external marketing activities before these are launched to external stakeholders (Vaseer & Shahzad, 2016).

Even though internal marketing takes an internal stakeholder perspective by implementing certain activities to enhance employee commitment, the overall aim is the improvement of the interaction between employees and customers. Hence the reason why Ahmed and Rafiq (2002) describe internal marketing as customer-focused management. Therefore, internal marketing defines the direct interaction of an organization with its customers as a “moment of truth” (p.23) where an organization must communicate its goals and deliver its promises (Khan, 2009). If a company fails to communicate its values at all customer-brand touchpoints it will lose credibility (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005).

After a detailed review of existing studies concerning internal marketing, it has shown that internal marketing constitutes of many different drivers of employee commitment. Many of these drivers were already mentioned in the chapter organizational commitment. This again demonstrates that internal marketing mainly incorporates the theory of organizational commitment. However, the literature review has also shown that almost every researcher defines different key drivers: Kim, Song and Lee (2016) for instance define training, compensation, communication, welfare system and management support as the main parts of internal marketing. Burmann and Zeplin (2005), however, describe that internal marketing is constituted of leadership, communication and human resource activities. Another study conducted by Zahara, Saleem and Iglesias (2016), that is based on an extensive literature

review about existing studies about internal marketing and internal branding, concludes that brand ideologies, brand leadership, brand-centred HRM, internal brand communication and internal brand communities are the essential parts.

This research will utilize the concept of internal marketing for CSR purposes. In particular, this study builds on previous studies which used internal marketing practices as a tool for engaging employees on the CSR journey (Kim, Song & Lee, 2016; Sanchez-Hernandez & Grayson, 2012). Therefore, this study adopts the definition of Sanchez-Hernandez and Grayson (2012) who define internal marketing for CSR as “any planned effort to align, motivate and integrate employees towards the effective implementation of corporate responsibility and the organization's sustainability strategy” (p. 282).

After reviewing all the different drivers of employee commitment, this study identifies five drivers that are defined as particularly important in the creation of employee commitment towards CSR: Organizational culture, internal CSR, internal communication, training and education and leadership. The following part will introduce the different drivers more in detail and their relevance in the development of employee commitment towards CSR.

2.3.1 Organizational values/culture

The first driver that is essential in order to create employee commitment towards CSR is the development of an organizational culture that supports the implementation of CSR initiatives throughout the entire organization. If companies want to be perceived as an environmental responsible performing company, they need to secure that employees not only internalize CSR but that they also communicate these values in the direct interaction with the customers on the sales floor (Gupta & Pirsch, 2008). In order to facilitate that employees develop an intrinsic understanding of CSR and actively communicate CSR messages and information to the customers, companies not only need to implement certain internal CSR activities like education and training but also an organizational culture that aligns the CSR strategies with an ethical organizational culture and identity. Otherwise, employees will be less committed to internalize and communicate CSR values to the customers (Brunton, Eweje & Taskin, 2017). In line with this, Prutina (2016) emphasizes that CSR initiatives only have a positive influence on organizational outcomes if these initiatives are lived by the employees and reflected by the organizational culture. Lee, Park and Lee (2013) also emphasize that the

“perceived fit between culture and CSR activities” (p.1717) is crucial to increase employee commitment towards CSR.

A beneficial organizational culture in terms of employee CSR commitment can be described as a value oriented culture in which employees are not only recipients of corporate orders and messages. Within a culturally driven culture, behavior and attitudes of employees are not shaped by compliance or obedience but by the identity and values of the organization (Nielsen & Thomsen, 2009). In line with this Crane and Glozer (2016) criticize that CSR strategies are mostly initiated and planned by the management without including ideas and opinions from employees. This could lead to a lack of identification with CSR values from an employee point of view. Bhattacharya, Sen and Korschun (2011) go even further by describing that the exclusion of employees during the development of CSR initiatives could not only lead to poorly informed and committed employees but also could trigger CSR dissidents within the organization. Therefore, the authors argue that it is crucial to create an organizational culture in which employees are seen as “actual enactors” and the organization as the “enabler” (p.23). Moreover, organizations that want to ensure ongoing employee commitment towards CSR need to include their employees not only in the initiation of CSR activities but also in the implementation and maturation process (Bolton, Kim & Gorman, 2011). In addition, organizations need to integrate the perception in their organizational culture, that social and financial objectives are not contrary to each other (Selsky & Parker, 2005).

The relationship between CSR and the organizational culture can be seen as synergetic interplay that also can positively affect employee’s identification with the organization. This is because a value oriented culture facilitates an efficient and intrinsic internalization of CSR values which in turn strengthen the organizational culture as employees who are actively involved in CSR feel more committed and emotionally attached to the organization (Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014). This implies that organizations striving to implement a successful CSR strategy, which is also communicated by employees, need to create an organizational culture in which the external communicated CSR strategy is also part of the identity of the organization (Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014). This is supported by the social identity theory which suggest “that individuals reinforce their self-esteem and augment their self-image by identifying with groups and organizations known for their social responsibility” (p.26.). Therefore, the social identity theory can be used to explain why an organization's CSR strategy affects not only customers but also employees internally (Kim, Song & Lee, 2016).

When it comes to organizational culture and CSR many articles take into consideration the concept of codes of conducts (Elg & Hultman, 2016; Frostenson, Helin & Sandström, 2012). Hill and Rapp (2014) define codes of conduct as an employee-driven bottom-up approach that influences internal and external stakeholders. Kaptein (2011) defines ethical codes of conducts as “business code of ethics (BCE), which can be defined as a set of prescriptions developed by a company to guide the behaviour of managers and employees “(p. 233). It is suspicious that the scope and boundaries of codes of conduct differ significantly in the literature. Whereas Kaptein (2011) describes that the aim of business code of ethics is mainly to avoid unethical behaviour, Ellen, Webb & Mohr (2006) go further by describing that codes of conduct not only aim to decrease the risk of unethical behaviour but also govern the behaviour and values of the organisation.

Furthermore, there is an ongoing discussion in the literature to which extend codes of conduct influence employees (Elg & Hultman, 2016; Frostenson, 2007; Frostenson, Helin & Sandström, 2012; Kaptein, 2011; Weaver, Treviño & Cochran, 1999). Frostenson, Helin and Sandström (2012) emphasis that codes of conduct do not have the function to regulate employee behaviour in the customer-employee interaction but to strengthen and deliver employee identity. This study follows the argumentation of Weaver, Treviño and Cochran (1999) who argue that codes of conduct „does not influence everyday decisions and actions” (p. 265) but that they can be used to anchor CSR values within the organizational culture and identity. For that reason, codes of conducts can be considered as an important part to build an organizational CSR culture.

This study defines organizational culture as a crucial driver of employee’s CSR commitment as it can be seen as the foundation for the implementation of further internal marketing activities. More precisely, this study argues that without the creation of a value driven organizational culture further internal marketing activities will not increase employee commitment towards CSR as they need to be build upon a strong CSR culture. Therefore, in contrast to other studies, the organizational culture is defined as a particular driver of CSR commitment and not just as an intermediate variable as mentioned by Burmann and Zeplin (2005).

2.3.2 Internal CSR

Internal CSR are activities that are directed towards internal stakeholders, the employees and appeared in the early 2000's when CSR was explored as internal and external dimensions (European commission, 2001). Much like CSR definitions, internal CSR is about going beyond what is required by law, by supporting and investing in the employees (Shen & Zhu, 2011). Hameed et al. (2016) explain it as actions and efforts taken for the psychological and physiological well-being of its employees. This includes human rights, work-life balance, employee health and safety, employee training, diversity and equal opportunities (Hameed et al., 2016; Shen & Zhu, 2011).

Hameed et al. (2016) further found that internal CSR develops a feeling of perceived internal respect among the employees. By developing perceived internal respect through internal CSR employees are encouraged to identify themselves with the organization. This was previously argued by Skudiene and Auruskeviciene (2008) who elaborated on the strong relationship between internal CSR activities and increased employee motivation. Moreover, CSR can empower employees' aspirations and hence increase their organizational identification (Costas & Kärreman, 2013). Hameed et al. (2016) argued that internal CSR further supports the maintenance of an effective workforce, and thus provide a competitive advantage (Branco & Rodrigues, 2006).

Brammer, Millington and Rayton (2007) concluded that internal CSR activities are correlated and positively impacting organizational commitment. In terms of organizational commitment, it was also found that external CSR indirectly affects internal stakeholder positively. This is in line with Meyer et al. (2002) who noted the benefits of employee well-being and health in relation to organizational commitment. By supporting the employees, Jones (2010) found that the employees felt more attached to the organization. This is further emphasized by Glavas and Godwin (2013) who suggest that internal CSR affects the employees' organizational identification. However, internal CSR has varying degree of clout over employees, based upon the value they assign to CSR and thus no best practice of carrying out the activities can be defined (Hameed et al., 2016). Therefore, employees who value CSR higher are more likely to be positively affected by and organizations CSR activities. This is further supported by Brammer, Millington and Rayton (2007) who found that employees' perception of CSR has a strong impact on their organizational commitment.

Much like organizational culture, internal CSR is defined as a foundation for organizational commitment and further implementation of internal marketing activities. As such, internal CSR is the fundamental basis for how organizations treat their employees and encourage their organizational commitment. Therefore, if employees are not treated accordingly, companies cannot expect employees to commit to CSR activities (Hameed et al., 2016).

2.3.3 Internal communication

Internal communication is a key concept in order to embody transparency between management and employees, which in turn can increase the employee engagement towards the organization's priorities (Mishra, Boynton & Mishra, 2014). This means that there shall be a direct communication towards the employees, and a culture of sharing information. The employee engagement is defined by Saks (2006, p. 602) as “the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles”, based on internal communication of “social interactions through messages” (Kalla, 2005, p. 303).

Carroll (2006) explains that employees who have trust in their managers tend to show genuine caring, support, willingness to listen, transparency and honesty. This trust Carroll says can be developed through positive communication efforts. By engaging the employees, they are likely to develop stronger relationships with the employer (organization) and thus also create more positive attitudes, behaviors and intentions (Saks, 2006). This is also supported by Mishra, Boynton and Mishra (2014) who say that internal communication should build trust between managers and employees, and thus increase the employee engagement with the company.

Gronstedt (2000) argued that employees who have great skills and knowledge about the company can make them important channels of interaction with the customers, and by this enhancing the company's reputation. However, in order to achieve a strong internal communication and engage the employees, communication managers need to be provided with clear information, time, resources and training. It is also argued by Mishra, Boynton and Mishra (2014) that transparent and genuine internal communication has a more positive impact on the employees when it comes from a direct manager. Stuart (1999) sheds light on the fact that external stakeholders are often interacting with the companies through the

employees, and thus any incongruences between the internal and external communication will reduce the company's credibility.

Research shows that by communicating CSR internally, organizations can motivate and positively impact the loyalty of the employees (Maignan, Ferrell & Hult, 1999), especially when the communication comes from a direct manager (Ramus & Killmer, 2007). Rodrigo and Arenas (2008) found that employees' approach to CSR is affected by their own attitudes, but also that organization's CSR activities can actively impact employee CSR attitudes. In line with this Brunton, Eweje and Taskin (2017) found that face-to-face communication is positively associated with employee's CSR initiatives. Men (2015) is aligned with the positive effects of internal face-to-face communication, and says that it is often considered the ideal channel for communicating complex information. By using face-to-face communication, it allows for instant feedback and multiple cues. Cameron and McCollum (1993) found that interactive face-to-face communication improves the management-employee relationships to a greater extent than publications.

With the technology of today, managers and organizations are left with multiple alternatives for communication channels apart from face-to-face, such as printed publications, intranet, blogs, e-mails and other internal networks (Crescenzo, 2011). From these, employees tend to prefer e-mails as a second alternative to follow after the aforementioned face-to-face communication (Men, 2014).

Men (2015) also found social media has become an increasingly popular platform among managers, although only few are using it to communicate with the organization's employees. However, this research shows that managers' social media presence are more inclined to be seen as responsive communicators by the employees. This entails to be seen as more sincere, agreeable, friendly, understanding and willing to listen.

In 1988 Deal and Kennedy defined organizational culture as "the way we do things around here" (p. 4). As such, the organizational culture sets the framework for what is expressed through shared values (Schein, 1992). Thus, organizational culture is a substantial driver for internal integration (Brunton, Eweje & Taskin, 2017).

Throughout communication and commitment literature it is argued that internal CSR

communication can increase employee commitment (Brunton, Eweje & Taskin, 2017; Maignan, Ferrell & Hult, 1999; Ramus & Killmer, 2007). Thus this study is considering internal communication as an important driver for employee CSR commitment.

2.3.4 Training and Education

Despite the fact strong internal communication can generate increased organizational and CSR commitment, it is sometimes not enough to engage the employees. Burton, Eweje and Taskin (2017) found that many treat CSR initiatives with contempt or even ignore them if only verbally communicated. Siebenhüner and Arnold (2007) claim that employees understanding of CSR much depends on how the information is delivered. Costas and Kärreman (2013) develops upon this by saying that the way in which CSR is developed, practiced and articulated is essential for the internal communication. In addition to this, Baldwin and Magjuka (1991) state that all management actions influence the employees behaviours. Furthermore, they also imply that learning and transfer is only to occur if the employees have the desire and capability to learn. Despite the employee's ability to learn, the learning outcome will not be significant if there is a lack of motivation or unwillingness to learn. Baldwin and Magjuka (1991) further explore the effect of making training mandatory. They found split-results in mandatory training, stating that within organizations with less favorable training conditions mandatory training can be demotivating. However, if making training mandatory but giving the employees freedom in choosing the nature and timing of the training the dilemma of demotivation can be solved. Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) develop on the idea of how to make training more effective. It is of importance that the training is aligned and supporting the organizational direction and goals. Black and Mendenhall (1990) also found that cross-cultural training can enhance job performance of the employees.

It is further emphasized by Siebenhüner and Arnold (2007) that although training may be essential, it shall be adapted to the organizational structures and cultures. In order to reach practical results, it is thus not sufficient to only implement specific trainings but they need to reflect the organization. Within medium-sized companies the implementation of change is often required to be supported at executive level, whilst at large companies this is often driven by public pressure and fear of damaging the reputation (Siebenhüner & Arnold, 2007). Tannenbaum and Yukl (1992) support this by stating that there is a difference in how training

should be executed depending on the growth rate of the company. Expanding companies and companies that work across borders can benefit from cross-cultural training.

When streamlining and making the training and transfer of knowledge more effective, it is not only the organizations that needs to prepare accordingly. The learning outcome has also been found to be affected and correlated with what happens before the training. Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001) found three determinants of pre-training factors that affect the training outcome, namely “(a) what trainees bring to the training setting, (b) variables that engage the trainee to learn and participate in developmental activities, and (c) how the training can be prepared so as to maximize the learning experience” (p. 477).

In recent times learning technologies have increased significantly (Liu, Liao & Pratt, 2009; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). Using technology as a tool for learning allows for the trainee to learn from a distance, and can decrease the need for teachers. It was found by Liu, Liao and Pratt (2009) that technology is especially efficient as a tool for learning when integrating text, video and audio together, rather than only using two of the three.

As the literature show, communication is not really efficient as an isolated driver to generate CSR commitment but should rather be combined with training and education. For this reason training and education is seen as a crucial complementary driver to internal communication.

2.3.5 Leadership

One factor that evidently influence organizational commitment and is also mentioned in various studies within internal marketing and organizational commitment literature is leadership (Brunton, Eweje & Taskin, 2017; Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Hansen et al., 2011; Mory, Wirtz & Göttel, 2016). According to Ramus (2011), supportive leaders who motivate their employees to contribute to CSR build the foundation to create employee commitment towards CSR. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) argue that strong leadership can increase the brand identification and brand commitment among employees towards certain corporate goals, like CSR. Another research conducted by Dirks and Ferrin (2002) especially focuses on the importance of trust between managers and their employees in order to facilitate brand commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour. They also emphasis that the employee’s perception of the organization and its values depends strongly

on the behaviour of their leaders. Similar to that Meyer et al. (2002) stress that organizations that are striving for “affectively committed employees” (p. 38) need to prove their own commitment on the management level. This means that leaders need to be paradigm of social responsible behaviour (Abd Rahim, 2016). Even though it appears that there is an increasing amount of studies investigating the impact of different leadership styles on employees CSR commitment there is still made to less research contributing to the understanding (Groves & LaRocca, 2011).

Leadership styles and CSR

One finding of the study conducted by Meyer et al. (2002) underlines that employee commitment also heavily depends on strong leadership and a transformational leadership style. Whereas transactional leadership focuses more on “bottom-line results” (p. 41), transformational leadership styles are “based on vision, trust-building, core values, continuous learning and long-term sustainability” (p. 41). Christensen, Mackey and Whetten (2014) define a transformational leadership as foundation to achieve employee commitment towards CSR, as they have the power to transfer CSR values to to their co-workers. Research has shown that a transformational leadership style not only influences employees performance and job satisfaction but also increases organizational commitment and citizenship behaviour (Groves & LaRocca, 2011). Other studies stress that a transformational leadership also reduces turnover rates (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005). However, Christensen, Mackey and Whetten (2014) stress that the connection between leadership and CSR requires the creation of a new leadership style that takes into consideration a stronger focus on which leadership characteristics are needed to facilitate strong CSR commitment. This is in line with Groves and LaRocca (2011) who criticize that leadership research is lacking empirical studies dealing with specific leadership styles that supports employee commitment towards CSR. They further argue that there is a need to distinguish between transformational leaders who really put emphasis on establishing a CSR culture by motivating and rewarding their co-workers to participate in CSR and what they call “pseudo-transformational leaders” (p. 512). The latter are more focused on financial performance and shareholder value which leads to a more superficial implementation of CSR.

Based on this critique Christensen, Mackey and Whetten (2014) take into consideration the concept of ethical leadership which defines leaders as individuals who support CSR through “communicating ethical standards, encouraging ethical conduct, modelling ethical behaviour,

and opposing unethical conduct” (Christensen, Mackey & Whetten, 2014, p. 172). Crane and Glozer (2016) focus on what they call “CSR interpretation” (p. 1241) which highlights the importance to explore how managers interpret CSR, as they are the interface to the employees. Basu and Palazzo (2008) go further into detail by emphasising the importance to explore “how managers think, discuss, and act with respect to their key stakeholders and the world at large” (p. 122). In general, one can say that managers occupy an essential role in engaging employees in CSR which implicates that managers not only need to motivate their employees towards CSR but that they are also aware that their overall behaviour within the organization needs to reflect the importance of CSR for the organization (Basu & Palazzo, 2008).

Social learning theory

The social learning theory can be used to illustrate the importance of leadership in the creation of employee commitment towards CSR as it adopts the notion that human behaviour is mostly learned by observing the behaviour of others (Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014; Decker, 1986; Groves & LaRocca, 2011). Social learning theory defines cognitive actions as essential in regards to behavioural change and distinguishes between learning based on previous incidents or “learning by consequences” (Decker, 1986, p.46). Individuals “can learn behaviors from a live, verbal, or symbolic model in a social context” (Bandura, 1977 cited in Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014, p.212) which implicates that in order to learn a certain behaviour people first need to recognise the behaviour. This underlines the importance of leaders acting as CSR role models as mentioned by Abd Rahim (2016). Manz and Sims Jr. (1981) define this as vicarious learning which “encompasses attentional, retention, motor reproduction, and motivational processes” (p. 105). If one of these processes is not implemented or executed in the right way employees will feel less committed to learn from their leaders a certain behaviour. In the end, this could hinder the accomplishment of organizational goals. Leaders can strengthen their position as role models by implementing a reward system that incorporates and appreciates employee commitment towards certain corporate goals (Manz & Sims Jr., 1981). However, if leaders take their role model function serious and align their behaviour towards a certain goal, others will adapt this behaviour, even though it might not correspond with their mindset or values (Decker, 1986). Nonetheless, the extent to which employees and also managers are willing to contribute to CSR will also depends on how important they believe CSR actions are in increasing organizational performance. This implicates that “followers must first recognize ethics and social responsibility to be

fundamental drivers of organizational effectiveness” (Groves & LaRocca, 2011, p. 515). In addition, leaders have to integrate their co-workers and work alongside with them to ensure high level of commitment (Zahara Saleem & Iglesias, 2016).

The existing theory and literature dealing with the relation between leadership and employees CSR commitment, demonstrate the need to incorporate leadership as a main driver of CSR commitment. It has shown that leaders occupy an outstanding role when it comes to engaging employees towards CSR. This particular applies for managers who are responsible for sales employees, as they can have huge impact on the behaviour of their co-workers on the sales floor.

2.4 Summary of the theoretical chapter

The following paragraph aims to provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of the different drivers of employee’s CSR commitment. As mentioned and elaborated in the previous part, this study focuses on five drivers that are defined as particularly important to facilitate employee commitment towards CSR: Organizational culture, internal CSR, internal communication, training and education and leadership. The empirical part of this study will use these drivers to explore the issue of employee’s CSR commitment and how employees communicate CSR in the customer interaction on the sales floor. However, as this study is of exploratory nature, the empirical part of this study not only tests the five drivers and their contribution to employee’s CSR commitment but also aims to identify other important drivers and barriers that are influencing employees CSR commitment and the communication with customers on the sales floor. Each of the five driver contains different aspects that were used as an indicator to investigate the certain driver.

Figure 1 illustrates the different drivers and the respective aspects that were used to explore and identify the drivers and their role in the creation of employee commitment. All these aspects are mentioned and explained in detail in the literature review of this study. The figure not only provides the reader with an overview of the five drivers but also helps the reader to understand how certain drivers were identified in the empirical part of this study. This is of particularly importance for drivers like organizational culture or internal CSR as there are many different ways to identify and study these concepts empirically.

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Figure 1: Drivers of employee commitment

3 Methodology

The following part of this study will provide a detailed description and justification about the applied methodological research approach. By providing the reader with a comprehensive and transparent overview of the applied practices, this study aims to demonstrate that the empirical data collection and analysis is based on professional work.

The first part will discuss the underlying research philosophy followed by the applied research approach, research strategy, research design and the used sampling methods. The second part of the methodology chapter will focus on the process of data collection and data analysis. Finally, the methodology chapter ends with discussing the quality and reliability of this study and ethical concerns in regard to the process of data collection.

3.1 Research Philosophy

One reason that demonstrates the importance of a philosophical debate within research can be illustrated through the fact that it is almost impossible to separate the researcher from the research. This means that the way how researchers make sense of the world will influence the entire research progress (Klakegg, 2014). This is in line with Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) who argue that the underlying research philosophy of a certain study can have considerable influences on the research process as it not only affects the researcher's role within the study but also the choice and form of the research design. In regard to this study, philosophical knowledge was used to clarify which research design will work and which not.

In general, it is important to reflect and be aware of different philosophical assumptions, as they not only increase the research quality but also contribute to the creativity of the researcher and his/her reflexive role in research methods (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Researchers who neglect their own philosophical position in regards to the conducted study not only increase the risk of selecting the wrong research design but also increase the

quality of the entire study (Klakegg, 2014). Therefore, this study will provide the reader with a brief overview of the underlying epistemological and ontological mindset of this study.

3.1.1 Ontology: the nature of reality and existence

Ontology can be described as philosophical assumptions dealing with the nature of reality and reflects a fundamental debate within natural and social science dealing with the question how things really are (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Klakegg, 2014). In general, there are three main streams dealing with the nature of reality within social- and natural science: realism, relativism and nominalism.

The underlying ontological position of this study incorporates a relativist viewpoint, which claims that the world cannot exist separately from people's perception and that there are always many truths instead of just one (Blaikie, 2007; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). A relativist ontology is suitable in regards to the research question, as it builds upon the perspective that there are no single truths but rather multiple truths created and held by people (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, this study expects to find different results and standpoints depending on who is being questioned. As illustrated in the literature review of this study, the concepts of CSR and employee commitment with all its drivers can be defined as abstract concepts varying in definition and assessment between individuals. Furthermore, this study defines these concepts as subjective terms that are hardly measurable with common rating scales, which are typically used within realism to identify the single truth (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, adopting a relativist ontology provides a suitable foundation to investigate the phenomenon of employee commitment towards CSR as subjectiveness in people's opinions is seen as strength for the quality of this research.

3.1.2 Epistemology: the theory of knowledge

As mentioned by Cunliffe (2011) who takes into account a previous study by Burrell and Morgan (1979) researchers not only need to be sensible of their viewpoint regarding the nature of social reality and existence (ontology) but also about the nature and purpose of knowledge (epistemology) as it influences the choice of research method, which again underlines the importance of research philosophy. Blaikie (2007) tries to simplify the

complex construct of epistemology by describing it as “a philosophical grounding for establishing what kinds of knowledge are possible” (p. 18).

Epistemology, as mentioned above, can be described as the study of the nature of knowledge and is coined by two contrarious views dealing with the issue of how research should be executed: positivism and social constructionism. However, it is essential to be aware of the fact that there has been no philosopher who completely adheres to all aspects of a particular view, which has led to an increasing amount of studies combining methods from both perspectives (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

This study incorporates a social constructionist epistemology that makes allowance for different aspects of social reality that are shaped by people rather than by objective and external factors. The latter is more associated with a positivist epistemology, which claims that knowledge needs to be observed as a part of the external reality (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Klakegg, 2014). The task of the researcher in this study is not the collection of facts based on objective measurements, which is common in positivist studies, but to acknowledge and appreciate how people make sense of the world, mainly by sharing their experiences with others through language (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, in contrast to a positivist epistemology, human interests can be considered as the main driver of science, which also means that the researcher takes a more active part in the process of data collection. In regards to the aim of this study, a social constructivist viewpoint is more suitable as it allows a more subjective and interpretative approach, which is needed to gain deeper understanding how and why employees are committed towards CSR. The aim is not to measure reality or facts as in positivism but to gain an in-depth understanding how employees make sense of CSR. This would probably not have been possible with a positivist approach as it does not allow the researcher to interact with the participant in the same way.

The underlying social constructionist epistemology of this research is closely linked to the incorporated relativistic ontological of this study as both build upon the same philosophical viewpoint (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The research philosophy of this paper builds the foundation for the research approach, research strategy and research design which will be explained in detailed in the following part of this study.

3.2 Research strategy

In general, a research strategy distinguishes between qualitative or quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). A simple distinction between these two research strategies is provided by Bryman and Bell (2015): “quantitative researchers employ measurement and qualitative researchers do not” (p. 37).

Even though many researchers underline the importance to distinguish between these two concepts, there is an ongoing debate within research discussing the relevance of differentiate between quantitative and qualitative research. Whereas some authors define them as two contrasting and distinct concepts which are based on different epistemological foundations, others emphasize that a distinction makes no sense and is simply wrong (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Even though this study does not define qualitative and quantitative as two completely distinct concepts that cannot be mixed within a research study, this study is solely based on a qualitative research strategy in terms of data collection and analysis.

3.2.1 Qualitative research strategy

A qualitative research strategy is mostly indicated by an inductive research approach which usually does not start with the formulation of certain hypothesis but instead uses the collected empirical data as a foundation to build broader themes. A deductive approach, on the other hand, is focused on testing theory based on the collected data (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Soiferman, 2010). Even though this study mostly belongs to an inductive research approach, which also fits with the constructionist epistemology of this study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), it also incorporates characteristics that are usually associated with a deductive approach. Bryman and Bell (2015) define this as an iterative approach, which “involves weaving back and forth between data and theory” (p.25).

In general, qualitative data can be described as non-numeric pieces of information gathered through a more interactive and interpretative process of data collection, which put strong emphasis on what the research participants have said or expressed. Conducting a qualitative research, in principle, means that the researcher occupies an essential role in developing the empirical data as he or she is more involved in the field as researchers conducting a

quantitative study. This also means that qualitative research can be defined as a more explorative approach towards research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Reflecting upon the research question, a qualitative research strategy was chosen as this study is based upon words and understanding rather than numbers and measurements. In particular, as this study aims to investigate how sales employees commit towards organizational CSR strategies and how they communicate CSR messages in the direct interaction with customers, this study adopts a more explorative approach which also fits better with a qualitative research strategy. A quantitative approach of data collection would have made it much more difficult or maybe even impossible to provide a rich picture of how employees internalize and communicate CSR. In order to gain a deep understanding of the employees world and how they make sense of CSR, it was seen as crucial to collect the data through a more personal interaction with the employees, which again illustrates the need to adapt a qualitative researcher strategy.

3.3 Research design

There are a wide variety of different methodologies that are associated with constructionist research designs as for instance ethnography, action research or narrative methods (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Simultaneously there are methods like grounded theory (Goulding, 2002; Oktay, 2012) and case method (Eisenhardt, 1989) that can be either qualitative or quantitative (Yin, 1981). This is consistent with Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) who stress, that even though the majority of the case method literature is associated with positivism, it can also be constructed from a constructionist and relativist perspective. The same applies for grounded theory, just the other way around.

3.3.1 Single case study design

This study applies a single case study research design by following the argumentation of Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) and other authors (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1981), who argue that a case method research design is not in contradiction to a relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology. This applies in particular for single case study designs as they are mostly associated with a constructionist epistemology (Easterby-Smith,

Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Yin (2014, p. 9) adopts a definition by Schramm (1971) that defines case study research as follows:

“The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result.”

A single case study design was chosen as the aim is to provide a rich picture of behaviour in organizations that reflects and take into account the dynamics within single settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Eisenhardt 1989; Stake, 1995). In addition, a case study design was chosen as it helps to answer questions like “how” and “why” (Yin, 2014, p. 9) which corresponds the explorative nature of this study.

Arguments for selected case

In particular, this study can be described as an embedded single case study design (Yin, 2009) of IKEA, which covers semi-structured interviews with both managers and employees. The majority of the collected data is based upon interviews with sales employees working directly on the sales floor to investigate firstly, to which extend employees are committed towards CSR and secondly, how they communicate CSR messages in the interaction with customers. However, in order to answer these questions and to explore potential incongruences, this study will also conduct interviews with two country CSR managers to understand how IKEA makes sense of CSR on the corporate level. Therefore, even though this case study is about a single organization (IKEA), it includes multiple units of analysis as the empirical data consist of interviews with sales employees and managers.

Yin (2014) emphasises that a single case study is only an appropriate research design if the case can be considered as “critical, unusual, common, revelatory or longitudinal” (p. 51). Taking into account the five different single case rationales above, IKEA can be considered as a common case which is defined by the aim “to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation” (Yin, 2014). Bryman and Bell (2015) adopt a similar definition by defining the selection of such cases as typical case sampling. However, as IKEA has a very strong corporate culture, which can be even defined as unique and special, one could also argue that IKEA shows characteristics of an unusual case.

Even though many researchers seem to challenge the role of the physical store in the future, there are still many companies like IKEA that define their brick and mortar stores as an essential part of their strategy. For that reason, such companies need to facilitate that their sales employees internalize and represent the corporate values and goals, such as CSR, in the interaction with the customers. Therefore, IKEA was chosen as a company that not only defines CSR as a crucial strategic pillar but also its brick-and-mortar stores. Consequently, one could assume that sales employees at IKEA occupy an essential role in communicating CSR messages as they are in a constant face to face exchange with customers on the sales floor. Therefore, IKEA was identified as a good example to investigate employee's CSR commitment and how these employees communicate CSR issues in the interaction with customers on the sales floor. Furthermore, the fact that IKEA defines itself as a company with a strong corporate culture makes it even more relevant to study, as the organizational culture plays an important role in CSR commitment.

Accessibility is undeniably another reason that has influenced the decision to chose IKEA as a case. During the previous years there has been developed a good relationship between IKEA and Lund University. The fact that this study is part of a master degree program at Lund University facilitated the matter of access significantly. This is a relevant issue, as it can be a huge challenge to get permission from such a large enterprise to conduct a case study research without any references. More precisely, the good relationship between IKEA and Lund University accelerated the search for contact persons who gave us deeper access to IKEA.

3.4 Data collection

The process of data collection can be defined as a key element within research as it builds the foundation for the following analysis. There is a wide range of different methods of data collection like interviews, surveys or focus groups (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In addition, there is a distinction between primary and secondary data. Whereas primary data is collected first-hand directly from the researcher, secondary textual data usually consists of written information like company reports that were written for other purposes than research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

3.4.1 Qualitative semi-structured interviews

As this study is based upon a single case study design and follows a subjectivist ontology and interpretative epistemology, semi structured qualitative interviews with sales employees and managers at IKEA were used in order to explore employee commitment towards CSR among sales employee at IKEA (Cunliffe, 2011). Referring to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) qualitative interviews aiming the “in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience” (p. 134) through the application of different open and non-directive interview techniques. In addition to the execution of semi structured interviews, the data collection also incorporated secondary data in the form of IKEAs sustainability strategy report, People and Planet Positive, to complement the gathered primary data. In particular, the secondary data was used to get insights about how IKEA is dealing with the issue of CSR internally and how IKEA makes sense of CSR on a corporate level. Additionally, as this study is part of a research project between Lund University and IKEA, we were also able to use one transcript of an interview with a swedish sustainability manager that was conducted as part of the main research project.

Topic guide

As mentioned above all interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews, which mean that the interviews didn't follow a strict order of questions, which is typical for more structured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore, the interviews were based on a topic guide (see Appendix A & B) that can be defined as a “prepared list of areas (rather than specific questions) that need to be covered during the course of an interview” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015, p. 342). Topic guides facilitate the generation of thick data and avoid superficial answers from the participants. This of particular importance for this study as the aim is to explore multiple truths and takes into consideration different interpretations (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

The topic guide for the interviews with sales employees (see Appendix A) was created while taking into consideration the different drivers mentioned in the literature review of this study. More specifically, there has been constructed at least one question with certain sub-questions in regards to each of the five drivers. In addition, as this study also wants to investigate if there are any other drivers that affect employee's CSR commitment and the communication with customers, the topic guide also includes certain questions that aim the identification of

potential other drivers. In line with the flexible and open character of a topic guide, the questions were not always asked in the same order. Furthermore, it appeared that not all sub-questions needed to be asked, as they were often answered automatically by the interviewee. The questions were also prioritized, as the time frame for the interviews were limited. However, there have been just two interviews in which certain sub-questions were excluded due to a limited time frame.

The topic guide of the interview with the German sustainability manager (see Appendix B) was constructed while taking into consideration the questions that were asked in the interview with the Swedish sustainability manager that our professors provided us as secondary data. However, the questions differ slightly in comparison to the interview with the Swedish sustainability manager as the topic guide of the interview with the German sustainability manager is more focused on how IKEA make sense of sustainability on the corporate level and how they try to achieve CSR commitment in different stores.

Data that was collected through loosely structured interviews is characterised by a small degree of standardization and a high level of interpersonal interaction between researcher and participant. Such data must be treated very carefully. Otherwise, there is the risk that the answers are biased and the participant only answers in favour of the researcher (Kvale, 1992). In order to decrease the risk of biased answers, the main purpose of this study was kept secret. This means that the employees only knew that the study is about internal communication and the employee-customer interaction in general. If they would have known that it is about CSR from the beginning, there would have been the risk that the answers were only given in regards to CSR. To further avoid that the interviewees know from the beginning that this study is about CSR the first questions of the topic guide are not directly related to CSR. The aim was to investigate if employees would mention CSR without being directly asked about it.

In total the empirical data consist of 19 interviews with IKEA sales employees and two interviews with the respective national CSR managers from Sweden and Germany (see table 1 & 2). It is important to mention that the names in the tables are fictional as all interviewees are treated anonymously.

Remote telephone interviews

Even though remote telephone interviews are lacking face-to-face interaction and the analysis of nonverbal communications, only four interviews were conducted face-to-face. This is because it was very difficult to arrange personal interviews with sales employees at IKEA as the majority of the respective store managers were not able to support this study. For this reason only 8 interviews were provided directly by IKEA, from which 4 were also held via telephone. The remaining interview participants were contacted privately through LinkedIn, XING or Facebook. This also implicates that all interviews that were not provided by IKEA took place outside the working hours of the participants. Even though the conduction of telephone interviews can be seen as a potential weakness of this study as they also neglect the immediate contextualization, it facilitated a more flexible and less time-consuming process of data collection (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

Each interview with the sales employees have lasted between 20 and 40 minutes, whereas the two interviews with the national sustainability manager of Sweden and Germany have lasted around 45 minutes each. It is important to mention that all interviewees were asked if they prefer to have the interview in their mother tongue or in english. This was a purposeful decision to overcome potential language barriers, which could have not only affected the interview flow negatively but also the quality of the gathered data, as the interviewees could have had problems to express their self in English. Furthermore, all interviews were recorded, transcribed and afterwards translated into English if necessary.

Nr	Name	Department	Store	Country
1	Linda	Bedroom	Hamburg - Schnelsen	Germany
2	Alberto	Kitchen	Älmhult	Sweden
3	Lisa	Food	Berlin - Tempelhof	Germany
4	Caro	Kitchen	Hamburg - Schnelsen	Germany
5	Aapi	Kitchen	Dresden, Leipzig, Berlin, Newcastle	Germany
6	Lisanne	Bedroom	Dortmund - Kamen	Germany
7	Weronika	Kitchen, Bedroom	Kungens kurva, Kalmar	Sweden
8	Miranda	IKEA communication	Älmhult	Sweden
9	Maik	Internship	Berlin - Tempelhof	Germany
10	Keren	Lightning	Kalmar	Sweden
11	Johan	Lightning	Älmhult	Sweden
12	Ronja	Kitchen	Göteborg, Kalmar	Sweden
13	Heidi	Customer support	Älmhult	Sweden
14	Jacob	Lightning	Kalmar	Sweden
15	Sofie	Kitchen	Älmhult	Sweden
16	Axel	Kitchen	Älmhult	Sweden
17	Mats	Kitchen	Kalmar	Sweden
18	Sofia	Lightning	Älmhult	Sweden
19	Scarlett	Lightning	Älmhult	Sweden

Table 1: Interviews sales employees

Nr	Position	Country
1	Sustainability manager	Sweden
2	Sustainability manager	Germany

Table 2: Interviews sustainability managers

3.5 Sampling

When it comes to sampling within qualitative research the most cited technique is called purposive sampling, which describes that the sampling process takes places with having regards to certain criteria that need to be met. That means that the researcher is choosing units of analysis that will allow him or her to answer the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This corresponds with the applied sampling technique of this study, as not only the target markets (Sweden/Germany) but also the departments (lightning/bedroom/kitchen/food) and the interviewees were chosen under certain criteria.

Sweden and Germany were chosen as both markets can be considered as key markets for IKEA in terms of sales. In addition, both markets have a strong emphasis on CSR, which is also relevant in regards to the research question. However, the fact that this study is written at Lund University, which is located in Sweden, also influenced the decision to take Sweden as a market, as it simplified the matter of access and reduced traveling time and costs. Another reason why this study also incorporates interviews with employees outside of Sweden is due to the fact that IKEA was founded in Sweden. Through the conduction of interviews with German IKEA employees this study excludes explanations in terms of CSR that are only based on the fact that Sweden is the home market of IKEA. In addition, the German market was not only suitable because of the mentioned characteristics, but also because it allowed us to conduct interviews in the mother tongue of the sales employees. The same applies for the Swedish market. This was beyond question a crucial point that influenced the decision to investigate the Swedish and German market, as especially in Germany sales employees at IKEA are usually not fluent in English. Language barriers would have decreased the quality of the empirical data significantly.

In regards to the selected departments (lighting/bedroom/kitchen/food) the idea was to focus on departments that have a close connection towards CSR issues. As energy and water efficiency are closely related towards CSR, the lighting and kitchen department were chosen. The food department was also identified as a department that is closely related to CSR issues as food waste can be considered as a crucial topic in the context of CSR (Parfitt, Barthel & Macnaughton, 2010). The bedroom department, finally, also implicates a close connection to CSR issues as many products are made of wood. In addition, mattresses are of particular

importance when it comes to CSR as there is an ongoing debate dealing with the matter of water consumption in the fabric production (Güyer, Nadeem & Dizge, 2016). However, as displayed above (table 1) there has been also interviews conducted with three employees that are not directly working as sales employees on the sales floor (communication/customer support/internship). It became apparent that these interviews could not be used to explore the customer interaction in regards to CSR as the interviewees had to less contact with customers on a daily basis. However, as the interviews could provide other valuable insights for this study, they were not excluded from the data analysis.

To limit the data collection to certain departments was beneficial in regards to the analysis and interpretation of the gathered data, as the focus on specific segments allowed us to control environmental variation (Eisenhardt, 1989). This means that it would have been more difficult to interpret and draw conclusions if the data would have been gathered from random departments. More precisely, with this approach it was possible to exclude differences in CSR commitment between employees that are only based on the reason that a certain employee works in a low involvement segment, in which CSR is not very relevant. This means that the sampling strategy in regards to interview participants can be defined as “criterion sampling” (Bryman & Bell, 2015) as the employees were chosen under the precondition that they are working in one of the four departments. In addition, snowball sampling was applied in order to get the needed sampling size. This means that every employee was asked after the interview if he or she knows other colleagues that meet the criteria.

3.6 Data analysis

Qualitative research does usually not follow a strict linear structure of data collection, analysis and theory construction. Especially the process of data analysis and interpretation often overlap (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015), which also applies for this study. However, it is crucial to convince the reader that the findings are not an outcome of biased subjectivity, but instead of professional work throughout the entire research (Kvale, 1992). Constructionist research designs need to be believable and transparent to support the quality and validity of its results (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Therefore, the following paragraph will provide the reader with a transparent overview of the process of data analysis.

The aim of the data analysis was the systematic reduction of the empirical data through a systematic identification of relevant themes. The identification of themes followed a certain structure provided by Ryan and Bernard (2003), who argue that there are different techniques to identify themes. Following their reasoning, the data analysis was based on four different steps. The first step deals with the identification of certain themes and subthemes. Second, the reduction of themes to a feasible amount by taking into consideration its relevance in regard to the research question. Third, organizing the remaining themes in a hierarchical order that considers again its relevance to the research question. Fourth, linking the themes to each other and compare them to the theory.

In regards to this study the identification of themes and subthemes was conducted with simultaneous consideration of the five different drivers of CSR commitment mentioned in the literature review. More specifically, this means that the identification of themes was affected by the different drivers of CSR commitment presented in the last part of the literature review. However, as this study incorporates an explorative nature, other emerging themes have also been taken into consideration. This is due to the fact that the aim of this study is not only testing certain theories but to explore how employees communicate and internalize CSR initiatives and which other drivers or barriers exist that influence employee commitment towards CSR.

3.7 Reliability and validity

The qualitative nature of this study not only affects the process of data collection but also the approach towards reliability and validity. More precisely, it is of importance to differentiate between the qualitative and quantitative measures. In regards to this study, quantitative quality measures are not of interest as they very much focus on the measures of the research, and whether or not they measure what they are supposed to (Bryman, 2012). This further entails that there would be a single truth or reality, which is not supported in this research. In general, constructivist research designs are less concerned with questions of validity than a positivistic approach (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). For that reason, there has been developed other terms dealing with the evaluation of quality within constructivist research designs. This study follows the argumentation of Bryman (2012) who introduces two alternative terms to discuss the issue of quality: trustworthiness and authenticity.

3.7.1 Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Bryman (2012) adopts a framework provided by Guba and Lincoln (1994) who stress that trustworthiness can be defined by four separate criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria will be used to discuss the issue of trustworthiness in regards to this study.

Credibility

Trustworthiness highly depends on credibility, which means that a research needs to be carried out according to best practice and that others can review the work (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In regards to this study great emphasis has been placed on providing the reader with a comprehensive and transparent overview of the applied methods of data collection and analysis. This implicates that the reader of this study is able to trace back the underlying research philosophy of this study, which demonstrates that the methods were not chosen randomly but through professional work. Moreover, this study can be reviewed by others as it can be freely accessed at any time, which can be seen as beneficial in terms of credibility.

Furthermore, a majority of the conducted interviews were not directly provided by IKEA and were thereby carried out outside of working hours of the employees. This can be argued as a strength of this study as it is not possible to exclude the risk that the managers prepare interviewees ahead of the interview. This is particularly relevant as the employees provided by IKEA were chosen by the managers and not by the researchers of this study. This is in line with Patton (1999) who argued for that the gathering of high quality data affects the credibility of a qualitative study.

Transferability

Bryman (2012) explain the second criteria for trustworthiness, transferability, as to what extent the research is adaptable to another context or the same context in another time. Transferability is closely linked to an ongoing debate within research that discusses the role of generalizability within qualitative research. It is of importance to emphasize that this study is not aiming any kind of statistical generalizability, which corresponds with the subjective and explorative character of this study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This study is in line with the argumentation of Kvale (1992) who stresses that even though a common critique from positivist researcher is that interviews are not generalizable, few subjects can also create

generalizable knowledge. In particular, even though this study is only investigating CSR commitment within a single organization (IKEA) the findings can be still transferred to another context. However, in accordance with Kennedy (1979) the question of generalization is also to some extent transferred to the people who have the intention to apply the findings of this study to their own settings. This is because the readers of this study, who might want to use the findings of this study, have the essential knowledge to decide if the findings are applicable to their specific situations or not. The fact that this study describes in detail the context and underlying condition of the case facilitates the issue of transferability. This is in line with Bryman and Bell (2015) who emphasize that thick a description of a case provides the reader with the necessary knowledge to judge about the possibility of transferability.

Dependability

The third criteria, dependability, describes to what extent the study is dependable on others during the research process. In regards to this study there has been a high level of dependency as the research process was not only constantly audited by a supervisor from Lund University, but also influenced by IKEA. This means that the supervisor was monitoring on a regular basis to what extent accurate procedures have been applied, which is also described by Bryman and Bell (2015). Furthermore, the process of data collection was greatly dependent on IKEA, as they established the connections towards managers, who in turn provided access to sales employees.

Conformability

Trustworthiness is finally defined by conformability. In a socially constructed research, such as this one, full objectivity is not possible, however, it is of particular importance that the researcher act in good faith, hence not allowing oneself to invoke too biased opinions (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This is closely related to the concept of reflexivity, which emphasizes the importance to avoid any hasty conclusion drawn by the researcher. In particular, reflexivity means to approach an issue from different angles and to avoid one-sided interpretations caused by a biased mindset (Alvesson, 2003). The fact that this study was conducted by two people can be defined as beneficial in terms of reflexivity as it facilitated the integration of multiple interpretations. This is of particular importance as this study incorporates an interpretative and explorative approach. In summary, the entire process of data collection and analysis was accompanied by a reflexive approach “of scepticism but not of rejection” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 28). This also entails that the data was analysed with the

knowledge that the interviewees could have answered not only in favour of the researchers but also in favour of IKEA or themselves. Alvesson (2003) describes the latter as “Moral Storytelling and Promotional Activity” (p. 21), in which the interviewees want to make a good impression of themselves and the organization they are working in. However, even though the interviews were analyzed with this knowledge, it is not possible to avoid that such phenomena influence the empirical data. This underlines the importance to approach the data with a reflexive mindset.

Authenticity

The data in this study was collected from a variety of IKEA stores in Sweden and Germany. More precisely, the collected data covers interviews with sales employees from several high involvement departments within each store. Furthermore, data also covers interviews with sustainability managers in order to get the full picture on IKEA and their sustainability values. By doing so the research depicts a comprehensive representation of IKEAs sales employees in Sweden and Germany and IKEAs internal view on sustainability, whilst it excludes the perception of external stakeholders. It is also to be noted that interviews from low involvement departments within each store were used in order to ensure rich and relevant data in terms of organizational culture and values. This is in line with Bryman and Bell’s (2015) criteria for authenticity and fairness, in terms of that a study shall be a fair representation of the social setting. Moreover, the interviewed employees have an employment span at IKEA from 3 months to 11 years. This provides a broad cover of employees and allows for a fair representation of the social setting.

3.8 Ethical considerations

According to the Academy of Management codes of ethical conduct (Bryman & Bell, 2015) the safety of the participants in this research will be respected to full extent. This study does not aim to get individuals view upon CSR commitment but to get an extensive understanding of sales employees CSR commitment. The result of this is that each participant was handled with anonymity in order to not jeopardize their career of future employment.

Much alike this, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) outline ten key principles for conducting ethical research, namely, ensuring no harm for participants, respect the dignity of

participants, ensuring full participation consent, protecting the privacy of participants, ensuring the confidentiality of the data, ensuring anonymity of organizations or individuals, avoiding deceiving aims, transparent communication and ensuring no misguidance of findings. Overall, this aims to protect the research participants as well as the integrity of the research community. With the exception of fully informed interviewees and open declaration of collaboration with IKEA, these ethical principles were followed. The interviewees did not beforehand know the specifics of the research in order to avoid biased answers, however this did not compromise their safety by any means.

Furthermore, this study does not intend to evaluate the performance of sales employees, thus not questioning their dignity nor in any way put the employees at harm. Therefore, this also ensured the protection of research participants as explained by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015). As aforementioned, all employees were treated anonymously by only categorizing and account for their respective department.

It is also of importance to ensure the integrity of the research community. To do so, there has been no deception of the study's desired aims. All data has carefully been accounted and analyzed according to the purpose of the research. It has also been clearly stated in all communication that this study and its collected data is part of a larger research project, and that there is a close collaboration with IKEA Sweden. It should be clear that this shows a strong affiliation towards two interest groups, however it should also be noted that all data was analyzed independently and objectively.

4 Findings & Analysis

The following part of this study will present the findings and analysis of the collected data. As mentioned in the previous methodology chapter of this study, the analysis and identification of certain themes and sub-themes was influenced by the model (figure 1) presented in the last part of the literature review. The model also provides the structure for this part of the study, as the findings for each of the five drivers will be presented separately. However, before analyzing the respective drivers the chapter will start with the analysis of IKEAs global CSR strategy and how CSR is managed on a national level in Germany and Sweden. Following this, the findings of the five different CSR drivers will be presented: Organizational culture, Internal CSR, Internal Communication, Training & Education and Leadership. After this, an additional driver of employee's CSR commitment will be introduced that was found during the analysis. The last part of this chapter will analyze employee's CSR commitment at IKEA and the CSR communication of sales employees in the interaction with customer on the sales floor.

4.1 IKEAs CSR strategy

As elaborated on in the literature review, CSR is based upon a company's willingness to take social responsibility beyond what is required by law, whilst sustaining the needs of future generations (Carroll, 1979; Mandhachitara & Poolthong, 2011; Raatsch, 2012). This commitment was found within IKEA through the collection of secondary data in terms of an interview done with the Swedish sustainability manager and IKEAs sustainability strategy, People and planet positive, along with executing one interview with the German sustainability manager, defined by the organization as sustainability.

*"Sustainability - Environmental, economic and social well-being for **today and tomorrow** - is becoming an integrated part of our business and is one of the strategic cornerstones in the IKEA Group direction 'Growing IKEA Together.'" (IKEA, 2012, p. 5).*

*"It [sustainability] is not only about environmental concerns ... we support communities in suffering areas and ... we **bring economics and ecology together.**"* (German sustainability manager, 2017)

These quotes show that IKEA defines CSR as sustainability, and that they are willing to commit to a more sustainable future beyond what is required by law, as explained by Carroll (1979). This is emphasized by that they are looking to be sustainable "today and tomorrow", that they want to make it an integrated part of their business and that it covers economic, environmental and social well-being.

The report People and Planet Positive was introduced in 2012 and contains the IKEA Group's sustainability strategy with goals to reach until 2020 (German sustainability manager, 2017; IKEA, 2012). The report claims three change drivers that will alter the way IKEA do business, to something more sustainable. The three change drivers, also known as IKEA's commitments are the following (1) a more sustainable life at home, (2) resource and energy independence and (3) a better life for people and communities (IKEA, 2012).

"It focuses on three main areas in order to simplify, in order to generate the greatest positive effect on people and planet." (Swedish sustainability manager, 2016).

Even though the sustainability strategy People and Planet Positive offers the full view on IKEA and dictates the main focus of their work towards becoming a more sustainable retailer, each country can make their own judgements on what areas to put focus. This is due to that each market respond to their own needs, whether it may be increasing sales or emphasizing sustainability.

*"It is very **different in all markets.** I think of for example the Swedish market, that is ahead of the German market on sustainability, but looking at eastern Europe they just have other problems than sustainability, so it is not their first **priority** to look at the environment."*
(German sustainability manager, 2017)

*"The sustainability strategy provides the **foundation**, but within this we have the **freedom** to develop according to our own conditions."* (Swedish sustainability manager, 2016)

There are interesting indications in the two above mentioned quotes. The degree to which the sustainability strategy seems to dictate the conditions of which the markets should operate is not really clear. By looking on the first section of this analysis it appears that IKEA has a strong idea about what they would like to achieve in regard to a more sustainable world, however, the implementation highlights words such as *different in all countries, priority, foundation and freedom*. This could imply a lack of structure regarding the implementation strategy in each market, potentially reducing the impact or coherency of the strategy.

What is also to be noticed is that IKEA wants to integrate sustainability in the day-to-day work among all employees, not only sustainability managers. It is predicted that by august 2017 95% of all co-worker shall think that sustainability is a natural aspect of their daily work (IKEA, 2012). This is of particular interest to analyze as Hameed et al. (2016) found that the benefits that an organization extracts from CSR activities are dependent on the commitment of employees.

*”Globally we have 155 000 sustainability coordinators, as sustainability shall be a natural part in **all co-workers** daily activities.”* (Swedish sustainability manager, 2016)

The idea is that all new co-workers are going through sustainability training as a part of the introduction. However, the information reaching the co-workers and sales representatives is only a fraction of the sustainability strategy for pedagogical reasons according to the Swedish sustainability manager (2016). By arguing for pedagogical reasons when not providing the full strategy could imply for a lack of trust in the employees, in the sense that they could not handle all information. Nevertheless, it is to be said that the effectiveness reached by a partial integration of the strategy is unclear. Furthermore, it was also argued that the recruitment of co-workers could bring increased commitment and engagement towards sustainability. However, it is also interesting to see that despite this immense commitment towards implementing sustainability at IKEA, the sustainability managers have limited influence of what is communicated or utilized in the stores. On the question about how to secure store engagement towards sustainability the answers were clear.

*”I have **no** power to do anything! The stores can decide what is important for them, I can merely motivate them.”* (German sustainability manager, 2017).

"The sales department have the authority to say 'yes fine, let's do that', or 'no, we have other things that need to be communicated here'." (Swedish sustainability manager, 2016)

The data indicates strong intentions of implementing sustainability throughout the IKEA organization, down to all the employee by making it a part of all co-workers daily activities. This is further emphasized by aiming for sustainability, today and tomorrow, including environmental, economic and social well-being. Nevertheless, the lack of power to implement the strategy is not in line with the targets. By stating that all employees shall undergo sustainability training does not seem as a sufficient implementation. Add to this that all stores have the power to priorities sustainability after their own needs, there is no guarantee that the training will be implemented either.

4.2 Drivers of employee CSR commitment

4.2.1 Organizational Culture

As elaborated in detail in the literature review the organizational culture can be seen as one of the most crucial drivers of employee's CSR commitment as the culture of an organization needs to reflect and align the desired CSR position that is communicated to external stakeholders. If there is a mismatch, employees will feel less committed to internalize and communicate CSR to the customers (Brunton, Eweje & Taskin, 2017). The analysis has shown that all employees, no matter for how long they are working at IKEA or in which department, store or country, they always defined the culture and atmosphere as special and unique. Even those employees who spoke critically about the salary described that the culture coupled with the strong sense of belonging within IKEA compensates a low salary.

*"The atmosphere between us employees is always **coined by the motivation to exchange knowledge and to work together on common targets**. I have the feeling almost everyone is willing to contribute and to learn." (Lisa, food, Berlin-Tempelhof)*

*"Even though the salary is not that high **the brand and the culture is so strong and everyone appreciate to work at IKEA and to be part of this**. For that reason, you can even except a lower salary." (Heidi, customer support, Älmhult)*

*“The first thing that comes in my mind regarding **the atmosphere is family.**”* (Maik, internship, Berlin-Tempelhof)

When the employees were asked to describe the prevailing culture and atmosphere they often highlighted strong “team spirit”, “teamwork” and “togetherness” within their departments. It seems that the employees appreciate a team focused working environment in which individual performance is of secondary importance. This is also reflected by IKEA’s reward system that forbids individual monetary bonuses for sales employees, which is unusual for the home furniture industry.

*“**The team spirit is very very good.** Team spirit is the biggest word that crosses my mind when I have to describe the atmosphere and culture at IKEA.”* (Lisanne, bedroom, Dortmund)

*“**IKEA has a special position in the furniture market** when it comes to the reward system of employees. This means that the salary of sales employees usually depends on the amount of furniture that they sell. We at IKEA don’t have this kind of payment, **we don’t put individual performance in the centre.**”* (Aapi, kitchen, Dresden et al.)

As highlighted by Nielsen and Thomsen (2009) a beneficial corporate culture in terms of CSR commitment is characterized by a value oriented culture that influences the behaviour of employees through their identification with the organization and not through strict compliance and obedience. This highly corresponds with the findings of the interviews with the sales employees and the sustainability managers as the entire chain of commands within IKEA seems to be based upon willingness support. It starts with the national sustainability managers who do not have the power to force the store managers to contribute to sustainability and it ends with the sales employee who described that they never feel forced to contribute towards certain goals or strategies. It seems that the employees are guided by the strong team work focus and not by the commands of the managers, which motivates them to perform well. This is also affected by the flat hierarchy and the close relationship to managers that almost all employees described during the interviews. Even though managers occupy theoretically a higher position than sales employees it seems that IKEA tries to give all employees the feeling that they are equally important for the company, which is recognised and valued by most employees.

“You never feel forced, you take the initiative. You build your own journey within IKEA, it is up to you [...] There is no manager chasing you down all the time.” (Axel, kitchen, Älmhult)

“I think the flat hierarchy and the close relationship to colleagues and managers leads to better performance and service. It gives you a positive vibe in the store and motivates you to contribute.” (Lisanne, bedroom, Dortmund)

“In IKEA it is like you can sit and have lunch with the store manager, you can sit and grab a beer after work with your supervisor or anything. They don’t make any difference in terms of what position you have.” (Alberto, kitchen, Älmhult)

As mentioned in the literature review, another important factor that contributes to an organizational culture that facilitates employees CSR commitment is the level of employee involvement in the development and maturation of certain strategies and activities. It has shown that IKEA provides different opportunities for employees to become engaged in certain areas. It also appears that IKEA tries to take into consideration the personal interests of employees and motivates them to try different things within the company. There is also the opportunity for employees to become a member of sustainability groups within certain stores, which are engaged in the process of evaluating and planning sustainability activities. Here the corporate structure of IKEA is beneficial, as the operational level has a strong impact on the development and implementation of CSR strategies in the stores. However, even though the employees seemed to be aware of these groups and appreciated the opportunity, no one was member of such a group.

“There are possibilities for this [to become member in a sustainability group]. Not only sustainability, there are always opportunities and possibilities. If you want.” (Sofie, kitchen, Älmhult)

“We always have somewhere to go if we have some input. If it is on packing or products, why is it like this and so on. We have the possibility to contact the person who can take it further... Sometimes you see products changing and then it is nice to see that the feedback is going somewhere.” (Scarlett, lightning, Älmhult)

As mentioned at the beginning, one of the most crucial aspects in terms of employees CSR commitment is to facilitate that the employees feel that the organizational culture corresponds with the intended external CSR position. This implicates that employees need to perceive CSR as an important value which is anchored in the organizational culture. The analysis of the collected data has shown that all employees are not only aware of IKEAs engagement in sustainability but that they also define sustainability as “a major value” that is part of IKEAs culture and identity.

*“I would say **sustainability is incorporated in the whole business idea of IKEA**. In a sense how products are built, delivered and packaged. I mean **we really value sustainability and it is part of our culture**.”* (Lisanne, bedroom, Dortmund).

This corresponds with the interview of the German sustainability manager who stressed that sustainability is part of IKEA from the very first beginning. According to her IKEAs focus on sustainability is not an image campaign but deeply anchored in the culture of the company.

*“We felt always responsible for people, we always took care for resources, **it seems that the sustainable way is in our DNA**. So we are engaged in sustainability right from the beginning”* (German sustainability manager)

The interviews with the sales employees reflect this as all employees, no matter if they are working in Germany or Sweden, defined IKEA as a sustainable company with an intrinsic motivation in terms of sustainability. In some cases, the strong corporate culture in terms of sustainability seemed to lead to a higher level of identification with IKEA, which is in accordance with Chen and Hung-Baesecke (2014) who describe that a strong CSR culture can positively affect employee’s identification with the organization.

*“Even though it sounds maybe a bit exaggerated **but we [other employees] are really proud to work for a company that is engaged in sustainability** and we also communicate this to our friends”* (Lisa, food, Berlin-Tempelhof)

However, the data also shows that even though almost all employees spoke very detailed and enthusiastic about how great the culture at IKEA is, there has been almost no employee that

mentioned sustainability as a factor of it from the beginning. However, when the employees were asked about the role of sustainability within IKEA they not only highlighted IKEAs engagement in CSR but also that sustainability is a strong value that is incorporated in the culture of IKEA. To further investigate to what extent sustainability is part of IKEAs culture employees were also asked to what extent sustainability is affecting their daily work. Here again the data shows a slightly controversial picture. Whereas some employees stated that sustainability is “a lot in the focus” the majority stress that sustainability is “more incorporated into the brand as a whole”.

*“I think it is a big part of the brand. But I think in regards to my department it is **not a thing that is very strong shown in the daily work**”* (Lisanne, bedroom, Dortmund)

*“IKEA works a lot with sustainability. Not only products **but also we as co-workers**”* (Sofie, kitchen, Älmhult)

It is interesting to see, that even though all employees define sustainability as a strong part of the culture, there are just a few who mentioned that sustainability is influencing their daily work. The employees define sustainability more as a general value that is part of the “mindset” and not necessarily an active part of their daily work. However, one could argue that a strong CSR culture usually implicates that sustainability plays a more active role on a daily basis.

When it comes to ethical codes of conduct in terms of sustainability the collected data also reflects a diverging picture as the extent to which employees CSR behaviour is guided by a set of prescription differs between the different stores. Whereas some employees described in detail different rules and prescribed behaviour in terms of sustainability others stated that they don't have any specific guidelines that dictate their behaviour in terms of sustainability. However, after asking more in detail about CSR practices that are influencing their daily work at IKEA it appears that they all following certain guidelines in terms of sustainability like waste separation or paper recycling. The only difference is that whereas some employees described waste separation and the usage of recycled paper as part of sustainability guidelines monitored by managers or other employees, the majority defined them as taken for granted which means that they didn't consider these practices as strict guidelines as they are a natural part of their behaviour.

*“Even when we are assembling the model products for the sales floor **we are really following the recycling guidelines**, we really separate all the trash always.”* (Linda, bedroom, Hamburg)

“When there is someone who is not willing to follow our sustainability guidelines, he is in trouble.” (Aapi, kitchen, Dresden et al.)

“I think the whole issue of sustainability is so much incorporated that you sometimes not even recognize it.” (Lisanne, bedroom, Dortmund).

The fact that most employees define practices like waste separation and recycling as taken for granted could be an indicator for the successful implementation of IKEAs sustainability guidelines and the positioning of sustainability as part of IKEAs corporate culture. However, to what extent these guidelines are really supporting the implementation of CSR values in the organizational culture and identity, as stressed by Weaver, Treviño and Cochran (1999), remains unclear. However, even though there is no evidence that IKEAs guidelines directly contribute to a strong CSR culture, the data shows that these guidelines can facilitate that the internal behaviour reflects and align the desired CSR position that is communicated to external stakeholders.

*“It would annoy me to work for a company that claims to value sustainability but then doesn’t behave sustainable internally. **I think this is very contradictory and even hypocritical.** I really appreciate the fact that **IKEA tries to implement sustainability wherever it is possible.**”* (Lisa, food, Berlin-Tempelhof)

Even though almost all employees defined CSR as part of IKEAs culture, it remains unclear to what extent this influences directly the active CSR commitment and the behaviour of the employees. Apart from IKEAs internal CSR guidelines and that IKEA is producing their products in a sustainable way, many employees could not give any further examples how CSR is influencing their daily work. It seems that even though sustainability is without question perceived as a part of IKEAs culture, employees mainly value the culture because of its focus on teamwork and togetherness that is based upon the flat hierarchy. Sustainability seems to play a minor role here. However, the analysis has shown that IKEAs corporate culture can be seen as beneficial for the creation of employee commitment towards CSR.

Nevertheless, as highlighted in the literature review, the corporate culture only builds the foundation for the implementation of further drivers.

4.2.2 Internal CSR

Much like organizational culture, internal CSR was identified as a driver with strong presence within IKEA. Also in line with the organizational culture, the majority of employees are very satisfied with IKEA as employer. There has been a strong consensus across departments and stores about the beneficial aspects of working at IKEA. Some even went so far as to argue that they felt spoiled, whilst others were satisfied with being provided with benefits such as new shoes. Of course, it shall not be overlooked that all interviewees were not equally satisfied.

*” There are **a lot** of small benefits, like you get new shoes every year ... it shows that IKEA as an employer really **appreciate** and **value** us as employees.”* (Caro, kitchen, Hamburg)

*”I feel a bit **spoiled**.”* (Axel, kitchen, Älmhult)

*”Shoe support ... and there is staff discount at some websites. But **thats about it**.”* (Ronja, kitchen, Gothenburg & Kalmar)

The fact that employees to such a broad extent expressed their satisfaction with towards these benefits could be argued that IKEA have managed to implement a strong benefit program for the employees. However, it appears again that although the overall satisfaction, there is a potential difference between stores that strengthens the previous discussions of the individual stores and their independency of decision making. Nevertheless, this is one aspect highlighted by Shen and Zhu (2011), who argued for the importance of investing and supporting the employees. Hameed et al. (2016) elaborate on this as psychological and physiological well-being of the employees. On this point, a major difference was found between the stores. The findings from the interviews held, revealed that only the Älmhult store offer a sports activity center for the employees, whilst other employees are only offered a contribution to support a gym membership.

*"IKEA always try to support me. We have **a lot of activities here in Älmhult**, like football and stuff ... we have this activity center where you can do sports with other colleagues."* (Johan, lightning, Älmhult)

When asking other stores about the sport activity center the answer were following:

*"Yes, I know, but **we do not have that at all** here [Gothenburg & Kalmar]."* (Ronja, kitchen, Gothenburg & Kalmar)

*"Really? No, as far as I am aware **we do not have it here** [Kalmar] or in Stockholm"*
(Weronika, bedroom, Kalmar & Stockholm)

Nevertheless, as mentioned in regards to the organizational culture IKEA employees seem more satisfied with their implemented reward system, that allows for equal opportunities no matter the employee's position and emphasizing on the team rather than the individual. This is in line with Hameed et al. (2016) and Shen and Zhu (2011) arguing for equal opportunities and the investment in employees as key internal CSR, and how this in turn can build perceived internal respect and identification among the employees. Therefore, it is interesting to see how the employees value and appreciate their rewards.

*"I have a feeling that IKEA wants us to feel good! ... There is a retirement plan called Tack, and we have a bonus system activating if the stores reach their goals [sales]. Everyone gets the same cut of the bonus. So **managers and sales employees get the same**."* (Mats, kitchen, Kalmar)

*"The **salary is not that high**, but the brand is so strong and everyone appreciates to work at IKEA and to be a part of this. So for that reason reason you can even **accept a lower salary** for this job. ... I mean, IKEA has a lot of things that other companies do not offer, like a **comprehensive** retirement plan."* (Heidi, customer support, Älmhult)

*"You have great benefits. They really take care of you and they call it the IKEA family for a reason, because you get **the same rewards** from being a manager as if you are on the floor. They make **no differences** and thats one great factor at IKEA."* (Alberto, Kitchen, Älmhult)

These statements are much alike what was appreciated with the organizational culture, the employees seem to value the equality between the levels of hierarchy when it comes to the reward system. Even though the salary came up as a weaker aspect of the reward system, the organizational culture seems to be so strong that it compensates for the deficiency. This raises the question if the internal CSR actually creates employee CSR commitment or if it is rather IKEAs organizational culture building the initial organizational commitment, with internal CSR as a supportive tool.

Nevertheless, IKEA employees across the stores and departments seem to recognize their employer to provide strong employee focus, arguing that it is up to the individual to build its own path within the organization.

*"It is a very good working place, that **cares about the employees** and wants everyone to feel good ... There is a lot of focus on health. **And that you can and want to develop**, it is an employee to recommend. **You are encouraged** to apply for different positions in order to not get stuck. Personal development brings development for the company."* (Mats, Kitchen, Kalmar)

*"I can really feel that **employees are seen as crucial at IKEA**. You are not only a high-performance machine, but **IKEA always also takes into account every single employee**."* (Lisa, IKEA Food, Berlin)

*"**You build your own journey within IKEA**, it is up to you. I would definitely recommend **IKEA**."* (Axel, Kitchen, Älmhult)

Much of what has been said, indicates a strong internal CSR and theoretically, by emphasizing this employee focus, IKEA can generate a strong organizational identification (Costas & Kärreman, 2013; Shen & Zhu, 2011; Hameed et al. 2016) and a beneficial atmosphere that facilitates employee CSR commitment. This is of particular interest in relation to the strong organizational culture that is also acknowledged among the employees, showing IKEA create strong positive associations among their employees by supporting and encouraging development.

Similar feelings seem to represent the work/life balance of the sales employees. A majority seem very satisfied with managing their life aside from work, potentially affected by the strong employee focus and provided benefits. However, it shall not be neglected that whatever the reason or influencing factors, a strong work/life balance can be of great importance in order for employees to appreciate and commit to their work. Thus, it is a strong factor for employee CSR commitment. The findings do however show that the work hours might have a negative impact on the overall satisfaction of the work-life balance.

*"It is very **difficult to have a life after work**. Or between. Considering the working hours, 10-20 or 16-20. It varies very much! And then we are off every second weekend. And then some random day during the week. You are **very stuck**."* (Ronja, kitchen, Gothenburg & Kalmar)

*"Good environment, good company, good values. Very multi-cultural, very very good. **But then the work hours...**"* (Axel, kitchen, Älmhult)

*"Privately is good too. **IKEA cares about our private life**."* (Sofie, kitchen, Älmhult)

*"As an employer, IKEA is really good. It is **easy to manage my life with IKEA** ... I would say **IKEA moved with my different life situations very well**."* (Lisanne, bedroom, Dortmund)

The overall findings related to internal CSR show that IKEA is an appreciated employer among the majority of employees, across most stores and departments. It shall be mentioned that Ronja is expressing extensive critical opinions towards the store and kitchen department in Gothenburg, after having been very satisfied working in Kalmar. It was mentioned by Ronja that there was a major difference between the two stores, mainly due to that the Gothenburg store was cutting on employee expenses leading to a shortage of staff, and that it was an increasingly stressful environment. This lead one to believe that the internal CSR of the store in Gothenburg is not representing the general picture. Looking at what the national CSR managers mentioned about the power of store managers, this could be the potential issue interfering with the implementation of internal CSR. However, IKEAs internal CSR seem to result in a strong organizational identification generating a sense of organizational commitment and identification among the employees (Brammer, Millington & Rayton, 2007; Glavas & Godwin, 2013).

Although IKEA seems to generate a strong internal CSR it is not clear whether this is actually generating CSR commitment. Many employees throughout the interviews expressed satisfaction towards benefits, rewards and their work/life balance provided by IKEA. Considering this, there are no real indications of employees committing to organizational CSR values, but rather it seems to generate internal respect as employees show appreciation towards their treatment. There also appears to be a strong employee focus within the organization, that further elaborates on the organizational appreciation among employees. Only one employee refers to IKEA having good organizational values when questions about internal CSR were brought up. This said, as theory is suggesting internal CSR activities to generate organizational commitment it is possible that it still acts as an enabler for the employee CSR commitment.

4.2.3 Internal communication

As identified in the literature review, internal communication is considered an important driver for employee CSR commitment. The channels through which information is delivered is considered as a driving force to the efficiency of the communication (Crescendo, 2011; Men, 2014; Men, 2015). All the collected data derived from the interviews show that IKEA provides their employees with a vast amount of sources from which they receive information, covering everything from staff magazines, internal TV, posters and meetings, but with a main emphasis on online presence.

*“There are **many different channels**, there is an internal TV which shows news and information. There is a staff magazine, the website and the intranet, with a lot of information.*

A lot of information is also sent by e-mail.” (Mats, kitchen, Kalmar)

*“The majority of all information is communicated through the **the intranet**. In addition to the intranet we of course also use **e-mail**.” (Lisa, IKEA Food, Berlin)*

In terms of which of these channels were used for CSR related issues it was split opinions and no real consensus among the interviewees.

*“Intranet, I believe it is.. We have this, you know, they put up notes and stuff. **A lot of talking**.*

There are things you can read.” (Axel, kitchen, Älmhult)

*"We have monthly meetings at the department ... **Not necessarily sustainability as such**, but it is covered sometimes." (Sofie, kitchen, Älmhult)*

*"**It pops up** in the intranet. All things that are happening are coming there. There are also some films about sustainability but that is nothing that I have been watching." (Miranda, IKEA communications, Älmhult)*

*"They **should** get it [sustainability information] from us managers, but we do not get that much information either." (Sofia, department manager lighting, Älmhult)*

Looking at these quotes employees tend to get the majority of their information from the intranet or e-mail. However, some information is also provided face-to-face by department managers which according to Brunton, Eweje and Taskin (2017) and Men (2015) is considered the most efficient channel of communication as it allows for instant cues and feedback. However, it is unclear to what scope the face-to-face interaction is adopted. Furthermore, it seems that the employees are unable to identify the CSR communication they are presented with and where the information comes from. One employee said *"the responsibility is on someone in the store"* whilst another defined the CSR information as *"nagging"* and that there was *"a lot of e-mails, or something"*. This reveals a similar pattern as discussed regarding IKEA's implementation of sustainability in the organization. It appears that the employees identify the same issues as highlighted by the sustainability managers, that there is no real structure behind implementation and communication about sustainability.

However, despite that channels defined as less efficient in literature seem to dictate the internal communication flow and the confusion among the employees, they all seem to have a sufficient knowledge about CSR as defined by IKEA. Considering this contradiction, it is interesting to see how well the employees talk about the organization's CSR activities, one employee said *"All taps save water, and one new cabinet door is made out of recycled plastic"*, another defined the sustainability strategy implemented by IKEA as *"very exciting"* other employees talked positively about IKEA's engagement in their local societies. One could argue for the relevance of each communication channel, but what could be more interesting is the connection to the organizational culture and the values of IKEA. It appears that employees

regardless of position, are well aware of CSR and thus share the basic values of IKEA. This could reflect that the channel of communication is inferior or of less importance if the basic values of what is communicated is already in place among the employees. Whatever the background of their knowledge is, employees who have great knowledge and skills regarding an organization can make them great channels of communication towards the customers, and thus enhancing the organization's reputation (Gronstedt, 2000).

Moreover, the employees still seem to appreciate the face-to-face interaction with their managers. One employee had noticed increased focus on sustainability on their meetings held by their managers and said *"that communication I have appreciated"*, another employee said *"you can always talk to your manager"*.

*"Most information from above [in the organization] is through e-mail. Lower in the organization, more locally, it is through meetings. We have **very close communication**, or I do, with my manager which is **very nice**"* (Jacob, lightning, Kalmar)

Based upon these insights, and the awareness of the existing confusion, there are reason to believe that increased efforts to communicate directly between department managers and sales employees could clarify the communication flow. This is particularly interesting since it is argued by Mishra, Boyton and Mishra (2014) that communication received from a direct manager has a more positive impact on the employees.

As elaborated on in the literature review and explained by Carroll (2006), Saks (2006) and Mishra, Boyton and Mishra (2014), the engagement of employees and development of trust between the employees and managers can enhance the caring, willingness to listen and support. The development of trust is also a creator of positive behaviors and could hence increase the employee CSR commitment. It was found within the IKEA organization that there was a mutual feeling of trust between managers and employees.

*"There is nothing special that IKEA wants us to emphasize, **they trust us as individuals**"*
(Mats, kitchen, Kalmar)

"I feel a lot of trust. The managers are always asking me if I'm fine and also how my private life is going and if there are any problems." (Heidi, customer service, Älmhult)

Above this, employees also seemed encouraged to communicate their opinions or feelings, and were offered the opportunity to approach managers at different levels or other work teams without the going through middle men.

*”We always have somewhere to go if we have some input. We have the possibility to contact people who can take it further ... sometime you see **products changing** and it is nice to see the the feedback is going somewhere.”* (Scarlett, lightning, Älmhult)

”If I would be more interested in sustainability I could just go to the responsible people ... I could just go and ask them to join that group.”

”I absolutely feel that we are offered the opportunity to contribute to the sustainability agenda.” (Axel, kitchen, Älmhult)

This indicates a well established culture of sharing and high employee engagement in terms of bottom-up communication. It also implies on a strong relationship between the employees and IKEA, showing positive attitudes and intentions. Furthermore, this culture of sharing reflects a strong transparency between employees and managers, something that according to Mishra, Boynton and Mishra (2014) increases the employee engagement. As such, it can be argued that this transparency, which is established within IKEA supports the notion of employee CSR engagement.

4.2.4 Training & Education

Training and education occupy an essential role in the creation of employee commitment as communication alone is often not enough to achieve high employee commitment towards CSR. Employees often ignore CSR initiatives without sufficient training (Burton, Eweje and Taskin, 2017). The Interviews show that training and education is implemented in all departments and occupy an essential role within IKEA. However, there is no specific training in regards to sustainability, neither in German stores nor in Swedish stores. Many employees stated that sustainability is not an explicit part of any training but that is mentioned implicitly as part of IKEAs democratic design, which is presented in detail during the introduction week.

“I never had any specific sustainability training. I mean of course it was mentioned during the information day and during the information week. I mean sustainability is a strong part of IKEAs identity and it is part of the IKEAs democratic design.” (Johan, lightning, Älmhult)

It is conspicuous that the kitchen department is the only department in which sustainability was sometimes mentioned as part of the regular training as sustainability is very much related to IKEAs kitchen appliances. It seems that IKEA employees should use sustainability as a sales argument when it comes to the choice of kitchen appliances. For that reason, sustainability is here more present than in other departments. However, it is important to mention that not all kitchen employees mentioned that sustainability is part of their kitchen training.

“There is no specific training in terms of sustainability but it is sometimes part of the training when it comes to kitchen appliances.” (Sofie, kitchen, Älmhult)

„There is a focus in kitchen training on communicating sustainability when it comes to the kitchen appliances... The aim is that we can tell the customer that this product is maybe cheaper because it saves more energy even though it might be a bit more expensive than other products.” (Caro, kitchen, Hamburg)

In general, the data shows that there are no clear structures or guidelines when it comes to the integration of sustainability in the training and education of employees. It seems that it very much depends on how important the responsible manager perceives the issue of sustainability. Some employees mentioned sustainability as part of their introduction training, others do not. Some employees mentioned that sustainability frequently pops up during training, others do not. Some kitchen employees mentioned that there is a strong focus on sustainability within their trainings, others do not. All this corresponds with the interview conducted with the German sustainability manager who stressed that they are currently working on the implementation of a sustainability training but that in the end each store decides if they want to integrate such a training or not.

“The stores are just implementing the sustainability training when they think that they have enough time and enough passion for it.” (German sustainability manager)

Another reason for the scattered picture in terms of sustainability and training could be the fact that most trainings for IKEA employees are voluntary. Maybe employees who take more frequently different kind of trainings are more often in touch with sustainability than others. On the other hand, the interviews show that all employees appreciate the opportunity to attend as many trainings as possible.

“We really appreciate the trainings and almost everyone takes the chance to attend. And we are not attending because we then don’t need to work, we do it because we really value the opportunity” (Lisa, food, Berlin)

“There is no shortage on training, you can never get too much.” (Axel, kitchen, Älmhult)

Apart from the fact that there is no structure in terms of sustainability training it seems that the construction and content of the training covers many different aspects. The employees described all different kind of trainings like “individual based based training with manager”, “group trainings”, “product trainings”, “refreshing trainings”, “round about the house training”, “customer interaction training”, “sales conversation training”, “meet and greet” training and much more. It seems that training is a crucial tool within IKEA to educate the employees, which is highlighted by many employees who mentioned that they never worked in a company that has so many different trainings. One employee even expressed that he lost the overview because of all the different trainings.

“In comparison to my previous jobs the training at IKEA is way more detailed and more often.” (Lisa, food, Berlin-Tempelhof)

“I would say IKEA is a bit special when it comes to training and education as they have almost every month a new idea, it is sometimes hard to keep the overview” (Aapi, kitchen, Dortmund et al.)

It appears that IKEA neglect the opportunity to use the trainings in a systematic way to educate and motivate their employees to contribute to CSR issues. The fact that all store managers can decide if they want to implement a specific sustainability training can delay the process of implementation strongly, as they first need to get convinced by the respective sustainability manager. It is further peculiar that sustainability is not stronger implemented in

the current trainings, as the majority of the employees described their managers as committed and interested towards sustainability. It also does not correspond with the strong CSR culture and IKEAs strong focus on sustainability discussed previously in this chapter. The training does not reflect IKEAs focus on sustainability in any kind. The training could be a very efficient tool to put sustainability more in the focus as the employees seem to have the desire and capability to learn, which is according to Baldwin and Magjuka (1991) crucial for the success of training programs.

As described by Liu, Lia and Pratt (2009) another way of educating employees is through online learning platforms. IKEA has implemented a comprehensive platform with all kind of information and workshops that also incorporates certain education in terms of sustainability. The collected data show that employees are using the platform very frequently to get information about products. However, there has been just one employee that stated that she is using the platform to educate herself in term of sustainability. She also stated that she can always ask for “my learning” time during or after work and that the managers are emphasized the opportunity from the very first beginning.

*“You always have the time to do what we call “my learning” and in this time **you can search for information on your own** in regards to sustainability. **I personally have a lot of freedom and free time to learn things about sustainability and other issues within my working time”***

(Lisa, food, Berlin-Tempelhof)

“They are really emphasizing this opportunity [using my learning platform] and they want us to be committed” (Lisa, food, Berlin-Tempelhof)

This again illustrates how much the issue of training depends on certain stores and their commitment to include sustainability in the training and education of employees.

4.2.5 Leadership

As mentioned by Ramus (2011) supportive leadership can be defined as crucial in terms of employee commitment towards certain strategies like CSR, which means that managers need to motivate their employees to contribute. The interviews show that managers within IKEA occupy a different role than in many other companies as IKEA managers have a much closer

relationship towards their co-worker which is more based on trust and freedom than on command and obedience. This special relationship is emphasized and valued without exception from all employees that were interviewed.

“The close relationship to manager is special when I compare it to other companies... The hierarchy is not that high” (Linda, bedroom, Hamburg)

“The way how managers treat co-workers is the same way as managers treat other managers.” (Lisa, food, Berlin-Tempelhof)

“In IKEA you can sit and have lunch with the store manager... They don’t make any differences in terms of what position you have.” (Alberto, kitchen, Älmhult)

“They [the managers] trust us as individuals” (Mats, kitchen, Kalmar)

“There is no difference if you speak to a manager or to another employee, within IKEA everybody is the same... Nevertheless, you still see the manager as something “higher” but on the other hand you don’t have the feeling that the manager sees you just as a small co-worker.” (Maik, internship, Berlin-Tempelhof)

However, in regard to motivating employees to contribute to sustainability, managers occupy a more passive role. This means that even though the employees defined their managers as committed towards sustainability they seldom described that managers actively motivate them to contribute to sustainability. The reason for this lies in the special relationship between manager and co-worker in which the employee has a lot of freedom, which means that managers are usually not putting special emphasis on certain topics. It seems that employees have to come up on their own when they are interested in a certain topic, which is then supported by the managers.

“No, since I got back here there hasn’t been any focus on sustainability.” (Sofia, lightning, Älmhult)

“They [managers] don’t stress sustainability to us but I have the feeling they value it.”
(Linda, bedroom, Hamburg)

“I never had such a manager [stressing certain topics]. But you know we have this that **you should challenge yourself.**“ (Axel, kitchen, Älmhult)

It seems that IKEA is not putting the emphasis on motivating the employees to actively participate in sustainability which is according to Ramus (2011) an important part to facilitate CSR commitment. On the other hand, most employees stated that they think that their managers are engaged towards sustainability, which is according to Meyer et al. (2011) another important factor in the creation of employee’s CSR commitment. It seems that managers at IKEA are not emphasising sustainability separately in the communication to their co-workers but more in general as part of IKEAs culture and values.

“They [managers] are not really stressing that we have to react in this way or something. I mean they talk a lot about IKEAs values in general and what the company is about...And sustainability is of course a part of this.” (Lisanne, bedroom, Dortmund)

Just a few employees described a more active role of their managers in terms of sustainability, which builds the foundation for the concept of ethical leadership described by Christensen, Mackey and Whetten (2014). It was conspicuous that almost all employees that emphasized a more active role of their managers in terms of CSR worked in the IKEA store in Kalmar, which is underlined by the fact that some Kalmar employees even stressed that their managers encourage them to communicate CSR actively to the customer.

“I think our manager commit very well to sustainability, I mean with LED and stuff.”

(Keren, lightning, Kalmar)

*“...long warranty, **sustainability** and **environment.**”* (Answer to the question if there is anything that IKEA encourage them to communicate to the customer) (Weronika, kitchen,

Kalmar)

“I think IKEA is investing a lot in sustainability. It also comes up on morning meetings and so on.” (Jacob, lightning, Kalmar)

Even though the majority described a more passive role of their managers in terms of CSR there has been found many parallels to the concept of transformational leadership. As elaborated in detail in the literature review a transformational leadership style can be seen as the foundation to achieve employee commitment towards CSR as it facilitates the transfer of CSR values through non-bottom line goals like trust-building, values and visions (Meyer et al. 2002). Having this in mind IKEA shows a very strong correlation to a transformational leadership style, as all employees highlighted the relaxed and “easygoing” atmosphere and the “very open” and “honest” relationship to managers in which bottom-line results seem to play a minor role for the sales employees. There has been not a single employee that stated that he or she ever felt stressed or forced to sell products to customers, which can be defined as very unusual for people working in sales. Employees often highlighted the close and trustful relationship towards managers, in which managers are not primarily interested in the work performance but also about the private well being of their employees.

“I feel a lot of trust. The managers are asking me if I am fine and also how my private life is going and if there are any problems” (Heidi, customer support, Älmhult).

“...they trust us as individuals.” (Mats, kitchen, Kalmar)

“You are not only a high-performance machine, but IKEA always also takes into account every single employee.” (Lisa, food, Berlin-Tempelhof)

“I never feel pressure to sell something.” (Johan, lightning, Älmhult)

The close relationship between managers and employees is also reflected by IKEAs clothing policy in which all sales employees, no matter if manager or sales co-worker, are wearing the same work clothes. In addition, many employees appreciated that managers are always around and that they are still close to the operational business.

*“All managers, doesn’t matter how high his position might be, also work on on the field so to speak. This means that **they are also working on the sales floor**. This is good, as they are still close to the basic work. **They are closer to us**” (Lisanne, bedroom, Dortmund)*

The collected data show that the employees highly value the close and trustful relationship towards managers. Even though the hierarchy is very flat, the managers are still seen as highly respected role models. Taking into consideration the social learning theory, which defines that human behaviour is mostly learned by observing the behaviour and actions of others, the role modelling function of managers could occupy an essential role in communicating the importance of CSR to employees at IKEA. However, the interviews illustrate that even though the employees describe their managers as committed towards CSR, the majority describe their manager as more passive in terms of communicating and engaging employees to commit to CSR. This leads to the conclusion that IKEA is not actively using their managers to engage employees to participate in CSR. However, there has been also one example (Kalmar) in which managers seem to occupy a more active role in terms of sustainability. This again illustrates that IKEA does not use leadership actively as a driver to increase employees CSR commitment. It very much depends on the stores to what extent managers motivate their employee in regards to sustainability. This underlines again that there is no systematic approach that deals with the issue of using leadership as a driver for employee's CSR commitment.

4.2.6 Other findings

The previous subchapters of the analysis have had a perspective based on previously identified drivers compiled into a model of employee CSR commitment. However, it was also set out to identify additional potential drivers of employee CSR commitment based upon the conducted interviews and gathered material. By doing so, a sixth driver was found to frequently appear among the interviewees, namely recruitment.

The Swedish sustainability manager (2016) argued for the importance of recruitment and the impact it can make. He stressed the importance in the recruitment process to identify a person's view upon certain values like sustainability as it facilitates engagement. He mentioned the example of the new store in Umeå where the majority of the personnel were new recruitments and the commitment to CSR clearly above other stores.

Based upon this, the employees were asked to what extent they believe to possess similar values to each other. A strong consensus was found among the interviewees regarding that

they saw each other as similar on a foundational level. It was to large extent argued that they shared similar values and opinions, but with a broad variety of personalities and backgrounds.

”If you get employed by IKEA, the HR department take a lot of effort into recruiting the right persons, that stands for the values ” (Alberto, kitchen, Älmhult)

”We have great team spirit, and IKEA put a lot of emphasize on values and mindset in the recruitment, and that shows - people are similar. ” (Weronika, kitchen, Kalmar)

”We are recruited to work well together. So I guess we have similar background, similar mindset. ” (Mats, kitchen, Kalmar)

”We are like minded ” (Keren, lightning, Kalmar)

”They have basically gathered many different people, but who all share the same interest ” (Miranda, IKEA communications, Älmhult)

”It really is like that, that IKEA hire a certain kind of people ” (Ronja, kitchen, gothenburg & Kalmar)

These quotes support the statement of the Swedish sustainability manager regarding IKEA's emphasis on uniform recruitment. By recruiting employees heavily based on value oriented requirements it is possible to imagine that IKEA lay the foundation of a strong organizational culture and CSR engagement already before employees are hired. By doing so, it may be possible to secure an elemental understanding of sustainability among all employees, ensuring shared values and interests of the organization as seem to be the case when looking at the prior analysis. It is clear that IKEA has managed to secure a substantial CSR culture within their organization, but also a consensus among employees regarding the flat hierarchy and that all employees seem to regard each other highly. By the way that the employees at time had difficulties to pinpoint where their CSR engagement, organizational culture and appreciation for their employer came from, it is not unlikely that it to some extent is based upon attributes already possessed by the employees prior to employment.

4.3 Employee CSR commitment

The following parts will present more precisely in what way employees at IKEA are committed towards CSR and if the level of commitment differs between certain stores. Furthermore, the role of each driver in the generation of employee commitment will be analysed.

As mentioned more precisely in the beginning of this study, there are different concepts and definitions dealing with the determination of employee commitment. In order to identify to what extent employees are committed towards CSR this study used the different indicators presented in the literature review. Among others we looked at employee's desire to remain in the organization because of its CSR engagement, the employee's willingness to exert effort in the organization's CSR activities and the acceptance of CSR among employees. We also took into consideration the concept of citizenship behaviour in terms of CSR, which means that we looked if employees are going beyond plain obedience in regards to CSR and if there is any altruistic behaviour triggered by intrinsic motivation (Smith, Organ & Near, 1983). We further asked employees if their time at IKEA has changed their personal behaviour and view upon sustainability, which we used as an indicator to investigate to what extent employees internalized CSR.

The interviews show that there is a very strong general commitment among employees to the IKEA brand. Almost all employees described that they have the feeling that not only themselves are committed to IKEA but also their colleagues.

*“I think there is a **very strong belonging** to the brand as well. I think **everyone is really committed** to the IKEA brand and the company.”* (Lisanne, bedroom, Dortmund)

*“**Almost all of my colleagues are very engaged and committed** in what they are doing at **IKEA.**”* (Lisa, food, Berlin)

This could lead to the conclusion that employees are also committed to IKEAs sustainability activities as sustainability is part of IKEAs core values and strategy. However, in order to investigate how committed employees are in terms of CSR, it is not enough to assume that

general committed automatically implicates CSR commitment. For that reason, we looked deeper into the material. Based upon the different indicators mentioned at the beginning of this section, we used Kelman's (1958) three processes of attitude change (Compliance, Identification and Internalization) to distinguish between different levels of employee commitment.

4.3.1 Compliance

The level of compliance can be defined as the lowest level of employee commitment as employees obediently follow instructions from others without having an intrinsic belief in the instructions, which also implicates that employees do not internalise the content (Kelman, 1958). Due to the special culture at IKEA in which the relationship between manager and co-worker is not based upon obedience but on mutual exchange and motivation, the level of compliance is in general very low at IKEA. Instead of building a strong hierarchy in which employees have to follow strict guidelines, employees at IKEA are seen as as equally important and are treated with a lot of trust and freedom. This automatically leads to a situation in which employees act more based upon their own motivation than on commands.

“I never had such a manager [stressing certain topics]. But you know we have this that **you should challenge yourself**. “(Axel, kitchen, Älmhult)

“You never feel forced, you take the initiative.” (Axel, kitchen, Älmhult)

This quotes are representative for the atmosphere between manager and employees, as it shows the the managers occupy a more passive role in terms of instructions and direct commands. However, even though the majority stressed that the managers are not giving instructions in terms of how to work with sustainability, there is still a certain level of compliance when it comes to IKEAs internal sustainability guidelines dealing with waste separation and recycling.

“When there is someone who is not willing to follow our sustainability guidelines, **he is in trouble**.” (Aapi, kitchen, Dresden et al.)

It is conspicuous that even though all employees described the relaxed atmosphere in terms of commands and instructions, that there is still certain level of compliance in terms of these internal guidelines. However, the interviews also clearly indicate that employees value IKEA's engagement in CSR and that they perceive sustainability as an important part of IKEA. This does not automatically mean that employees fully internalise IKEA's sustainability engagement but it shows that they have a certain intrinsic believe in IKEA's sustainability focus.

“We have it [sustainability] high on the priority list. It feels like it is an important aspect for us.” (Mats, kitchen, Kalmar)

“They [IKEA] think about sustainability in every step.” (Caro, kitchen, Hamburg)

“It [sustainability] is included in everything from the start.” (Weronika, kitchen, Stockholm & Kalmar)

“We are a sustainable company.” (Sofia, lightning, Älmhult)

“I think sustainability is a big part of the brand.” (Lisanne, bedroom, Dortmund)

“Sustainability is an issue throughout the entire organisation.” (Aapi, kitchen, Dresden et al.)

The fact that the level of compliance seems to be less strong within IKEA can be seen as beneficial in terms of employees CSR commitment. However, it is important to mention that a low level of compliance in terms of sustainability does not automatically mean that employees are highly committed towards CSR. It just shows that sustainability is accepted among employees and that they see the relevance.

4.3.2 Identification

As touched upon before, the level of identification describes employees who respect and follow the instructions and values of an organization without necessarily adopting them as their own values. It further means that employees are proud to work for the company

(O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Relating this to IKEAs sustainability initiatives it can be argued that there is a high level of identification with IKEAs sustainability strategy. There are plenty of quotes describing the important position of sustainability for IKEA. Following the argumentation of Smith, Organ & Near (1983) it can be argued that there is an extremely high level of acceptance in regards to CSR among employees, which is of particular importance when it comes to CSR commitment. This is highlighted by the fact that the employees define sustainability not only as strategically relevant for IKEA but also also part of IKEAs identity and culture as elaborated more precisely previously. In addition, a few employees also stressed that they would not like to work for a non-sustainable company or for a company that just pretend so be sustainable.

“I would not work for a company that is bad in sustainability.” (Maik, internship, Berlin)

“I would not like to work for a company that is performing bad in regards to sustainability.”
(Lisa, food, Berlin-Tempelhof)

Even though not all employees expressed so clear that they would not work for a non-sustainable company, the data shows that sustainability is a factor that contributes to their desire to work for the company, which again is defined as an indicator in terms of CSR identification (Smith, Organ & Near, 1983). The interviews also illustrate that employees developed a certain mindset in regards to sustainability, which means that employees take many internal CSR initiatives as taken for granted.

„There is the mindset to reduce waste everywhere, even printing paper.“ (Weronika, kitchen, Stockholm & Kalmar)

“Let me think about other examples... It is not easy, as many things are taken for granted in regards to sustainability.” (Lisa, food, Berlin-Tempelhof)

However, there has also been indications that some employees define sustainability as something that is more an issue on the corporate level. This means that several employees stated that sustainability is “everywhere” but that it not really affects their daily work apart from waste separation and recycling.

*“I think it is a big part of the brand. But I think in regards to my department it is **not a thing that is very strong shown in the daily work.**”* (Lisanne, bedroom, Dortmund)

It is interesting to see that this quote does not correspond to IKEAs corporate view on sustainability, as sustainability is often not fully incorporated in the daily work, even though employees highlighted the crucial role of sustainability.

*“Globally we have 155 000 sustainability coordinators, as sustainability shall be a natural part in **all co-worker’s daily activities.**”* (Swedish sustainability manager, 2016)

Nevertheless, there is a high level of identification with IKEAs sustainability initiatives, which is highlighted by the fact that many employees value sustainability on a personal level and define sustainability not only as an image campaign but as crucial for IKEAs business.

*“**Sustainability is for myself very important.** I am really engaged in this, I think it would be very old fashion to say that it is not relevant today. It is very important to think about this in all kind of situations.”* (Caro, kitchen, Hamburg)

*“No, definitely not! [answer to the questions if sustainability is more an image campaign] **Sustainability is an issue throughout the entire organisation.**”* (Aapi, kitchen, Dresden et al.)

The high level of identification with IKEAs sustainability focus seems to be due to the implementation of sustainability in IKEAs democratic design. Many employees referred to sustainability as something that was there from the very first beginning as part of the values that were introduced during their introduction week. It further seems that many employees value sustainability even before they start to work for IKEA.

*If I would not be interested myself in sustainability, I would not value the company’s actions that much. **But since I am interested I engage and value it a lot.**”* (Weronika, kitchen, Stockholm & Kalmar)

This again supports the importance of the recruitment process in regard to employee’s CSR commitment, which was identified as a potential 6th driver. It seems that most employees

already valued CSR before they started to work at IKEA, which seems to be a criterion of IKEAs recruitment process. The fact that employees value CSR from the beginning seem to influence their level of identification with sustainability.

4.3.3 Internalisation

When it comes to internalization the data shows different findings as the level of internalization differs. However, the majority stated that they not only value and respect IKEAs engagement in CSR (identification) but also internalize them as part of their own value system (internalization). Whereas some employees stated that they were interested from the beginning in CSR, others emphasized that IKEA has changed their view upon sustainability in a positive way. Both can be seen as beneficial in terms of CSR internalization.

“IKEA has an impact on my view on sustainability.” (Axel, kitchen, Älmhult)

*“Definitely. **IKEA has changed my view upon sustainability.** However, I am still not perfect when it comes to sustainability but I try to decrease unnecessary energy consumption, which I didn't do before. **So of course you internalize these things.**”* (Aapi, kitchen, Dresden et al.)

“Yes, definitely! I would definitely say that IKEA has changed my view upon on sustainability, not just in regards to my work but also in regards to my everyday life”.

(Lisa, food, Berlin-Tempelhof)

*“Not really, I would say that it was always important for me. **Sustainability is a thing that I have internalized from childhood**”* (Linda, bedroom, Hamburg)

*“Perhaps in some way. I personally already come from **a background in which sustainability is an important issue.**”* (Lisanne, bedroom, Dortmund)

Following the argumentation of Kelman (1958), the quotes indicate that there is a high level of internalization in terms of sustainability, which indicates a strong CSR commitment. However, in order to explore to what extent employees are actively committed towards CSR we also looked at the employee's willingness to exert effort in IKEAs CSR activities.

Furthermore, we looked if employees are going beyond plain obedience in regards to CSR and if there is any altruistic behaviour triggered by intrinsic motivation (Smith, Organ & Near, 1983). Having this in mind the data shows a very controversial picture. If we only take into consideration the high acceptance of sustainability among employees and their personal interest one could argue that the employees show a high level of employee commitment. This is also supported by the fact that the employees seem to know in detail about IKEAs CSR initiatives. However, when we look to what extent employees are actively working with sustainability on a daily basis the data shows that there is a very low level of employee's willingness to exert effort in the company's CSR activities on a daily basis.

The only store in which sustainability seem to play a greater role than in other stores was the IKEA store in Kalmar. However, the extent to which these employees internalized and value CSR on a personal level does not differ significantly from other employees who have not mentioned sustainability that often during the interview. It seems that the extent to which sustainability is used in the daily work not only depends on the personal commitment and interest in CSR but also if sustainability is on the agenda of the respective store manager. This again reflects the chain of command in terms of sustainability in which the store manager has the power to decide how active a certain store works with CSR.

It is interesting to see that internalisation and a high general CSR commitment not automatically means that employees are actively using sustainability on a daily basis. There has been little evidence that sustainability is something that really influences the work of the employees and their interaction with the customers. This is also supported by the fact that employees are not using the opportunity to join certain sustainability groups to actively influence IKEAs CSR strategies. The employees show without question many traits that indicate a high CSR commitment. However, after looking deeper into the material it became clear that their CSR commitment is often rather passive than active.

4.3.4 Concluding employee's CSR commitment

Taking into consideration the five different drivers and their role in the creation of employee commitment towards CSR, the analysis has shown that there is no systematic approach in using these drivers to create employee commitment. The level to what extent certain drivers

are used in the store seem to depend on the store manager and his or her motivation to implement certain drivers.

*„But as soon as a store has problems with our things like sales and turnover **they just stop to contribute to sustainability issues.**“ (German sustainability manager)*

This illustrates the struggle to systematically implement certain CSR drivers from a corporate level. One can argue that the flat hierarchy is a barrier to facilitate a systematic implementation of certain CSR drivers. Due to this it is difficult to determine the role of each driver in the creation of employees CSR commitment. However, the analysis of the different drivers has shown that training and education and also leadership are almost completely neglected as drivers for employee commitment. When it comes to the internal communication employees seem to be very well informed in terms of sustainability, even though it is not possible to identify a certain structure how employees get information about sustainability. The organizational culture seems to occupy a more present role in the creation of employee's commitment towards CSR, even though it is difficult to determine if the culture directly influences employees CSR behaviour. However, as shown in the analysis, the employees perceive sustainability as part of IKEAs culture and identity, which can be seen as a foundation for commitment. The analysis has also shown that IKEAs internal CSR is very much in line with IKEAs strong employee culture in which all employees are seen as equally important for the success of the company. IKEAs culture and internal CSR initiatives show strong parallels to the concepts mentioned in the literature. However, as mentioned in the literature review, internal CSR and the organizational culture only build the foundation for the implementation of further drivers. This is also reflected by the collected data, as there is no clear evidence showing that employees active CSR commitment is directly affected by these two drivers. It seems more that the organizational culture and the internal CSR initiatives contribute to the strong acceptance and awareness of IKEAs CSR initiatives and the high passive CSR commitment. It also seems that recruitment plays an important role in the creation of a fundamental CSR understanding among employees. The recruitment together with IKEAs organizational culture and internal CSR initiatives seem to contribute to the strong passive CSR commitment among employees. It seems that the other drivers (internal communication, training and education, leadership) are more relevant in the creation of an active employee commitment towards CSR. This would explain why the employees show a very strong passive CSR commitment but not a strong active commitment, as culture and

internal CSR are clearly more developed as the other drivers. This would also explain why the active CSR commitment in the Kalmar store was stronger than in all the other stores as the managers seem to put more emphasize on CSR in the Kalmar store.

4.4 Employee CSR communication

As discussed in the previous subchapter, it seems that IKEA has managed to create a strong passive CSR commitment. However, it further appears that often no active decisions or actions are taken based upon this commitment by the employees, and patterns in the collected data indicate that the employee-customer CSR communication is very limited. Employees stated that CSR communication towards customers was just a matter of secondary information, to justify price differences or comparing products. This is particularly interesting as incongruence between internal and external communication is argued to reduce an organization's credibility (Stuart, 1999).

During the interviews, the employees' external communication to customers were divided into three parts. Initially, without mentioning CSR, the employees were asked whether there was anything they emphasized in their communication to the customers. This was followed by questions whether IKEA encouraged any certain communication before finally looking into how sustainability affected the employees' communication with customers.

"For me it is about selling a kitchen that they [the customers] are satisfied with. Based upon their conditions, measures of the room, water and drain, and so on." (Mats, kitchen, Kalmar)

"When you are working with the lamps there are a lot of technical questions, like how can I use it and what kind of lamp do I need, and how many Watt is needed." (Jakob, lightning, Älmhult)

"What it is good for and why it is so expensive ... so I guess that what you need to emphasize, that you get so much more from a LED." (Scarlett, lightning, Älmhult)

"It is about finding what the customer want." (Caro, kitchen, Hamburg)

"I am not sure really, if there is anything we emphasize." (Ronja, kitchen, Gothenburg & Kalmar)

*"The most important thing for me is that the **customer gets satisfied**."* (Weronika, kitchen & bedroom, Stockholm & Kalmar)

These quotes follow the consensus of most interviews, showing that to a very low extent CSR is mentioned towards customers as a unique selling proposition. It also strengthens the indications of a low active CSR commitment as the employees argue to have the knowledge necessary but do not actively put it to use in the communication. At the same time, sustainability has been declared as one of IKEAs official values, and is also a part of their democratic design which was occasionally mentioned by employees. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) argue for the importance of communicating CSR in the direct customer interaction if it has been defined as a key strategic pillar by the organization, as if it is not, the organization can lose credibility. As such, the aforementioned quotes do not play in favor of IKEA, and could even have negative impact on their credibility. Not only do these quotes implicate lost credibility, but also highlight the fact that IKEA is overlooking the opportunity they have as a widespread brick and mortar retailer to engage and reap benefit from their employees as a gateway of CSR communication towards customers.

Similar statements were told when the employees were asked if IKEA encouraged them to emphasize anything in the communication, without the interviewers mentioning sustainability. Although the statements were similar, it appears to be a stronger emphasis on sustainability among the employees from the store in Kalmar, which can be imagined reflecting the power of the store managers. This highlights the importance of CSR committed store managers in order to secure the CSR communication between employees and customers, although the employees did not seem to take action based on the first question.

*"I guess that is all positive features. We have long warranty, **sustainability and environment**."* (Weronika, kitchen & bedroom, Stockholm & Kalmar)

*"You need to think of **things that the customer do not have in mind** ... that could be that the kitchen could be more efficiently planned or something."* (Caro, kitchen, Hamburg)

*"We have **not gotten anything specific to communicate.**"* (Sofia, lightning, Älmhult)

*"The only thing we have to do, in our dressing roomie have a poster that says that **we should always smile**, and that is also what our managers tell us."* (Johan, lightning, Älmhult)

*"Yes, they always tell us to **smile.**"* (Linda, bedroom, Hamburg)

*"They want us to provide customers with the **IKEA vision, and our company culture and showing that we have great diversity.**"* (Alberto, kitchen, Älmhult)

*"They want us to emphasize **sustainability, which is a major value at IKEA.**"* (Keren, lightning, Kalmar)

Finally, the interviewees were asked whether sustainability affected their direct interaction and communication with the customers. The following quotes continues with the same pattern as previously with the Kalmar store appearing to put more emphasis on sustainability communication in the employee-customer interaction in comparison to other stores.

*"I try to always **emphasize the things where sustainability is present and relevant.**"* (Jacob, lightning, Kalmar)

*"I would say if you stress those things, **it would make us less trustworthy.**"* (Alberto, kitchen, Älmhult)

*"No, and **IKEA is not telling us to put emphasis on this.**"* (Johan, lightning, Älmhult)

*"No, **I am not stressing the sustainability aspect.**"* (Linda, bedroom, Hamburg)

The lack of employee's communicating CSR on the sales is not only contrary to IKEA's strong strategic focus on CSR but also in regards to IKEA's corporate view on employee's CSR communication. According to the German sustainability manager employees occupy an important role in communicating CSR to the customer.

*“I would not say that there is any particular department that is more important than the others in terms of sustainability, **the co-workers on the sales floor who are in direct contact with the customers are the once we put the emphasis on.** They need to give valid information to the customers.”* (German sustainability manager)

This illustrates a clear incongruence between what is expected on a corporate level in terms of employee’s CSR communication and what is implemented in the certain stores. Grewal and Levy (2007), Grönroos (1990) and Vargo and Lusch (2004) all argued for how the personal interactions in brick and mortar stores can have a significant impact on consumers’ perception of the organization. Considering this, it is likely that IKEA stores do not only communicate differently, but the customers may also have different perceptions about the organization depending on the store they visit, even to the extent that some stores generate a decreased credibility among customers. With the national sustainability managers claiming that they have “no power” over what is communicated in the stores, this responsibility is on the store managers. The store managers seem to have the power of influencing everything from the CSR training to the extent which sustainability is encouraged and communicated internally. This further adds on to the passive CSR commitment possessed by the employees. The majority did not take any actions in communication sustainability to customers and one even went on to argue that it could make IKEA less trustworthy if they did, thereby taking an active decision to not communicate sustainability. Another employee said that he did not communicate sustainability, and that IKEA did not encourage him to do it either. This could indicate that a clearer communication within IKEA of a desire that the employees did communicate sustainability could change his mind.

Beyond this, employees also referred to that there were signs in the stores promoting sustainability.

*“We have a lot of information on **screens and other channels like banners** where the customers get informed about sustainability.”* (Johan, lightning Älmhult)

*“There are **many signs in the store** that the customers can see.”* (Ronja, kitchen, Gothenburg & Kalmar)

*”At the store there were **signs to each product** to show ’this product is made of this material.’” (Miranda, IKEA communication, Älmhult)*

It is however unclear how efficient the signing is in relation to the theoretically highly regarded employee-customer interactions. The lack of discussing signs in the literature as a primary channel of communication towards customers could imply that they do not carry the same weight of importance or efficiency as the verbal face-to-face communication. CSR activities have further been found to increase profitability as they change the way customers evaluate products (Hur, Kim & Woo, 2014), however it is also argued by Auger et al. (2003) and Pomeroy and Dolnicar (2009) that customers tend to be unaware of organizations CSR activities even though it may be a well-integrated part of the organization. This strengthens the relevance of the emphasizing of CSR activities internally and externally through employees, something that IKEA is not achieving. Thus, poor employee-customer CSR communication may have significant negative impact on the stores results.

Over the course of the conducted interviews, sustainability was mentioned sporadically. This was done primarily in relation to questions where customers could make gains such as saving money and cover their private interests. One frequent argument for LED lightning was that it is cheaper in the long run. The same went for dishwashers and taps, which both saved the customer water, and fridges that were more energy efficient. During one interview it was also stated that IKEA has an image of ”use and throw away” and that their products are ”cheap shit”. It was said that they actively worked to remove this image, but it can be argued how encouraging to this purpose it is to highlight products from a cost saving perspective. As it is seen today, these self-serving arguments were dominating the employee-customer CSR communication, only focusing on cost saving aspects. To highlight the price as key factor for sustainability is also contradictory to IKEAs vision and the purpose of creating a more sustainable life at home. Instead the sustainable life at home, and its impact on the environment today and tomorrow could be argued to be the employee's main selling point. This would create a more congruent communication throughout the organization and act as a positive driver of credibility.

5 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore how committed sales employees are towards organizational CSR initiatives, and how they communicate CSR in the interaction with the customers on the sales floor. As previous research suggests, employee's CSR communication occupies an important role as the widespread absence of trust in retailers CSR initiatives can be compensated by employees stressing the organizational CSR values in the interaction with customers on the sales floor. It was further argued that it is of great importance for organizations to create a great level of employee commitment towards CSR to facilitate that employees not only internalize CSR values but also communicate them to the customers on the sales floor.

The study was guided by a framework containing five different drivers that were identified as particularly important in the creation of employee's CSR commitment. The analysis of the empirical data has shown that the chosen drivers have different impact on employee's CSR commitment. Furthermore, a major finding of this study highlights the importance to separate employee's CSR commitment from employees CSR communication on the sales floor. More precisely, this means that a great level CSR identification and internalization, which indicates a great level of CSR commitment, not automatically implicates that employees communicate CSR to the customer on the sales floor.

Firstly, the investigated case showed that the two drivers of organizational culture and internal CSR were found to facilitate and generate a more passive employee CSR commitment. Although the two drivers appear crucial in the creation of employee CSR commitment, they do not seem to directly influence employee CSR behavior, particularly employee-customer CSR communication. This also implicates that a beneficial culture in terms of CSR coupled with strong internal CSR initiatives can lead to high commitment (passive) even though other drivers like training and education, internal communication and leadership are lacking a focus on sustainability.

Secondly, the remaining three drivers, internal communication, training and education, and leadership appeared to contribute more to the creation of active employee CSR commitment. A more active commitment means that employees incorporate CSR actively in their daily work, such as employee-customer CSR communication.

Finally, a 6th additional driver was found. Recruitment appeared to be a driver influencing employee CSR commitment. With the implementation of a recruitment process that actively considers CSR, employees will have an elementary understanding of CSR activities.

Having in mind the findings of this study, the initial framework of this study needs to be adapted. This is mainly due to the fact that the case illustrated that employees CSR commitment not automatically means that employees also communicate CSR on the sales floor as suggested by the initial framework. The initial framework further neglects that certain drivers like organizational culture and internal CSR seem to be more relevant in the creation of a general CSR commitment whereas the other drivers occupy a more prominent role in facilitating a more active CSR commitment in which employees also communicate CSR in the customer interaction. Lastly, the framework disregards the recruitment process that was identified as a potential additional driver.

5.1 Theoretical contribution

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding of employee's CSR commitment and their CSR communication in the interaction with the customers. The study has shown that it is crucial to distinguish between active and passive CSR commitment as general commitment towards CSR not automatically implicates that employees are actively working with CSR and communicate CSR initiatives in the customer interaction. As highlighted in the knowledge gap, previous studies (Crane & Glozer, 2016, Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014; Brunton, Eweje & Taskin, 2017; Kim, Song & Lee, 2016) have neglected to investigate the relationship between employee's CSR commitment and their CSR communication towards customers. The findings of this study contribute to the existing CSR commitment theory by emphasizing that CSR commitment not automatically implicates that employees incorporate CSR actively in their daily work and in the communication with the customers. Kin, Song and Lee (2016) and other authors are highlighting the importance of the cultural fit in terms of

CSR commitment. However, these studies neglect to investigate how the corporate structure and the chain of commands are influencing the implementation of certain CSR drivers. The findings of this study show that a flat hierarchy can hinder a systematic implementation of certain CSR initiatives as the responsible CSR managers have less power to establish certain drivers throughout the organization. This means that the implementation of certain drivers not only depends on the corporate management level but even more on the interest and motivation of the local store managers to actively work with CSR within their stores. The current theory about employee's CSR commitment neglect this issue. Furthermore, this study is to our knowledge the first study that identified the recruitment process as a potential 6th driver of employee's CSR commitment that can facilitate that employees already possess a certain level of CSR commitment from the beginning. Finally, this study contributes to the understanding about the role of certain drivers in the creation of employee commitment. The findings show certain drivers seem to play a more prominent role in the creation of a more passive CSR commitment, whereas other drivers are more relevant to facilitate that employees also actively work with CSR on a daily basis.

5.2 Practical contribution

Emerging from the theoretical contributions of this study three distinctive practical implications arose. As the theoretical contributions show, the framework separate employee CSR commitment from employee-customer CSR communication as a guaranteed outcome. The great importance and efficiency of CSR communication towards customers have been argued for by Elg and Hultman (2016), Burmann and Zeplin (2005) and Khan (2009) however it has not been clarified how to secure the employee-customer CSR communication.

Therefore, this study contributes to the organizational understanding for how to secure employee CSR commitment and employee-customer CSR communication respectively through particular drivers. In order to develop employee CSR commitment a foundation should be built on organizational culture and internal CSR. The study showed that by doing so, organizations can secure a primary level of passive commitment and internal respect among the employees. By further emphasizing sustainability training, recruitment, internal communication and leadership a more active CSR commitment can be implemented.

In order to transform the organizational activities of the drivers and turn this into actions generating employee-customer CSR communication it is of importance for organizations to emphasize the role of leadership and internal communication. With this, managers and organizations should actively encourage employees to communicate sustainability. Particularly, this should be clear throughout the organization in order to create a coherent external and internal communication across all stores and platforms, such as sales employees and signs.

Furthermore, by developing a comprehensive recruitment process with a focus on CSR engagement, organizations can secure a fundamental employee CSR commitment. By doing so, the extent to which the remaining drivers are actively engaged becomes less critical. Recruitment can also be of particular importance within the retail sector due to the high employee turnover rate. By investing in the recruitment, less effort would be needed to integrate new employees within the organizational directions. This recruitment process could further be put into practice in the recruitment of managers. The investigated case showed that the store managers possessed a key role in the implementation of CSR activities. A focus on CSR values in the recruitment of managers would streamline the implementation of organizational CSR activities.

Therefore, this study helps to optimize the resources spent on generating employee CSR commitment and securing employee-customer CSR communication respectively by directing the focus towards the accurate drivers.

5.3 Limitations

Besides the methodological limitations discussed earlier, the following section will present the research limitations of this study and recommendations for further research. Even though this study was able to answer the research questions, we are aware that there are several possible limitations affecting the outcome of this study. Many of these limitations are related to the underlying qualitative nature of this study.

As been touched upon briefly in the methodology chapter, the single case study design of this study does not support a broader generalization of the results due to the fact that the research

has been conducted on only one organization in a single sector. Therefore, it is unclear to what extent the findings can be transferred to other organizations operating in different sectors. Moreover, the sample size of the empirical material has been gathered from only two operating markets of the case organization, which both contain similar characteristics in terms of culture and structure. This again illustrates the limited possibilities for generalizability beyond markets with this structure and culture.

The fact that the empirical data only consists of verbal insights implicates that the researchers of this study have a greater impact on the findings compared to quantitative studies. This is also due to the fact that IKEA did not allow the conduction of mystery shopping, which could have provided a more objective reality of the CSR communication between employees and customers. The qualitative nature of this study also influenced the identification of themes and sub-themes, which means that there is a potential imprint on the analysis induced by the perception of the researchers. The sample size of this study was also influenced by the researchers, as the number of interviews was dependent on the researchers perception in terms of empirical saturation. As elaborated more in detail in the methodology chapter, it is further not possible to exclude the risk that some interviewees were influenced by their managers, as the interview participants were not only chosen by the researchers but also by IKEA directly. This not only means that employees might have been set under pressure to answer in favor of IKEA but that employees were selected based on their interest in CSR. This could limitate the quality of the data as the employees should not be biased or selected by their interest in CSR.

Even though this study contributes to the existing literature in terms of CSR commitment and communication there is still a need for further research. Further research could use the findings of this study to investigate their transferability to other contexts and cases. There is further still the need to investigate how certain drivers not only affect employees CSR commitment but also their CSR communication with customers on the sales floor. More precisely, as the identified 6th driver (recruitment) seem to be neglected in the current literature further research should investigate to what extent the recruitment process affects employee's CSR commitment. The study also shows, that IKEA emphasizes their CSR commitment more through visually exposed signs in the store environment than through employees stressing CSR in the customer interaction. Therefore, further studies could investigate the effectiveness of CSR communication through signs in comparison to CSR communication between employees and customers. To conclude, even though this study

contributes to the research field of employee's CSR commitment and their CSR communication in the customer interaction, there is still too less research that takes into consideration the prominent role of sales employees as a communication channel for CSR.

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7 Appendix

Appendix A – Topic guide sales employees

1. Could you present yourself and your position?
 - What is your day-to-day job at IKEA?

2. What is your aim when communicating with customers? Please elaborate?
 - What are you encouraged to communicate in the interaction with customers?
 - Could you tell us frequently asked questions by customers? What do you think the customers value?
 - Price, quality, sustainability, features?

3. If you were presenting ikea to someone else, what keywords would you use?
 - How would you describe the atmosphere?
 - How do you perceive your work/life balance? (Sports activity center?)
 - What do you think about IKEA in regards to sustainability?
 - To what extent do you feel that your managers commit to sustainability?

4. How do you you communicate sustainability internally?
 - Channels of communication? (Where do you get your information from about products, corporate values and aims? Is it face-to-face?)
 - Who is providing you with this information? (store manager? Direct manager?)
 - When you talk to your colleagues at work, what do you talk about? Is it private or work related?

5. Did you get any training? (When, How, by whom, how often) No ongoing training? Sales and products?
 - Are you using the “my learning platform” (Intranet) do get information about sustainability?
 - Customer interaction?
 - IKEA values?
 - Is there any sustainability included in the training? How do you touch upon this?

6. Would you say that IKEA can claim that they are a sustainable company?

7. What is your view on sustainability issues?
 - Do you think it is important for IKEA?
 - Has your time at IKEA changed your view upon sustainability?
 - Do you consider IKEA as a sustainable company?
 - Is sustainability important for yourself?

8. Wrapping up
 - Is there something that we should have asked, that we didn't?

Appendix B – Topic guide managers

1. Could you present yourself and your position?
 - What is your day-to-day job at IKEA?
2. What does sustainability means for IKEA? How is IKEA defining sustainability?
 - How important is sustainability for IKEA? Has it changed over time?
 - Are there any specific targets/goals in regards to sustainability?
 - Current sustainability projects?
 - How integrated is sustainability in the daily Agenda?
3. 3. How is the information flow within IKEA when it comes to sustainability? Top-down or bottom-up?
 - Is sustainability organized by the IKEA headquarter or an a local level?
 - How is the communication to the specific stores? How do your secure store engagement towards sustainability?
 - How engaged are the stores
 - How do you engage store managers or other managers to participate in CSR ?
 - Do they also have sustainability coordinators at all stores?
4. How are you working with sustainability across markets?
 - Is CSR in some countries more important than in others? Why?
 - What differences are there between markets and how do the co-operate
5. How does sustainability reaches the operational level (employees)?
 - Regular training in regards to sustainability?
 - Does store managers have to provide certain trainings? Or are the store managers free?
 - What role have the stores managers in regards to sustainability?
 - Are there differences between departments? On a store level.
 - How does sustainability affect the daily work of the managers and the employees? (Parking slots, recycling, printing, paper consumption...)
6. How do you communicate sustainability to external stakeholder? Society...
 - What role does the store floor play in the communication of sustainability?
 - Is there a demand for sustainable products from the consumer side?
7. Is there anything we haven't covered yet that you would like to tell us?