



SCHOOL OF  
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“We are actually doing this for real”

Organizational identity and identification when CSR is part of the  
business model

by

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# Abstract

<b>Title</b>	“We are actually doing this for real”: Organizational identity and identification when CSR is part of the business model
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<b>Key words</b>	CSR, sustainable business model, organizational identity & organizational identification
<b>Purpose</b>	The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of how CSR affects the organizational identity and identification when it is incorporated into the business model.
<b>Methodology</b>	The thesis is based on a qualitative method in order to focus on employees’ perceptions. It is based on a case study at Krafringen Energi AB, who has a completely fossil free energy production.
<b>Theoretical perspective</b>	The theoretical perspective consists three main concepts: CSR, organizational identity, and organizational identification.
<b>Conclusions</b>	When a company has a sustainable business model it is likely to: (1) constitute a highly significant part of the employees’ perceptions of the organizational identity; (2) entail a high level of organizational identification among the employees; (3) increase the employees’ knowledge about sustainability; and (4) normalize a “sustainable” behavior among employees without active managerial initiatives.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Climate change can according to Stern (2007) be characterized as this century's biggest economic, political, and social challenge. This is due to the increased use of finite natural resources, which eventually will run out (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). Climate change has led to a rapidly growing interest for the concept of sustainability, which generally means a concern with preserving the natural environment for future generations (Dyllik & Hockerts, 2002). Wright, Nyberg and Grant (2012) argue that our economic system to some extent is based on the growing usage of fossil fuels and that the climate change discourse, therefore, challenges established assumptions about social and economic activity. They argue that many companies therefore modify their strategies, start investing in new technology, and brand themselves as eco-friendly organizations. Companies' responses to climate change can be labeled CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) which according to Costas and Kärreman (2013) represents organizations' answers to social, environmental, and ethical issues.

Even if CSR can be traced back to the 1900s when the discussion regarding companies' societal impact and responsibility emerged (Clark, 2000), the term was not cemented as a global phenomenon until the 2000s (Carroll, 2008). The meaning of the term heritage from the Brundtland Report in 1987, where the UN World Commission defined sustainability as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43). With this definition as a foundation, CSR has been defined in several ways, and one of the most influential contributors is John Elkington (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010), who introduced the Triple Bottom Line-model which implies companies' concern for people, planet, and profit (Elkington, 1998).

Today, CSR should no longer be seen as something optional (Collier & Esteban, 2007), and companies have to adjust to stakeholders' expectations (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). In 2017, more than 90% of the 250 largest companies worldwide conducted a CSR report with the purpose of informing their stakeholders about their sustainability initiatives (Brieger, Anderer, Fröhlich, Bairo & Maynhardt, 2019). Many companies whose products have negative effects on the environment and treat CSR as an extra additional activity are found on different top lists of sustainable

companies. For example, Bocken et al. (2014) studied The Guardian Green, Sustainable Business Awards, the Dow sustainability index, and Forbes top 100 sustainability leaders, and found out that several top organizations still have not changed their business model in a more sustainable direction. The treatment of CSR as an extra activity also seems to characterize much of the academic literature (MacMillan, 2020).

Although, Pomeroy (2017) argues that companies face the risk of being seen as inauthentic if the communicated CSR identity does not match the perceived organizational identity. One way of decreasing this risk is to incorporate CSR into the business model, which according to Porter and Kramer (2011) creates a CSV (Corporate Shared Value). According to them, CSV differs from CSR because the latter is more about doing good and reputation, while CSV is integral to a company's profit maximization. This can be compared to a SBM (Sustainable Business model). The purpose of a so-called SBM is to generate revenue through operations that also create good effects on the environment and society (Bocken, Short, Rana & Evans, 2014). In the organization and management literature on CSR, MacMillan (2020) reports that the topic of CSR as a business model is nascent and needs more research to advance. The few studies that exist on this topic have, according to Bocquet, Le Bas, Mothe & Poussing (2017), so far focused on the link to financial performance. In their article, they conclude that CSR as a part of the core business strategy can favor innovation and organizational growth. However, employees' perceptions of this phenomenon are still an uncovered area.

## 1.2 Problematization

The literature regarding CSR, typically as an additional approach of companies rather than as part of the business model (e.g product or service) itself, has predominantly been from a macro and strategic perspective (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Costas & Kärreman, 2013). The macro perspective concerns corporations' role in society and political economy (Campbell, 2007; Matten & Moon, 2008), while the strategic perspective focuses on marketing, image and reputation (Sankar & Du, 2007; Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011; Daudigeos and Valiorgue, 2011).

The internal perspective, concerning the relationship between CSR, employees, and organizations, has according to Costas and Kärreman (2013) received little attention. So far, the studies have mostly focused on the positive effects of CSR (Brieger et al. 2019), and some studies point to increased organizational identification through CSR initiatives of the company (Turban and

Greening, 1997; Brammer, He & Mellahi, 2015). However, Costas and Kärreman (2013) argue that CSR does not necessarily affect organizational identification positively. In their article, they found that employees' interpretation of their companies' CSR can come to expression in three different ways depending on its interpreted authenticity: believers, straddlers, and cynics. Although, when employees believe in their companies CSR, it has been shown that it can have negative effects on them in terms of work addiction and self-sacrifice (Brieger et al. 2019).

With the constantly growing public discourse around climate change, there is an increasing demand for organizations to take responsibility (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). With the successively increasing number of companies trying to take responsibility, a natural effect is that more and more people are getting affected by their companies' CSR approach. Therefore, to better understand contemporary organizations, it is important to acknowledge what implications different CSR initiatives have on employees. We see the internal perspective of CSR as an important part of the literature that needs more attention.

One common aspect of the studies on the internal perspective of CSR is, as mentioned earlier, that they treat CSR as an extra additional activity (MacMillan, 2020). The employees who participated in the existing studies on CSR and organizational identification are thus people that do not necessarily work for a coherently sustainable company, but rather organizations that invest significantly in different CSR initiatives. For example, the sample in Brieger et al.'s (2019) study is based on companies from Switzerland Public Value atlas' ranking of sustainable companies, which do not have SBM as a criterion. Thus, there is still no understanding of how employees are affected when CSR is incorporated into the business model. At the same time, an increasing number of companies are adopting their business strategy by incorporating CSR into the business model (MacMillan, 2020). With an increasing amount of these kinds of organizations, we also think it is an important part of the internal perspective of CSR that needs to be emphasized.

Another common aspect of the research on the internal perspective of CSR has predominantly been conducted through quantitative methods (e.g. Turban & Greening, 1997; Brammer, He and Mellahi, 2015; Brieger et al. 2019). Many studies have for example based their research on surveys, where employees grade their answers on a scale. The problem here is that it has not provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. With these kinds of methods, it is only possible to establish the fact that CSR leads to increased organizational identification, the reasons behind it,



and how people are affected. It is not possible to provide an understanding of employees' interpretations and perspectives on it. The missing part of the internal perspective of CSR is thus qualitative studies that focus on the employees' lifeworld and provide a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena.

### 1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of our thesis is to contribute to the understanding of CSR, and especially the internal perspective in companies that claim CSR as part of their business model by selling services or products that are sustainable. In alignment with the practical importance of CSR in contemporary businesses, we also see an increasing value for organizational studies to cover this area. To better understand organizations, it is important to emphasize how employees are affected by CSR when it is incorporated into the business model. More precisely, we want to provide an understanding of how employees are affected by the organizational identity that a sustainable business model entail. We see this as an important angle to better understand how such an approach to CSR affects employees' organizational identification process. Moreover, we want to offer a qualitative study to the internal perspective of CSR, which otherwise is characterized by quantitative research, and thus provide a nuanced understanding of the phenomena. To fulfill our research purpose, we have been working towards the following research questions:

- How does a sustainable business model influence the employees' perceptions of organizational identity?
- How is organizational identification affected when sustainability is incorporated into the business model?

### 1.4 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six different parts. The **first chapter** is an overview of our topic that introduced some of the key elements behind the purpose of the study, and the objectives with it. The **second chapter** is the literature review, which covers the three concepts CSR, Organizational Identity and Organizational Identification, and constitute the foundation of the analysis. This chapter ends with an explanation of how the concepts are connected and intertwined. **Chapter three** concerns the methodology behind the study, containing the different choices we made and a critical reflection over them. The **fourth chapter** is where the empirical findings are presented.

The presented data in this chapter has been both sorted and reduced, and the quotes we present are the most significant ones for the study. In **chapter five**, we discuss the presented data in the previous chapter and use the theories from chapter two to facilitate analysis. The **sixth chapter** is where the thesis is concluded, and we summarize our key findings. It also contains reflections around the study and suggestions for future research.

## 2 Literature Review

This literature review is centered around three main concepts: CSR, organizational identity, and organizational identification. We are going to present the concepts separately and highlight key aspects within the separate sections that illustrate the relationship between the concepts, how they are intertwined, and affect each other. In the final section, we will put the concepts together and clarify our usage of them. A key relation between CSR and organizational identification can be seen in the potential of CSR to be part of organizational identity if seen as a central part of the organization by the employees. Furthermore, some studies show that CSR can create a stronger organizational identification among the employees (Brieger et al. 2019), and that value congruence between the organization and employee can result in higher degrees of identification (Pratt, 1998). This indicates that CSR, organizational identity, and organizational identification share some common ground and have the potential to be integrated into each other. We are also using the concept of identity work, with the purpose of developing a more in-depth understanding of how the employees cope with different identities. This concept will also help us understand whether the employees perceive any conflicts and tensions that are related to the CSR organizational identity and their personal identity.

### 2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) can be traced back to the beginning of the 1900s when the discussion about companies' impact on society and their responsibility arose (Clark, 2000). The period prior to the 1950s was according to Carroll (2008) predominantly focused on philanthropic objectives and when an organization took a socially responsible initiative, it was rather characterized by good-will than a business case. The policy concept 'sustainability' originates from the Brundtland report (Kuhlman and Farrington, 2010), where the UN World Commission, led by Norway's former Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, defined sustainability as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43). With the definition as a foundation, sustainability has been further explored and one of the most influential contributors is Archie B. Carroll. A well-cited definition by him is the pyramid of CSR, which includes and ranks the following dimensions in the presented order: economic, legal, ethical, and

philanthropic (Carroll, 1991). The pyramid illustrates a hierarchical order of importance, where CSR should have its starting point in the economic dimension.

Another effort to define CSR was made by John Elkington who introduced the Triple Bottom Line-model (TBL), containing the dimensions of People, Planet, and Profit (Elkington, 1998). Unlike the Pyramid of CRS, the dimensions in the TBL-model are supposed to receive equal attention and act in harmony, even though it is not unusual that companies emphasize a specific dimension at the expense of another. Porter and Kramer (2011) distinguish CSR from Corporate Shared Value (CSV), where they argue that profit maximization is integrated in the latter one while it is excluded in CSR. They mean that CSR is more about investments that increase organizations' positive reputation, while CSV is integral to organizations' profits. Furthermore, they argue that sustainability is not something organizations should do for purely philanthropic reasons, but rather as something that is supposed to be integrated into the business model. By including economic, social, and environmental factors, it is thus a business case for the organizations. This can, in turn, be related to what is being referred to as strong and weak sustainability, where the first-mentioned imply that you do not for example sacrifice environmental aspects for the benefit of financial ones.

Companies can, according to Kuhlman and Farrington (2010), enforce strong sustainability by setting strict thresholds, which they do not overstep, and thus benefit people, planet, and profit. Without strict thresholds, companies' CSR may seem insubstantial and dishonest in their communication. In such cases, where there is a gap between the externally communicated CSR identity and the perceived identity, organizations face the risk of being interpreted as doing greenwashing (Pomering, 2017). Greenwashing is according to Prasad and Holzinger (2013) a phenomenon that refers to organizations' efforts to create a green image without actually taking measures. On the other hand, we also see companies setting strict thresholds and incorporating sustainability into their business models, which can make the company's CSR appear more authentic. "The gap between the desired identity and conceptualized identity needs to be as narrow as possible, and only CSR that is true to the firm's business model that creates, delivers and captures value in legitimate, socially responsible ways will achieve this" (Pomering, 2017, p. 186).

### 2.1.1 The relatively unexplored internal perspective on CSR

Research regarding CSR has dominantly been from a macro-institutional and strategic perspective (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). The first-mentioned perspective focuses on the relationship and the role

of corporations within society and the political economy (Aguilera et al. 2007). From a strategic point of view, CSR has been studied in the light of marketing, image, branding, and reputation (Sankar & Du, 2007). Thus, both perspectives focus on the relationship between CSR and external factors, such as different shareholders, customers, and governments (Costas & Kärreman, 2013).

A less studied area of CSR is according to Costas and Kärreman (2013) the internal relationship between CSR and internal factors like employees and identity. They researched a consultancy firm with strong CSR and the employees' perception of it. In their research they found that employees reacted in three different ways depending on the perceived authenticity of the CSR activities: believers, straddlers, and cynics. These three positions are in turn reflecting to what degree the employees identify with the company. Firstly, the employees who perceived the company's CSR as genuine and authentic were classified as believers. Secondly, the ones who were ambidextrous regarding the purpose of the company's CSR were named straddlers. Lastly, the employees who expressed cynicism towards the company's CSR, and believed that the purpose was related to internal and external marketing, were termed cynics. Since their study, the internal perspective on CSR has received more attention but the field is still relatively unexplored.

The existing literature has so far focused on the positive effects on employees (Brieger et al. 2019; Brammer, He & Mellahi, 2015). Brieger et al. (2019) argue that there is convincing evidence supporting that employees who work for an organization with strong CSR better identify with the organization. For example, Turban and Greening (1997) argue that companies can attract prospective employees by being perceived as socially responsible because it makes people more prone to identify with the organization. Another example is Brammer, He & Mellahi (2015) who studied the underlying mechanisms behind the causal relationship between CSR activities and increased financial performance. They concluded that CSR activities led to employees identifying stronger with the organization. This, in turn, resulted in increased creativity among employees, which thus affects the financial result positively.

Both Turban and Greening (1997) and Brammer, He and Mellahi (2015) have quantitative approaches and base their studies on surveys where participants grade e.g. questions about organizational identification on a scale. Nevertheless, the micro perspective of CSR fails to acknowledge the negative aspects, or as Brieger et al. (2019, p. 2) put it - "the dark side of CSR". The authors argue that the literature on CSR does not provide an understanding of how the

increased organizational identity can negatively affect the employees' attitudes and behavior, and concludes, through a quantitative approach, that it unintentionally can lead to work addiction. In our study, we want to develop an understanding of both the positive and negative aspects of CSR through a qualitative perspective, and thus offer an employee perspective to the literature.

Even if CSR has positive effects on employees, it is still important to acknowledge that there are potential negative outcomes as well. Drawing on concepts from organizational psychology, Brieger et al. (2019) present the following three different types of danger that can occur when working in an organization with strong CSR. The most relevant for our study is self-sacrifice, which can be explained as "voluntarily and excessively meeting the needs of other people at the expense of meeting one's own needs" (Brieger et al. 2019, p. 3). When employees identify strongly with the organization they tend to end up in an imbalanced state where they work too much and spend too little on recovery (Avanzi, van Dick, Fraccaroli & Sarchielli, 2012). The second risk is stagnation, which (as the name indicates) concerns employees' stagnation of personal growth. The third risk, self-righteousness, implies a moral superiority that can foster exclusion (Brieger et al. 2019).

### 2.1.2 CSR as the main business model

CSR can both be used as an add-on activity or something that permeates the whole organization (Porter & Kramer, 2011). For example, a company with a product that has negative externalities on the environment can still put a lot of effort into CSR and brand themselves as a sustainable company. However, when CSR is not treated as an additional activity, but rather as integrated into the business model, it is often referred to as a sustainable business model (SBM) (Bocken et al. 2014). SBM can be seen as a way for organizations to fully incorporate CSR values in their operations.

A business model is described by Osterwalder, Pigneur & Tucci (2005) as a blueprint for the operation of a company, including variables such as structure, goals, strategy, and value proposition. Another definition is presented by Bocken et al. (2014), where they define a business model by three main elements: value proposition, value creation, and value capture. The importance of SBMs are partly a result of CSR's (as add-on activity) failure to solve problems of waste, emission, and energy consumption (Bocken et al. 2014). These sorts of add-on initiatives and improvements are not enough to tackle environmental problems, and Bocken et al. (2014, p. 44) argue that there is a need for companies that incorporate sustainability by "changing the way

you do business”. Sustainable business models are mainly focused on three things: minimizing the material used and maximizing the energy efficiency, reusing materials and products turning waste into value, and lastly cleantech with a focus on renewable energy (Bocken, Boons & Baldassarre, 2019). A central aspect of sustainable business models is to generate revenue through operations that lead to good externalities on the environment and society (Bocken et al. 2014).

However, companies with an SBM are not necessarily perceived as the most sustainable organizations by rankings. Bocken et al. (2014) studied, for example, The Guardian Green, Sustainable Business Awards, the Dow sustainability index, and Forbes top 100 sustainability leaders, and found that none of them based their scores on business models. Thus, the companies that scored highest in these rankings treated CSR as an add-on activity. The usage of CSR over sustainable business models is also evident in research. For example, Brieger et al.'s (2019) quantitative study on the relationship of CSR and work addiction is based on Switzerland Public Value atlas from 2017 ranking of sustainable companies, that does not include business model as criteria. The absence of a sustainable business model is also seen in the study of Costas and Kärreman (2013), where they explored how CSR can function as a mechanism to control the employees, the two case companies that they explored had neither one of them a sustainable business model. It, therefore, seems as if there needs to be more research on businesses with a sustainable business model, and especially how it internally affects organizations.

## 2.2 Organizational identity and organizational identification

With the purpose of exploring the internal effects of CSR as a business model, we are going to use the two concepts of organizational identification and organizational identity. To understand the two concepts of organizational identity and organizational identification, and how they are related, we suggest that it is necessary to begin by acknowledging the characteristics and differences between the terms. This is also necessary because some identity theorists have used the terms as synonymous, while others have seen identity as a stable entity and identification as the active process or result of associating or relating with an organization or a group (Alvesson, 2013; Baldi, Bartel & Dukerich, 2016). To understand organizational identity and identification, we start by presenting the concept of identity and its meaning.

Identity is a buzzword that has received a lot of attention within organizational studies (Alvesson, 2013). Most commonly, identity is used to define oneself, social group, or organization through

certain key characteristics (Alvesson, 2013). Furthermore, identity aims to create a coherent and consistent self-view that can take expression in forms of emotions, behaviors, and actions (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Individual identity can be understood as an attempt at answering the question: “who am I and what’s important for me”? (Alvesson, 2013, p. 35). The individual identity is often affected by social group identity and organizational identity. Whereas, social group identity is related to a specific group’s identity, which in an organizational context can be a certain task force or a department within the organization. Meanwhile, organizational identity is related to a more holistic view of the values and characteristics related to the organization (Alvesson, 2013), which we will go further into detail in section 2.2.1. In organizational studies, identity is often analyzed on the three mentioned levels above, individual, social, and organizational (Alvesson, 2013). However, there are inter-relational aspects of identity, sometimes they co-exist, conflict, or interrelate (Pratt et al. 2016). In this thesis we are not going to treat identity and identification as synonyms but rather identity as an entity and identification as the active process of defining or relating with (in our case) an organization.

### 2.2.1 Organizational identity

In the previous section, we touched upon the meaning behind organizational identity. In this section we will go more into detail regarding the definition and how it stands in contrast to culture. The most established and shared definition of organizational identity is created by Albert and Whetten (1985, cited in Brown & He, 2013). They define it as what the members of an organization think are the central, distinctive, and enduring attributes of the organization. Even though this concept is still quite commonly shared and accepted throughout different traditions, there are some differences regarding how they view the epistemology and the *enduring*, and *central* parts of the definition (Gioia & Hamilton, 2016; Schultz, 2016; Brown & He, 2013). Furthermore, organizational identity can be understood as an attempt at answering the question, who are we as an organization? (Albert & Whetten, 1985 cited in Ravasi, 2016). The organizational identity has implications on organizational members because it affects their actions and decisions (Lin, 2004).

A way of defining and maintain the organizational identity is through organizational anti-identity, which according to Stanske, Rauch and Canato (2020, p. 139) can be defined as “socially constructed cognitive understanding from which organizational members draw claims and attributes to describe their organization in regard to who it is not”. They argue that this helps organizational members to form and construct the organizational identity. By pointing out aspects



that distinguish their organization from others, they can thus clarify what they actually are. To uncover these distinguishing characteristics, organizational members can ask themselves ‘who we are not as an organization?’ (Reger, Barney, Bunderson, Foreman, Gustafson, Huff, Martins, Sarason & Stimpert, 1998). By answering this question, they can distance themselves from what they are not, and thus clarify the organizational identity (Stanske, Rauch & Canato, 2020).

Organizational identity and culture are two concepts that share a lot of similarities and it is, according to Alvesson (2013), therefore hard to make a distinction between them. He describes culture as being a broad umbrella concept, with internal focus and especially two central characteristics of relevance, symbols, and meaning. He argues that culture thus can be understood as a lens that employees from an organization share, making them extract the same, or at least similar, meaning from different materials, ideas, and, activities. Elaborating on the differences between the two concepts, Ravasi (2016) argues that identity is narrower in its scope of analysis and more self-reflective. Further elaborating on this, the construction of organizational identity is more of an explicit conscious activity, meanwhile, organizational culture is more of an implicit and non-self-reflective activity (Schultz, Hatch & Larsen, 2002). The difference between the two concepts can be observed in the light of the context, where culture broadly concerns more aspects of everyday organizational life, whereas the context of organizational identity is more related to answering the question of “who are we as an organization?” (Albert & Whetten, 1985 cited in Ravasi, 2016).

Furthermore, Schultz, Hatch and Larsen (2002) argue that organizational identity is more affected by external views, regarding the image of the organization while culture's scope of focus, as mentioned above, is more internally focused. There are thus some differences between the concepts. However, in some cases they integrate and affect each other. The creators of the concept of organizational identity believed that culture can partly answer the key organizational identity question: who are we as an organization? (Albert & Whetten, 1985 cited in Ravasi, 2016). They argued that culture can affect how organizational members make sense of their identity. Expressing it differently, Alvesson (2013) suggests that identity is affected by the culture in the sense that it emerges within the cultural context, making culture an important factor for organizational context. Moreover, he argues that identity expressions have the possibility to affect the culture if done seriously and grounded in present cultural meanings.

### 2.2.2 Organizational identification

The brother of organizational identity is organizational identification, which according to Brown & He (2013) in their literature review of the two terms, contains a greater consensus regarding the definition than organizational identity. However, there is according to Brown (2017) no crystal-clear shared definition of the concept. Yet, one widely accepted definition of the concept of organizational identification is, according to him, when an organizational member feels that he or she belongs to an organization. Furthermore, he argues that this can come to expression through employees defining and referring to themselves as members of their organization, and see their values being reflected (Brown, 2017). Therefore, organizational identification focuses on the employee's active process of identification.

Pratt (1998) explains that there are two main ways for organizational identification to occur, either through recognition that the organization seems like one-self, or through changes in one-self accordingly with the organizational identity. Furthermore, he explains that for most identification to happen there needs to be a degree of value congruence between the individual and the organization. It is also important to distinguish between organizational identification and organizational internalization, whereas the latter are related to internalizing organizational values or beliefs, while the first is more related to a perception of unity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). However, through identification, internalization sometimes happens as an effect (Pratt, 1998). Pratt (1998) also highlights the distinction between organizational commitment and organizational identification. The former could be interpreted in a similar way such as the criteria of job-satisfaction. It can also be a statement for how happy or unhappy one is with their organization (Pratt, 1998). Moreover, he argues that organizational commitment does not necessarily have anything to do with the self-relational aspect between an individual and an organization.

Elaborating on what increases the likelihood of organizational identification, Pratt (1998) describes that social identity theory, which is about how groups of people create a shared identity, suggests that organizational identification is more likely to occur when the organization stands for something distinctive and of high social status. When the organizational identity is perceived as something morally bad or of low-status, there is an increased chance that employees will participate in a so-called dis-identification (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002). This means that the employees

actively are dis-identifying with the organization and are separating their identity from the organization (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002).

An underlying mechanism behind dis-identification might be that the construction of individual identity is mostly done in a positive manner, meaning individuals strive to portray themselves in a positive light (Dutton, Roberts & Bednar, 2011). The positive mental construction of one self's identity, tend to be a bit narcissist, and contain elements of fantasy, regarding who and how the individual 'is' and the process of creating a coherent identity also tends to disregard the "ugly sides" of one's persona and highlight the positive sides (Alvesson, Kärreman & Sullivan, 2015). Furthermore, strong CSR is often perceived as something positive among the employees, and there have been several studies, as mentioned above, that found a link between organizations with a strong CSR profile and organizational identification (Brieger et al. 2019; Brammer, He & Mellahi, 2015; Glavas & Kelly, 2014). Therefore, it seems likely that strong CSR increases the likelihood of strong organizational identification among the employees.

Ashforth, Harrison & Corley (2008) presents that there were several outcomes on the employees related to a high degree of organizational identification, such as increased job involvement, job satisfaction, extra role-performance and an attempt to live up to the ideals of the organization, which in some cases are positive aspects for the organization and the employee. However, Dukerich, Kramer & Parks (1998) presents negative aspects of strong identification, mostly on the employees. Yet, the employees and the organization are intertwined, and they have thus spillover effects on each other. Dukerich, Kramer & Parks (1998), argue that strong identification with the organization can lead to inaction, due to the reliance on co-workers to make decisions. This is in turn related to a prevalent high degree of inter-organizational trust, which also can lead to self-censorship, and conformity pressures. Furthermore, they present another aspect, that one's behavior might become less viable in relation to the organization, making the employee less prone to question the legality and ethicality of the organization. Moreover, they present that strong organizational identity can be negative for individual identity in cases where the employees would, for example, lose their job and thus lose a big part of their identity. There are therefore both positive and negative aspects of organizational identification of employees.

Organizations can according to Alvesson and Wilmot (2002) actively try to encourage the employees' identification process through cultural management initiatives. They suggest that this

implies that the company is actively trying to influence normative values of the employees. An example of a cultural management initiative is internal branding, which is an attempt from the organization to try to align the employees' identities with the organization's identity by different slogans and workshops (Müller, 2017). Even if the organizational identification process contains a degree of autonomy from the employees' perspective, regarding whether they choose to identify or not with the organization, the organization can try to influence the identification (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

A concept used for understanding the process of organizational identification is *identity work*, which has the purpose to further elaborate, understand, and explore the inherent dynamics that individuals experience during the process of constructing and balancing identities (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The concept identity work is defined as peoples engagement in “forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165), and is of the view that organizational identity is an ongoing construction (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). This concept will enable us to develop a deeper understanding of the employees' organizational identification process with the organizational identity and their experience of it.

Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016), in their book *Managerial Lives*, presents five different ways of how identity work comes to expression. They focus on the internal self-view of employees, and their experienced friction and conflict in the process. Furthermore, they also explain that most identity work aims to create a coherent and positive self-image, and when this is not fulfilled, more conflict and tensions are created. The first two that are mentioned contain less degree of tension and conflict, while the last three contain more. The first one is called *identity adjustment* and is the one that we are going to mostly focus on in our thesis. Identity adjustment is a common phenomenon and something that most people will experience in their working life related to changes in areas, such as “work tasks, demands, relationships, situations, and new ideals” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016, p. 247). This need for changing “who you are” is quite necessary and almost unavoidable due to the changing nature of reality. This might also trigger uncertainty and anxiety; however, this type of adjustment is quite harmonious and tension-free (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016).

The following four are we going to mention quickly, but not extensively because they will not be the focus of our study. Sveningsson & Alvesson (2016) explains that *identity expression* is when a person is affecting the environment with their identity and persona. Furthermore, they describe *identity juggling* as “a mild form of identity struggle” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016, p. 252). Moreover, *identity wrestling* is described by them as a more serious form of identity struggling, whereas the individuals under longer periods of time struggle with maintaining their self-view with the organizational environment and demands. The last concept that they explain is called *identity crashing*. This is according to them the strongest form of identity struggle and represents strong conflicts between the person's self-view and the demands and expectations created by the organization

## 2.3 Clarifying the relationship between the concepts

In this section we bring together the different parts of the literature review by highlighting the connections between CSR and the concepts of organizational identity and organizational identification. If the employees of an organization believe that CSR is a central and distinctive part of the organization, then CSR has the potential to be a part of the organizational identity. Furthermore, the more likely the employees are to believe that CSR is central and distinctive, the more CSR will be part of the organizational identity. Following this reasoning, if organizations have a sustainable business model, it will likely increase the employee's perception that CSR is something central in the organization. This makes it on a theoretical level quite clear that CSR, if integrated into the business model, potentially influences the organizational identity and becomes a key factor in the search for answering the fundamental organizational identity question: Who are we as an organization? (Albert & Whetten, 1985 cited in Ravasi, 2016). Another aspect that can lead to CSR being a central part of the organizational identity is related to the finding that identity tends to be constructed in a positive light (Dutton, Roberts & Bednar, 2011), and CSR is generally seen as something positive. This might lead to employees highlighting the CSR parts of the organization when determining the organizational identity.

As previously mentioned, the construction of identity is biased toward emphasizing positive aspects and neglecting negative aspects (Dutton, Roberts & Bednar, 2011; Alvesson, Kärreman & Sullivan, 2015). This tilts people towards identifying with things that are perceived to be good. However, what is perceived to be good does contain a degree of subjectivity. But at the same time, as presented above by Pratt (1998), value congruence increases organizational identification and

as mentioned earlier, there are multiple studies that show that strong CSR increases organizational identification (Brieger et al. 2019; Brammer, He & Mellahi, 2015; Glavas & Kelly, 2014). This indicates that strong CSR can work as a factor for increasing organizational identification. However, this might only work if the individual subjectively believes that the CSR activity is authentic and something that will positively portray the person's identity. Furthermore, people are not isolated islands, but rather intertwined in societal context and discourse. If strong CSR is perceived as something good by society in general, it might increase the likelihood that employees want to identify with it, due to the collective belief that it is something good. As shown by Pratt (1998), organizational identification increases when the organization stands for something of high social status and is distinctive. It might be that strong CSR and doing something that is "good" for society is of high social status.

As shown in the paragraphs above, there are both theoretically and empirically signs that strong CSR can be a central part of the organizational identity and increase the likelihood of organizational identification. This increase in organizational identification has some effects on the employees, both positive and negative. The former can come in the shape of increased job-involvement and job-satisfaction (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). The latter can result in negative aspects for the individual identity such as, in-action, self-censorship, conformity pressures, and make the employees less prone to ask questions about legality and ethicality of the organization (Dukerich, Kramer & Parks, 1998). Furthermore, Brieger et al. (2019) are more specifically presenting negative aspects of organizational identification with companies that have a strong CSR profile. However, these companies do not have a sustainable business model, but rather emphasize CSR strongly through different additional activities. They define the negative effect on employees as, self-sacrifice, stagnation, and self-righteousness. This shows that CSR has the potential of increasing organizational identification, which can have both negative and positive effects on the employees.

As elaborated on, CSR can be a part of the organizational identity and the employees' identities through organizational identification, especially if it is perceived as strong CSR. The CSR inspired organizational identity might put employees in situations where different identities come into conflict or tension. To further elaborate, understand, and explore these types of situations, we are going to use the concept of identity work. This concept has the potential of analyzing identity struggles that can emerge from identifying with an organization (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

This in turn, might enable us to create a deeper understanding of the effects on the employees related to organizational identity and organizational identification.

The degree of identification with a certain group or organization, are to some extent an active individual process where the individuals contain a degree of autonomy in his or her willingness to identify with a certain group or organization (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). However, there are mechanisms and influences that affect the organizational identification, making it “appealing” to identify with a certain group or organization (Alvesson, Kärreman & Sullivan, 2015). There are also fields of cultural management, focusing on how especially normative control can affect the inner life of the employees and their identities in organizational preferred ways (Müller, 2017; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Yet our study’s theoretical standpoint does not focus on how an organization is actively affecting the employees through different cultural practices, but rather from the perspective of the employees and how they choose to identify with the organization. Although we are aware that there is a chance that there will be mechanisms in the company that could be observed as forms of normative control, that will affect the employees. This mechanism will not be the focus of our study.

Our literature review suggests that the internal aspects of CSR are an under-studied subject. Especially, when the business model is sustainable. This has led to our interest in wanting to further understand how organizational identity and organizational identification are affected during circumstances where the business model is sustainable. Therefore, our research questions are:

- How does a sustainable business model influence the employees’ perceptions of organizational identity?
- How is organizational identification affected when sustainability is incorporated into the business model?



# 3 Methodology

In this section, we are going to explain how we conducted this thesis. To provide an understanding for how a sustainable business model affects employees' perceptions of an organizational identity and how it affects them, we needed to have a qualitative approach. We want to contribute to the internal perspective of CSR, that is mostly characterized by quantitative studies, by offering a more nuanced perspective of the phenomenon. In this chapter, we will begin by explaining the philosophical grounding followed by the approach. Thereafter, we will cover how we collected the empirical material, including a description of our case company. After that we will explain how we analyzed our material before ending up in reflections regarding the thesis' credibility and limitations.

## 3.1 Philosophical Grounding

With the purpose of exploring and understanding employees' perception of how they relate to the company and its CSR approach (which we explore in terms of identity work and organizational identification), we enforce an interpretivist epistemology, which implies an understanding for human behavior rather than an explanation of it (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This means that the data our study is built upon cannot simply be observed and measured with instruments, but rather contains a degree of subjectivity where it is up to the researcher to find hidden patterns and meanings that are not explicitly appearing (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). Interpretivism requires the researcher to understand the subjective meanings of social actions (Bryman & Bell, 2015), and we, therefore, embrace our active role as interpreters. "The challenge here is to enter the social world of our research subjects and understand their world from their point of view" (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, p. 116).

Our interpretative approach enables us to explore the subjectivity in what employees express and thus analyze how they are affected by the social context. Even if interpretations are individual, they tend to be limited and to some extent shared in a given situation (Prasad, 2018). In practice, this means that for example employees at a certain company can have a common understanding and thus develop shared interpretations of the reality, which according to Berger and Luckman (1967) can be referred to as intersubjectivity. In this study, we try to understand how the somewhat shared social context at a socially responsible company affects the employees' perception of



organizational identity and their relationship to the company. To do so, we collect inspiration from symbolic interactionism which according to Prasad (2018) concerns individuals' development of the self in social situations. Individuals embrace different roles depending on the social situation which in turn brings a certain expectation of behavior (Prasad, 2018), and we are interested in analyzing what implications it has on employees' organizational identification.

The focus on interpretations also leads us to an ontological orientation that is characterized as constructivist, which according to Bryman and Bell (2015) implies that social phenomena, and the meaning of them, is constantly accomplished by social actors and thus dismiss the idea that they are separated from the individuals constructing them. Due to our interpretative perspective, there is no objective truth and we acknowledge different perceptions of reality. We are studying and presenting specific versions of social realities, which is constantly negotiated and thus not definite.

## 3.2 Research Approach

In alignment with our epistemological and ontological orientation, this thesis is exclusively built on a qualitative method which according to Mason (2002) is a suitable method for exploring understandings and experiences of research participants. We are interested in employees' interpretations and value nuanced descriptions instead of measurable data. Therefore, we prefer a qualitative approach over a quantitative one because the latter is more concerned with words than numbers (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). Another motive for engaging in qualitative research is to find answers to "what is going on here?" and "what does it mean?", even if it is not possible to be completely certain (Rennstam & Wästerfors (2015, p. 13). We want to understand how the employees, at a company with CSR incorporated into the business model, are affected by the organizational identity and therefore have our starting point in the perspective of the studied subjects (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

Before entering the empirical field, we had already decided on the topic we wanted to study. From our Master's Programme in Managing People, Knowledge and Change, we had a course in CSR which, together with our personal interests, inspired us to investigate different aspects of sustainability in an organizational context. When reviewing the literature on CSR we found out that the internal perspective, i.e. how people inside organizations are affected, had received little attention. Furthermore, we also found that most literature treat CSR as an add-on activity, while we wanted to study CSR while incorporated into the business model. We thought this was an

interesting angle and started to look for potential theories that could be used for analyzing the material. During and after the data collection, we have adjusted our theory for it to suit the empirical material. The data gathering is conducted by altering theory and empiri and therefore resembles an abduction, which Alvesson and Kärreman (2011) describe through the process of establishing theory, observing a surprising phenomenon, and then articulating the new theory.

### 3.3 Data Collection

The data collection is structured as a case study, which according to Bryman and Bell (2015) typically means an intensive study of a single case, e.g. an organization. Instead of studying different companies, we decided to focus on just one company because we value a more in-depth understanding of one particular organization, rather than a superficial description at several companies. Since we want to analyze employees' identities, we decided to do qualitative interviews, which according to Kvale (1983 cited in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015) is a suitable method for understanding someone's lifeworld.

The interviews lasted for 50 to 60 minutes, and most of them were conducted face to face. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, three of the interviews were held via Skype without the video function. On the implication of this is the inability to observe body language which made it difficult to identify e.g. discomfort and other nonverbal responses to questions (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Nevertheless, focus has been on what the interviewees said, and we conducted the interviews together, which made it possible for us to discuss them and see if we interpreted things similarly. Furthermore, all interviews were conducted in Swedish. All the used quotes that we show in the 'Empirical Findings' chapter are therefore translated from Swedish to English, which can have some implications. For example, some Swedish expressions that did not make sense in English have been substituted with corresponding English expressions. To make the employees' quotes fair, this is a precaution that needed to be made.

To not steer the interviewees, we used a semi-structured interview guide with the purpose of increasing our flexibility and letting the interviewees speak freely. As advocated by Bryman and Bell (2015), the semi-structure made it possible for us to adjust to the direction that the interviewees took the conversation. It also made it possible to ask different kinds of questions like follow-up, specifying and interpreting (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Thus, we could ask the interviewees to

elaborate on interesting answers, clarify what they meant, and determine whether we made the correct interpretation or not. The questions formulated in the guide is mostly based on a pilot interview where we interviewed somebody who also fitted into the research question, but with another profession. From this experience, we learned what kind of questions that worked and added them to our actual interview guide. To avoid speculative answers, we followed Gubrium and Holstein (1997) advice of asking questions in terms of ‘whats’ and ‘hows’. By doing so, it is possible to find answers to ‘why’, without asking the interviewees explicitly (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). The answers are then used to analyze how employees’ organizational identification is affected when working at a company with a sustainable business model.

To conduct interviews ethically, we have for example reflected on and dealt with the following critical aspects presented by Mason (2002): what we ask, how we ask it, and whether or not we can guarantee confidentiality. Since we have been asking questions about employees' private lives, we have been discussing which questions we can ask and which we cannot. We have also, at the beginning of every interview, been clear about the interviewees’ anonymity and asked for permission to record it. The interviewees have been given code names in the transcription and presented material in the analysis, and we have made sure that no quotes can be traced back to the source.

### 3.3.1 The case company

When doing case studies, it is highly critical to choose a case that qualifies into the specific research criteria (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To find a company suitable for our purpose and research questions, we needed to find a company with a sustainable business model. The CSR thus needed to be in the actual business model and something that permeates the whole organization rather than an add-on activity. Therefore, we collected empirical data at Krafringen Energi AB (who we call Krafringen from here), which is an energy company with completely fossil-free production. By selling renewable energy, we see the environmental responsibility as included in the core of their business.

The history of Krafringen can be traced 150 years back in time, when Lund obtained gas-driven illumination and a gas plant (Krafringen, 2020a). In 1906, the Lund town board together with the cities Malmö, Helsingborg, Halmstad, and Landskrona established Sydkraft, which were supposed to deliver energy produced by hydropower in Lagan (one of Sweden's four major rivers). Almost 60 years later, the Lunds Tekniska Verk (as Krafringen was called then) installed, with the help of

Sydkraft, two oil-fueled steam boilers with an effect of 150 MW together (Krafringen, 2020b). In 1981, the work with alternative energy sources began and one year later Lunds Energi (as it was renamed) established a collaboration with Lund's wastewater treatment plant and started extracting energy from the wastewater (Krafringen, 2020c). Ten years later, two wind power plants were initiated and in 1998, Lunds Energi was one of the first energy companies to get an environmental certification (Krafringen, 2020d). In 2012, after long negotiations, the construction of Örtoftaverket began, which is a bio-fueled combined power and heating plant (Krafringen, 2020e). Two years later, the plant opened and in relation to this, they also changed their name to Krafringen Energi AB. Örtoftaverket runs on forest fuel and recycled waste wood from regional landowners in Skåne and Småland. It has a capacity of producing 500 GWh of heat and 220 GWh of electricity per year. Today Krafringen has around 500 employees and almost 260 000 energy customers (Krafringen, 2020g).

The sustainable profile is highly visible in their external communication. Krafringen (2020f) claims to take responsibility by using natural resources as efficiently as possible and focusing on local energy solutions that benefit the environment and contribute to sustainable growth. Their vision is “energy for future generations” (Krafringen, 2020f), which is well-aligned with how The UN World Commission defined sustainability in the Brundtland Rapport - “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43). Furthermore, they have an environmental steering system including e.g. a code of conduct, policies, and business plan (Krafringen, 2020f). Even if the environmental aspects are central, they are also clear about how they work with the social aspects, like safety, health, and diversity among employees (Krafringen, 2020h). On a final note, Krafringen is owned by four counties, but operates as a separate unit with demands of revenue that goes back to their owner, who then invests in social welfare (Krafringen, 2020g). Considering how they take social, environmental, and economic responsibility, we argue that Krafringen is a company where the business model is centered around CSR.

Even if almost all the empirical data is collected through interviews, we still want to mention that the information above resembles secondary data, which according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) is already printed documents, e.g. an organization's web page. The purpose of the information about Krafringen in this subchapter is primarily to give the reader more context of the organization where the primary data was collected, not to analyze it. Furthermore, it was also

obtained to make sure that they fitted into the research purpose. Consequently, this information has probably affected the gathering of primary data. It has also, to a limited extent, affected the analysis.

### 3.3.2 Access and Sample

To gain access, we made an initial phone call where we got in touch with a company representative at Krafringen who took our request further. Eventually we got in contact with Peter (code name), who works at a high position in the company. We then explained our project in more detail and discussed some of the technicalities that needed to be in place. Peter showed an interest in our study and single-handedly scheduled ten interviews with some of his colleagues. Consequently, we have not chosen the interviewees by ourselves, they have been chosen for us. Although, when we discussed with Peter, we emphasized that we wanted a diverse sample of employees at Krafringen. Peter had no problem fulfilling this and he picked interviewees from different parts of the organization. Thus, we were able to interview people who work with sales, environment, HR, marketing, PR, projects, production, and development, which made it possible to get a more holistic picture of the organization instead of just a department. The table below provides an overview of the people we interviewed.

<b>Code name</b>	<b>Years at the company</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Jennifer	18	Female
Lisa	5	Female
Amanda	12	Female
David	10	Male
Jason	3	Male
Vincent	2,5	Male
Alice	1,5	Female
Olivia	3,5	Female
Roger	16	Male
George	25	Male

### 3.4 Analyzing the data

It is hard to define when our analytical work began. It can be argued that it already started when we were making the pilot interview because we already then started to discuss what could be interesting for the actual thesis. Consequently, we had these thoughts in the back of our head when creating the semi-structured interview guide, and we already then discussed potential answers and what could be of interest for our analysis. Thus, before entering the empirical field, we have both consciously and subconsciously thought in analytical terms. Even if the interviews were open-ended, we still steered the interviewees in different directions which also can be seen as a component of our analytical work. Furthermore, in between the interviews, and especially the first ones, we discussed and talked about interesting tendencies that we wanted to explore in the coming interviews as well. Therefore, our analytical process is rather in alignment with Styhre (2013) who describes it as un-linear and messy.

After collecting the empirical material, we started by transcribing and discussing the material. All ten interviews are fully transcribed, and we used otranscribe.com as a tool. Since we both participated in all interviews, we discussed the material back and forth, and tried to come up with interesting keywords. With these keywords on the whiteboard, we then tried to identify different categories that we could place them under. The categories then resulted in three main themes that we decided to analyze, which we did by following the steps of sorting, reducing and arguing, as suggested by Rennstam and Wästerfors' (2015) in their book 'Analyze!'. We began sorting the empirical material by putting relevant quotes under each theme. From this large document, we then picked out the most interesting quotes and put them in a new document to reduce the material. The quotes were then used to analyze and argue with our material. By making commentary unit-excerpts, we combine empirical findings with what we think is relevant theories, and then express our analysis of it. We are aware that our findings are not objective reflections of the interviews but rather processed by our interpretations with the purpose of making sense of it. Styhre (2013, p. 78) argues that data needs to be spoken for because it cannot "speak for itself".

When presenting quotes from the interviews in our 'Empirical Findings' chapter, we use a few different commands, with the purpose of clarifying who says what, and to shorten quotes depending on relevance. Furthermore, when we present a quote from an interviewee, we simply use their code names. The commands that we use are the following:

<b>Command</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
M:	When a question is asked by Misha
O:	When a question is asked by Olof
/.../	When parts of the quote have been cut out

### 3.5 Reflections and Limitations

A conventional wisdom about case-studies is, or was, that it only can produce context-dependent (practical) knowledge which is less valuable than context-independent (theoretical) knowledge (Flyvberg, 2006). This view has been proven wrong and Flyvberg (2006) provides us with counter arguments towards this misunderstanding. He argues that context-dependent knowledge has the possibility to provide more expertise in a certain area. Specialized skills are rarely achieved from absorbing formal rules and knowledge applicable in any other context, but rather through years of experience and practice (Flyvberg, 2006). To become an expert orthopedist, for example, it is probably not sufficient to read all textbooks about theoretical orthopedics, there is still a necessary element of context-dependent knowledge. While having that said, we also want to emphasize the importance of context-independent knowledge. To get a deep understanding of something, it is rather when context-dependent and context-independent knowledge works in synergy. As stated in our literature review, the effects of CSR on employees have predominantly been explored in quantitative ways. We want to complement this context-independent knowledge by providing a more nuanced view of the phenomenon. With our qualitative case approach some restrictions need to be considered. In the remaining part of this chapter, we will highlight the implications of our study, and explain how we deal with them.

#### 3.5.1 Trustworthiness and Authenticity

To enhance the quality of our study, we have been working on different critical aspects that are considered important for evaluating research. In quantitative research, it is common to talk about validity and reliability, but in qualitative studies, their relevance has been questioned. In interpretative studies there are instead alternative criteria and Bryman and Bell (2015) advocate trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness can be divided into the following four subcategories: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Seale, 1999). In the following section, we will explain how we worked with these four criteria and why we find it relevant for our study.



To increase credibility, one of the most common techniques is respondent validation (Bryman & Bell, 2015), which can be done by showing the transcript of the interview to the interviewee so that she or he can agree or disagree on how they are depicted (Seale, 1999). Therefore, we have sent the transcribed material to the respective interviewee and asked if it reflects their picture. None of the participants had any objections and they all said that we could use the material for our analysis (one example of this can be found in Appendix A). The second criterion, transferability, refers to how findings are applicable in other settings (Bryman & Bell, 2015). At first glance, this may sound like an exercise of making it context-independent, and thus applicable in any other context, but, in a case study, the actual strength is the rich and detailed context (Flyvberg, 2006). “It is simply that the very value of the case-study, the contextual and interpenetrating nature of forces, is lost when one tries to sum up in large and mutually exclusive concepts like rationality and power” (Peatti, 2001, p. 260).

Therefore, to deal with transferability, Seale (1999) advocates a thick and detailed description of the settings whereby the reader should be able to determine whether it is applicable in another context or not (Seale, 1999). We have constantly been working towards this criterion, and by a rich description of both the case company and our methodology, we hope to meet the expectation of it. To increase the dependability of our study, we follow Bryman and Bell’s (2015) advice of having a complete and accessible documentation of the whole procedure of our study. We have documented every step of the process, and everything is available on request. Finally, since our qualitative study relies on interpretations, we cannot claim complete objectivity. To ensure conformability, it shall be apparent that the findings are not influenced by personal values (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In our opinion this goes, to some extent, hand in hand with our thick description of the procedures. Another aspect that we think has influenced the “objectivity” of our study is the fact that we consistently have been working side by side physically. This has made it possible for instant and continuous discussions about what is being written in this thesis. Before typing words, we have made sure that we have a shared understanding of what is going on.

The other dimension for evaluating qualitative research is as mentioned authenticity, which according to Seale (1999) can be ensured by showing that different realities are demonstrated. Since we interview a diverse group of people at Krafringen, we argue that we fulfill this criterium. We interviewed people with different titles, functions, gender, age, hierarchical positions, and



everyone is incorporated in the analysis. Another aspect of authenticity is according to Seale (1999) to provide members with a better understanding of the studied phenomenon and a better understanding of others' viewpoints. One of our ambitions with this project is that our findings could serve as an organizational tool for enhancing performance, which we will present to Krafringen. By understanding how employees' organizational identification are affected when working at a company with a sustainable business model and taking it into consideration, it is hopefully possible to maneuver the company in a better way.

### 3.5.2 Source-criticism

A characteristic of qualitative research is that people can experience and interpret the same course of events differently which can lead to questioning whether there is any underlying truth (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). To deal with this question, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) outline the following criteria for evaluating source-criticism: authenticity, bias, distance, and dependence. From these criteria, our study is especially affected by biases, which means that an informant might skew information (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). We cannot guarantee that our interviewees gave us completely honest answers and there is a risk that they aestheticized both themselves and their organization. Since the interviewees were there as company representatives, it might have affected their answers. Another limitation that falls under this dimension is the fact that Krafringen themselves decided whom we talked to. There is a risk that the interviewees were selected depending on who would present a nice picture of the organization. This can also influence the authenticity, which is concerned with "whether or not the source is a source" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009, p. 110). Although, we do not doubt that the people we interviewed were who they claim to be, we are just simply pointing out that we cannot be one hundred percent sure. The two other criteria regarding distance, concerning the timespan from when an event happened and the collection, and dependence, concerning the amount of people the information went through, are not as relevant for us. We are not studying a specific event and the information we are interested in is the one arriving from the interviewee.

## 4 Empirical findings

We have thematized our empirical findings from the interviews at Krafringen into three main sections, with sub sections. The first main section, ‘Positive energy’, is data that accounts for employees expressing positive feelings towards Krafringen as an organization. These positive expressions came into different shapes and were related to different aspects of the organization, which led us to categorize it into three different subsections. In the second section, ‘Expectations of knowledge on sustainability’, we present data concerning employees’ increased knowledge about sustainability. This section is a shorter section and is therefore not divided into different subsections. The third section, ‘Practice what you preach’, is about employees’ perception of the pressure they feel to behave “sustainably”. This section is divided into work life and leisure time, which constitutes two subsections.

### 4.1 Positive Energy

A central theme that emerged from our interviews at Krafringen was that the employees expressed positive feelings towards different aspects of the organization. These positive feelings can mainly be categorized into three different sections: first, ‘More than just profit’ about perceptions that the company’s focus is not just on profit; second, ‘Personal importance of purpose’, that the employees mention; and third, ‘Feelings of pride’ about being a member of the organization. We are going to present these sub-themes separately however they are to a certain degree intertwined and affect each other. Furthermore, these perceptions and feelings are also connected to the vision and the values of Krafringen.

#### 4.1.1 More than just profit

A category that emerged from our empirical findings is that the employees expressed that they worked towards more than just generating profit for. A reason for this was according to the employees that their revenue went back to their owner counties, which then got reinvested in social welfare. This seems to create a feeling among several employees that they are doing something socially responsible for the local community. When asking employees the open question ‘what is Krafringen for you?’, several employees mention that it is a county-owned company and that this brings certain values along, that is different from privately-owned companies. Roger expresses:

Krafringen for me has some sort of pathos, we want something more. The fact that we are county-owned comes with the pressure to deliver, we are supposed to generate good results and money to our owner counties, however, there is a counterforce to that, which is that we should deliver social benefit. Working at a privately-owned company is quite different, there are of course companies with a deeper purpose, however, it seems hard (Roger).

This illustrates that Roger thinks Krafringen is something more than a regular company. Even if they function as a profit driven company, the revenue goes back to the society, which seems to be something the employees' value. When talking to Vincent, who previously worked at a privately-owned multinational energy company, we asked what the biggest differences are if there were any.

Money. Money is much more on the table at XX. Always hunting for more and supervision from foreign controllers is present. It sippers through the entire culture /.../ they are being viewed as big and greedy by the customers meanwhile we are perceived as having a local presence. It is a difference, also internally within the culture /.../ the profit here is later invested in welfare, which makes us do something that is good for society (Vincent).

The fact that the profit in Krafringen goes to the counties, who then reinvest in social welfare are important for the employees. This is also something that they like to bring up when talking about what Krafringen is. Furthermore, it is something that they articulate as a factor that distinguishes them from other privately-owned energy companies. When talking about Krafringen's value principle, responsibility, this is often mentioned in terms of environmental and social responsibility. The latter is often referred to as a function of Krafringen being owned by the county. Lisa articulates that:

I like that we are owned by the counties, this creates a feeling there is a higher purpose than generating profit. We are here to contribute to a sustainable societal development (Lisa).

Many employees expressed similarly that they felt a higher purpose. This indicates that employees feel that their work is meaningful, and that it positively affects them. How they contribute to societal development more practically is expressed by Alice: "We have counted that we in one year give back enough money to the counties' that they can operate a middle-sized school for one year". This reinvestment and the perceived higher purpose are something that the employees emphasize when presenting what Krafringen is, this is also a factor that they extract pride from.

#### 4.1.2 Personal importance

Our empirical material shows that the employees on several instances expressed that Krafringen's values and vision were important for them personally. First of all, we would like to remind the reader that Krafringen's vision is "energy for future generations" (Krafringen, 2020f), which is comparable to the Brundtland rapport and is thus related to environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the employees express that Krafringen has three official value principles that they operate by, namely courage, responsibility, and engagement. The vision and the values are to a certain degree overlapping and intertwined. For example, it could be argued that providing renewable energy is an act of responsibility for the future generation, which also is one of the official values.

The alignment between Krafringen's vision and the tangible operations seems to be an important factor for making the employees perceive the company's vision as authentic. A Employee that works with selling energy solutions to real estate owners articulated his feelings in the following way regarding Krafringen's operations, vision, and the purpose of his working tasks:

We are actually doing this for real, we are not doing this with the purpose of earning the last penny. We are doing this for the good of future generations. I believe in what we do, and that makes it much easier to work here (David).

This quote illustrates that the sales manager believes that his working task as a seller does have a deeper meaning than generating revenue. It also seems like his personal belief and the vision of the organization is in line. This quote is also an example of how this section and the section 'more than profit' sometimes overlap. When interviewing another employee about the values and how she felt them were represented in the company. Alice answered clearly:

For me, Krafringen is important in my life. We have value principles, courage, responsibility, and engagement. It might sound a bit like a cliché but I really think that we are trying to live after them (Alice).

Here we also see examples of Alice highlighting the important role that Krafringen plays in her life. Furthermore, this quote also indicates that the aligned relationship between Krafringen's values and their actual operations, makes her perceive the company as authentic. The importance

of the aligned relationship between the values and operations can also be seen in the following quote:

If I were to explain what Krafringen is to someone that does not know, I would describe it as a county-owned energy company, and highlight that the revenue is going to the county, which is very important for me. Because it makes the purpose of the company more than just profit-generating, which is noticeable here /.../ (Lisa).

This quote by Lisa further implies that the alignment between the values and actual operations is important for the employees' pride and belief in Krafringen's values. By having the profits reinvested into the county it seems to become visible and clear for the employees that the values of engagement and responsibility are realized. Furthermore, this quote also shows that the values of Krafringen are very important for Lisa.

The following quote was expressed when talking about environmental sustainability and Krafringen:

I really like the engagement that is present here at Krafringen towards sustainability and the part that Krafringen plays to tackle this. I really feel for it and it feels important that it is like that for me (Alice).

Unpacking this quote leaves us with the impression that there is mutual engagement among the employees regarding working for sustainability, which is reflected and executed by Krafringen's operations. Here again, we observe an example of an employee who believes that Krafringen is doing something important. This is also seen in the following quote:

There are probably many that apply to Krafringen because they want an outlet for something that they think is important and want to feel that one's values are aligned with a higher purpose (Lisa).

Lisa, who studied engineering with a focus on energy, expressed that before starting at Krafringen, she had a big passion for sustainability. This was something that made her apply for a job at Krafringen. The tendency of seeking to Krafringen because of their values is something that Jennifer, who has worked at Krafringen for eighteen years, confirmed. She expressed the following: "A lot of people that search for a position here tell us that they care about environmental

questions” (Jennifer). Krafringen’s values, vision, and operation, therefore, seem to be personally important for several of the employees. This is also expressed by Roger who said: “/.../ Krafringen is a facilitator for my personal values regarding sustainability”. His quote is another example of the tight relationship between Krafringen’s values and those of the employees working there. However, not all people that start to work at Krafringen had a personal interest in sustainability before. As expressed by David: “I knew nothing about sustainability before. Krafringen has taught me everything about it”. Therefore, sustainability became more important for him after he began working at Krafringen.

The relationship between Krafringen’s values, vision, and products in relation to the employees’ personal values was also expressed by Jennifer:

/.../ I like to work with products that I believe in, I would probably have a hard time working with a product that I don’t believe in (Jennifer).

This quote is an example of the importance of value congruence between the employees and Krafringen. Our findings in this section indicate that several employees find Krafringen’s values and vision reflected in the actual operations and products. Furthermore, our findings also suggest that many employees find Krafringen’s values and vision important for them personally. There seems to be an overlap between their values and those of Krafringen.

#### 4.1.3 Feelings of pride

Another category, within the theme of ‘Positive Energy’, that emerged from our interviews at Krafringen was the employee's feeling of pride. All employees portray Krafringen in a positive manner, and they seem to like being a part of the organization. When we asked David the open and somewhat fluffy question ‘what is Krafringen for you?’, he replied:

Krafringen is a fantastic company that works for a better future. This sounds like something Donald Trump would say. But anyhow, we are working with real products and services that make the customers use less energy (David).

David’s articulation of what he believes that Krafringen is sounds a lot like the company’s formal description of their vision (energy for future generations). Furthermore, this quote also shows that

David is taking a lot of pride in the company and in the vision by highlighting how fantastic he thinks Krafringen is.

When interviewing the employees about the values and how they feel them represented in the company, Alice answered clearly:

For being such a small company we are being courageous in our ambitious goals /.../ We are acting responsibly for our employees and the society in general and for the environment. Engagement is something that we create and have a lot of internally (Alice).

This quote shows Alice expressing pride towards Krafringen by articulating that she feels that Krafringen is courageous, even though it is a small company compared to its competitor. Courage is one of Krafringen's official values and it therefore seems to be a degree of alignment between their formal values and the employees' perception of Krafringen.

Furthermore, employees are on several occasions expressing pride towards Krafringen's products, and that they believed in them. Olivia has for example bought a hybrid car herself because she believes in renewable energy. She expressed the following quote:

I can't sell electrical charging stations and ride in a diesel. I should be able to say 'this is how the charging works'. You have to believe in what you do and feel pride in it (Olivia).

This quote is an example of a seller expressing pride towards the product that she sells. Furthermore, she also highlights that it is important for her to feel pride in the product in order for her to sell it. The products that they are selling at Krafringen contain meaning for the employees, which is greater than just generating profit. The meaning that the employees find in the product seems to be mostly related to them doing something that is good for the environment. In our empirical findings, we also see instances of employees showing pride towards areas linked to technical innovation. The engineer, who is head of business development expressed his pride towards the solutions that they are building in some of the projects.

We are providing energy for the big science plants ESS and MAX4. They are both using a lot of energy, which creates a ton of heat that needs to be cooled down. When you cool down, you create residual energy which we use for our district heating. Therefore, we say that the research facilities

are heating the city, and that's a unique solution that I'm very proud of /.../ and I have a couple of those examples that I am very proud of (Vincent).

Here we see a different kind of pride of the products, which is related to the technical solutions that they provide. Although, the technical solution is intertwined with positive effects on the environment. As with most things at Krafringen, the purpose of the technical solutions is to use energy as efficiently as possible and thus contains a sustainable element. However, from the quote above, it seems as if the complexity and solution is the thing that makes Vincent feel pride, not necessarily the environmental effect that the solutions bring about.

This pride towards the innovative solutions that Krafringen develops is also something that the other interviewed engineer shares:

It is a lot of innovation thinking here, and it is plenty of people with high degrees that work here. Krafringen is tightly linked with academia, which is super cool because we can work on innovation projects that are far ahead in the sector and due to Sweden being far ahead in the world, we are really in the forefront (Lisa).

The pride expressed towards the product is thus mostly related to the effects of the products and the value that they bring to the society, but also the innovative and technical expertise that are related to the development of the products. One additional source of pride for the employees can be found in the public opinion. It seems like people outside the company believe that Krafringen is working with something good for society. This can be seen in the following quote:

We are doing something that is actually good. When you talk to people from the outside like family and friends, they say that. For example, my kid says, daddy, you are working with something that is important /.../ That feels good (David).

This quote indicates the importance of how people from the outside view the organization. In the case of David, this seems to contribute to his feeling of pride towards his work.



## 4.2 Expectations of knowledge on sustainability

The empirical material shows that sustainability is present in the day to day operations at Krafringen. Since the actual business is about sustainability, many of the interviewees argue that it is unavoidable not to touch upon the subject and that it is present even during meetings centered on different subjects. Roger said for example: “If you talk about our business, you talk about sustainability in one way or another”. By working at Krafringen you obtain knowledge about environmental sustainability both directly through your working tasks but also conversations with customers and colleagues. We found tendencies of sustainability knowledge expectation mostly related to the execution of work tasks and during customer interactions. These expectations have turned into an implicit, unspoken norm that the employees try to adhere to.

There are some cases of Krafringen actively educating the employees about environmental sustainability. As explained by Jennifer: “We have an onboard theoretical course for all the new employees about environmental sustainability”. Our material also indicates that multiple employees have learned more about environmental sustainability due to their work at Krafringen. Amanda for example, who before working for Krafringen had obtained a degree in eco-engineering at Lund’s University, expressed the following quote related to knowledge at Krafringen about environmental sustainability: “I’ve learned a lot by working at Krafringen, especially through my working tasks and all the sustainable questions we are working with”.

Amanda is an example of where an engineer through her working task has obtained more knowledge about sustainability. This can be categorized and defined as practical knowledge related to the actual development of products and solutions. Furthermore, Krafringen also has external stakeholders and customers that highly prioritize sustainability and they are thus putting pressure on Krafringen to solve and deliver sustainable solutions. Amanda explains it accordingly:

Most of our bigger customers have environmental sustainability as a driving force. Our owners, board, and government agencies also have it. If we elaborate on our partners, they are all prioritizing environmental sustainability, when we are working with innovation projects for example. We should not just develop new technology and solutions but also, be environmentally sustainable at the same time. Most of what we do and develop is sustainable and one also wants us to act in that direction (Amanda).

This quote suggests that Krafringen has external pressures on them to deliver sustainable products, which in turn pushes them to be innovative and develop knowledge about sustainable solutions. This type of external pressure from the customers derives from Krafringen having expertise in sustainable products. This pressure is also vivid when the sellers' talk about their meetings with customers. Even though the sellers are not developing the products that Krafringen sells, they still feel an external pressure from the customers to know what they are talking about in terms of technical details. This is evident in what David communicated about how he learned more about Krafringen's products and thus environmental sustainability:

My customers asked these kinds of questions: Is district heating really more environmentally sustainable? How does Krafringen practice being socially responsible? Big words, what do you mean by that? One must learn these things in the beginning, then you start to understand. Then you can start to live it. It might sound a bit noble, but you have to have it with you in all internal meetings and all customer meetings because it will always come up in the discussions (David).

This kind of external pressure to know more about environmental sustainability was also expressed by the other salesperson that we interviewed:

The customer's demand makes one have to straighten up and search for knowledge about the particular thing, often is that knowledge to be found internally. Otherwise, I have to talk to my boss and say that we need education (Olivia).

Working with external customers and stakeholders pressures the employees to learn more about environmental sustainability. This also seems to be caused by Krafringen's business model and their service/product offerings. However, besides the initial onboard training course regarding environmental suitability, there does not seem to be many instances of Krafringen actively creating e.g. workshops and training courses for the employees to learn. It seems as if most knowledge is obtained through working tasks and customer interactions. For example, David mentioned:

I obtain most of my knowledge from my own interests. I noticed quite quickly when I ended up here that to be worth something for Krafringen and their customers, I needed to have knowledge about this issue (David).

The knowledge that the employees obtain when working with developing or selling a specific product is quite specific. However as expressed in the quote above, David believes that knowledge about sustainability is valuable for the company, which could create a subjective pressure to obtain knowledge about sustainability in broader terms than just product specific.

From our material, we also found that there are a lot of people who work at Krafringen that are interested in environmental sustainability in general, which leads to conversations about it. This can be illustrated by the following quote by Alice:

A lot of people have environmental sustainability as an interest. So, it is quite common that during lunch and in corridors, people are discussing these sorts of things (Alice).

This quote does not necessarily indicate that the employees are feeling pressure to gain knowledge about environmental sustainability with the purpose to participate in conversations. However, it could be that just by working at Krafringen, where people are talking about environmental sustainability, employees are receiving more knowledge about sustainability, both in specific terms related to products but also more general knowledge through discussions and similar. To summarize our findings of knowledge pressure, some of the working tasks require knowledge about environmental sustainability, mostly related to the product they are selling or developing. Furthermore, the most common way to obtain this knowledge is by working or searching up information by oneself. Alternatively, by the onboard course provided by Krafringen or any if they have another type of meeting regarding where different departments present what they are working with, or through informal conversations with coworkers.

### 4.3 Practice what you preach

Another central theme that emerged when discussing the interviews was how employees described their behavior, primarily at work but also in their free time. Many of the reasons for their behavior can be seen as a function of what we have discussed so far, like for example the pride for the products and vision, but also the increased knowledge about sustainability in general. When having good knowledge about sustainability, they also know how to live more sustainably in their private life. Furthermore, the employees described they perceive Krafringen as a sustainable company. This, together with the increased knowledge about sustainability, seems to affect their behavior in e.g. sales meetings. The empirical material indicates that they behave in a certain way to maintain

Krafringen's sustainability image and thus be good representatives of the company. Furthermore, they also know how to behave around the office to fit into the occurring norm. In the following sections, we will analyze how they describe their behavior in customer interactions, around the office, and in their private lives.

#### 4.3.1 Work-life behaviors

When doing the interviews at Krafringen, almost every employee emphasized that they to some extent had to practice what they preach. They feel a need to appear authentic and when having a business where they perceived sustainability as a central theme, there seems to be an inevitable pressure to also behave sustainably. Amanda expressed for example: "Not only our products and services should be sustainable, but we also have to do it internally. We need to show that we practice what we preach". Another example of this is the following quote:

Alice: We try to think things through all the way so that sustainability is not just an empty expression or something we just say. Everyone says that it is important, but here it is supposed to be well-reasoned in everything we do.

O: Does it create a discrepancy otherwise?

Alice: Then it is easy to end up in some kind of greenwashing. All companies say that the environment is important. /.../ I think we try to practice what we preach as much as possible.

One of the main reasons for feeling pressure to behave "sustainably" can be drawn to the expectations of external stakeholders and especially customers. In customer interaction, the employees at Krafringen feel that they need to fulfill customers' expectations which according to them is to behave "sustainably". Since they sell sustainable products, it will create a discrepancy if they don't act in a sustainable direction themselves. All employees expressed the importance of acting according to Krafringen's image to be a good company representative. Otherwise, their behavior would, according to the employees, create a gap between customers' expectations and experience. Even if this is something recurring in all interviews, it was especially prominent when we talked to employees who work with sales. David, who has frequent customer contact, expressed the following quote when we asked him if he represents Krafringen:

Yes, for sure. You are always, maybe not owned, but you do have a responsibility to your employer to behave according to what the employer wants. That is something you accept and reconcile with when you begin at the company (David).

To maintain the image of Krafringen, there are therefore aspects of their appearance that they need to think of when for example visiting customers, like the means of transportation. The employees altogether emphasize that they cannot show up in gasoline cars and then talk about renewable energy. For example, Vincent explained the desired behavior shortly and figuratively: “To show up with your briefcase in one hand, and the bicycle helmet in the other, that is a pretty good symbol I think”. A more detailed example of this is the following:

The symbolic questions are really important. Especially for those of us, who are out a lot and meet different stakeholders, like the salespeople. It would be pretty weird if they arrive in a gasoline thirsty car and then talk about sustainability. So that is an important question. That is why we have electric cars to borrow. /.../ We also have bicycles that they can use. It is the same when we have visitors at our office. What kind of snack, coffee, and so on? Small questions, but these are important details for creating credibility (Amanda).

From the empirical data, it is quite clear that the employees know how to behave in order to look sustainable in stakeholders' eyes. For some employees, who claim to live sustainably and for example have their electric car, there might not be a particularly big adjustment to fit into the expectations. This can be exemplified with Roger who seems to live a sustainable life privately. He expressed the following quote when we followed up a statement by asking ‘you mentioned that you live sustainably at home?’: “Absolutely, no flights more or less. Everything from sorting waste and upwards you can say”. The employees who expressed quotes like this seem to be able to behave somewhat similarly as they do at home or in their free time. But, on the other hand, people who do not seem to live as sustainably in their private life, they have to alter their behavior. This can be illustrated by the following quote:

Now I live 55 kilometers from here so I still commute by car. That is not something good. At least I say that my next car will be an electric car. /.../ You have to think things through on beforehand. Especially when you have a meeting with the county. That you think ‘no, I should not take my own car there’ (Vincent).

The employees need to play a certain role and by working at Krafringen, together with the discourse around sustainability in general, they get provided with the proper knowledge to make a

good performance. Since they perceive Krafrtingen as a sustainable organization, they know what kind of adjustments that need to be made in order to fit the perceived sustainability image.

From the empirical data, we can see different perceptions of whether colleagues' behavior is genuine or not. Jennifer perceive that it is not an especially big adjustment for people working at Krafrtingen:

Jennifer: It is like this, you have to be who you set out to be. You have to feel for it as a person, otherwise, it would never work.

O: Can you elaborate?

Jennifer: If I don't have the same values as Krafrtingen, then I would not be able to stay there for long, I would not withstand it. We are supposed to work sustainably, with clean values, and take responsibility. If you have been here a while, you are that person, or at least appeal to it.

Another coworker is a bit more critical. The following quote is his perspective on it:

Roger: If we take the cars as an example. I might not be the most diplomatic. I know that you can't practice what you preach all the time, but you can at least strive for it. I don't know if you have seen our employee parking lot? The fact that some people roll in with their diesel SUV can annoy me. What do they think now? They get the evil eye. Then, of course, there are reasons for having such a car.

M: Is it because it is against Krafrtingen's image?

Roger: For me it is. /.../ Many commutes pretty far, where a car is necessary, and then I get surprised that they do not choose something more sustainable.

Even if the employees have different takes on whether employees alter their behavior or not, it is still obvious that they need to practice what they preach, and especially in front of customers and other stakeholders. Otherwise, they face the risk of not being perceived as authentic and they lose their credibility. From the empirical material, it does not seem like a problem representing the organization and what it stands for. Some have to alter their behavior; some just behave as they always do.

At the same time as the employees need to behave in a certain way when they meet customers, they also indicate that they feel a pressure to behave somewhat similarly around the office and in contact

with their colleagues. Even if the pressure to behave “sustainably” internally seems to be a bit toned down in comparison to when they interact with customers, there is still a sort of shared understanding among the employees of how to behave in e.g. meetings and the lunchroom. One contributor to the existing norm seems to be Krafringen, who has made some active initiatives. From the interviews, it appeared that there are e.g. chargers for electric cars in the parking lot, recycling bins, and vegetarian as a default setting when serving food. However, it seems like the employees themselves are playing the most important part in maintaining the norm. From the empirical material, it seems like the employees themselves maintain the norm by for example pointing out unsustainable behaviors, leading by example, and encourage sustainable initiatives made in their colleagues’ private lives. These kinds of actions will be the focus of maintaining part of this subchapter.

Around the office, there seems to exist implicit rules and norms for how to behave. For example, many of the employees talked about the recycling stations around the office, and how people sorted their waste strictly. The following quote is a response to the question ‘is sustainability visual in informal settings?’:

Yes, I think so. It is evident in the small things. Sometimes you see colleagues with their heads down a recycling bin because they misplace an item. If they accidentally throw a plastic can in the wrong bin, they immediately pick it up and place it where it belongs. That is something you do without someone ordering you (Jennifer).

Another colleague who also commented on the recycling bins is David. To follow up on his statement, we asked him what would happen if someone misplaces their waste. He then responded:

If someone would have seen it, they would absolutely comment on it. Not in a harsh way firstly. Maybe if it is someone who works specifically with ecology and is really passionate about it. Otherwise, it would probably just be like ‘that was not okay’ with a twinkle in the eye so that the person would feel ‘yeah, I know’. /.../ So, a little bit back to the thing with sustainability in the walls. If I would have seen somebody else, I would have cleared my throat and said ‘that is not okay, how could you do so?’ (David).

The two quotes illustrate how the employees are maintaining the sustainability norm at Krafringen. Reasons behind their behavior can, of course, be drawn to their individual values, but nevertheless,

they play an important part in establishing what Krafringen is. Even if some may have brought the behavior from their private life while others learned the behavior at Krafringen, they together reconstruct the appropriate behavior at the office. To fit into the norm at Krafringen, it seems like you are supposed to be a person who cares about sustainability, and especially the environment.

Another expression of the norm at Krafringen can be found in employee conversations. Even if many of the employees describe informal conversations as at any other company, they still express that sustainability is a topic appearing from time to time. Vincent said for example:

When it for once is good weather, the people with solar cells start to talk. How much could you utilize? I don't have solar cells myself, but the people that have it get really engaged. They try to maximize. And then it is also good to have the user experience in the house when you are going to sell it to customers (Vincent).

Other employees expressed similar quotes and it is not unusual that people tell stories from how they live a sustainable private life. When we asked Alice if they talk about sustainability in the hallway, she responded:

Yes, I think so. The most informal conversations are when we sit out here and eat lunch. Then it pops up. People give tips about whatnot, like buying good bags. There are a lot of initiatives like that, which indicates that people have a personal drive for things that are not connected to Krafringen also. It might be that you get aware by being here, but you still incorporate it into your personal life.

At the same time as the empirical data indicates that the employees like to share sustainable initiatives from their private life, it should also be pointed out that it is a quite liberal climate as well. Several interviewees emphasized that people are free to be however they want to be and that there is no shaming involved when someone does not live as sustainable as someone else. Roger expressed for example in relation to taking the flight on your vacation:

O: Is that something you say? 'I'm going to fly there'

Vincent: /.../ It is still no religion, but you can get a pat on your shoulder if you take the train.

O: It is rather encouragement?

Vincent: Yes, encouragement rather than shame.



Still, it is quite obvious that it is an encouraging climate where colleagues get credit when sharing a sustainable initiative. When an employee shares sustainable initiative implemented in their private life, it is always well received. Vincent summed up the reactions he got when he told his colleagues about a trip on entirely eco-friendly means of transport: “They said ‘good!’, they liked that”. By encouraging people to be more sustainable, the employees at Krafringen are also constantly reproducing the norm for desired behavior.

#### 4.3.2 Private life decisions

In this chapter, we have so far established that the employees feel a need to behave in a certain way in both customer interaction and more informal settings. The remaining part of this chapter will be dedicated to analyzing their descriptions of their behavior when they are not at work. As mentioned above, employees are encouraging each other to live more sustainably in their private life, and from the empirical data, it seems like the average behavior in employees’ private life is somewhat sustainable. Some employees said that they have become more sustainable after they started to work at Krafringen. Others expressed that sustainability has been an interest for long and that they applied for the job because of the possibility of working with sustainability. Nevertheless, they all agree on being affected in some way or another.

Mainly, the empirical data indicate that the increased knowledge about sustainability (as we explained earlier) is something they bring with them into their personal life. The employees seem to be generally more aware of sustainability, which affects their decisions and how they live their life. The following quote is an example of how Roger has been affected by working at Krafringen: “I would probably not have gotten a natural gas vehicle if I didn’t work here. That is a thing that opened my eyes because colleagues work with it, and therefore got knowledge about how they work”. The following two quotes are also illustrations of this:

Several times, I have chosen to not fly to Thailand for example, and instead chose a closer option because I think it is insane to fly halfway across the globe for a half week of vacation. If you compare airplanes with trains, it is a huge difference. They should make the flights more expensive (Jason).

Lisa: Maybe it is easier to say if I compare with others. I consume less or rather think more ‘how’ I consume. I think more about how I transport myself to. I reflect more than others I would say. I

think of the amount of meat I eat more than others. I'm not a vegetarian but I have decreased my consumption. /.../

O: Do you think Krafringen has anything to do with it?

Lisa: Yes, I think so. I think you get affected by a place when you spend so much time there.

Among the employees, some say that they are very dedicated and live a strict sustainable private life. Others seem to have a bit more distance to it and do not let the increased knowledge about sustainability control their private life to the same extent. Although, many employees stress that there is a liberal climate at Krafringen and that people are free to do what they want. When we asked Amanda if she feels a pressure to practice what she preaches privately, she said:

Well, you have to draw a line. You are entitled to a private life outside the job. Personally, I have a deep commitment to environmental questions and sustainability. Therefore, I have made several different changes in my lifestyle. For example, in my family, we have chosen to not buy a car. We never owned one. We bicycle and adjust our lives accordingly. /.../ I know that many coworkers reflect similarly. That is a thing we can discuss at lunch. For example, different choices you made regarding food and travels. If you think for a coworker, the employer can't demand anything connected to their private life (Amanda).

However, it appears to be an underlying consciousness that employees always have with them all the time. Alice said for example the following quote in reference to sustainability and shopping patterns: "The consciousness is there, that you think the thought". Even if Krafringen does not order them to live a more sustainable life privately, the employees' private lives seem to be affected by the company. With work tasks, customer interaction, and informal conversation about sustainability, it seems to almost inevitably affect the employees to some extent. However, this does not seem to bother the employees. On the contrary, many of the employees express that they like the fact that they do live a more sustainable life, and that the changes that they did have not affected them negatively. Since many of the employees told us they did not fly anymore, had electric cars, and decreased their meat consumption, we followed up the implications of it. Our biased opinion was that it also affected them negatively and that it, for example, would be irritating to make certain sacrifices. This view has been proven wrong and the employees rather feel that it, on the whole, is not a problem at all. For example, Alice answered the following when we asked her if the increased knowledge about sustainability limits her private life:

No, I wouldn't say that. Affected is probably back to this with the electric car. There is actually a limitation, but a small one. It limits us when we are taking long journeys. /.../ But even if it takes a few more hours to travel to my parents in law with my family and the kids, and I'm a person who doesn't like when things take time, I justify it for myself. It is still good and it feels right. /.../ That's something I can live with since I think it's nice to have an electric car (Alice).

Like Alice, there were several employees that expressed similar opinions. The limitation is most commonly not seen as a problem. Another example is the following:

There are a few small local dairy factories, butcheries, corps, that don't have the same negative affect as other brands. More expensive of course, but also funnier to shop. It is more expensive, but we think it is worth it. To not buy Danish fillets of pork for 29 SEK/kilo. That is reprehensible (George).

This way of thinking is something general for the employees at Krafringen. Instead of seeing the limitations that their sustainable behavior causes, they rather see it as something good because of their positive impact on the environment.

## 5 Discussion

To facilitate discussion, we are first going to highlight the main findings from the previous chapter. Our empirical material shows that the employees of Krafringen expressed positive feelings towards the organization, which came into expression in different ways regarding separate aspects of the organization. The employees also seem to believe that sustainability constitutes a significant part of what they think Krafringen is. Furthermore, the empirical material also indicates that all employees have received more knowledge about sustainability, by working at Krafringen. Mostly due to their working tasks, through conversations with coworkers, and for some because of an increased interest in sustainability in general. Moreover, our analysis also shows that employees feel a pressure to behave “sustainably”, both at work. In customer interaction, it is highly important for the employees to represent the company by behaving sustainable and thus live up to their expectations. Around the office, there is an informal normative pressure to act according to what they preach. Lastly, the empirical material shows how their work also affects private life decisions.

### 5.1 Organizational identity and organizational identification

The influence of the sustainable business model can be seen in the fact that Krafringen’s official values and vision were tightly linked to those of CSR. As stated in the literature review, CSR heritages from the Brundtland report in 1987 when the UN World Commission defined sustainability as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43). This is aligned and somewhat similar with Krafringen’s official vision which is “energy for future generations” (Krafringen, 2020f). This vision was something that permeated all interviews, and the employees expressed that this was something central for the company. They also communicated that they perceived the company to work towards this vision. The employees perceived the vision as authentic since their working tasks were related to providing renewable energy for present and future generations. For example, the engineers who worked with sustainable city development expressed pride in working towards developing innovative and energy efficient solutions.

With the definition from the Brundtland report as a foundation, Elkington (1998) defined the concept of CSR through the triple bottom line, which contains the dimensions: economic, environmental, and social. In the interviews, the employees communicated that Krafringen worked with all three dimensions, and that they were perceived to be integrated and dependent on each other. For example, the employees stressed that Krafringen is a profit-driven company and that they have demands of revenue from their owners. However, the owners are four different counties, and the employees expressed that their revenue was reinvested in social welfare by the counties. Meanwhile, Krafringen's way of creating revenue is through selling renewable energy. Therefore, all dimensions of CSR are according to the employees intertwined in the organization.

A theme in the empirical material is employees' pride towards working at Krafringen. This was mostly related to the company's focus on all three dimensions of CSR, not just the economic one. The employees express that this creates a feeling of higher purpose, and that it feels like they are making a positive contribution to the society and environment. The integrated CSR values in the business model thus seem to affect the employees' perception of who they are as an organization, which is in alignment with Albert & Whetten's (1985 cited in Ravasi, 2016) definition of organizational identity. From the empirical material, we see that employees perceive the intertwined CSR as a big part of who they are as an organization. The employees express that Krafringen is something greater than just a regular energy company.

In the interviews, many of the employees were clear in their distinction between Krafringen and other energy companies. This was mostly related to others usage of a mix between renewable energy and fossil fuels, but also the fact that most of them were privately owned. Therefore, the intertwined CSR values were important for how they distinguished their perceived organizational identity in relation to other energy companies. This can be related to organizational anti-identity, which according to Stanske, Rauch & Canato (2020) implies that employees describe the organizational identity by saying what it is not. The employees at Krafringen emphasized that they are not like other energy companies, who were not completely fossil free. Many of the employees expressed that other energy companies often claimed to be environmentally friendly, but still had aspects of their production that were not. Several employees made this distinction and expressed that Krafringen 'did it for real', because of the completely fossil free production. Furthermore, they also emphasized that their profit got reinvested in social welfare, while the revenue in private owned energy companies ended up in somebody's pocket. The employees

were clear about not being privately owned and that they expressed proudness of their contributing to the society.

Our empirical material also indicates that the employees' perception of Krafringen's organizational identity is highly affected by its sustainable business model. Albert and Whetten (1985, cited in Brown & He 2013), defines organizational identity as what the employees of the organization believe are central, distinctive, and enduring aspects of the organization. When we asked the open question 'what is Krafringen?', the employees answered that Krafringen is a sustainable company whose purpose is something more than just generating profit. Therefore, the employees seem to perceive that the organizational identity is highly influenced by the sustainable business model.

When it comes to organizational identification, we saw several signs of a high degree of organizational identification at Krafringen. Brown (2017) writes that organizational identification is when an organizational member feels belonging to an organization or when they refer or define themselves in terms of the organization. This was something that permeated the empirical material. The employees expressed that they felt proud of working at Krafringen, and that it played an important part in their life. Furthermore, organizational identification is more likely to occur when there is value congruence between the employees and the organization (Pratt, 1998). Several employees communicated that there was value congruence between their values and those of Krafringen. Some even articulated that Krafringen was a facilitator for their own personal values. Our empirical findings thus indicate clear examples of high levels of organizational identification.

A reason for the high degree of organizational identification can be found in the perceived organizational identity which is characterized by sustainability. According to Alvesson, Kärreman and Sullivan (2015), people strive to identify with things that are perceived to be morally "good". The employees are, in our material, expressing that they are doing something good for both the environment and society by working at Krafringen. Furthermore, there are also examples of employees who say that people outside the organization seem to share this opinion. Therefore, this might work as a mechanism for the employees to identify with the organization.

Bhattacharya & Elsbach (2002) presents that the opposite of organizational identification is dis-identification. They argue that this is likely to occur when the organization stands for something of low social status and is perceived to be morally bad. From our empirical findings, we do not find any indications of dis-identification or other types of negative articulations towards Krafringen. Pomeroy (2017) argues that companies can be seen as inauthentic if the communicated CSR identity differs from the organizational identity. In the case of Krafringen, there is according to the employees an alignment between actual operations and vision and values, and the employees seem to believe in their organization's purpose. We see this as an effect of Krafringen's sustainable business model, which creates a coherent picture for the employees regarding what the organization stands for and how the values and vision are operationalized.

Costas and Kärreman's (2013) study on employees' perception of their company's CSR work, when treated as an add-on activity, showed three different kinds of employee perceptions regarding the purpose behind it. These perceptions were believers, straddlers, and cynics, where the first one's believed that the CSR was authentic. The second one was unsure and the third one was skeptical towards the authenticity. Furthermore, they suggested that the believers were more likely to identify with the organizations than the other two. In our study, we only found 'believers', who seemed to perceive Krafringen's CSR as authentic and genuine. This can be seen in our empirical material where employees for example expressed that the organization were actually doing something that was good for society and the environment. They also expressed that the purpose behind the CSR was not related to marketing or greenwashing, and they perceived it as authentic. In our opinion, this might be an effect of the sustainable business model.

## 5.2 Behavioral outcomes of working at Krafringen

So far, we have established that the employees' perception of Krafringen's organizational identity is highly characterized by sustainability. The employees express that sustainability is consistently present, all the way from the official visions and values to the products and business model. The perceived sustainable organizational identity affects the organizational identification, and many employees seem to identify with the company. In this section, we are going to further explore how the organizational identity and organizational identification affects the employees, in terms of cognitive and behavioral outcomes.

From the empirical material, we saw that employees' knowledge about sustainability increased through working at Krafringen, which occurred mainly through different projects, products, customer interactions and internal communication with co-workers. By working at Krafringen, the employees thus, almost inevitably increase their knowledge about sustainability. Reasons behind this can be drawn to Krafringen's sustainable business model. A sustainable business model means that an organization's products or services are classified as sustainable (Bocken, Short & Evans, 2014). In Krafringen's case, they sell products in the form of renewable energy. Therefore, both the engineers and the sellers expressed that they needed to have knowledge about product specific knowledge about sustainability. The engineers articulated that they need knowledge about sustainable solutions to develop sustainable products. Furthermore, the sellers expressed that they need to have a good understanding of the products, and especially the sustainable aspects, to answer these kinds of questions in customer interaction. This, in turn, puts a pressure on them to obtain sustainability knowledge to perform their working task. Even if the salespeople got some knowledge from formal meetings and workshops, they also expressed that most of their knowledge was obtained through their own initiatives.

Another effect of Krafringen's sustainable business model can be found in employees' actions and decision making, which according to Lin (2004) can be affected by the organizational identity. Since the employees perceive the organizational identity as characterized by sustainability, they also said that they feel a pressure to reflect it. The employees, overall, expressed that they felt a need to practice what they preach, which according to them implies a "sustainable" behavior. This seems to be especially important in customer interactions, where employees expressed that they could not, for example, arrive at a customer meeting in a gasoline car and try to sell a sustainable product. Since they perceive the organizational identity as characterized by sustainability, they feel that such a behavior could be seen as inauthentic, and thus affect their credibility.

In order to increase credibility, some employees expressed that they take a detour through Krafringen's office to change their personal gasoline car to one of Krafringen's electric ones. In such cases, they seem to feel a need to change their own behaviors in order to reflect the perceived sustainable organizational identity of Krafringen. It seems like they want customers to perceive them as "sustainably". This can be seen as an act of altering their values with those of the company, or as Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016) puts it - identity adjustment. The employees expressed that they had a clear perception of the sustainability part of Krafringen's identity, and they understand



how to alter their identity to match Krafringen's identity in customer interactions. They knew what to do in order to be seen as a sustainable person, and thus represent the perceived organizational identity. Although, it should be mentioned that some of the employees expressed that they lived a strictly sustainable life privately. In such cases, the employees could behave somewhat similar as they do at home.

At the office, it is also important to reflect the organizational identity, even if it is a bit toned down in comparison to customer interaction. Our empirical material shows that Krafringen has created an environment that enables the employees to recycle waste, eat less meat, use bicycles, charge, and use electrical cars. The expectations around sustainable values and behavior, as well as examples of colleagues adhering to these norms, show employees that it is important to act according to the organizational identity. Furthermore, we see examples of employees actively reproducing, maintaining, and strengthening the sustainable organizational identity by norms communicated through behaviors and language, which according to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) are signs of identity work. Schultz, Hatch and Larsen (2002) argue that the construction of organizational identity is a continuous process. Our empirical material indicates that the employees play a central part in maintaining and socially constructing the sustainable organizational identity at Krafringen. One example of this was that employees lectured colleagues when somebody did not sort their waste at the office. Another example is the constant encouragement of sustainable behavior, like taking environmentally friendly means of transport after work or installing solar cellars in their homes. Our empirical material shows that the employees played an active part in reproducing what they perceived as the organizational identity.

Furthermore, our empirical material also showed that some of the employees behaved sustainable after work. Some employees expressed that they prior to working at Krafringen had an interest in sustainability and tried to live accordingly. Others communicate that they started to live more sustainably after they began working at Krafringen. These employees might have been influenced by the organizational identity and the values that skims through the organization. This came to expression in terms of, for example, not flying to Thailand, buying an electric car, and questioning the sustainability footprint of some consumption decisions. Reasons for these private life decisions can be drawn to the affection of the organizational identity and the increased knowledge about sustainability. Therefore, we suggest that the employees' perceived organizational identity of Krafringen can have spillover effects on the employee's private life.

Brieger et al (2019) describes that a negative effect of CSR can be self-sacrifice. This is also something that we find from our empirical material. There are instances where the spillover effect from acting according to the organizational identity has led the employees to self-sacrifice certain activities and consumptions. This comes in the form of e.g. skipping flying to Thailand for winter vacations and buying an electric car that needs to be charged every 200 kilometers for 30 minutes straight. However, the employees that do some sort of self-sacrifice do not express that it is negative, but rather that it is something positive. Instead, they justify their decisions and like the fact that they now live a more sustainable life. Furthermore, it is not all employees that are doing some sort of self-sacrifice. But generally, the employees seem to be more aware of the problems related to acting non-sustainable and thus are more conscious of their consumption behaviors.

In this final section, we are going to relate our findings with the literature on cultural management. From our empirical material, we saw some initiatives from Krafringen that can be perceived as forms of cultural management initiatives, like for example providing vegetarian food and having electric cars to borrow. However, our material mostly suggests that the employees' reasons for identifying with Krafringen is related to increased knowledge about sustainability, and that they perceive their organization as morally "good", which seems to occur as a consequence of the sustainable business model. The organizational identification could be perceived as a self-discovering process for the employees within the context of Krafringen. The employees do not seem to be pushed into identifying with the company by management initiatives. They rather seem to identify with the organization because of their increased knowledge about sustainability and that they perceive the organization to stand for something socially and morally "good". Therefore, the mechanism that leads to an increased organizational identification, might differ from e.g. internal branding where the company is, according to Müller (2017), actively trying to align the employees' identities with the organization's identity, through different workshops and slogans.

# 6 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the internal perspective of CSR by studying how organizations and the employees are affected by a sustainable business model instead of CSR as an additional activity (which sometimes might even run counter to the business model). With the increasing amount of attention that CSR has received from the business world recently, this type of knowledge is important for contemporary businesses. More specifically, we want to contribute to the literature by providing an understanding of how a sustainable business model affects employees' perception of the organizational identity and their identification with the organization. By working towards our two research questions, we have reached four main conclusions. When a company has a sustainable business model it is likely to: (1) constitute a highly significant part of the employees' perceptions of the organizational identity; (2) entail a high level of organizational identification among the employees; (3) increase the employees' knowledge about sustainability; and (4) normalize a "sustainable" behavior among employees without active managerial initiatives.

## 6.1 Main findings

Our first conclusion is that the employees' perception of organizational identity can be significantly affected by the sustainable business model. According to Albert & Whetten (1985, cited in Brown & He 2013), organizational identity is constituted by what employees perceive to be a central, enduring, and distinctive part of the organization. The employees at Krafringen expressed that sustainability permeated all aspects of their company, which was a result of the sustainable business model that led the employees to continuously work with products and solutions that were classified as environmentally sustainable. Furthermore, this seems to have made them perceive sustainability as a central in constructing the notion of who they were as an organization.

The second conclusion suggests that the employees are affected in several ways due to the organizational identity. The organizational identity of Krafringen was portrayed as something positive and of high social status by the employees, customers, and some family members of the employees. This made it more desirable for the employees to identify with the organization. Furthermore, the values and the vision of Krafringen resonated with the employees' personal values, which resulted in value congruence, which is an important factor for organizational identification (Pratt, 1998). On some occasions, the employees had similar values as Krafringen

before joining the organization. For others, the values related to sustainability emerged while working there, which was an effect of partially increased knowledge and awareness about environmental sustainability.

Our third conclusion suggests that working at Krafringen resulted in increased knowledge about sustainability. Because of the sustainable business model, the employees felt that they were expected to obtain knowledge about sustainability. Since, for example, the engineers' work contained several different aspects of sustainability, they needed this kind of knowledge to do their job. Furthermore, the sales people also expressed that they needed knowledge about sustainability to perform their working tasks. To answer customers' questions regarding this topic, they needed to obtain this kind of knowledge.

The fourth conclusion concerns employees' behavior. Because of the sustainable business model, the employees also seem to feel a pressure to behave in a "sustainable" way, and the employees emphasized that they experienced a need to practice what they preach. Especially in customer interaction, employees expressed that they need to appear authentic and represent the organizational identity. Therefore, they said it was important to e.g. show up in an electric car or with a bicycle helmet under the arm. Furthermore, it was also important to behave somewhat "sustainably" around the office as well to fit into the organizational identity. Lastly, many employees expressed that they live a more sustainable private life since they began working at Krafringen, which seems to be an effect of the sustainable business model rather than managerial initiative.

## 6.2 Contributions

As we mentioned in our introduction and literature review, the internal perspective on CSR has received little attention (Costas and Kärreman, 2013). Furthermore, it has been argued that CSR increases organizational identification (Brieger et al. 2013). Costas and Kärreman's (2013) study (on the topic) aimed at understanding CSR as a cultural management initiative that can normatively control the employees. They concluded in their article that the CSR activities affect the employees' organizational identification, which was dependent on employees' perception of the company's CSR. These perceptions came to expression in three different ways: believers, straddlers, and cynics. They argue that these three positions are dependent on employees' perceived authenticity

behind their company's CSR. Comparing their findings to our study, where CSR was integrated into the business model, we did not find any examples of either straddles or cynics, we only found believers. We suggest that this might be a result of the sustainable business model. When sustainability permeates everything from visions and values to daily operations, it seems to be perceived as authentic and genuine by the employees, which makes it more appealing for the employees to identify with the organization.

In cultural management, the organization is actively trying to influence the norm and employees' identities through different activities (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002). In our case, it seems like the business model also can have this kind of affection. We contribute to the understanding of how organizations affect the employees' identities by showing that a sustainable business model can function as a facilitator for organizational identification. When CSR is incorporated into the business model, it seems to have a major effect on the organizational identification.

Furthermore, we also mentioned in our introduction that the internal perspective on CSR most commonly has been studied through quantitative research, which has not provided a nuanced perspective on the phenomenon (e.g. Turban & Greening, 1997; Brammer, He and Mellahi, 2015; Brieger et al. 2019). Part of the purpose was therefore to contribute to this research area by offering a qualitative study that has its starting point in the employees' perceptions. The research has so far established the fact that CSR increases organizational identification. With our study, we complement this knowledge by offering an understanding of how it comes to expression in an organizational context. Our study provides a deeper understanding of how the sustainable organizational identity affects employees in terms of language, actions, and behaviors. Furthermore, relating our study to Costas and Kärreman (2013), it seems important for the perceived authenticity, and thus the organizational identification, that CSR is integrated into the business model rather than done as an add-on activity. Therefore, we provide a more nuanced perspective to the finding that CSR increases organizational identification.

## 6.3 Suggestions for Future Research

We suggest that future research should continue to examine the internal effects of CSR in relation to organizational identity and organizational identification. It would be interesting to study how employees in a company from a sector that historically have been viewed as harmful either for the environment or the health of people, such as the tobacco industry, that recently have invested a lot of money in CSR activities. With the purpose of researching whether this has affected the employee's perception of the organizational identity and their desire to identify with the company. We think that the perceived authenticity of CSR activities is an interesting field for future research. Especially, when CSR activities run the risk of being perceived as attempts of greenwashing.

Furthermore, we also see a need for more research on sustainable business models. This is according to MacMillan (2020) a nascent area that so far has focused on the economic relationship. With the increasing number of organizations that integrate CSR to their business model, we also see the importance of further exploring this literature. It could for example be interesting to study how these kinds of companies are perceived on the job market by job seekers. Another interesting aspect could also be to focus on the change process of implementing a sustainable business model. By following a company before, during, and after an organizational change, other research could focus on the affection of employees and how they make sense of it.

## 6.4 Practical implications

With our study, we hope to provide some practical knowledge that can be useful in business context. Firstly, we see a clear tendency of employees adhering to the company's values and visions when they are in alignment with their services, projects, and products. Therefore, to enhance employees' organizational identification with the company, we suggest that companies could strengthen their CSR or even implement a sustainable business model. If it is possible to integrate CSR into the business model, we suggest that it might be a good way to increase organizational identification.

Our study also strengthens the view that a company's CSR benefits from being perceived as authentic. As previous research has stated, companies' CSR initiatives can be perceived in different ways, depending on its credibility. As mentioned, we only found people who believed in the CSR, which seemed to be an effect of the sustainable business model. Therefore, if a company does not have the possibility to implement CSR into their business model, we strongly suggest that

companies should strive for doing their CSR activities in a genuine and honest way. CSR initiatives should, in our opinion, be well thought through and clearly practiced when implemented.

Furthermore, we also see the importance for organizations with a sustainable business model to understand how their employees are affected. As an employee, we think it is necessary to take these outcomes into consideration and be aware of it. It might for example be healthy to have dialogues with employees and discuss boundaries, and see what they, as an organization, can do. It could also be good to talk about employees' perception of the affection and provide moral support when needed.

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# Appendix A



to me ▾

Tue, Apr 28, 1:01 PM (13 days ago)



🌐 Swedish ▾ > English ▾ [Translate message](#)

[Turn off for: Swedish](#) ×

Hej,

Jag har bara en kommentar och det är om miljöstandarden vi följer, den heter ISO 14001, inte IC1401. Låter nästan likadant 😊.

Jag tillåter att ni använder citaten.

Det vore mycket intressant att få del av er studie när den är klar, om det är möjligt?

Vänliga hälsningar,

██████████



