



SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS AND
MANAGEMENT

**Gen Z's Influence on Corporate Social Responsibility within
Multinational Corporations**

*“Analysing the influence of Gen Z employees through the perspective of Gen X
Top-Management”*

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Chapter 1. Introduction	6
1.1 Research Purpose and Contribution	7
1.2 Problem Formulation	8
1.3 Research Question.....	9
1.4 Research Limitations.....	9
Chapter 2. Literature Review	11
2.1 Search Strategy.....	11
2.2 Generation Z and X.....	13
2.2.1 Gen Z and Society	14
2.2.2 Gen Z and Employment.....	14
2.2.3 Gen X and Society	15
2.2.4 Gen X and Employment	16
2.3 The Importance of CSR Within Contemporary Organisations	17
2.3.1 Aligning CSR with Gen Z Expectations.....	19
2.3.2 CSR & Recruitment Strategies	20
2.4 Stakeholder Theory	21
2.4.1 The Intersection of Stakeholder Theory and CSR.....	22
2.4.2 Categorising and Identifying Stakeholders.....	24
2.4.3 Contested Theory.....	25
2.5 Summary	26
Chapter 3. Methodology.....	28
3.1 Methodological Approach.....	28
3.2 Data Collection.....	28
3.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews	29
3.2.2 Selected Interviewees and Interview Process.....	30
3.2.3 Pilot Interviews.....	31
3.3. Thematic Content Analysis	32
3.4 Reliability and Validity	34
3.5. Ethical Considerations	35
3.6. Methodology Limitations.....	36
3.7 Summary	37
Chapter 4. Results of Interviews	38
4.1 Gen X's Perspective on CSR	40
4.1.1 The Standards and Practices of CSR are Constantly Changing	41
4.1.2 'Repackaging' of Already Existing Practices.....	42
4.1.3 Summary of Theme One and Related Subthemes	43
4.2 Working with Gen Z	44
4.2.1 Challenges of Working with Gen Z.....	44
4.2.2 Benefits.....	45
4.2.3 Influence of Gen Z.....	46

4.2.4 Expectations of Gen Z	48
4.2.5 Summary of Theme Two and Related Subthemes	48
4.3 Recruitment	49
4.3.1 Retaining and Attracting Talent	49
4.3.2 Entitlement of Gen Z	50
4.3.3 Summary of Theme Three and Related Subthemes	51
4.4 Balancing Ethical Practices with Competitive Business Pressures.....	52
4.4.1 Balancing Feasibility and Aspiration	53
4.4.2 Transparent Practices Effect on Competitive Advantage.....	54
4.4.3 Changing the Organisation’s Language	55
4.4.4 Summary of Theme Four and Related Subthemes	57
4.5 Managerial Implications.....	58
4.5.1 The Future Influence of Gen Z on a Manager's Role	59
4.5.2 Concerns about Skill Shortages	59
4.5.3 Summary of Theme Five and Related Subthemes.....	60
Chapter 5. Discussion	62
5.1 Outline of Findings and Contributions.....	62
5.2 Generational Cohorts and Shared Characteristics.....	63
5.3 Conceptualisation and Repackaging of CSR	63
5.4 Gen Z's Influence on CSR Strategies	65
5.4.1 Recruitment, Retention & Entitlement	67
Chapter 6. Conclusion	71
6.1 Summary	71
6.2 Future Research Directions.....	72
6.3 Final Remarks	73
References:	74
Appendix A: Pilot Interview Guide.....	83
Appendix B: Revised Interview Guide	85
Appendix C: Search Strategy	87
Appendix D: Intersection of Stakeholder Theory and CSR.....	88
Appendix E: Interview Process	89
Appendix F: Themes and Subthemes	90
Appendix G: Participant Key	91

Abstract

This thesis investigates the influence of Generation Z on the Corporate Social Responsibility strategies within multinational corporations led by top management from Generation X. It employed semi-structured interviews with eight top managers across six countries. The study explores how Gen Z's values and expectations impact CSR initiatives in organisations. The findings of our study have identified 5 themes and 13 sub themes which both support and conflict with the existing body of literature. Substantively, despite Generation Z's growing influence and emphasis on ethical practices, transparency, and social accountability, our findings reveal that their impact is constrained, to a degree, by practical and financial limitations. Top management perceives Generation Z's enthusiasm for ambitious CSR objectives as sometimes conflicting with the operational realities and financial priorities of their organisations and shareholders. Our research further highlights a discrepancy between the conceptual and practical applications of CSR, where traditional practices are frequently repackaged under the CSR umbrella to align with evolving stakeholder expectations. Our study contributes to the existing literature by offering insights into the perspectives of Generation X managers, emphasising the need for genuine and embedded CSR practices rather than superficial, strategically driven initiatives. We also underscore the challenges faced by organisations in balancing the demands of different generational cohorts and integrating CSR authentically into their core values and operations.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Generation Z, Generation X, Stakeholder Theory, Influence

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be defined as a business's moral obligation to the environment and society to act ethically towards established societal expectations and standards (Mitchell, 2021). Contemporary discourse has increasingly emphasised the significance of CSR with individuals, particularly those from younger age demographic cohorts, placing more value on companies that demonstrate a strong commitment towards social and environmental responsibility (American Marketing Association, 2020). Employment trends observed among individuals entering the workforce indicate a shift in preference to favouring working for, and with, companies that prioritise CSR (2020) and this phenomenon is largely observed in the Generation Z (Gen Z) cohort, which is composed of individuals born between 1995 and 2010 (Coughlin & Dorner, 2023). Specifically, Gen Z places a significant emphasis on companies that share their personal values about CSR initiatives, such as giving back to the community, upholding ethical standards, and promoting diversity (Fisehaye & Teclehaymanot, 2023). This is not to say that older individuals, such as those belonging to the Generation X (Gen X) cohort, those born between 1965-1980, do not exhibit the same value systems with regard to CSR (Borges et al. 2006). Rather, this phenomenon is observed and documented more extensively among the younger Gen Z demographic (2006).

We, the authors of this thesis have experienced firsthand the difficulties of working for organisations whose ethical and sustainable business practices conflicted with our values and beliefs. This direct personal experience has substantially shaped our professional aspirations and goals and resulted in a reluctance to maintain long-term employment with these organisations as they did not align with our principles and commitments to environmental and social responsibility. The direct exposure to this conflict between our personal convictions and our previous employers' sustainability approaches has proven a driving force in shaping our career trajectories. The unwillingness to remain with such companies long-term stems from a deep-seated desire to work for organisations that share our dedication to sustainable and ethical business practices.

Recent studies have revealed a perceived disparity between the attitudes and values of individuals belonging to Gen Z, and the perspectives held by top-level or upper-management employees, who are typically older and belong to different generational cohorts (Twenge, 2023). An example of this disconnect may be that Gen Z individuals, who are now entering the professional realm, tend to possess a unique set of characteristics, expectations, and ideological leanings that differ significantly from those embraced by their older, more experienced counterparts in positions of organisational leadership and authority. Perhaps this generational divide could manifest in areas such as work-life balance, technological proficiency, social consciousness, and overall workplace culture preferences.

In contrast, senior managers and upper-level executives, who have often spent decades climbing the corporate ladder, may hold more traditional or established viewpoints shaped by their own formative experiences and the norms of previous eras. We note that whilst this may be an assumption to make, the cultural shift in thinking regarding work and the workplace between younger and older generations within a company could potentially lead to challenges in communication, collaboration, and the implementation of policies that adequately address the needs and expectations of all employees. These findings may suggest that there is a noticeable gap or disparity in the outlooks, priorities, and fundamental beliefs exhibited by these two demographic groups within the workforce. Understanding and navigating these differences will be crucial for organisations seeking to foster a harmonious and productive work environment that can accommodate the diverse perspectives and priorities of their multigenerational workforce.

1.1 Research Purpose and Contribution

The increasing awareness regarding sustainable and ethical practices along with firms' social impact, serves as the basis to examine Gen Z as a key stakeholder group. The objective of this dissertation is to investigate the extent to which a younger Gen Z demographic influences the CSR strategies implemented by top-level management, who typically belong to the older Gen X cohort. Rather than exploring the complexities of CSR, emphasis is placed on the impact that Gen Z have on strategies and initiatives. The thesis aims to contribute insights that can help top-level

management align their firm's CSR policy formulation and strategies with the expectations of their stakeholders who will inevitably take over these positions.

Previously, there have been similar studies conducted which have explored the relationship between Gen Z and influencing CSR management practices in organisations but they have often overlooked the crucial role of upper management in this dynamic (a discussion presenting these studies appears later in 2.3.1). However, this thesis aims to differentiate itself by conducting eight semi-structured interviews with individuals who hold senior or top-level management positions. These individuals have been chosen on the premise that they are directly responsible for the implementation and execution of CSR strategies within their respective organisations, owing to the seniority and top level position of their roles. These participants come from and operate in different countries, these being; Sweden, Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, the United States and Norway.

Additionally, Stakeholder Theory has been recognised as a theoretical framework for our topic as there is a significant intersection between stakeholders, employees, and CSR. Specifically, the work presented by Dmytriiev et al. (2021) provides the foundation for applying stakeholder theory to address our research question. Dmytriiev et al. identify employees (in the case of our study, those from Gen Z and Gen X demographics), as key players in both stakeholder theory and CSR (2021).

1.2 Problem Formulation

As the influence and purchasing power of the Gen Z demographic continues to grow, now occupying 32% of the total global population (Rothfuss, 2021), businesses must adapt their practices to meet the evolving expectations of the modern workforce. Companies that fail to prioritise CSR may find themselves at a disadvantage in attracting and retaining employees from this generation, who are increasingly seeking out employers that demonstrate a genuine commitment to social and environmental responsibility and will inevitably take over the workforce (this narrative will be outlined later in the discussion). By aligning their practices with the values

and preferences of the younger generation businesses can position themselves as attractive and socially conscious employers, which could enhance their competitiveness and long-term sustainability.

1.3 Research Question

In line with the purpose of our thesis, the following question will be explored:

“What influence do Generation Z employees have on Corporate Social Responsibility strategies within multinational corporations led by Generation X top management?”

1.4 Research Limitations

We recognise that there may be limitations to our research; firstly, there may be an issue surrounding biases. Specifically, the participant group for this study is completely composed of the Gen-X demographic and by categorising the participant group as homogeneous due to the shared age cohort, we may be disregarding several underlying factors such as education, socio-economic differences or ethnic backgrounds which play a huge role in shaping an individual's outlook and perspective. Moreover, whilst we will always try to remain critically reflexive in how we approach our interviews, research, and thesis overall, we must acknowledge that both of us may have an unconscious bias which may affect the objectivity of this research as we belong to one of the groups in question (Gen Z) and have directly experienced, and been influenced by an organisation's unfavourable CSR policies. One could further critique the generalisability of the scope of the study. We have interviewed eight managers, who work across various companies and sectors (a participant key can be found in Chapter 4, figure 5). To support the validity and applicability of the findings, further studies could benefit from conducting the results towards specific sectors. Examining the results within the context of particular industries or organisational types may yield more nuanced insights and uncover any sector-specific differences.

The following chapter will present a literature review including a formal search strategy undertaken by the researchers which identified 59 core academic studies.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The scholarly literature on Gen Z, Gen X, and CSR is examined in the chapter which follows. Furthermore, it describes the search strategy used to identify relevant academic literature and scholarly material, the distinctive traits of both generational cohorts as well as their societal and professional behaviours, and the role that CSR plays in contemporary organisations. This chapter also discusses the aspects of Stakeholder Theory, such as the categorisation of stakeholders, and the interplay between CSR and Stakeholder Theory. The last section of this chapter will conclude by acknowledging the contested nature of Stakeholder Theory whilst highlighting how, despite criticism, it is still relevant and applicable within CSR research.

2.1 Search Strategy

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the relevant previous research about the thesis topic, which serves to demonstrate what this research contributes as well as to present the necessary background information for further analysis and discussion which will appear in Chapter 5. The study used Google Scholar and LUBsearch as a database. Additionally, Google was employed as a search engine to identify the most recently published articles, research studies, and publications.

We employed a search strategy (as illustrated below) to guarantee academic integrity, comprehensiveness, and reliability throughout the literature review process. This guided the selection and consolidation of relevant literature to corroborate the research objectives of the thesis.

We initially identified and selected 98 sources from the search engines, Google Scholar, LUBsearch and Google. The keywords used were; Corporate Social Responsibility, Generation X, Generation Z, Strategy, and Influence. As a note, these key terms were also searched as their abbreviations. For instance, ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’ became ‘CSR’, and so on.

Subsequently, we proceeded to exclude any articles that were more than 20 years old (with two exceptions) from the database to maintain the relevance and currency of the information. Furthermore, articles written in languages other than the target language (English) were removed, as were incomplete texts. Lastly, we examined the abstracts and removed any articles that lacked relevant information for the study. As a result, the literature review included 59 studies that were subsequently discussed.

Results of the Search Strategy for Google Scholar and LUBsearch and Google :

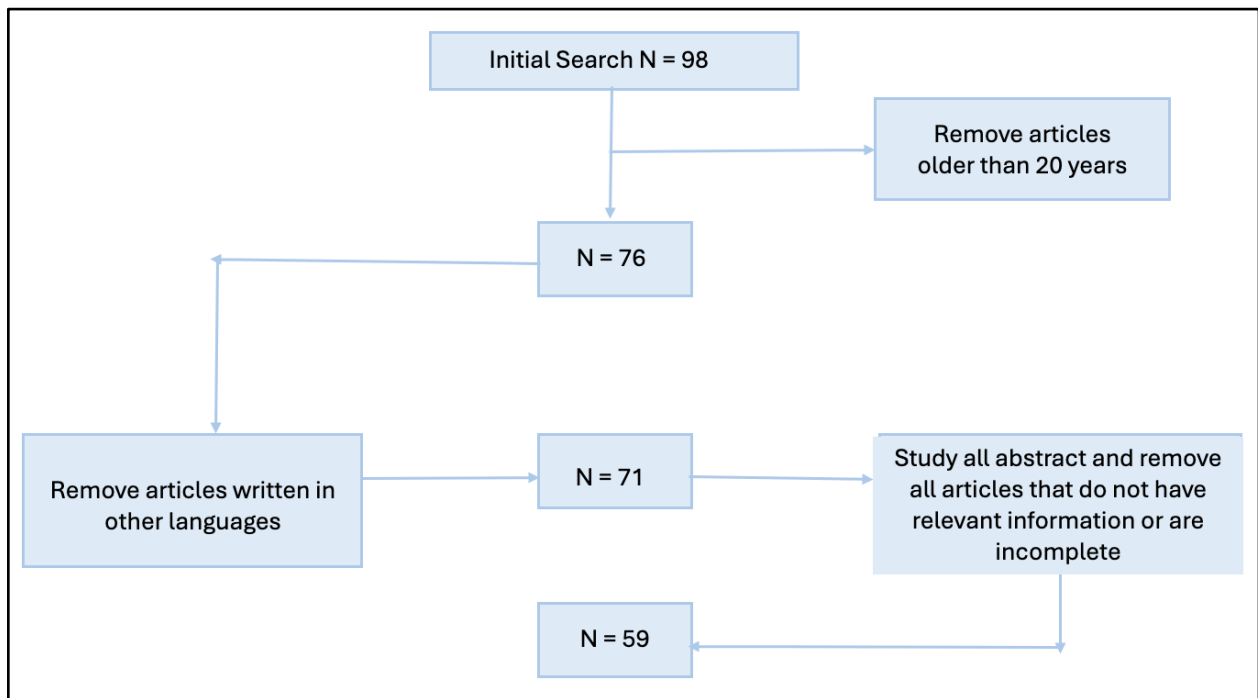


Figure 1. Search Strategy

2.2 Generation Z and X

Gen Z and Gen X are two distinct generational cohorts which play a significant role in shaping societal and work-related trends. Generational cohort theory divides a population into different generational cohorts and argues that such cohorts share the same ideas, attitudes, values and beliefs based on their birth during the same period and by living through the same experiences such as macro-level social, cultural, political events (Lissitsa & Kol, 2021). We note that whilst there is an ongoing scholarly debate surrounding the specific age categorisation of the different Generational cohorts, academic literature most commonly identifies Gen Z as those born between 1995-2010, and Gen X as those born between 1965-1980 (Larkin, 2017; Robinson, 2013; Seemiller, 2017; Suwana, 2020; Widagdo, & Susanto, 2016). In line with Gen X being the focus of our study, the average age of a CEO is 58 years old and the average age of a CFO is 52 (Goodale, 2023). Moreover, the average age of a senior-level manager is 44 years old. Therefore, these positions can largely be categorised within the Gen X demographic (Beresford Research, 2024). One can gain valuable insights into how these generational cohorts navigate and interact with the world around them by examining the distinctive qualities, values, and distinguishing aspects of Gen Z and Gen X. Ultimately, through the examination of the two generations, parallels and disparities can be recognized, which in turn elucidate how they both perceive matters related to CSR.

Whilst we acknowledge that the information presented below can be termed quite general or broad, a substantial body of available academic literature supports and argues, that individuals exhibit a variety of behaviours and characteristics, about the generational cohort to which they belong (Alkire et al. 2020; Chung et al. 2016; Fernández-Durán, 2016; Yawson & Yamoah, 2020). Furthermore, the literature argues for the categorisation and grouping of certain specific attributes that members of each cohort may share, despite the recognition that individualistic behaviours exist and persist across generational boundaries.

2.2.1 Gen Z and Society

Gen Z, also known as the generation of the digital age, is the first generation that has grown up with lifelong access to the internet. As Gen Z has grown up with immediate access and constant exposure to information, this has allowed the demographic to learn about different cultures/ethnic groups at a rapid pace, therefore giving Gen Z a great appreciation for diversity and social-related issues (Katz, 2022). Uche also claims that due to this connectivity and rapid access to current information, this generation is particularly conscious and vocal regarding social and political issues (2018). They have also been referred to as a politically progressive cohort due to their involvement and progressive stance regarding social-related issues such as the progression of LGBTQ rights and racial justice (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2024).

Many members of Gen Z identify as environmentally conscious, and the demographic places a strong focus on principles related to environmental sustainability and climate change (McKinsey & Company, 2023). Moreover, Gen Z's consumption patterns are significantly influenced by environmental concerns, as well as by companies' "green reputation" and it is stated that currently, this demographic exhibits a greater willingness to partake in environmental activism, compared to previous generations (Dragolea et al. 2023, p.5). Dragolea et al. further argues that companies must adopt their "green" marketing strategies to fulfil the expectations of Gen Z consumers as they are more informed than previous generations regarding sustainability issues and they now have certain expectations for greener products regardless of the sector (2023, p.5). A notable segment of Gen Z thoroughly investigates a company's environmental impact and policies before accepting employment. More precisely, 55% of this demographic conduct such research, and 17% have even changed their jobs or industries due to concerns related to climate concerns (McAllister, 2024).

2.2.2 Gen Z and Employment

Gen Z is defined as the most educated and sophisticated generational cohort to date, according to third-level enrolment statistics when comparing Gen Z to previous generations at a corresponding age (Dolot, 2018). Moreover, there is a growing theme in literature positing that Gen Z will

represent the “greatest generation shift the workplace has ever seen before” (Iorgulescu, 2016, p. 48). For instance, whilst Gen Z tends to value some traditional workplace benefits or factors such as salary, they tend to view the concept of climbing up the ladder to be outdated and constricting instead, opting for flexibility and mobility, a perspective which largely separates them from older generational cohorts such as Baby Boomers (individuals born between 1946-1964) (McAllister, 2024). Also, it is noted that Gen Z are more focused on the output of their work rather than on the perception of being hard workers, which was often traditionally viewed as staying late, past one’s contract hours (Kaplan, 2024). Additionally, 73% of Gen Z staff now seek a flexible working arrangement which includes both in-person and remote working (Thinkup, 2023).

Statistically, Gen Z tends to switch jobs the most (along with Millennials) and it is estimated that the demographic will have between 16-17 jobs and across 5-7 careers (The University of Queensland, 2023). Gen Z members today are currently switching jobs at a rate that is 134% higher compared to the year 2019 (Morgan McKinley, 2023). In line with the information presented above, and by examining the different relationships held by Gen Z cohorts regarding traditional workplace structures and behaviours, it can be said that this may create tension among senior or top-level management. According to a study by ‘ResumeBuilder.com’, for example, 74% of senior managers and leaders believe that Gen Z is entitled, that they don't put in sufficient effort, that they struggle with motivation and productivity, and that they are much harder to work with than previous generational cohorts (Kelly, 2023).

2.2.3 Gen X and Society

Whilst Gen X also has a high digital or technology know-how, they have been categorised as “digital immigrants” as they abandoned outdated technology and transitioned to new, digitally-enhanced technology as it became available (Goldring, & Azab, 2021, p.886). Moreover, Gen X has served as a bridge between pre and post-digital eras, as well as between liberal and neo-conservative political landscapes, and has observed economic prosperity and adversity (Katz, 2017). Having been influenced by these events, it is stated that Gen X expresses a deep yearning for stability (in comparison to other generations), often leaning towards moderation and pragmatism which reflect their preference for a stable social environment (Media Culture, 2023).

The Gen X demographic has been progressively shifting towards more environmentally responsible behaviours, including their consumption habits (Simons, 2023). However, it can be observed that this cohort maintains a distinct relationship with sustainability when compared with younger demographics, such as Gen Z. For instance Kisieliauskas and Jančaitis (2022) investigated green/sustainable product consumption among the Gen X demographic and compared the results to younger cohorts (particularly Gen Y, born 1982-94). They found that Gen X consumers are more sensitive to changes in consumption patterns, being more affected by product prices whereas younger consumers have a deeper understanding of environmental issues and are more willing to pay more for eco-friendly products and services (Kisieliauskas & Jančaitis 2022). Additionally, the results of the study indicated that Generation X shows less interest in brand environmental awareness compared to younger cohorts and Gen X tends to adhere more strictly to their already established cultural norms and habits, also labelled “values” (Kisieliauskas & Jančaitis, 2022, p.128).

2.2.4 Gen X and Employment

The Gen X cohort can be characterised by a distinctive set of traits that largely define their attitude and approach to work and employment. Bielińska-Dusza (2022) posits that Gen X is known for their distinctive work approach which includes; workaholism, loyalty to their employer, the capacity to collaboratively effectively and a more accepting attitude towards authority and hierarchical structures compared to Gen Z. Gen X tends to embrace a more formal work environment than younger demographics. In a cross-generational study by Knipp and Gallagher (2021), the authors analysed work ethic and the importance of work in relation to one's identity and concluded that Gen X had a “higher hard-working desire” (work ethic) in comparison to younger generations, as well as having a higher score in the “centrality of their work” (the importance that the individual assigns to work in comparison to other life spheres) (Knipp & Gallagher, 2021, p.26). Furthermore, it is also noted that education and up-skilling are of central importance for Gen X, leading this cohort to express a strong willingness to continue their

education, adopt a task-oriented approach to work, seek opportunities for personal development, and demonstrate qualities of reliability and independence (Bielińska-Dusza, 2022). A significant factor for Gen X is the value placed on community and cooperation in a team. However, whilst Gen X have a more formal relationship with authority and hierarchy compared to Gen Z, they also exhibit low trust in their superiors and have a rather pessimistic view of the work environment, which can be attributed to their desire to ensure a decent standard of living for their families, resulting in Gen X often prioritising professional duties over personal life (Bielińska-Dusza, 2022).

2.3 The Importance of CSR Within Contemporary Organisations

The previous subchapter covered literature surrounding generational traits and characteristics concerning the workplace and society at large. The following subchapter aims to highlight how these generational differences are interlinked and affect CSR practices.

Through an analysis of Fortune's annual survey of corporate reputation, McGuire et.al explore the connection between CSR and firm financial performance (1989). The overarching finding provides contrasting results; on the one hand, CSR may be disadvantageous for firms on the premise that they increase costs, whilst on the other hand, they may improve employee morale which in turn enhances firm performance.

Additionally, the analysis is extended with a comparison of CSR activities and prior financial data as well as investigating the implications that CSR has on financial risk. They challenge the view that firms with firms recognized for higher CSR have already achieved financial success (McGuire et al. 1989). The study employs comprehensive data spanning various industries and years, involving evaluations from over 8,000 professionals on multiple corporate attributes from financial soundness to community responsibility. Finally, the study posits that while CSR is influenced by previous financial performance, it also impacts a firm's reputation positively, thus influencing stakeholders' trust and future investment decisions. Their findings are relevant on two premises. Firstly it proposes that engaging in socially responsible activities may serve as a marker of risk

management competency, potentially mitigating financial volatility (1989). Secondly, they highlight how CSR's role within financial strategies can boost a firm's reputation.

Similarly, Peifer and Newman expanded this notion by conducting a cross-stakeholder analysis of the business case justification for CSR (2020). With a focus on stakeholder perception and trustworthiness (2020), the authors define the economic and financial benefits that firms might gain from their CSR activities (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). This study extends existing research by examining the role of perceived trustworthiness categorised into integrity, benevolence, and ability and how these perceptions differ among different stakeholders; consumers, employees, and investors.

Peifer and Newmans' (2020) findings indicate that CSR initiatives increase perceived trustworthiness among investors, suggesting that investors favour firms that align CSR with profitability. This effect among employees is attributed to their closer and more dependent relationship with employers, which makes them particularly sensitive to actions perceived as self-serving by the firms. Surprisingly, the results find that business-case justifications have no significant impact on consumers' perceptions of trustworthiness in any category.

The study reveals a disparity in how CSR business-case justifications are received across different stakeholder groups, with negative effects on employee perceptions particularly troubling. This suggests that while investors may see a firm's profit-driven CSR strategies as a competency boost, employees may view them as a detriment to genuine corporate altruism, potentially harming loyalty and productivity. Overall, these findings challenge the notion that a business-case approach to CSR is universally beneficial, highlighting the importance of context and stakeholder-specific impacts in CSR strategy and implementation.

2.3.1 Aligning CSR with Gen Z Expectations

We referenced in the study's purpose that we aim to address a gap in the current literature. Whilst previous studies have investigated the relationship between Gen Z and their influence on CSR management practices in organisations they often overlooked the crucial role of upper management in this context.

Parry and Urwin's (2011) study highlights that there are generational differences in work values and what these effects imply for firm strategies. Their study finds that Gen Z values CSR initiatives and ethical business practices more than Gen X with the key takeaways for managers. These being; that recognising and addressing these generational differences can result in better management practices, enhanced employee engagement, and more effective conflict resolution.

Rank and Contreras compare with CSR between Gen Z and Millennials (2021). Their findings highlight that Gen Z emphasises the value of transparency and authenticity in CSR efforts. This is because Gen Z possesses a critical approach when evaluating corporate actions that drive organisations to genuinely enhance their CSR strategies as opposed to using them as mere marketing tools (2021). This is relevant because it highlights the strategic importance of aligning CSR initiatives with the values of younger employees and improving the firm's loyalty and trust.

Through a bibliometric analysis, Benitez-Marquez et al. (2022) examines the integration of Gen Z into the workforce with findings that indicate a digital proficiency by Gen Z as well as greater expectations for social responsibility. They mean that these factors, in-turn, are reshaping firms' CSR strategies. The predominant practical application for their findings is that firms need to adopt responsible practices to attract and retain Gen Z but also to redefine entry-level jobs in line with changing expectations (2020).

The combination of these studies shows that Gen Z's arrival in the workforce is changing organisational priorities, especially relating to CSR. The notion poised by studies suggests that Gen Z's great focus on ethical behaviour, transparency, and social responsibility is encouraging top management, mainly from Gen X, to rethink and adjust their strategies. This change highlights

a potential need for CSR strategies and operations that align with the values of younger employees, ensuring that business practices are both sustainable and inclusive.

2.3.2 CSR & Recruitment Strategies

Asemah et.al (2013) offer a comprehensive examination of the business benefits of CSR, highlighting its necessity in the modern business environment for both reputational enhancement and operational longevity. They differentiate the advantages into internal and external categories. They find that from an internal analysis, CSR is associated with increased employee satisfaction which correlates with lower turnover and higher productivity. They stipulate that this is because CSR initiatives tend to boost morale by promoting an ethical, employee-conscious work culture, resulting in a more dedicated workforce.

Externally, the authors argue that CSR enhances customer loyalty and brand perception. Ethical business practices are shown to significantly influence consumer behaviour, with customers more likely to support companies that demonstrate responsibility towards society and the environment. Moreover, the findings indicate that CSR policies can improve relationships with governments and the public, potentially leading to beneficial regulatory conditions and a stronger public image. Asemah et al. (2013) overall findings provide critical insights into how integrating CSR can profoundly affect a company's success and societal image.

Odumeru and Ogbonna (2013) delve into the strategic utilisation of CSR as a pivotal recruitment tool. They articulate how CSR initiatives can significantly enhance a company's ability to attract top talent by aligning the organisation's values with those of prospective employees who prioritise ethical and responsible employers. This alignment is increasingly relevant in today's job market, where candidates often seek out companies with positive social impacts(2013).

The authors present a compelling argument that CSR-driven recruitment strategies not only attract top talent but also boost employee retention and satisfaction. By integrating CSR into their core

values, companies can foster a corporate culture that resonates with socially conscious individuals, thus attracting candidates who are not just qualified, but also deeply engaged with the company's mission (2013). Odumeru and Ogbonna emphasise that such strategic alignment between corporate values and employee expectations can lead to a more motivated and loyal workforce, which in turn enhances overall organisational performance (2013).

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of effectively communicating CSR commitments in recruitment. The researchers suggest that the integration of CSR into employer branding and the visible enactment of social and environmental responsibility are key to attracting top talent. Odumeru and Ogbonna's study identified a gap in the empirical exploration of CSR's role in recruitment. They underscore that firms need a strategic and communicative approach to leveraging CSR in human resources practices.

2.4 Stakeholder Theory

The previous chapter outlined the intersection between Generational cohorts and CSR. The following section aims to explain, justify and highlight the intersection between Stakeholder theory and CSR. Our study aims to contribute to the Stakeholder Theory literature, with insights regarding the understanding of how Gen X and Gen Z can influence CSR which is an area that has not been extensively investigated. The overarching premise of the discourse is that successfully engaging key stakeholders will lead to effective and sustainable firm strategies. Analysing how Gen X managers interact with Gen Z employees about CSR matters would offer a valuable contribution to this notion.

The essence of a business/organisation primarily lies in building relationships and generating value for all its stakeholders (Sleiman & Tusubira, 2023). The concept of Stakeholder Theory was introduced in 1984 by R. Edward Freeman in his book, '*Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*' which argued that businesses operate within a broad network of relationships that are crucial to their success. Freeman asserts that managers should not solely focus on stock price to create value but rather on the relationships with stakeholders. These stakeholders include internal stakeholders; employees, managers, and volunteers and external stakeholders include; customers,

communities, debtors, suppliers, vendors, and the environment (Mitchell, 2021). Although the constitution of stakeholders may vary by organisation, Mitchell (2021) further states that all stakeholders are essential and must be treated equally, and any attempt to prioritise one over another should be avoided. Concentrating on these relationships will enhance financial performance based on traditional ethical norms such as fairness, trustworthiness, transparency, and respect.

Gen X, in the context of this study, refers to senior or top-level managers who play a crucial role in determining how their organisations respond to external pressures and shifting market conditions. As some of the primary decision-makers within their companies, the perceptions, mindsets, and strategic approaches employed by these senior-level managers are instrumental in shaping their organisation's overall response to the various demands and challenges it faces. The strategic choices and policy decisions made by these Gen X individuals in top management have a profound impact on the entire company, as they establish the tone and direction for the entire workforce.

2.4.1 The Intersection of Stakeholder Theory and CSR

The principle of stakeholder theory highlights the imperative need to maintain relationships with groups that are impacted by a business or organisation. This approach is aligned with CSR, which requires businesses to undertake initiatives that go beyond their short-term financial goals to improve society and the environment. Thus, it is possible to state that both a CSR framework and a Stakeholder Theory framework share a commonality in their emphasis on considering aspects beyond solely the economic obligations of the company.

In addition, Russo and Perrini (2010) analyse how CSR's strategic positioning in both large firms and SMEs can be explained through stakeholder theory. The authors suggest that companies of different sizes may adopt different methods to CSR, based on the specifics and requirements of their stakeholders (Russo & Perrini, 2010). The importance of a stakeholder-oriented approach to CSR is further demonstrated by Jamali (2008), who illustrates that this offers a practical framework

for coordinating business operations with ethical standards that serve the interests of different stakeholder groups (Jamali, 2008).

Freeman and Dmytriiev in their paper *'Corporate Social Responsibility and Stakeholder Theory: Learning From Each Other'* (2017) further contribute to this discussion wherein they state that by integrating stakeholder theory into CSR practices, this will not only address criticisms of CSR but will also align corporate responsibilities with stakeholder needs, fostering an environment where ethical considerations are at the forefront of business decision-making (2017). Their findings also suggest that Stakeholder Theory emphasises the broader responsibilities of a business, including corporate responsibilities where societal responsibility is just one aspect, in contrast to CSR which primarily focuses on a business's social orientation towards society, prioritising this aspect over all other business responsibilities (Freeman & Dmytriiev, 2017).

According to their analysis, when CSR and Stakeholder Theory are integrated, this promotes a balanced approach to managing corporate influence and obligations, offering a strong foundation for ethical business practices (Freeman & Dmytriiev, 2017). Moreover, Dmytriiev et al. (2021) present the intersection of Stakeholder theory and CSR in the following diagram:

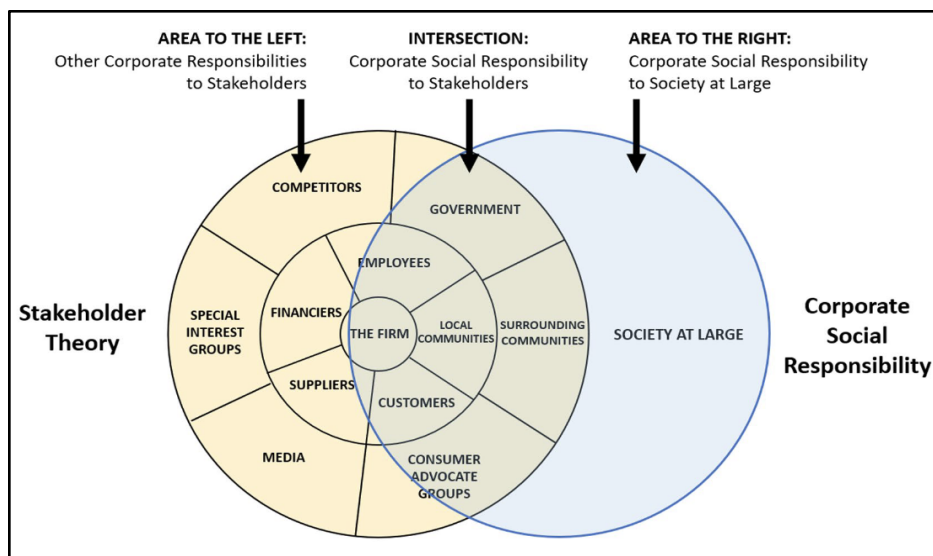


Figure 2. The diagram illustrates the relationship between Stakeholder Theory and CSR, organised by corporate responsibility (indicated by arrows above the circles) and by stakeholders (represented within the circles). *Note that this figure has been adapted from Dmytriiev et al. (2021, pp. 1458).

Dmytriiev et al. diagram also serves as the basis for justifying the application of Stakeholder Theory concerning our research question (2021), as it identifies employees as key actors in both Stakeholder Theory and CSR, thus recognising an intersection between Stakeholder Theory and CSR at large. In the subsequent section, we will establish a categorisation of internal stakeholders. Freeman suggests that it is reasonable to single out a particular stakeholder relationship when applying a stakeholder framework. As our study focuses on employees belonging to different generational cohorts, these actors are considered internal stakeholders. Thus, internal stakeholders are the only actors which will be discussed due to the focus of our study.

2.4.2 Categorising and Identifying Stakeholders

When applying Stakeholder Theory the first step is to categorise and identify stakeholders. This initial step is crucial as stakeholder theory often involves several considerations/perspectives. By identifying, and then categorising stakeholders, an organisation can better understand the specific motivators of each stakeholder group, which is essential as different groups often have competing demands. By clearly delineating stakeholders, organisations can develop strategies and policies to address the complexities of stakeholder theory.

Our study aims to depart from the widely adopted method of classifying stakeholders into primary and secondary groups based on their direct economic interest in the organisation. Although we acknowledge that all stakeholders have an economic stake in the firm, our study's purpose does not lie in the economic stakes held by Gen Z and X but rather regard to their organisational influence. With this in mind, we have opted for a categorisation that aligns with the purpose of the research (organisational influence). Therefore, Mazur and Pisarski's (2015) categorisation of internal stakeholders will be adopted.

The internal stakeholders of an organisation include individuals of both managerial and non-managerial personnel who are pivotal to the implementation of any corporate strategy. This is based on the premise that employees who are aligned with the company's environmental goals are

more likely to remain with the organisation (Freeman, 1984). Freeman (1984) further delineates the term by stating that internal stakeholders are individuals or groups who influence or are affected by the firm's strategic decision. Freeman (1984) and Sutton et al. (2022) mean that the scope of those considered internal stakeholders is expanding due to a dynamic and volatile corporate environment.

Moreover, Ahmad et. al (2005) research provides insights into the role of internal stakeholders relating to the impact on firm performance, focusing on leadership and decision-making process. They describe internal stakeholders as individuals involved in or influencing the firm's internal value chain, including all employees and management levels, including those traditionally not involved in strategic decision-making. Based on the presented studies, both Gen Z and X fulfil all the outlined characteristics of internal stakeholders which justifies the application of stakeholder theory to CSR issues.

2.4.3 Contested Theory

We acknowledge that Stakeholder Theory remains a contested theory within academic and scholarly debates with some authors citing it as “misguided” and “mistaken” (Sternberg, 2019, pp.399) whilst others recount it as “flourishing” (Agle et al. 2008, pp.153). However, due to the theory’s prominence in CSR-related themes, topics, and research (Brin & Nehme, 2019; Brown et al. 2013; Fernando et al. 2014; Mu et al. 2024), in addition to the substantial body of literature which emphasises its relevance and credibility as a theory (Mahajan et al. 2023; Langrafe et al. 2020), we have decided to use stakeholder theory as our main theoretical framework.

Firstly, a large amount of criticism towards stakeholder theory argues that it fails to provide a robust ethical framework for a business decision-making (Orts & Strudler, 2009). Moreover, Orts and Strudler argue that stakeholder theory fails to; reach a consensus on the definition and identification of stakeholders, adequately capture the breadth of the concept, and does not guide how to balance competing stakeholder interests (2009).

However, and as previously stated, there remains a substantial amount of literature which argues the opposite. For instance, Harrison et al. (2015) state that stakeholder theory promotes a practical, efficient, effective, and ethical way to manage organisations. Furthermore, Bridoux and Stoelhorst (2022) argue that stakeholder theory will be a lasting phenomenon. The authors also stress that stakeholder theory can “help strategy scholars develop a theory of managing value creation that explicitly acknowledges both the economic and moral nature of relationships in and around organisations” (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022, pp.797).

2.5 Summary

The initial part of this chapter examines the search strategy used to identify relevant scholarly material. After presenting this, the discussion switches focus and explores the characteristics and value sets of both Gen Z and Gen X, as well as presenting a discussion surrounding the social and work-related behaviours that each generational group tends to display. Furthermore, the topic of CSR's place in organisational practices is covered, as is the relationship between CSR and Stakeholder Theory, highlighting the need to maintain relationships with stakeholders and aligning CSR goals with their interests. This serves as a justification for this study. In addition, this chapter also covers the classification of internal stakeholders within organisations and the role that CSR plays in recruiting top talent. Lastly, and despite ongoing debates, this chapter emphasises the value of Stakeholder Theory as a framework for comprehending organisational dynamics and CSR. The following Chapter will present a detailed description of the study's methodology whereby a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted through semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Methodological Approach

This study will adopt a qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured one-on-one interviews with top-management belonging to the Gen X cohort. Each interview is expected to last approximately 40 minutes to an hour. Our methodology is partially deductive, as it begins with gathering broad information in the initial investigation to develop a foundational understanding in line with stakeholder theory. Figure X illustrates the process undertaken. Each step was crucial in helping us develop a suitable interview guide for the main study and is discussed in detail throughout the paper.

3.2 Data Collection

Data will be collected via recorded interviews, conducted online via Google Meets, with participants which will be built around a Topic Schedule written up thematically and sequentially to ensure clarity of answers. Audio will be transcribed verbatim and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) will search for commonalities of themes and subthemes across and within the data. As the study is qualitative, we seek data saturation as opposed to generalisability. Moreover; the premise that the themes will be formed during the analysis, in an exploratory manner, makes the study partly inductive.

Laplume et.al (2008) suggest that qualitative research methods are more appropriate than quantitative methods for certain aspects of Stakeholder Theory research, particularly in exploring the cognitive processes of managers as they respond to stakeholder interests and expectations. The authors argue that qualitative methods are better suited to capture interactions between firms and their stakeholders because these interactions often involve subjective interpretations and contingent decisions that are difficult to quantify. Unlike quantitative methods, which excel at

providing numerical data across large samples for statistical analysis, qualitative methods can offer insights into the motivations, thoughts, and rationale behind managerial decisions and influence. We find qualitative studies more suited to understanding how and why managers prioritise certain stakeholders' influence over others and the implications of these priorities on firm strategies and outcomes.

3.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

We chose to use semi-structured interviews, guided by the suggestions of Eisenhower and Graebner as this method is suitable for research involving strategic inquiries (Eisenhower, Graebner, 2007). The former suggests that interviews are an effective way to collect empirical data on broad topics that require interpretation, a category under which CSR appropriately falls (2007). As described by Wilson, semi-structured interviews combine elements of both structured and unstructured interviews (Wilson, 2014). It utilises a structured agenda of predetermined questions along with impromptu follow-up questions (2014).

The semi-structured interview format offers a significant advantage in that it enables the interviewer to pose impromptu follow-up inquiries based on the participant's responses, thereby granting interviewees the opportunity to express themselves more freely and allowing the researcher to develop a more nuanced understanding of the topic. Moreover; Qu and Dumay (2011) provides an account directly relating to managers, stating that; “semi-structured interviews help develop understanding of how managers make sense of, and create meanings about, their jobs and their environment” (2011, pp.246). The authors mean that this is because of the method's flexibility, depth, and ability to capture the contextual and personal ways in which managers interpret their roles and organisations. Another advantage of conducting semi-structured interviews is that researchers can delve deeper into particular aspects of CSR strategies and explore unforeseen topics that emerge. This is essential for understanding the diverse interpretations that managers might have of the broad concept of CSR.

3.2.2 Selected Interviewees and Interview Process

To achieve the most accurate results for our investigation, it was necessary to conduct interviews with individuals who currently occupy senior or top-level management positions within the multinational organisation in which they currently work. Moreover, the purpose was to interview individuals who, due to their senior positions, have a direct influence in their organisation's CSR strategies and/or initiatives. Whilst the participants may differ in terms of the sector and country they are from and operate in, there are other criteria and variables which they all share and can, therefore, be categorised under. Specifically, the participants' ages range from 44 to 59 years old, indicating that the sample size belongs to the Gen X demographic cohort. Each participant also works and has involvement, in some capacity, with younger Gen Z employees. Lastly, and as previously stated, all participants occupy high positions within their respective organisations and influence their organisation's CSR strategies. A participant key appears in Chapter 4, figure 5.

To contact the participants, we utilised LinkedIn as a means of communication, as the platform is the most professional social networking site (Davis et al. 2020). When determining the participants, we searched for individuals by top-level positions such as 'CEO', 'Director', or 'Senior Manager'. Recognising the demanding nature of their roles, which often leaves little time for formalities and can include challenges such as limited availability and accessibility. The researchers requested interviewees to recommend two individuals for further interviews with the intent of bypassing formalities and maximise participation which worked with great effect.

After compiling a list of potential interviewees, we sent out an initial email explaining the study's objectives, requested permission to record the conversations, and assured confidentiality with the option of anonymity. For those who opted for anonymity, we sought consent to include details such as age, job title, and the sector of their organisation. Participants who did not consent to these terms were not included in the study. The interviews were conducted online using Google Meet. At the start of each session, we confirmed the participants' agreement to have the interview recorded. Each interview was facilitated by the two researchers and lasted between 27 and 50 minutes.

To prepare for the interviews, a comprehensive guide was developed. This guide included a list of topics and corresponding questions designed to facilitate the introduction of each subject into the conversation. The topics covered were: Background, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) related issues, and Questions specific to Managers. The Background section posed questions about the organisation's culture and values, as well as interactions between Gen Z and Gen X concerning CSR. The subsequent section delved into examples of CSR initiatives, while the final segment examined the managerial roles in implementing these CSR activities. The discussion often intertwined these topics, with follow-up questions seamlessly linking them together.

3.2.3 Pilot Interviews

Initially, the study carried out two pilot interviews before conducting the remainder of the official interviews. These pilot interviews involved two individuals who were relatives of the researchers and met the participant criteria: they belonged to the Gen X cohort, held high-ranking management positions, and had experience working with the younger generations.

The following visual highlights the pilot interview process:

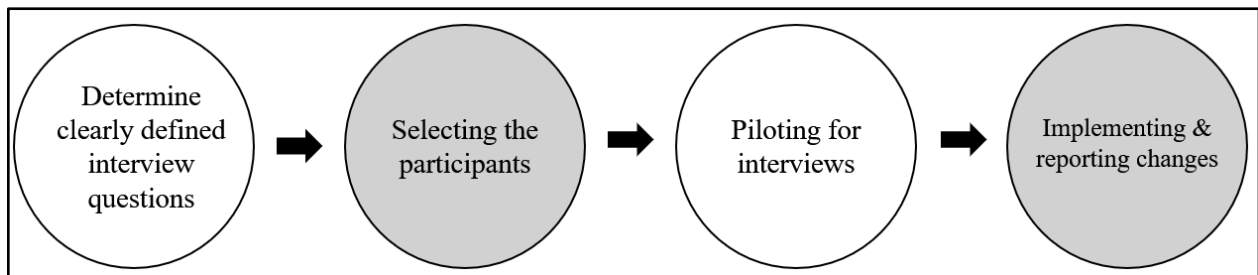


Figure 3. Interview Process

These preliminary interviews were crucial for several reasons. First, they provided an opportunity for the researchers to refine the interview questions by rephrasing, removing, or adding new questions. Consequently, it became apparent that the sequencing of questions needed adjustment. Questions that elicited yes or no answers were either removed or reworded, and new questions

were introduced to expand the interviews, which initially lasted only twenty minutes. After each pilot session, participant feedback was inquired, which proved invaluable. This feedback highlighted gaps in the questions, assessed the quality of communication before the interviews, and critiqued our conduct during the sessions. Consequently, one new question was incorporated into the 'Specific Questions Related to CSR' section of our interview guide and two new questions were incorporated into the 'Manager Specific' question section (see Appendix A and B).

To add, the pilot interviews acted as a practical test of our data collection procedures. They helped identify any logistical issues that could impact the interview flow or participant comfort. For instance, issues such as the length of the interview, the effectiveness of the technology used (ex. recording devices), and the suitability of the interview environment were assessed and optimised based on these initial encounters. For instance, we were instructed to clearly outline the study's purpose in an email before the interview to show consideration for their time.

3.3. Thematic Content Analysis

We will conduct a structured thematic content analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) on eight semi-structured interviews. Braun and Clark (2006), interpret thematic analysis as a method that focuses on three aspects; identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data.

After conducting eight semi-structured interviews via Google Meets, the data was partially transcribed using the AI program 'Otter'. To ensure accuracy, the transcriptions were then cross-referenced with the original audio files for a final review. Transcriptions were reviewed, denoting important content relating to the research question.

Thematic Analysis as a method can be conducted in several ways, and we have chosen to use a 'master interview' as the overall guide for our analysis to identify 5 themes and 13 sub-themes which we will then compare to the remaining interview transcripts. The master interview was selected because it offered the most narrative-rich content when compared to the other interviews.

Firstly, to identify themes in the master interview, we printed out two separate copies of the transcribed master interview and, with a ruler and highlighter, we went through the document line-by-line, noting themes and subthemes. Crucially, we analysed the master interview individually. The reason behind this was to see if we identified similar themes and subthemes within the transcribed interview. Whilst there were notable similarities, we also noticed that we tended to deviate on some themes/subthemes. When this occurred, we discussed this, and either included, rephrased, or in most cases, excluded such themes/subthemes. To give an example of this, one researcher identified the subtheme of ‘Gen Z and Changing Travel Policies’, however, the other researcher felt that this was not appropriate and so, it was not included. Instead, we rephrased this to be more general and gave it the new title of ‘Influence of Gen Z’ under the theme of ‘Working with Gen Z’.

After identifying and agreeing on themes and subthemes within the master interview, these served as benchmarks for the subsequent interviews. This is not to say that additional themes and subthemes were not recognised in the remaining interviews; several novel subthemes were observed and documented. However, the themes and subthemes identified in the master interview served as a guideline for the other interviews, as this facilitated more consistent findings/results.

When analysing the data, we will apply a deductive method of coding. Every participant will be assigned a numerical identifier, such as ‘P1’. A key including age, job title, and firm sector and country of origin/operation can be found in Chapter 4, figure 5. Themes and sub-themes will be categorised numerically following their respective main themes. For example, the first sub-theme under the first main theme will be labelled as ‘1.1’. The second sub-theme under the same main theme will be labelled as ‘1.2’, and this pattern will continue accordingly. As a note, the number ‘4’ will appear before the number of the theme and subtheme, as this discussion is presented later in Chapter 4, ‘Results of Interviews’. The codes associated with the themes identified in the master interview will be consistently applied when analysing themes in subsequent interviews. The thematic framework developed from the interviews will be organised, displayed, and discussed. Initially, this will be shown in a figure format, followed by a detailed discussion and analysis in the text.

3.4 Reliability and Validity

The following subchapter discusses the measures taken, as well as the limitations in regards to reliability and validity.

The flexibility of semi-structured interviews provides challenges relating to the reliability of the results, referring to the consistency of the study. To counteract this, we considered and revised multiple procedures to secure reliability. Initially, we conducted preliminary interviews with experts in the field, including three CEOs with extensive experience in developing CSR strategies for various companies. These experts were selected from different sectors to provide different perspectives on the studies' wide-ranging topics, thereby enhancing the generalisability of the results. Furthermore, steps were taken to ensure the consistency of the interviews. The questions were standardised, with the same interviewer asking identical questions to all participants, except for any follow-up questions that were needed. Additionally, a uniform description of CSR was emailed to all participants before the interviews to maintain consistency.

We also sent the interview questions to participants in advance for review and asked for permission to record the interviews both before and at the beginning of each session. We inquired if it would be possible to contact participants again if some questions remained unanswered or to clarify any unclear responses, to which all participants consented. This was intended to enhance the consistency of data analysis. Transcriptions were carried out using AI tool Otter, and a copy was sent to each participant to ensure there were no misinterpretations of their responses.

Validity in qualitative research as according to Coleman (2022, p.2042) is defined as

“Its appropriateness for studying what it claims to inform and its veracity in reporting”...although no method or procedure can guarantee validity, various tools can greatly assist in the reduction of validity threats and increase the credibility of the conclusions reached within a research study”.

Coleman further claims that such tools include the likes of audio and video recordings as opposed to traditional methods such as researcher notes (2022). To ensure validity, the researchers recorded

all interviews via Google Meet, which facilitated both audio and video recording of all interviews. Moreover, all interviews were transcribed verbatim as it is the most comprehensive and detailed transcription format.

Another approach used to support validity is “member checking” which is when the researcher discreetly confirms with participants the accuracy of their knowledge throughout the data collection process (the interview) (Coleman, 2022, pp.2042-3). In the interviews, the researchers consistently employed member checking to clarify ambiguous respondent comments by repeating, paraphrasing, and requesting additional information. Interviewees are then allowed to either confirm or deny the interviewer's interpretation of their comments.

We acknowledge that similar to the majority of qualitative studies, the sample size utilised was relatively small, which may potentially restrict the ability to generalise the findings to a broader population. However, as the participants were employed across various industries and sectors, as well as coming from various countries, the insights and conclusions drawn from the research may be applicable and transferable to other comparable contexts and scenarios. Specifically, although the limited sample size poses a potential limitation, the diverse backgrounds of the participants suggest the findings could be relevant and informative for a range of similar situations and environments.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The study has considered the information requirement, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement as well as the utilisation requirement, in line with the accord from ‘*Vetenskapsrådets forskningsetiska principer*’ (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017).

To meet the information requirement, participants received an email detailing the study's purpose, voluntary participation, interviewee expectations, and anonymity options. Specifically, this study permitted the use of participants' positions and ages. The consent requirement was partially fulfilled through an information letter, which also included the option to withdraw from the study

at any time, a point reiterated at the interview's start. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing participants as P(x) in a non-sequential order relative to when their respective interview was conducted. We acknowledged that the accounts provided by interviewing top management have the potential of impacting their respective organisation. To address this, participants were permitted to also draw on experiences from any roles they had previously held across various organisations which in turn prevented direct associations with specific companies. Additionally, in the participant key we included the country they are from and the country in which they operate under the general heading of 'country' to further ensure anonymity, to further mitigate the risk, the company names were omitted and replaced with industry sectors (Chapter 4, figure 5). Additionally, we assured the study was conducted for scientific purposes only, and participants were offered a copy of their transcribed interviews, allowing them the opportunity to refute, add, or contest the data.

3.6. Methodology Limitations

Several limitations must be considered. Firstly, our research has solely concentrated on interviewing top-level managers belonging to the Gen X demographic. Deliberately, we have disregarded the perspectives of both Gen Z employees who may have, in fact, influenced the CSR strategies of an organisation. Additionally, the study has overlooked the potential contributions of Gen Z individuals occupying top management positions who could have ultimately shaped an organisation's CSR strategies. As a result, this limitation could impact the generalisability and comprehensiveness of the research findings, as it excludes important perspectives and potential influencers in the field of CSR in an organisation.

The semi-structured format, while flexible, relies heavily on the capabilities of the interviewer to guide the discussion effectively without leading or nudging the respondent towards a narrative in line with our biases.

Moreover, we acknowledge that the research would have benefitted from interviewing a larger sample size. This would have improved the robustness of the findings, especially in the case of identifying more comprehensive patterns, themes, and trends in the data which would lead to more

reliable conclusions and thematic saturations. Furthermore, a larger sample size would improve the generalisability of our findings which would ultimately improve the transferability of our findings to wider contexts and populations.

3.7 Summary

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, employing a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with eight senior managers from six different countries. The results found in these interviews were organised into five meta themes and thirteen sub-themes based on Braun and Clarke's guidelines (2006). Ethical considerations were in line with the accord from 'Vetenskapsrådets forskningsetiska principer' (2017). Lastly, the methodology's limitations were discussed, acknowledging the study's focus on a specific demographic and potential biases in the semi-structured format. The following chapter will present the data gathered from these interviews in accordance with the identified themes.

Chapter 4. Results of Interviews

The following chapter outlines the analysis and findings gathered from the eight semi-structured interviews with Gen X in top management positions, in line with the research question: “*What influence do Generation Z employees have on Corporate Social Responsibility strategies within multinational corporations led by Generation X top management?*”. This chapter presents this material under themes and sub-themes. In all, 5 themes were identified from the Master Interview Transcript and 13 sub-themes. The five themes and thirteen sub-themes are presented below:

Themes	Sub-themes
Gen X’s Perspective of CSR	The Standards and Practices of CSR are Constantly Changing Repackaging’ of Already Existing Practices
Working with Gen Z	Challenges of Working with Gen Z Benefits Influence of Gen Z Expectations of Gen Z
Recruitment	Retaining and Attracting Talent Entitlement of Gen Z
Balancing Ethical Practices with Competitive Business Pressures	Balancing Feasibility and Aspiration Transparent Practices Effect on Competitive Advantage Changing the Organisations Language
Managerial Implications	The Future Influence of Gen Z on the Managers Role Concerns about Skill Shortage

Figure 4. Themes and Subthemes

The table presented below is the participant key outlining; Participants Code, Job Title, Firm Sector and Country of Origin/Operation:

Participant code	Job Title	Firm Sector	Country
P1	CEO	Research Consultancy & Publishing	Ireland
P2	CEO/Country Manager	Banking & Private Consultant	Bangladesh
P3	Communications Manager	Conservation	Sweden
P4	Chief of Governance	Humanitarian Aid	Sweden
P5	CEO	Waste Management	Saudi Arabia
P6	Farming Director	Aquaculture	Norway
P7	CEO	Chemical Treatment	Ireland
P8	HR Manager	Humanitarian Aid	United States
Pilot 1	CEO	Banking	Ireland
Pilot 2	CFO	IT	Sweden

Figure 5. Participant key

4.1 Gen X's Perspective on CSR

As a note, the following two paragraphs directly mention every participant. This is due to the importance of CSR as a topic within our study, this is the only section where all eight participants will feature.

The first theme which emerged from our data is that the language used to describe CSR was generally quite similar in description. Commonly used words and phrases were; “Best practices... and an appropriate mindset” (**P1**), “A set of standards, principles or a model that helps a company be accountable to itself and its employees” (**P3**), “Offering positive and broad environmental services” (**P5**), “Conduct business responsibly and ethically” (**P8**), “Doing good in the community” (**P7**) and “The ethical ways one should interact with those around them, regarding both their company, employees, and the greater environment around them” (**P6**). These descriptions all suggest that CSR looks beyond economic interests and instead, focuses on ethically sound and guided principles to conduct business.

However, a more sceptical account of CSR was provided by **P2** wherein they described CSR as being “only applicable for major corporations who have excess capital or money to spend... It is generally a luxury that smaller companies don't have”. **P4** noted similarly that “CSR is nothing but a tool used to enhance public relations. It has no substance and is not used in firms that I lead”. This alludes to the notion that CSR may be somewhat exaggerated in the sense that it lacks true substance. It also speaks to the notion that CSR is a superficial luxury for large corporations with the means to afford it, and lacks a practical application in some smaller companies.

4.1.1 The Standards and Practices of CSR are Constantly Changing

A second theme which emerged from six of our participants is the notion that CSR standards and practices are fluid and changing. **P1** states that “The notion of best practice is rapidly changing in line with a more commonly used CSR discourse ... we're living in a very confused and confusing time to operate in business, in any kind of an ethical standard”. An example is provided from the publishing sector;

We purchased our paper in Europe due to concerns about the treatment of workers in South American factories, aiming to uphold ethical standards and good corporate social responsibility. However, there's increasing pressure from different stakeholders that we should source materials locally from Ireland to better fulfil our CSR obligations. (**P1**)

P1 indicated that “The standard quota of a firm's CSR practices does not exist anymore, in line with stakeholders never being satisfied”. **P3**, suggests that there has been a shift from solely focusing on environmental sustainability to incorporating social aspects, identifying that “In the past, I think I would have equated CSR with just environmental factors. But it's only been in the later years that I've honed into the social responsibility part more”. **P3** also emphasises the importance of adopting social practices to uphold stakeholder interests “We need to start prioritising social responsibility with the increasing demands placed by other partners and stakeholders”. After inquiring about whom **P3** meant by stakeholders, **P3** states “Investors and employees predominantly. Even new recruits”.

There is a suggested connection between the emphasis on CSR and that it is largely only applicable in first-world, developed, western countries with an excess of capital. For example, CSR might be deemed less crucial in countries experiencing economic difficulties or harsh economic conditions. **P5** captured this by stating “CSR becomes less significant when unemployment rates are high. When individuals are struggling to provide basic necessities for themselves and their families, they

pay less attention to a company's social or environmental objectives". **P2** presents a similar experience from consulting with different companies, from varying sectors "One can see a clear difference in social responsibility between firms with an excess in capital, and firms who are struggling". When asked why that is the case, **P2** suggests that "Under these circumstances, stakeholder pressure increases and the first areas often targeted for cost reductions are those related to CSR initiatives."

Both **P4** and **P8** shared how transparency in CSR practices has evolved. **P8** noted, "Our donors are demanding more detailed information about our practices, and we have actually lost business due to this growing scepticism, which has compelled us to seek new sources of revenue". **P4** draws this further, "Our leadership can't keep up with the demands posed by stakeholders. Developing a strategy has never been as challenging. It's hard to be proactive, when we constantly have to react to new demands."

4.1.2 'Repackaging' of Already Existing Practices

All eight participants shared the experience that CSR is an umbrella term for already existing business practices, with varying opinions of its effect on the firm's strategies. This was exemplified by the study's master interview;

We were recently asked by one of our authors if we publish on forestry sustainable paper. And the answer that is we do, but we've done that since 2009. Our firm has practised, what would now fall under the CSR umbrella, for a long time, but it has only recently become a prominent part of our stakeholders discourse. We are reluctant to change our discourse, but that does not mean that our practices are less ethically sound. (**P1**)

A similar account is presented by (**P2**);

When I previously worked at a bank I noticed that they financed projects which contributed to environmental sustainability. What I notice now is that the language discourse has

changed and companies often use more buzz words for very similar projects. They have now adapted their communication strategy, without changing their practice, to fit the time we are in. (P2)

P3 posits an account whereby CSR can be used to the firm's strategic advantage;

I feel a lot of people think CSR is altruistic, but I personally think it can be self-centred too in the sense that sometimes it can be used as a smart ploy, like with Green washing. Rules and guidelines, values and visions are put forward, but it's not always that companies walk the talk, or practise what they preach. They use CSR as a strategy for financial means. (P3)

Supporting this sentiment, **P5** commented “There's a lot of companies that are saying they're doing CSR and it's really just repackaging and if you go down that road and if you put a foot wrong, you're in trouble”. Moreover, **P7** also suggests that CSR without genuinity is a poor strategy “If you're just doing it to tick a box and for the marketing or PR, you won't be long being called out and people will become quite cynical to it. It won't hold in the long run”.

4.1.3 Summary of Theme One and Related Subthemes

The information presented above indicated that CSR practices are shifting due to the various demands of stakeholders in addition to economic factors. Participants also mentioned that there is a notable shift regarding CSR where emphasis is moving away from solely focusing on environmental sustainability to incorporating aspects of social responsibility. Moreover, participants also attributed that this is largely due to pressures from stakeholders. Another discussion point is the notion that organisations are ‘repackaging’ some of their existing practices and labelling it as CSR to fit a narrative which is widely driven by stakeholders. Lastly, there is an increased demand, and expectation, for companies to provide transparent practices regarding CSR initiatives and this has proved challenging for some organisations.

4.2 Working with Gen Z

Every participant noted that they work directly with someone belonging to the Gen Z cohort. Whilst the frequency and capacity of working with Gen Z differs among participants, it is evident that they all have regular contact with the demographic. Almost all of the participants (six) mentioned that the Gen Z employees they have contact with are in graduate positions “We’d often meet fresh graduates in this capacity. So, we would deal with them on a constant basis” (P6), “Yes, but they are mostly interns or graduates” (P3), “Yes, as employers a lot of our staff are in various Government, local, departmental agencies and we’d deal with them a lot. We’d often meet fresh graduates in this capacity”. This was common throughout except for P1 who stated that they were in some more senior positions and were also clients “We have Gen Zers, and younger millennials as consultants, and we have clients in both of those categories”.

4.2.1 Challenges of Working with Gen Z

The majority of participants, five, stated that they have experienced difficulties when working with the Gen Z demographic “I think the current, a lot of the current thinking of Gen Z and younger millennials, is very much in an abstract un-workable platform” (P1). Similarly P2 stated that “There has been several issues regarding planning operations”. P3 discussed that in their experience, Gen Z often brings forward innovative and bright ideas but they tend to neglect the feasibility of implementing such ideas “They lack a genuine, well-grounded understanding of the real-world business world and its practical implications”. This rhetoric also appeared in discussion with P1 wherein they mentioned that;

There's nothing more annoying for a CEO than an intern coming in saying, I've got this great idea about your corporate social responsibility policy, I've read your 10 pages, and I've yellowed out loads of it. And I've got all these great ideas. My very first question will be what is the cost? Gen-Z don't think about the cost, because that's not their frame of reference. (P1)

Both examples suggest that there is a gap between the idealism and creativity of Gen Z and the practical considerations necessary in business.

Another challenge brought forward was by **P8** and **P6** who both suggested that many Gen Z staff they work with rely heavily on influencers and social media personalities for advice and information about the business world without conducting their own research or gaining firsthand experience. **P6** posited that this lack of genuine understanding can hinder their ability to grasp the practical implications of real-world business decisions;

Many Gen Z seem to lack a genuine, well-grounded understanding of the real business world and its practical implications. There appear to be many self-proclaimed ‘influencers;’ and social media personalities who provide advice and commentary... Gen Z seems to be overly reliant on the opinions of these popular online figures and influencers, rather than taking the initiative to investigate and research things themselves. (**P6**)

P8 added to this by stating “There’s a lot of light currently being shunned on media personalities like influencers and a lot of Gen Z seem to be getting information and opinions from them regarding CSR. But, I’m not sure how often they actually question the perspectives of these influencers”.

4.2.2 Benefits

In terms of benefits, participants were particularly vocal about Gen Z's digital, tech skills and the tendency of the demographic to express an opinion or be vocal about issues which they care about. Three participants compared these elements/characteristics to older colleagues which they work with and concluded that Gen Z possesses a significantly higher level of these characteristics;

I have definitely noticed that Gen Z are vocal and are not afraid to express an opinion. I’ve seen them speak up in meetings and I’ve read a lot of suggestions that were put forward by people in their early 20’s. I’ve noticed that they are a lot more expressive, earlier on in their careers, compared to say older employees when they were starting off (**P6**).

Moreover, **P1** noted that whilst Gen Z are digitally proficient in terms of office related technology, the demographic has a more immediate access to major events through social media channels compared to more generic and filtered accounts presented by traditional news sources, where older demographics often tend to get their information from traditional news sources.

A lot of people in the company that would be in their 50s. And 60s, wouldn't spend that much time on social media, they tend to get their news from mainstream news broadcasting corporations, whereas Gen Z don't. They get their news from Snapchat and from Instagram and in the moment? **(P1)**

P1 further states that “The benefit of having Gen Z's in the company, I would say, is that it's a less filtered account of what's going on. Both circumstance and happenstance, I think, is a much more accurate view of what's going on.” **P3** mentioned the advantages of Gen Z's tendency to be vocal on topics they are passionate about, combined with their proficiency in digital technology and ability to access unfiltered information. Specifically, **P3** stated that this will positively impact CSR strategies in the future “I foresee a CSR narrative, driven by Gen Z as only positively. I think it will push my company to get a more nuanced and fresh perspective on what CSR truly means and to constantly reflect on if it's up to par with other companies and societal expectations”.

4.2.3 Influence of Gen Z

All eight participants mentioned that Gen Z has some form of direct influence within their organisations. Three participants noted that Gen Z were more attune to current issues surrounding CSR and have brought about organisational change. **P3** captured this by stating;

I think younger people, especially Generation Z are a lot more attuned to diversity, political sensitivities, and equal rights between women and men these days. And I've seen younger employees voice these concerns openly in meeting chats during all staff meetings. These certainly cause a ripple effect, and make their way back into board rooms. **(P3)**

Moreover, **P7** gave an example of a Gen Z employee who brought forward a CSR initiative surrounding wildlife conservation to senior management and is now currently leading the project “We have signed up to the B-pollinator plan here in Ireland. Which is a Countrywide initiative and that was driven by one of the younger people on our team. She came with the idea and she’s the one who’s in the driving seat taking care of all that.”

P2 described how Gen Z has been impacting both small and large business decisions, stating that it has become a common practice for company leadership to consider the preferences and influence of this demographic “A couple of the biggest strategic pivots that I have done with the bank comes directly from informal settings with younger employees. Some of them have yielded millions (SEK) for the bank.” When asked to provide an example **P2** state;

The bank was discussing internally about financing a project abroad, but during an afterwork, two younger employees had ideas to make it more socially responsible. The project got a lot of good PR from different news outlets and our reputation improved. (**P2**)

However, **P8** stated that whilst Gen Z have some organisational influence, it is only on the surface level and does not really affect organisational policies or strategies “On a more superficial level they have some influence over things like the organisations travel policies, paper and food waste initiatives etc. On a strategic level, they don’t have an influence, probably due to the reluctance of senior employees”. We asked **P8** to provide an example of a case of when a Gen Z employee has affected the organisation's strategy and the participant was unable to do so.

4.2.4 Expectations of Gen Z

Six participants stated that Gen Z expects a hybrid working set-up, with some feeling an initial reluctance or hesitation to accommodate this request. **P5** summarises this by stating that “It’s almost like a given, younger people expect hybrid working but they need to prove themselves capable of being able to do the work first”. This was also mentioned by **P6** wherein they stated “People need to show that they are capable of doing the job before they start working remotely.

It's almost like younger people expect it as some sort of right but I need to know you're capable of doing the work and the job first, before I let you manage yourself essentially".

It has also been noted that Gen Z expects a company to have an existing and working CSR strategy in place and that it is a huge factor in deciding where to work, and where to continue employment.

P3 emphasises this point by stating;

Not only do they want to spend more on products and services from companies that are committed to social and environmental responsibility, but they want to work for them too, and would have a hard time accepting a job that doesn't follow good CSR strategies... For many I think, the company you work for is a reflection of your own values. **P3**

4.2.5 Summary of Theme Two and Related Subthemes

The preceding theme and subthemes shows that each participant interacts regularly with Gen Z employees, primarily in entry-level roles, such as; graduates and interns. Based on these experiences, the results highlight a misalignment between Gen Z proposed ideas and the practical realities of the subject firms. Critique is directed towards Gen Z reliance on social media as a source for business insights on the premise that they limit Gen Z understanding of real world practicalities. Additionally, positive accounts are provided; referencing Gen Z's digital proficiency and willingness to express ideas, which are seen to drive CSR discussions. Gen Z's influence is noticeable in diversity initiatives, with limited impact on strategic decisions which is described as superficial.

4.3 Recruitment

All interviews with participants revealed a common theme among Gen Z individuals regarding their attitude when they approach a job interview or the recruitment process more largely. Specifically, six participants noted that in the recruitment stage, Gen Z presents themselves as

being very individually focused as opposed to being company and team focused, **P2** emphasises this by stating “They tend to be very focused on themselves when they approach an interview as opposed to demonstrating a commitment to the company in which they are applying”. These participants noted that this individual focus, in the recruitment process, is more specific to Gen Z than any other cohort. As an example **P6** mentioned that Gen Z tends to often ask questions like “What can your company do for me instead of saying, this is x, y, and z, that I can do for your company to help your organisation grow”. Furthermore, when discussing this theme with our participants, they mentioned that it completely puts a recruiter off selecting an applicant “I would actually say it's something that frustrates us a bit in the recruitment. That you have people who come in who have practically zero experience and they still feel that they can put down all these demands” (**P7**).

4.3.1 Retaining and Attracting Talent

Four participants noted that having a well defined CSR strategy significantly helps in attracting Gen Z demographics “I mean, there's a whole group of people who won't work or invest in companies who don't have Progressive CSR” (**P5**). Participants noted that simply offering a high or competitive salary is not enough anymore and that Gen Z demographics are now looking beyond this immediate factor as they view their job as a crucial part of their identity “We need to have a compelling positioning statement as to why people should come and work with us because we're competing for talent. And more and more people are looking for more than just a salary. They want to make a positive contribution” (**P7**).

An organisation's CSR initiatives are also a crucial factor in retaining employees, as noted by **P3** “CSR practices is key for attracting, and more importantly retaining young talent these days”. This opinion was also supported by **P8** wherein they stated;

I think when young people apply for jobs, they look to see what the organisation's mission, vision and values are. So in this sense, it incentivises the organisation to update their strategies and internal procedures to both retain and attract new talent. I think generally,

organisations need to keep prioritising diversity and inclusion, as well worker rights/well-being. **(P8)**

4.3.2 Entitlement of Gen Z

When we discussed the theme of recruitment with the participants, seven out of eight expressed strong opinions regarding the sense of entitlement which they perceived Gen Z to have in comparison to older generations. **P1** suggests that;

I think that's true in the sense that Gen Zeds, and young millennials that come into the companies that I work with, they see the world in a certain way, and that world is a very entitled way. And Gen Z's and younger millennials have been brought up in what I call the Iwatch culture. Iwatch culture to me is where if I walk 100 yards, I get a gold star. And if I walked 500 yards, I got a Bronze Star. And if I walk another 500 yards, I get something else. And so Gen Z and young millennials have become very used to always being praised for any aspect of their life? **(P1)**

P6 also noted that many senior colleagues within their organisation feel that Gen Z are noticeably entitled compared to older Generations;

I've heard from my colleagues here that these younger people come in with little to no experience, and almost start acting like senior consultants with twenty years experience. They view themselves very highly and, that's absolutely fair enough, you totally should, but they have absolutely no experience to back up such self-assurance, and there should be a fine line between both. I know that this really annoys a lot of my colleagues who are the same age. **(P6)**

When we pressed the participants on why they feel that Gen Z are so entitled **P5** stated that it was largely due to economic conditions, specifically **P5** mentioned that if Gen Z were applying or

working in such jobs during a recession or harsh economic period, this “Air of entitlement” would completely stop “They never experienced a recession. Gen Z doesn't know what it's like to not be able to kind of send a CV out and not get an offer. You know, so I think that changes everything right?”. However, such entitlement was not always viewed entirely negatively. **P1** proposed that;

Another really good thing about Gen Z is that fearlessness you have around your entitlement to come and say hey, you guys are doing this but, did you think you're doing that? And I say well, not really why should we be doing that? Typically Gen Zed have the answers you know, have some answers around why something could be done a different way and how it could be done a different way. **(P1)**

4.3.3 Summary of Theme Three and Related Subthemes

This section has identified that individuals belonging to Gen Z often approach interviews and/or recruitment processes with an air of self-centeredness and individualism. This is notably different when compared to older age demographics, who are much more likely to emphasise what they can contribute to the organisation or the team in which they may be joining. Participants also mentioned Gen Z's focus on themselves tends to put off recruiters. This segment has also highlighted that having a well defined CSR strategy is crucial for attracting and retaining Gen Z talent as this demographic tends to look past salary, and considers the ethical and social stance of potential employers. Therefore, firms aligning their values with Gen Z's expectations is crucial in attracting and retaining talent from this demographic. The discussion also addressed the topic of entitlement in relation to Gen Z, noting that their expectations may be perceived as excessive by older colleagues. However, this could also introduce novel perspectives and drive change.

4.4 Balancing Ethical Practices with Competitive Business Pressures

Every participant expressed experiencing a strategic dilemma in-regards to CSR implementation and remaining competitive. **P1** notes;

I think the term Corporate Social Responsibility is just thrown out there all the time by companies, but a lot of companies don't actually sit down and have a drill down discussion on what the practical implications are, and what the cost basis is and what the return on investment is. Whilst I fully respect that change often comes from younger generations in any area of life. At the same time, the bottom dollar of any company is dollars. **(P1)**

P6 provides another account;

There's been cases where young people in particular have been vocal about recycling of plastics, food, debris and that's always a good start, but needs to be consistently maintained and promoted. The issue there is that some CSR's have good intentions, like a lot of good intentions which are genuine and they're trying to improve conditions but in a lot of cases they don't have the follow up and staying power that is required.

When asked about the feasibility of the firm's CSR initiatives, **P6** notes;

Sure, there is an opportunity cost with every strategic decision our leadership makes, but my experience with the younger generation is that they fail to recognise that allocating time is also a cost. Even though my firm has the financial means, we don't have the human capital to maintain all projects'. **(P6)**

This participant means that CSR initiatives require more than financial means. A firm having the financial means does not imply that the firms have the human resources to implement the proposed changes.

4.4.1 Balancing Feasibility and Aspiration

We then focused our questions surrounding the challenges of aligning the ambitious CSR visions of younger generations, with the practical capacities of the participants' firms. **P1** expressed a critical view, stating;

While I agree in principle with many of the ideas proposed by younger employees, I find them unworkable in practice. The main challenge is translating their aspirations into actionable projects within my department or organisation, which requires resource allocation, including HR efforts to initiate specific projects. **(P1)**

P8 highlighted the mixed influence of younger employees on CSR strategies, noting their enthusiasm and urgency, particularly regarding environmental and social justice issues. However, **P8** pointed out that "Their contributions often lack practical application, which can misguide our strategy implementation".

P6 further elaborated on the difficulty of implementing the ambitious CSR ideas proposed by younger employees. **P6** emphasised;

Merely having a desire or vision doesn't ensure realisation. The actual implementation involves navigating real-world logistics, which can be challenging due to financial and practical constraints. Younger employees, often influenced by social media, may not fully understand the financial implications and commitments required, which impacts the feasibility of their ideas, especially for new companies. **(P6)**

4.4.2 Transparent Practices Effect on Competitive Advantage

A common denominator between participants is the impact of increasing demands for operational transparency. **P2** highlighted a growing stakeholder demand for clarity in all aspects of operations, noting that "New recruits inquire about it during interviews, customers seek more detailed information, and lower-tier employees request greater clarity on how our board functions." When asked what the effects this has had, **P2** said "There are downsides to this. Firstly, providing more honest accounts can be used and replicated by competitors to improve their practices which is bad for us, but if you aren't transparent enough that's bad PR right, and you might lose business that way".

P1 shared a similar experience, providing an insight into their firm's means of combating the problem;

We actually have a head of sustainability and development in our company who is a Gen Z. And the reason we picked the Gen Z rather than somebody older is because we want to see what was the current thinking, not to say that we agree with it, but we want to know fully what that is, so that we can have a chance to sit down and talk about it and compare it to some of the older people in the company. So I think that's been useful. (**P1**)

P7 also emphasised the importance of authenticity in CSR activities, particularly for younger employees, "It's crucial to be genuine in our CSR efforts. Superficial measures are quickly recognised and criticised, leading to cynicism. However, genuine efforts resonate well with younger employees, keeping our practices honest and accountable".

P5 discussed the broader societal and market influences, particularly in the U.S., where there is significant polarisation around CSR, "There is a distinct divide, with some shareholder groups, especially on the right, refusing to invest in companies with perceived inadequate CSR. This has made transparency and ethical practices crucial in avoiding backlash and maintaining a positive company image". **P3** shared insights on internal communications related to CSR;

Transparency within the company is maintained through regular updates via emails, a dedicated section on our intranet, and open HR communications. This transparency is essential for maintaining employee morale and ensuring they act as brand ambassadors rather than detractors. **(P3)**

4.4.3 Changing the Organisation's Language

A recurring example of change initiated by Gen Z regarded the firm corporate language. For instance, **P1** discussed the challenges of adjusting communication styles to meet the preferences of different age groups within their client base;

This particular intern wanted us to use language with all of our client base, and the younger millennials, but it's definitely not fine for the older people who work with people in their 50s and 60s, who just don't like/have that kind of familiarity, and they don't like being told what to do. So we have to walk a fine line between the different age demographics and cultural demographics of our clients, and how many of them have bought in or not bought into this evolving culture. **(P1)**

Further highlighting the impact of Gen Z's feedback, **P1** added;

Because of the advice of Gen Z and the company, we've now changed the entire brand. So it's now colour coordinated, it's now date stamped, it's now order stamped, it now is a certain language and flow that was quite different. So while it might have just been kind of informational before, now it's more, you know, more inspirational than informational. **(P1)**

P2 noted that the focus on nuanced communication seems more important in larger multinational companies;

Although I know that this is receiving a lot of focus at the moment, I have not directly experienced this. I think that this is more of an issue for companies who are multinational, quite grand in scale or those that are often in media or the public eye. I think the scale of the company has something to do with this. **(P2)**

P3 shared specific instances from their experience, underscoring the importance of respectful and accurate communication;

Yes, but both by younger employees and mid-age ones. For example, how we define Indigenous peoples and communities when communicating about them. Ensuring we pay homage and respect to their stories. Making sure we get consent forms signed by local voices we wish to use for public communications. **(P3)**

P5 compared experiences within different company sizes;

Not so much in the domestic economy. Right as you mentioned there. A lot of this is kind of political correctness is taken to an extreme. I think if you're one of the bigger companies, if you're in the big International tech companies or if it is the big four accounting firms and if you're competing for staff you are more susceptible to this but I don't think the smaller indigenous firms are kind of at the mercy of that. So I haven't seen it. I haven't experienced it much in the Indigenous economy. **(P5)**

Lastly, **P6** critiqued the role of social media in shaping communication norms;

Yes, I have observed it, but it's driven by social media, not by common sense, and unfortunately not everyone can agree or discuss it with the respective knowledge\experience to demonstrate an understanding of PCL (Politically Correct Language) in a workplace and its implications across the board. As many people don't actually follow, read, digest the news, PCL is more driven by social media views and thus is confusing and convoluted, and in many cases misinterpreted by the younger staff and thus not successfully transferred or accepted into the company culture. I work and have lived in the states so I definitely see it happen a lot more over

there compared to Europe but it's definitely creeping over. **(P6)**

4.4.4 Summary of Theme Four and Related Subthemes

This section highlights how Gen X managers are struggling balancing CSR implementation and remaining profitable. Participants note that there is a significant challenge in understanding the costs and benefits of implementing CSR initiatives. Examples of Gen Z employees proposing smaller-scale CSR initiatives are exemplified, however, participants note that Gen Z do not understand the cost involved, positing that aligning their enthusiasm within the firm's capacity is difficult. Transparency in business practices are highlighted as a dilemma for managers where CSR can improve a firm's reputation externally and internally whilst potentially exposing business strategies to competitors. This section provides insights into the ongoing tension between wanting to act ethically and the need to remain financially viable in a competitive market.

4.5 Managerial Implications

When we asked participants about this topic, we framed our questions by inquiring if participants have encountered any difficulties regarding collaborating with Gen Z and the significance this age group places on CSR. This line of questioning elicited interesting responses. **P7** mentioned that;

I do not view this as a challenge. Well, I think it's great because first of all, I believe in it myself, but secondly, I think that many companies are not on board with this and they're approaching it like a box exercise or as something that has to be done. They're not really invested in it. So for me, as we progress this becomes more important, but being genuinely bought into this and invested in it, I think is going to become the differentiating factor among businesses. **(P7)**

P6 highlighted that it is crucial to strike a balance between the innovative ideas and ideals of younger, less experienced Gen Z employees with the practical experience of senior-level and top management executives when developing and implementing effective CSR policies. However, **P6** also stressed that this is extremely challenging to successfully implement as integrating CSR policies may conflict with immediate financial priorities and practical considerations;

Integrating CSR into a company's core business model can be complex and challenging, as it may not always align with the organisation's immediate financial priorities or practical considerations. This is where the ideals and aspirations of younger, less experienced professionals may not always align with the realities and constraints faced by more seasoned management teams. Striking the right balance between the ideas of younger people and the practical experience of senior leadership is crucial for the successful development and implementation of effective CSR policies. It's getting that combination right that allows for the development and implementation of CSR policies. **(P6)**

4.5.1 The Future Influence of Gen Z on a Manager's Role

Three participants tended to view the future influence of Gen Z as a largely positive phenomenon, as exemplified by **P3** "I foresee it as only positively. I think it will push my company to get a more nuanced and fresh perspective on what CSR truly means and to constantly reflect on if it's up to par with other companies and societal expectations". This view was also put forward by **P1** wherein they suggested that;

The influence of younger generations is vital as it pushes us to continuously reevaluate and refresh our CSR approaches. While it presents challenges, their fresh perspectives and urgency for change drive our company to remain adaptable and proactive in our CSR commitments. **(P1)**

P8 proposed that the influence of Gen Z on a manager's role will become quite significant and will require a greater adaptation to values such as; transparency, technology and flexibility;

As the head of HR, I believe Gen Z's influence on a manager's role will be significant and multifaceted. This generation values transparency, flexibility, and technology-driven solutions. Managers will need to adapt by fostering open communication and providing clear, consistent feedback. Additionally, there will be a greater emphasis on providing purposeful work and development opportunities, as Gen Z seeks to grow within their roles. **(P8)**

Other participants were unsure of where future influence may be and preferred not to speculate “I have no idea what will come next” **(P5)**.

4.5.2 Concerns about Skill Shortages

When we asked the participants if they felt concerns about future skill shortages regarding managing Gen Z demographics, we received mixed replies. For instance, **P3** answered “Not really, no”, as did **P6** “No, I don’t but I acknowledge I need to stay up-to-date regarding the multitude of the term CSR”. **P7** also noted that “Not particularly, no. I think they’re probably as good as it could be currently, we’ve made a huge effort to do so and we’re increasingly bringing in more young people into the organisation”. However, **P8** suggested that the role of technology will become more important for engaging employees and that managers will constantly need to upskill;

The use of technology will also become more integral, not just for productivity, but also for engagement and connectivity within teams. Overall, managers will need to be more agile and attuned to the expectations and values of Gen Z employees to effectively lead and motivate them. **(P8)**

Notable accounts were provided by **P4**, “There are challenges that await us. Although the average age of our organisation is toward the older end of the spectrum, the board has pressured HR to recruit younger employees. We currently don’t have the knowhow or at the very least the habits of managing them”. When asked about the implications of this in developing a strategy, **P4** stated;

The current strategy discourse is all about agility, but new circumstances require new skill requirements which contradict this notion. It is genuinely so challenging to A, plan ahead and B, include opinions from further down the hierarchy in strategic decisions. And this is from an organisation with a flat hierarchy, I can only imagine how it is in firms with more top down hierarchical approaches. **(P4)**

4.5.3 Summary of Theme Five and Related Subthemes

This chapter provided accounts of a managerial challenge; trying to balance innovative ideas with practical business realities. Some participants recognised the importance of engaging with CSR with genuinity, as opposed to a symbolic task. Other participants described the influence of Gen Z as a positive force addition to the firms through providing a new perspective of CSR. However, these participants note that there are practical difficulties in aligning these new ideas with existing business models and financial constraints. Moreover, managers describe their expectations regarding how their role will change, in line with greater stakeholder expectations surrounding transparency, flexible working hours and technological developments. Concerns were raised about potential skill shortages in managing Gen Z and their corresponding expectations, with some participants feeling prepared and others acknowledging the need for new strategies and skills to integrate younger employees more effectively into the firm.

This chapter has outlined and explored 5 themes which were then broken down and discussed further through the lens of 13 specific sub themes. The chapter provided a detailed and thorough understanding of the central concepts under discussion. In the following chapter, the findings and insights gathered from our interviews will be elaborated on and discussed, outlining the main findings and contributions of this thesis.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The following chapter provides a critical analysis and discussion of the study's findings and insights. The chapter connects responses from the interviews to the existing body of academic literature, aiming to answer the research question; *“What influence do Generation Z employees have on Corporate Social Responsibility strategies within multinational corporations led by Generation X top management?”*

5.1 Outline of Findings and Contributions

This study has contributed to the existing body of academic literature in several ways. Our results have illustrated that individuals belonging to the same generational cohort tend to (largely) exhibit similar characteristics and behaviours thus, confirming the literature. The relationship between the implementation and long-term maintenance of CSR strategies within an organisation has been emphasised, with direct reference to the scale and financial resources of such organisations. Additionally, there were findings surrounding the tendency of Gen Z to be disloyal towards their employer, which ultimately affects recruitment and retention strategies and, in turn, the ability to negotiate CSR. This further confirms the literature.

Furthermore, this study has provided several novel findings and insights which have not been extensively explored in academic discussion. Firstly, this study contributes insights from top management that highlight the Gen X perspective, which has largely been ignored. Another substantive finding is that a challenge for Gen Z's influence is not in their ideas but rather in adhering to the financial and practical realities of the firms. Specifically, Gen Z is heightening the demand for companies to comply with global CSR practices, which may not necessarily align with the organisations in which they are employed. Existing literature has also highlighted that Gen Z is drawn to companies partly due to their CSR practices but does not adequately address how these

preferences are often viewed as a sense of entitlement by potential employers. This, in line with their short employment duration at companies, limits their capacity to exert significant influence.

5.2 Generational Cohorts and Shared Characteristics

At the start of the literature review, we presented the notion, as identified by Alkire et al. 2020, Chung et al. 2016, Fernández-Durán, 2016, and Yawson & Yamoah, 2020, that individuals belonging to the same age cohort are likely to share similar sets of behaviours, views and characteristics. After conducting the eight interviews with Gen X individuals in senior/top management positions across completely different sectors and countries, we noticed that whilst some participants disagreed on several questions, topics, or themes, in the main there were very few moments across the interviews where participants radically disagreed with one another. Therefore, our findings support the claim presented by the aforementioned authors that there is a degree of truth in stating that individuals belonging to the same age cohort tend to share similar perspectives and outlooks.

5.3 Conceptualisation and Repackaging of CSR

Our results revealed a polarising account regarding the term CSR and the importance of its framework across firms' strategies. Firstly, participants agree that CSR strategies involve ethical practices that go beyond profit-making, including positive impacts on the community, environment, and workplace. This is in line with the notion presented by Jamali (2008) wherein they state that businesses adopt a stakeholder-oriented approach to CSR to cater to the interests of various stakeholder groups. However, it was noted that some participants view CSR as more of an umbrella term for practices that have been long established within their organisations, albeit under different labels. This notion is reinforced by examples where traditional practices, such as sustainable sourcing or environmental initiatives, are now categorised under CSR due to evolving stakeholder discourse and changing stakeholder expectations. Our study's participants suggest that the terminology around CSR has become far more prominent but the actual practices often remain

unchanged, suggesting a discrepancy between CSR as a concept and its implementation. Some participants also argued that CSR is frequently leveraged as a strategic tool rather than as a genuine commitment to ethical standards, often repackaged to suit current trends or to enhance public relations. These results are similar to the conclusions drawn by Peifer et al. (2020) who, challenge the discourse that the business-case approach of CSR is universally beneficial, suggesting that while investors might perceive a firm's profit-oriented CSR strategies as enhancing its competencies, employees could see them as undermining true corporate altruism, which could negatively affect employee loyalty and productivity. Our findings add to this discussion by highlighting that the top management of Gen X shares this perspective. There is a risk that CSR can be perceived as insincere if not aligned with genuine corporate values and actions. The discussion suggests that these managers reconsider their firms' strategies in response to changing stakeholder expectations. For CSR to be effective and sustainable, it must transcend being merely a label or marketing strategy and be authentically integrated into the core practices and values of the organisation. Our findings indicate that the concept of 'best practice' has diminished in importance amidst an overreliance on complying with CSR discourse.

As a final note, this finding supports the claims posed by Parry and Urwin (2011), who suggest that Gen Z impacts organisational behaviour and places a higher importance on CSR initiatives and ethical business practices compared to Gen X. However, whilst organisations may have rebranded their CSR initiatives due to the influence or pressure from Gen Z, it is also evident that these CSR practices existed previously and were simply just reworded or rebranded to fit a common narrative. Therefore, whilst Gen Z has organisational influence, in this sense, we suggest that it is exaggerated.

5.4 Gen Z's Influence on CSR Strategies

The existing literature (Benitez et al. 2022; Dobrowski et al. 2020; Perry & Urwin, 2011) has suggested that Gen Z are influencing top management and prompting them to reconsider and modify their CSR strategies. However, our findings add a layer of discussion to this narrative as we suggest that this phenomenon may be more exaggerated than it is in practice.

One possible explanation can be provided by Russo and Perrini (2010) who claim that the size of a firm plays a significant role in how they position and implement their CSR strategies. Specifically, the authors contend that companies of different sizes employ customised approaches to CSR that are founded on the distinctive characteristics and unique demands of their stakeholders. This rhetoric was also mentioned by participants wherein they stated that there are obvious, evident differences among how firms approach and employ CSR-related strategies due to their size, access to capital, and public image. Our findings support Russo and Perrini's contribution to Stakeholder Theory (2010); for instance, participants noted that firms with extra/excess capital are more likely to invest in CSR initiatives, while these initiatives are reduced quickly when the firm's finances are poor. Participants also stressed the relationship between the scale of the firm, their public image and their targeted demographic and how this influences CSR initiatives.

Examples of strategic initiatives led by Gen X that originated from ideas by Gen Z were few, involving only three participants of the eight. This does not imply that Gen Z lacks influence in integrating a CSR framework within various firms. Rather, participants indicate that their impact is often seen in smaller-scale initiatives, such as internal travel policies and remote working arrangements. With this in mind, the participants of this study initiated the discussion whether or not involving younger employees in a firm's CSR strategies is more challenging now than in the past, as a consequence of a growing stakeholder engagement, but also from the proposed scepticism from top managers.

This difficulty is compounded by a strategic dilemma that every participant identified in integrating CSR while staying competitive and profitable. This supports, and could be explained by McGuire et al. (1989), finding that high CSR ratings may correlate with lower earnings and stock returns, underscoring the financial risks associated with CSR, which in turn could explain the reluctance of top management of integrating initiatives poised by Gen Z. Participants expressed that maintaining ethical and social responsibility strategies can sometimes clash with the financial goals of a company. Even though CSR initiatives are frequently praised publicly, the actual costs and expected financial returns can discourage deeper commitments by internal (and, indeed,

external) stakeholders. Although Freeman and Dmytriyev (2017) claim that when CSR is integrated with stakeholder theory, this promotes a concrete framework for maintaining ethical business practices; however, participants have found that strategically integrating the CSR demands of younger employees is challenging. Our results contribute to this assertion, highlighting that these demands often lack a comprehensive understanding of their practical implications, costs, follow-through, returns, and the broader resources required to sustain such efforts.

Additionally, our results suggest that Gen Z may drive CSR strategies by offering a new perspective compared to older demographics. Participants attributed that this perspective likely originates from Gen Z's digital proficiency, vocal nature in expressing opinions, and access to unfiltered information through social media, along with Gen X's acknowledgement may provide an opening where Gen Z can influence an organisation's CSR strategy.

Uche (2018) claims that due to the connectivity and rapid access to current content via the internet, Gen Z is particularly conscious and expressive regarding social and political issues. This claim supports Katz (2022), who states that due to the internet, Gen Z has been able to learn more about various cultures and ethnic groups as information is extremely accessible to them. Both Uche and Katz argue that Gen Z's digital proficiency and access to unfiltered information through social media plays a significant role in shaping their views on social responsibility.

The information presented above offers an explanation for how Gen Z may shape an organisation's strategies. However, our discussion with Gen X managers also underscores the various challenges that arise when working with Gen Z, which ultimately limit their potential influence. For instance, it was expressed that Gen Z workers fail to perform sufficient research or obtain first-hand knowledge, instead over-relying on social media influencers and personalities for guidance and information. Whilst Katz (2022) provides a positive account of social media's influence, top management from our study indicates that there is an overreliance on external social media/internet sources that can hinder Gen Z's ability to fully grasp the practical implications of business decisions and may lead to a lack of genuine understanding of the real-world business environment.

Moreover, the divide between Gen Z's idealistic and creative thinking and the realistic concerns required in business was presented as another major problem. This disparity may often lead to innovative concepts that might not be workable or feasible within a business's operational reality. Whilst Gen Z's digital proficiency and expressive nature may contribute to how the demographic influences CSR strategies, our findings further indicate that the areas in which they focus may be overly ambitious, and could be defined as a trendy or worldwide issue as opposed to something specific to the company in which they work. Our findings suggest that due to this, their initiatives may not always align with the practical capabilities and immediate financial priorities of the organisation and therefore, might not be an obstacle for Gen when asserting strategic influence. Whilst we are Gen Z, we understand that companies are fundamentally about making a profit (with expectations for non-profits), and we realise that it is easy to be ideological because it costs nothing.

5.4.1 Recruitment, Retention & Entitlement

Half of the participants highlighted the significant role of a well-defined CSR strategy in attracting Gen Z demographics. Their experiences surrounding recruitment reflected that many individuals from this group refuse to work or invest in companies that lack genuine CSR initiatives. This claim aligns with McAllister's study (2024), which found that a significant portion of Gen Z examines a company's environmental policies and impact before accepting a job. The study notes that 55% of the cohort conducts such research, and 17% have changed jobs or industries due to environmental concerns (McAllister, 2024). Our study builds on these findings, with participants noting that offering a high or competitive salary alone is insufficient. Gen Z values their job as a key part of their identity and seeks more than just financial compensation; they are looking for opportunities to make a meaningful contribution. Additionally, CSR initiatives are important for retaining employees. Effective CSR practices are seen as essential for both attracting and retaining young talent. This includes aligning the organisation's mission, vision, and values with the expectations of young employees, which encourages organisations to continually update their strategies and internal procedures. Emphasising diversity, inclusion, worker rights, and well-being are also seen as priorities for companies aiming to attract and retain this demographic.

These accounts are consistent with the findings of Odumeru and Ogbonna (2013), who argues that CSR efforts can greatly improve a company's capability to attract leading talent by harmonising the organisation's values with those of potential employees who favour ethical and responsible employers. Odumeru and Ogbonna suggest that this alignment is particularly significant in the current job market, where Gen Z candidates prioritise companies that make a positive societal impact (2013). Our findings support this central argument of their study, whilst contributing with the perspective of Gen X management who are aware of Gen Z's preference for employers with strong CSR credentials. This claim emphasises the findings of Freeman (1984) who suggests that employees (internal stakeholders) who are satisfied with the organisational goals of a company are more likely to stay at such an organisation. A central finding of our study emphasises that recruitment is an area where Gen Z has affected these firms' strategies.

In line with this, several participants observed a pronounced sense of entitlement among workers from Gen Z. This led to discussions that showcased a range of perspectives among the participants. Some attributed that since Gen Z was largely brought up in an environment where they were subject to constant praise and validation and despite their inexperience, they have an entitled mentality similar to that of 'senior consultants'. Certain economic circumstances, like never having experienced a recession, are also thought to play a role in this sense of entitlement. Due to the limited research on the perspectives of top management, this aspect is not included in the literature review. The existing literature emphasises that Gen Z is attracted to companies partly because of their CSR compliance but does not address how these preferences might be perceived as entitlement.

Nonetheless, some see this entitlement as a benefit, emphasising Gen Z's boldness and inventiveness, which frequently contribute novel concepts and original viewpoints. This sense of entitlement also translated into how Gen Z approached recruitment processes and job interviews. To add, all eight participants noted that Gen Z displays a strong focus on themselves rather than the organisation and the team(s) in which they would be joining/working. Furthermore, participants noted that this self-centred/important attitude is much more prominent among Gen Z individuals compared to older demographics. It was observed across several interviews that during

the recruitment process, Gen Z often inquired about what the company could do for them instead of the other way around. This ultimately resulted in recruiters finding it off-putting and not selecting what were otherwise prominent candidates. A potential reason for this may be the different outlook that Gen Z has regarding the workplace, as identified by McAllister (2024), who states that Gen Z views a lot of traditional concepts such as climbing up the ladder to be outdated. Moreover, Kaplan (2024) posits that instead of being perceived as hard workers, which was traditionally associated with staying late and working above their contracted hours, Gen Z is more concerned with the output of their work. Also, Knipp and Gallagher (2021, p.26) claim that Gen X have a “higher hard-working desire” compared to Gen Z and this may be an indicator as to why Gen X perceive Gen Z as entitled. The literature suggests that the varying relationships and expectations that different demographic groups have towards the workplace and employment can explain the perception that Gen Z is entitled. Our findings support these claims by illustrating that Gen Z's unique, individualistic, perspective on work leads the demographic to prioritise their individual needs and goals over traditional workplace norms, and this is often perceived as entitlement by older generations.

Another theme which appeared across all interviews is that Gen Z tends to be less loyal to their employer in comparison to older demographics. This claim is supported by The University of Queensland (2023) which states that Gen Z will have an average of 16-17 jobs, across 5-7 careers in their life. Notably, all participants referenced this during one point of their interviews and expressed that this had a series of implications. Most significantly of which was the fact that some participants were reluctant to invest in Gen Z as they believed the cohort would constantly move around, between different employers. To further emphasise this point, one participant stated that their organisation has held onto ‘C players’ rather than seeking to recruit and retain top ‘A and B Players’. This was a direct consequence of the perceived lack of loyalty and long-term commitment. McKinley (2023) supports such a perspective by stating that Gen Z members today are currently switching jobs at a rate that is 134% higher compared to the year 2019. In line with this, our results contribute to this discourse by finding that Gen X managers believe that Gen Z employees do not stay long enough at an organisation to influence the organisation's strategic processes and initiatives. This is a significant point raised by our study participants; that the main

challenge for Gen Z's influence lies not in their ideas but in their short stints at companies, which restricts their capacity to exert influence.

The central findings of our thesis have been delineated in Chapter Five. This chapter has outlined our findings that support the existing academic literature, as well as presenting several novel discoveries and insights that contribute to and expand scholarly discourse on the subject matter. The concluding chapter, which follows, will present a summary of our thesis, a discussion surrounding future research directions and lastly, a note on final remarks.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary

This thesis has examined the influence of Gen Z on multinational organisations' CSR strategies. This was achieved through conducting eight semi-structured interviews with top managers belonging to the Gen X cohort. Crucially, all participants of this study hold or have held positions where they possess(ed) a direct influence over the creation and implementation of their organisation's CSR strategies. This study has identified both the potential and the constraints of Gen Z's influence on these strategies.

Our findings have demonstrated that whilst Gen Z does, in fact, exert a degree of influence within the organisations they work, particularly through their emphasis on ethical practices, transparency and social accountability, this influence is ultimately impeded by a series of practical and financial limitations which they fail to adequately consider. According to our Gen X senior management participants, Gen Z's enthusiasm for ambitious CSR objectives occasionally conflicts with what are seen as the realities of corporate operations and financial priorities.

Additionally, our findings highlight the significance of having an authentic or genuine relationship and engagement with CSR initiatives as superficial or strategically-driven CSR efforts run a considerable risk of being perceived as insincere. As an effect, this can potentially undermine employee loyalty and productivity. Therefore, effective CSR strategies or practices must be deeply embedded within the organisation's core values and operations, demonstrating a genuine commitment to ethical principles, rather than operating solely as a marketing or public relations strategy.

6.2 Future Research Directions

Our study provides various avenues for further research. The first suggestion is to replicate the study with further delimitations and/or inclusions; for instance, conducting the study with participants from the same industry. Whilst our study's inclusion of participants from various organisational settings provided a broader overview, conducting an industry-specific study with the same methodology could provide more targeted insights. Analysing the influence of Gen Z within the same industry provides further benefits on the premise that the research can further demarcate, and focus on specific areas of CSR. Additionally, this would enable future comparative studies, between industries, which can identify trends as well as commonalities in how Gen Z influences CSR.

Although the sample size is small, there is an opportunity for future researchers to conduct interviews with top management from Gen Z which could be compared to the findings of this study. Similarly, we acknowledge the study's sole emphasis on internal stakeholders. Future research should consider multiple stakeholders, including external ones on the premise that this would provide more applicable results for managers.

Lastly, this study utilised a qualitative methodology which allowed for an in-depth exploratory examination of this topic. However, future research could build upon our findings by implementing a quantitative research design with a much larger sample size, resulting in a broader study. This would also significantly reduce the amount of variables through close-ended data collection methods and would ultimately speed up the data collection and analysis process.

6.3 Final Remarks

Before conducting the study we believed that the Gen Z demographic would have a significant influence on top management and more broadly, the CSR strategies in which they implement. After completing the literature review, this opinion was further solidified due to the emphasis various scholars have placed on Gen Z as being an influential demographic (Benitez-Marquez et al. 2022; Parry & Urwin 2011; Rank & Contreras, 2021). However, after conducting eight interviews with Gen X individuals in senior/top managerial positions from several different countries, our findings revealed that whilst Gen Z may have a degree of influence, the extent to which it penetrates an organisation's CSR framework and strategies completely varies and ultimately, is much less significant than we had originally thought. Although both of us belong to the Gen Z demographic, we recognise that businesses are fundamentally driven and motivated by generating profit and creating as much value for stakeholders as possible. We also acknowledge that adopting an ideological stance is easy, as doing so does not necessitate any real personal or financial investment.

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Appendix A: Pilot Interview Guide

Background Questions:

1. How would you describe the organisation's overall culture and values?
2. What is your understanding surrounding the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility?
3. Does the organisation in which you currently work in, or have previously worked, implement(s) any specific CSR-focused strategies or initiatives that you are aware of?
 - A. If so, what procedures are in place to ensure these are accorded to?
 - B. How frequently does your company revise its CSR policies?
4. Can you describe the processes or systems in place at your company, or at any previous company in which you worked, that are set up to gather feedback from employees on CSR-related issues?
5. Do you work directly or in any capacity, with younger demographics such as graduates, 'new hires', or those generally belonging to the Generation Z cohort (early 20's)?
6. Does this demographic directly influence the organisation's CSR strategies?
 - A. YES; how is it expressed by younger employees?
 - B. NO: why do you think that is?

Specific Questions Related to CSR:

7. Can you share a case study or example where the influence of younger employees significantly shaped a CSR initiative at a company in which you work, have worked in?
8. How are ethical considerations weighed against business goals when making strategic decisions?
9. As an example of social responsibility, the notion of "Politically Correct Language" has become increasingly prominent and is now commonly adopted across various organisations. Essentially, influencing and/or changing an organisations corporate language. Have you observed this trend or similar trends being driven by younger individuals within your organisation or any organisation in which you have worked in? If so, how?

10. What expectations do younger employees tend to have about corporate ethics and transparency, and how, if at all, has this influenced your CSR policies?
- A. Do you believe that a company's CSR strategy influences its brand perception more among younger audiences (graduates, new hires, early 20's) compared to older ones (generally senior/top-level management)? Why or why not?
11. Do you see any benefits in having a well-articulated CSR strategy? For instance, in attracting and retaining young talent to your company?
- A. If yes: In what ways do you think CSR strategies might need to evolve to continue attracting young talent over the next decade regarding your company or more generally?
12. How do you foresee the influence of younger generations affecting the long-term CSR vision of your company?

Manager specific:

13. Do you anticipate any challenges in your role specifically due to the increased importance of CSR?
14. What challenges have you faced when integrating younger employees into pre-existing CSR plans, and how have you overcome these challenges?
15. Do you plan to sustain young employee engagement in CSR activities in the long run?
- A. If yes: how?

Appendix B: Revised Interview Guide

Background Questions:

1. How would you describe the organisation's overall culture and values?
2. What is your understanding surrounding the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility?
3. Does the organisation in which you currently work in, or have previously worked, implement(s) any specific CSR-focused strategies or initiatives that you are aware of?
 - A. If so, what procedures are in place to ensure these are accorded to?
 - B. How frequently does your company revise its CSR policies?
4. Do you work directly or in any capacity, with younger demographics such as graduates, 'new hires', or those generally belonging to the Generation Z cohort (early 20's)?
5. Does this demographic directly influence the organisation's CSR strategies?
 - A. Yes: how is it expressed by younger employees?
 - B. No: why do you think that is?
6. Can you describe the processes or systems in place at your company, or at any previous company in which you worked, that are set up to gather feedback from employees on CSR-related issues?

Specific Questions Related to CSR:

7. Can you share a case study or example where the influence of younger employees significantly shaped a CSR initiative at a company in which you work, have worked in?
8. How are ethical considerations weighed against business goals when making strategic decisions?
9. As an example of social responsibility, the notion of "Politically Correct Language" has become increasingly prominent and is now commonly adopted across various organisations. Essentially, influencing and/or changing an organisation's corporate language. Have you observed this trend or similar trends being driven by younger individuals within your organisation or any organisation in which you have worked in? If so, how?

10. What expectations do younger employees tend to have about corporate ethics and transparency, and how, if at all, has this influenced your CSR policies?
- A. Do you believe that a company's CSR strategy influences its brand perception more among younger audiences (graduates, new hires, early 20's) compared to older ones (generally senior/top-level management)? Why or why not?
11. How do you balance the need for ethical integrity with competitive business pressures? How do you communicate your CSR activities to potential and current employees?
12. Do you see any benefits in having a well-articulated CSR strategy? For instance, in attracting and retaining young talent to your company?
- A. If yes: In what ways do you think CSR strategies might need to evolve to continue attracting young talent over the next decade regarding your company or more generally?
13. How do you foresee the influence of younger generations affecting the long-term CSR vision of your company?

Manager specific:

14. Do you anticipate any challenges in your role specifically due to the increased importance of CSR?
15. How do you think managers are preparing, regarding your company or more generally, to address the increased importance of CSR?
16. What challenges have you faced when integrating younger employees into pre-existing CSR plans, and how have you overcome these challenges?
17. Do you plan to sustain young employee engagement in CSR activities in the long run?
- A. If yes: how?
18. Are there any concerns about skills shortages or training needs to manage and implement CSR?

Appendix C: Search Strategy

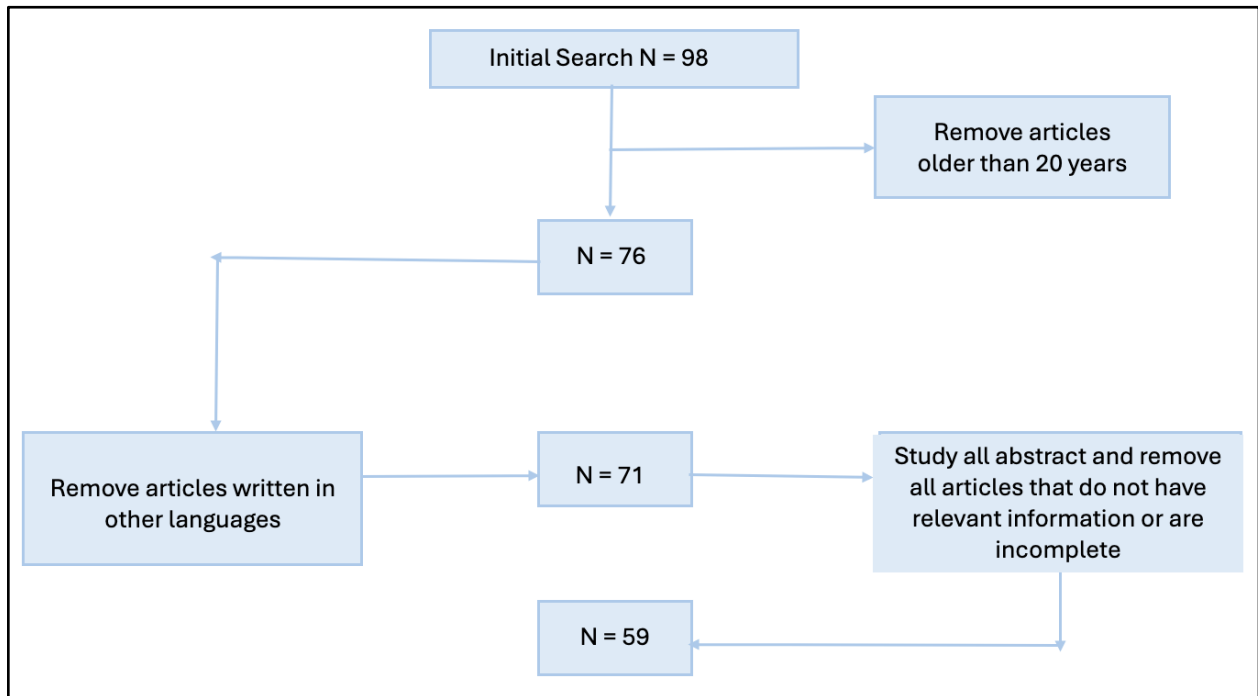


Figure 1.

Appendix D: Intersection of Stakeholder Theory and CSR

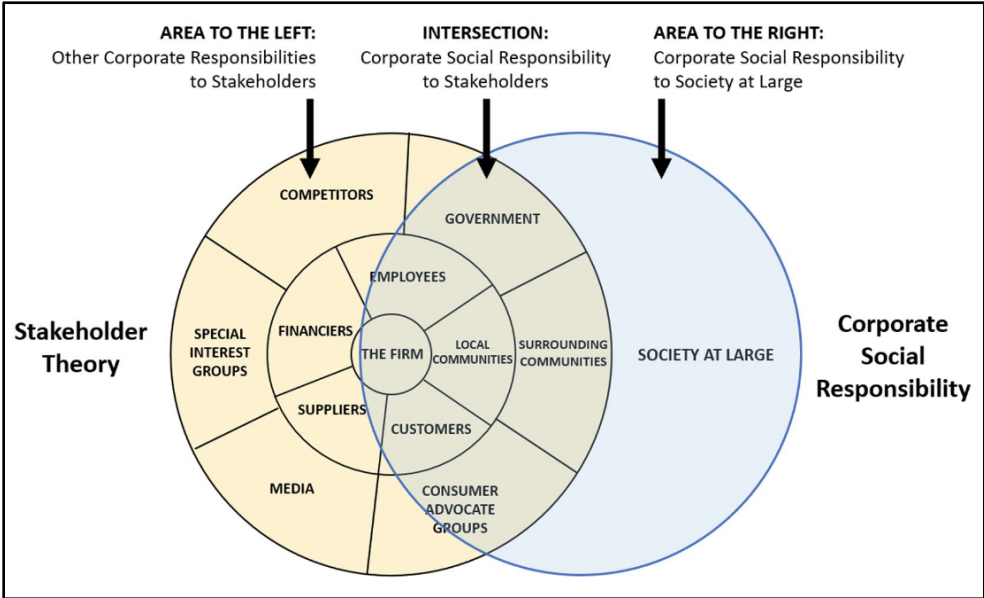


Figure 2.

Appendix E: Interview Process

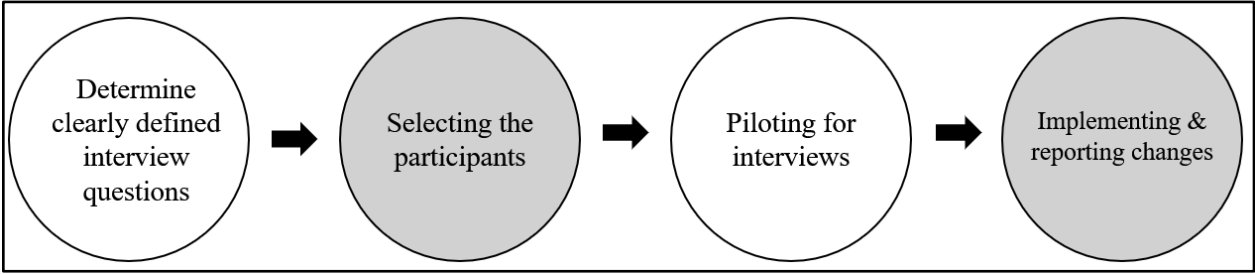


Figure 3

Appendix F: Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Sub-themes
Gen X's Perspective of CSR	The Standards and Practices of CSR are Constantly Changing 'Repackaging' of Already Existing Practices
Working with Gen Z	Challenges of Working with Gen Z Benefits Influence of Gen Z Expectations of Gen Z
Recruitment	Retaining and Attracting Talent Entitlement of Gen Z
Balancing Ethical Practices with Competitive Business Pressures	Balancing Feasibility and Aspiration Transparent Practices Effect on Competitive Advantage Changing the Organisations Language
Managerial Implications	The Future Influence of Gen Z on the Managers Role Concerns about Skill Shortage

Figure 4.

Appendix G: Participant Key

Participant code	Job Title	Firm Sector	Country
P1	CEO	Research Consultancy & Publishing	Ireland
P2	CEO/Country Manager	Banking & Private Consultant	Bangladesh
P3	Communications Manager	Conservation	Sweden
P4	Chief of Governance	Humanitarian Aid	Sweden
P5	CEO	Waste Management	Saudi Arabia
P6	Farming Director	Aquaculture	Norway
P7	CEO	Chemical Treatment	Ireland
P8	HR Manager	Humanitarian Aid	United States
Pilot 1	CEO	Banking	Ireland
Pilot 2	CFO	IT	Sweden

Figure 5.