| | |
|---|---|
| Course: | SKOM12 |
| Term: | Spring 2021 |
| Supervisor: | Camilla Nothhaft |
| Examiner: | |

# Employees as sensemakers: a case study on perceptions about CSR, employee engagement and organisational identity

**MARIE CHRISTIN OTTO**

Lund University

Department of Strategic Communication

Master's thesis

# Abstract

**Employees as sensemakers: a case study on perceptions about CSR, employee engagement and organisational identity.** Global warming, environmental damage and economic and financial crises have put businesses under scrutiny. Today, stakeholders demand that companies engage in social and environmentally responsible behaviours beyond what is required by law. For that reason, companies heavily invest in corporate social responsibility programmes (CSR) to appear responsible in the eyes of their stakeholders. However, employees' perceptions about their organisations' CSR initiatives have remained under-researched in theory and neglected in practice.

Building on the slowly increasing research interest into employee perceptions about external CSR communication, this study relies on sensemaking and organisational identity and identification theories. The study is based on the British Co-operative Group and its employees of the food retail division. Seven semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted. The results of this paper indicate that despite the mounting acknowledgement of employees being of high strategic value in organisations' CSR communication, their perceptions are still widely neglected. Furthermore, it becomes clear that the internal distribution of information about the external CSR strategies is insufficient. The findings suggest that this has implications on the organisation's identity, employee's organisational identification and overall employee engagement in CSR activities.

*Keyword*: CSR, perception, sensemaking, organisational identity, communication

*Word count:* 19,718

# Table of contents

# 1. Introduction

Changes in climate, the environment, and the subsequent global warming, as well as recent economic downturns induced by severe financial crises, have put businesses under scrutiny (Tench, 2014). Ethical and environmental failings of companies such as Enron, WorldCom, Shell and malpractices of other companies resulted in stakeholders, such as campaign and interest groups, politicians, celebrities, key opinion leaders and the public, to demand that organisations publicly position themselves in and contribute to society (Tench, 2014; Tuominen, 2017). One response of organisations to these demands has been corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Christensen et al., 2008; Schlegelmilch & Pollach, 2005).

CSR has many different conceptualisations, and no general consensus exists; thus, different authors focus on different areas (Waddock, 2004). To avoid confusion, this study follows Aguinis's (2011) definition of CSR, which coincides with other researchers (such as Rupp, 2011; Carroll, 1999; Waddock, 2004; Gond et al., 2018). Aguinis (2011, p. 855) refers to CSR as being "context-specific organisational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance". Thus, CSR is the product of a moral contract that an organisation has with its stakeholders, which covers its responsibilities towards environmental, ethical, and social issues that go beyond solely financial implications (Gray et al., 1987). In other words, stakeholders expect that an organisation fulfils social and environmental expectations to contribute positively to society and the environment; in return, legitimacy and reputation are created, and consequently, the organisation obtains its licence to operate (Cornelissen, 2017). Hence, stakeholders' perceptions about an organisation's behaviour have gained in ponderosity, and companies now invest heavily "in policies, practices, management and reporting systems to ensure their corporate behaviour is responsible in the eyes of their stakeholders" (Dawkins, 2005, p. 107).

In the United Kingdom, which provides the geographical setting for this study, 74 per cent of the public agree that they would prefer to buy from a company that communicates well about their ethical, social, and environmental behaviour (Dawkins, 2005).

Consequently, CSR has been researched extensively from a stakeholder theory perspective, emphasising that all stakeholders must be treated equally (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Nielsen & Johansen, 2009). Nevertheless, employees as one of the stakeholder groups have been widely neglected in organisations' CSR compared to other groups (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2008). In fact, as of yet, CSR research has focused mainly on external responses and the business case to CSR, such as customer satisfaction and brand preference, revisit intentions or financial performance executed through PR, advertising and marketing communications (Chong, 2007; David et al., 2005; Wigley, 2008; Dhanesh, 2014; Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Du et al., 2010; Vlachos et al., 2014). Whereas research on employees' perspectives on external CSR is still scarce (Nazir & Islam, 2019; Kang et al., 2020; Vlachos et al., 2014; Rodrigo & Arenas, 2008; Ditlev-Simonsen, 2015) and research into the internal communication channels directed at employees about the organisation's responsible behaviours have so far been mainly neglected (Dawkins, 2005).

According to Aguinis and Glavas (2012), only four per cent of current CSR studies that focus on micro-level analysis, i.e. from an individual perspective, have so far been published in relevant management and psychology journals (Vlachos et al., 2014). This underrepresentation is surprising since employees make up about 70 per cent of a corporation's assets (Halal, 2001). For this reason, employees must be made aware of or involved in CSR programs since their impact can be far-reaching. They usually are the first contact to external stakeholders, making them incremental in building trust in the CSR program and ultimately in the company itself.

Nevertheless, more recently, research into the potential impact of internal stakeholders on the success of an organisation's external CSR has picked up pace but still has a long way to go (Schaefer et al., 2020; Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018).

Employees have been coined the most important stakeholders for a company's external communication efforts and a credible source of information (Christensen & Askegaard, 2001; Dawkins, 2005). However, employees have insider views on their employer's CSR strategies and practices and may perceive their employer hypocritically while external stakeholders may not (Goswami et al., 2018). If employees do not perceive the CSR communication to be authentic or credible, they can behave in ways damaging to the company, such as negative word of mouth (Rupp et al., 2018).

Moreover, the way employees perceive to be aligned with an organisation's core values, and identity is essential in creating a perceived strong corporate brand (Ackerman, 2000), for which they can become brand ambassadors (Dhanesh, 2014) and shape public opinion (Fombrun, 1996). However, it is immensely challenging for employees who do not align with their employers' socially responsible behaviours to identify with their organisation (Dutton et al., 1994). Organisational identity has long been acknowledged to be an important part of CSR literature (Tian & Robertson, 2019). Previous research suggests that employees' identification with their organisation somewhat influences their contribution to CSR activities. Employees who judge their employer as socially and environmentally responsible show higher identification with the organisation (Tian & Robertson, 2019).

While some studies show that a firm's CSR can lead to higher employee engagement, satisfaction, organisational identification and trust (Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014; Lee, 2019; Kim et al., 2017; Brammer et al., 2007), others argue that not enough substantial research exists on how employees respond to their employers external CSR and that more research is needed (Allen, 2016; Aguinis & Glava, 2012; Rupp et al., 2006). Hence, the study problematises that there is still limited and contradictory evidence on how employees perceive their employer's CSR activities, the communication thereof, and the insufficiency of understandings in employees' perceptions and their impacts on employee behaviour (Gond et al., 2017). More research is needed as researchers affirm that an organisation's success in its CSR efforts depends on its employees' and high engagement levels since employees "strategise, make decisions, and execute CSR programs" (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012, p. 953).

## 1.1 Research aim and question

The study aims to contribute to the micro-CSR literature by taking a sensemaking view (Weick, 1995). Since organisations are increasingly challenged to contribute to society and the environment, it is vital to fathom how employees perceive and make sense of their employer's CSR activities (Nazir & Islam, 2020). CSR can be understood as a challenging issue since it expects employees to engage in, act and respond to their firm's projects in communities, their social and environmental contribution, and complex planetary issues at large. However, it can also be understood as a means to create meaning and value for employees (Nazir & Islam, 2020).

Hence, this research aims to expand the knowledge on how employees of a co-operation make sense of the external CSR communication of their employer. In doing so, it contributes to the growing research interest in employees as essential stakeholders for their company's CSR communication with a small-scale, qualitative study to the existing, mainly quantitative research.

The thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do employees of the retail division of a large cooperative make sense of their employer's CSR communication?

**RQ2:** How does the perception of CSR communication affect employees' organisational identity and employee engagement?

A case study on the perceptions of employees from the Co-operative Group (henceforth Co-op) in the United Kingdom will be conducted to answer these questions. More precisely, this research paper studies how employees from the food retail division of the Co-op make sense of the external CSR communication as communicated both through internal and external channels. So far, scholars have paid little attention to how employees of consumer co-operatives perceive the CSR of their employer (Tuominen et al., 2017). This is surprising since a co-operative is a type of company for which CSR is a "natural obligation" and thus essential for their operation and existence (Tang et al., 2020, p. 1). Co-operatives are denoted as being regionally responsible by emphasising the importance of stakeholders, promoting local interests, and supporting communities (Jussila et al., 2007) and model proponents of CSR (Tuominen et al., 2017). As a result, researchers argue that co-operatives should take CSR seriously (Tuominen et al., 2017; Mills, 2002).

Since CSR is such a crucial cornerstone in the enterprise architecture of co-operatives, it offers an appropriate foundation for the study at hand. The British Co-op has been chosen as the case organisation since it is one of the largest consumer co-operatives in the world, comprising several businesses in the service industry, of which its food retail business ranks fifth among the UK’s biggest food retailers (Co-op, 2020). The Co-op engages in several CSR initiatives across the UK, emphasising its community work in the respective counties, zero waste and sustainability agenda, ethical and fair treatment of farmers, high-quality Fairtrade products, and high standards in employee well-being. Hence, the case organisation is an ideal environment to investigate the employees’ perceptions of their employer’s external CSR strategies.

## 1.2 Relevance

Due to the increasing threats of climate change on the environment and society, corporations can no longer engage in business-as-usual (Allen, 2016). Now, more than ever, it is essential for organisations to use strategic communication to make people aware, influence and help them to adopt sustainable behaviours (Allen, 2016). Zerfass and Huck (2007, p. 108) define strategic communications as an exercise that “shapes meaning, builds trust, creates reputation, and manages symbolic relationships with internal and external stakeholders to support organisational growth and secure the freedom to operate”. Moreover, it is the social actors’ sensemaking process about organisational practices from a communicative perspective (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018).

Golob and Bartlett (2007, p. 1) contend that “communicating with stakeholders about an organisation’s CSR activities forms a central charter for strategic communication managers in creating mutual understanding, managing conflict, and creating legitimacy”. One of the incremental factors that strategic communicators in the organisation must consider is how employees perceive and understand the CSR strategies and how information can be made accessible (Allen, 2016). Employees are of great strategic value for an organisation as they execute CSR programmes, are a trusted source of information and serve as the contact person to external stakeholders (Rupp et al., 2018; Halal, 2001). Thus, the department responsible for CSR communication must develop strategic communication strategies that are tailored to all stakeholder groups similarly. This project aims to gain understanding in the sensemaking process of employees; these insights can offer important information on how CSR communication strategies can be enriched in order to strengthen the role of the employee as an advocate for the company and its CSR activities.

## 1.3 Disposition

The introduction is followed by the literature review chapter, in which the researcher provides detailed review about academic literature. The next chapter provides the theoretical foundation for this study. It comprises organisational sensemaking and organisational identity theory. Next, the methodology chapter provides the research paradigm, social constructionism, followed by an overview of an elaboration on case studies, data collection, sampling, data analysis and ethical considerations. The methodology chapter is followed by the analysis. Lastly, the researcher presents her discussion and concluding remarks.

# 2. Literature Review

The following chapter will provide an overview of the literature. The chapter is divided into three parts that centre around the research problem: corporate social responsibility, corporate hypocrisy, and employee engagement.

## 2.1 Corporate social responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is not a new concept but has gained momentum in the 21st century due to stakeholders becoming more aware and knowledgeable about environmental and social problems (Cunningham et al., 2010).

A stakeholder is “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives” (Cornelissen, 2017, p. 7). Thus, an organisation’s success and long-term survival depend on its stakeholders, that is, the individuals and groups and their members in an organisation’s community (Tench, 2014); for its continued existence, an organisation depends on whether stakeholders perceive it as legitimate and valued by society. For that reason and to avoid damage to its reputation, it is vital for an organisation to build quality relationships with its stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2017). By using CSR, organisations can manage their stakeholders, which has resulted in the institutionalisation of the concept in organisational procedures (Bartlett et al., 2007). The European Commission (2001, position paper) outlines CSR as a

> concept whereby companies decide voluntarily to contribute to a better society and a cleaner environment.
>
> Most definitions of corporate social responsibility describe it as a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis.

> Being socially responsible means not only fulfilling legal expectations but also going beyond compliance and investing “more” into human capital, the environment and relations with stakeholders. (pp. 5-8)

Researchers in the field generally link CSR with positively contributing to a society’s well-being or improvement; this is also referred to as ‘doing good’ (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013). A strong CSR is often associated with commitments to several activities, such as being invested in philanthropic activities, development programs for employees, or reducing environmental impact; each activity impacts an organisation’s reputation (Brammer & Pavelin, 2006). Organisations with a beneficial or positive impact on stakeholders and society at large enjoy a better brand reputation than those with a negative impact (Cornelissen, 2017). A distinct, socially responsible reputation may also provide a competitive advantage on the market compared to other similar organisations with less distinct CSR communications (Cornelissen, 2017; Tench, 2014).

CSR comprises the actions that a company takes to advance and benefit society beyond what is required by law (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). It is an umbrella term that includes similar overlapping concepts, such as corporate citizenship, stakeholder theory, business ethics, and corporate sustainability (Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013, p. 1928; Freeman & Hasnaoui, 2011). To gather support from its community, an organisation must drive and nurture community relations and answer to and take advantage of the expectation of its community and community involvement programs, especially those that are mutually beneficial to organisational goals and the community (Cornelissen, 2017).

Elkington (1997) has introduced the ‘triple bottom line’ of CSR, which proposes three primary responsibilities of an organisation: people, planet, and profits. In this context, ‘’people’’ refers to all internal and external social issues, including employee rights and support and workforce diversity. Second, environmental initiatives integrated into everyday organisational processes, such as avoiding environmental damage through, e.g. (harmful) waste, are referred to as ‘’planet’’. Lastly, ‘’profit’’ suggests that organisations are responsible for generating profit (financial returns) (Elkington, 1997). The responsibilities of people and the planet can only be achieved if profit is generated (Carroll, 1997).

Moreover, Berger et al. (2007) differentiate between three rationales as to how CSR is integrated into a company’s agenda, namely, social-values led, business-case and syncretic-stewardship. In the social-values model, a company has CSR at its core and does not exert it purely for economic reasons. The other two models are characterised by CSR for rational reasons; whereas companies in the business-case model focus entirely on economic outcomes and financial performance, the syncretic-stewardship model pursues economic objectives by turning to external markets from a management perspective (Berger et al., 2007). CSR is at the core of a cooperative as its corporate purpose is to serve and support its respective community and members through socially and responsible actions instead of focusing solely on gaining profit. This means that it corresponds to both Berger et al.'s (2007) social-value model and Elkington's (1997) triple bottom line. Moreover, cooperatives' pledge to Fairtrade underlines its commitment to ethical treatment of farmers and growers in developing countries and offering fair working conditions.

Previous research on CSR shows that companies must provide consistent information internally and externally if they want to profit from their CSR initiatives (Dawkins, 2005). This can be achieved through efficient communication strategies that consider all stakeholders' concerns and expectations (Talonen et al., 2017). By drawing on a MORI opinion study set in the UK, Dawkins (2005) contends that an organisation must listen to all its stakeholders to align their corporate responsibility communications with the concerns and expectations of the stakeholders. Furthermore, studies show that organisations need to tailor their communication strategies to the different stakeholders to succeed in their responsibility communications. However, in practice, this is not yet effectively done (Dawkins, 2005). Bhattacharya et al. (2008) contend that managers do not communicate their CSR strategies consistently and clearly to their employees and generally do not consider the potential impact of employees on the success of CSR.

Furthermore, managers communicate majorly top-down, mandating that employees engage in CSR activities (Bhattacharya et al., 2008). Managers must listen to all stakeholders, including employees and align their CSR communication strategy accordingly instead of following a one-way flow of communication if they aim to be successful in their CSR communication. However, the potential of communication in CSR is not efficiently exhausted if managers neglect their employees in CSR strategising and communicating. Even though, as recognised in previous research, in practice, the value of employees in an organisation's CSR communication has not been harnessed, a notion that will be addressed in this research paper.

In her study of CSR set in the UK, Dawkins (2005) segregates an organisation's CSR communication ideally targeted at opinion leaders (e.g., NGOs, legislators, (business) press and investors), the wider public and organisation internal.

Opinion leaders, especially British media editors and legislators, judge a corporation based on the communication of its responsible behaviour while NGOs expect proof of the CSR's impact; such proof can be shown in case studies, targets, and trends (Dawkins, 2005). However, journalists, investors and analysts perceive the quality of British companies' CSR as poor with 63 per cent, 54 per cent and 45 per cent respectively (Dawkins, 2005). Drawing on that data, journalists, investors, and analysts expectations in an organisation's CSR communication are not met. Within the British public, 74 per cent agree that they would prefer to buy from a company that communicates well about their ethical, social, and environmental behaviour (Dawkins, 2005). Nevertheless, the British public's awareness of this behaviour is relatively low; only about 30 per cent are aware of British companies that act responsibly. Thus, messages about CSR are generally not received by consumers (Dawkins, 2005).

As mentioned before, the communication channel which is least focused on in the existing literature is the internal communication to employees; internal communication to employees is often neglected and under-researched in terms of an organisation's communication on social and environmental behaviours (Dawkins, 2005). Previous research has shown that organisations underestimate the power of their employees in communicating responsible behaviours to the public; i.e. external stakeholders often perceive employees as being a trustworthy source of information dissemination (Dawkins, 2005). Since most effective communication is distributed via informal communication channels through word of mouth and being in contact with an employee, the reach of an employee should not be underestimated (Dawkins, 2005). More so, Dawkins (2005) highlights that employees must be kept informed on ongoing CSR activities to be able to respond to customer questions and queries. She concludes that researchers should not ignore the importance of internally communicating when the company wants to be successful in communicating with external stakeholders (Dawkins, 2005).

Similarly, Bhattacharya et al. (2008) state that employee awareness and involvement lies on a spectrum, ranging from no awareness to active involvement; their research indicates that employees generally know little about the CSR efforts and are not directly involved. In their study, an interviewed retail employee responded that infrequent announcements about their employer's CSR had been made by displaying the number of

their organisation’s donations. The respondents argued that more frequent information would help raise the employees’ attention (Bhattacharya et al., 2008). Moreover, their study shows that if CSR is communicated well to employees and they become involved, it increases the chance of organisational identification (Bhattacharya et al., 2008).
The data clearly illustrates that employees must be made aware of or involved in CSR programs since their impact can be far-reaching. They usually are the first contact to external stakeholders, making them incremental in building trust in the CSR program and ultimately in the company itself. This offers a point of departure for this thesis which aims to provide knowledge to address this void in the literature.

A company’s CSR communication efforts can falter because stakeholders might perceive it as dishonest, irresponsible or hypocritical (Dawkins, 2005). Dishonest CSR is often referred to as corporate social irresponsibility (CSI) or ‘doing bad’, which is, among others, price-fixing, offering inaccurate product information or faulty products and services (Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013). Lin-Hi and Müller (2013, p. 1932) define CSI as “corporate actions that result in (potential) disadvantages and/or harm to other actors”. CSI is characterised by a breach of the law and can be intentional or unintentional; if an organisation acts deliberately to the disadvantage or harm of others to reach a specific benefit, then the organisation intentionally acts irresponsibly. However, organisations can unintentionally engage in CSI when they do not deliberately inflict harm or disadvantages on others to achieve a goal, or it might be a by-product of an activity (Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013). Current literature shows that the main challenge in CSI is to ‘avoid bad’; i.e. corporations can learn from their past irresponsibility to avoid it from happening in the future. Hence, by preventing CSI (avoiding bad), the corporation can deliver on and contribute to its CSR (doing good) (Lin-Hi & Müller, 2013). However, Kang et al. (2016, p. 59) have modelled the interplay among CSR, CSI, and firm performance, and the data shows that CSI can harm a company’s financial performance. Moreover, the study indicates that many companies adopt a CSR strategy after engaging in CSI to compensate for irresponsible behaviour; however, the data shows that the negative impact of CSI on the financial performance can hardly be mitigated (Kang et al., 2016).

## 2.2 Corporate hypocrisy

While researchers are increasingly interested in external stakeholder’s perceived corporate responsibility, they have not yet paid much attention to employees’ perspectives. On the one hand, CSR can have positive impacts on employees, such as improved work engagement or satisfaction, while on the other hand, when employees perceive the CSR to be contradictory, it can be damaging to the company leading to behaviours such as negative word of mouth or decreased motivation (Rupp et al., 2018). Employees have insider views on their employer's CSR strategies and practices; thus, they may perceive their employer to be hypocritical while external stakeholders may not (Goswami et al., 2018). Hence, corporate hypocrisy is defined as "the belief that a firm claims to be something that it is not" (Wagner et al., 2009, p. 79). Credibility and authenticity are vital in a company's CSR communication (Bruhn & Zimmermann, 2017). If a company communicates aggressively or deceptively in their CSR programme, they will be an object to public scrutiny, especially if there is a gap between what they say and what they do (Shklar, 1984). Stakeholders perceive organisations to be hypocritical if they do not fulfil their self-imposed standards of social responsibility (Lenz et al., 2017). Importantly, a person's perception is their overall experience, belief and sensemaking and can vary between different individuals; i.e. each individual themselves assesses a company's CSR communication and decides how responsible they believe it is (Du et al., 2007). Thus, it is important to acknowledge that some stakeholders can perceive an organisation to be responsible while others perceive it to be irresponsible (Ditlev-Simonsen, 2015). Furthermore, when a corporation communicates inconsistently it can also be accused of being hypocritical (Goswami et al., 2018). Previous research shows that negative perceptions about CSR have a stronger impact on stakeholders compared to positive perceptions (Wagner et al., 2009). Hence, to avoid losing out on trust and credibility, information must be communicated concisely via all channels, both internally and externally, and without any contradictions to limit the chances of being perceived as hypocritical (Glozer & Morsing, 2020; Bruhn & Zimmerman, 2017). As already elaborated on in the previous subchapter, managers have not paid much attention to creating awareness about their external communication on their socially and environmentally responsible behaviours to their employees yet. Similarly, research on employees' perception of said communication is still scarce. This thesis departs from this notion as it investigates whether or not employees perceive their organisation to be hypocritical based on their understanding and sensemaking.

Two currently heavily debated examples of corporate hypocrisy are greenwashing and rainbow washing. Greenwashing refers to corporations misleading consumers about their environmental performance or impact or publishing misleading information about green products and services (Laufer, 2003). Similarly, in rainbow washing (also known as Rainbow Capitalism), corporations are accused of priding themselves in being an ally to LGBTQ+ communities while simultaneously lacking queer people in their senior management or supporting anti-queer causes or individuals (Falco & Gandhi, 2020).

Wagner et al. (2009) conducted three experimental studies to test how consumers evaluate and respond to conflicting CSR information. The studies revealed that people perceive a company to be significantly higher in hypocrisy when they use a proactive CSR strategy compared to a reactive strategy. By employing a proactive strategy, the company creates an image of itself as highly engaged in CSR activities before stakeholders can receive any negative information. Conversely, in a reactive strategy, companies aim to protect their image after being challenged for irresponsible behaviour by making a statement about their CSR. The study revealed that inconsistent information led to significantly higher perceptions of corporate hypocrisy. Moreover, the data also showed that when companies act contrary to what they claim they do, whether the actions are positive or not, they are perceived as hypocritical (Wagner et al., 2009). Nevertheless, Wagner et al. (2009) also found that inconsistent or conflicting CSR will negatively impact stakeholders' evaluation of the company no matter the strategy.

Goswami et al. (2018) tested how employees perceive corporate hypocrisy in their mixed-methods study (nine qualitative interviews and 520 respondents to a survey). In doing so, they investigated how employees from the US retail industry perceive their respective employer's internal and external CSR strategies. The results show that if employers neglect their employees' perception of their CSR practices and do not do as they say they do, the overall CSR strategies can become ineffective. Additionally, employees' job engagement can decrease, employee turnover can increase, and potential negative attitudes can be expressed on social media, leading to negative word of mouth (Goswami et al., 2018). Additionally, the study showcases that if employees perceive their employers have double standards, i.e. they favour their needs over those of their employees, perceived corporate hypocrisy increases.

Other perceptions of corporate hypocrisy were met when companies presented themselves as being higher in morality but acting insufficiently to meet this level (Goswami et al., 2018). Goswami et al.'s study is relevant to this project since it provides a practical example of corporate hypocrisy's potential impact on a firm's CSR in a retail environment. This thesis ties in with their study but focuses on one organisation, the Co-op, in the British retail industry. Hence, it aims to add to the existing literature but shifts the focus to a European setting and a data collection method that is purely focused on qualitative interviews.

## 2.3 Employee engagement

Due to work being a big part of individuals' lives, it has become one of the primary sources in which individuals look for identity, meaning and belonging (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2018). Nevertheless, stress, heavy workload and meaningless work have led to a decrease in compassion and negative physiological and psychological impacts on employees' health since humans constantly seek to do socially significant and valuable work (Bailey et al., 2017; Nazir & Islam, 2020).

In his study, Mirvis (2012) highlights that there is a so-called "employee engagement gap", which, according to a survey by Towers Perrin (2007), shows that only 21 per cent of employees are engaged in their job. Similarly, the Gallup Employee Engagement Index (2010) disclosed that 33 percent of employees were fully engaged in their job compared to 67 percent being not engaged or actively disengaged. Generally, employee engagement refers to "the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (Kahn 1990, p. 694). Similarly, Schaufeli et al. (2002, p. 74) define employee engagement as "a positive fulfilling work-related state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption". Therefore, it is an employee's emotional and intellectual commitment to their work (Bamruk, 2004).

More recently, researchers argue that CSR may be one way to address the employee engagement gap since a few of the existing studies show positive impacts of CSR on employees' meaningfulness, compassion, and engagement (Nazir & Islam, 2020). Moreover, Rupp (2011) argues that meaning and value can likely be created for employees by an employer's CSR. Arguably, the success of CSR activities of a firm depends on the efforts of its employees since they are those "who conceive, design, and execute such [CSR] activities" (Opoku-Dakwa et al., 2018, p. 581). This is in line with Aguinis and Glavas' (2012, p. 953) argument that employees are vital in an organisation's success since they are "those who actually strategise, make decisions, and execute CSR programs". By giving meaning to their employer's CSR activities, employees' engagement may thus be increased (Rupp et al., 2018). These studies second the research that has been elaborated in the previous chapters, namely that a successful external CSR communication strategy hinges on its execution of employees since they are the contact person to external stakeholders. This, in turn, may depend on the degree of commitment of the employees to their organisation. However, research on the link between employee engagement and CSR is scant; this thesis aims to fill the void.

Accordingly, three factors have been identified on which employee commitment to CSR efforts may depend (Ditlev-Simonsen, 2015). Those factors are the extent to which an employee and their company's identity are aligned, the general company and job commitment and managers' attitude to CSR (Ditlev-Simonsen, 2015). The last factor is in line with Aguinis and Glavas's (2012) argument that a critical predictor of employee engagement is the level of commitment from their supervisors to CSR. In fact, employees show signs of being more engaged if their supervisors advocate for participating (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Vlachos et al. (2014) affirm that their superiors influence an employee's judgement of and response to CSR strategies since they are often referred to as social referents. This phenomenon is often called the 'trickle-down effect' and describes how employees imitate the actions of their superiors (Vlachos et al., 2014; Mayer et al., 2009).
Importantly, not all employees seek to become a part of the CSR efforts; in fact, some employees remain or become cynical or aloof (Opoku-Dakwa et al., 2018; Rodrigo & Arenas, 2007). Indifferent employees are mainly concerned with their career instead of CSR-related initiatives; for this group of employees, it is not important whether CSR activities are enhanced or mitigated (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2007).

In his qualitative study on employee (dis)engagement, Kahn (1990) interviewed summer camp counsellors and employees of an architecture company. He defined disengaged employees as acting robot-like and effortless (Kahn, 1990). Moreover, employees who perceive CSR as another task on top of their work tasks are unlikely to derive meaning from it and are less likely to feel engaged. Thus, sensemaking is limited (Bakker et al., 2007; Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). In other words, top-down or external pressure for employees to engage in CSR activities leads to less meaning production and thus less feeling of engagement (Rupp et al., 2018). Whereas in bottom-up strategies, employees voluntarily engage in CSR activities and are more enthusiastic and engaged due to deriving more meaning from their actions (Rupp et al., 2018). Typically, managers and upper management develop CSR strategies which will then be communicated to stakeholders. The literature emphasises the importance of leadership in engaging employees in CSR activities, which offers a valuable link to the study at hand.

Nevertheless, Gond et al. (2017) have reviewed 268 micro-CSR research papers and concluded that understanding employees' perceptions of CSR and potential employee behaviour are insufficient. The few existing studies on the relationship between employee engagement and CSR show, however, that employees working for a socially responsible company are more motivated and satisfied in their job; conversely, employees working for an irresponsible organisation are disengaged (Young et al., 2018; Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). A quantitative study by Nazir and Islam (2020) showed that an employer's CSR activities had a positive impact on employee engagement. They collected data from 350 employees of luxury hotels across New Delhi and tested employees' sensemaking processes of CSR and their subsequent engagement in CSR behaviours (Nazir & Islam, 2020). This study is similar to an earlier study by Mirvis (2012), who draws from a survey conducted by Sirota Survey Intelligence. The survey demonstrates that employees who perceived their employer's social responsibility as authentic showed signs of higher engagement, felt that their employer cared more about their well-being, and perceived their organisation to be more competitive (Mirvis, 2012). Generally, however, employees do not perceive to be considered and involved in developing CSR strategies, although they are encouraged to be involved (Ditlev-Simonsen & Brøgger, 2013; Ditlev-Simonsen, 2015). Arguably, this gap between theory and practice results from managers not acknowledging the importance of involving employees in CSR strategies (Ditlev-Simonsen & Brøgger, 2013). Not involving employees in the CSR process can result in negative consequences (Vise, 2005); conversely, involvement can decrease disagreement and resentment between upper management and employees (Ditlev-Simonsen, 2015).

## 2.4 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of previous research on CSR, corporate hypocrisy and employee engagement. It has shown that, although limited in quantity, studies in these fields offer many points of interest from which this research paper departs. The literature review has demonstrated that consistent and regular CSR communication to all stakeholders is essential and that particularly employees must be considered since they are those who execute it. Furthermore, inconsistency offers the entry point for perceived corporate hypocrisy, which can negatively affect employees' attitudes and behaviours, which in turn can impact external stakeholders through informal communication exchange and interaction. Lastly, it can influence employees' commitment to their organisation and initiatives and employee engagement.

# 3. Theory

This chapter will elaborate on organisational sensemaking theory and organisational identity and identification theory. It will serve as the theoretical foundation and analytical lens for this study and provides a path for exploring the research problem.

## 3.1 Organisational sensemaking

Sensemaking is referred to as the process in which individuals and organisations give meaning to an event (Weick, 1995). It is a “constructivist social study” since it refers to “the construction and interpretation of meanings that underpin the justification and reasoning behind daily decisions” (Teck et al., 2020, p. 69). It describes an individual’s retrospective rationalisation of actions, experiences, and events in their constructed reality (Weick, 1995). Hence, sensemaking is a part of the interaction between action and interpretation. That is to say, it is concerned with an individual’s interpretation of an action rather than the action itself (Weick, 1995).

Sensemaking is a crucial part of organising as it “unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). In other words, sensemaking is the continuous reflection on and rationalisation about what individuals do (Weick et al., 2005). Furthermore, it is the “process of organising” (Brown et al., 2008, p. 1055) through which the flood of experiences is labelled and categorised into information that is easier comprehensible (Weick et al., 2005). Organisation can be understood as a pattern of intertwined behaviours of a group, while sensemaking can be understood as the process in which a pattern is formed (Kudesia, 2017). If this pattern is damaged or disturbed, sensemaking is the only choice for restoring organisation (Kudesia, 2017). Hence, sensemaking and organising are mutually complementary to each other (Weick et al., 2005).

Sensemaking is an ongoing process in which “meanings materialise that inform and constrain identity and action” (Helms Mills 2003, p. 35) through “language, talk, and communication" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). Drawing on the definition, Helms Mills et al. (2010) argue that organisational sensemaking is a concept used to fathom the procedure of organising. It describes how both people and organisations assign meaning to events and environments (Helms Mills et al., 2010) and aims to explain how different actors attach different meanings to the same event (Weick, 1995).

In his book Sensemaking in Organisations, Weick (1995) has described sensemaking as an ongoing process influenced by seven interconnected properties. The first property describes that an individual's identity is socially constructed and thus continuously shaped by experiences, communication, exchange with other individuals and its environment; in other words, "identity construction is about making sense of the sensemaker" (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 184). Nevertheless, sensemaking research has mainly focused on the process of sensemaking instead of the sense maker themselves because the sense maker is a product of their sensemaking. Put differently, by giving meaning to their environment, the sense maker is assigned an identity based on that meaning (Czarniawska, 2004).

Secondly, to understand the present, individuals draw from their memorised past experiences to make sense of the current event. Hence, the process of sensemaking is retrospective. Similarly, Hernes and Maitlis' (2010, p. 2) argue that meaning is "made in an ongoing present in which past experience is projected upon possible futures". That means, meaning is fluid and does not adhere to any set concept but is a part of a process (Hernes & Maitlis, 2010).

The third property illustrates that individuals omit specific elements and instead focus on others in their sensemaking process (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Through retrospection, individuals will decide which cues to rely on in sensemaking and which to ignore. By selecting and omitting cues, it becomes clear that sensemaking is subjective and relies on the sense makers motivation, interpretation and belief system (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Fourth, similar to the previous property, individuals choose cues to make sense that they perceive are plausible, i.e. they need not be correct. Hence, the sensemaking of the same event can differ between actors depending on their perceptions of what seems plausible or not regardless of its (in)accuracy (Helms Mills et al., 2010). The fifth step, the enactive of the environment, explains that sense makers are influenced by and influence the environment they have created through sensemaking (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Sixth, the social property describes that sensemaking depends on individuals' interactions and their interactions with organisations through, e.g. language, routines and symbols. All these interactions shape the sensemaking process and offer routines for adequate behaviour; if routines are not available, however, individuals must make sense based on their own knowledge (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Lastly, as mentioned before, sensemaking occurs continuously (Helms Mills et al., 2010) and not all properties are equal in weight (Weick et al., 2005). Helms Mills (2003) and have emphasised that the construction of identity is decisive to sensemaking. Additionally, they state that to legitimise sensemaking, plausibility must be made a core concern.

Furthermore, the sensemaking process consists of three steps: enactment, selection, and retention, which can be linked to the seven properties (Kudesia, 2017). Enactment refers to the "perceptual process of noticing and bracketing information from the environment" and choosing the interpretations on which an individual's actions rest which are to influence the environment (Kudesia, 2017, p. 14; Weick, 1979). That means, in this step, individuals tend to categorise and interpret information on which they base their actions that shape and adjust their environment.

Selection refers to the use of retrospection of past events to make sense of current events by using plausible interpretations instead of completely accurate ones (Kudesia, 2017). Lastly, retention refers to how enacted interpretations are stored as results of successful sensemaking, how these results are discussed in interactions with others while they are constantly applied to the ever-changing and dynamic environment (Kudesia, 2017).

Given the rise in interest in employees' perceptions of their employer's CSR efforts, it becomes essential to apprehend how employees make sense of those efforts (Nazir & Islam, 2020). Sensemaking in individuals usually happens when challenging or intricate problems arise that need to be dealt with (Nazir & Islam, 2020). CSR can be understood as such a challenging issue since it expects employees to engage in, act and respond to their firm's projects in communities, their social and environmental contribution, and complex planetary issues at large (Nazir & Islam, 2020). That is in line with Aguinis and Glavas' (2019) argument that CSR produces tension through added experiences on top of work-related tasks. Nevertheless, CSR can also be seen as the epitome for individuals to make sense since it goes beyond work-related tasks and profit-focus and can provide meaning through contributing to environmental and social causes (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). Factors that influence employees to make sense are, among others, environmental values, communal values, identity and the direction of CSR communication flow (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019).

As elaborated on, communication is a central part of the sensemaking process as through communication, meaning is created, which has a bearing on identity and behaviour. As such, sensemaking as the analytical lens can help understand how and why different employees attach different meanings to the same (organisational) event. Sensemaking is an essential point of departure for analysing the perceptions of employees as shaped by their employer's CSR communication. Furthermore, it can aid in understanding how and why employees identify with the organisation or engage in certain behaviours since their understanding of their current organisational setting or event is informed by past experiences.

## 3.2 Organisational identity and identification

As established in the previous subchapter and described in the first property of sensemaking, an individual's identity is socially constructed and rests on the sense maker's understanding of themselves (Helms-Mills et al., 2010). A sensemaker assigns meaning to themselves based on the meaning they give to their surrounding environment (Czarniawska, 2004). Organisational identity is a root construct in organisational research associated with organisational (internal) members' perceptions about an organisation (Ravasi, 2016; Ashforth et al., 2008). Generally, *organisational identity* can be defined as meaning structures focused on "how members develop, express, and project their organisational sense of self" through self-reflection and comparison (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 23).

According to Gioia and Hamilton (2016), scholars in the field of organisational identity have been mainly divided into three perspectives, namely social actor, social constructionist and institutional.

In the first perspective, Albert and Whetten (1985, p. 264) have defined organisational identity as the answer by the individual organisational members to the question "Who are we as an organisation?". They suggest that the answer to the question will always be centering around the core of the organisation and what is "central, enduring and distinctive" about it (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 264). This perspective indicates that strategic actions and identification within the organisation are guided by identity, which is static and based on sense giving (Gioia & Hamilton, 2016).

From the social constructionist perspective, self-reflection is at the core of organisational identity; i.e. it describes how members continuously make sense of the organisation's supposed central and continuous characteristics and how it compares to that of other organisations (Gioia & Hamilton, 2016). In this view, "identity involves the consensual interpretive schemes that members collectively construct to provide meaning to their shared experience" (Gioia & Hamilton, 2016, p. 25). Thus, due to being seen as a social construct within this perspective, organisational identity is continuously re-evaluated in interaction with others and a constantly collectively debated interpretation of the organisation by its members (Gioia & Hamilton, 2016). The last perspective, the institutional perspective, suggests that internal members create organisational identity, which is also influenced by external forces, i.e. their environment and larger social context (Gioia & Hamilton, 2016). Organisational identity is a social construction because "it is subject to sensegiving influences from organisational leadership as well as sensemaking efforts from organisational members" (van Knippenberg, 2016, p. 336). That means leadership may influence the perceptions of organisational identity, and so do members' perceptions (van Knippenberg, 2016). Additionally, identities are formed through interaction with external stakeholders (Corley et al., 2006).

One considerable influence on employees' sensemaking of their job and role in the organisation is that of leadership (van Knippenberg, 2016). Leadership requires a substantial effort in sensegiving since leaders affect and shape how employees understand, among others, the organisation's mission, vision and goals and it, therefore, has an impact on both individual and collective identity (Hackman, 2002). To succeed in influencing employees' perceptions towards an anticipated or desired identity, the leader must develop an unequivocal link between the current and desired organisational identity and contribute to the employees' sensemaking thereof (van Knippenberg, 2016). Furthermore, an envisioned identity that is perceived as more attractive than the old one is more likely to be accepted by employees since this is seen as an opportunity for enhancement in their self-image, and thus more meaningful (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). To succeed in changes to organisational identity, previous research has shown that role modelling behaviour of leaders has a positive impact on employee behaviour (Corley & Gioia, 2004). Thus, it is important for leaders to "walk the talk" in combination with strategic communication instead of only relying on advocating for the desired change (van Knippenberg, 2016). That is similar to what He and Brown (2013) refer to as transformational leadership. This leadership style entails, 1) individualised consideration, in which leaders pay attention to employees' individual needs; 2) intellectual stimulation, which refers to providing meaning, asking for feedback, challenging assumptions; 3) inspirational motivation, which is the communication of an envisioned and inspiring identity; and 4) idealised influence, which describes the leader's role as a role model for ethical standards. Previous research suggests that transformational leadership enhances the organisational identification of employees (He & Brown, 2013).

While "identities situate entities such that individuals have a sense of the social landscape, […] identification embeds the individual in the relevant identities" (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 326). That means identity is self-referential and responds to the questions "Who am I?" or "Who are we?" (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 327). On the other hand, organisational identification refers to the degree to which organisational members identify with the features that they conclude the organisation is defined by (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994). Hence, each organisational member's identification with the organisation rests on individual sensemaking and beliefs and may or may not be similar to the collective organisational identity or that of other individual members (Dutton et al., 1994). Therefore, organisational identification is unique to each organisational member and rooted in their perceptions (Dutton et al., 1994). Correspondingly, Dutton et al. (1994) contend that organisational identification also describes the degree to which organisational members view the organisation to be a part of themselves, i.e. the extent to which organisational members adopt core features of the organisation.

Organisational identity has long been acknowledged as an important part of CSR literature (Tian & Robertson, 2019). When an employee perceives that an organisation's internal and external image align, that is how the employee perceives the organisation and how they think outsiders view the organisation, the employee's self-continuity and self-distinctiveness may be enhanced. Consequently, they are more inclined to view their organisation as having a positive image, resulting in a stronger identification with the organisation (Dutton et al., 1994). Moreover, if the employee views the organisation's CSR as positive, they may evaluate their organisation as more attractive. Consequently, this may positively affect the internal and external image through positive employee behaviour and can increase organisational identification (Tian & Robertson, 2019). A distinguished external image can increase the company's perception of prestige, which can stimulate feelings of pride in the employee (Dutton et al., 1994). By aligning with the company's values and pride in working for the organisation, the chances of identifying with the company are higher; consequently, the motivation to engage in organisational tasks and CSR activities are enhanced (Tian & Robertson, 2019). Previous research indicates that employees' identification with their organisation somewhat influences their contribution to CSR activities. Employees who judge their employer as socially and environmentally responsible show a stronger identification with the organisation (Tian & Robertson, 2019).

## 3.3 Summary

This study is guided by sensemaking and organisational identity theory. In summary, sensemaking is the process by which individuals and organisations give meaning to an event through retrospective rationalisation and is thus unique to each individual. Meaning is created through communication, language and talk, which, in turn, influences identity and behaviour. Organisational identity theory offers another theoretical perspective that shares many aspects with sensemaking theory. It describes how employees attach meaning to their organisational setting and subsequently make sense of themselves and their role in the organisation. Both theories offer the theoretical basis for analysing how employees make sense of their employer's CSR communication and the potential ramifications on their organisational identification and behaviour.

# 4. Methodology

The following chapter displays the methodological approach of this study. A qualitative approach was applied to understand how employees perceive the external CSR communication of their employer and how this might influence organisational identification and employee engagement in CSR activities. First, the chapter elaborates on the research paradigm, social constructionism. This is followed by an elaboration of the case study, data collection, sampling and participant selection. The chapter will finish with the description of the data analysis procedure and ethical reflections.

## 4.1 Social Constructionism

This research paper views the world through a social constructionist lens. It acknowledges that reality is not a set natural order that observations can prove. Instead, it argues that reality is socially created (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism is concerned with the sensemaking processes of individuals and how those sensemaking processes correlate with the social contexts they are communicated in (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018). Thus, through communication, i.e. talking and exchanging messages, individuals construct meaning (Falkheimer & Heide, 2018). From a social constructionist perspective, knowledge is created through the daily interactions among people in s social system and "is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality" (Burr, 1995, p. 19). Burr (1995, p. 3) argues that researchers should be "suspicious" of how they make sense of the world and critical of taken-for-granted ways of understanding. Furthermore, it welcomes differing perceptions and sensemaking of reality (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006)

This study aims to understand how employees of an organisation perceive and ultimately make sense of its employer's external CSR communication. In doing so, it aims to gain insights into how each employee constructs meaning through perception and interpretation of their reality according to specific contexts and situations (Gergen, 2009). Moreover, social constructionists agree that objective facts do not exist because all knowledge rests on, among others, individuals' experiences, perceptions, understandings (Burr, 2015). Thus, the author acknowledges that the data from the participants is not objective and can thus be unpredictable. Additionally, she acknowledges that she herself cannot be objective in the data gathering and interpretation of said data. However, neither of these hinder the process since qualitative data rests on the researcher’s interpretation, sensemaking, and reflexivity in creating in-depth knowledge (Alvesson, 2011).

As mentioned before, sensemaking is the construction of meanings. When individuals make sense, they rationalise their own actions and those of others and events and experiences through retrospection in their constructed reality; in doing so, older discourses are replaced by new ones (Weick, 1995).

## 4.2 Case study

By investigating how employees of Co-op food stores perceive the external CSR communication of their employer, this research paper used a case study approach. Case studies are “[strategies] for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Robson, 2002, p. 178). In case studies, the focus lies on the close interrelation between the studied phenomenon and its context (Yin, 2003). A case study is a type of in-depth research (Swanborn, 2010).

This project used a single case to analyse a problem that has not yet received much attention among researchers (Saunders et al., 2007); i.e. it analyses how employees perceive the external CSR communication of their organisation and how this might affect employee engagement and organisational identification.

Using a case study for this research project is appropriate since it provides in-depth data helping to answer the priorly established research questions in an organisational context (Swanborn, 2010). Moreover, this paper analyses similarities and differences in opinions, perceptions and values of the people engaged in the phenomenon and tries to illustrate how and why they understand and make sense of the world (Swanborn, 2010).

The author chose to use the Co-operative Group in the UK as a case study; it is one of the largest consumer co-operatives in the world and comprises several retail businesses, such as food retail and wholesale, e-pharmacy, insurance, legal services and funeral care (Co-op, n.d., homepage). It ranks fifth among the biggest UK’s food retailers and is the top funeral service provider in the UK (Co-op, 2020). The British Co-operative group employs about 70.000 people across the UK and is situated at Angel Square, Manchester, UK. The British Co-operative Group originated from the Rochdale Society and merged with several retail and wholesale co-operatives to become the Co-operative Group of today.

## 4.3 Data Collection

Qualitative research is "interpretive, experience-based, situational, and personalistic" (Stake, 2010, p. 31). Hence, its implementation differs between researchers; nevertheless, all emphasise the importance of the personal and holistic interpretation of phenomena (Silverman, 2010). For this reason, the method of data collection was semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Qualitative interviews consist of a long chain of encoding, decoding and using language to transform research questions to interview questions. These questions are answered by interviewees, whose answers are recorded, transcribed, coded and categorised. The product is an analysis or interpretation that might be published (Brinkmann, 2018). The chain continues if people decide to read the publication of such analysis or interpretation and change their opinions, behaviours or actions accordingly (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Qualitative interviews aid in gathering information about the participants' perspectives and their meaning-making of themselves and their surrounding reality (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Interviews furthermore help in capturing feelings and perceptions of the participants ('subjects'). In a qualitative interview, the researcher asks a participant questions to explore and interpret the sensemaking process, perceptions and understandings of the participants' reality (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

The researcher collected data from seven employees of the food retail division of the British Co-operative Group (Co-op) using semi-structured in-depth interviews.
Three Customer Team Members (CTM) and four Customer Team Leaders (CTL) were interviewed. The participants are located in five different Co-op food stores; two are located in different parts of Manchester city centre, two in Greater Manchester and one in North Yorkshire. The interviews lasted between 31 to 65 minutes, with an average of 50 minutes, took place via Google Meet and were conducted during weeks 27, 28 and 29 of 2021. The interviewees were between 19 and 32 years old and worked for the company for one to fourteen years.

Before the interview, the researcher drafted an interview guide with different sections. The first block of the interview guide started with an introduction to the interview (briefing) followed by opening questions aimed to ease the participants into the interview and create a safe environment (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Questions in this part were related to the participant's job role, the shop they work at and overall perception of the working atmosphere. The second block was the largest part comprising questions that aimed to gather the data relevant for this study; the block aimed to gather data about the 1) level of awareness of CSR activities, 2) perception about the amount and content of the CSR communications, 3) their role in the company. The last section of the interview guide consisted of debriefing questions, wrapping up the interview and answering participants' questions; this step also offers participants the opportunity to share more information and their experience of the interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Since the interviews were semi-structured, the interview guide was not intended to be followed strictly. Instead, questions were chosen according to the flow of the conversation; this allowed flexibility and encouraged participants to speak freely. Opting for a less strict and more open way of interviewing can contribute to new knowledge production but might complicate later systematic comparison (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The interview guide can be found in appendix 1.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digitisation of qualitative digital data gathering methods (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). Hence, due to health restrictions and new travel regulations, the interviews were conducted through the video communication platform Google Meet. In this study, the interview process was similar to the traditional face-to-face interview in that it was synchronous communication, i.e. it happened at the same time and space (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). Furthermore, the video function of Google Meet allowed the interviewer and interviewees to interact face-to-face, albeit observations were only partially possible depending on the participant's distance to and posture in front of the camera. Additionally, online interviews allowed participants to choose a comfortable and convenient environment (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021). Another advantage of the video interviews was that the researcher could interview participants located in the United Kingdom, without having to travel; this reduced cost and time and adhered to COVID-19 regulations. The interviews were recorded through the recording function on Google Meet; they were simultaneously audio-recorded on a second device as insurance against failure. Through the recording, the interviewer could be fully present in the conversation and focus on the dynamics thereof (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

## 4.4 Sampling and participant selection

In this study, the researcher chose to employ both purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling aids the researcher in identifying and selecting “information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources” (Patton, 2002, p. 273). Thus, participants may be selected due to being exceptionally knowledgeable about or experienced or interested in the studied phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). A further advantage of purposive sampling is that it allows choosing participants based on availability and consent to participate (Spradley, 1979).

Snowball sampling is a form of sampling in which a contact person or participant is asked to help identify further participants. The chosen sampling methods enabled selecting an organisation capable of offering data crucial to the research aim (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the selection of the case organisation and contact person that granted access to Co-op employees rested on expected informational pertinence.

The following three criteria had to be met to qualify as an interview participant; first, the participant must be employed by the Co-op and work in a food store. Second, the member must be a customer team member (CTM) or customer team leader (CTL) and shall not be an assistant or store manager since the managers are responsible for distributing information from the upper management at the head office. Lastly, the employee must be working at the Co-op for at least one year because they must have gathered work experience in the daily shop floor activities, be exposed to the external CSR communication and internal communication from the head office or manager; this time also allowed for employees to make sense of their organisational setting and get engaged in CSR activities. Socioeconomic, level, age, ethnicity, gender and other demographic parameters have not been considered.

After the contact person identified the first participant, the researcher contacted them via email, invited them to the interview, explained the process and provided a consent form (appendix 2). As shown in the consent form, participants were informed about their anonymity, the confidential handling of data and their right to withdraw at any time. The participant then identified further potential candidates, of which six were chosen based on the criteria above.

### *4.4.1 Interview participants*

As mentioned above, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with seven participants, all employed at The British Co-operative Group. The original aim was to interview employees from England and Scotland. However, due to the current layoffs of the Customer Team Manager role (assistant store manager) in the stores, the workload on all other team members increased drastically, according to the interviewees. Moreover, COVID-19 and the concomitant reduction of opening hours led to many employees being furloughed. Both reasons have resulted in a reduced availability of potential participants; three of the initial ten potential candidates dropped out because of time and work pressure. Nevertheless, seven participants were willing to partake.

## 4.5 Data analysis

All interviews were conducted via Google Meet and recorded through the recording function on the platform and audio-recorded on a second device to ensure that all parts of the conversation were captured and to prevent a loss of data due to any malfunctions of any device. All participants consented to participate in the interviews and agreed to be recorded.

Afterwards, the audio recordings were transcribed. The researcher opted to transcribe the audio data right away because her memory of the participant's countenance, bodily gestures and vocal expressions accompanying the spoken word was still vivid (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

A transcription of interviews is essential in "[structuring] the interview conversations in a form amenable to closer analysis and is in itself an initial analysis" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 94). That means that the transcription helps break down large amounts of spoken words into smaller blocks of written words that can be easily structured and analysed (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Transcripts are abstractions of the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee in a set reality; they are not one-on-one copies since they are a conversion from spoken into written language. However, this cannot be done from a truly objective standpoint. Instead, the researcher should ask the question, "What is a useful transcription for my research purpose?" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In that sense, the researcher can choose to induce stutters and tone of voice if they are to look for signs of psychological distress. Alternatively, they can leave out repetitions and stutters to emphasise the story above the appearance (Flick, 2007). Through this, the quality of the data and validity of the findings can be ensured (Berg, 2001). In this study, the researcher focused on a more formal written style by leaving out filling words and immediate repetitions. That way, the narrative of each transcript was easier to comprehend and compare to the other transcripts.

After the interviews had been transcribed, the data was coded. "A code in qualitative analysis is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 5). Codes can be seen as a component that links data collection and the description and interpretation of their meaning (Charmaz, 2001). A code is assigned by the researcher to data according to their interpretation thereof and can help in, among other things, pattern detection, categorisation and theme (Vogt et al., 2014). They are constructed based on the researcher's knowledge, background and motivation (Saldaña, 2015 ).

The researcher opted for abductive coding. Abduction contains both inductive and deductive elements and encourages to move back and forth from theory to data and vice versa to gain a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Using abductive coding, the researcher developed an initial coding frame by deriving codes from the previously established theoretical framework; this was later revisited and edited, new codes were added, and inapplicable codes were abandoned. Thus, this procedure was iterative, non-linear, and dynamic. In this study, the overall goal of the interviews and coding processes was to be open and flexible when listening to and exploring the participants' experiences, perceptions, and opinions.

## 4.6 Ethical considerations and reflexivity

Participants share in-depth information of their experiences, perceptions and opinions in qualitative research data gathering methods while researchers interpret the data from various theoretical standpoints (Mertens, 2018).

Before each interview, the researcher sent out consent forms to the participants, which informed them about the purpose of the interview by providing the context without revealing too much information as too much information could have led to bias in the participants (Mertens, 2018). Furthermore, participants were informed about their role in the interview and their rights to withdraw at any time. The consent form included the researcher's phone number and email address for the interviewee to contact the researcher for any questions. The interviewees were informed about the video and audio-recording before the interview and were asked their permission. The participants were informed about the storage and eventual erasure of their data and the confidentiality of their data. Researchers argue that total anonymity is an ideal that cannot be fully achieved due to the interviewer directly engaging with the interviewees (Scott, 2005; Saunders et al., 2007). This information was included in the consent form, and the subjects were also informed orally before the interview.

Reflexivity refers to the awareness of the role that the researcher holds in the data gathering process. It is, furthermore, the reflection on how both the researcher and subject might have influenced the research process and its outcomes (Haynes, 2012). Since the researcher holds a critical role in the study's quality, she needed to keep a professional distance, balancing a friendly and professional attitude at once (Denscombe, 2017). One central concern in interviews is influencing the interviewees accidentally and leading their reasoning in a specific direction due to leading questions or body language (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). When drafting the interview guide and during the interview process, the researcher was aware of her background, education, and the research she had acquired before the interview. At no point did the researcher attempt to make the participants feel uncomfortable, judged, or patronised, and paid careful attention to asking unbiased, judgemental-free questions (Mertens, 2018).

# 5. Analysis

The following chapter represents the findings of seven semi-structured in-depth interviews. The data was coded into four main discussion topics, and one section which includes the suggestions of the employees. The main topics are CSR communication, engagement, perceived credibility and a summarising discussion. All the answers rest on the participants' perceptions.

## 5.1 CSR communication

In this part of the analysis, questions were asked about how the interviewees perceived the Co-op's external CSR communication and how they compare this to the internal information dissemination about the external communication. First, by looking at the Co-op's image, the responses were mainly congruent. All participants agreed that the public image of the Co-op is generally good; they described the image as being ethical and trusted by customers due to offering quality products, engaging in community work, and pushing a green and zero waste agenda. One participant described the image as "shop with us and we give back to the community" (P4). The participants also stated that the Co-op has a slight competitive advantage over other food retail chains due to their commitment to social, sustainable, and ethical causes. This perception supports Cornelissen's (2017) research findings, which state that organisations with a distinct social and environmental reputation may have a competitive advantage. However, all participants perceived that the Co-op does not live up to its messages.

The lack of information about ongoing CSR activities has been frequently brought up. According to the participants, information about their employer's external CSR initiatives was scarce and rarely communicated internally. While all employees were aware that Co-op members could pick three charities they wish to donate to out of a pool of several charities, they did not receive this information through internal channels but through posters and social media. Information about the Co-op, what it stands for and what CSR activities they were involved in were provided majorly through the initial training tests, which all employees must pass at the start of their career to become a part of the team. The participants explained that this document consists of several hundred pages of information they stated are impossible to remember.

Further than that, not much more information was given about the image, identity, and CSR strategies. While this seemed to be the case in all stores from which the participants participated, some have mentioned that their store manager receives occasional emails from the head office about CSR-related communication that should then be communicated to the colleagues. Some have mentioned that they also received some information from the area manager, who every so often comes in. However, both managers seemed to be primarily interested in the store hitting financial and operation-specific targets while expecting the charity work to happen naturally on top of the daily routines. Moreover, nobody, including the team leaders perceived the information as accessible; instead, "it just trickles down from above" (P3). P7 argued as follows

> "I wouldn't say it's the most effective way for us. I feel like it should be sent to the colleagues directly and not to the manager to then send to us. I feel like if it's just sent to the manager, then it doesn't really feel like we're part of it. It just feels like it's information that's been sent down and sent down, where I feel like it should just come out straight to us." (P7)

Generally, the participants perceived that the communication from the responsible department was lost on the way down to the shop floor colleagues or perished in the heavy workload. P7 continued

> "You feel like you might not know about what's going on with certain things. Because I've been there quite a while now. Everything's fine. But if a new sort of project came around into the Co-op or something new was happening; I feel like sometimes we may not know about it or be late to find out about it at least." (P7)

According to the participants, only the store manager has access to that information. It is for them to decide whether they want to spread the information, which, according to the team leaders, hinges on whether they are themselves interested in responsible causes. Moreover, the team leaders stated that there is an app called "My Work" on all handheld devices in the store. Generally, a convenience store with a shift size range of four to six people has two to three handheld devices and one tablet. The handheld devices are only accessible to CTMs when a specific task is to be performed, which requires this device, while the tablet is only accessible to the management team. Usually, all information from the head office is distributed through My Work; however, this communication is mainly made up of shop floor specific tasks. Sometimes, if a shop is encouraged to participate in CSR activities, this information is sent to My Work. One CTL summarised this as follows

> "We have a system called My Work, where everything is sent down. So, it comes into your account, and you can read it, you can print it off, you can share it with your colleagues, if you feel like you want to." (P3)

This shows a significant imbalance in the access to information between team members, team leaders and store managers and a dependency on the management and its commitment to CSR to disseminate information. Since store and area managers and team leaders seem to be relatively uninterested, according to the participants, the access to CSR information may be further constrained. Moreover, managers' attitudes towards CSR are a critical predictor for employee engagement levels (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Ditlev-Simonsen, 2015). As elaborated on in the literature review, studies show that employees are more committed to and engaged in an organisation's CSR strategies if their superiors advocate for participating (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Vlachos et al., 2014). However, according to the participants, this is not the case in their respective stores due to the store and area managers' indifferent attitudes to CSR. By dismissing to forward information to their employees due to their lack of interest, the trickle-down effect may cause employees to become aloof and disinterested themselves. To recap, the trickle-down effect refers to employees imitating their superiors' actions due to them being important social referents (Vlackos et al., 2014).

The access to information may furthermore be inhibited by managers relying on private messaging apps to forward information. The participants stated that the store manager forwards infrequent screenshots of important emails to the store's WhatsApp group. However, WhatsApp is not accessible to everyone, especially to older employees. Nevertheless, even the individuals who have access to the app perceive that the information is insufficient. Due to the lack of information from the store management and head office about ongoing CSR activities, some participants turned to external sources. Three participants stated that they turn to social media to get straight-to-the-point information about ongoing Fairtrade and community work. Another participant explicitly explains that they contact employees of other stores to get information.

At the same time, some of the participants have described that the information they receive is bland, at times unrealistic and unrelatable, and not encouraging. Consequently, this has led to feelings of discouragement, boredom, demotivation, and apathy, as shown in the following quote:

> "We are not really getting updated about what the Co-op is doing. And the little information I get isn't particularly engaging. I think I am a big supporter of charities, but even for me, there isn't a lot of motivation for that kind of stuff at all. And I am already quite enthusiastic." (P1)

Another frequently mentioned aspect was that most communication is perceived to be centred around financial targets instead of responsible causes.

> "There hasn't been anything where I was proper behind. I don't think it is ever really portrayed as "do this because it's for a good cause". It has to do with hitting targets and then they get rewarded for being good management. That is kind of the vibe I get." (P1)

Some participants explained that they receive the Co-op's internal newsletter or automated emails in which annually it is presented how much money the Co-op had raised. However, one participant emphasised that it is not shown what happens with that money. Hence, they perceived the internal communication as relatively passive, focusing on financial targets instead of showing the actual story behind the donations and the people it helped.

> "For me, it just feels like I'm just reading brainwashing garbage. My mind just switches off instantly because it's just the same sort of drivel. If I could see that something was actually happening in the community and whenever we're given a figure on how much we've raised, we never really get shown what's actually been done with that money. Or if anything's actually happened in the community, there are not any tangible results. We only get given a sheet of

> paper or an email or something saying what the goal or the target is, but then it's never anything tangible at the end of that." (P6)

Conversely, one participant described that they had witnessed their shop collecting money and donating it to a charity that bought schoolbooks for the local primary school.

> "One of the charities you could choose to donate to is one that bought books for the local primary school. And my mum literally sees those very books that are bought for that school. So, what they are telling you comes back. It is actually what's happening. It wasn't just hot air. It wasn't just an unfulfilled sort of promise or anything." (P4)

When the participants were asked how they would compare the internal and external communication about the Co-op's CSR, differences became apparent. Four participants explicitly stated that the messages in the communication strategies are different and, at times, inconsistent.

> "I think how they communicate with the customers is very different. The customer gets the more moral side of it, and we get more communication on targets and stuff like that." (P1)

As the participants have stated, the store manager or team leaders who have access to My Work can decide whether they want to share information they have received and that generally little information is disseminated. This perception of the employees supports Bhattacharya et al.'s (2008) research which shows that retail employees' awareness of or involvement in their employer's CSR activities is low due to infrequent information on progress. The participants have stated that they, to some extent, are aware of the community work the Co-op engages in; however, none actively participates in any other CSR activities. Moreover, the study supports Bhattacharya et al.'s (2008) and Dawkins's (2005) argument that, in practice, managers do not communicate to their employees and, as a result, discount their potential reach. The participants have stated that they serve on average 1,100 customers per day; given that a proportion of them are customers who only pass through, the employees are still exposed to a wide range of the public. As elaborated in the introduction, Dawkins's (2005) research results show that 74 per cent of the British public prefer to buy from a company that communicates well about their CSR behaviour. Hence, the reach of employees should not be underestimated, especially since interactions and informal communication are acknowledged to be the most effective form of communication. Consequently, the potential of communication in CSR is not efficiently exhausted.

One particularly often mentioned aspect that seems to be a big part of the Co-op's external and internal communication is the so-called 'Co-op card'. Customers can buy a Co-op Card for GBP 1, which makes them members of the Co-operative group. Members can choose between three different charities they want to donate to; two pence go towards a charity for each pound spent on Co-op branded products (Co-op, n.d. membership).

The interviewees stated that the Co-op card is a sound system in theory because the customers benefit from it for saving money in their account. Moreover, that way, donations are collected to benefit the charity the member has picked. However, only two participants describe the Co-op card as a positive concept. The others have described the Co-op card as one of the main selling points. The participants reiterated that they must actively promote them because the store must hit a target of sold cards. According to the participants, sometimes there were extra pushes from the management because if a shop in the area sold the most cards, the store manager would receive a bonus. Furthermore, it also seemed to be a common understanding between all interviewees that the card is being used to collect data and track the customers' shopping history. Moreover, according to the participants, the marketing about it inside the shop feels overwhelming.

> "They are plastering the big circle stickers of advertising onto the glass walls, sort of like Alcatraz. […] It is just very consistent and very persistent and relentless and sort of "make sure to ask every single customer if they want a new Co-op card". This is obviously something that they really wanted to hammer home." (P4)

Similarly, although the idea behind the charity donations is perceived as positive, it is not perceived as being truly genuine. That is due to the participants' feeling that they are forced into selling the cards. The participants perceive it as a means to increase profit and that the donations to the different charities are only of secondary importance.

At this step of the analysis, it is pertinent to consider Elkington's (1997) triple bottom line of CSR and Berger et al.'s (2007) social-values led rationale of how CSR is integrated into the Co-op's agenda. As described before, CSR is at the core of a co-operative as its corporate purpose is to serve and support its respective community and members through socially and responsible actions instead of focusing solely on gaining profit. However, the perceptions of the participants seem to deviate slightly. While they were aware that the Co-op is committed to helping their communities (people) and the environment (planet), they have stated that they perceived the CSR communication to rely too heavily on marketing and advertising and that the CSR initiatives seem to be secondary. Thus, they perceive that profits are prioritised, which, at least in this case, challenges the view that co-operatives may be model proponents (Tuominen et al., 2017).

### *5.1.1 Perceived CSR communication-action discrepancies*

All participants agreed that the Co-op continuously pushes a staggering amount of marketing and advertising about what it does for its respective communities, its engagement in green initiatives, its ethical treatment of farmers and its fair and outstanding treatment of its employees. Some participants argued that the Co-op displays itself as caring, sustainable, and fair to the outside, but they perceived it not to be reinforced adequately. They described that the Co-op uses jingles and slogans such as "It's what we do" and distributes those through Co-op Radio (instore radio channel recorded at the Co-op head office), social media, television ads, in-store posters and materials, and billboards.

> "…you see it as soon as you walk through the door and it's on every advert. It's on the walls, plastered onto the windows and on the tills and everywhere you go." (P4)

Similarly, another participant stated about the Co-op radio that

> "They are saying a lot, but nothing is really behind it. They just try and make it a bit false. It's kind of a bit like they are trying to be cool, like a mum trying to be cool in front of her kids. It's a bit like that sometimes. But it's just not." (P3).

One participant illustrated one example in which they felt that partaking in a highly visual movement was utilised for marketing purposes. According to the participant, during pride month, the Co-op has had different kinds of allyship posters, promotions, and products in their shop catering to different groups of the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, it participated in the Manchester pride march. However, the participant generally perceived it as being a response to the growing LGBTQ+ community. They reason that the Co-op has only recently begun to show allyship, and to them, it seems as if it jumped on the bandwagon for marketing reasons. That is to say, they argued that the Co-op is priding itself in being an ally while the upper management consists of majorly white, cis-gender male and straight individuals. Thus, it projects an image that is not necessarily the reality. This is summarised in the following quote:

> "… when the pride March was happening, the Co-op does have a float which is obviously good for representation. Apparently, they had a hearse as a float, which is a car to transport coffins in. And obviously with the AIDS crisis in the eighties where a lot of people from the LGBTQ+ community had died, I do feel like a hearse was a decision made by a straight person. […] I feel like a lot of companies are like 'oh, we need to sort this out now'. I feel like they are doing it for good marketing." (P5)

This participant's perception of the Co-op participating in the Manchester pride march for publicity reasons is an example of rainbow washing. The participant explained that they are unaware of queer people in the Co-op's upper management while publicly demonstrating its allyship. (Falco & Ghandi, 2020). In this case, the participant has judged the situation from an insider's perspective since they have insights into who is situated in the management team(s). According to their perception, the public display of allyship is contradictory to the actual reinforcement in the Co-op and is thus somewhat ingenuine, which can increase the perception of corporate hypocrisy (Rupp et al., 2018).

A further example that the participants frequently referred to during their interviews was the perceived gap between the Co-op's highly publicised pledge to sustainability and its realisation in the stores. The participants mentioned several examples, the most prominent of which was the high amount of food wastage.

> "Whatever wastage they have should go to someone to be used, rather than it all just get put in the bin which should not happen. But there is a lot of food wastage. I think they should put in an effort to be trying to help the community and the people because there are a lot of people that could really need that food and it's also really bad for the environment." (P1)

According to the interviewees, the Co-op has recently started to donate its food wastage to homeless charities in Manchester. This initiative has started from the shop floor as something that the employees demanded from the upper management with the argument that this should have already been happening.

They stated that the upper management is out of touch with what happens in the stores and only cares about the monetary value of the waste and not the opportunities this offers for the community.

> "I feel like it is unfortunate that it had to be started from the bottom. Especially for a company that prides itself in being ethical, it should have been doing this a lot sooner and it should have been from the top realising the problem, not just from staff in the stores." (P5)

The sentiment among the interviewees is uniform in that the Co-op does not follow through on what it advertises to its external stakeholders. Correspondingly, the food waste initiative is not implemented in all stores of the participants; in fact, only in two out of five stores waste is being donated to charity. One participant of a store where the waste is not donated has stated that, against corporate policy, they give away the wasted food for free after the late shift has finished. They argue

> "I keep all the bakery stuff. So instead of throwing out I wait until someone comes in and I just ask "Do you want this? Do you want that?" Because I am throwing things away. It's the amount of waste we produce. Each day from just a tiny store, it hurts to see that. It really is quite horrible. So if there's any way that I can give it back to those who want it or need it, I give it away." (P6)

Another aspect for which the interviewees felt a discrepancy between the advertising and implementation is the packaging of its products. While the participants acknowledged that the Co-op is turning to more sustainable packaging, they explained that they do not perceive that the actual practical side has been thought out from the responsible departments; e.g. some plastic packaging has been swapped out for cardboard packaging. While the participants contend that this seems to be a good idea in theory, it is described as counterproductive in practice. One participant exemplified that cardboard packaging becomes easily damp or does not hold the weight of its product, which means that it rips easily. Thus, more waste is being created.

These two examples of a perceived incongruence between what the Co-op communicates externally about their CSR and what is reinforced in the stores correspond with several arguments in the corporate hypocrisy literature:

1. The perception that Co-op is an ally to the LGBTQ+ community while seemingly omitting to include members that identify with being a part of this community shows a perceived contradiction.
2. All participants have perceived the Co-op’s heavily marketed pledge to zero waste and sustainability as contradictory to what happens in stores. As stated in the literature, contradictions in the CSR strategy can increase the perception of corporate hypocrisy (Rupp et al., 2018).
3. Stating that the Co-op’s communication to external stakeholders deviates from the actions in-store has left the participants perceiving it to be a bit ingenuine.

However, in CSR, credibility and authenticity are vital; if the CSR communication is not perceived to be entirely credible and authentic, perceived corporate hypocrisy can increase (Bruhn & Zimmermann, 2017). Based on these experiences, the participants have judged the Co-op as not fully fulfilling their self-imposed responsibility standards.

### *5.1.2 Employee treatment discrepancy*

According to the participants, the Co-op portrays itself as caring of and attending to its employees both internally and externally. Nevertheless, the employees emphasised that this is not the case in practice, and the messages are not being perceived as necessarily true.

> “They are putting adverts out like, “Hey, we’re great” and “We do everything for everyone”. It’s a bit frustrating sometimes. I always think of Co-op Radio as Co-op propaganda, really, because they put an advert out saying, “Oh, we’re letting our colleagues go home early to watch the football at 7:45”. But what they don’t tell you is that we also have to do exactly the same amount of work, but with two hours less to do it in. Also, a lot of the time going around the store… I probably shout “shut up” about 10 times a day to the radio, just because it is total rubbish. Some of it is alright, but you can just tell that the people are fake, really.” (P6)

All employees share this sentiment for similar reasons. One striking factor is the heavy workload that the employees must deal with. The participants described that the Co-op seems to be more invested in publicly pushing its community- and charity work while not taking the mental health of their employees seriously. Especially the four team leaders stated that the workload is increasing while, at the same time, the workforce is being reduced. Resembling the argument from P6, the team leaders have reiterated that the Co-op does not care as much about its employees as it publicly expresses. The participants annotated that the Co-op has recently eliminated the role of "customer team manager", also known as assistant store manager after the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to be under control in the UK. However, this was not communicated to the team leaders prior, as shown in the quote:

> "So recently, they've turned around and said to all team leaders that you get this big pay rise and then, all of a sudden, they get rid of all team managers, which means that all the team leaders are doing more work. Which makes me think, you've paid me this extra one pound, but you haven't told me the full extent of why you'll pay me this. […] That wasn't the job I signed up for. And all of a sudden, you've just made my job about, I would say, about 30 – 40 per cent harder. And then you expect me to do the charitable things on top. We just don't have the time to put that into our daily routine, along with all the extra stuff we have to do." (P3)

Another participant emphasised that the decision to eliminate the role of customer team manager had widened the gap between head office and the stores, cutting an essential link in the information chain.

> "I think with the Co-op getting rid of the team managers, they're only drifting further away from us because having a team manager and a store manager really helped with being able to understand what they wanted from the top or what we could communicate back up to the top. But now it is only store manager and team leaders. It basically just cuts another link really between the community and everything at the top. We are at the bottom, really." (P6)

While all participants are somewhat aware of what their employer is engaged in terms of community work, they can only name one charity to which the Co-op contributes actively, namely MIND. MIND is a large mental health charity that aims to help everyone with mental health problems to receive advice and support (MIND, 2021). In this aspect, the employees accentuated and criticised the contradiction between the Co-op to raising much awareness about their partnership with a mental health charity while simultaneously not taking the mental health of their employees seriously. This contradiction adds to the two previously elaborated contradictions between what the Co-op says and does, supporting Rupp et al.'s (2018) research findings that if contractions occur in CSR strategies, an organisation can be perceived as hypocritical. None of the interviewees felt that they could talk to their managers about their mental health struggles or ask for days off to recover.

> "I've not had a single sick day during the pandemic, and I am suffering from extreme stress at the minute. There's so much going on in my life where I'm super stressed. If my mental health took a crash, I wouldn't feel like I could go to the store manager because I feel that they would personally not understand that much […] So that's one thing where I would just say, 'yeah, you are supporting the MIND charity, but you are not supporting your own employees that way then." (P6)

Additionally, the participants contended that employees with mental health disorders do not seem to be included in upper management positions despite the Co-op's publicly communicated value of inclusion and equality. However, one participant explicitly stated that they tried to challenge this view. They have stated that they have autism spectrum disorder and have recently been made team leader in a store. Although they felt that mental health inclusion in the lower management is possible, although very difficult, they perceive the Co-op as welcoming of all people.

The quotes from this part of the analysis show a gap between what the Co-op advertises about how it treats its employees and what the employees perceive to be happening in practice. Studies show that employees who perceived their employer's social responsibility as authentic showed signs of higher engagement and felt that their employer cared more about their well-being (Mirvis, 2012). That is not the case in this study. The findings indicate that the perceived discrepancy between the Co-op's public commitment to employees' well-being and the actual treatment of the participants results in perceived double standards, which can increase the perceived corporate hypocrisy further (Goswami et al., 2018).

## 5.2 Engagement

According to the interviewees, the motivation levels to initiate or engage in any form of CSR activities are low. Three frequently mentioned reasons emerged: the lack of information or tedious information, the perceived communication-activity discrepancy, and the heavy workload. One participant reiterated that they could not contribute to the Co-op's identity because they do not have any information about the identity.

> "It's only my job, so I will make the store look good, but I'm not going to go out of my way to try and push this identity that I myself don't fully know about." (P2)

This is unfortunate since, according to the participants, some customers seem interested in it. Furthemore, this shows that the participant does not have an answer to the fundamental question "Who are we as an organisation?" of organisational identity. This question guides organisational identification and strategic actions, explaining the lack of both among the participants. No participants and only one store were actively engaged in any CSR activities. One participant stated that they once dressed up for collecting money in the store, but they would not organise anything themselves because the store is not invested. If the store is not participating in CSR efforts it is due to store managers not being interested in CSR activities. The participants stated that if they were to receive more information and encouragement from the management, they would be inclined to feel more motivated. As mentioned before in section 3.2, leadership plays a central role in the identification process of employees due to its potential influencing properties (Knippenberg, 2016). Effective and inspiring leadership is essential in engaging employees in CSR activities. Leaders have the ability to influence the sensemaking of their subordinates by constructing and guiding the understandings and interpretations of an event (van Knippenberg, 2016). Leaders must give sense to employees about the organisation's vision, mission and goals since they contribute to the employees understanding of their organisational context (Hackman, 2002) through role modelling, inspiring employees to enact, and consistent communication (Corley & Gioia, 2004).

Moreover, leaders must consider employees' needs and provide feedback (He & Brown, 2013). However, the findings reveal several deviations. First, by neglecting to communicate with its employees about their values, identity, vision and mission, the management of the Co-op exacerbates the employees' sensemaking as to what degree they align with the features of the organisation, simply because the employees are not aware of the features. Secondly, as described by P6, the eradication of a management position in the store has erased an opportunity in access to information and upper management and has reduced the opportunity for feedback to the upper management by half.

Moreover, the participants emphasised that the heavy workload puts much pressure on them, and there is no time and energy left to push the charity work on top. One participant noted that they tried to actively advocate for the Co-op and its community and sustainability work; however, due to the increasing workload and subsequent mental stress, they are no longer motivated to do so.

> "… there's a lot of pressure to get the basics done right. Then adding the charity stuff on top of that, it's just a bit ridiculous, you know? And when we're short-staffed in the first place, we're not going to be worrying about the details like charity." (P3)

This supports previous research, which shows that employees who perceive CSR as being another task on top of their work tasks are unlikely to derive meaning from it and thus are less likely to feel engaged (Bakker et al., 2007; Aguinis & Glavas, 2019).

Furthermore, the perceived extensive amount of marketing about the Co-op's charity work is another aspect that decreased the motivation levels.

> "I just feel like the radio crams it down people's throats all the time. The last thing they want is me going up to them being CHARITY!, you know." (P3, emphasis added)

## 5.3 Perceived credibility

In terms of the perceived credibility of the Co-op's communication, the participants are of different opinions. While one participant stated that the communication is credible because they can see that the Co-op positively contributes to the community, others seem to be more indecisive, as the following quote shows:

> "I would say it's credible to some extent, but you do sometimes read it and think that they are just doing this to look good. Sometimes you get the feeling that it is them just trying to sort of make it look like they are doing the right thing." (P3)

Two participants reiterate that the Co-op is "riding on [the] success stories of some employees" (P3) or hop on the bandwagon of current talked about and highly mediatised topics (P5). They argued that their communication is credible to some extent because the right intentions exist, but their execution is not always viable. One participant clearly stated that the communication is not credible because they perceive that it is all about profits, similar to other businesses. By drawing on the example of the football European Championship finals, the participant argued:

> "They only did that because they knew they were going to make money anyway. They wouldn't have done it if they knew that they weren't going to earn any money. So it's all about the profit for them, but they'll twist it in a way where it seems as they're doing it for the employees first." (P6)

However, this participant also reiterated that the communication could be credible because the Co-op seems to care enough for the people and environment. They reasoned that by showing the moral side of its actions, the communication could become more feasible.

## 5.4 Summary

Similar to Wagner et al.'s (2009) study, which indicated that stakeholders perceive a company to be more hypocritical if it acts contrary to what it claims, the participants brought up three aspects which they questioned the most in terms of their credibility.

First, the communication of its green agenda and sustainability pledge is not perceived to be fully honest due to high amounts of uncollected waste, ill-considered product developments, leading to more waste and corporate policies that prohibit giving away wasted food. Secondly, the perception that the Co-op portrays its allyship to the LGBTQ+ community has been perceived as a bandwagon effect due to the community becoming louder and more visible, offering a platform for publicity.

Lastly, the perceived lack of interest in the wellbeing of its employees while publicly supporting mental health charities has been criticised frequently. This contradiction between internal and external communication can decrease trust and credibility and thus increase the feeling of hypocrisy and can ultimately damage an organisation's reputation or operations (Glozer & Morsing, 2020; Rupp et al., 2018). In this case, the employees described themselves as demotivated, indifferent, and unenthusiastic to CSR activities or any activities that are not strictly job-related.

Looking at the aspects that have been brought up, it appears that some interviewees perceive the Co-op's CSR strategy to be hypocritical while others do not. Everyone's perception is their overall experience, belief and sensemaking on which their construction and interpretation of meanings rest (Teck et al., 2020). For example, the employees have frequently criticised the high amounts of food waste which is not donated or otherwise used. All participants identified as being sustainable and environmentally-conscious. Similarly, the Co-op promotes that it is sustainable (e.g. cardboard packaging, growing vegetarian food range) and committed to zero waste. However, the participants have stated that the gap between what the Co-op promotes and what happens in-store has decreased their perception of alignment between their values and those of the Co-op. This poses a tension which triggers the sensemaking process. The participants actively noticed that too much edible food was discarded and concluded that the food can be donated to a charity. Through the implementation of their idea, the participants have contributed to the CSR strategy and created meaning for themselves.

In the mentioned three examples, the employees face a tension between their morals (sustainability/environmental values, allyship/inclusion, mental health support/communal values) and what they perceive to be marketing. This tension triggers the sensemaking process because their values shape how they perceive the world, which increases meaningfulness (Hahn et al., 2014; Aguinis & Glavas, 2017). Since the employees in this study have perceived that their values and the Co-op's actions do not fully align, less meaning is created, resulting in apathy, demotivation, and boredom and a decreased feeling of engagement in CSR activities. Because values are an essential source of meaningfulness, the decreased value alignment can result in a poor perception of attractiveness of the organisation and a low level of pride, which potentially decreases organisational identification (Dutton et al., 1994).

Furthermore, the participants described that they feel unvalued, replaceable and unessential to the organisation due to being at the low end of the company structure. One participant has pointed out that there is a gap between the upper management, office workers and the employees in the stores, stating that they believe that the office workers are being treated better and might thus be more attached to the Co-op as a brand and to its activities. Accordingly, none of the participants experiences any form of compassion towards working for the Co-op, despite its reputation as a socially responsible company. This shows that they are not emotionally and intellectually committed (Bamruk, 2004). All refer to it as being only a job for "another capitalist supermarket" (P2), "huge conglomerate" (P6), "big chain business" (P1) and "just another big brand" (P1) that does differ from other retailers but not by much (P5). Consequently, the participants do not seem to be psychologically attached to the employees in the head office or the Co-op in general. Since identification is the psychological connection of members with a group, and the participants do not perceive to be connected, the identification is low (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

A further factor that can influence organisational identification is the feeling of pride in working for the organisation (Dutton et al., 1994). Pride is created when the employees perceive that their values align with the organisation's and when the internal and external image align (Dutton et al., 1994). However, both values and images do not align, according to the participants, which explains why none of the participants feel proud to work for the Co-op:

> "I just feel like there's a lot more to it because we do these surveys and one of the questions is 'do you feel proud to tell others that you work for Co-op?' and it's just like, no, not really. Because they don't make you feel special." (P6)

Furthermore, the lack of identification can be a reason why none of the participants identified as a face of the company, as exemplified in the following quote:

> "The face of the company is always your smiley, shiny person that is handpicked from a store. But that's really not what it's like. [...] I'd say that like most of the co-op community, unless you are the one doing the charity events yourself and going there, you're not the face of it." (P2)

This quote shows a psychological disconnection to the Co-op. The participant states that the employees portrayed as the face of the company resemble perfect examples of employees both in appearance and commitment to community causes. As has been established before, no participant is engaged in any CSR activity, which is why they do not perceive to be the face of the Co-op or the link between the Co-op and the customers.

If the Co-op implemented the participants' suggestions, i.e. started to communicate to the employees regularly and consistently and more similar to the external communication strategy, the perception of corporate hypocrisy could decrease. If the employees perceive the communication as more authentic, the internal image could improve and align with the external image. This can increase the feeling of pride in working for the Co-op, indicating that the employees are psychologically connected to the organisation. That way, the employees' identification with the organisation may become stronger, ultimately leaving to higher engagement in job-specific tasks and CSR could be developed (Bhattacharya et al., 2008).

## 5.5 Suggested improvements and opportunities

From the interviews, one aspect was frequently brought up; the participants want to be engaged and wish for more information, more enthusiasm, passion and compassion. Furthermore, they wish to be regularly encouraged by their management to make it natural for the employees to talk to customers about social and environmental activities.

In this regard, the interviewees offered some insights into their desired improvements. All employees wished for better communication and more information that would enable them to become more involved in the CSR activities. Moreover, they stated that receiving direct information is preferred since that would decrease the information access imbalance and eliminate the dependency on the store manager or management team to communicate the information. Consequently, the possibility of information getting lost on the way down to the employees is limited. A reoccurring pattern throughout all interviews was that the participants wanted to be kept updated about ongoing community and charity work and being involved in sustainable activities in the shop. That way, they would feel more motivated to advocate for the activities and the Co-op as a brand. Furthermore, it would enable them to better communicate with their customers and play a more significant part in the community, as shown in the following quote:

> "The communication to the stores doesn't tend to be that great with new things happening. I would like to receive more information. I do feel like it will be better for customers to know as well as staff. We might be able to take larger part in communities. I feel like as well, the more knowledge we have the better for us and customers." (P5)

Similarly, P7 summarises

> "I guess that way we could also get people more involved. It only takes them to tell a couple of people and then they tell someone, they tell someone. So yeah, I feel like a small change could make a big difference." (P7)

Through the interaction with external stakeholders, meaning is created and identity is formed (Corley et al., 2006). These wishes support what the literature indicates as having a positive effect on employee contribution to and engagement in CSR activities. Notably, the need for more and concise communication to employees is essential when the company wants to mitigate the degree of perceived corporate hypocrisy (Goswami et al., 2018; Rupp et al., 2018). Furthermore, it must be free of contradictions and double standards. That means what the company says and what it does must be aligned (Glozer & Morsing, 2020), and the concerns and expectations of all stakeholders must be considered when aiming for efficient communication strategies (Talonen et al., 2017). The quote by P7 points out the importance of employees in communicating responsible behaviours to customers. They reiterate that through more efficient communication to the employees, they can interact with customers, who can then communicate to further public members. This proposition supports Dawkins's (2005) research findings by underlining that managers still do not acknowledge employees' power in communicating with external stakeholders. Similarly, as shown in the quote above by P5, employees are a crucial and credible source of information for customers since the most effective communication is distributed via word of mouth and through the information exchange between employees and customers (Dawkins, 2005). By updating employees regularly, employees can respond to customer questions and advocate for the Co-op's community and charity work and its contribution to sustainable operations and activities.

Participants also agreed that the communication needs to become snappier, more engaging and to the point. The preferred channels of receiving communication are via email or text message and briefings in store. Some interviewees stated that they want to receive the same amount and content of information that is communicated to external stakeholders as this is anticipated to give more of an "urge to get involved" (P7). Furthermore, they wished for notice boards in staff rooms and calendars with upcoming activities. That way, all employees would have access to the information, including those who do not have the technological means.

The data clearly shows that the participants have not yet been acknowledged as the most important stakeholder group in the Co-op's environment. The participants perceive the information as scarce and meaningless, leading to demotivation and lack of passion and enthusiasm to participate in CSR activities. The findings support Goswami et al.'s (2018) study, demonstrating that employers must consider their employees' perception of their CSR efforts; otherwise, they can become ineffective due to potential decreased engagement and negative attitudes.

# 6. Discussion

The study problematised that there is still limited and contradictory evidence on how employees perceive their employer's CSR activities, the communication thereof, and the insufficiency of understandings in employees' perceptions and their impacts on employee behaviour. This research paper addressed employees' perceptions of their employer's external communication and investigated how this might affect their identification with their organisation and engagement in CSR activities. In doing so, it aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do employees of the retail division of a large co-operative perceive their employer's CSR communication?

RQ2: How does the perception of CSR communication affect employees' organisational identity and employee engagement?

The results of this qualitative study show that it is ever more important to acknowledge employees as one, if not the most important stakeholder group of an organisation in achieving a successful CSR strategy. The findings underline existing research that contends that organisations must communicate consistently to all stakeholders and consider their concerns and expectations if they want to profit from their CSR initiatives (Dawkins, 2005; Talonen et al., 2017). According to the literature and the responses from the interview participants, lack of or inconsistent communication is the cause for several undesired outcomes, such as decreased organisational identification, negative attitude towards work and decreased engagement in CSR activities (Ditlev-Simonsen, 2015; Bhattacharya et al., 2008). The identified problematic aspects and consequences are delineated in the following.

The participants' lack of internal information about the Co-op's external CSR efforts was the most talked-about aspect. All participants stated that they were somewhat aware of the ongoing community work but could not name any current charities but one. So much so that some participants turned to the Co-op's external communication channels and colleagues from other stores for information. Managers responsible for the CSR strategy neglect employees' influence on external stakeholders by neglecting internal communication channels. The findings show that the participants are left unable to engage in customer interactions or respond to questions about ongoing CSR initiatives.

However, the participants also stated that receiving more and consistent information is not enough. They argued that what is being publicly communicated must also be reinforced in the stores. Since this appears not to be the case, the participants perceived the external CSR communication as somewhat ingenuine or incredible, especially in their pledge to sustainability, LGBTQ+ allyship and well-being of their employees. The literature shows that ingenuine or inauthentic communication can lead to an increased level of perceived corporate hypocrisy, which was underlined in this study. However, perceived corporate hypocrisy is subjective as it relies on individual sensemaking, which explains the varying levels among the participants (Ditlev-Simonsen, 2015). The participants perceived that their values and the Co-op's actions do not fully align, resulting in apathy, demotivation, and boredom and a decreased feeling of engagement in CSR activities. Furthermore, the decreased value alignment might also result in the decreased feeling of pride in working for the Co-op, which ultimately might lessen organisational identification.

The participants elaborated that they wished for more, directly addressed, regular information about the Co-op's social and environmental responsibilities and encouragement by their managers to get involved in CSR activities. They furthermore wished that the Co-op's reinforcements of their CSR activities would meet the high level of self-imposed and publicly advertised standards. The participants stated that they perceive it to be challenging to identify as being a face of the company due to feeling undervalued, insignificant, replaceable and at the low end of the company hierarchy to which adequate communication is seemingly not prioritised by the responsible communication manager(s). This supports the following existing literature: First, the level of engagement is low in all participants. They reiterated that they feel unmotivated, indifferent and without passion towards their job, their employer, and the CSR initiatives and are not emotionally committed to either. The participants' disengagement reflects a "decoupling of the self within the role" (Kular et al., 2008, p. 4) and in automatic, robotic and effortless role performance (Kahn, 1990).

Second, the participants contended that their values and those of the Co-op do not align due to the perceived gap between what the Co-op says and what it does. Value alignment is a crucial factor that influences the identification with an organisation. For example, all participants defined themselves as sustainable, which is one possible answer to the question “Who am I” (identity). Although the Co-op also identifies as sustainable, the participants, although to a varying degree among them, do not perceive their employer as sustainable as it claims due to high amounts of wastage and product developments that produce more waste. Hence, the degree to which the participants identify with the organisation is incongruent with how they identify themselves. The lack of interest of the store managers in community work furthermore influences organisational identification because leaders shape how employees understand the organisational settings (Knippenberg, 2016). Both value alignment and leadership style can impact how employees perceive the internal and external image. In this case, the participants have expressed that they do not perceive both images to be coinciding, with the external image outweighing the internal image in terms of attractiveness. An inconsistent alignment of the images may also decrease organisational identification (Dutton et al., 1994). Overall, research indicates that organisational identification can impact the contribution to CSR activities, meaning that lower identification results in less contribution to CSR and vice versa (Tian & Robertson, 2019).

In conclusion, this thesis exemplifies that employees’ perception of their employer’s external CSR communication influences employee behaviour. The findings of this research paper resemble those of previously mentioned research; first, the data suggest that irregular, uninformative, automatic, and discouraging communication without any clear message can negatively impact organisational identification and employee engagement in CSR activities. Furthermore, it shows that significant differences in the amount and content in the output of CSR communication between the external and internal communication channels leave the participants feeling unimportant and unvalued. Lastly, the perceived gap between what their company promotes extensively to external stakeholders and what is reinforced within the company in CSR activities affects the degree to which employees perceive their firm to be hypocritical.

Taking everything under consideration, it becomes clear that the Co-op is losing out on the potentially positive impacts and opportunities of employees’ engagement in CSR activities by not picking up on the wishes of the employees to be involved in the activities.

## 6.1 Contribution

Most of the existing research in employees' perception of the external CSR communication of their employer rests on quantitative research methods. So far, little attention has been paid to employees' in-depth sensemaking processes. This research paper is of a qualitative nature and is based on seven semi-structured in-depth interviews. It aimed to gather in-depth information about the participants' sensemaking, experiences and overall understanding of themselves in the context of their workplace and stimulated by the communication of their employer.

The study contributes to theoretical and practical understandings about the importance of employees as key stakeholders in CSR communication strategies. This paper contributes to the slowly growing research interest into employee perceptions of and responses to external CSR initiatives from a theoretical perspective. Furthermore, this study adds to the debate between researchers about whether enough research exists to form conclusions about whether the perceptions about CSR influence employee behaviour such as engagement and organisational identification. On the practical side, this study added to the argumentation of previous literature in that managers do not involve employees in the development and execution of CSR strategies. The results show that the participants wish to be kept informed and encouraged to become involved in CSR strategies.

## 6.2 Limitations

The study at hand is a small-scale study based on a single organisation, The Co-operative Group in the UK and geographically constrained to northern England. The study focuses on customer team members and team leaders who do not have the same access to information as the store and (former) assistant managers. The managers' perspectives have not been considered in this study, nor have any Co-op employees that do not work in a food retail store. The study focused on the food division since this is the largest division in the Co-operative Group. Thus, findings from other divisions might differ.

That means that this study is not representative of employees across different hierarchical levels, other than food retail co-operatives within the Co-operative Group nor other areas across the United Kingdom. It also has to be taken into account that results between urban and rural Co-ops may differ.

# 7. References


Ackerman, L. D. (2000). *Identity Is Destiny: Leadership and the Roots of Value Creation*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Albert, S. & Whetten, D. A. (1985). Organizational Identity. In . L. Cummings and B. M. Straw (Eds.), *Research in Organizational Behavior* (263–95). JAI Press.

Alvesson, M. (2011). *Interpreting interviews*. London: Sage.

Alvesson, M. & Deetz, S. A. (2006.). *Critical theory and postmodernism approaches to organizational studies*. SAGE Publications Inc. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.4135/9781848608030.n8

Ashforth, B. E., Harrison, S. H., & Corley, K. G. (2008). Identification in Organizations: An Examination of Four Fundamental Questions. *Journal of Management*, *34*(3), 325–374. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206308316059

Ashforth, B. E. & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review*, *14(*1), 20–39.

Aguinis, H. (2011). Organizational responsibility: Doing good and doing well. In S. Zedeck (Ed.), *APA handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (Vol. 3, pp. 855-879). American Psychological Association.

Aguinis, H., & Glavas, A. (2012). What We Know and Don’t Know About Corporate Social Responsibility: A Review and Research Agenda. *Journal of Management, 38*(4), 932–968. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206311436079

Aguinis, H., & Glavas, A. (2019). On Corporate Social Responsibility, Sensemaking, and the Search for Meaningfulness Through Work. *Journal of Management*, *45*(3), 1057–1086. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206317691575

Allen, M., & SpringerLink (Online service). (2016). *Strategic Communication for Sustainable Organizations. Theory and Practice*. Springer International Publishing.

Bailey, C., Madden, A., Alfes, K., Shantz, A., & Soane, E. (2017). The mismanaged soul: Existential labor and the erosion of meaningful work. *Human Resource Management Review*, *27*(3), 416–430. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1016/j.hrmr.2016.11.001

Berg, B. L. (2001). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (4. ed.). Allyn and Bacon.

Berger, I. E., Cunningham, P. H., & Drumwright, M. E. (2007). Mainstreaming Corporate Social Responsibility: Developing Markets for Virtue. *California Management Review*, *49*(4), 132–157. https://doi.org/10.2307/41166409

Bhattacharya, C. B., Sen, S., & Korschun, D. (2008). Using Corporate Social Responsibility to Win the War for Talent. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, *49*(2), 37–44.

Brammer S. J. & Pavelin, S. (2006). Corporate Reputation and Social Performance: The Importance of Fit. *Journal of Management Studies 43*, 435-455

Brammer, S., Millington, A., & Rayton, B. (2007). The contribution of corporate social responsibility to organizational commitment. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 18*(10), 1701–1719.

Brinkmann, S. (2018). Philosophies of Qualitative Research. Oxford University Press.

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *Doing interviews* (2nd edition). SAGE.

Brown, A. D., Stacey, P. & Nandhakumar, J. (2008). Making sense of sensemaking narratives. *Human Relations*, *61*(8), 1035–1062. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708094858

Bruhn, M. & Zimmermann, A. (2017). Integrated CSR Communications. In S. Diehl, M. Karmasin, B. Mueller, R. Terlutter & F. Weder (Eds.), *Handbook of Integrated CSR communication* (pp. 3-21). Springer International Publishing.

Burr, V. (2015) *Social Constructionism* (3rd edition). Routledge.

Carroll, A. B. (1999). Corporate Social Responsibility: Evolution of a Definitional Construct. *Business & Society*, *38*(3), 268–295. https://doi.org/10.1177/000765039903800303

Carroll, A. B., & Shabana, K. M. ( 2010 ). The business case for corporate social responsibility: A review of concepts, research and practice. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *12*(1), 85–105. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2370.2009.00275.x

Charmaz, K. (2001). *Grounded Theory: Methodology and Theory Construction.*

Chen, Y.-R., & Hung-Baesecke, C.-J. (2014). Examining the Internal Aspect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Leader Behavior and Employee CSR Participation. *Communication Research Reports*, *31*(2), 210–220.

Chong, M. (2007). The Role of Internal Communication and Training in Infusing Corporate Values and Delivering Brand Promise: Singapore Airlines' Experience. *Corporate Reputation Review*, *10*(3), 201–212. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550051

Christensen, L. T. & Askegaard, S. (2001). Corporate identity and corporate image revisited - A semiotic perspective. *European Journal of Marketing, 35*(3/4), 292-315.

Christensen, L. T., Morsing, M. & Cheney, G. (2008). *Corporate Communications: Convention, complexity and critique*. Sage.

Commission of the European Communities. (2001). *Green Paper "Promoting a European framework for corporate social responsibility*." Brussels: COM(2001) 366 final.

Corley, K. G. & Gioia, D. A. (2004). Identity Ambiguity and Change in the Wake of a Corporate Spin-Off. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *49*(2), 173–208.

Corley, K. G., Harquail, C. V., Pratt, M. G., Glynn, M. A., Fiol, M., & Hatch, M. J. (2006). Guiding organizational identity through aged adolescence. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *15*, 85-99

Cornelissen, J. (2017). *Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. Sage.

Co-op (2020). *What is a co-op*. https://www.uk.coop/understanding-co-ops/what-co-op

Co-op (n.d.). *Co-op Values*. https://www.co-operative.coop/about-us/values

Co-op (n.d.). *Homepage*. https://www.coop.co.uk

Czarniawska, B. (2004). *Narratives in social science research*. SAGE Publications, Ltd https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781849209502

David, P., Kline, S., & Dai, Y. (2005). Corporate social responsibility practices, corporate identity: and purchase intention: A dual-process model. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 17*(3), 291–313. DOI: 10.1207/s1532754xjprr1703_4

Dhanesh, G. S. (2014). CSR as organization-employee relationship management strategy: A case study of socially responsible information technology companies in India. *Management Communication Quarterly, 28*(1), 130–149.

Dawkins, J. (2005). Corporate responsibility: The communication challenge. *Journal of Communication Management*, *9*(2), 108–119. doi:10.1108/13632540510621362

Denscombe, M. (2017). *The good research guide for small-scale social research projects.* Open University Press.

Ditlev-Simonsen, C. (2015). The Relationship Between Norwegian and Swedish Employees' Perception of Corporate Social Responsibility and Affective Commitment. *Business & Society*, *54*(2), 229-253.

Ditlev-Simonsen, C. & Brøgger, B. (2013). CSR and Employee Motivation. In A Midttun (Ed.), *CSR and Beyond – A Nordic Perspective* (pp 117-134). Cappelen Damm AS; ISBN 978-82-02-41215-9

Du, S., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2007). Reaping relational rewards from corporate social responsibility: The role of competitive positioning. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *24(3)*, 224–241.

Du, S., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2010). Maximizing business returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR): *The role of CSR communication. International Journal of Management Reviews, 12*(1), 8–19. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2370.2009.00276.x

Duthler, G., & Dhanesh, G. S. (2018). The role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and internal CSR communication in predicting employee engagement: Perspectives from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). *Public Relations Review*, *44*(4), 453–462. doi: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.04.001

Dutton, J. E., Dukerich, J. M., & Harquail, C. V. (1994). Organizational Images and Member Identification. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *39*(2), 239–263. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.2307/2393235

Elkington, J. (1997). The Triple Bottom Line. Sustainability's Accountants. In M. V. Russo (Ed.), *Environmental Management: Readings and Cases* (pp. 49-68). Sage Publications.

Falco, A., & Gandhi, S. (2020). The Rainbow Business. *Eidos*, *9*(1), 104-107.

Falkheimer, J. & Heide, M. (2018). *Strategic Communication: An Introduction*. Routledge.

Flick, U. (2007). *Designing qualitative research*. SAGE Publications, Ltd https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781849208826

Flick, U. (2018). The Sage handbook of qualitative data collection. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Freeman, I., & Hasnaoui, A. (2011). The meaning of corporate social responsibility: The vision of four nations. *Journal of Business Ethics,100*(3), 419–443.

Fombrun, C.J. (1996). *Reputation: Realizing Value from the Corporate Image*. Harvard Business School Press.

Gergen, K. J. (2009). *An Invitation to Social Construction*. Sage.

Gioia, D. A. & Hamilton, A. L. (2016). Great Debates in Organizational Identity Study. In M. G. Pratt, M. Schultz, B. E. Ashforth & D. Ravasi (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Identity* (pp 21-38). DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199689576.013.25

Glozer, S., & Morsing, M. (2020). Helpful hypocrisy? Investigating 'double-talk' and irony in CSR marketing communications. *Journal of Business Research*, *114,* 363–375. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.08.048

Golob, U., & Bartlett, J. L. (2007). Communicating about corporate social responsibility: A comparative study of CSR reporting in Australia and Slovenia. *Public Relations Review*, *33*(1), 1–9. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.11.001

Gond, J., El Akremi, A., Swaen, V., & Babu, N. (2017). The psychological microfoundations of corporate social responsibility: A person-centric systematic review. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *38*(2), 225–246. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.217

Goswami, S., Ha-Brookshire, J. & Bonifay, W. (2018). Measuring Perceived Corporate Hypocrisy: Scale Development in the Context of U.S. Retail Employees. *Sustainability 2018*, *10*(12), 4756. doi:10.3390/su10124756

Gray, R., Owen, D. & Maunders, K.T. (1987). *Corporate Social Reporting: Accounting and Accountability*. Prentice Hall.

Hackman, J. R. (2002). *Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances*. Harvard Business Press.

Halal, W. E. (2001). The collaborative enterprise - A stakeholder model uniting profitability and responsibility. *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, Summer 2001, 27-42.

Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2002). The Dynamics of Organizational Identity. H*uman Relations, 55*(8), 989–1018. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726702055008181

Haynes, K. (2012). Reflexivity in qualitative research. In G. Symon, & C. Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative organizational research* (pp 72-89). SAGE Publications, Inc., https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781526435620.n5

He, H., & Brown, A. D. (2013). Organizational Identity and Organizational Identification: A Review of the Literature and Suggestions for Future Research. *Group & Organization Management*, *38*(1), 3–35. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601112473815

Helms Mills, J. (2003). *Making Sense of Organizational Change*. Routledge, London, UK.

Helms Mills, J., Thurlow, A. & Mills, A.J. (2010). Making sense of sensemaking: the critical sensemaking approach. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, *5*(2), 182-195. https://doi.org/10.1108/17465641011068857

Hernes, T. & Maitlis, S. (2010). Process, Sensemaking, and Organizing. In S. Maitlis, & T. Hernes (Eds), *Process, sensemaking, and organizing* (pp 1-12). Oxford University Press.

Jussila, I., Tuominen, P., & Kotonen, U. (2007). Customer-owned firms and the concept of regional responsibility: Qualitative evidence from finnish co-operatives. *Social Responsibility Journal, 3*(3), 35–43.

Kahn, W. (1990). Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work. *The Academy of Management Journal, 33*(4), 692-724. doi:10.2307/256287

Kang, C., Germann, F., & Grewal, R. (2016). Washing Away Your Sins? Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Social Irresponsibility, and Firm Performance. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(2), 59–79. https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0324

Kim, A., Kim, Y., Han, K., Jackson, S. E., & Ployhart, R. E. (2017). Multilevel influences on voluntary workplace green behavior: Individual differences, leader behavior, and coworker advocacy. *Journal of Management, 43*, 1335–1358. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206314547386

Kudesia, R. (2017). Organizational Sensemaking. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology.*

Laufer, W. S. (2003). Social Accountability and Corporate Greenwashing. *Journal of Business Ethics, 43*(3), 253–261

Lee, Y. Toward a Communality with Employees: The Role of CSR Types and Internal Reputation. *Corp Reputation Rev 23***,** 13–23 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41299-019-00069-x

Lenz, I., Wetzel, H., & Hammerschmidt, M. (2017). Can doing good lead to doing poorly? Firm value implications of CSR in the face of CSI. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 45*(5), 677–697. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-016-0510-9

Lin-Hi, N. & Müller, K. (2013). The CSR bottom line: Preventing corporate social irresponsibility. *Journal of Business Research, 66*(10) 1928-1936

Linneberg, M.S., & Korsgaard, S. (2019). Coding Qualitative Data: A Synthesis Guiding the Novice. *Qualitative Research Journal, 19*, 259-270.

Lips-Wiersma, M., Haar, J., & Wright, S. (2020). The Effect of Fairness, Responsible Leadership and Worthy Work on Multiple Dimensions of Meaningful Work. *Journal of Business Ethics, 161*(1), 35–52.

Mayer, D. M., Kuenzi, M., Greenbaum, R., Bardes, M., & Salvador, R. B. (2009). How low does ethical leadership flow? Test of a trickle-down model. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 108*(1), 1–13.

McWilliams, A. & Siegel, D. (2001). Corporate Social Responsibility: A Theory of the Firm Perspective. *Academy of Management Review, 26*(1), 117–27.

Mertens, D. M. (2018). Ethics of Qualitative Data Collection. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative data collection* (pp 33-48). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Mills, C. (2002). Distributions and what it means to be a co-operative. *Journal of Cooperative Studies, 34*(3), 173–181.

Mirvis, P. (2012). Employee Engagement and CSR: Transactional, Relational, and Developmental Approaches. *California Management Review, 54*(4), 93-117.

Nazir, O., & Islam, J. U. (2020). Effect of CSR activities on meaningfulness, compassion, and employee engagement: A sense-making theoretical approach. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *90*. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102630

Nielsen, A. E. & Johansen, T., S. (2009). Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Identity: Potentials for Disciplinary Cross-Fertilization within Research and Teaching. In K. Podnar & J. Balmer (Eds.), *Contemplating Corporate Marketing, Identity and Communication*. Routledge.

Opoku-Dakwa, A., Chen, C. C., & Rupp, D. E. (2016). CSR initiative characteristics and employee engagement: An impact-based perspective. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 39*(5), 580–593. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1002/job.2281

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Hoagwood, K., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., & Duan, N. (2015). Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, *42*(5), 533–544. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Sage Publications.

Ravasi, D. (2016). Organizational Identity, Culture, and Image. In M. G. Pratt, M. Schultz, B. E. Ashforth & D. Ravasi (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Identity* (pp 65-78). DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199689576.013.25

Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research : a resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*. Blackwell.

Rodrigo, P. & Arenas, D. (2008). Do Employees Care About CSR Programs? A Typology of Employees According to their Attitudes. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *83*(2), 265–283. DOI 10.1007/s10551-007-9618-7

Rupp, D. E. (2011). An employee-centered model of organizational justice and social responsibility. *ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY REVIEW*, *1*(1), 72–94. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1177/2041386610376255

Rupp, D. E., Ganapathi, J., Aguilera, R. V., & Williams, C. A. (2006). Employee reactions to corporate social responsibility: An organizational justice framework. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 27*(4), 537-543.

Rupp, D., Wright, P., Aryee, S., & Luo, Y. (2011). Special Issue on 'Behavioral Ethics, Organizational Justice, and Social Responsibility across Contexts'. *Management and Organization Review, 7*(2), 385-387. doi:10.1017/S1740877600002515

Rupp, D. E., Shao, R., Skarlicki, D. P., Paddock, E. L., Tae-Yeol Kim, & Nadisic, T. (2018). Corporate social responsibility and employee engagement: The moderating role of CSR-specific relative autonomy and individualism. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *39*(5), 559–579. doi:10.1002/job.2282.

Saarijärvi, M. & Bratt, E. L. (2021). When face-to-face interviews are not possible: tips and tricks for video, telephone, online chat, and email interviews in qualitative research, *European Journal of Cardiovascular Nursing*, *20*(4), 392–396. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1093/eurjcn/zvab038

Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage Publications.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2007). *Research methods for business students* (Fourth edition). Financial Times/Prentice Hall.

Schaefer, S. D., Terlutter, R. & Diehl, S. (2020). Talking about CSR matters: employees' perception of and reaction to their company's CSR communication in four different CSR domains. I*nternational Journal of Advertising*, 39(2), 191-212. DOI:10.1080/02650487.2019.159373

Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., González-romá, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The Measurement of Engagement and Burnout: A Two Sample Confirmatory Factor Analytic Approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *3*(1), 71–92. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1023/A:1015630930326

Schlegelmilch, B. B. & Pollach, I. (2005). The Perils and Opportunities of Communicating Corporate Ethics. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *21*(3–4), 267–290. https://doi.org/10.1362/0267257053779154

Shklar, J. N. (1984). *Ordinary Vices*. Belknap.

Spradley, J.P (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston

Stake, R. E. (2010). *Qualitative research. Studying how things work*. Guilford Press.

Swanborn, P. (2010). *Case study research*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Talonen, A., Jussila, I., Saarijärvi, H., & Rintamäki, T. (2016). Consumer cooperatives: uncovering the value potential of customer ownership. *AMS Review*, *6*(3–4), 142–156.

Tang, J., Sipiläinen, T. & Fu., G. (2020). How Could Cooperatives Successfully Develop Their Social Responsibility: The Perspective of Life Cycle. *Sustainability*, *12*(9282), 9282. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.3390/su12219282

Teck, T. S., Ayadurai, S., Chua, W., Liang, T. P., & Sorooshian, S. (2020). Sensemaking Corporate Social Responsibility, Reflexive Organisational Change and Moral Transpose, the Case of Volkswagen "Diesel Dupe" Crisis. *Journal of Management and Sustainability*, *10*(1), 66–82.

Tench, R. & Yeomans, L. (2014). *Exploring Public Relations*. Pearson Education.

Tench, R. (2014). Community and society: corporate social responsibility (CSR). In R. Tench & L. Yeomans (Eds.), *Exploring Public Relations* (3rd ed., pp. 97-116). Pearson Education.

Tian, Q. & Robertson, J. L. . (2019). How and When Does Perceived CSR Affect Employees' Engagement in Voluntary Pro-environmental Behavior? *Journal of Business Ethics*, *155*(2), 399–412. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1007/s10551-017-3497-3

Tuominen, P., Syrjä, P., Sjögrén, H. & Tuominen, T. (2017). CSR activities in consumer co-operatives: Exploring the case of Finnish S Group co-operatives based on board reporting. *Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management*, *5*(2), 108-117. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcom.2017.10.002

van Knippenberg, D. (2016). Making Sense of Who We Are: leadership and organizational identity. In M. G. Pratt, M. Schultz, B. E. Ashforth & D. Ravasi (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Identity* (pp 335-350). DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199689576.013.25

Vlachos, P. A., Panagopoulos, N. G. & Rapp, A. A. (2014). Employee judgments of and behaviors toward corporate social responsibility : A multi-study investigation of direct, cascading, and moderating effects. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *35*(7), 990–1017.

Vogt, W. P., Vogt, E. R., Gardner, D. C., Haeffele, L. M. & DiDonato, T. (2014). *Selecting the Right Analyses for Your Data. Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*. Guilford Press.

Waddock, S. (2004). Parallel Universes: Companies, Academics, and the Progress of Corporate Citizenship. *Business & Society Review (00453609)*, *109*(1), 5–42. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0045-3609.2004.00002.x

Wagner, T., Lutz, R. J., & Weitz, B. A. (2009). Corporate hypocrisy: Overcoming the threat of inconsistent corporate social responsibility perceptions. *Journal of Marketing, 73*(6), 77–91.

Weick, K. E. (1979). *The Social Psychology of Organizing*. McGraw-Hill.

Weick, K.E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations.* Sage.

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization science, 16*(4), 409-421.

Yin, R. (2003). Designing case studies. *Qualitative Research Methods*, 359-386.

Young, H. R., Glerum, D. R., Wang, W., & Joseph, D. L. (2018). Who are the most engaged at work? A meta-analysis of personality and employee engagement. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 39*(10), 1330–1346. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1002/job.2303

Zerfass, A. & Huck , S. (2007). Innovation, Communication, and Leadership: New Developments in Strategic Communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 1(*2), 107-122, DOI: 10.1080/15531180701298908

# 8. Appendices

## Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Block 1: Introduction

1. Background Information
1. Role, task, shop, activities
2. How many people do you usually work with in a shift?
3. What would you say how busy with customers the ship is usually?
4. How is the atmosphere?
5. What is your role?
6. What does your typical day at work look like?

2. What is important for you in an employer?

3. Has the employer fulfilled your expectations you had/have re his behaviour?

Block 2: Main body

1. How would you describe your employer's values and what does it stand for?

    Please describe what you think the Co-op's image is like?

    How is it communicated?

    How do you perceive your role?

2. Looking inside the company, what would you say is the identity that the coop wants to have?

    How is this communicated to you?

    Do you align with that identity, values etc?

    Overall, how would you compare the internal and external communication?

3. What would you see are activities that the Co-op? (CSR activities)

Are you being informed about those activities?

Are you getting updated about ongoing / past successes (i.e. amount spent etc, people helped) and future plans?

How are you getting informed?

4. Can you think of any particular cause/activity of the coop that has led to a change or achieved anything?

5. How do you perceive the quantity of the information that you get from your superior(s)?

6. How would you describe your role?

7. Do you get the chance to give feedback? How does this feedback process look like?

8. Are you participating in any CSR activities?

To what extent do you think you are advocating for the CSR activities/the Co-op?

9. How does the interaction with customers look like?

10. How would you describe your motivation?

11. What do you think can be improved about the communication?

Block 3: Debriefing

1. Is there anything you would like to add?

## Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form

This consent form is part of the process required for ethical treatment of participants in research. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about the research process or procedures, please ask.

**Invitation to participate and research purpose**

This research paper looks at the external CSR communication perceived from an employee perspective. This research is conducted by Marie Christin Otto for her Master Thesis (SKOM12) at Lund University.

**Research Method**

If you decide to participate, I will invite you to participate in a semi-structured in-depth interview. For example, you will be asked: Can you describe the values and behaviours as communicated by your employer? How would you describe your role in the company? Your answers will be recorded and transcribe together with data from other research participants.

**Benefit**

By participating, you will contribute to a better understanding of how employees perceive the external CSR communication of their employer.

**Confidentiality - Security**

If you decide to participate, your identity as a participant in this study, and any other personal information gathered about you during the study, will be kept strictly confidential and will never be made public. All data containing personal information from which you could be identified will be deleted after the data analysis. Electronic data will be password protected. When the study is completed, all data containing personal information will be destroyed. The published results of the study will contain only data from which no individual participant can be identified.

**Voluntary participation**

You are being asked to make a voluntary decision whether or not to participate in this study. If there is any part of the information that is not clear, please feel free to ask for clarifications. If you would like to consult with someone not associated with this study that will be alright, too. If you decide not to participate, or if you later decide to discontinue your participation, your decision will not affect your present or future relations with the researchers or Lund University. Upon request, a copy of the information, data, and results will be made available to you. You will always be free to discontinue participation at any time, and all data collected up to the time of decision to leave will be destroyed without being used in the study. If you decide to participate, please provide your signature as indicated below.

**What Your Signature Means**

Your signature on this Consent Form indicates that you have understood the information regarding participation in this research project and agree to participate as a participant. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any consequences. Your continued participation should be informed as your initial consent, so you are free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Signature of Participant | Date

________________________________ ________________________________

Print Name:

________________________________

Signature of Investigator | Date

________________________________ ________________________________

Contact Information

(ma7882ot-s@student.lu.se; +46732449640)