

**EXPLORING THE FOUNDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND DISCURSIVE
SENSEMAKING OF (EMPLOYEE-DIRECTED) CORPORATE SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)**

by

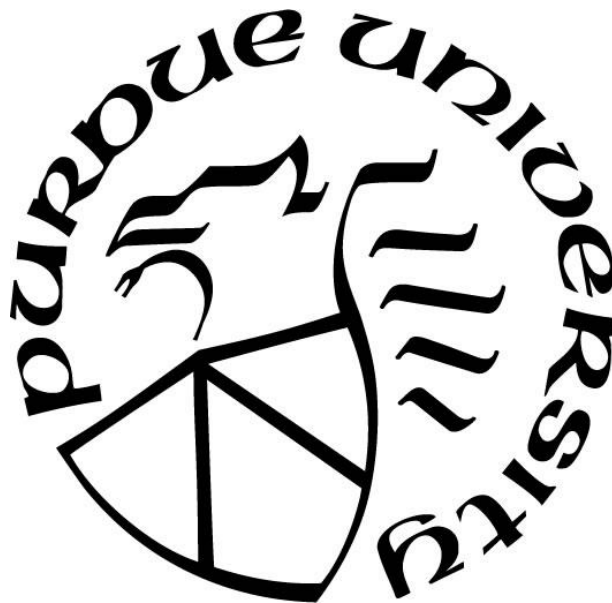
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For my parents.

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ABSTRACT

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Title: Exploring the Foundations, Implications, and Discursive Sensemaking of (Employee-Directed) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

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In an age where corporate scandals around diversity, equity, harassment, and other social issues continue to surface, particularly in the wake of the #MeToo and Time's Up movements, scholars must reconsider the role of business in society. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) provides organizations with a way to benefit stakeholders, society, and themselves beyond legal compliance. However, while practitioners and other stakeholders have often viewed CSR as an external, reputation, or crisis management tool, its conceptualization and operationalization are changing shape in response to growing social concerns and pressures on corporations to "do the right thing." With this call for expanded aims of CSR, scholars are pushing for an internal CSR view through employee perspectives regarding CSR efforts, particularly in considering how organizations act responsibly toward internal stakeholders (May, 2014). Thus, research has begun taking a "micro-turn" in analyzing CSR (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012), focused on an individual analysis of such practices *within* organizations. Broadly, this dissertation seeks to answer the question of how organizations are responsible to their own employees, particularly through CSR efforts.

This study takes a mixed-method, micro-approach to understanding the internal sensemaking and understanding of employee-directed CSR given the potentially changing nature of such efforts. In particular, this study explores how organizational members (i.e., employees) construct knowledge (via their sensemaking) of organizational CSR and primarily those employee-

focused. I take a communicative and discursive approach in viewing CSR as a socially constructed phenomenon (Schultz, Castello, & Morsing, 2013) and (social) movement within organizations (Georgallis, 2017), and thus contextual and unique to organizational sites. Findings revealed D/discourses of CSR from employee perceptions at the micro level and reflected in macro level document messaging. Through this, I found various paradoxes of CSR from the expectations versus reality of what it means for organizations to be “responsible.” At the individual level, employee sensemaking around CSR came to light—particularly in highlighting how these stakeholders rationalize, perceive, and identify with such efforts, especially those targeting or benefiting employees. In presenting a multi-method study, this dissertation contributes to research on the micro-foundations and limited internal perspective of CSR and provides important pragmatic implications given the timely and relevant nature of this work.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“But how can companies do better?” This question has spread across various headlines and popular press in response to the growing concern of sexual harassment and gender discrimination in the workplace (Gerdeman, 2018; Kantor, 2018; Temin, 2018). Months after the #MeToo and Time’s Up¹ movements broke out, people began turning to organizations and asking, “what should employers do about it?” #MeToo, founded in 2006 by Tarana Burke, became a social phenomenon to help survivors of sexual abuse or harassment, and sparked greater conversation and popularity after it went viral on social media in the fall of 2017 (Johnson & Hawbaker, 2018). The Time’s Up movement specifically addresses sexual misconduct, as well as gender inequality, in the workplace. Founded in early 2018, a collective of hundreds of women, primarily in Hollywood, aimed to fight harassment of any kind across the entertainment industry and beyond (Garber, 2018). As it seems, public outcry and media discourse is calling for an explicit and clear dedication to changing and bettering workplace environments. Thus, I argue that corporations need to be reflexive in considering changes in policy, culture, leadership, and more as these issues have developed into a great societal concern. In the pursuit of exerting positive social change within and outside the organization, companies can use Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs. In the push for companies to change (from) within, both scholars and popular press have argued that it is time for CSR to be more internally and employee focused, with a push for scholarship to specifically take an internal perspective in exploring how this may, or may not, be happening.

¹ To clarify, the hashtag (#) is commonly used when referring to the Me Too or #MeToo movement due to its popularization via Twitter. However, Time’s Up has been primarily offline, formed by a collective of individuals, mostly celebrities, in response to #MeToo but focused on workplace issues, whereas #MeToo addresses all forms and places of sexual harassment (Langone, 2018).

While their perceptions are largely neglected in current literature (May, 2011, 2014), employees are a central, important stakeholder group to influence Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in organizations (Bhattacharya, Korschun, & Sen, 2008; May, 2011, 2014; Morsing, Schultz, & Nielsen, 2008). Rather, extant work, particularly in a Western context, has examined the explicit and often external-focused efforts labelled “CSR” (Matten & Moon, 2008) and has been largely macro in focus. In a time of increased challenges facing corporations due to the current social and political climate², internal processes regarding CSR are particularly pertinent in understanding how organizations, and their employees, are responding. Thus, CSR research has called for a micro-turn in CSR focused on individual analysis of such efforts *within* organizations (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). In other words, scholars are pushing for taking an “insider’s view” (May, 2014) in gaining access to internal audiences to understand CSR dynamics. Additionally, empirical research is needed to explore to whom organizations believe they are responsible (i.e., for whom or what CSR is designed)—and how they are enacting such beliefs. In considering CSR as a communicative and discursive construction in and around organizations, this study considers how corporations are engaging in CSR strategically to address internal issues from the perspective of those inside.

As Morsing et al. (2008) claimed, “it seems more important than ever before for companies to be perceived as respectable and socially responsible” (p. 97). In considering the current and (near) future for CSR trends, conversations and articles in current popular press call for and emphasize a change in workplace environments (Gerdeman, 2018; Kantor, 2018; McPherson, 2018; Temin, 2018). Specifically, key CSR issues should be focused internally—including the explicit addressing of workplace harassment and inequality, expanding diversity initiatives, and

² Here I refer to growing social concern and disclosure of unethical workplace practices by organizations and/or individuals within these contexts. Also referring to issues amplified by #MeToo, Time’s Up, and related movements.

getting CSR integrated into conversations at the C-suite level (Garcia, 2018; McPherson, 2018). In fact, research confirms that treatment of employees is an absolute and necessary element of a corporation's CSR (Morsing et al., 2008). Organizations continually face pressure from external stakeholders (e.g., customers, investors, community members) and employees to take a stand with regard to growing social concerns.

1.1 Current Issues and Debate in CSR Research

CSR fundamentally calls for corporations to integrate both social and environmental factors and considerations into their core operations and relationships with various stakeholders. Here, I introduce current issues and considerations in CSR research and practice which ultimately led to the idea for this dissertation. As Carroll (1999) predicted, CSR continues to evolve particularly in response to growing social issues, as reactive to corporate crises and scandals, and in fulfilling continuous calls for organizations to simply *do the right thing*. For Carroll, CSR always has a place in both theory and practice “because at its core, it addresses and captures the most importance concerns of the public regarding business and society relationships” (p. 292). Additionally, more and more companies are increasingly communicating CSR and sustainability efforts through nonfinancial reporting. While the voluntary nature of such reporting differs culturally, organizations are making their CSR activities more public as way to showcase to investors, community members, employees (current and prospective), and so on.

From the perspective of corporations, CSR can be incredibly valuable in terms of self-interest, specifically related to increased financial performance (Ihlen, Bartlett, & May, 2011b). Additionally, CSR “helps create a better reputation; it forestalls regulation, secures a more stable societal context for business, and reduces operating costs by avoiding conflict (Carroll, 1999;

Davis, 1973; Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Davis, 1973)” (p. 552). Internally, CSR increases employee identification and might prevent irresponsible behaviors (Gond et al., 2010).

Thus, the academic and practitioner conversation continues to debate what CSR means, to/for whom corporations should be responsible, and how these responsibilities should be operationalized to simultaneously benefit both society (and other stakeholders) and organizations.

Beneficiaries and influencers, also known as “CSR actors” (Moon, Murphy, & Gond, 2017), play a role in reflecting and shaping an organization’s CSR agenda. These broadly include societal, business, and governmental actors. Societal actors are often associated with the core of CSR, hence the word “social” in the term itself. Likewise, societies have various expectations and powers over business, and believe these entitles have certain (ethical) obligations to those they impact. The individuals in these societies can range in terms of political or economic status, and in relation to the organization itself (i.e., stakeholders). In short, businesses continue to seek social legitimacy through “public acceptance, endorsement, and support” (Carroll, Liparito, Post, & Werhane, 2012, p. 1).

While Moon et al. (2017) described society as the context for which CSR finds itself, the authors argue that business is the primary actor—for the responsibility of business is the very basis of CSR. While the main point of a for-profit business is to sell goods and services, the social objectives and further purpose or role of business in society is continually debated in both theory and practice. In other words, what and whom companies are responsible for, and how such entities enact these responsibilities through various efforts or policies, is contested based on various perspectives. Therefore, the business case for CSR continues to be relevant in considering how investing in such efforts should result in tangible benefits on the side of the corporation. I would also include relevant *internal* stakeholders who undoubtedly affect CSR policies in terms of

execution, communication, and constitution. Thus, as is the focus of this dissertation, organizational members should also be considered a CSR actor, most likely under the business category, and can be viewed as both a beneficiary or receiver of CSR, as well as a group who is actually responsible for CSR.

Finally, Moon et al. (2017) presented governmental actors as “the key rule-makers and institutional shapers for business responsibility” (p. 44; see also Moon, Kang, & Gond, 2010). While not often considered as having a role in CSR due to their relatively voluntary nature on behalf of organizations to take part in such efforts, governments have in fact directly influenced CSR through regulatory actions. Examples include:

...the creation of incentives for philanthropy (e.g., the English Charities Act 1601) or for the provision of insurance (e.g., in U.S. health and retirement plans); subsidies for CSR activities or organizations (e.g., as directed by the Thatcher government to companies and CSR associations and partnerships in the early 1980s); the introduction of CSR-type criteria for public procurement (e.g., the adoption of fair trade and sustainable product requirements by public agencies; and ‘soft rules’ to encourage CSR (e.g., the requirements of various forms of social reporting in countries from Denmark to India, and in stock exchanges from the U.S. to China). (Moon et al., 2017, pp. 44-45)

Additionally, as noted in the latter, in some cultures and countries, CSR and the reporting of these activities is in fact legally required, to an extent based on the context.

It is difficult to define what CSR is and what it looks like is because “what counts as responsible corporate conduct changes over time. What we consider to be responsible behavior not only depends on the relevant business context but also on temporal dynamics” (Rasche, Morsing, & Moon, 2017, p. 12; see also Rivoli & Waddock, 2011). Additionally, the ignoring social events and concerns of the time is no longer an option. Instead, some corporations choose to either take a stance against such issues, political or otherwise, or integrate them into new CSR focus or platform.

1.1.1 The Changing Nature of CSR

Indeed, the “social” aspect of CSR has been somewhat of a hot topic in recent years and is increasingly becoming an expectation of corporate activity. To begin, companies are finding more ways and reasons to collaborate with community partners, NGO, and various philanthropic initiatives. Likewise, societal groups are putting increased pressures on organizations to change, which could mean development of alternatives to a variety of business practices, supply chain processes, address issues of past wrongdoings (i.e., Corporate Historical Responsibility), supporting certain social justice issues as part of corporate mission, and so on. For Doerr (2018), CSR matters now more than ever—particularly in the age of #MeToo and other social movements. In fact, “CSR functions are responsible for more than 40 percent of a company’s reputation, and CSR professionals play a pivotal role in developing a culture” that is ethically sound (Doerr, 2018, para. 3). Additionally, CSR can have strategic benefits as well. Not only does CSR improve overall company image and reputation, it has direct effects on consumer motivation and action (Cardona, 2017) and recruitment with prospective employees (Greening & Turban, 2000; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010).

Today, organizations are becoming more involved in advocating for social or political issues—becoming what has been termed “meaningful brands” (Cardona, 2017). Here, I focus on the social—often as a result of the context (e.g., cultural, economic) or industry in which they find themselves involved. Danziger (2018) discussed what happens when corporations veer into political action, and away from the commonly viewed CSR operationalization of environmental preservation or raising money for various nonprofit causes. What happens when companies move into the arena of political and social activism? A specific example includes several corporations (e.g., Dick’s Sporting Goods, Walmart, Meijer) taking a stand in various ways against gun violence

in the wake of the Parkland school shooting. As Covercent CEO Patrick Quinlan put it, the world of business “is undergoing an ethical transformation” (Danziger, 2018, para. 10), suggesting that organizations engaging in CSR must fulfill both the business and moral or ethical case. Thus, Danziger (2018) argued that “Times have changed and corporate social responsibility is no longer just a ‘feel good’ position companies take as a public relations gesture” (para. 5). And while the traditional ‘business case’ for CSR (Carroll & Shabana, 2010) is still an important consideration, legitimacy from the perspective of corporate stakeholders continues to be a pressing issue given these groups’ “perception of the role of business in society” (Colleoni, 2013, p. 228) and how this relationship is continually redefined. I view organizational legitimacy as Abdulrazak and Amran (2018) did in perceiving this concept as “subjectively and construed socially” (p. 45; see also Palazzo & Scherer, 2006)—and therefore highly contextual given the society being considered.

In addition to the economic and performance benefits of CSR particularly in terms of legitimizing an organization’s activities (Palazzo & Richter, 2005), corporations are increasingly seeking *moral* legitimacy (i.e., if and how an organization’s actions promote social welfare and positively contribute to the greater good) through these efforts as well (Abdulrazak & Amran, 2018). As called for by stakeholders, “ethical expectations have risen along with a set of contingent responsibilities that corporations are now asked to fulfill” (Colleoni, 2013, p. 228). With this, the public is calling for corporations to not only justify their economic or financial-related actions, but also any social or environmental as well particularly as organizations are being more involved in social or political issues—and those deemed external or perhaps not explicitly related to the organization’s existence. As Colleoni (2013) asked, how can CSR, and CSR communication, effectively create “congruence between corporate and stakeholders’ *social* values” (p. 230). Thus, it seems like the moral and ethical case for CSR is becoming increasingly called for and supported,

rather than or in conjunction with a sole business or financial case, in believing that companies truly have a responsibility to better society and the communities, individuals, and nations they impact.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on current discourse in the media and popular press in extending what these outlets and corresponding practitioners are arguing as the most important CSR trends now and in the foreseeable future. Overall, these groups call for and emphasize a change in workplace environments (Gerdeman, 2018; Kantor, 2018; McPherson, 2018; Temin, 2018). Thus, key CSR issues should be focused internally—including the end of workplace harassment and inequality, expanding diversity initiatives, and getting CSR more involved at the C-suite level (Garcia, 2018; McPherson, 2018). In other words, as times and the issues we as a society care about change, so must corporate approaches and CSR foci. Therefore, it is important to understand how more companies are adopting and aligning CSR into their core business strategies. Additionally, scholars can further investigate for what or whom companies believe they are responsible.

1.1.2 CSR For Whom; For What?

Much of the historical academic and popular press debate regarding CSR has centered on one main question: why should corporations be socially responsible? Likewise, the follow-up question is often then, “to whom or for what should companies be responsible,” which has been the driving question behind the very foundation of this dissertation’s focus and goals. An early theoretical and conceptualization of social responsibility came from Friedman (1970) in arguing that CSR is self-serving behavior, and that corporations are thus only responsible to their shareholders in pursuit of profits. For the sake of this dissertation, I approach the case for CSR using a stakeholder approach. In response to the changing business environment, Freeman (1984)

proposed, at the time, a newer model using the term stakeholder, or “any group or individual who is affected or can affect the achievement of an organization’s objectives” (p. 46). For Carroll (1991), this approach personalized societal responsibilities by putting faces to the names in further considering the responsibilities of organizations.

Later, Freeman et al. (2007) proposed the term corporate *stakeholder* responsibility as an effort to reconceptualize and refocus the term. Likewise, S. Kim, Kim, and Tam (2016) further intended to refocus the goals of CSR by presenting corporation *public* responsibility “based on which organizations utilize the concept of *publics* to prioritize the groups to which they must fulfill their responsibilities before attending to *society* as a whole” (p. 91, emphases in the original). Thus, it is evident that scholars and practitioners of CSR are continually rethinking the role of business and society, particularly in reconsidering to whom or what corporations are even responsible. And, it is clear that external institutional pressures in the form of social or political issues impact an organization’s CSR agenda and goals.

However, apart from a stakeholder view of social responsibility, other scholars have presented a more business-oriented view in considering CSR as strategic. In other words, CSR can be seen as a way to increase an organization’s competitive advantage—one to ultimately benefit themselves. McWilliams and Siegel (2001) proposed a resource-based and firm perspective of CSR whereby these strategies can translate into an advantage particularly when supported by political strategies. Most notably, Porter and Kramer (2006) further explored the link between CSR and an organization’s competitive advantage. For the authors, CSR was too disconnected from business and strategy—therefore failing in adequately benefitting the greater society. Instead, they proposed that if...

corporations were to analyze their prospects for social responsibility using the same frameworks that guide their core business choices, they would discover that CSR can be

much more than a cost, a constraint, or a charitable deed—it can be a source of opportunity, innovation, and competitive advantage. (p. 79)

Thus, if CSR efforts were more closely tied with an organization's core business initiatives, it would translate into an opportunity to better leverage the company's resources, thus providing the most benefit to society, and therefore reflecting positively on the organization. Porter and Kramer (2006) further breakdown how corporations should prioritize their social agenda based on a range of how these issues may impact the firm itself (i.e., generic social issues, value chain social impacts, social dimensions of competitive context). In short, Porter and Kramer (2006) presented this idea as creating shared value, rather than simply viewing CSR as one-off philanthropic campaigns or crisis response (i.e., damage control).

In following the stakeholder model, this dissertation is grounded in the argument that corporations are, in fact, responsible to internal stakeholders and members (i.e., employees) and therefore undoubtedly create CSR policies targeting such audiences. As Hemphill (1997) argued, part of the definition of corporate social responsibility should include “an implicit, informal social contract between the corporation and its employees” (p. 53). However, extant research is lacking in further examining these CSR policies from the perspective of employees vis-à-vis an internal organizational standpoint. Thus, taking a communicative and discursive view of the internal, micro-processes, micro-foundations, and messages around CSR is incredibly useful. Throughout this dissertation, I present and focus on the conceptualization and operationalization what I term “employee-directed Corporate Social Responsibility.” Traditionally considered internal CSR, I expand on Hameed et al.'s (2016) definition of CSR practices focused on “the psychological and physiological well-being” of employees (p. 2). Specifically, I suggest any voluntary effort an organization puts forth focused on benefitting internal members in some way (e.g., diversity and

inclusion, work-life balance, health and wellness policies) can be considered an employee-directed CSR initiative.

1.2 Preview of Study and Summary of Chapters

This study takes a micro-approach to understanding the internal dynamics and processes of Corporate Social Responsibility within organizational settings. To do so, I sought to understand how organizational employees make sense of and understand CSR while examining internal and external discourse of such efforts. Weick's (1995a) theory of organizing and sensemaking serves as the theoretical framework. Specifically, this dissertation is guided by the broad research question of: how do employees make sense of CSR? Therefore, this study takes a largely internal perspective to provide both theoretical contributions and implications for practice. Drawing on multidisciplinary literature including management, organizational behavior, business ethics, and (organizational) communication, this study takes an empirical, "inside-out approach" by starting with employees (Morsing et al., 2008, p. 98) to understanding the constitutive nature of CSR. This approach suggests that "initially, employees are the key stakeholders of concern for CSR activities" (p. 103).

This dissertation is an interpretive study which has developed rich and deep insights about CSR from the perspective of employees. More specifically, this project used a grounded-discursive and rhetorical methodology to understanding the inner-workings of employee-directed CSR at multiple organizations. Through a mixed-method approach via qualitative interviews and rhetorical document analysis, this dissertation explores the various ways in which CSR is communicatively constituted, understood/defined, and implemented from a primarily internal view.

In the following chapters, I first present extant literature on the topic of Corporate Social Responsibility in Chapter Two. I begin broad in presenting CSR's conceptual multidisciplinary evolution and debate, before describing a communicative lens on CSR that runs throughout this dissertation, while specifically highlighting the study of the topic in the organizational communication discipline. I then present the internal and employee side of corporate responsibility while specifically emphasizing and pointing out the lack of such research and gaps in which this dissertation intends to fill. Finally, I explicate the broad theoretical framework of this study and end with a brief summary and present the specific research questions.

Chapter Three details this study's methodological approach and how I answered my research questions using a qualitative strategy. I first describe my own metatheoretical positionality as a researcher which affects and guides how I approach scholarship. I then provide a detailed description of the specific methods of interviewing 42 participants and analyzing nearly 900 pages of organizational documents. Chapter Four addresses the research questions in presenting findings of this dissertation, namely how employees and documents revealed D/discourses of CSR, particularly those considered employee-directed. I present these through a d/Discourse take of CSR. Finally, in Chapter Five I situate these findings in extant scholarship, presents the theoretical and pragmatic contributions of this study, particularly focused on the social, communicative, and shifting nature of CSR, and offers both limitations and directions for future work in further exploring the employee side of corporate responsibility.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is by no means scarce in its study, and has been approached from multiple areas including communication, management, business ethics, economics, and so on. Various initiatives labelled under the CSR umbrella range and include multiple conceptualizations—including corporate citizenship, sustainability, corporate governance, among others. While many organizations are continually implementing or changing some type of social responsibility effort, how they are conceptualized, operationalized, and communicated differ. The variation is largely due to the incredibly contextual, contested, and dynamic nature of CSR (Rasche et al., 2017).

I begin this chapter with an overview of the conceptual overview of CSR including how I define the construct and processes in this dissertation. I then present relevant literature on CSR situating in the (organizational) communication discipline, with a particular emphasis on the internal and employee side as will be the focus of this project. Finally, I present the theoretical groundings of organizational sensemaking and identification in filling gaps and calls for an internal-employee focused view on CSR.

2.1 Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility

The concept of CSR was first formulated and presented by Bowen in 1953, putting forth the initial argument for the responsibilities of businessmen as the obligation “to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society” (p. 6). Bowen (1953) extended the belief that corporations were centers of power, and thus impacted the lives of societal groups.

Carroll (1999) presented a seminal piece on the evolution of CSR as a definitional construct, beginning with the introduction of its modern era. Through this, he details the conceptual evolution of CSR starting with a discussion of the responsibilities of businessmen (Bowen, 1953) in the 1950s-1960s. The 1960s in particular “marked a significant growth in attempts to formalize or, more accurately, state what CSR means” (Carroll, 1999, p. 270; also see Lee, 2008), but was seen largely in a managerial context. Moving forward, the 1970s became the age of enlightened self-interest (Samy & Robertson, 2017),

Most notably, Friedman (1970) presented an argument *against* CSR—terming it a “fundamentally subversive doctrine”—and arguing that the only (social) responsibility corporations have are to increase profits, and to benefit their shareholders. However, it is important to note that in recent decades CSR has remained a relatively unchallenged, yet supported, concept. Throughout this decade, conceptualizations of CSR were largely economic in nature, as society expected businesses to make money and comply with legal obligations (Carroll, 1999). By the 1980s, fewer definitions of CSR were being presented but instead were being refined or expanded into new or different themes, while academic research began to flourish. Alternative terms such as corporate social responsiveness, corporate social performance (CSP), business ethics, and stakeholder theory resulted from this decade. Furthermore, a consideration for an organization’s responsibility to groups and society beyond legal requirement was born, with an emphasis on public responsibility (Jones, 1980). In this decade, Freeman (1984) published his work on stakeholder theory. As Carroll (1999) noted, this approach “personalizes social or societal responsibilities by delineating the specific groups or persons businesses should consider in its CSR orientation and activities” (p. 290). In other words, a stakeholder perspective on CSR puts “names and faces” on societal groups who are most important to organizations (Carroll, 1991, p. 43).

Additionally, Jones (1980) further conceptualized CSR as a process, rather than a set of outcomes, and a further discussion of implementation, decision-making, and behavior. Thus, there has been a shift into a more communicative view of CSR within organizations. Finally, a growing interest in operationalizing CSR began with empirical studies of a possible connection between financial performance and a corporation's socially responsible efforts.

Whereas Carroll (1999) claimed that few contributions to the definitional debate of CSR occurred in the 1990s, scholars continued to develop and embrace CSR through further conceptualizations of CSP, stakeholder theory, corporate citizenship, and so on. Additionally, Carroll (1991) presented the widely referred to "pyramid of corporate social responsibility" that outlined the four components of CSR depicted systematically to see how organizations fulfill each category of responsibility. These four levels are (from base to top of the pyramid): economic responsibilities (i.e., be profitable), legal responsibilities (i.e., obey the law), ethical responsibilities (i.e., be ethical), and philanthropic responsibilities (i.e., be a good corporate citizen). For Carroll, social responsibility could only become a reality if organizational members, primarily managers, become more 'moral' in their business efforts. Moving into the millennium, Carroll (1999) expected further theoretical developments on the topic of CSR through empirical research:

The CSR concept will remain as an essential part of business language and practice, because it is a vital underpinning to many of the other theories and is continually consistent with what the public expects of the business community today. (p. 292)

Likewise, further definitions and conceptualizations of CSR have certainly continued to be developed and debated, but are grounded in the work that has been established since the mid-1900s. I revisit this consideration in presenting current issues around CSR in literature and practice later in this chapter.

It is important to understand and consider the evolutionary history of the conceptualization and operationalization of CSR, particularly in considering how this concept has and continues to change based on growing social concerns, various organizational actors, and issues surrounding globalization. As Samy and Robertson (2017) argued:

The rationale for looking at the history of the development of the CSR concept is that of understanding of the developmental changes in conceptualization of CSR as a practice. The theoretical developments over the decades have given the impetus for academics to fervently explore the nature of CSR in a much more practice stance. (p. 438; see Table 1).

Table 1 Historical and Conceptual Developments of CSR³

1950-1970 Identifying what CSR means and how important it is for business and society	1970-1980 Rationale for being socially responsible and first CSR frameworks	1980-1990 Expansion of CSR research and development of alternative themes	1990-2000 Further development of alternative themes	2000-2011 New research developments
<p>Abrams (1951): business to take into account interests of various groups</p> <p>Bowen (1953): defines social responsibilities of businessmen considered the Father of CSR (Carroll, 1999)</p> <p>Frederick (1960): identified 5 conditions for business to satisfy to be socially responsible</p> <p>Davis (1960; 1967): defines CSR</p>	<p>Wallich & McGowan (1970): develop enlightened self-interest model</p> <p>Friedman (1970): argues that the social responsibility of business is to increase profits</p> <p>CED (1971): business to serve the needs of society as the later consent to business operating</p> <p>Concentric circles model of CSR</p> <p>Davies (1973): business to be socially responsible for its long-term interest</p> <p>Sethi (1975): CSR framework to classify corporate behavior.</p> <p>Introduces term 'corporate social performance' (CSP)</p> <p>Carroll (1979): 3-dimensional model of CSP</p> <p>Attempts are made to find relationship between CSR and CFP</p>	<p>Jones (1980): CSR is a process, not an outcome</p> <p>Tuzzolino & Armandi (1981): framework to assess CSP, based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs</p> <p>Strand (1983): model relating CSR and corporate environment (i.e., systems approach)</p> <p>Freeman (1984); Freeman & Reed (1983): develops stakeholder theory, defining narrow and wide view of stakeholders</p> <p>Drucker (1984): introduces 'doing well by doing good'</p> <p>Research into relationship between CSR and CFP expands</p>	<p>Carroll (1991): introduces pyramid of CSR</p> <p>Wood (1991): criticizes CSP models by Carroll (1979) and Wartick & Cochran (1985), creates own model</p> <p>Clarkson (1995): applies stakeholder theory to evaluate CSR</p> <p>P Berman et al. (1999): suggest strategic and intrinsic stakeholder management models</p> <p>Research into relationship between CSR and CFP becomes the main theme</p>	<p>Schwartz & Carroll (2003): introduce the intersecting circles model of CSR</p> <p>Margolis & Walsh (2003); Hahn et al. (2010): suggest trade-off between CSP and CFP</p> <p>Samy et al. (2010): identifies causal link between CSP and CFP</p> <p>Cacioppe et al. (2008); Hine & Preuss (2009): explore perceptions on CSR</p>

³ Table adapted, in part, from Varenova et al. (2013) and Samy & Robertson (2017)

As scholars have presented (Matten & Moon, 2008; Rasche et al., 2017), defining and therefore operationalizing CSR is challenging for three primary reasons. First, CSR is contested whereby it is defined and applied differently by different people, groups, and organizations. In other words, CSR is contextual. This ambiguity has been cause for both praise and criticism in the continuous debating of the role of business in society (Rasche et al., 2017, p. 5). I present this ambiguous nature as a positive aspect of CSR as corporations can be selective in how they define and operationalize such efforts—and “can apply the concept to those issue areas they can conveniently address” (p. 6). Thus, organizations often pick and choose the issue and rationale behind their CSR initiatives that best fits the organization’s own mission and means. However, these rationalizations and program foci continues to be debated in considering how workplaces may change in response to growing social concerns.

Second, as was established earlier in this literature review, CSR often overlaps with other terms or conceptions that also address or describe the business-society relationship. These often include: corporate citizenship, organizational ethics, sustainability, corporate responsiveness, and accountability, among others. Third, CSR is what Rasche et al. (2017) called a ‘dynamic’ phenomenon. In other words, “what counts as an issue relevant to the CSR debate changed over time, as new problems emerge, and formerly novel practices become routine” (p. 6). This final reason is particularly relevant for this dissertation in considering how CSR changes—how it is socially constructed, who it benefits and why, and what issues CSR addresses in and outside the workplace.

When debating the definition of CSR, professionals, and academics often refer to its issues, modes, and rationales (Moon et al., 2017). First, in considering how CSR has changed, it is evident that there has been a change in the issues (i.e., the what) being addressed by such efforts including

community development or environmental sustainability. Second, there have been changes in the way (i.e., how) CSR is conducted or enacted. Examples may include through creation of cause-related marketing or formalized corporate codes. Third and finally, as CSR has continued to evolve, so has the rationale behind why businesses should be responsible in the first place. In other words, the changes in CSR among corporations have been behind the rationale(s) (i.e., the why) behind such efforts.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I believe it is important to provide the definition to which I refer in this project. As detailed later in this chapter, I view CSR as a localized, and therefore contextual, communicative, and socially constructed organizational phenomenon. Specifically, I refer to Rasche et al. (2017) in defining Corporate Social Responsibility as and in reference to...

the integration of an enterprise's social, environmental, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities towards society into its operations, processes, and core business strategy in cooperation with relevant stakeholders. (p. 6)

Additionally, I adapt Aguinis' (2011) definition in further considering CSR as an organizational construct. Here, CSR is defined as "*context-specific* organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and triple-bottom line of economic, social and environmental performance" (p. 855, emphasis added). Once again, this conceptualization is stakeholder-centric, while also acknowledging the contextual nature of CSR and how it inevitably, and arguably should, vary among organizational systems. Thus, in presenting this dissertation as a project focused on employee-directed CSR, I refer to these efforts at those policies or activities meant to benefit employees by their organizations.

2.2 CSR and Communication

As this study is presented and analyzed through a communicative lens, it is appropriate to discuss the connection between CSR and communication as presented, or called for, in extant literature. I begin by broadly describing how CSR has been explored in the realm of organizational communication, followed by an explication of how CSR can be viewed as a social construct, in line with a communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) approach. I conclude this section by discussing a newly accepted communicative view of CSR as well as how it can be seen as a discursive construct within and around organizations.

Beyond the organizational communication discipline, and evident in the historical evolution of the concept, CSR research has been historically and broadly broken down into three approaches to the topic in exploring the responsibilities of corporations from a communicative standpoint: business, stakeholder, and societal (O'Connor & Ihlen, 2018). In short, the business approach posits that the only responsibilities a corporation has are to make money, and to produce value for shareholders (Friedman, 1970). From the popular stakeholder perspective, organizational responsibilities go beyond shareholders or investors, but also to other groups that have a stake in the company (Freeman, 1984). Finally, a societal view suggests that companies have an obligation to the larger society and that society itself determines what is right, ethical, and responsible (O'Connor & Ihlen, 2018; see also Waddock, 2004). I situate this dissertation in the organizational communication discipline, and therefore introduce the strands in which this field has approached CSR research.

2.2.1 CSR in Organizational Communication Research

As an increasingly important topic in scholarship, CSR has been largely examined within the business and management disciplines. However, organizational communication scholars are

particularly appropriate to study CSR due to the discipline's long-standing history of examining organizational phenomena, organizing processes, and interactions—often via a cross-sectional or multi-level approach. More broadly, organizational communication, as May (2011) argued, is not merely an instrumental tool used by management, “but rather produces and reproduces commonly studied phenomena in organizations...” (p. 89). One of the most important and prominent theoretical conceptualizations in the organizational communication was developed by Stan Deetz in 2001 in order to emphasize the organizing process via symbolic interaction. He developed four dimensions of theory and research studies: dialogic, critical, interpretive, and normative.

May (2011) situated the topic of CSR in these four strands of research unique to organizational communication. While rather scarce in scholarship, a normative, or instrumental, approach in studying organizational communication and CSR takes a very transmission approach in analyzing phenomena such as “information flow and channels, organizational climate, organizational structure, supervisor-subordinate communication, leadership and managerial styles, communication networks, and decision making” (May, 2014, p. 774). Additionally, a normative take on CSR involves focusing on accepted “norms” or standards across various organizational contexts.

Alternatively, an interpretive organizational communication approach: focuses on the social rather than the economic dimensions of organizing and, as a result, explores how organizational realities are created, maintained, and transformed in/through informal, daily practices. Researchers from this orientation seek to understand the sensemaking activities of the persons they study as a kind of translation of participants' interests. (May, 2014, p. 775)

The interpretive sphere largely includes studies that have been external in focus—examining the practices corporations present openly and publicly, such as reports, websites, and press releases. Thus, the internal vantage point in terms of interpretive CSR research is lacking, particularly related to employees working on such efforts, and employee sensemaking and perceptions of

CSR—and what this project in particular hopes to address. May (2011) claims this to be problematic—as scholars are missing this important perspective on CSR, what he terms “the insider’s view” (pp. 96 & 776).

Perhaps the most popular approach to CSR in organizational studies comes from a critical viewpoint, or a discourse of either suspicion (Mumby, 1997) or hope (Kuhn & Deetz, 2008; Zorn & Collins, 2007) whereby organizations are considered “to be historical constructions that are brought in/through power relations” (May, 2011, p. 91; see also May, 2014, p. 776). Critical CSR studies, therefore, focus on broader conditions with an emphasis on critique and reflexivity. From a traditional or suspicious take on critical CSR, scholars have questioned the idea of CSR with particular attention to issues of power of large organizations (Banerjee, 2008). Alternatively, as a discourse of hope, academics have looked for hopeful opportunities that could be brought about by CSR (see Kuhn & Deetz, 2008). This dissertation, therefore, takes a slight critical turn in exploring how CSR can promote more humane and ethical workplaces practices (May, 2014), particularly in benefiting employees internally.

Finally, a dialogic take on CSR is what May (2011) expected to become more common in future work. May (2011) stated that:

Similar to critical research on CSR, this approach is concerned with asymmetry and power in organizations, but there is a greater tendency to focus on micro-practices, as well as the fluid and dispersed (rather than centralized) nature of power. Rather than viewing CSR as unified and coherent, dialogic scholars see it as complex, contradictory, and contested... (p. 99; see also Morsing et al., 2008)

From the dialogic view, CSR is potentially contradictory and complex within organizational systems, so much that it “can become self-referential” or “self-explanatory and neutral” (May, 2011, p. 100). Thus, the dialogic approach, as closely aligned with a critical discourse, allows scholars to consider “what has been lost, negated, or silenced” in the development and evolution of CSR (p. 100).

2.2.2 CSR as a Social, Communicative, and Discursive Construction

In this section, I argue that CSR is a social, communicative, and discursive construction. Before delving deeper into a communicative view of CSR, I first acknowledge my view of CSR as a social construction. From an epistemological perspective, social constructionism thought is “principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live” (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). It is important to acknowledge the importance of communication for organizations and their CSR agenda(s), primarily from an epistemological stance. In short, “our knowledge about the world is generated and socially shared through communication and is situated materially and historically” (Ihlen, Bartlett, & May, 2011a, p. 10). As Ihlen et al. (2011a) pointed out, the notion of social constructionism, particularly in the context of organizations, is largely unchallenged today. Thus, approaching CSR through a communicative lens is important to understanding “how the meaning of CSR is constructed, how it is implemented in organizations, and used to achieve organizational goals” (p. 11). Additionally, while the question of whether or not communication is needed for CSR is debated particularly in public relations, it is widely accepted that communication is simply inescapable on the matter of CSR—and that communication is what helps “constitute stakeholder participation and ethical business practices” (p. 11).

Within the past half-decade, an increasing number of studies have embraced a constructivist view of communication and, thus, approach CSR as a communicative construct as well (e.g., Golub et al., 2013; Schultz, 2013; Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010). Within this “constitutive” perspective on CSR communication, scholars “are particularly concerned with how organizations interact and connect with stakeholders with the aim of negotiating and discussing CSR projects and activities as a process of achieving mutual understanding” (p. 179). Thus,

viewing CSR as a set of communicative and co-created processes, rather than just outcomes, continues to grow in organizational studies. Additionally, as Ihlen et al. (2011b) pointed out, (public) “CSR expectations are a changing social construct, and to keep abreast, corporations need to map their environment and engage in stakeholder dialogue” (p. 565). This emphasizes the importance of continuous communication between organizations and relevant stakeholder groups—both internal and external—in evolving and implementing certain CSR initiatives.

2.2.2.1 CSR as Communication

In adopting a stakeholder-centric approach, I consider how CSR “dynamics derive not only from multiple social relations, but that CSR is communicatively constituted in complex and dynamic networks. Different actors such as corporations, government institutions, the media, and consumers organize and negotiate knowledge about the meaning and expectations to corporate responsibility” (Schultz et al., 2013, p. 685). Thus, I approach this study in viewing CSR as a socially constructed phenomenon, and CSR *as* communication—created, organized, constituted, and sustained through and by communicative and social interactions, particularly within organizational contexts. In terms of CSR, Ihlen et al. (2011a) argued that “communication can be seen as important for organizations and their CSR work” (p. 10). In the following, I present the view of CSR as communication put forth by Schultz et al. (2013).

Building on the CCO approach to organizations, which is discussed further in this chapter, Schultz et al. (2013) regarded “CSR as communicatively constructed in dynamic interaction processes...” (p. 681). Thus, the authors defined “CSR *as* communication” (p. 682) in attempt to fill the void in mainstream research on the topic in considering the role and dynamics of communication in constituting what CSR is and how it is operationalized. They define communication using Deetz (1995) and Phillips and Hardy (1997) as “a socially constitutive

process by which through the use of language (discourse) meanings, knowledge, identities, social structures, and the various practices and means of the contact of the organization with the environment are produced, reproduced, or changed” (Schultz et al., 2013, p. 684). Therefore, communication is what constitutes, creates, or organizes reality in organizations, and CSR is a “fundamentally communicative event” (p. 685)—“constituted in complex, reciprocal communication processes” (p. 686). Approaching CSR as a communicatively constituted phenomenon benefits our exploration of the topic. For example, in applying this view, allows for further exploration how CSR dynamics derive from social relations and interactions, but also observe complexities of and around CSR and how these are negotiated and engaged by various actors. Additionally, we can see how CSR is both ongoing and changing as a communicatively constructed and “discursively open” (p. 688) concept in and around organizational systems.

2.2.2.2 CSR as Discourse

Furthermore, this study adopts the view that organizations are discursive constructions (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). Traditionally, organizational discourse comprises “a set of interrelated texts that, along with the structures and practices related to text, production, dissemination and consumption, brings an object or an idea into being” (Grant & Nyber, 2011, p. 546). Put simply, discourse is language in action. More specifically, d/Discourse has been distinguished and presented as the study of talk or text in social practices (i.e., little ‘d’ discourse) or broader, general, enduring systems of thought (i.e., big ‘D’ discourse) (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 7).

In recent years, CSR has begun to be viewed as a discursively constructed practice (Christensen, 2007; Grant & Nyberg, 2011; Stumberger & Golob, 2016). Different from the conceptualization of communication, a discursive perspective CSR can be viewed as brought into

being through discourse “so that it becomes a material reality in the form of the practices that it invokes for various stakeholders (employees, managers, consultants, etc.) (Hardy, 2001)” (Grant & Nyberg, 2011, p. 536).

An organizational discourse-oriented approach can further contribute to our understanding and analysis of CSR and CSR communication in a number of ways (Grant & Nyberg, 2011). First, it can allow “us to identify and analyze the key discourses by which CSR is conceptualized, idealized, and articulated” (p. 536). In other words, we can further explore how CSR policies and efforts are socially constructed via discourse in organizational settings. Second and relatedly, taking a discursive approach to CSR allows us to consider how discourses of CSR are created, supported, and sustained through interaction among internal and external stakeholder groups. Thus, we can explore the structural properties of CSR discourse embedded in daily, communicative, and social exchanges. As stakeholders continually debate, negotiate meaning, and make sense of organizational practices like CSR, for example, a particular Discourse inevitably “emerges as a dominant meaning” (p. 537). Third and finally, an organizational discourse informed approach can inform our understanding of the importance of context. In short, “to understand how and why CSR-related discourses and their meanings are produced, as well as their effects, it is important to understand the context in which they arise” (p. 537). As I consider CSR to be a localized and socially constructed phenomenon within organizations, I emphasize the importance of context to further understanding how certain CSR efforts are communicatively created, and why.

2.2.3 A Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) Approach to CSR

A communicative constitution approach to organizations (CCO) answers the question of “what is an organization?” by presenting that these systems emerge in and through communication

(Christensen & Cheney, 2011; see also Kuhn, 2008). Thus, communication “is understood as a complex process of continuous meaning negotiation (e.g., Ashcraft et al., 2009)” (Shonenborn & Trittin, 2013, p. 194). Likewise, Craig (1999) presented, “communication is theorized as a process that produces and reproduced—and in that way constitutes—social order” and reality (p. 128). In other words, “organizations do not consist of directors, managers, and other employees but result from the interactions among these members, as well as between those and third parties (see McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Robichaud, Giroux, & Taylor)” (Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013, p. 198). In organizational studies, there have been three primary threads of CCO thinking: the Montréal School, McPhee’s Four Flows Model, and the Luhmannian systems approach⁴ (Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud, & Taylor, 2014).

Extant CSR research has been informed by each approach. For example, in arguing that communication “is not something an organization does once in a while...but is constitutive of all organizational life and sensemaking” (p. 375), Christensen, Morsing, and Thyssen (2013) drew largely on Luhmann’s systems theory in conceptualizing CSR as aspirational communication—exploring the potential gap and inconsistencies between CSR and talk and action by organizations. In taking a Montréal School approach and thus emphasizing non-human agency, Cooren (2018) discussed organizational ventriloquism and surprisability related to CSR communication. Emphasizing CSR as dialogic, Cooren presents instances whereby organizations are represented or ‘spoken for’ through both human and non-human actors with regard to CSR—both inside and outside the organization. Lastly, Jahn and Johanssen (2018) utilized the Four Flows or structuralist

⁴ All three schools share same grounding premise that “communication is not just a peripheral epiphenomenon of human actions but the primary mode of explaining social reality” (p. 303)--that organizations emerge through communication (i.e., communication and organization as mutually constituted and therefore conceptualize communication beyond the transmission view. However, the three views “sharply diverge in other respects (e.g., on the issues of suitable empirical methodologies and the role of human and non-human actors in the CCOs)” (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 287).

view to examine the communicative link between actors and organizations during times of crisis, particularly natural disasters, largely “due to its focus on ways that common types of organizational structuring practices, or ‘flows,’ are maintained, altered, enacted, or discontinued through communication between and among interactants” (pp. 165-166).

I adopt the traditional Montréal School of thinking approach to CCO which, as a (meta)theoretical lens, considers two manifestations of communication that create and sustain organizations: text and conversation. Taylor and Van Every (2000) presented a conceptualization of organizations as dialectic episodes of conversation and textualization. In other words, “the textual dimension corresponds with the recurring, fairly stable and uneventful side of communication [...], while the conversational dimension refers to the lively and evolving co-constructive side of communication” (Ashcraft et al., 2009, p. 20). Thus, both human and non-human entities and agency constitute an organization’s social reality.

Recently, studies have taken a constitutive perspective on CSR and communication as a focus on CSR communication has significantly grown (Christensen et al. 2008, Christensen et al. 2013; Cooren; 2018; Haack, Schoeneborn, & Wicker, 2012; Koschmann, Kuhn, & Pfarrer, 2012; Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013; Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010; Schultz, 2011). For example, Christensen and Cheney (2011) argued that:

The basic premise is that communication is not simply a mechanism through which organizations convey their objectives, intentions, and avowedly good deeds, including their various CSR activities, but a continuous process through which social actors explore, construct, negotiate, and modify what it means to be a socially responsible organization. (p. 491)

Therefore, communication around CSR is “simply one of the many communicative practices that collectively constitute the phenomenon we call organization” (Schoeneborn & Trittin, pp. 197-198)—acknowledging the interrelations between internal and external communication messages.

Communication from this view is not just what occurs inside an organization, but rather what makes and sustains the organization itself.

The notion of a constitutive view of CSR rejects the traditional transmission or conduit metaphor of communication whereby messages are simply transported from sender to receiver and communication is ‘contained’ within organizational systems (Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013). This approach has been criticized for deducing communication to a linear process of only disseminating or exchanging information (Axley, 1984). Rather, Axley (1984), among others, have argued for the conceptualization and understanding of communication as a dynamic process of constant meaning negotiation. Thus, scholarship on CSR communication has begun emphasizing the need for multi-way communication and dialogue (e.g., Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

According to Schoeneborn and Trittin (2013), the CCO approach can be applied and connected to understanding CSR communication in four ways. First, “the impact of CSR communication practices depends on the extent to which they become connected to and are resonant with other organizational communication practices” (p. 200). Thus, we as scholars should consider how CSR messages, connected to other communicative interactions both internally and externally, collectively constitute an organization. With this, we can understand how CSR can become influential and legitimate when coupled with other organizational practices. Second, “practice of CSR communication should not be dismissed as mere ‘greenwashing,’ given that talk can be action” (p. 201). Related to Christensen et al.’s (2013) idea of CSR as aspirational talk and in taking a CCO view, we can see CSR communication as performative “in the sense that they generate pressure to create the very reality they refer to” (Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013, p. 202).

Third, from a CCO perspective, CSR communication can permeate boundaries of the communicatively constituted organization by involving third parties (e.g., the media, social media,

NGOs, external stakeholders). Therefore, practices of CSR communication and stakeholder involvement (Morsing & Schultz, 2006) “invite third parties to co-constitute the organization communicatively” (Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013, p. 203). Fourth, we must take into account the responsibility and role of non-human agents (e.g., texts, routines, processes) in CSR communication. In other words, these agents can indeed “act” on behalf of the organization—as the CCO approach stresses both human and non-human entities in communicatively creating and establishing organizations. Therefore, CSR communication is not only the concern and formation of individuals, but also non-human actors (e.g., established communicative practices or policies). Referring back to a discursive view of CSR, it is important to understand how CSR (communication) is brought into being through both discourse and social interactions within and beyond organizational boundaries.

2.3 The Internal Side of CSR

CSR as seen from a communicative epistemological and ontological lens is still rather absent from organizational literature in considering CSR as constituted in and through communication and interaction. More specifically, there are areas where CSR research is lacking from this perspective particularly in considering internal organizational processes around CSR. For example, the employee perspective and sensemaking around such issues, also known as the “insider’s view” (May, 2014), is largely scarce in CSR studies, as well as these internal stakeholders’ role in facilitating, communicating, defining, and implementing these efforts. This calls for concern given that this particular group is one of the most critical voices in constituting who or what an organization is (Morsing & Schultz, 2006).

Given the internal nature of this dissertation, I present three discussions in beginning to address this focus. First, I begin by presenting CSR as contextual, and why context matters in

considering the socially and communicatively structured nature of CSR as an organizational phenomenon. Second, I detail a micro-approach to exploring CSR within corporations and why this approach is particularly important and appropriate. Finally, I present extant work in connecting CSR and employees, while identifying gaps and further presenting the goals of this project.

2.3.1 CSR as Contextual

I conceptualize the consideration of the role and importance of context for corporate responsibility in two ways. First, CSR is contextual, and also contested (Rasche et al., 2017) in that it is both defined and applied by different groups of people, organizations, industries, and countries. The seminal piece by Matten and Moon (2008) suggested that CSR issues, modes, framing mechanisms, and communication approaches differ across cultures. Therefore, CSR is not a one-size-fits-all approach, as various (contextual) factors (e.g., political ideologies, social climate, cultural understandings, historical economic context) influence CSR foci or agenda and reporting (Tilt, 2016). Referring back to my discussion of the continuously changing and evolving nature of CSR, scholars must consider the “social context” in which organizations operate. This includes, but is not limited to: political systems, sociocultural environment, or stage of development. Additionally, ideological, hegemonic, and cultural beliefs undoubtedly affect the pressure of firms to take on certain CSR issues. Therefore, Tilt (2016) argued that it is important to consider the broader, external context in which research of CSR takes place.

Second, in considering CSR to be a social constructed constituted through and by communicative practices, these efforts are unique to the organizational contexts they both create and in which they are created. CSR as ambiguous—with no clear or definitive meaning or operationalization—affirms the fact that the concept is indeed a social construct. Therefore, embracing the discursively open-endedness of CSR, and other related efforts (e.g., sustainability),

can be an advantage to corporate stakeholders—inviting these individuals to partake in dialogue, critique, sensemaking, and contribution of CSR (Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2015). As an ongoing organizational phenomenon, corporate responsibility “can be understood as a set of guiding values that continuously evolves through input and challenges from managers, employees, and citizens” (p. 141). Therefore, CSR is contextual insofar as it is socially constructed in a localized organizational environment.

2.3.2 Exploring the Micro-Processes of CSR

In exploring the constitutive nature of CSR within organizations, I take a micro or individual level to examining the underlying, communicative mechanisms of corporate responsibility. Prior CSR work has primarily taken a macro, or organizational level approach (see review by Aguinis & Glavas, 2012), while largely neglecting individuals primarily in the exploration of (psychological) micro-foundations of CSR (or micro-CSR), but are beginning to grow in human resource management (HRM) and organizational behavior disciplines (e.g., Gond, El Akremi, Swaen, & Babu, 2017). In fact, only 4% of the CSR articles reviewed by Aguinis and Glavas (2012) examined social responsibility at the individual level—and 50% of journal articles focused on this level of analysis have come only since 2010 as reported by Aguinis and Glavas (2019).

More specifically, engaging in micro-CSR is “the study of the effects of the experience (however it is defined) on individuals (in any stakeholder group) as examined at the individual level” (Rupp & Mallory, 2015, p. 216). Thus, this area of research often examines individuals’ psychological experience, understanding, and feelings regarding an organization’s CSR initiatives. However, most research to date taking a micro and individual approach to CSR, while still rather limited, has focused on how a firm’s external CSR efforts impact or affect employees (Rupp &

Mallory, 2015). Among the first of these studies explored the impact of CSR on prospective and current employees from a recruitment standpoint (Backhaus, Stone, & Heimer, 2002; Turban & Greening, 1997). Other employee-focused research has examined topics such as: the relationship between CSR and organizational identification (Bartel, 2001; Carmeli, Gilat, & Waldman, 2007; Kim et al. 2010), job satisfaction (De Roeck et al. 2014; Dhanesh 2014), management attitudes (Muller & Kolk, 2010), organizational commitment (Brammer, Millington, & Rayton, 2007), and organizational pride (Jones, 2010).

In their review of extant “micro” CSR research, Rupp and Mallory (2015) distinguished different corporate activities using the traditional internal-external dimensional divide. In other words, activities directed toward external stakeholders (e.g., activism, philanthropic giving, volunteering, economic development efforts, environmental sustainability programs, community development) were termed “external CSR.” Conversely, CSR activities specifically directed toward employees (e.g., training, continuing education programs, ethical labor practices, daycare programs, diversity policies, safe working environments) were deemed “internal CSR” (p. 215).

I draw on recent media coverage in shedding light on how organizations are taking a more internally-directed focus on what could arguably be seen as CSR activities, such as sexual harassment prevention training. For example, Gurchiek (2018) emphasized how “media attention and public outcry shine a spotlight on sexual harassment in the workplace, it’s a lesson for employers scrambling to address the issue...” (para. 4). More specifically, employees surveyed recently following the start of #MeToo and Time’s Up reported that “The most common changes: adding a workplace-civility component, customizing training, and including the training with onboarding activities for all staff” (para. 8). Along these lines, corporations are being pushed to create a more respectful and safe workplace culture (Boulton, 2018). Recent social movements

regarding harassment and discrimination have encouraged employers “to take a fresh look at ways to engage employees and prevent certain behavior” (para. 12) and “makes good business sense to address it” (para. 14).

In general, I adopt the argument that offering, encouraging, and even requiring employees to partake in training programs is indeed a type of organizational CSR. Noe (2011) explicitly defined social responsibility in a training context: “social responsibility also means that companies comply with laws and regulations but perhaps most importantly, take actions and create conditions to help all employees grow, develop, and contribute to company goals, regardless of their background and career issues they are facing” (p. 444). While certain types of these initiatives, policies, and programs are legally required—depending on geographic location (e.g., state) or industry—others are voluntarily implemented. For example, Lê and de Nanteul (2015) presented three domains whereby corporations are responsible, drawing on Carroll (1979): economic development, environmental integrity, and social equity—all going beyond those legal and monetary (or shareholder) requirements. While the environmental domain emphasized external impact by organizations, the latter (i.e., social) calls for a commitment to employees including working conditions and training opportunities. Specifically, Lê and de Nanteul (2015) argued for the link between vocational-focused training for all employees as an ethical and social responsibilities of their employers. This “commitment” of investing in employees and thus progressing toward a better organizational future can be seen as a type of a CSR that is explicitly employee-directed.

A more current example of where CSR is more training and employee focused could include when 8,000 Starbucks stores across the United States were closed back in May of 2018 for anti-bias training (Baertlein, 2018). The commitment to this specific training initiative resulted

when a Starbucks' manager in Philadelphia called for the arrest of two African American men—sparking accusations of discrimination and racial profiling on behalf of the coffee conglomerate. As Baertlein (2018) reported, those advising the organization on the training program “hope it will reinvigorate decades-old efforts to ensure minorities get equal treatment in restaurants and stores, setting an example for other corporations” (para. 1). Additionally, Starbucks is one of many organizations to include “diversity and inclusion” initiatives under a social impact and community on its corporate website (“Starbucks Social Impact,” 2019).

In general, employers are looking to strengthen and reiterate their policies around workplace harassment and discrimination to employees while inevitably hoping to create a culture of support (Hauer, 2018). I argue that these can be approached and seen as a CSR initiative—taking what is now viewed as broader “social” issues and attending to them within organizational environments. As Doerr (2018), a CSR professional, argued that,

There are a number of ways that CSR teams can help their companies get ahead of these issues, apart from the typical approach of establishing trainings and policies. The ideal approach, in my experience as a leader in Corporate Social Responsibility in the financial sector, is to create a culture that allows for courageous conversations and acceptance before you reach a point where you have to adjust for sexual harassment issues. (para. 4)

In adapting Rupp and Mallory's (2015) definition for a micro take on CSR at the individual level, this study specifically explores “employee-focused,” or directed (via primarily employee perceptions), micro-CSR. While micro-CSR is certainly not limited to solely employee perceptions, this dissertation seeks to focus more on internal efforts put forth by organizations to *benefit* internal stakeholders, and how these groups make sense and perceive such activities. Understanding the reactions of employees to their organizations' CSR activities is relevant—particularly in understanding the (social) good CSR efforts are meant to generate (Rupp & Mallory, 2015).

Gond et al. (2017) presented an integrative review, utilizing a person-centric perspective of how extant literature has engaged in the three approaches to the study of CSR micro-processes—specifically in exploring various psychological drivers of (a) individual CSR engagement (i.e., drivers), (b) individual processes of CSR evaluations, and (c) individual reaction to CSR initiatives (Gond et al., 2017) of individuals both inside (e.g., employees, managers, executives) and outside (e.g., prospective employees) organizational boundaries. Prior research has focused on the effect of CSR specifically on employees in corporations in uncovering CSR-related outcomes (Glavas, 2016; Rupp & Mallory, 2015), and predictors or drivers of engagement with CSR (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi, 2007; Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). However, prior work has ignored interpretive processes, specifically those through which:

people form and organize their perceptions of CSR initiatives (framing of CSR perceptions); reflect cognitively on, appraise the worth, and attribute CSR initiatives to some causes (CSR causal attribution); make sense of meaning (CSR sensemaking); and experience emotions in appraising CSR. (Gond et al., 2017, p. 227)

To further unpack CSR evaluation processes by individuals, Gond et al. (2017) called for empirical examination to consider “CSR perceptions, attributions, and sensemaking processes” (p. 233; see also Basu & Palazzo, 2008). They conclude that CSR does indeed “matter” to individuals, but “that current knowledge of micro-CSR is fragmented and incomplete” (p. 240).

In the past several years, an individual or micro-level analysis of CSR has received both theoretical and empirical attention (Gond et al., 2017). While focused primarily on drivers, reactions, and evaluations, research is lacking in exploring the underlying mechanisms, interactions, and dynamic connections between these areas. This dissertation attempts to fill the interpretive process of sensemaking through a communicative approach, and with a particular focus on employees and those audiences located inside organizations.

2.3.3 CSR and Employees

CSR from a *communicative* standpoint has historically taken an external (May, 2011, 2014) and macro perspective in extant scholarship. However, while limited, work has increased utilizing an internal view—connecting CSR and employees within last decade or so. Many of these topics include employee motivation connected to: CSR engagement (Brammer et al., 2007; Collier & Esteban, 2007; Rupp et al., 2006), employee-organizational identification due to CSR (H. Kim, Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2010; see also Bhattacharya, Sen, & Korschun, 2008), employee reaction or consideration (Dawkins & Lewis, 2003), employee attitudes or perception regarding/toward CSR (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2008), and how CSR is communicated to these internal audiences (Crane & Glozer, 2016; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2007). Largely from a performance and engagement or commitment standpoint, research confirms that CSR influences internal stakeholders (i.e., employees) (Collier & Esteban, 2007; Kim et al., 2010). Additionally, as Kim et al. (2010) pointed out, while previous research has in fact explored employees' perceptions or feelings about CSR, what is missing is these individuals' role in constituting, communicating, or implementing an organization's social responsibility agenda, and further considering their sensemaking and identification with such efforts.

Additionally, some work has presented how CSR can in fact benefit employees, particularly in terms of work-life balance, safe working environments, promoting employee wellness, gender equity, and the like (Santhosh & Baral, 2015). For example, Morsing et al. (2008) cited a poll from the Reputation Institute confirming “that CSR efforts should focus on improving conditions for employees, not only strategically in order to gain the commitment of employees, but also to fulfill the expectations of the public” (p. 105). In short, research exploring how and to what extent employees truly care about CSR initiatives (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2008) is scarce.

O'Connor et al. (2016) paved the way for the explicit examination of employee CSR perceptions through a case study approach, specifically in exploring how employees talk about their expectations of organizational CSR efforts. Findings suggested “that workers fuse together economic and ethical responsibilities to develop a portrait of their employer’s CSR” (p. 40), as employees are arguably the beneficiaries of such efforts. From this stakeholder view, “CSR can be conceptualized as an explicit and implicit contract that outlines the responsibilities an organization has to its workforce” (p. 41; see also Preuss, 2008).

Thus, scholarship confirms that organizations do target employees in their CSR efforts, and that employees to some extent have certain perceptions or attitudes toward such activities. But, further questions remain, such as: how do corporations communicate or rationalize them? If and how do employees feel these CSR activities truly benefit or serve them? Thus, research is still significantly missing how employees are an important stakeholder group in both the creation and implementation of CSR, but also in how companies are (or should) be responsible to employees from *their* perspective (i.e., at the micro or individual level).

Through a review of extant literature explicitly connecting CSR with internal audiences, it is evident that further research is needed in exploring the internal perspective, particularly in terms of sensemaking. Thus, this dissertation takes an empirical, “inside-out approach” (Morsing et al., 2008, p. 98) to understanding the constitutive nature of CSR—starting with employees. This approach suggests that “initially, employees are the key stakeholders of concern for CSR activities” (p. 103). Specifically, employees should be more involved in the CSR (communication) process, and also serve as beneficiaries of such efforts. In other words, this model has two implications: “First, companies should base their CSR communication on ensuring employee commitment before they start communicating about their CSR activities to external stakeholders.

Second, companies should communicate those CSR activities that relate to employees” (p. 102). Therefore, companies should involve and commit employees on all CSR policies or issues, “beginning with CSR employees themselves, then local communities, and later national and international stakeholders” (p. 109). More specifically, Morsing et al. (2008) presented Novo Nordisk as an example of how companies may prioritize employees first when it comes to their CSR activities, and that these internal stakeholders must first experience their workplace as socially responsible—that a corporation’s CSR strategy must start from inside through bettering issues of environment, and sick leave, amongst others (p. 103).

In exploring employee-directed CSR within organizational contexts, I draw on perspectives of employees as my primary data source in order to take the true “insider’s view” called for by May (2011) and May and Roper (2014). Thus, I explore how employees make sense, construct knowledge of, and (un)identify with their employer’s internally-focused CSR efforts. As evident in the gaps and calls in extant literature, there is a lack of empirical and interpretive approach to exploring the internal sensemaking and identification by employees particularly as it relates to the constitutive nature of internal (i.e., employee-directed) CSR. I adopt Hameed et al. (2016) in defining *internal* CSR as (voluntary) efforts directed toward employees within the organization, and “denotes the policy and practices of an organization that are related to the psychological and physiological well-being of its employees” (p. 2). Therefore, this project is guided by Weick’s (1995a) theory of organizing (i.e., organizational sensemaking). I explicate these theoretical frameworks as they fit this dissertation in the following section.

2.4 Theoretical Foundation: Organizational Sensemaking

Weick's theory of Organizational Sensemaking⁵ is appropriate for exploring internal knowledge construction of CSR for it helps explore how individuals make sense and make meaning out of such practices. Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) defined communication as “an ongoing process of making sense of the circumstances in which people collectively find ourselves and of the events affecting them” (p. 413). Thus, according to sensemaking, it is through communication “in which things, situations and even entities come into existence” as actors attempt to make sense of uncertainties and search for meaning in organizational contexts (Golob, Johansen, Nielsen, & Podnar, 2013, p. 366). In defining sensemaking as a process, Weick et al. (2005) argued that “sensemaking involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible⁶ images that rationalize what people are doing” (p. 409). Weick (1995a) presents seven properties of sensemaking: (1) grounded in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) enactive of sensible environments, (4) social, (5) ongoing, (6) focused on and by extracted cues, and (7), driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (p. 17).

In viewing CSR as communicatively and socially constituted, sensemaking around such initiatives is an ongoing, constant, and reflexive process whereby organizational members individually and then collectively make sense of their realities through interaction. Thus, sensemaking is inherently social. For Weick, organizations are complex, equivocal environments in which there exist multiple interpretations of the same event. Due to the ambiguous and

⁵ Weick's sensemaking theory is grounded in his move from “organizations” as a noun to the verb of “organizing” as “the experience of being into an ongoing, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410).

⁶ It is important to note that the process of “sensemaking is driven by plausibility, rather than accuracy” (Weick, 1995a, p. 55).

contextual nature of CSR, equivocality⁷ undoubtedly exists in interpreting⁸ and determining what CSR is, what efforts “count,” and who they are meant to benefit. In terms of knowledge construction, I view the understanding of CSR by organizational members as a sensemaking and communicative process.

Relating to CSR, particularly from a micro perspective, Golob et al. (2013) presented “a process-oriented understanding of sensemaking as a construction of shared meanings (Calton & Payne, 2003)” (p. 365). Drawing on past work (Golob & Podnar, 2011; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Pater & van Lierop, 2006), the authors pointed to the fact that both sensemaking and dialogical communication specifically are becoming important to the study of CSR as it is through dialogue that stakeholders search for meaning and consensus as it relates to corporate responsibility. Similarly, Basu and Palazzo (2008) presented this process as an alternative way to study CSR without only studying CSR messages or content, but instead through analyzing the sensemaking and decision-making processes of organizational managers specifically. In other words, the authors viewed “CSR as derived from organizational sensemaking” (p. 124). Thus, the theory of sensemaking “as a collective process offers a way to address” the complex phenomenon of CSR and related problems—such as the disconnect between CSR words and actions or failing to include multiple stakeholders in such efforts (Golob et al., 2013, p. 368; see also Calton & Payne, 2003; Pater & van Lierop, 2006). Taking a sensemaking process of CSR, then, and relating to a CCO approach to organizations “locates the phenomenon as an intrinsic part of an organization’s character (i.e., the way it goes about making sense of its world” (Basu & Palazzo, 2008, p. 124).

⁷ “The idea that sensemaking is focused on equivocality gives primacy to the search for meaning as a way to deal with uncertainty” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 414) .

⁸ Note that Weick (1995a) distinguishes sensemaking from interpretation in that sensemaking is about an activity or process, whereas interpretation is simply describing something. Additionally, interpretation implies there is something to be discovered, whereas sensemaking “is less about discovery than it is about invention” (p. 13)—rendering “the subjective into something more tangible” (p. 14).

Aguinis and Glavas (2019) presented a conceptual framework for connecting employee sensemaking around CSR in the search for meaningful work—via analyzing “how individuals experience CSR by taking an active role in searching for and finding meaningfulness” (p. 1059). This work sought to fill the knowledge gap in individual-level CSR scholarship. They presented a multilevel analysis of CSR sensemaking: “intraindividual (i.e., within individuals), organizational (i.e., organizational level), and extraorganizational (i.e., outside of the organization and the interplay between internal and external stakeholders)” (p. 1064). The goal, similar to that of this dissertation, was to analyze sensemaking and perceptions across different levels, particularly shedding light “on why and how individuals experience differently” (p. 1064). In line with this work, I am interested in observing how employee CSR understandings and experience vary within and across organizations and industries.

As Aguinis and Glavas (2019) confirmed, “CSR is fertile ground for sensemaking” (p. 1064). This project takes a person-centric approach to CSR (see Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Rupp et al., 2013), which “considers employees, at various levels of the organizational hierarchy, who witness acts of CSR, who implement CSR, as well as leaders who have the power to initiate CSR on a more strategic level” (Rupp et al., 2013, p. 362). In adapting this view, this dissertation uses interviews to explore how employees make sense of and experience CSR in their organizations and beyond—specifically giving attention to how individuals come to define or describe CSR in their own words.

Given the ambiguous and often unclear nature of CSR, taking a sensemaking approach is particularly useful in further understanding how employees come to understand, interpret, generate opinions, and legitimize their employer’s CSR activities. However, this dissertation takes a further internal approach to explicating how employees may be aware of, make sense of, and feel with

regard to those specific CSR efforts meant to target or benefit them as part of the sensemaking process. These may include anti-harassment or discrimination, gender equality, workplace safety policies, access to training programs, among others.⁹ Given the potentially changing nature of CSR and increasing call for corporations to change internal policies and culture particularly in response to the growing discourse of workplace harassment and discrimination, my goal was to explore how employees are responding to and making sense of how their own employer may (or may not) be responding in terms of social responsibility.

2.5 Summary and Research Questions

In the preceding review, I have presented the conceptual and theoretical history, current literature, debates, and gaps in research concerning (internal) CSR. This dissertation proposes an important step into further exploring the communicatively constitutive, evolving, and social nature of CSR within organizations, particularly from the (micro) perspective of employees and corresponding internal-external discourses. More specifically, my goal is to consider how attention to (internal) CSR, particularly employee-focused (i.e., employee benefit, employee directed) CSR, has or could change CSR's nature and constitutive processes. In acknowledging the changing nature of both CSR and organizational environments given increasing social pressures, I argue for consideration of to what or whom organizations should be responsible—primarily with an internal focus. Through a contextual and localized approach to CSR, I adopt the view that the reality of CSR is created through discourse and social interaction, and is also embedded in larger communicative practices that constitute or create an organization. In line with an interpretive and

⁹ These policies largely depend on those specific to the organizational contexts being studied.

dialogical take on CSR in the organizational communication discipline, this dissertation focuses on internal (i.e., employee) sensemaking via interviews and organizational document analysis.

To address the aforementioned gaps in literature, primarily regarding the internal and micro-processes of CSR, this dissertation asks the following research questions in a progressional sense, starting more broadly and then transitioning into more specific inquiries:

RQ1: What are employees' understanding of CSR?

In an effort to explore employee sensemaking, I begin by asking how these individuals understand the concept of CSR in general. I then move into my second set of research questions to examine the localized nature of CSR through employee perceptions of this phenomenon within their own organization and industry. Here I also investigate how employees are communicated about CSR programs, instances of organizational identification/disidentification, and how these initiatives serve, benefit, or impact individuals both on a personal and professional level.

RQ2: How do employees make sense of employee-directed CSR efforts in their organizations?

RQ2a: What do employees know and perceive about employee-directed CSR?

RQ2b: How do employees perceive they themselves benefit from CSR?

RQ2c: How does employee-directed CSR affect employees' daily lives, both at work and in their personal lives?

RQ2d: How do employees perceive that their employee-directed CSR affects their relationship with the organization?

RQ3: In general, what employee-directed CSR efforts are most common among sampled organizations?

This third research question connects the first two by taking a holistic view of employee-directed CSR as understood by employees and as reported by organizational documents. In

general, I use the term CSR “efforts” very purposefully as a way of broadly encompassing organizational practices, guidelines, strategies, mission, aspirations (i.e., vision), and policies related to CSR. Through data collection, I explored what efforts surrounding CSR were common, but it became clear that these also varied greatly across organizations and industries. In short, I examined these initiatives as presented in the data across three temporal periods: recent past (i.e., past year), current, and aspirational or future goals and plans in terms of CSR efforts. I detail my methodological approach to data collection and analysis in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This dissertation explores how employees at all levels of various corporations and industries make sense of their employer's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts, particularly those that are employee-focused. In other words, this study's goal is to understand the micro-processes and foundations of such efforts given how internal stakeholders construct knowledge of CSR policies, and how such efforts are communicatively constructed and disseminated both internally and externally. To examine this goal, a combination of qualitative and rhetorical methods is utilized. Before explicating these specific methods, I first present my metatheoretical positioning. As noted by Claydon (2017), "the epistemological position that a researcher takes before conducting research is key to understanding the researchers' motivations and perceptions of the social world they are about to study" (p. 46). As a result, I discuss my own positioning to indicate how and where my motivations and perceptions guide my research. Then, I outline how the procedures (i.e., data collection, data analysis) enable me to address the research goals of this dissertation.

3.1 Metatheoretical Positioning

Methodologically, I utilize qualitative methods to understand internal communicative processes surrounding topics of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and business ethics. I position myself using an interpretivist-constructionist ontological framework with a communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) grounding, and a situated, subjectivist epistemological take. Thus, I see (internal) organizational realities as socially and communicatively constructed through interactions and sensemaking processes by organizational members. In the context of organizations, I take a CCO approach in viewing these entities, and the

various structures and elements associated (and therefore the social reality of the organization), as constructed and constituted through communication, rejecting the traditional notion that these processes simply occurred and stayed *within* an organization (i.e., the container metaphor). Additionally, in taking a communicative view on CSR (Schultz et al., 2013), considering these efforts to be a social construction and discursive phenomenon in and around organizations. Specifically, as outlined in the literature review, I draw on the Montréal School CCO approach whereby emphasis is put on both human and nonhuman entities in the creation of organizations.

Thus, I take this view as seeing organizational reality, knowledge, and sensemaking processes as constructed through member communication. Specifically, I view social constructionism as both an ontology and an epistemology. From an ontological perspective, we consider questions of the nature of reality—understanding the world around us. In taking an interpretivist ontological standing, I believe reality is constructed through communicative and interactive practices of interpretation (Blumer, 1966). Specifically, I take a social constructionist perspective—arguing for the existence of multiple realities, and considering the nature of reality itself as relative whereby social life is situated and created through interaction.

Questions of epistemology are concerned with the nature of knowledge, or how knowledge about the world is accumulated and understood. I take a social constructionist and subjectivist epistemological stance in viewing knowledge as socially constructed whereby social interaction determines individuals' understanding of their environment (Claydon, 2017). Thus, the production of knowledge is a collective process and therefore is “something people do together” (Gergen, 1985, p. 270). As individuals come to assign meaning and understand their world, they do so through interaction and social practices with others, and the larger social system. In other words, meaning is not only derived from individuals themselves, but also the broader social systems of

which they are part (Allen, 2005). Thus, knowledge is subjective, relative, and fluid rather than objective or static, and “can only be understood from the point of view of the individuals who are directly involved in the activities which are to be studied” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 5). Therefore, in understanding how knowledge is gathered, scholars seek to do so through local understandings of social life through community or organizational members from a methodological consideration, and situated in the interpretive paradigm. Knowledge is therefore not generalizable but rather unique to individuals and groups within various contexts, such organizations.

Alasuutari (1996) argued that the goal or job of qualitative scholars is “to make sense of a particular, unique phenomenon, to come up with a local explanation of matters” (p. 378). Thus, many interpretive qualitative scholars take a subjectivist epistemological stance, whereby scholarship “does not seek universal knowledge claims but rather attempts to deepen our sense of what it means to understand (or misunderstand) other humans qua members of communication communities” (Mumby, 1997, p. 7). As Mumby (1997) described, the interpretive or interpretive modernist paradigm “is premised on a dialogic, social constructionist approach to the world” (p. 8). In contrast to those taking an objectivist stance arguing for separation between the knower and the known, and scientific methods are primarily used, a subjectivist’s “methodological commitment in search for knowledge” is to inquire “from the ‘inside’” (p. 29), particularly in the formation of theory. Therefore, the researcher *is* the instrument by and through which data are collected. These beliefs closely align with the interpretive paradigm in considering knowledge and reality as constructed through interaction and communication (Tracy, 2013). Thus, it is “absolutely necessary to analyze social action from the actor’s standpoint” (p. 41), which again connects well with my choice of qualitative methods for this project. Individuals view and see the world through

the various talk, discourse, and communicative interactions they are a part of in their day-to-day lives (Weick, 1995b).

The philosophical positioning of the individual researcher “should be the guiding force in developing the methodology that suits the research problem” (Samy & Robertson, 2017, p. 437). In following my own personal metatheoretical commitments, I must acknowledge how these specific views benefit the study of CSR in organizational contexts. Scholars have described a failure in CSR theory development without actually engaging with or studying in-depth the organizations implementing it (Samy & Robertson, 2017; see also Adams & Larrinaga-Gonzalez, 2007). As noted in the literature review, they have called for “engagement research conducted inside organizations focusing on the micro/internal processes” (Samy & Robertson, 2017, p. 437).

The move toward a social constructionism or constructivist approach¹⁰ to CSR scholarship in the last decade has begun answering the call for exploration of how corporations construct what CSR is, the motivations behind implementing such efforts, and how they should report or communicate it. As Samy and Robertson (2017) argued:

It is now recognized that CSR research cannot rely on positivist mainstream quantitative techniques which are too shallow to address its complexity, as they can rely on: too few variables; do not put studied phenomenon in their proper context and natural setting; and ignore the human aspects, individual personalities, collective consciousness, and roles that govern CSR practices. (p. 437)

Thus, I turned toward the use of qualitative inquiry as the methodological approach for this dissertation. Using qualitative methods as the research strategy provided the way to answer this project’s specific research goals while being in line with my personal metatheoretical positioning.

¹⁰ Although used synonymously and both related to subjectivity, I acknowledge the difference between social constructionism and constructivist as it relates to ontology and epistemology. Traditionally, constructivist has focused on “how the individual cognitively engages in the construction of knowledge” whereas social constructionism “claims that knowledge and meaning are historically and culturally constructed through social processes and action” (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 373; see also Ackermann, 2001; Rudes & Guterman, 2007).

3.2 Qualitative Inquiry

A qualitative approach is particularly pertinent and fitting for this dissertation. At the core, the goal of qualitative research “seeks to discover and to describe narratively what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them” (Erickson, 2018, p. 36). This type of inquiry largely “consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 10). From this perspective, the goal of research is to understand experiences. Additionally, connected with an interpretivist and socially constructed ontological grounding, realities between the researcher and researched are co-constructed. Accordingly, this project takes a multimethodological approach in further understanding and exploring the multiple realities and knowledge constructions of CSR that may exist in an organization.

In line with interpretivist thinking and a discourse of understanding (i.e., Mumby, 1997), this project sought to understand and examine “the ways in which human actors co-construct a meaningful world through various communicative practices” (p. 9), with regard to CSR. Furthermore, adopting an interpretivist perspective asserts the belief that “the social world can be assessed upon subjective observation and interpretation of human behavior” (Claydon, 2017, p. 46). As outlined above, I adhered to certain methodological commitments in the search for knowledge and in following my own meta-theoretical positioning. Since a primary goal of qualitative research is to analyze how individuals construct meanings in their natural environment, these methods are particularly pertinent to this project. Focusing on exploring the interpretive processes and sensemaking of CSR by internal members (i.e., employees), I could only understand these experiences empirically from the inside of the organization through a number of qualitatively-based methods to gain an understanding of subjective interpretations (Claydon,

2017). Additionally, I take a communicative view on CSR (Schultz et al., 2013) as previously described in the literature review—considering it to be a social construction and discursive phenomenon in and around organizations.

3.2.1 Mixed Methods

Combining qualitative methods through a mixed-method approach, through the use of both interviews and document analysis, can be valuable in terms of validity if including the same individuals in both. I also incorporated rhetorical-discourse analysis in analyzing both internal and external organizational texts and messages focused on CSR policies. Additionally, “the use of multiple types and sources of data” (Tracy, 2013, p. 40) and different methods of collection allows for triangulation and multivocality to gain multiple perspectives and voices in analyzing a particular phenomenon thus enhancing the study’s credibility (Denzin, 1978). Qualitative methods were very fitting to the goals and research questions of my dissertation in viewing CSR as a communicatively constructed social movement and reality (Georgallis, 2017; Wickert & de Bakker, 2018) in and around organizations.

Due to the inter- and multi-disciplinary nature of CSR communication, the great variety and number of methodological and meta-theoretical approaches to studying the topic are unsurprising and quite common. In taking a traditional transmission view of communication, whereby messages are sent, received, and processed by individuals, as well as the rather external-nature of CSR discourse, quantitative methods have been particularly popular through the use of surveys and content analyses (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). However, qualitative methods are being increasingly employed in taking a communicative and constitutive view of CSR, but there still exists a lack of exploring employee involvement, or taking the “insider’s view,” in the literature (May, 2011, 2014). Therefore, I incorporated qualitative methods to fill this gap and answer my

specific research questions surrounding internal CSR policies and, in particular, the communication and employee sensemaking (i.e., knowledge construction) of such efforts at all levels of the organization. Taking a mixed-methods approach in general “greatly benefits the researcher for a number of reasons, primarily in that it allows for the generation of richer data and ensures validity of the research data by enabling the researcher to compare responses from different methods” (Claydon, 2017, p. 53).

As already presented, there is not much known about CSR in the context of organizations from the individual perspective (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). This employee consideration is particularly important given that “individual actors are those who actually strategize, make decisions, and execute CSR initiatives. Also, individual actors perceive such initiatives and take action as a result” (p. 953). Thus, I began at the individual level in exploring employee sensemaking and communication around CSR prior to broadening my analysis to other macro-levels seen through organizational documents. Thus, I explored how internal CSR practices, particularly those benefiting or targeting employees, are embedded in broader organizational and societal or institutional practices and concerns.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

As previously noted, this dissertation takes a multi-methodological approach. In the following section, I provide a description of the research sites and participants that were included, as well as the specific methods of interviews and document analysis to be utilized. Through this, I present the invaluable use of these particular data collection tools, and qualitative research in general, to the examining the nature of internal CSR.

3.3.1 Interviews

Interviews are one of the most commonly used methods in qualitative inquiry; “a face-to-face verbal exchange where a person attempts to elicit information or expression of opinion from another person” (Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954, p. 449). Interviews are therefore valuable if used by researchers in a participant’s natural setting—“when the objective is to acquire explanations and descriptions of insights and experiences which would not be possible to be answered simply or briefly” (Semeen & Islam, 2017, p. 281).

As Semeen and Islam (2017) argued, interviews are crucial to securing knowledge about CSR, such as motivation behind CSR reporting. They are particularly useful “for mutual discovery, understanding, reflection, and explanation” (Tracy, 2013, p. 132) and can be understood as a jointly created event through conversation. In other words, an interview is a complex social event—“as two or more people are involved in creating knowledge,” therefore making the process contextually bound (Semeen & Islam, 2017; see also Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Therefore, in line with interpretive constructionist metatheoretical approaches, with the belief that the researcher or interviewer affects the data, the qualitative interview is appropriate for understanding human experience (Semeen & Islam, 2017; see also Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

3.3.2 Organizational Documents

Documents, both print and electronic, have been a long-standing source of data for qualitative researchers (Bowen, 2009). Documents as artifacts “contain text (words) and images that have been recorded without a researcher’s invention” (p. 27). Additionally, Atkinson and Coffey (1997) defined documents as “social facts”—“produced, shared, and used in socially organized ways” (p. 47). As Bowen (2009) described, the incorporation of documents into the data corpus is often for means of triangulation whereby the researcher draws upon at least two sources

of evidence. Particular to case studies, document analysis as a method is invaluable to case studies—“producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organization, or program” (p. 29; see also Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Thus, the inclusion of documents is often a complement to other methods and sources of data, such as interviews or observations.

In this study, I used publicly accessible documents. Bowen (2009) detailed five specific functions of document material in scholarship. First, “documents can provide data on the context within which research participants operate” (p. 29). Second, analyzing documents can aid in suggesting certain questions that should be asked or specific contexts that should be further explored or observed. Third, as previously noted, documentary material can be crucial supplementary data—providing additional knowledge or insights that may not surface in other data sources. Fourth, “documents provide a means of tracking change and development” (p. 30) particularly when taking part in a longitudinal study. Fifth and finally, analyzing text from documents can verify other findings or evidence from additional data sources. Or, for example, if findings from interviews contradict information from documents, this additional analysis could provide theoretically new and/or expansive findings or encourage the researcher to explore further.

This dissertation included primarily external and/or publicly-available organizational documents related to or focused on a company’s CSR. While I am interested in internally-directed CSR, I also wanted to explore how employees reflect upon the external face that the organization presents regarding CSR through documents. In beginning preliminary analysis and to aid in the recruiting and sampling process, I conducted a rhetorical analysis of the companies in which I was particularly interested or where I had personal contacts who agreed to be interviewed. This analysis allowed me to first see if these organizations indeed had, or at least explicitly communicated externally about, employee-directed CSR efforts. This rhetorical analysis permitted me to compare

what employees were disclosing from their positioning as insiders of the organization in terms of their knowledge and sensemaking of such activities, and whether or not their reports and interpretations were aligned with those communicated on more public platforms. These documents included the organization's primary social media sites, if available, as well as its website, annual report, news coverage or press releases, and CSR or sustainability reports. I made notes prior to interviews. These documents of course varied by organization and industry in terms of name, focus, length, etc. Document analysis was ongoing throughout data collection, as I went back to my notes and artifacts upon interviewing employees. I conducted this back and forth memoing and analysis for the document and interview analyses for comparison purposes. For example, I often found a misalignment between what employees thought their organization did in terms of CSR, and what was communicated in a sustainability report. In a few instances, I even found employees to be unaware of their company's CSR external communication (e.g., online reports) or CSR programs altogether. Overall, I could see whether or not employee referenced and used external messages as part of their sensemaking, or whether or not they were even aware of all the ways in which their organization communicated about CSR. Additionally, continuing document analysis allowed me to go back to a company's website or social media platform if suggested by participants. I could then include any documents that I may have missed or not thought to review prior to interviews.

3.3.3 Participants and Context

I present CSR as a socially constructed, localized (i.e., contextual), and situated phenomenon. As, Samy and Robertson (2017) advocated, CSR research should continue to move from a relatively dominated (post)positivist approach to that of social constructionism/constructivism. For these authors, "future research in CSR would arguably have

an impact on society if researchers undertaking in-depth analysis” (p. 458) and investigating individual corporations. Through this and the reporting of CSR practices by (multinational) organizations through case study process “would reveal best practices that could be modelled for other organizations” (p. 458).

To uncover how employees feel, make sense of, and understand CSR on a personal level, interviews were invaluable in attaining these particular data. I conducted 42 one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with employees via video conferencing (e.g., Skype, FaceTime), phone, or in-person (for a participants profile, see Table 2). Due to their time constraints or scheduling conflicts, some participants requested conducting the interview via e-mail correspondence. I sent a version of the interview guide¹¹ to the individuals and requested written responses to each question. I followed up as necessary for clarification or if elaboration was needed, and responded to particular questions that these individuals had as they were completing their responses. Participants for interviews were recruited using convenience snowball sampling, as well as the professional networking platform LinkedInTM¹². Additionally, I also began sampling through a preliminary analysis of publicly available organizational artifacts (e.g., CSR reports, corporate websites, media coverage, social media accounts) to narrow down those organizations I believed

¹¹ This version differed slightly from the original interview guide as I was not able to ask certain follow-up or clarification questions I preemptively included for those conversation conducted via phone, video chat, or in-person. This version was also formatted differently in terms of spacing so that participants could clearly write out their responses, and included explicit instructions for completion

¹² This recruitment invitation message was stated as follows and included contact information:

I am looking for participants to interview for my dissertation project! Specifically, I am interested in talking with employees of various organizations and industries to understand how they make sense of and perceive their employers' Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts, especially as organizations are being called on to create more respectful, safe, and equitable work environments. In short, the purpose of this research study is to explore employees' perceptions and sensemaking of employee-directed, internal Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts and policies. Interviews can be held in-person, over the phone or video chat, or via e-mail and will last between 30-60 minutes. Your names and responses will be kept confidential, and no prior knowledge about or work in CSR is required. I would very much appreciate the help and to hear your thoughts!

to have a clear CSR agenda and, preferably, include employee-directed responsibility initiatives or policies. Specifically, I considered multi-national corporations first and foremost as exemplars that may have well-developed CSR programs, and are have increasingly publicized such efforts in at least the last decade (Levis, 2006). Sampling continued as participants were suggested to me by others or contacted me directly in volunteering to be interviewed. I expand on this document analysis later in this chapter. While not developing a case study, I was interested to see and explore how employee-directed CSR and the awareness and sensemaking of such efforts by internal stakeholders may vary across specific industries and organizations.

Table 2 Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Position	Industry	Tenure
Willa	Senior Project Coordinator	Construction	1 year
Flora	Director, Projects	Construction	5 years
Angie	Senior Communication Specialist	Financial Services	3 years
Penelope	Marketing Associate	Food Service Wholesale	1.5 years
Rick	Manager, Sustainability	Airline	4.5 years
Mark	VP, Finance	Oil & Gas	20 years
Mason	Director, Corporate Affairs	Beverage	8 years
Betty	Sales Representative	Beverage	6 years
Kory	Actuary	Insurance	3.5 years
Ruby	Manager, Human Resources	Insurance	4 years
Kris	Financial Analyst	Beverage	3 years
Fred	Senior Financial Analyst	Automation	3.5 years
Violet	Director, Corporate Communication	Manufacturing	4 years

Table 2 continued

Helena	Assistant Director, Philanthropy	Financial Services	16 years
Rose	VP, Corporate Communications	Financial Services	8.5 years
Brooke	Senior Communication Specialist	Financial Services	4 years
Brandy	Senior Account Executive, Sales	Professional Sports	3 years
Diego	Manager, Research and Analysis	Professional Sports	6 years
Zoe	Engineer	Construction	7 months
Stan	Senior Engineer	Electronics	5 years
Cora	Business Manager	IT Solutions	4 years
Stella	Senior Account Executive	IT Solutions	4 years
Rudy	Engineer	Food Processing	9.5 months
Tanner	President & CEO	Food Processing	4 years
Walter	Accountant	Construction	5 years
Elise	HR Specialist	Healthcare	1 year
Harrison	Account Supervisor	Agency	2 years
Sid	Firefighter & Paramedic	Public Sector	5 years
Robin	Account Representative, Sales	Heating and Cooling	4.5 years
Wendy	Strategy Partner	Not for Profit	2 years
Ally	Strategy Partner	Not for Profit	8 years
Marcia	Project Management Coordinator	Not for Profit	15 years
Polly	Assistant Buyer	Retail	4 years
Fiona	Senior Account Director	Marketing	5 years
Cleo	Senior Communication Specialist	Hospital	6 months
Halle	Independent Sales Associate (Contractor)	Medical Device	15 months

Table 2 continued

Carlo	Operations Supervisor	Utility	6 years
Kassie	Manager, Content Marketing	Consulting	6 months
Melody	Team lead, Marketing	Consulting	3.5 years
Maggie	Barista	Coffee	2 years
Persia	Account Executive	Entertainment	1 year
Elliot	Engineer	Automotive	5 years

Upon approval from IRB, I instantly began reaching out to potential participants via e-mail as well as a public call-out on LinkedIn detailing the overall goal and intent of this dissertation and a formal invitation to participate in interviews (for recruitment e-mail, see Appendix A). Once they agreed and offered potential dates and times for the interview, I sent over a consent form if applicable¹³ detailing the potential benefits and risks of this study while also ensuring their confidentiality throughout the research and publication process (for consent form, see Appendix B). I also responded to any requests for additional information or specific details regarding the focus of the study or process. Participants were not limited or recruited based on organizational tenure, rank, or knowledge and/or connection to their organization's CSR (i.e., holding a CSR role or actively participating in CSR-related activities). In fact, when asked to participate, several employees claimed they had no baseline knowledge of CSR in general, at their company, or specific work in CSR efforts, thus questioning their fit to be interviewed. I assured them that I was interested in their perspectives on CSR and they agreed to be interviewed. I also interviewed a

¹³ Those participants interviewed remotely (i.e., via phone, video chat) were sent the consent form for review once the interview was accepted and scheduled. They were asked to verbally accept the terms of the consent form at the beginning of the interview to be kept on record via audio recording and transcription. Those completed in person were asked to sign a hard-copy of the consent form prior to the start of the interview. Finally, those interviews completed via e-mail were sent the consent form upon acceptance of participation and were required to respond with their consent prior to being sent the interview questions.

number of employees who worked at the same organization and/or in the same industry. However, the companies represented preferably engaged in CSR explicitly (i.e., had some sort of external CSR communication) but were included regardless of CSR focus in order to explore how employees understand these activities or even believe they exist or are relevant at all. Thus, I interviewed employees regardless of the nature of their work or of their organization's observable (e.g., website, CSR reports) commitment to CSR.

In the end, I interviewed over 40 employees (for list of participants, see Table 2), representing 32 different organizations of varying industries and size—primarily for-profit and multi-national corporations (MNCs), with the exception of two nonprofits and one in the public service sector, and of varying tenure, role, and rank. In 8 cases, there were 2 or 3, at most, participants who were employed at the same company. Most interviews (76.2%) were conducted via phone or video chat; a few (23.8%) were completed over e-mail per their request due to scheduling conflicts, geographic location (i.e., different time zones), or health reasons. There were two instances where participants required consent from their organization's legal team prior to participation, with one ultimately declining the invitation to be interviewed. What was of concern for these employees was the ability to discuss issues within and activities by their company, particular those internal in nature. Interestingly, these two participants held positions of seniority in their organizations. It is important to acknowledge this often-occurring challenge to qualitative research, particularly when engaging in interviews. While consent forms as approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) assured anonymity, our confidentiality procedures were deemed insufficient by corporate legal teams, especially given internet searchability.

During interviews, participants were asked a variety of questions broken down into five broad areas: background and introductory information of participant, company information and

perceptions (i.e., feelings), thoughts or knowledge of CSR in general, thoughts or knowledge of CSR as operationalized at participant's current place of employment, and the future of CSR both in general and at current organization (for complete interview protocol, see Appendix C). Throughout I asked questions regarding employee-directed CSR, including questions of certain efforts to see if employees believed these were or could be operationalized as corporate responsibility initiatives. I conducted memo-writing (i.e., writing of analytic notes) following Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory approach to data collection. Per Charmaz (2014), "memos catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons of connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue. Memo-writing creates an interactive space for conversing with yourself about your data, codes, ideas, and hunches" (p. 162). This process of writing notes or posing questions to myself as the researcher was incredibly valuable—ultimately aiding in the analysis stage through early brainstorming of possible codes, while also suggesting changes I could make or further questions I could pose in future interviews. Given the semi-structured format of my interview guide, I was able to alter questions or propose follow-up inquiries throughout the data collection process.

Each interview was audio recorded per consent given by participants. Upon completion, I also wrote a brief, one paragraph summary of each interviewing highlighting parts I found to be particularly salient or interesting, while also posing questions to myself to consider later in the analysis phase in line with the memo-writing process (Charmaz, 2014). Afterwards, interviews were transcribed by a third-party service through institutional funding support. This process resulted in 405 pages of single-spaced transcripts, including those done via e-mail. After completed transcriptions were returned, I went back through each while listening to the audio recording of the interview to check for accuracy of the transcription.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

In this study, I engaged in qualitative inquiry using interviews with and documents from employees at multiple organizations. Specifically, I conducted organizational discourse analysis (ODA) which is described in the following section. ODA is an umbrella term that incorporates both grounded theory approaches and other discursive approaches, such as rhetorical document and critical discourse analyses. In my case, I utilize constructivist grounded theory and rhetorical analyses as are consistent with my metatheoretical alignments and with my research questions.

3.4.1 Organizational Discourse Analysis (ODA)

In general, I took a “language in use” approach via discourse analysis in order to “provide a detailed examination of talk and texts as instances of social practice” (Grant, Hardy, Osrick, & Putnam, 2004, p. 9). In addition to collecting data through one-on-one interviews with organizational members, I included a variety of organizational documents highlighting, presenting, or mentioning CSR to further understand organizational and employees’ sensemaking processes. Examples of these documents included: (non)financial reports, CSR brochures, CSR tabs or sections on company websites, press releases, and any other documents that may be publicly available and/or suggested by employees to review.

Through the data gathering and analytic processes, I drew on Fairhurst and Putnam’s (2004, 2015) presentation of ODA through their conceptualization of organizations as discursive constructions and a “grounded-in-action” approach, particularly in line with the CCO way of thought. Thus, this view of discourse “provides a more nuanced way for understanding the grounding of organization in action, the intersection of communicative actions and discursive structures, and the modality of actors’ interpretive schemes” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2015, p. 382;

see also Heracleous, 2013). In line with my metatheoretical positioning, I adopted the view that discourse constitutes organizational reality (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2014).

In short, organizational discourse analysis can be understood as a methodology, method, and data analysis technique (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2018). ODA aids in understanding “how the socially produced ideas and objects that comprise organizations, institutions, and the social world in general are created and maintained through the relationships among discourse, text, and action” (Phillips, Lawrence, & Harding, 2004, pp. 636-637). In this study, I presented it as an approach to analysis in order to investigate written and spoken language in an organizational setting as told by employees. Unique to the study of CSR, ODA can be particularly useful in uncovering tensions, contradictions, or paradoxes in organizations (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2018). For this study, ODA is appropriate for exploring the major goals of this dissertation via interview and organizational rhetoric around CSR. In general, the use of ODA aligned with my view of CSR as a communicative and socially constructed phenomenon within organizations, and allowed me to be open to the complexities accompanying or surrounding the organizations’ CSR.

3.4.2 Grounded Theory

In this dissertation, I took a constructivist grounded theory approach using Charmaz (2006, 2014). As an inductive methodology, grounded theory results in the generation of theory from data. Additionally, this strategy posits the simultaneous process of data collection and analysis. The constructivist grounded theory approach, as described by Zydziunaite and Tauginiene (2017), “focuses on interpretive understandings of meanings, and this version of grounded theory is equal to multiple social realities” (p. 35; see also Charmaz, 2006). An example of this related to CSR may be in “exploring leadership styles and motivations of corporate leaders in line with their chosen CSR activities, where multiple social realities are perceived” (p. 35). In considering CSR

to be incredibly contextual and also a socially constructed phenomenon, taking a grounded approach is appropriate. And in emphasizing the constructivist notion of grounded theory, I acknowledge my own subjectivity and role in the construction and interpretation of data (Charmaz, 2014).

Using Charmaz (2014), I present grounded theory as both a methodology and a method, consisting of:

systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves...grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis. (p. 1)

Thus, a grounded approach is not linear; analytic connections can occur at any time during the research process through the constant comparison approach—even when data collection is not yet complete. Therefore, data collection (e.g., interviews, document analysis) following sampling was completed all at once and allowed for the simultaneous comparative process.

While I am ultimately guided by theory in this dissertation (e.g., organizational sensemaking), I employed a grounded approach due to its flexibility as an inductive analysis technique, and in allowing for new theory to be generated from the data as collection and analysis occur. Thus, I essentially took an iterative approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994), “in which the researcher alternates between considering existing theories and research interests on the one hand, emergent qualitative data on the other” (Tracy, 2013, p. 8).

3.4.2.1 Coding Procedures

Throughout the coding and analysis process, I coded full transcriptions of interviews. I also went back through and reading my notes from each carefully, as I often memoed when something was said in the interview by the participant and I wanted to further explore the idea at a later date.

Charmaz (2014) discerns the difference between coding from interview notes and transcriptions. In short, “coding full interview transcriptions gives you ideas and understandings that you otherwise miss...Coding full transcriptions can bring you to a deeper level of understanding. In contract, coding from and across notes might give you a wider view” (p. 136). I ultimately had to code only notes from one interview due to technological issues in which the conversation was not audio recorded.

Following transcription of the data, I conducted open, line-by-line coding of interviews as they chronologically occurred and/or were received using QSR’s NVivo™ software. The open nature is the technique of coding data without a codebook created prior to analysis or the application of external criteria to the data. Open coding allowed for a true inductive or emic approach to the data whereby “behavior is described from the actor’s point of view and is context-specific” (Tracy, 2013, p. 21)—once again aligned with my subjectivist epistemological grounding. To code “means categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 111), and was completed in two phases: initial and focused coding. Coding allows for the separation and sorting of the data before the formalized analysis stage. Through coding, the researcher defines and attempts to understand what is happening in the data.

Initial or open coding keeps the researcher close to the data in allowing for theoretical possibilities and remaining open to where the data can lead (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, “initial codes are provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data” (p. 117), as this stage simply involves “naming each word, line, or segment of data” (p. 113). Second-level coding as the next stage of the coding process involves “a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data” (p. 113). I engaged

in line-by-line coding in order to group data into themed categories as a result of what is in and emerged from the data. As previously noted, this process occurred throughout the data collection stage in beginning analysis of interview and documented data. After the first few interviews, I had a list of 30 codes that emerged from these conversations (for list of codes, see Appendix D). These codes were transferrable and applicable to other interview data, but I also added or modified codes as necessary through additional interviews. In the end, I had a total of 78 thematic categories as part of my final coding scheme, including various hierarchical codes (Tracy, 2013) which included “systematically grouping together various codes under a hierarchical ‘umbrella’ category that makes conceptual sense” (p. 195). These hierarchical codes formed when I distinguished between different types of communication (e.g., internal, external, formal, informal), external versus internal CSR, definitional learning or experience of CSR (e.g., via work, school, the media), and general understanding of CSR (e.g., rationales, future, generational differences).

Throughout the coding process and data analysis as a whole, I relied on the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to “make comparisons at each level of analytic work” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 132). I conducted quick, initial coding upon receiving each transcript on a weekly basis following a week’s worth of interviewing and data collection. I then transitioned into focused coding in comparing the interviews as they were occurring and after each was transcribed.

As Charmaz (2014) argued, the transition from initial, open coding to focused coding is not necessarily a linear process. I continually went back and forth between my data, especially as I found different themes or codes in later interviews. I then returned “to earlier respondents and explore[d] topics that had been glossed over, unstated, or may have been too implicit to discern initially (p. 141). Taking a constant comparative approach allowed me to compare incidents, perceptions, and experiences across different conversations. This continued throughout the six

weeks of primary data collection a part of phase two (see Chapter 4) to ensure a close and constant interaction with the data (Charmaz, 2014). I kept a dissertation or methodological journal throughout this period noting overarching themes and questions to further explore through analysis. More specifically, keeping this journal allowed me to “engage in reflexivity” through jotting down “methodological dilemmas, directions, and decisions” (p. 165). Following my first round of initial coding, I exported code reports from the Nvivo software to then engage in a second round, line-by-line coding of each interview. Through this coding round, I highlighted specific quotes and instances of the interviews that fit under each of my research questions, and made note to include in the findings chapter.

3.4.3 Integrating Grounded and Discourse Analysis

In this study, I employed recent work from Fairhurst and Putnam (2018) in aligning grounded theory and organizational discourse analysis as a promising methodological approach to further exploring organizational phenomena. These authors discussed this strategy as particularly useful for a study that seeks to uncover tensions, contradictions, dialectics, and paradoxes. While I did not frame this study through a tensional or oppositional approach, analysis highlighted discursive contradictions in the data between CSR initiatives and the rhetoric around them, both internal and external, particularly in comparing industries. Additionally, this integrative methodology aided in identifying and examining “micro organizing dynamics” (p. 1). Thus, the grounded-discourse analysis convergence was critical to unpacking the socially constructed nature of internal CSR efforts through interviews with those inside an organization.

Integrating grounded theory in the study of organizational discourse can allow for the exploration of potentially contrasting themes that emerge through data collection, such as in interviews or publicly-available documents—or how certain discourses play out in organizational

contexts. For example, during times of organizational change or innovation, employing both grounded theory and organizational discourse analysis can allow for focusing on these processes and the effects of such oppositions. In the case of internal CSR, this approach uncovered the various discourses or social interactions (i.e., little “d” discourse) around the potentially changing nature of CSR, given certain external institutional pressures or growing social issues calling for the bettering of workplace environments. For instance, employees often credited a societal concern or Discourse such as gender equality or increased concern for work-life balance when rationalizing for certain CSR initiatives or changes in focus regarding CSR within their companies.

Fairhurst and Putnam (2018) proposed the integrative methodology as one that embraces the inductive aspect of grounded theory while diving deeply into the language and communicative interactions brought on by ODA to understand the “becoming” (p. 5) or creation of phenomena, such as oppositional pulls. Thus, combining a grounded and discourse analysis approach first involves the stages of coding and constant comparison technique in order to then uncover or identify (clashing) Discourses (i.e., historical and larger systems of meaning). Thus, Discourses can be compared as a result of the coding process. This approach is particularly appropriate for this study in considering how internal, micro or little “d” discourses such as employee interactions and communications and organizational documents (Feldner & Fyke, 2016) around CSR are ultimately embedded in larger, macro organizational or institutional big “D” Discourses, and vice versa. Additionally, further emphasis is put on matters of co-construction within the organizational context being analyzed. In other words, as Fairhurst and Putnam (2018) argued, the congruence of this methodological integration lies in combining aspects of grounded theory’s discovery of meaning with ODA’s construction of meaning (p. 6). Finally, this methodology calls for the consideration and focus on variability (i.e., “multiple plausible meanings as actors provide

different readings of their situation and introduce alternative courses of action” p. 14), in exploring the existence of multiple interpretations in given contexts or situations. Therefore, the integrative analysis can account for and extend to organizational member perception and sensemaking.

In taking a grounded approach to discourse and organizational documents specifically, we can “address form as well as content, audiences as well as authors, and production of the text as well as the presentation of it” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 45). Specifically, using grounded theory in the analysis of messages and artifacts created and communicated by organizations focuses on what the documents *do*, rather than only analyzing what it is they contain textually (see Charmaz, 2014; Prior, 2008). Thus, documents are not inherently objective, but instead present particular views and discourses of those who created them. In describing the representation of documents as discursive accounts, Charmaz (2014) argues that:

As a discourse, a document allows certain conventions and assumes embedded meanings. Researchers can compare the style, contents, direction, and presentation of material to a larger discourse of which a document is a part. As accounts, documents tell something of intent and have intended—and perhaps unintended—audiences. (pp. 46-47)

In conclusion, as Fairhurst and Putnam (2018) argued, the integrated grounded-discourse methodology works best in a mixed and qualitative method strategy particularly because “analysts can use grounded theory techniques to summarize data and rely on ODA approaches to ‘zoom in’ on specific details” (p. 16).

3.4.3.1 A Rhetorical Approach to CSR Messages

As O’Connor and Ihlen (2018) argued, CSR is inherently dialogic—a communicative construction between organizations and relative stakeholders. However, there has been limited work taking a rhetorical approach in CSR scholarship (Ihlen, 2011; O’Connor & Ihlen, 2018)—with existing studies focusing “primarily on the most important strategies used by corporations”

(p. 408; e.g., Castelló & Lozano, 2011). For example, current literature with an emphasis on CSR and rhetoric has explored specific CEO strategies in communicating about CSR (Marais, 2012).

While broadly approaching data via discourse analysis, I specifically took a rhetorical stance in analyzing organizational CSR discourse and messages both internal and external. As Fairhurst and Putnam (2014; also see Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001) presented, literary and rhetorical analyses are a specific type or domain of discourse analysis. In studying the rhetoric in organizations, scholars are “concerned primarily with discourse’s strategic dimensions” (Grant et al., 2004, p. 7).

In line with my view of “accepting communication as the constitutive element of organizations and CSR,” I adopt O’Connor and Ihlen’s (2018) argument that “rhetoric is instrumental in the conceptualization, construction, and negotiation of CSR between corporations and stakeholders” (p. 402). To view CSR rhetoric as dialogical and dialectic—focused on improving communication with stakeholders—O’Connor and Ihlen (2018) presented a new understanding of the corporation’s role in society. In other words, in emphasizing communication with relevant stakeholders through CSR rhetoric, corporations are seeking moral legitimacy (p. 408).

The scarcity of a rhetorical take on CSR in the literature suggests a call for further work. Most recently, O’Connor and Ihlen (2018) outlined four specific paths for rhetorical scholarship particularly due to the increase in exploring CSR communication and viewing it as a socially constructed, negotiated, and discursive concept. One is particularly relevant and in line with the overall goals of this dissertation—to investigate “how rhetoric constitutes and legitimizes different types of CSR” (p. 410). Through this, they call for specific attention to employees as enactors, receivers, and sensemaking agents of CSR messages, as well as their lived experiences with

CSR—expanding our understanding of how CSR is socially constituted, understood, and acted in organizational contexts. In taking a rhetorical approach to CSR generally, I emphasize the communicative and constitutive relationship between corporations and their stakeholders, particularly in the creation and dissemination of CSR efforts and messages.

3.4.4 Phases of Analysis

Data collection and analysis for this dissertation was primarily broken down into two phases. Phase one included a preliminary document analysis, while phase two included simultaneous collection and analysis of interviews while comparing with organizational documents. First, while awaiting approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) specifically regarding the use of interviews, I conducted a rhetorical analysis which aided in narrowing down which organizations to include as part of my sample, while also educating myself in the types of employee-directed CSR that may or may not be common among organizations as communicated via publicly-available documents. Prior to this analysis, I made a list of organizations with which I had personal connections or contacts that I believed could be promising for participant recruitment. In the end, I had a total of 16 organizations on this initial list but, in the end, my sample represented 30 different organizations across various industries.

As I began considering which organizations' employees I wanted to interview, I took a purposive sampling approach in addition to my convenience, snowball sampling procedure whereby recruitment starts with personal connections and participants subsequently recruit others. Purposive or "qualitative sampling" is a non-random approach to sampling, and is particularly used when the researcher: (a) wants to find instances or cases that are representative of a particular phenomenon, and (b) intends to compare different cases to one another (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). I conducted purposive sampling in recruiting participants of certain organizations that I believed

engaged in some sort of CSR agenda, including efforts that were employee-directed, per my preliminary analysis (see below) and made up a variety of organizations in terms of size, nationality, and industry.

3.4.4.1 Phase One: Document Analysis

I took a discursive approach in conducting a rhetorical analysis of organizational documents in phase one, particularly those communicating a company's CSR efforts. Krippendorff (2013) described discourse analysis of texts as one version of a qualitative content analysis—one that goes “above the level of sentences” and tends “to focus on how particular phenomena are represented” (p. 22). Broadly speaking, the study of discourse utilizing a language-centric approach per Fairhurst and Putnam (1998) which is focused on “the study of words and signifiers, including the form or structure of these words, the use of language in context, and the meaning or interpretations of discursive practices” (p. 79; see also Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001)—and includes the study of text production, distribution, and reception (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2014). Here, text “refers to the material representation of discourse in spoken or recorded forms” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2014, p. 272; see also Taylor & Van Every, 2000).

A discursive approach is not scarce in the CSR literature, particularly in the analyzing of organizational texts communicating a corporation's social responsibility. For example, O'Connor and Gronewold (2012) analyzed CSR discourse, specifically in environmental sustainability, in the petroleum industry via a textual analysis of sustainability reports. They noted that, “Analyzing the discourse of corporations through their texts is a fruitful research method that allows researchers to examine language-in-use (Rapley, 2007)” (p. 220). This dissertation is unique in presenting a cross-industry comparison of both document analysis as communicated by organizations externally as well as internal stakeholder perceptions.

I conducted a rhetorical examination publicly-available CSR-specific documents. Emphasizing the persuasive element of classical rhetoric, this type of analysis is often used “to examine corporate messages in crisis situations, organizational decision making, and identification” where “emphasis is given to texts and the ways that meaning intertwines with function to shape messages and message responses” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2014, p. 273). Through this analysis, I focused on both *what* was said in the text in terms of content, and *how* it was said, structured, or communicated. CSR is a rhetorical construct—particularly as a result of when organizations seek to persuade, gain support, and be viewed as legitimate by stakeholders. Thus, “rhetoric plays a crucial role for CSR when it is conceptualized, constructed, understood, and contested” (O’Connor & Ihlen, 2018, p. 403).

As Ihlen and Heath (2018) explained, “Rhetoric helps explain the ways in which organizations attempt to achieve specific political or economic goals, build identity, and foster relationships with their stakeholders” (p. 3). Going beyond what was said at the surface level, the rhetorical approach focused “on how messages are delivered, and with what (intended or actual) effects” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 22). As Boyd and Waymer (2011) presented, organizational rhetoric represents three particular organizational interests: a) those of organizational members, b) those self-serving the organization, and c) those that may be hidden or marginalized. Though limited in extant scholarship (O’Connor & Ihlen, 2018), a rhetorical take on CSR has traditionally fallen within three categories: strategic, institutional, and dialectic (Castelló & Lozano, 2011). With the latter focusing on communication with various stakeholders, organizations are seeking moral legitimacy through CSR rhetoric (Castelló & Lozano, 2011).

From a CSR as communication perspective, “what it means to be socially responsible is negotiated through rhetorical give and take between corporations and stakeholders based upon

their shared and unique experiences and expectations” (O’Connor & Ihlen, 2018, p. 402) (see Ihlen et al., 2011a). In other words, I took a stakeholder approach to rhetorically analyzing CSR communication via organizational documents. This communication is dialogic—as “CSR represents a social contract that is co-constructed between stakeholders and corporations” (p. 404). While a stakeholder approach to CSR rhetoric has been primarily focused on consumers and activists, for this dissertation, I give particular attention to employees as a stakeholder group.

My own document analysis aligned with extant work of others (e.g., O’Connor & Shumate, 2010). For instance, many of the corporate websites I analyzed, primarily those that are or at one point were Fortune 500 companies, presented strategically ambiguous language around their CSR. Buzzwords like ‘Responsibility’ and ‘Social Impact’ with a sense of pathos and ethos around doing the *right thing* became all-encompassing CSR categories. In other words, it feels as if there is something for everyone—with many larger corporations having as many as ten corporate responsibility areas or categories. This flexible and ambiguous language while using the transcendent ‘we’ can “create connections between stakeholder groups who may have conflicting interests” (O’Connor & Ihlen, 2018, p. 402; see also O’Connor & Shumate, 2010). Additionally, companies seemingly prioritized philanthropic and community-based efforts across the board, while others in terms of environmental impact and ethical business practices, for instance, varied based on industry and individual mission (i.e., what the organization produces and states as its goals). O’Connor and Shumate (2010) concluded that most Fortune 500 companies in the United States mimic each other’s strategies in communicating CSR—particularly when within the same industry and as a way to appear competitive, which was confirmed in my analysis as well. For example, the two large beverage organizations I examined has a primary focus on water use which

makes sense given the nature of the industry and also recent emphasis on clean water and declining water reserves.

Prior to contacting and recruiting potential participants for the interview portion of this project, I first conducted a preliminary document analysis to strategically include those companies with at least some form of CSR or a reference to a CSR-related activity, with particular attention and emphasis on those which could be deemed employee-focused. I began by examining corporate websites of the various companies from which I planned to recruit participants. These were primarily for-profit and multinational, with a few being on the Fortune 500 or Fortune 100 list. The majority of organizations are headquartered in the United States, with the exception of a few internationally based in other countries.

As with interview data, I took a grounded and interpretive approach to this document analysis without applying a pre-defined coding scheme, thus being exploratory in nature. I was simply looking for themes and words companies were using and associating with or categorizing as their CSR efforts. First, organizations needed to have a publicly-available corporate website so that my analysis was consistent; I began with the website for all organizations. I then noted first whether or not the company included a page or document on CSR¹⁴, and then mentioned or suggested some sort of employee-directed CSR (e.g., internal workplace processes). I included a company's CSR or Sustainability¹⁵ report, and any other pages or tabs communicating some form of 'responsibility' activity. In general, CSR-related information needed to be explicitly stated and easily accessible (e.g., no more than three 'clicks' to different pages on corporate website) (see

¹⁴ I looked explicitly for the term 'corporate social responsibility (CSR)' but also included related keywords in my search including: (corporate) responsibility, sustainability, community, citizenship, and likewise. Conceptualization of CSR varied greatly among organizations.

¹⁵ Majority of companies (n = 32) had a Sustainability page or Report encompassing their CSR initiatives, rather than explicitly having a CSR or Corporate Responsibility Report.

Sones, Grantham, & Vieira, 2009). Additionally, I noted if and how organizations clearly rationalized their specific CSR programs through “public introductory statements corporations use to describe what they consider to their socially responsible activities and the justification for those activities” (O’Connor & Schumate, 2010, p. 534). In this introduction, seven of the organizations had a letter from the CEO at the beginning of any formal CSR report. I also did a search of media coverage associated with each company in the past year, and analyzed the press documents if clearly associated with the organization’s CSR. Additionally, I reviewed the company’s social media pages (e.g., Facebook) if recommended by employees following interviews. In all, 28 of the 32 organizations I analyzed included some sort of CSR communication in the public domain, with the exception of a regional hospital, a financial consulting company, a local heating and cooling company, and a global PR agency. I suspect these specific organizations did not have explicit CSR communication first due to their relatively limited online presence and little amount of information on their websites altogether, and perhaps their lack of resources available to commit to CSR altogether. However, employees from these organizations specifically still argued that their employers did take part in various CSR activities.

In my analysis and in what I categorize under the term ‘employee-directed,’ or ‘internal’¹⁶ CSR more broadly, I found five broad themes of activities or efforts as: (1) diversity and inclusion¹⁷, (2) work environment (i.e., culture, safety, anti-harassment, codes of conduct), (3) training and development opportunities (also called professional development), (4) health and wellness, and (5) (employee) engagement. While these categories were the most common, they

¹⁶ Although I refer to these efforts as employee-directed, I include the phrase “internal CSR” more broadly in suggesting that these efforts were including internal audiences (i.e., employees) (Hameed et al., 2016) or processes in some way, but are not necessarily directed towards or purposely benefitting these parties.

¹⁷ Diversity and inclusion initiatives often encompassed efforts related to ethnic diversity and inclusivity as well as gender equality and empowerment (e.g., opportunities specific to female employees). These initiatives varied by organization as several also included diversity and gender as separate categories of their CSR.

are not all encompassing. For example, one organization included several employee-directed activities under a recruitment page (i.e., for prospective employees or recruits) on their website. These employee-directed efforts included benefits such as: work-life balance, quality facilities, and tuition reimbursement (framed as employee investment), while also including the others noted above.

I categorized these as “employee-focused” especially when a company’s CSR report or website used the term “(Our) People” to categorize and organize these particular activities. As introduced in the beginning of this dissertation, employee-directed (i.e., internal) CSR efforts are described as those activities specifically benefiting, targeting, or serving internal stakeholders, most notably employees. In other words, these activities brought on by an organization are explicitly and directly “related to the psychological and physiological well-being of its employees” (Hameed et al., 2016, p. 2). However, other CSR activities I also deemed “internal” in nature included specific initiatives within the organizational structure or facilities (e.g., LEED® certified, recycling, upgraded water stations). However, general responsible business practices (e.g., supply chain, responsible sourcing) I included as external.

I also noted if companies included awards and recognition, such as Best or Top Places to Work, on their websites (n = 12). Pointing to these accolades was an organization’s attempt to increase credibility around CSR engagement (Du & Vieira, 2012). These categories and findings were in line with those of O’Connor and Shumate (2010) in identifying employees as a primary stakeholder group benefiting from and supported through an organization’s CSR. Du and Vieira (2012) found that many oil company CSR activities framing employees as beneficiaries were associated with health and workplace safety, with those focused on diversity and inclusion and work-life balance were lacking, for example. My analysis found the majority of companies now

do explicitly include these types of programs and frame them as part of a CSR agenda. Finally, I noted if the organization had been recently named to the 100 Best Corporate Citizens list¹⁸ (n = 2). Companies considered for this honor are evaluated on based on their CSR performance and disclosure efforts as reported primarily on their websites in seven categories: climate change, employee relations, environmental, financial, governance, human rights, philanthropy and community support (“100 Best Corporate Citizens,” 2018). In conclusion, 18 of the 32 (56.3%) organizations included some type of employee-directed or internal corporate responsibility in their public communication.

Additionally, I documented categories of external (in terms of stakeholder groups directed) or “outside organizational-directed” CSR. Common themes for these included: (1) philanthropy (e.g., charitable giving, fundraising), (2) sustainability (e.g., environmental protection, conservation, and impact), (3) community outreach (e.g., volunteering, nonprofit partnerships, community-based events), (4) supplier diversity, (5) responsible business practices (e.g., outsourcing, supply-chain, animal welfare), (6) human rights, and (7) responsible and ethical stakeholder relations (e.g., investors, suppliers, customers). Many of these themes were not mutually exclusive and varied in emphasis, prioritization, and rationalization based on industry and size. In all, 14 of the 32 organizations (43.8%) had some sort of formal reporting that mentioned CSR in some capacity. However, terms and names of reports varied. Some examples included: sustainability report, corporate responsibility report, social responsibility report, human rights report, diversity and inclusion policy, environmental policy, global sustainability report, business conduct report, ethics report, social impact, and annual report which included CSR

¹⁸ Dating back to 1999, the most recent list was released in 2018 and is compiled by *Corporate Responsibility Magazine* by 3BL Association.

communication. In fact, two of the organizations' annual reports opened with CSR-specific information.

Once interviews began as detailed below, I continued this analysis of publicly available documents as my sample grew to other organizations I had not originally analyzed. In only two instances was I unable to recruit participants from the initial organizations I had hoped primarily due to lack of response to invitation or unable to commit to an interview. Therefore, those organizational documents were not included in the final sample. Additionally, I went back to any initial documents I examined prior to phase one and added any texts to my sample as encouraged or suggested by employees following interviews, which allowed me to gain a broader understanding of company CSR programs, agendas, and discourse at the macro or institutional level. I also cross-referenced the data by comparing what employees reported in terms of their company's CSR (both internal and external) with what the organization presented publicly. In the end, this analysis resulted in 875 total pages of documents (see document breakdown in Table 3).

In line with my research goals and questions, document analysis allowed me to explore macro Discourses and common themes of CSR more generally at the organizational and institutional levels, primarily communicated to external audiences. Thus, interview data resulted in exploration of CSR at the micro or individual level to understand internal discourses (i.e., communicative interactions) and sensemaking of these efforts within organizations. CSR is often conceptualized as a macro-level phenomenon as part of an organization's strategy and practice (Aguinis, 2011; Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). However, and perhaps more importantly, it is crucial to understand that "it is actually employees who shape CSR and are affected by a firm's CSR policies and actions" (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019, p. 1060). Together, this mixed-methods approach allowed for a holistic view of CSR by exploring the interplay between the organizational level CSR

discourse and that of the understudied individual or employee level. As Aguinis and Glavas (2019) presented, while CSR is often examined via the policies and communication put out *by* the organization, “such policies and actions are actually created and enacted by individuals” (p. 1061). Therefore, this dissertation focuses on how employees experience CSR, “which has thus far not been the focus of the literature possibly because it has originated at the macrolevels (i.e., firm and institution)” (p. 1061). And from a rhetorical perspective, I pay attention to how employees are seen and described as a primary driver and beneficiary of CSR efforts, and how they may take up CSR in their day to day lives and personal rhetoric (O’Connor & Ihlen, 2018). Thus, I aimed to “identify gaps between words, practices, and experiences” in comparing documents with interviews (p. 410)

I elaborate on these findings in connection with interview data through a discourse analysis in the Chapter Four.

Table 3 Document Analysis

Industry	HQ Location	Number of Employees	Number of Pages of (CSR) Documents Analyzed
Beverage	South U.S.	60,000	48
Oil and Gas	Western Europe	90,000	10
Construction	Midwest U.S.	600	3
Financial Services	Midwest U.S.	7,500	6
Financial Services (not for profit)	Midwest U.S.	90	5
Automation	Midwest U.S.	22,000	37
Beverage	Midwest U.S.	17,000	42
Airline	Midwest U.S.	90,000	36
Insurance	Midwest U.S.	40,000	20

Table 3 continued

Professional Sports	Midwest U.S.	250	21
Agency (PR)	South U.S.	2,500	5
Heating and Cooling	Midwest U.S.	1,000	5
Food Processing	Midwest U.S.	20,000	85
Construction	Australia	11,000	37
Food Service Wholesale	South U.S.	66,000	90
Electronics	South U.S.	5,600	5
IT Solutions	Northeast U.S.	4,500	3
Construction	Northern Europe	41,000	8
International Not for Profit	Midwest U.S.	900	4
Agency (Marketing)	Northeast U.S.	500	4
Coffee	West U.S.	280,000	42
Retail	Midwest U.S.	85,000	33
Hospital	Midwest U.S.	3,500	7
Medical Device	Midwest U.S.	18,000	8
Consulting	Midwest U.S.	1,200	4
Utility	Midwest U.S.	8,000	80
Automotive	Midwest U.S.	200,000	20
Manufacturing	Midwest U.S.	6,600	4
Healthcare	Midwest U.S.	9,000	18
Public Service	Midwest U.S.	60	2
Entertainment	West U.S.	3,200	58
Consulting	Northeast U.S.	2,500	5

3.4.4.2 Phase Two: Semi-structured Interviews

Phase two began at the beginning of March 2018 with interviews upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB; for letter of approval, see Appendix E), with an amendment made half-way through data collection to approve third-party transcription services (for letter of approval for amendment, see Appendix F). This temporarily paused transcription for approximately one week. I made sure to complete a review or refresh of each organization's documents and/or the notes from my preliminary analysis prior to conducting each individual interview, which allowed me to ask more specific questions to participants when inquiring about certain efforts they may or may not label as CSR—particularly those unique to their employer and publicly communicated by the organization.

Pertinent to this study, contemporary organizational rhetoric has included the examination of internal employee communication and how these messages “may fuse with the discourses of external branding” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2014)—often blurring the lines between this divide (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). According to Ihlen (2011), a rhetorical approach “helps us to understand the specific textual strategies that corporations employ when they communicate about corporate social responsibility (CSR)” (p. 147). The analysis of data from both external organizational documents and interviews with employees allowed for a comparison between types of CSR texts and discourse, and how broad Discourses of CSR across various organizations are constituted. During and after collection of interviews, I went back to compare what participants told me in interviews with what was included in terms of content of (external) organizational documents, and I often used documents alongside interviews. For example, if I was conducting a phone interview with a participant, I would always have a document on my laptop in order to take notes throughout, but also would have the interviewee's company website and corporate

responsibility page if applicable and would make note if the participant's response aligned or misaligned with the document content. Additionally, participants would often times suggest I go "look something up" online with regard to CSR, company values, specific media coverage, and so on. With the laptop in hand, I could look up these materials immediately.

A rhetorical and discursive approach to CSR sensemaking and communication was fitting in examining organizational voices, through documents and interviews, and understanding localized constructions of the corporate responsibility phenomenon. As Guthey and Morsing (2013) argued, CSR can be viewed as "a forum for sensemaking, diversity of opinion, and debate over the social norms and expectations attached to corporate activity" (p. 556). Combining discourse analysis with a grounded approach (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2018) allowed me to explore the social construction that is CSR through a combination one-on-one interviews and organizational documents.

Within my grounded theory approach to data collection, coding, and analysis utilizing the constant comparison method, saturation was reached at the point when "all categories are well developed in terms of properties, dimensions and variations. Further data gathering and analysis add little new to the conceptualization, though variations can always be discovered" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 263). Drawing on the original words by Glaser and Strauss (1967), "'Saturation' means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated" (p. 61). Saturation was achieved after the analyses of 42 total interviews and document analysis of all organizations represented, thus completing data analyses and collection.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

*I think requirements of society are only going to increase and increase over time.
So I think all of this; I think CSR is going to continue to become
more and more and more important into the future (Mark).*

Throughout this dissertation, I have taken a social constructionist and communicative view in exploring CSR as perceived and presented through employee interviews at various organizations as well as company reporting and rhetoric through publicly-available, external documents. Throughout analysis, I compared and assessed employee perceptions and experiences regarding CSR at the micro level alongside programs presented at the macro level via organizational texts. These two approaches to analysis complemented each other in exploring the communicative and social nature of CSR as the organizational texts were understood “as material representations or talk or interaction in written or recorded forms” (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012, p. 1046).

Based on empirical data, I present results to RQ1 which asks what employees’ general understanding of CSR is as a concept, and RQ2 which asks how employees make sense of CSR more at an operational level, particularly those employee-directed and internal, within their organizations. I present the findings in themes of inquiry across levels of analysis. First, I begin with presenting the broad, social nature of CSR starting at the macro level. Second, I describe employee perceptions and knowledge of CSR broadly in further answering the remaining RQs around internal sensemaking and micro-foundations of such efforts. Throughout the various sections of this chapter, I also answer RQ3 in presenting what (employee-directed) CSR efforts are most common among the 32 organizations I sampled.

4.1 The Social and Discursive Nature of CSR: On Macro Discourses of Responsibility

Findings from both interviews and document analysis suggest CSR as equivocal and flexible, but also structured and traditional in terms of what “counts” as a CSR initiative. Additionally, CSR appears to be a fluid, viable, and continually evolving initiative—with employees identifying and predicting shifts in its operationalization moving forward. Historically, CSR has been explored at the macro (i.e., organizational and institutional) level in presenting common themes of programs by companies. Whereas CSR efforts and policies are often understood as actions developed by organizations as broader systems, these efforts are typically enacted, supported, and driven by employees (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019), as confirmed in the interviews. Therefore, I followed Aguinis and Glavas (2019) in making “the role of individuals explicit by focusing on how they experience CSR, which has thus far not been the focus of the literature possibly because it has originated at the macrolevels (i.e., firm and institution)” (p. 1061).

I begin this chapter by discussing the socially constructed, ambiguous, and ever-evolving nature of CSR. Before focusing in on how employee-directed CSR efforts are presented by various companies and made sense of by employees within those organizations, I first took a step back in examining and presenting how employees made sense of and constructed knowledge of CSR more broadly—both in terms of general conceptualization and operationalization inside and outside their particular organizations—while also exploring general themes of CSR at the organizational level. Thus, this section of findings responds to RQ1: *What are employees’ understanding of CSR?* These general understandings and perceptions became a substantial portion of the interview conversations prior to discussing specific CSR efforts in employees’ places of work. In taking a discursive and social constructionist metatheoretical approach, I view the reality of CSR as (re)constituted through and by communicative and social interactions. More specifically, a

constitutive view of CSR sees this phenomenon as created through and in communication. From this perspective, “CSR is not a preexisting, out there idea, but one that is constructed, legitimized, and sustained through communication” (Chaudhri, 2016, p. 423) and the constitutive view “treats CSR itself as a communicative process/phenomenon and brings attention to how CSR is constructed by organizations and stakeholders groups” (p. 423). Thus, understanding how CSR is talked about and understood at both the macro and micro levels help reflect broader, yet contextual perceptions and provide implications for these practices moving forward.

4.1.1 Discourses & General Perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibility

First and foremost, what surfaced throughout interviews was the convoluted and equivocal nature of the words forming the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility and what Discourses emerged in relation to it. This was clear in both interviews and organizational documents in understanding the broader perceptions of CSR across varying organizations, industry, and cultural contexts. CSR can be seen as a product of cultural and societal expectations and values (see Klein, 2012), and “Discourse emphasizes what is valued in society and is our primary concern” (Fyke et al., 2016, p. 221). From this perspective the “social” of CSR becomes highly contextual and rather localized based on the certain societal environment (Leitch & Motion, 2014). However, Discourses around larger, universal issues such as global warming and climate change appear to be an ideal and common focus for corporate CSR programs as these “transcend individuals, corporations, and nations” (p. 507). Thus, the issue of globalization is reflected in the organizations’ CSR reporting, with 18 of the 32 included in the sample being multi-national or a Fortune 500-ranked company.

Before getting into questions specific about CSR as a concept and phenomena, I asked employees broadly to think about the main responsibilities corporations have as a whole—considering to who or for what organizations are responsible. While responses varied from a

traditional business case in prioritizing the client or customer to the broader ecological system, the majority of participants argued for the importance of being responsible to employees, particularly through creating a safe and equitable work environment, compensating well, encouraging work-life balance, and providing resources for them to succeed and grow. For example, Zoe, a young engineer working for a European-based construction company less than a year after graduating college, said:

I think companies should be most responsible to their employees. This includes employee's safety, well-being, happiness, etc., as it's the employees that are the manpower of the company. Obviously good management leaders and business practices are key to a company's success, but employees and their work practices are incredibly important. Ultimately, the happier your employees are at work, the harder they are going to work and the more efficient and successful the company will be.

I explored how these perceptions connected to later discussions about corporate responsibility in considering whose interests CSR programs were promoting (see Dobers & Springett, 2010).

As evident in both interviews and organizational documents, there were overarching Discourses of morality in considering the role of business in society. Discourses of “doing the right thing,” “making a difference,” or “contributing positive social impact” were present, in addition to the rather interchangeable and synonymous use of (organizational) ethics, citizenship, responsibility, obligation, and stewardship. These were common in definitional understandings as reported by employees in interviews. When asked questions around “why CSR” in terms of rationalizing for CSR programs more broadly, participants referred back to these somewhat moral or ethical Discourses, while also drawing on broader societal Discourses in considering the power that corporations have and their opportunity to create change. Maggie, a barista at a global coffee conglomerate, encapsulated this view in her perception of CSR by stating that it is, “some way to hold corporations accountable for their impact that they have...they have so much money and so

much influence, they should use it for the greater good.” This reference and sense of morality is largely common among organizations’ CSR rhetoric (Ihlen, 2011).

Additionally, Discourses surrounding a sense of “(Internal) Consciousness” and “Culture” were particularly evident in employee’s description of CSR activities on a broader scale. For example, when describing his own organization’s approach to CSR, Harrison, an account supervisor at a global PR agency, contextualized his company’s efforts within European society and the corresponding cultural expectations. He described how the organization reaches out to refugees who settle in the local community, and how issues of recycling and environmental conservation are heavily prioritized. Specifically, he says that his agency goes above and beyond legal requirements in taking their environmental footprint incredibly seriously because the country they are located in “is very much environmentally conscious.” Taking a more internal focus, Harrison refers to the Discourse of work-life balance—a very present phenomenon in European, specifically Scandinavian, countries (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011). Specifically, he discusses responsibility to employees through policies of shorter workweeks and offering more vacation days than what is governmentally mandated—all “to make sure that the employee is happy and can perform to their best ability.” Thus, Discourses of employee satisfaction, well-being, and productivity were evident. Similarly, “Safety” was common in organizational reporting of CSR, with 12 of the companies referencing safety in terms of their business practices and, especially, workforce.

Specifically, Tanner, who happens to serve in a high leadership position at a large food processing company, discussed the nature of the industry and increasing trends specific to that context in rationalizing for the specific CSR efforts his company engages. For instance, he said,

One thing that we see more and more frequently is the animal handling and safe, safe practices inside of our industry. And I think that will continue to be a focus on how we can go and provide those resources, uh, and able to go and have safe handling practices, um, throughout our entire supply chain.

He also emphasized animal safety and responsible handling of products—both in-line with the company’s core business agenda and particular industry.

Unsurprisingly, there were several Discourses of Responsibility that transcended across different industry and organizational boundaries—a variety of key phrases or words used in alluding to or in place of Corporate Social Responsibility. Most obviously, the broader Discourses of “Responsibility,” “(Social) Impact,” and “Sustainability” were commonly communicated at the macro level externally via organizational documents. While often confused or commonly coupled with ideas of environmental conversation or protection, Sustainability was used in describing organizational and societal longevity, growth, generational consideration, and, of course, long-term sustainment. Discourses of “Community,” “Citizenship,” “Partnership,” and “Development” highlighted primarily external CSR initiatives beyond organizational walls and infrastructure. Organizations commonly used “Philanthropy” and/or “Our Community” when reporting these and further differentiated between local and national or global efforts. Additionally, phrases around “Development” referred to impact the organizations was making in communities, particularly developing countries, in which it operates.

Broader social Discourses clearly impact the rhetoric used by organizations in naming and choosing certain CSR efforts or programs, while showing external audiences that the company integrates and prioritizes larger societal concerns. For example, Discourses of “Diversity,” “Inclusion,” and “Equity” (i.e., equal opportunity) in terms of work environment were commonly used to describe particular CSR efforts, both internal and external in nature. Other examples include those efforts that are aspirational, such as goals to diversify the workforce or eliminating

a certain amount of waste in the near future. Organizations' approaches to supporting cultural and societal issues through CSR can be seen as means to close "the gap between business and social objectives" and reflecting the values of the communities in which they operate (Klein, 2012, para. 6).

From the employee perspective, general conceptualizations and understandings of CSR largely centered around the external, social, and voluntary nature of such efforts. Initial definitions emphasized the externality of CSR efforts. Discourses of "Consciousness," "Accountability," and "Ethicality" were prominent in interview responses when asked what CSR means to them. Where perceptions diverged were in thinking about who or what were, or were not, included in the definition, and to what extent or in what capacity. Almost all participants included "society" or "surrounding communities" in their definition—really emphasizing the social nature of CSR from an external outreach standpoint. Broad definitions included: "it's the organization's responsibility to give back to the surrounding communities for the better and the greater good" (Penelope); "how good of a neighbor and citizen a company is, um, to its community" (Violet); "How a company is interacting with the community that it's in or that it serves, and how concerned they are with the footprint that they're having within society in different way" (Willa); and "when a company goes above and beyond what is expected of them to make a positive impact on the community and environment" (Halle).

Other participants included other stakeholders in addition to the surrounding community, referencing the potential internal nature of CSR by mentioning employees. For example, Fiona's response was, "A company's responsibility to better the community that surrounds them internally and externally." Diego, who works for a professional sports team and had no prior knowledge of CSR conceptually, alluded to a more transactional relationship in his definition: "the implicit

contract between society and corporations which allows the company to organize in exchange for improving the lives of its employees and the public.” Finally, Brandy’s, who works for the same organization as Diego but who has personal experience in the nonprofit space, response was, “an organization's responsibility to the people that they serve, the community that they serve, um, whether that'd be like, you know, employee happiness or, um, like environmental responsibility.” In short, this inclusion of employees and anything regarding internal processes was the minority of definitional understandings by participants. However, Fiona, a young, senior director of a large construction firm, believes CSR should be entirely employee-focused, which, in her opinion, is the reality of most CSR programs, like giving employees the chance to grow and incentivizing them in various ways. For her, “I have seen over the last year a huge shift in our company, realizing that to me CSR could be looked at as anything not directly related to someone's salary, or for what their day-to-day responsibilities are. Anything else to me can be considered CSR, so anything bonus incentive related. Anything that you're showing an employee that they're valued.” From a leadership perspective, Fiona is acknowledging the voluntary nature of CSR in providing for stakeholders (i.e., employees) beyond what is legally expected of the company from a purely business perspective. For her, it is about employee value and “being responsible *to* your people.”

Additionally, in the interview, employees were asked to comment on the potentially long-lasting positive implications or impacts CSR. Many were optimistic; viewing CSR as “overwhelmingly positive” (Harrison). These impacts ranged from those on a minor, local scale and at the organizational level (e.g., local partnerships, increased awareness and community support, reputation, recruitment, consumer preference, financial impact, competitive advantage) to those a more global level (e.g., pollution, poverty, water resources, building sustainable

communities, activism), and even those with internal effects (e.g., improving workplace morale, retention).

In contrast, others were skeptical of CSR when asked if there were any negative implications or challenges for companies engaging in such activities. For example, Fiona said,

I think a lot of that stuff is solely driven by companies wanting to be in the public eye and it's actually not solely for the gain of just the better good...It's not realistic to go say that all these companies are going to go volunteer all the time, that's kind of B.S.

Relatedly, Elise believed there might be “ulterior motives.” And Persia’s thought was, “I want to say that it's just the morally right thing to do. But I don't think that is 100% the truth or reason behind everything. I definitely would say that there is a marketing PR ploy at times.” Interestingly, employees pointed to added benefits of good press or financial benefit via CSR, but that presents the question of: does that make them unethical, insufficient, or simply *bad* CSR? In general, participants were split when discussing CSR as a PR move—either acknowledging the potentially disingenuous or strictly self-serving nature of CSR from this perspective, or in a positive light associated with employee pride, improved organizational image, or beneficial from a recruitment standpoint.

4.1.2 The Ambiguous and Paradoxical Nature of CSR

I began investigating the ambiguous nature of CSR that surfaced through document analysis and which became even more evident in conversations with employees, particularly surrounding both of their conceptualizations and operationalizations of what ‘counts’ as CSR. Several employees were not sure what CSR was—having not heard it prior to our interview—and thus struggled with identifying what could constitute CSR both within and outside their organization. Others could only define CSR in terms of what it meant at their own organizations.

Ambiguity around CSR can in fact contribute to variance in or false understandings (i.e., differing from the organization's intent) from the perspective of employees, as the notion of responsibility itself could be considered subjective (Juholin, 2004)—as “absolute standards of corporate responsibility do not exist” and may change (p. 22). So while stakeholders may expect a consistent and clear definition of CSR, it remains “discursively open and ambiguous” (Guthey & Morsing, 2013, p. 556).

The contextual and changing nature of CSR, resulting in organizational variance, makes sensemaking around the term difficult, as many participants began to use terms like CSR and sustainability interchangeably (see Scandellius & Cohen, 2016). For example, Fiona gave various definitions of what CSR might be throughout the interview. She eventually made a comment saying, “I don't even know if that's really a definition, if that's a thing, and then that's kind of where I get confused of what it actually means.” This expression of confusion and/or ambiguity was a common occurrence in conversing with employees. In fact, many felt forced or intimidated to even give a response when asked to explain what CSR might be or how it could look operationally within their organization or across others more generally. As this confusion continued to happen repeatedly, I found myself prefacing this specific question with, “I know this is putting you on the spot, but...”

However, the ambiguous nature of CSR can also be seen as opportunistic and strategic (see Eisenberg, 1984; Guthey & Morsing, 2013), given that scholars call for exploring the potential of such ambiguity (Christensen et al., 2015). In taking this perspective we can understand CSR “not as a clear or consistent agenda, but rather as a forum for sensemaking, diversity of opinion, and debate over the conflicting social norms and expectations attached to corporate activity” (Christensen et al., 2015, p. 555). Thus, like sustainability, CSR can certainly be viewed as “a

social constructed phenomenon that has no definite definition—no final closure” (Christensen et al., 2015, p. 137) and can be seen as adaptable and resilient (Guthey & Morsing, 2013).

In terms of conceptualization and operationalization, stakeholders, and arguably employees, define and redefine what CSR is, making it a “contextual construct” (Matten & Moon, 2008). In fact, some employees even acknowledged CSR’s contextual nature, particularly in attempt to rationalize why companies engage in such efforts. For example, Wendy, a young professional who recently made the move from a large PR agency to a global nonprofit, stated,

...while some organizations do this to do good in the world, there are also many organizations that only do it to boost its reputation, because the government makes them (e.g. CSR in India is mandatory) and possibly even for tax benefits.

Here, Wendy acknowledged institutional and contextual pressures that may impact whether or not an organization engages in CSR—and to what extent—including government regulation, culture, societal or consumer expectation, and so on. When asked what the point of CSR was, Mark, a VP at one of the largest oil and gas companies in the world, responded with, “I think it depends on the company, I think, if I’m really brutally honest.” Additionally, he recognized his limited view of CSR by contextualizing the concept within the industry in which he works: “I must confess these questions made me realize that I wish I knew more about what people outside our industry do because I’m very focused on the energy industry and then probably don’t get as much of a lens on what happens in consumer products or any other in your industry that you can think of.” Finally, Betty, a sales representative at a bottling company as part of a global beverage corporation, recognized the role of public and stakeholder perception in saying, “Everyone’s got a different experience, because some things are more important for some people than other people. Like, I don’t know, like if [my company] hires more women, some people may take offense to that. There’s

just so many critics that have different opinions or are going to say different things about what each company's stewardship is.”

On a more definitional level, both organizational documents and employee interviews suggested a consideration of those typically thought of as affected by CSR efforts—stakeholders. For Stella, a senior account executive at a global IT solutions company, the best businesses are the ones that acknowledge and act responsibly to those with which they have relationships. She said, “I think the most influential and successful (not solely in a monetary way) companies are those who positively enable their people, customers, stakeholders and those they impact daily.” For Elise, a human resources specialist who handles employee engagement,

it's just a matter of responding to any social issue in a manner that least negatively impacts stakeholders. So anybody affected by your company because they're being affected by a social issue. That's something you should be engaged in, and figuring out a way to eliminate any negative experiences they're having as result of the social issue.

However, the term “stakeholder” is ambiguous (Donaldson & Preston, 1995)—particularly with regard to CSR in considering where organizations draw the line around who they are responsible to/for. Mason, a director of corporate affairs at a global beverage company, noted, “the definition of stakeholder has changed.” Brooke’s, a senior communication specialist for a financial services company, response encapsulates the open-ended nature of CSR, insinuating the dilemma of where CSR ends (i.e., when is enough enough). She said,

I think it would be the corporation's responsibility to give back and make an impact for the community that they're part of, and the stakeholders that are not just their immediate customers. It's kind of a little bit more of beyond transactional fulfillment, but actually creating empathy, or making a difference in ways that they really don't have to, but they want to. I think that it gets tricky because some people see it as self-serving, but it really is bigger than that.

Likewise, Angie’s, who works in the nonprofit space and handles a variety of communication responsibilities, view of CSR is incredibly vague and open to interpretation. For her, the point or

goal of CSR is, “to basically improve a society as a whole in some way.” Thus, it was clear that participants emphasized stakeholders ranging from employees to customers to society at large—often noting the latter in drawing from CSR as a term, especially with little to no prior knowledge.

4.1.2.1 Paradoxes of CSR

As seen through interviews, CSR appears to be a widely accepted phenomenon—often led with good intentions and hard to openly refute or challenge. Additionally, documents presented various Discourses of what CSR is, how it is executed, and what it could be at the organizational level based on size, location, industry, and overall mission. Broadly speaking, companies are communicating and framing CSR in terms of stakeholder prioritization, external outreach, and overall social and environmental impact. However, employee perceptions collected through interviews shed light on the nuances and collective ambiguity around CSR also at the macro level.

Here, I present and unpack the potentially paradoxical nature of CSR as a result of its socially constructed nature, and as emerged through the discourse analysis of this dissertation. Drawing on Fairhurst and Putnam (2018), I consider paradoxes as “persistent oppositions that often result in an ironic or absurd outcome” (p. 2). From this perspective, and in identifying potential organizational oppositions regarding CSR, I was interested in unpacking “the socially constructed nature of paradoxes in their empirical settings” (Andriopoulos & Gotsi, 2017, p. 516). In fact, Frankental (2001) argued that the phrase of Corporate Social Responsibility itself is inherently paradoxical.

It was fascinating for me as the researcher to witness these ironies and, in some sense, contradictions around CSR especially in comparing different datasets. In doing so, it was important to keep in mind “wider sociocultural influences on paradoxes, the role of multiple interpretations

of paradoxical contexts, and the treatment of time” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2018, p. 2). Throughout my analysis, I found four broad paradoxes currently associated with CSR (see Table 4).

Table 4 CSR Paradoxes

CSR Paradox	Description
Local – Global-minded	While many CSR efforts are operationalized in the local context, organizations often discuss and frame within larger Discourses of global issues or concerns. Relatedly, while companies present their CSR efforts from a global perspective, their reach can only extend so far (i.e., locally, areas of operation). Cancio (2017) termed this idea “Glocal” in saying that, “While employees tend to be attracted to help their communities at the local level, with their companies’ support, they can drive initiatives that reach a much greater scale” (para. 3).
Voluntary – Necessary	CSR has traditionally been defined and conceptualized as voluntary efforts taken on by organizations. Although these practices transcend legal requirements and profit maximization, employees frame CSR as necessary and valuable from a business perspective (e.g., recruitment and retention, consumer choice, reputation).
Additive – Ingrained	CSR efforts framed as campaign-based and external in nature appear to be additive, or an “adjunct of PR” (Frankental, 2001, p. 22), from the perspective of organizational documents. However, from an internal viewpoint, many employees suggest the reality and/or importance of CSR to be engrained in business practices, decision-making processes, and internal culture.
Static – Evolving	Several employees and organizational documents describe a company’s tradition and long-standing, ongoing commitment to social responsibility (e.g., responsible/ethical business practices, community involvement, employee safety), but suggest that these practices continue to evolve, adapt, and grow in response to societal and stakeholder expectations, as evident through increased reporting efforts by corporations. Additionally, while some organizations, particularly those within the same industry, “mimic” or have similar themes of CSR, employees acknowledge the importance of being set apart from competitors.

4.1.2.2 Integrating Internal and External Dimensions of/for CSR

These paradoxes emerged from a side-by-side comparison of my two datasets. In considering the larger Discourses of CSR and understanding broader themes or categories of such efforts, I relied heavily on a close reading of organizational documents while also incorporating broader perceptions of CSR held by individuals not just as employees, but also as members of

society. May and Roper (2014; see also May, 2011) called for a simultaneous consideration of the external and internal dimensions of CSR from a research perspective to examine the “integration (or lack thereof) between CSR communication that is externally and internally focused” (May, 2011, p. 102). However, past work continues to differentiate between CSR efforts in terms of the stakeholder being targeted (Rupp & Mallory, 2015). As Rupp and Mallory (2015) argued, external CSR efforts are typically community-oriented, while internal initiatives are employee-oriented in terms of benefitting these particular stakeholders.

Thus, I thought specifically about how these spheres worked together or were integrated, and/or potentially contrasted and diverged by comparing interviews and document content. Additionally, in taking a more institutional perspective, I considered how broader societal or cultural expectations, industry norms and trends, and other external pressures impacted CSR organizing internally, and vice versa. For example, Discourses of a Diverse and Inclusive work environment are increasingly discussed at a societal level, and thus are often reflected internally through various organizational initiatives, including CSR. As many employees argued, “it is about drawing your employee base from the communities in which you operate and having your people be representative of the countries and communities in which you operate—I think that’s part of our social responsibility” (Mark).

Others gave a negative connotation when stating that CSR is often done in order to simply “boost reputation” (Wendy), or as Fiona put it, “unfortunately, and this probably makes me sound like a negative person, but I think a lot of that stuff is solely driven by companies wanting to be in the public eye and it’s actually not solely for the gain of just the better good.” Thus, employees found it crucial that CSR aligns with core business practices and appears genuine and altruistic, rather than something simply additive. This relates to the idea of CSR as a “peripheral activity”

and one that is often viewed as externally located from a PR perspective—“an adjunct of PR, a function of a company’s external relationships” (Frankental, 2001, p. 22). However, as suggested by participants, CSR should be more of just an extension of an organization or disconnected from internal dynamics (Fyke et al., 2016, p. 226).

Relatedly, employees argued that CSR must be reactive, rather than proactive, particularly from a competitive advantage standpoint—suggesting a distancing away from viewing CSR as a purely PR and issue management tool, but rather something planned. If not, it could be viewed as “reactive measure to negative publicity so it doesn’t come off as a genuine one” (Diego). Similarly, Brooke said, “In my opinion, it is more impactful if they (organizations) have the program continuously.” Additionally, a more preemptive approach to CSR allows for increased dialogue and participation with employees. Tanner believes reactive CSR certainly does occur, but then needs to be regularly included in organizational discussions moving forward. In giving an example, he explained,

So we're talking about four times a year that we're pulling everyone away from their responsibilities to make sure that they have the right training and um, and to understand what we're doing to be corporate responsible. And that's who we talk about our cultural beliefs too. It's gives the opportunity for all of our employees to speak up and share their feedback to possibly create solutions within our organization that can deliver a more safe, a more corporate responsible environment for everyone.

Thus, Tanner’s point correlates with past research confirming that a proactive CSR strategy is more favorably viewed than reactive in practice (Groza, Pronschinske, & Walker, 2011).

Finally, interviews and document analysis unearthed this idea of bringing external social issues and movements into internal CSR processes and discourses. For example, Brooke noted her company’s creation and support of employee resource groups—“it's almost like bringing CSR

outside in.” Later in the interview, she began to suggest a blurring in the internal-external divide. Specifically, she said,

I have been seeing that we're a company that does the right thing used to talk about the stuff we do internally to create our own social change within our walls, but then externally that we do the right thing for our clients from providing financial security but then we also do the right thing within the communities that we impact... So I think when there's those social issues that we then, policies or initiatives, that we bring within our walls to make better, to make positive I think really makes an impact.

Likewise, Polly, who works for a large retail corporation, described how social Discourse has impacted their product line and internal conversation around certain issues. Specifically, she stated,

One thing I'm really thinking of right now is like society feeling uninvolved. And uh, right now we have like lines that are supporting LGBT. So for example, as we move into spring, we have like family tees (T-shirts). Oh, you and your husband and your kids can all wear the same shirt with the American flag on it or whatever it is. And now we actually have some that are like pride shirt. Then the marketing is two men or two women. And I feel like that's, that wouldn't have happened five years ago.

Thus, there appeared to be this understanding that social movements and concerns from a macro or Discourse level influence organizational CSR efforts and are reflected in them—perhaps considering CSR as more than PR and damage control (Porter & Kramer, 2006). I explicate this phenomenon further later in this chapter.

4.1.3 Future of CSR: Expectations of Practice

In efforts to define and predict trends regarding CSR in the future, employees often contextualized the phenomenon within sociohistorical and cultural big “D” Discourses, “and then operationalizes them in the performative dynamics of the little “d” discourses” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2018, p. 6). While I focus on the localized experiences and sensemaking of CSR within organizations later in this chapter, I further present general perceptions of employees in uncovering shifts moving forward. I concluded each interview with asking participants where they believed

CSR was going in terms of future trends—what CSR-specific activities are organizations doing now and will continue to, what themes will become increasingly popular, and/or what practices will be considered a “hot topic” in which companies begin to adopt.

Additionally, I paid close attention to how organizations presented their future CSR efforts through their “aspirational talk” (Christensen et al., 2013)—listing goals and intentions for CSR moving forward, including integrating such concerns into core business practices. Common aspirations most notably focused on gender equity and inclusivity, and environmental conservation. As perceived in the breadth of CSR reporting and through employee opinions, it is clear that CSR is no longer an option or a “nice to have”—it’s important and relevant. For example, Rose concluded her interview by saying, “I think it's just powerful. You know, bottom line: I just, I think it's powerful for everything about all of the good things that are happening in this world, in this country and what different companies are doing to step up and be a voice.”

Overall, employees referred back to broader Discourses of societal concern when predicting future CSR practices (e.g., climate change, political or social activism). As Wendy stated, “CSR activities will change to reflect the issues facing society. The more issues are broadly publicized the more we will see companies launching initiatives to combat those issues.” However, perhaps due to the sensemaking process of the interview itself, considering the future of CSR is where many participants began to discuss internal and employee-directed CSR (e.g., diversity and inclusion, employee mental health). For example, Ally said, “I think this will look like organizations offering meaningful volunteer opportunities to their employees, increased transparency and diversity, offering professional development focused on social causes, and providing educational opportunities on social and environmental consciousness.” Similarly, Cora, Walter, Cleo, Polly, and Carlo all mentioned future CSR as addressing social issues of

discrimination, gender and sexuality equality, mental health, workplace inclusivity, and overall efforts surrounding employee satisfaction, retention, and well-being.

In rationalizing these particular themes of CSR, employees credited broader social movements (e.g., #MeToo) and global concerns (e.g., global warming), as well as generational expectations from both a consumer and recruitment standpoint. As Penelope argued, internal “culture's just a huge thing now. And without CSR practices, I don't think that people are going to enjoy the culture of a workplace as much as they would otherwise. Like we're not going to work anymore just to get a pay check. You know, like if we're spending so much time there, we really want to care about the company and be proud of what we do.” Once again, Mark even predicted an even more influential role that corporations will take in tackling problems where governmental entities may fall short. For him, “it's going to fall more and more for the company to, to lead, um, as opposed to be led by regulatory bodies.” Overall, it seems as though CSR is operationally shifting as perceived and predicted by employees—moving away from solely philanthropy and campaign-based programs. As Diego put it, “the best employees are expecting their companies to take care of their well-being.”

Additionally, a few employees emphasized the need for CSR to be embedded in core business practices and decision-making processes, which responded to May's (2011) call for scholarship to consider “the ways in which CSR programs impact corporate decision-making” (p. 102). While clearly a top priority for leaders and ingrained in their daily thought processes, as noted by Tanner, Rick, and Rose and as described by Mark (“it's embedded in everything we do”), employees feel it could be even more visible through important business conversations. As Ruby noted, “it needs to influence the way you create products; the way you make decisions and the way you do business... so corporate responsibility and sustainability is the lens through which things

are being created.” Additionally, employees strongly felt that CSR needed to be proactive, rather than reactive suggesting an issue management strategy; “...companies will need and should start having CSR if you like an initial consideration as something is being built (e.g., a new facility) versus something that they report on it in retrospect” (Ruby). Additionally, employees recognized the recurrent nature of CSR—a concept that will continue to be relevant and live on. As Mason put it,

The evolution of CSR now will always be living. It will always be evolving. And we have to make strides now to understand our purpose, understand the lives that we want to impact more than ever. And you can't put a pin in it. You can't just say stop. I think that evolution will be, you know, just that it (CSR) will be ever changing... [Later] And we have to understand that teams of people writing checks now, uh, for communities, teams of people to go out and get our donations and to say we care about certain social issues, uh, isn't enough.

Elise questioned where the responsibilities of organizations stop, particularly to their employees, and recognized the changing nature of work:

I think that's still being defined slowly as we move forward, I think employees are getting more from their employers. You look at the history of employment right before we had all these labor laws, conditions were just absolutely horrible. People were working in a super unsafe environment. And now it's like, okay, everyone has to be safe. But that's not where it stops. It's almost like that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs if you think about it. Okay, I'm physically safe but now is that where the organization's obligation ends? Or do we keep moving up the pyramid to sense of purpose and self-actualization?

Overall, interviews revealed commonalities among participants in questioning to who organizations are responsible, and to what extent. For many, like Fiona and Elise, a company's social responsibility does not end after providing fair compensation or acceptable working conditions, but can mean so much more. This was consistent with content in organizational documents and external rhetoric in presenting and rationalizing for activities that go beyond what the organization is responsible for at a very basic level in the form of CSR efforts. Following

questions of general perceptions and definitional understandings of CSR, I began asking participants about CSR activities specific to their workplaces.

4.2 Employee Sensemaking of (Employee-Directed) CSR: On Micro Discourses of Responsibility

While the first discussion of findings presented the overarching themes associated with Discourses of CSR at the macro level as perceived by employees and communicated through organizational documents, interviews further unearthed the micro and discursive practices of CSR via employee sensemaking. In other words, in this next set of findings, I describe how employees perceived, understood, rationalized, and made sense of specific CSR activities, particularly within their own organizations, with special attention given to those employee-directed efforts. In other words, I wanted to see if and how employees viewed CSR that was geared inwardly, and how or why various internal efforts they listed could or should be perceived as CSR initiatives. Here, I took a localized approach in understanding the situated nature of CSR as an organizational phenomenon in responding to RQ2: *How do employees make sense of (employee-directed) CSR efforts in their organizations?* Here, I was particularly interested in exploring the little “d” discourse as language-in-use via social interaction (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012).

4.2.1 Instances of Sensemaking: The Interview Experience

In taking a sensemaking approach through this dissertation, I adopted “micro/interpretivist data-gathering techniques that aim to grasp the meanings that people attach to themselves, to others, to their experiences and to the situations they encounter” (Allard-Poesi, 2005, p. 177). Thus, employees’ points of view were crucial, and taking a grounded approach to data collection and analysis was both fitting and valuable (Allard-Poesi, 2005). What became evident through

talking with participants was that the interview became a true sensemaking experience. Prior to each conversation, I assured employees that they did not have to prepare anything in advance (e.g., research, look up materials), and did not need to have any prior knowledge of or work experience in CSR at all. Many in fact were initially reluctant to be interviewed due to lack of knowledge or experience—having not worked or often thought about what corporate responsibility is or what it could mean—but I reassured them that I was simply trying to understand general perceptions. This reassurance ultimately eased their hesitation. Even for the few participants who completed the interview via e-mail, many would send their responses back with reflexive comments such as “wow, my knowledge of CSR was insufficient,” or “I didn’t realize how much I didn’t know about this concept,” or “I didn’t know much about CSR so hopefully I answered in ways that made sense!”

In interviews over the phone or in person, I was able to truly witness and follow each participant’s thought process and their instances of reflexivity, sensemaking, confusion, identification (i.e., defining oneself in relation to what the organization represents (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004), and so on. Because most employees, with the exception of three, did not work in the CSR space or in a specific role, CSR was not something they typically thought about or discussed in their work on a daily basis. Thus, the interview became an opportunity for participants to attempt to conceptualize, describe, and operationalize CSR.

Several participants ($n = 13$, 31%) reported to having absolutely no knowledge of CSR at the conceptual level, while 13 (31%) said that they had a little knowledge, and 15 (36%) said that they were quite familiar CSR in general. However, even for those who claimed to have no experience or familiarity with CSR, the interview became a reflexive experience in which understandings emerged from our one-on-one conversation. Then, as the interview continued,

many employees began identifying various practices that they believed could “count” as CSR in some capacity. For example, when asked if CSR can or should be more employee-directed, Mark articulated his confusion but then acknowledged that CSR could in fact take a more internal form:

That's interesting. Yeah, I can see how it just there, I never really thought about it, but we have a lot of, we put a lot of effort into something like diversity and inclusion, but I tend to think of it separately. But it's an interesting way to think about it cause it is a broader, yeah, it is a broader way to think about our corporate and social responsibility. Um, I tend to think about it again, as I said in terms of the planet and communities rather than within our own offices and, and in our own plants.

Likewise, Violet’s response was, “I guess I wouldn't think about it that way. But if you're kind of looking at it all towards, the greater goods, yes. But I wouldn't necessarily, I wouldn't have not really thought of it that way.”

In fact, many employees were hesitant or overwhelmed when I asked them to define CSR. Some responses to this before attempting to define were, “oh, is this a test now?” (Harrison) or “I am not that familiar with CSR but I think I can try to describe it” (Cora)—and many prefaced their response with “so when I think of CSR...” (Brandy), or “if I had to guess, um...” (Robin), and even “I don’t want to, that’s putting me on the spot (laughed)” (Kassie). Additionally, even for participants who were familiar with the concept of CSR or had heard the term at some point, being asked to define CSR was difficult. For example, Elise said “that is the worst because there are so many different definitions of CSR and so I don’t feel like there’s one right definition.” Or, if the participant was familiar with CSR but does not typically use or think about the term on a daily basis, this question would signal an instance of sensemaking, like for Brooke who stated, “oh it’s been a while but I would say...”

One of the first questions I asked in the interview was for the participant to describe an instance or time of organizational change. Additionally, I asked participants to recall a time when they, as employees, felt either embarrassed or prideful of their employers. In both instances, several

employees described things related to CSR, and some without realization. Some of these included prioritizing and improving safe working environments for employees during a time of transition and facility upgrade, growing corporate donations, starting or revamping explicit diversity and inclusion initiatives, and so on. Thus, I would often remind them and have participants reflect back on these comments later in the interview when discussing their awareness and understanding of CSR efforts within their organizations. Often times I would respond or ask follow-up question such as, “and do you think that particular activity or policy is CSR,” or, “you mentioned before that you are proud of what your company is doing in terms of community outreach, employee wellness, and so on... do you consider those things CSR?” These types of questions continued throughout the interview if I was curious to see if the individuals would make a connection between what they previously said about CSR and what they concluded to ascertain more about their sensemaking and personal perspective.

When it came to asking participants directly about whether employee-focused or internal practices, or some corporate initiative they mentioned previously (e.g., new diversity policy) could or should be considered CSR, the participants often paused in interviews where they usually spoke immediately in response to questions. I labeled these times a confusing moment as several employees hesitated to answer or needed to think before responding. For example, when I asked what her perception of CSR was, Fiona said, “I think now I don’t really, truly understand the definition of it because I work at a place where it's not as black and white as I thought it would be.” Furthermore, she began reflecting on reconceptualizing CSR within her own organization. Specifically, she said:

I was talking to my HR director, actually we were talking about this, a couple months ago she was taking a course and she was like, "It's hard for me to think like what does [her company] do as far as CSR?" And that's when I was talking to her about, I was like, "But don't you think in a way it's also this internal need to give

back to your employees?" I don't even know if that's really a definition, if that's a thing, and then that's kind of where I get confused of what it actually means. But to me it's okay, you're socially responsible for these employees.

More specifically, when asked if CSR could be internally focused in any way and can benefit employees, Mark responded by saying, "Good one. Um, so I think there's plenty of space for that. So I don't know if I, I've never really thought about it in terms of corporate social responsibility, but I guess I could put it in that bucket." Kory's initial response was, "Yeah, I mean, I don't, I wonder, I don't really know." Thus, the interview process and questions asked served as a sensemaking mechanism and reflexive experience for participants. As the interviewer, it was interesting to observe participants' thought processes around CSR in terms of what it is and what it could be both within their organizations and beyond. It was common for participants to struggle when attempting to define CSR at both the micro and macro levels. Certain questions triggered reflection; and employees were forced to make sense of organizational practices (i.e., little "d" discourses) they encountered and how these were reinforced by or evident (to them) in broader societal or cultural discussions (i.e., big "D" Discourses).

Through interactions with employees, I was able to observe their sensemaking around discourses of responsibility and, more specifically, around practices specific to their organization and whether or not they considered these to be CSR or responsible, and why. Instances of sensemaking were particularly evident when I concluded the interview by asking employees to think about the future of CSR and where it is going in an operational sense. In other words, I asked if there were specific programs, practices, or "themes" of CSR efforts that they thought companies either would continue to focus on and increase moving forward, or have not begun but will initiate in the near future.

4.2.2 Employee Awareness and Perceptions: Exploring the “How” and “Why” of CSR

In considering the interview itself as a sensemaking experience for participants and finding that the majority of these individuals did not think about CSR on a day-to-day basis, I found that CSR also was in itself ambiguous in terms of definition and operationalization. In short, as presented in the literature review, CSR is an inherently contested, dynamic, and evolving phenomenon (Rasche et al., 2017). Likewise, I consider CSR efforts to be “context-specific organizational actions and policies” to fulfill stakeholder expectations and the triple-bottom line (Aguinis, 2011, p. 855). The findings of this dissertation confirm these definitional elements—in other words, CSR clearly means very different things to different individuals and companies, and can vary greatly depending on organizational role/position, seniority, and even age. However, while this definitional variation may be perceived as a challenge, CSR’s ambiguity and contextual nature can instead be seen as relatively normative and optimistic. In other words, employees did not view the variance of CSR practices as problematic, but rather as opportunities for organizations to decide what efforts are worth investing in, and for what reasons.

In the subsequent sections, I first present how individuals described their organization’s practice(s) of CSR in terms of conceptualization and operationalization. I then detail how participants described the communication and communicative constitution of CSR within their organizations. I conclude by expanding on employees’ more specific perceptions and rationalization for CSR. In short, this section continues to respond to the overarching question of RQ2 while also presenting findings related to RQ2a: *What do employees know and perceive about employee-directed CSR?*

4.2.2.1 What “Counts” as (Employee-Directed) CSR

Throughout the interviews, one thing I began to notice was that the majority of the conversations became an attempt for the two of us (interviewer and interviewee) to discuss and co-construct what really “counts” as CSR. For some, this question was fairly easy—particularly for those working in a CSR-specific role (e.g., Helena as Assistant Director of Philanthropy) or in communication (e.g., Rose as VP of Corporate Communications, Violet as Director of Corporate Communication, Brooke as a Senior Communication Specialist) who faced CSR in some capacity in their work. But what became clear was that if the discourse and terminology around these efforts were not necessarily labeled as “CSR,” participants were not sure if their organization even had any type of CSR.

Interview conversations suggested that employees in a way must cope with ambiguity in considering what could (or could not be) considered CSR beyond what their organization at the macro level or what leaders say it is. Thus, I asked myself, how do employees come to name or identify CSR when communication as a whole may be lacking? While many employees could clearly name CSR efforts unique to their company, especially when they were specifically named or called “CSR,” others had to think more deeply about if their company even had CSR and if or how those efforts could be deemed employee-focused, especially when I directly asked them to do so. Thus, employees did not initially or instinctively describe or define CSR practices as those internal or employee-directed. Once I asked if CSR is or could be internal in any way, almost all responded with “yes” but on the condition that these efforts be both internal *and* external. However, a few employees actually argued that CSR must start internally and first and foremost with employees before expanding on a more macro or organizational level. For example, Stella’s response was, “I think internally developed CSR helps encourage and shape employees to practice

external CSR.” Similarly, Kris stated, “I believe CSR can be internally and employee focused as corporations should be held accountable for not only conducting business ethically to society, but also to the people who are helping grow the company and make the business successful.” From a leadership perspective, Mason said,

Internally we’ve become much more focused on what does transparency mean internally because we want to be a transparent company. And I think until you start those, you make sure you start those practices internally. It doesn't matter what you're saying externally... I mean, that's where I, I feel as if CSR is a completely, you know, starting internally is where you have to become a true believer because those internal processes impact, you know, how you're viewed externally.

As the interview process continued and as employee sensemaking around CSR progressed, many began listing specific practices, policies, or programs of internal or employee-directed CSR. While there were nuances in perceptions, these efforts could fit under the over-arching umbrella of employee wellness/well-being or engagement. For instance, many of the internal CSR activities reported by participants included: promoting diversity and inclusion, organizing appreciation days, taking care of employees, engaging and empowering employees, advocating for fair and ethical treatment, encouraging productive and equitable work cultures, devising mentoring and professional development programs, espousing commitments to work-life balance and parental leave, developing employee resource groups, providing company time for volunteering opportunities, working toward internal transparency, holding sessions on mental and physical health and safety, offering educational opportunities (e.g., tuition assistance), and implementing internal environmental or sustainability practices (e.g., recycling, water stations, energy-saving lights). When asked *why* those things could or should be considered CSR, Diego said, “if you can’t take care of your employees then you will have a difficult time taking care of the broader community.” Likewise, Walter, an accountant for an Australian-based construction company, responded with,

CSR activities that affect the community and public as a whole, but also for the benefit of employees. It shouldn't be strictly external, because the workers may see all the effort going outwards and wonder why there's no effort being made on improving their lives or well-being in some way; there are programs that should do both at the same time.

Thus, both Mason and Walter's points speak to May (2011) and May and Roper's (2014) discussion of a simultaneous consideration for internal and external CSR communication, and perhaps disintegration of this divide altogether. Specifically, it appears as those employees see this connection and would question a misalignment between messages related to CSR.

The thought process and discussion of what counted as CSR in their organizations was where I as the interviewer truly noticed instances of sensemaking as described previously. For those who had little to no knowledge of CSR, they tried their best to "guess" what CSR could look like by breaking down the term on a definitional level and relying heavily on the word "social." For instance, Melody said, "yeah you gotta do right by your employees. But like there's also the larger obligation to society you know, the social piece... it's like not just doing right by your people but it's doing right by all people." Likewise, employees geared heavily toward defining CSR in a very philanthropic and voluntary light. For example, Fiona said that it was CSR when "investing in your employees on items that go beyond their immediate day-to-day activities..." Likewise, when I asked her if initiatives around bettering workplace culture and providing various added benefits to employees could count as CSR, Kassie, a new employee who has been with her company for only six months, said,

Part of me wants to say yeah, I think employee engagements is all part of this... my company doesn't have to do that. They don't have to create a corporate culture. They don't have to reward their employees. They don't have to support their employees with like health initiatives and stuff like that. But they choose to and they've invested in it. And so I feel like yeah, it is CSR 'cause it's like I think they do have this certain social responsibility that's outside of the business responsibility.

In contrast, those who work or have worked in CSR specifically had a much broader and evolved view of what CSR is or could be. For example, Ruby has spent several years working in a CSR-related role. She explained how her understanding of what CSR is changed through her work experience:

In that space I thought a lot about like the environmental, social, and governance impacts that like a company is making on the world and the community. Um, and I never really thought about a corporation like responsibility, not necessarily to like those three factors. Um, and I think that's like a big part of CSR. Like a lot of times people just think about volunteerism. Um, and I guess that so yeah, I said I think like at first that was what came to mind. Um, but then after working in this space, I saw that it was the definition and the work encompasses like a lot more than just, um, how your employees volunteer or how the company is donating to different causes.

Thus, Ruby's past experience in corporate responsibility, or sustainability as she refers to it, has impacted her sensemaking, definitional and operational understanding of CSR—shifting it from a traditional philanthropic and campaign-based view as common among other participants, to something that spreads across the “triple bottom line” (Elkington, 1997) in practice. Her retrospective sensemaking was clear in this instance in negotiating what CSR is, and how this has changed for her through various work experiences.

After asking basic foundational questions regarding the conceptualization and operationalization of CSR specific to their organizations, I asked employees how they come to know about CSR both formally and informally, and if and how they are communicated about CSR may impact or aid in their sensemaking and knowledge construction.

4.2.2.2 How Do We Know: Communication of CSR

Sensemaking is an ongoing process; both individual and collective in nature. Thus, as organizational members strive to make sense of (equivocal) practices, they often do so through face-to-face communication resulting in “vivid, unique intersubjective meanings” (Weick, 1995a,

p. 75). Organizations are inherently complex and chaotic systems (see Poole, 2014)—the very foundation for sensemaking. Communication is then essential and can be viewed as an act of sensegiving on behalf of organizations for their members—“a sensemaking variant undertaken to create meanings for a target audience” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 416; see also Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). During routine activities, individuals begin noticing and bracketing and becoming aware of activities, particularly those that have occurred before in the organization but have not yet been termed or named (Weick et al., 2005). Thus, sensemaking becomes “about labeling and categorizing to stabilize the streaming of experience” and is retrospective in nature (p. 411). As already mentioned, the interviews for this dissertation were a sensemaking experience for participants—I began asking them to label and list different processes or practices in their organization, and then reflect on whether or not they would be considered CSR. Additionally, the act of sensegiving through formal communication both internal and external gives audiences ideas about a present versus future image to aid in interpretation (Weick et al., 2005).

Communication is a crucial and central element of the sensemaking and organizing process. As Taylor and Van Every (2000) described,

We see communication as an ongoing process of making sense of the circumstances in which people collectively find ourselves and the events that affect them. The sensemaking, to the extent that it involves communication, takes place in interactive talk and draws on the resources of language in order to formulate and exchange through talk...symbolically encoded representations of these circumstances. (p. 58)

In line with a CCO perspective, “situations, organizations, and environments are talked into existence” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409)—which I found to very much be the case given the contextual nature of CSR within organizations and across industries.

In presenting CSR communication as part of the findings for this dissertation, I draw on work by Morsing and Schultz (2006) and their description of three communication strategies: the

stakeholder information strategy (i.e., public information, one-way communication), the stakeholder response strategy (i.e., two-way asymmetric communication), and the stakeholder involvement strategy (i.e., two-way symmetric communication). Employees reported a combination of both informal and formal methods of how CSR is communicated and use of all three CSR communication strategies (Morsing & Schultz, 2006) within their organizations. Interestingly, they also commented on how CSR could or should be better communicated in both their company and in general.

First and foremost, employees listed several top-down channels of one-way communication whereby stakeholders are simply informed (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). These included: company intranet and website, company-wide e-mail or e-newsletter, external (non)financial reporting, employee manual, online employee training, and physical boards (i.e., bulletin, monitors) or signage placed around the organization. Second, employees discussed various two-way asymmetric communication strategies whereby stakeholders are given an opportunity to respond to organizational actions, and leadership demonstrates how the company plans to integrate employee concerns and opinions. This strategy is evident in communication through in-person or web-based ‘town halls’ and presentations by leadership, through in-person employee training specifically around ethical workplace conduct, announcements encouraging employee participation for various activities (e.g., food drive, volunteering, charitable giving campaign), or via online platforms where employees could sign-up for or post different volunteering or fundraising opportunities.

Finally, the stakeholder involvement strategy through two-way communication was used whereby stakeholders are invited to participate in active dialogue. This strategy, as reported by employees, was used through employee resource group (ERG) meetings and/or presentations,

interactive sessions during work hours (e.g., “Learn-at-Lunch”), regular departmental/team or division-wide meetings, and through community presentations given by representatives or ambassadors of a local organization (e.g., community service representative). In all, several employees mentioned word-of-mouth as a common, integral, and effective mode of communication around CSR especially when gauging interest and encouraging participation throughout the organization. One participant, Ruby who had previously worked in a CSR-specific department, described her company’s preferred channel of CSR communication as very “initiative-driven.” She elaborated by saying,

And I think the communication is really like driven by certain initiatives. So like for example, when you have the, the month of like employee giving and volunteerism, you'll hear a lot about it from like email, we'll hear about it from our leaders will hear about it in meetings. And it's kind of like this multi-pronged approach, um, when there's these “big initiatives.” But then other times you're kind of more seeking out the information on the Internet if it's something you're interested in. There's not like a consistent stream of messaging around employee CSR. Um, though I say it's like more initiative-based communication.

This example speaks to the rather inconsistent nature of CSR not only conceptually, but also in its communication. It is clear that while CSR is value-laden (Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010), organizational leaders cannot just assume employee buy-in or general awareness of these efforts. For example, Mason, described a continental-wide focus group he helped conduct discussing the company’s CSR. He stated that,

What we found out is almost all of our employees knew nothing about them. If they knew them, they knew *about* them and, you know, just kind of the title only of what our purpose was, but they had no idea of the good we’ve done. So we've actually started to invest money to increase the dynamics and how we're telling the good that we do to our own employees and making them proud of the place where they work. Um, employee morale, things like that are always important. But we were never investing dollars to share those stories other than putting them out in, you know, internal newsletters, putting them on our intranet site that nobody goes to, and our internal teams and our connect corporate reputation teams. We took a look at this last year, I was part of the group and he said, why don't we invest some dollars to actually tell the story of these people could actually tell the good that

we're doing and invest dollars in our internal channel just like we do, like TV or radio or digital and doing so it's not, is somewhat tough because most companies have never put that type of money there...we have to communicate to them in different ways... I don't know that anybody's got it figured out, but that's the, that's an amazing place to start for us to fully understand how we reach employees and new channels and new ways because they're one of our most important stakeholders.

Thus, Mason's testimony suggests that those in leadership positions especially "need to understand how to enact carefully the dynamic of sensegiving and sensemaking in order to develop endorsement in practice" (Morsing & Schultz, 2006, p. 334), and that organizations are needing to find more creative and effective ways to engage members internally around CSR.

While some discussed internal CSR communication as being pretty inadequate and should be increased in terms of visibility and reach, others said there is a limit—that there is such a thing as "too much" communication. In short, several employees believed that going overboard in terms of awareness or external, public campaigning can take away from the assumed "good nature" of the effort itself, or could distract from other activities. For example, Persia stated,

I don't know what else or what more they could do without it being too much in your face. I think that there is a fine line with, "Hey, we're doing good and we want to tell people about that," to being like, "We're going to make sure you know every good thing that we do." So there's I think a fine line between that.

Similarly, Elise said there was a right way to communicate CSR externally, saying,

when you take something like a good, ethical corporate social responsibility campaign and make it a campaign, that's when I think it loses a bit of its value in terms of, you know, "Did we do this to do good, or did we do this to look good?"

Mason discussed his organization's rhetoric and more formal channels of communication, and how this has changed throughout his tenure there in terms of streamlining the company's messaging:

Um, so, you know, we've, we started, I can tell you eight years ago when I joined the company, we had corporate mission statements, we had corporate visions, we had corporate social responsibility goals, we had you know, 12 different documents

I could point too that I probably couldn't tell you clearly and identify what our vision was or what our purpose was or how we want to make a difference and within the last really year to two, We simplified it as easy as possible so that every person around the globe, you know, that at least was aware of this and works for us.

Mason's comment speaks to the proliferation and evolution of CSR communication, both internally and externally, as both stakeholders, most notably consumers, have increased access to such information (see Groza et al., 2011).

Finally, employee awareness of CSR came from structural elements within the halls and walls of the organization. In considering one element of internal or employee-directed CSR related to the very infrastructure, employees mentioned various CSR initiatives they could physically see and touch. For example, Brandy described her employer's effort to reduce plastic waste through the installation of water bottle filling stations. Additionally, several employees felt inclined to mention if their facilities were "green" or LEED (i.e., leadership in energy and environmental design) certified. Similarly, Harrison further discussed "physical" employee-focused CSR which impacted employees before or after work. For example, employees at his PR agency's European office are given free access to public transportation on behalf of the company in order to reduce the use of cars, thus eliminating the release of carbon emissions.

In short, it was evident that an organization's physicality, texts, and various verbal communication efforts worked together to constitute CSR into being and aid in sensemaking and sensegiving by employees. Regarding the latter, employees often relied on formal communication channels when thinking about what CSR is *not* at their organization, relating to the ambiguous nature of CSR and why some employees struggled through the interview process—because they simply did not know what CSR was, or what it could possibly mean at their organization. In fact, a few employees I interviewed over the phone even mentioned that they were looking at their

organization's website, intranet, or CSR report when speaking with me to make sure they "got it right" (Tanner) when it came to listing various initiatives.

4.2.2.3 Rationale for CSR

Here I focus on how employees rationalized and even advocated for their company's CSR efforts, particularly those internal or employee-focused. In general, rationalizations for "why" CSR matters, "why" organizations *do* it, and "why" their employers invest in it varied immensely—particularly with regard to overall knowledge of CSR conceptually, seniority, role, tenure, and awareness of specific CSR initiatives.

As presented previously in terms of employee perceptions around CSR as a general organizational phenomenon, I found responses to be relatively split or balanced between participants drawing from either a business case, sustainability case (i.e., enlightened self-interest), or moral case perspective on CSR (see Porter & Kramer, 2006). In short, the business case argues that CSR may improve a company's competitiveness and financial success (Weber, 2008). A sustainability or enlightened self-interest principle invokes the triple bottom-line in assuming that "companies should operate in ways that secure long-term economic performance by avoiding short-term behavior that is socially detrimental or environmentally wasteful" (Porter & Kramer, 2006, p. 82). The moral argument posits that companies have an obligation to "do the right thing" (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

The business and sustainability argument was most in line with views held by those in leadership or managerial positions. Specifically, these employees view CSR as a way to gain competitive advantage, fulfill consumer and client expectations, and ensure a sense of long-term sustainability. For them, CSR provides opportunities from a strictly business perspective. For example, Tanner said CSR, "is very important for our shareholders to understand what we're doing

in this realm...and be able to have confidence in our ability to succeed as an organization.” Violet, a director of corporate communication, simply said “It’s a business imperative. It’s [got] to be competitive.” Finally, Mason stated,

I still think it's good for the business. I still think enough studies, or at least enough anecdotal evidence has been proven that doing good we'll make you more money... I think the need for us to better understand the good that we're doing in the world, how the good that we're doing in communities, translates into sales.

So while skepticism was common among participants if CSR appeared to be simply an add-on or was self-serving in nature, some, such as Mason, acknowledged the importance of CSR as a strategic move to benefit the organization’s bottom line. However, his response still referenced the moral case for CSR in that it is also the right thing to do.

Additionally, employees were upfront in aligning the business case with positive effects on recruitment and retention. Internally, CSR can benefit overall employee morale and motivation (i.e., Kim & Scullion, 2013; Weber, 2008). but can also impact the attractiveness of the organization from a recruitment standpoint (Greening & Turban, 2000). In all, nearly half of the employees I interviewed discussed and rationalized CSR from a recruitment perspective. For example, Violet said that her company’s investment in CSR, has “a lot of do with employee engagement and employee morale, retention and recruitment of employees.”

Similarly, many noted that CSR may be an organization’s response to generational expectations. Of the 42 participants interviewed for this dissertation, approximately 20 were of the Millennial generation. For example, Ally stated,

I think CSR will become critically important to most companies, especially in the United States, as millennials and Gen X take over a larger part of the workforce. These generations have shown a desire to be a part of a company or organization that is driving social change and acting ethically and being environmentally conscious in addition to making profits or revenues.

Generational considerations from a recruitment standpoint was a consistent with others who argued that Millennials and younger generations “are really asking for those opportunities” (Violet) and even asking about them in job interviews, as Elise did. Thus, from both a recruitment and a consumer behavior standpoint, the consideration of CSR from a generational perspective was overwhelmingly evident.

Those who took a more optimistic view of CSR came from a perspective grounded in the moral imperative of business. Several used the phrase “to do the right thing” when I asked why their company engages in CSR. For example, Harrison’s initial response was, “I mean, I think first and foremost it’s about a good conscience.” However, what I found interesting was that most participants would integrate and combine the various arguments for CSR in rationalizing for these efforts. While many would respond in saying their hope was that the company was doing it out of the goodness of their hearts or to simply be ethical and a good corporate citizen, the rationalization typically did not stop there. For instance, Elise’s response was,

The really optimistic part of me wants to believe that they genuinely care about their members, they genuinely care about their employees, and they want to do good for those parties, but I do think there is also kind of a financial return on both ends.

Additionally, Tanner stated,

It’s the right thing to do. And so I think that we need to do these things in order for us to have our competitive advantage in the marketplace and continue to take share and grow our business. If we’re not doing these efforts, I think, I feel like we’d be left behind.

Considering competitive advantage aligns with the perspective of strategic CSR whereby these efforts are “an opportunity to engage in community-based policies and programs while still supporting core business activities” (p. 769; see also Logsdon & Wood, 2005).

In addition to providing a competitive advantage and fulfilling a moral obligation, employees saw the benefits of their company's engagement in CSR from a PR perspective.

Other specific rationalizations employees noted included the idea of good press or PR for the company through CSR—particularly in terms of reputation and legitimacy among local communities and broader society. In fact, for some, public and outward visibility around CSR even reflected internally in terms of employee pride. This was clear in Harrison's remark that CSR, "sets a positive light on, on our company as a whole. It gives us a good image and it gives us something to be proud of, which in turn boost employee morale." Similarly, Willa credits volunteering opportunities as ways to boost employee engagement, saying, "it helps employees bond and helps build some relationships between them." Considering generational expectations and recruitment benefits became a common and important implication regarding CSR as perceived by employees—particularly felt internally.

Finally, a few employees would credit the company's engagement in CSR to its very mission and foundation. For Maggie, the organization does it "I think it had to do with the foundation of the company and it went back to [founder's name] and how he founded the company. It was always his vision...it was embedded in the basis...because it's been embedded in the company since the beginning." Thus, CSR can be seen as more than an "invention of PR" (Frankental, 2001, p. 18) as participants, like Maggie, rationalized for her company's CSR because of how it has been ingrained internally and foundationally. This highlights the importance of employee buy-in to CSR becoming embedded in an organization's culture and business practices, particularly as these individuals play a role in 'championing CSR' (Jenkins, 2006).

From an employee-directed CSR perspective, participants did not innately provide rationalizations. However, as interviews continued, I began asking how those internal-based CSR

activities are or could be impactful, even if they did not believe such efforts necessarily existed within their organization. For Elliott, these activities enable “internal satisfaction and loyalty” with employees “knowing their company is doing the right thing.” Similarly, Zoe finds “these activities help [my company] promote a welcoming and including culture for its employees,” and Rudy believes that “people like working for a company that cares about them and will help them in times of need.” Related to diversity initiatives from a CSR perspective, Penelope described her company’s concern of “not practicing inclusion and diversity whatsoever.” For her, “if we did make it more of an effort to hire and attract a more diverse group internally, I think that we could reach more audiences externally for sure.” Finally, Maggie was blunt in stating,

I feel like any corporation should try and treat both external and internal responsibility as important. Their public image is important. But also how they treat their employees is huge. If you're treating your employees like crap, how do you expect them to work for you?

In general, I found employees to vary in their rationalizations for why they believe their company takes on and invests in CSR efforts—from a business, recruitment, and PR perspective to a retention and moral viewpoint. Overall, employee perceptions suggest a need for strategic CSR—in line with an organization’s mission and practices—or for them it is not sensible, credible, or effective. In other words, if CSR activities are so disconnected from the core business agenda, it can “obscure many of the greatest opportunities for companies to benefit society” (Porter & Kramer, 2006, p. 79).

4.2.3 Employee-Directed CSR: Employees as Actors/Benefactors vs. Beneficiaries

What became evident through interviews was the rather explicit distinction between two “types” of employee-directed or “internal” CSR as expressed by employees. I view internal CSR as efforts directed toward internal stakeholders (i.e., employees) in order to benefit the overall

physiological and psychological well-being of these individuals (Hameed et al., 2016). In short, from an employee perspective, “internal CSR appears to be self-focused whereas perceived external CSR efforts appears to be others-focused” (p. 2). While the majority of participants defined or operationalized CSR from the others-focused perspective, their sensemaking around what is or could be considered internal CSR began to surface. Thus, I argue that the self-focused and others-focused efforts of CSR could both fit under the practice of employee-directed, but take a different shape depending on the *end* recipient or target audience. In other words, are these initiatives employee-directed, or employee-driven? Or, both?

Toward the beginning of interviews, I asked participants the question of “to whom or for what are organizations/corporations responsible” on a broad scale. If they mentioned employees as a top priority for organizational responsibility, I would ask them to elaborate as to why or in what capacity. Many responded along the lines providing employees with a safe and comfortable working environment, providing with the resources and means to succeed and grow, encouraging work-life balance, and so on. In general, the majority of participants believed that, in addition to serving customers and/or shareholders, employees are the ones who “really make a difference” and being responsible to them is “the first step to being successful” (Harrison). So it was interesting when transitioning into a discussion around corporate responsibility, participants were not innately mentioning employees. In fact, Elise even said that she “thinks of CSR as external facing. I don’t really think about it in terms of how it impacts employees.”

During the concurrent interview and analysis processes, I began to notice that my questions around employee-directed or employee-focused CSR specifically drove employee understanding and responses in one of these two ways in considering their roles. When asked the questions “do you believe CSR is in any way internal or employee-focused” followed by “and if not, should it

or could it be,” employees distinguished between two positions employees may hold related to CSR—as internal members as actors, ambassadors, or agents of CSR and as beneficiaries or recipients of CSR efforts. Through employee sensemaking, these roles appeared to be mutually exclusive. For instance, Harrison considered two angles to an employee focus on CSR:

Well I think that's a difficult question to answer because I think that it's going to be, boy, I mean it's either going to be employee focused in a way as the beneficiaries of CSR are your employees or it can be employee focus in terms of your employees are a vital part of whatever's CSR initiative you're putting out. So, um, I don't know if employee focused is the right word, but I think that employees are always going to be either beneficiaries or a vital element of your CSR initiatives.

Importantly, Harrison's response speaks to the crucial role of employees in CSR—whether they are the ones enacting such activities or are the receiver. Thus, there were two sides to the employee-directed CSR coin in terms of view or role: employees as agents of CSR versus employees as beneficiaries of CSR—however, both internal in nature and keeping employees at the center. Unsurprisingly, employees are truly advocates for CSR in their organizations. Participants often turned to their own involvement in CSR when describing the efforts as “available” to them to partake in. Thus, certain CSR activities make employees the actors—the ones doing “the work” of CSR. As Bhattacharya, Sen, and Korschun (2007) explained, CSR is most effective when the organization is the “enabler,” but employees are the “actual enactors” (p. 23). Thus, employee participation in CSR is vital (Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014). Diego called employees “stewards” of an organization, and Ruby discussed the importance of representation when employees feel a strong sense of responsibility and portray this responsibility through local community outreach efforts. Willa said that CSR, like through charitable giving, “starts with employees,” and Brooke called these individuals “champions” of CSR—“Employees keep it going, if that makes sense. They sustain it... sure our company could write a check, but it wouldn't have the impact of thousands of our employees getting out there...”

In fact, many employees discussed paid time off they are given in order to volunteer in their community. Helena, who is an Assistant Director of Philanthropy, argued that “allowing your employees, uh, the opportunity to volunteer and share their time and their skills with organizations that need support is very meaningful.” In particular Helena continued by saying that,

Giving employees that are paid time off to volunteer is a great way for us to provide some flexibility for people to do what matters to them and it's not prescriptive so we don't require them to sign up for a project that we're sponsoring. It can be helping out or doing something that is meaningful to them.

In all, volunteering and other forms of community outreach/support and philanthropic efforts (e.g., charitable giving, nonprofit partnerships) were largely referred to in connecting employees and CSR, particularly in seeing organizational members as actors or ambassadors.

Other perceptions—including my own going into this dissertation—positioned employees as the beneficiaries or recipients of CSR. For Kassie, this positioning is where CSR starts. She said,

I feel like it has to start there... corporate social responsibility, like it is kind of a jargon phrase. But like I think there's a couple of CSR. I think it's first to their human capital, you know, their employees....it kind of starts there and then can be broadened out. So I think it can like giving employees good things like, you know, if you start internally and like know a lot of companies like ours have a food kitchen for employees.

Examples like this call into question the nature of CSR both conceptually and in practice. While the “s” being social is often associated with society as seen through interviews, and therefore external to an organization, it remains discursively open to interrogating what makes up the social in regards to corporate responsibility.

Similarly, Fiona, who takes a rather skeptical view on CSR, particularly those external efforts that appear to be solely for good press, said “employees are definitely the beneficiaries.” Betty described various events like Employee Appreciation Days, active and wellness initiatives

(e.g., free gym membership), and educational opportunities for professional development as all employee-directed CSR. In terms of growing this internal CSR space, Elise described her company's furthering commitment to diversity and inclusion. Specifically, she said,

We recently ran a diversity and inclusion survey. Did some surveying to that in terms of how people identify as far as gender, sex orientation, ethnicity. Just to kind of get a feel for what our employee base looks like. So, that we might implement programs that support everyone there.

Throughout this process I also began to question who are or should be the drivers of CSR within organizations. Are these practices employee-driven (i.e., at the micro-meso levels) or organization-driven (i.e., at the macro level). While not explicitly asked, the majority of employees seemingly believed that leaders and tradition were who or what decided what CSR efforts existed. A phrase used by employees, which became an *in vivo* code (i.e., special or unique term used by participants) throughout my analysis (Charmaz, 2014), to describe employee-driven CSR was “grassroots initiative.” For example, employee resource groups (ERGs) became a clear form of internal CSR that could either be directed to or driven by individuals within the organization. On the one hand, these groups are created as a way for employees to collectively join and bond via a common goal, lifestyle, ethnicity, gender, or initiative. Commonly reported ERGs included Millennials, Working Mothers, Hispanics, Women, and LGBT, among others. From this perspective, they are created *for* employees and were perceived as a specific CSR initiative.

On the other, employees reported some of these groups as grassroot organizations—meaning they were created from “the ground up.” Brooke is an active member of her company's Women ERG, and explains how this group has successfully improved the organizational-wide paternal leave and “took it upon themselves to talk to the executives and make that change... and to me, that is social change.” While she did not instinctively consider ERGs necessary a CSR practice, Brooke concluded our presentation by stating that, “CSR has always been thought to be

an external thing, but I really like this idea of, it (CSR) can kind of been seen in like a grassroots undercurrent of social responsibility...almost like internal activism.” Additionally, Ruby argued that it is more meaningful if CSR efforts are driven by employees internally:

I think you know you’ve been successful if like employees are creating kind of grassroots programs on their own that fall into the CSR bucket. So like, um, if you create a culture of, of like social responsibility, I think you'll have instead of the top down programs that people can participate in, you'll have bottom up program where like people feel so passionate about, uh, social responsibility on behalf of their company that they are like creating things for it on their own that don't just fall under like a CSR department. Uh, I think like that would be a sign of success and the internal engagement in a, in a way that's much broader than just like assigning ambassadors or requesting ambassadors.

Again, the importance of creating an internal around corporate responsibility, rather than a program that appears one-off, was referenced by employees. Brooke’s idea of internal activism suggests a commitment between both employees and their employers in successfully implementing and driving CSR. Thus, employees, from the ground up, can discursively construct and create CSR. In short, while I was interested in exploring if and how CSR internally can be more employee-directed, but what emerged from the data suggested two types of “ED CSR” in terms of the role of employees and the end target of such efforts.

4.2.4 Employee-organizational (dis)identification via CSR: Expectations and Impact of Responsibility

In answering RQ2b, RQ2c, and RQ2d, there was an overwhelming sense of pride, satisfaction, and identification associated with CSR. Overall, these perceptions came from questions asked in the interview regarding how employees felt their company’s CSR efforts impacted them both personally and professionally, and how they felt CSR in general helped or benefitted the company as a whole. The connection between CSR and organizational identification and morale is not a new phenomenon in the literature (see Collier & Esteban, 2007; Kim et al.,

2010). However, this dissertation gives particular emphasis to the specific CSR activities (i.e., employee-directed) that contribute and give rise to such identification and relationship from the perspective of employees.

Put simply, organizational identification is referred to as a sense or “perception of one’s belongingness” (Ashforth et al., 2008, p. 329) and occurs “when a person’s self-concept contains the same attributes as those in the perceived organizational identity” (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 239). While not explicitly asked about employee thoughts surrounding identification or any kind of relationship associated with their company’s CSR, this came through very prominently in the interviews. Throughout this section, I describe employee’s feeling and sense of organizational identification vis-à-vis CSR—including those seemingly employee-directed, employee-driven, or entirely external from a macro standpoint.

4.2.4.1 Impact On Professional Life

While the majority of employees interviewed did not have any professional connection to CSR in terms of their specific role and day-to-day tasks, many still felt impacted by these efforts on a professional level. If they did, it was often in a volunteering/community outreach capacity, or engaging in more internal functions. For example, Fred, an accountant at a large automation group, is actively involved in one of his organization’s employee resource groups focused on engagement and inclusion, although not originally considering this CSR or thinking that his company even had such initiatives.

I noted if participants described a time or instance in which they as employees felt embarrassed or proud by the organization—and many described events and organizational values or priorities that were clearly connected with a social responsibility initiative. Organizational pride was immensely evident throughout interviews when it came to employee perceptions of CSR. For

instance, Zoe's company "takes a personal responsibility in promoting sustainability in projects and that makes me very proud as an employee." Ally was proud that her organization allows employees to "take a day off to do community service" Diego mentioned his employer's "wellness initiatives – subsidizing gym memberships, our own healthcare program on site, subsidized childcare, running errands while at work when our schedules get crazy." Finally, on a more global scale, Walter described when "Employees led a movement to get our company to become a major sponsor of the Pride Parade in Charlotte," and as his company "recently partnered with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation to combat global climate change. In terms of employee-directed CSR, Mason described his company's recent paid parental leave which came out of a specific resource group. Regarding this he said,

...that came out of a really a petition and a presentation from our millennial business resource group. Uh, ultimately there were a number of mothers that are in the workplace now that say, you know, we've seen older, um, women in the workforce being pushed out because we don't have the opportunity to balance their work. And their wives and we're not gonna stand for that... So I'm really proud of that, that we foster that kind of inclusion, um, in different groups to say the best ideas don't come from the top. You know, we, we really have a grass roots organization and how we try to identify issues and deal with them.

Thus, in considering these efforts and policies as CSR, it can be assumed that CSR is enacted not only in response to surrounding communities and other stakeholders, but also to employee needs and concerns in both their work and personal lives.

In terms of embarrassment, Fiona discussed the lack of openness and honesty when it comes to onboarding and training new employees. Specifically, she stated,

Personally, I guess as a whole I've been a little embarrassed of is I feel like sometimes we're not honest with people when we onboard them about how much work it is. People just think it's just the sign industry. Like, no one understands or knows more. I've had 50% turnover in my department over the last year.

Broadly, research has shown that CSR and employee engagement in these practices reduces turnover, specifically as younger generations are calling for companies to engage in social responsibility (Shadovitz, 2018)—and participants, such as Fiona, have recognized this. Internal transparency was one area of internal corporate responsibility employees mentioned, and particularly one that is employee-directed. Two employees also mentioned if they felt disconnected and “put-off” by certain activities or events the organization or leaders would support that were political. For Brooke, she did not identify with that political stance, and so felt a bit embarrassed and a sense of disidentification with the organization as a result. Finally, Maggie, a barista at a global coffee chain, discussed a widely publicized campaign in which employees were instructed to engage in conversations around rather sensitive issues while interacting with customers. She felt this not only took time and concentration away from her working tasks, but she said “it didn’t feel sincere” and was not taken seriously by the public. Thus, there may be a sense of ambivalent identification associated with a feeling of embarrassment toward certain organizational actions, and therefore perhaps disidentifying, while also feeling identification with other aspects of an organization (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Empirically, studies have confirmed that individuals may identify with and be committed to organizations, but simultaneously identifying with an ideology or cause not supported or not part of the organization’s identity (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; see Meyerson & Scully, 1995)

On a more positive note, employees credited CSR as motivation and desire to come to work. Ruby claimed that her active engagement in CSR has undeniably provided professional benefits:

In my performance reviews at the end of the year has been like basically like patted is on the back for volunteering in the community, which I think is really cool because it has nothing to do with my work. Uh, but like that's is something that like my manager has, has celebrated. And then also, um, like whenever I've gotten

involved with this CSR efforts from either like a grassroots level or like when they solicited volunteers, if there's something that like has been recognized as part of good performance. So I think it does impact me professionally, um, because it makes it like part of why I'm advancing but then also like part of why I want to stay, like it helps retain, me too.

Finally, those who took up any kind of CSR practice in their work or as an extra-curricular framed it as meaningful work. While the connection between meaningful work and CSR has not been explicitly explored in extant literature, literature confirms the Millennial generation continuing to enter the workforce expects to find meaningful work (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010) and are often attracted to an organization's CSR reputation (see Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010)—with goals to work for an organization that can “help them to lead more purposeful and meaningful lives” (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 283). As Helena argued, “allowing your employees, uh, the opportunity to volunteer and share their time and their skills with organizations that need support is very meaningful.” Similarly, her co-worker, Brooke, stated, “Makes me feel good and it makes me feel, you know, fulfilled that I'm part of that association.” Finally, when asked how CSR impacts him, Mark responded with,

It's very, very motivating. We, myself and the other employee, you know, we feel good. We can, yeah, the world may think we're bad, but we know we're doing good things. And so, um, in terms of the energy that creates within the company that you can connect to and you believe in what your company's doing, that creates tremendous energy and tremendous, I mean, the positivity that we all speed on internally.

4.2.4.2 Impact On Personal Life

Relatedly, CSR efforts made an impact on employees' personal life outside of the office. This personal connection was particularly true for those employee-directed initiatives where employees were the primary beneficiaries including health and wellness initiatives, encouraged work-life balance, parental leave, lactation rooms, and so on. Both Diego and Polly admitted to taking advantage of the many employee wellness initiatives their companies provide. For Betty,

she felt incredibly supported by her organization after having a child—and that efforts like this are “part of their mission.” Fiona claimed that in addition to boosting morale, internal CSR initiatives, like team-building exercises and giving employees recognition in ways beyond monetary benefits, shows that companies value the employees and their worth. Personally, Harrison is proud to see his own values reflected in company priorities when it comes to CSR:

I'm someone who is, to give a personal example, I'm very much in favor of, um, you know, helping refugees out there come to this country with ridge, really nothing but a passport and sometimes not even that, um, and making sure that they have the same opportunity that I had growing up here. And so knowing that [my company] kind of understands and supports that notion of being able to help people that are less fortunate definitely gives me, uh, you know, on a more personal level of reason to be here. It makes me proud to say that I worked for this company.

Thus, CSR is invaluable when linked to employee-organizational identification, and has a clear impact on how employees feel about their work, their company, and their relationship. This again speaks to prospective employee expectations when it comes to job placement and retention.

Additionally, Mark described how his company's prioritization of CSR has led to increased organizational identification and personal growth. Specifically, he said,

I am who I am because I work for the company I work for. I mean, when I graduated from university I, you know, in, in Arizona 20 years ago. And these were not things that I thought about, you know, um, call it, you know, I call it a privileged life. And there's probably an element of that, naïvety. There's definitely an element of that. Um, but you know, the issues that exist in the world and the role that companies play in the world, and then me as an employee and a leader in this company, the responsibility I have, I didn't have that 20 years ago. That's something that the company has imbued in me. I would've told you 20 years ago, all the tears about all that recycling crap, you know, um, I'm a very different person. So I think the impacts that the company has on us, is immeasurable.

Similarly, Harrison clearly connected the idea of identification through CSR:

whatever CSR initiatives that company is undertaking are in line with an employee's personal values, that obviously creates a direct connection between the organization and the employee and boost their morale and gives them a reason, a purpose in being there.

He later says that the opportunity to engage in CSR gives,

employees the ability to kind of broaden their horizon and be part of something that is much bigger than their day to day work. Um, which can be a nice, you know, not only nice because you're doing something that's, you know, doing something for the greater good, but it's also gives you, uh, you know, gives you the ability to switch things up and not have to focus on your day to day responsibilities and your clients all the time.

Finally, Elise reported noticing her company's new implementation of lactation rooms for young, working mothers. While not inherently considered a CSR move, she was quick to list this change as something she noticed immediately, and regarded it as a way in which her employer was responding to employee needs and lifestyle—and thus being responsible.

4.2.4.3 Impact on Recruitment and Retention.

As previously discussed in terms of rationalization for CSR, current research suggests that prospective employees are drawn to organizations that engage in CSR efforts (see Brammer, Millington, & Rayton, 2007; Greening & Turban, 2000; Peterson, 2004; Rupp, Ganapathi, Aguilera, & Williams, 2006; Turban & Greening, 1997). On a personal level, Ruby credited CSR as a primary reason for retention. Specifically, she said, “like I don't think I would go to a company that did it, at least support CSR to the level that mine does.” Regarding generational expectations, Helena credited her company's CSR in drawing in business and prospective employees. She said,

I think it's, it makes [our company], the type of place, uh, people want to work and people want to do business with, especially when you look at the next generation, millennials and beyond. They want to get to know a company and they want to know the company cares about more than just the bottom line before they choose to do business or work for that company.

When asked if CSR could be internal and how, Penelope discussed initiatives that boost morale and personal and professional health, ultimately contributing to employee retention as,

something that really should be provided for employees so that they can be their best selves. You spend so many hours of your life at work that if you don't focus on giving back to your employees internally with this responsible, you know, application, then how, how are you going to retain good people and make people want to, to work every day.

Relatedly, Willa said, “I think is quite special and important to me as an employee. I would always like to be a part of a company that does things like this.”

In terms of recruitment, Elise admitted to showing interest in CSR during job interviews—
 “Usually when I interview somewhere I ask about volunteering opportunities and stuff like that...
 I remember in my interview I asked my now boss what kind of volunteer efforts they had.”

Relatedly, Rick said,

I think customers are still the leading target for sustainability awareness. But yes, I do think employees are definitely a growing area in that regard. We have anecdotal evidence of many employees who chose to come to [this company] because they were aware of our CSR activities.

Thus, one rationalization for communicating CSR externally through reporting efforts, media coverage, communication around certain internal initiatives (e.g., inclusion, engagement) helps organizations gain legitimacy, influence current and potential stakeholders including consumers, intrigues prospective employees, and help reflect an identity and image around social responsibility.

4.2.4.4. Impact on Disidentification and Neutral Identification

Interestingly, there was also a sense of disidentification or neutral identification and disconnect from CSR initiatives expressed by three employees in particular. While not the polar opposite of identification, disidentification often “occurs when an individual defines him or herself as *not* having the same attributes or principles that he or she believes define the organization” (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004, p. 3 italics in original; see also Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Relatedly, participants also felt a sense of neutral identification. In other words, while they were not actively disidentifying with certain organizational values or activities, there was simply an absence of both identification and disidentification (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). In exploring the idea of disidentification or neutral identification in my data, I looked for instances of separation in which participants felt a disconnect from his or her organization, or explicitly felt objectionable toward certain policies or activities related to CSR. Halle prefaced her consenting to participate in this project with the fact that she is an independent contractor, and works primarily on her own and remotely, so she felt she did not have sufficient knowledge about CSR. In fact, she was one participant who completed the interview via e-mail, and actually neglected to answer any of the questions regarding specific CSR initiatives at her company specifically —she intentionally left these blank.

Both Persia and Penelope credit a disconnect from their organization's CSR because they are not located at headquarters. Persia remarked:

I don't think those (CSR) ideas are really ever talked about at our location. They're never really enforced here. Like we can't volunteer at x, y, z place in (headquarter location) because we aren't there. But there's never anything like that, like I wish there would be a way to have a similar initiative here away from headquarters.

Later Persia continued,

I would love to participate in that sort of thing but we don't do that here, so I just delete those e-mails... I would say it is almost a negative thing being away from it... it's kind of like frustrating... we just don't feel them (CSR) at the remote location.

Similarly, Penelope, who also works at a separate operating office, felt a sense of disidentification due to geographical distance from headquarters and thus a lack of communication or connection around CSR. She said:

I'm not familiar with corporate level CSR. They do send a newsletter out...they do send like corporate does send e-mails but it's one of those things like you see something come through from the desk of so-and-so and you just delete it because it doesn't pertain to me.

Additionally, through her brief tenure, Penelope has noticed her remote location only initiating one particular event that she perceived as CSR in the form of a cause-related run for charity. However, the event failed to occur, and communication and encouragement around it was minimal. This was also something she felt extremely embarrassed about as an employee. When asked if her company's CSR affects her in any way, she responded with,

Yes, I think so. I think especially with that run-walk thing. It was very disappointing to me and discouraging. And that was one of the things that I talked about in my interview when I was applying for this job and interviewing for the job. There's just like culture and without, you know, a company that really does give back. It doesn't impact me, it doesn't make me like super excited, or proud, I would say.

She later made a remark saying, "At my operating company, I don't think it (CSR) helps our company at all because I don't think that we do enough of it." Overall, Penelope felt a strong sense of disidentification due to the failure of commitment and explicitly valuing CSR on behalf of her organization. Thus, pragmatically, we can see that CSR has a great impact on employee satisfaction and pride. CSR appears to be an expectation of employees and an influence on organizational identification. However, to what extent employees expect their organizations to engage in CSR specifically (i.e., types of activities) could be further explored.

4.3 Summary of Findings

In summary, the findings from this dissertation brought to light the variety and complex nature of CSR d/Discourses as communicated by organizational documents and perceived by employees in interviews. I first presented general perceptions, understandings, and Discourses of CSR as described by employees and communicated in external documents across various

industries and organizations at a macro level. Within this, I found conceptualizations and operationalizations of CSR from these data sources to be both ambiguous and paradoxical in nature, connecting to the idea of integrating internal and external boundaries when it comes to social responsibility. Finally, I described the ways in which employees predicted CSR to be changing or focusing on in the future, and how organizations more broadly communicated these efforts through aspirational language.

I then detailed findings from the micro-level in terms of how employees understand their organizations' (employee-directed) CSR efforts in a situated context. I described how the interview itself became a sensemaking experience as many employees clearly did not contemplate or reflect on CSR on a daily basis—both in their work and professional lives. Then, I presented employees' awareness and perceptions of CSR at their companies specifically, and how they come to know and rationalize these efforts individually. Perhaps the most significant finding was that employees clearly considered internal or employee-directed CSR in two ways: employees as drivers of CSR and/or employees as recipients. In terms of top-of-mind opinions when it came to thinking about CSR at the employee level, many participants were quick to reference volunteering or community outreach activities in which they are the ones “doing” CSR. Finally, I found CSR to be a vehicle of identification for both current and prospective employees, as many participants found these practices to be connected to recruitment and consumer purchasing behavior. However, some employees actually felt neutral identification and even disidentification in result of being “separate,” disconnected from, or disappointed their organization's CSR activities, or lack thereof.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This dissertation began with my own curiosity about how academics and practitioners may be re-considering and re-negotiating the role of business within the broader societal context. Whereas the conceptual and operational study of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) historically is not scant across multi-disciplinary literature, a focus on the internal understanding, sensemaking, and experience of CSR by employees has been largely absent. Additionally, exploring the micro-processes and foundations of these efforts within organizational contexts as perceived by individual members is lacking. As a result, this project resulted in a complex and multifaceted examination of CSR d/Discourse evident in employee talk and organizational documents in answering three broad research questions. May (2011) called for scholars to explore “not only on external features of CSR but also consider specific practices within organizations to determine whether the company is acting responsibly toward its own employees” (p. 102), and to examine such efforts through “the insider’s view” (p. 96). This dissertation responds to this call in its entirety.

In concluding this project, I discuss its theoretical, pragmatic, and methodological contributions. I then finish with acknowledging limitations and directions for future CSR research and practice.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This dissertation contributes to theory and CSR scholarship in several ways. First, and perhaps the most significant contribution and theme from this dissertation was presenting the

concept of “employee-directed CSR.”¹⁹ Traditionally termed “internal CSR,” little work has been dedicated to understanding how organizations act responsibly toward employees through CSR (e.g., Hameed et al., 2016). While employees commonly described CSR from a traditional campaign and philanthropic perspective, it was clear that initiatives existed within their organizations that were meant to target and benefit them. Many became aware of such practices ranging from health and wellness to diversity, from increased environmental awareness within company walls to increased work-life balance efforts. However, employees credited feelings of morale, job satisfaction, and pride to those activities they could drive and/or get involved in. So while employees are undoubtedly an important actor and element when it comes to organizational CSR, we can also acknowledge that companies are increasingly prioritizing efforts meant to help and satisfy those internal members.

Second, this study takes an explicitly interpretive perspective, one that is relatively lacking to date in CSR research located in the organizational communication discipline (May, 2011; May & Roper, 2014). This was important given the few studies utilizing a qualitative and emergent approach common to interpretive work—particularly in a Western context. From an interpretive perspective, scholarship presenting an “insider’s view” (p. 776) and general employee understandings of CSR was a significant contribution provided by this dissertation. Additionally, few have “necessarily made the link between a company’s CSR practices and the ways in which it may affect employees” (p. 95). This dissertation was intentional in presenting CSR from the employee perspective in considering how employees make sense of CSR, specifically those within

¹⁹ While I initially shifted the idea of “internal CSR” to a more focused “employee-directed CSR,” findings suggest the need to re-work this terminology. Employee-directed CSR suggests that CSR is one-dimensional and transactional—targeting employees as beneficiaries by the organization. However, findings from both document analysis and interviews indicates that this is in fact multi-faceted engagement—as directed also means employee designing and leading.

their organizations and that may be employee-directed, and how these individuals may “account for and ‘take up’ CSR in their day-to-day work lives” (p. 96). Thus, it has begun to fill a gap in literature focused on exploring how individuals experience CSR as well as their psychological sensemaking. This dissertation presented rare insight into the personal experience of CSR by employees—how it is shaping their personal and professional lives. CSR is about doing; it is an agentic and communicative act. Relatedly, this dissertation was unique in presenting perceptions of employees from all levels of organizations rather than of those only in managerial roles, while also presenting a sample with different knowledge about CSR from different organizations. Thus, I found the “inside-out approach” to be necessary in including employees throughout the entire process of CSR creation, execution, and communication, and that these individuals are truly “the key stakeholders of concern for CSR activities” (Morsing et al., 2008, p. 103). This dissertation contributes heavily to the limited perspective on CSR from the micro (i.e., actors of organizations) or individual level (Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010).

While inherently interpretive in nature, this project also takes a dialogic perspective in focusing on organization micro-practices, reflexivity, and discourse (May, 2011). From the dialogic approach, this dissertation encourages corporations to be more self-reflexive in understanding internal practices, impact, and communication, specifically around CSR (see Christensen, 2007). Perhaps, then, CSR moving forward will take on a more conscious-capitalist approach whereby responsibility is “at the core of a business through its stakeholder interdependence model and a higher purpose that transcends profit maximization, as opposed to more traditional view of CSR as a business add-on (e.g., community relations, philanthropy)” (Fyke et al., 2016, p. 234). In taking an interpretive and dialogic perspective, this dissertation also responds to May’s (2011) call for a simultaneous consideration of the internal and external

dimensions of CSR through a concurrent analysis of public documents and employee sensemaking through interviews. Thus, future work can continue this in further investigating the interrelated nature of these two dimensions in perhaps blurring the historical demarcation. As findings suggest, internal and external CSR efforts are interrelated and connected. In fact, employees argued that CSR is done “best” when understood and practices this way—again reaffirming the need to move away from an additive view of CSR as seen as merely a PR function and only communicated to or executed for external publics.

Third, this dissertation draws on a social constructionist view of CSR (Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010) and a CCO approach to organizations in viewing CSR *as* communication (Schultz et al., 2013; italics in original). From a social constructionist perspective, “people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live” (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). Specifically, this dissertation brought to light “common forms of understanding as they now exist, as they have existed in prior historical periods, and as they might exist should creative attention be so directed” regarding CSR as seen in the data where these efforts were discussed in a past, current, and aspirational sense (p. 266). As seen through interviews and document analysis, CSR is brought to life through formal and informal communicative and social interactions, and considered “real” or “official” when reported publicly. In other words, meaning around CSR is constructed via a cyclical relationship between texts and conversation. Additionally, employees serve a primary, critical role in driving and executing CSR (i.e., bringing into being). As Schoeneborn and Trittin (2013) presented, a “CCO view perceives CSR communication not simply as an instrument for achieving strategic goals but, crucially, as one of several voices that invoke notions of ethics and responsibility within the entire organization” (p. 195). Thus, CSR is communicatively (re)constructed and will continue as such, particularly as an organizing response to social issues and

stakeholder expectations creating internal social movements. CSR is not a “thing,” but rather a phenomenon—and the question becomes not necessarily how to define it, but how to decide “what constitutes the social responsibility of business” (Dahlsrud, 2008, p. 6). Future research may more explicitly embrace a full CCO approach—thus eliminating the division between internal and external CSR practices and communication. As findings from this dissertation confirm, CSR is boundaryless as the typical internal-external dimensions are blurred and integrated, particularly in practice.

Fourth, from a rhetorical standpoint, this project presented the ways in which organizations have defined what CSR means (O’Connor & Ihlen, 2018). In connecting to the micro-level, we can see how employees rely on their organization’s rhetoric when defining CSR, receiving CSR, and how they “reproduce CSR rhetoric” in their own (p. 410). On a broader level, it is clear that CSR is, and perhaps will continue to be, ambiguous—but may be done so strategically. For example, when asked what CSR initiatives he was aware of within his own company, he responded rather confused, saying, “Corporate Social Responsibility? I guess we call it a Corporate Responsibility overall. But we don’t necessarily go into Corporate *Social* Responsibility I guess.” He later stated,

I think we have a more broad focus on Corporate Responsibility? When I say that, I mean we do a lot of different things and we may be different than other companies where they’d be only concentrating on a few different efforts when we’re trying to go and do a lot of different things.

This broad nature was reflected in much of the various companies’ CSR reporting—particularly those larger and multi-national corporations, and could allow for the changing nature of such efforts given shifts in contextual pressures or priorities. Thus, “strategically ambiguous rhetoric provides flexibility to alter behaviors that are no longer desirable and provide avenues to discontinue costly CSR efforts; to amplify corporate credibility on social issues while minimizing

clarity that may provide benchmarks that can be used by stakeholders to assess impact; and to foster multiple answers to the question ‘what does it mean to be socially responsible?’” as communicated by organizations in their rhetoric and by employees in “expanding the range of behavior that satisfice under the broad umbrella of CSR” (O’Connor & Ihlen, 2018, pp. 410-411). Throughout analysis and in writing the findings of this dissertation, I found that I could describe results that offer starting points for further research in offering general patterns regarding CSR as a movement. In other words, the data were complex and varied based on organization, industry, and individual employee sensemaking, meaning that I leave it to others to develop scholarly projects on the issues I have identified and to provide generalizable findings about employee-directed internal CSR. To promote these possibilities, I created a typologies of CSR that systematically presents the different themes and conceptualizations of these efforts that surfaced in my data (see Table 5).

However, the operationalization as executed by organizations individually also may vary. Thus, CSR is inherently complex, paradoxical, equivocal, and discursively open (Christensen et al., 2015), which appears to be normative and accepted. In other words, while employees actively engage in sensemaking, they subconsciously created or discussed CSR paradoxes—often defining CSR one way and then altering their conceptualization later, or second-guessing their own knowledge and meaning making of these efforts. Paradoxical tensions were brought to light when employees and organizations used words like “balancing” or “integrating” or “mediating” (González-González et al., 2019, p. 8)—suggesting that there may be oppositional pulls or tensions organizations face when attempting to harmoniously and simultaneously respond to social concerns of various stakeholders, and communities (González-González et al., 2019). Thus, this dissertation highlights the paradoxical nature of CSR as evident in employee sensemaking and

rhetorical constructions of such efforts through organizational documents. I draw on González-González et al. (2019) in considering, “that CSR involves a compelling field of debate in which some of the most representative and relevant cultural changes and socio-economic and labor conflicts of the actors, discourses and practices of contemporary global society are being managed” (p. 12). Thus, the CSR efforts of organizations will continue to reflect the changing, shifting, and chaotic nature of socio-economic life. As Juholin (2004) put it, (corporate social) responsibility is subjective—varying based on industry and company. And as this dissertation confirmed, what may be considered responsible or CSR-specific behavior for one organization, may be very different than that of another.

Fifth, this study questions the nature of the term “social” as part of CSR definitionally. For this dissertation, I was particularly interested in the social element of CSR—and what this meant, primarily from the perspective of employees. For many, the term “social” was instinctively connected to society—primarily external in terms of the communities that surround organizational boundaries (i.e., the relationship between business and society). However, this dissertation further interrogates this social dimension of CSR (Dahlsrud, 2008), suggesting it can include stakeholders and social concerns of employees as well. One participant, Kassie, who argued that CSR needs to start with employees at its foundation. Specifically, she said, “it’s like the social...I would argue that it’s the human component of the organization, which has to include in your employees, or else there is no organization.” Thus, it may be worth reconceptualizing what or who is included in this social dimension, and once again considering what or who constitutes a company’s social responsibilities.

Finally, this dissertation began with the broad idea of the responsibilities organizations have today. Specifically, this study challenges and extended current literature in questioning the

nature of responsibilities organizations have, and thus the overall point of CSR. In other words, my initial question as the foundation for this dissertation was in asking “to whom or to what organizations are responsible.” Findings from employee interviews as well as content from external documents suggest that organizations are balancing more responsibilities than ever before—striving to be responsible in their business practices, to their supply chain and customers, making profit and being successful for shareholders and investors, while also trying to make a positive impact in their communities and prioritizing their own people (i.e., employees) simultaneously. I believe that both practitioners and scholars will continue to struggle with the question of “where does a company’s responsibility end?” beyond legal requirements.

Particularly in an age where CSR is critical to an organization’s current and potential workforce, increased globalization (Dahlsrud, 2008), and when corporations and leaders are increasingly taking stands in the form of activism, the conceptualization and operationalizations of corporate responsibility are becoming more complex and convoluted. And given the ambiguous and rather undefined nature of CSR, companies and employees are hard-pressed to cap or limit such efforts. From this, I refer to Deetz (2003) in considering what is meant by corporate social responsibility. As he explained, “...in ‘corporate social responsibility’ the ‘I’ is the corporation; the “answering” must be to the ‘social.’ Our core question has to be, ‘What are the conditions that increase the likelihood of corporate responsiveness (answering to) the social?’” (p. 607). Thus, this dissertation brings to light questions of who and what should be involved in the decision-making processes, particularly when it comes to CSR, for organizations as workplaces “must become appropriate places for value debate” in order to become socially responsible (p. 609).

5.1.1 Across Levels of Responsibility: Typologies of CSR

I conclude this section of theoretical contributions by presenting a typology culmination of CSR as analyzed empirically through my rhetorical and discourse analysis of organizational documents and employee interviews. Put simply, a typology “is a classificatory system for ways of doing something” (Tracy, 2013, p. 210). Thus, as part of my exploration of various CSR initiatives and communicative efforts from the perspective of employees and reporting through organizational documents, I was able to develop broader typologies of both outward or external CSR practices and inward CSR practices—and each created a larger conceptual “big bin” and then connected into “smaller” related types (p. 210).

As presented in my results, there were many Discourses of “Responsibility” in terms of how organizations chose to broadly term, name, and categorize their CSR initiatives. Within those organizational contexts were then localized, micro discursive practices around the constitution, development, communication, and enactment of corporate responsibility. Thus, there were two dimensions of CSR that were clearly defined into targeting or benefiting internal or external stakeholders but, as presented in the results, were implicitly connected and worked together via organizational processes. For example, various practices in eliminating broader environmental impact started internally through recycling or greenhouse gas eliminations—inevitably impacting the external atmosphere. I present these CSR practices as typologies and as a culmination of my data analysis through interviews and document analysis.

Table 5 Typologies of CSR

Types of Outward/External CSR	Types of Inward/Internal CSR
Environmental Protection or Conservation	Employee Engagement & Empowerment (e.g., internal culture & environment, employee resource groups, codes of conduct)
Sustainability (external longevity)	Sustainability (infrastructure)
Philanthropy	Diversity & Inclusion
The “Good” Corporate Citizen: Community Outreach & Engagement	Safety
Transparency (to external stakeholders)	Transparency (to internal stakeholders)
Responsible Business Practices & Industry-Specific Efforts (e.g., supply chain)	Training & (Professional) Development
Activism (e.g., social or political stance)	Health & Wellness (physical & mental) (e.g., work-life balance, parental leave, lifestyle centers, lactation rooms)

5.2 Pragmatic Contributions

CSR is on the rise, as company reporting of such efforts increased 30 percent from 2010 to 2014, and continues to grow (Gilbert, 2015). And as Abensour and Hahn (2019) argued, “doing good is no longer the exception; it’s the expectation” (para. 3). This dissertation most clearly contributes to the practice and pragmatic understanding of CSR in several ways. First, this study is timely and relevant, particularly given the continual interest in redefining and questioning the role of business in society. It is clear that broader social movements and broader societal and ideological discourse impact CSR programs as understood by employees and in aspirational talk (Christensen et al., 2013) of organizational documents. It is through these times that society’s expectations of a company shift, and organizations often respond through CSR efforts. Thus, this study began exploring the impact of social movements on societal expectations of corporations and, inevitably, CSR programs, as “social movements reflect ideologies that direct behavior *inside* and outside organizations” (Georgallis, 2017, p. 735; emphasis added; see also Zald, 2000). For one, on the organizational level, publics are prone to attack companies they believe to have

behaved irresponsibly, and taking on social initiatives are thought to salvage reputation. Therefore, social movements can impact a firm's CSR from an issue management and legitimacy standpoint. On an individual level, we can see that “organizational change that touches upon social issues can take a bottom-up approach, with employees acting as internal activists” (Georgallis, 2017, pp. 743-744).

Likewise, this dissertation gave insight into the blurred demarcation between the traditional internal and external CSR practices. Clearly, external pressures and Discourses at the macro level influence the internal, micro-processes of CSR. Those initiatives targeting external stakeholders (e.g., community outreach, charitable giving, volunteerism) impact internal audiences in terms of pride and identification, but also in a professional capacity as employees are typically the ones executing those efforts. Likewise, responsible practices as a whole are most effective when fully ingrained in the culture of the organization, as perceived by employees. And as the discourse around workplace safety and equity continues to flourish, having a more responsible and ethical organizational culture will become more and more crucial. We see this cultural shift already being considered by organizations in their external documents—addressing issues around diversity, inclusion, and emotional and physical health, amongst other considerations. In other words, this communication speaks to this internal dimension, and CSR professionals may become more vital in “developing a culture that protects events like sexual harassment from occurring in the workplace” (Doerr, 2018, para. 3), for example. As reported by the most recent Edelman Trust Barometer (2019), employees want to feel a sense of “trust at work” through a “new employer-employee contract” (p. 35). Bottom line: “employee expectations now include societal change” (p. 38) and are thought to be fulfilled in a number of ways including: leading change (i.e., being aspirational, training the workforce), empowering employees (be transparent, give them a voice),

starting locally (i.e., improve conditions in the communities you operate in), and bettering CEO leadership (i.e., living values, engaging directly, being visible) (p. 35). From an external perspective, this dissertation highlighted the increase of social responsibility reporting, as the majority of organizations analyzed from a vast variety of industry and size had some sort of online CSR communication primarily through formal reports (Juholin, 2010).

Second, as discussed previously, findings from this study reflected the view of CSR as a socially constructed phenomenon. From both interviews and organizational documents, CSR can be seen as a fluid, evolving, viable, and living concept. As Mason put it, “it’s a living purpose.” In other words, CSR is constantly changing and shifting in conversation and focus. Whereas this dissertation reported various *current* CSR efforts, including those employee-directed, there were several instances of aspirational communication (Christensen et al., 2013) when it came to companies planning for the future of these practices. For example, one of the global construction companies included a “Diversity and Inclusion 2020 vision” on their website listing goals in attracting and retaining a diverse talent, securing an inclusive culture, and so on as a way to assure the organization’s sense of longevity, responsibility, and social awareness. Put simply: we see what (employee-directed) CSR looks like right now—but this is shifting, and employees have recognized this. I argue this view of CSR as a living and continuously progressing concept can be healthy—but only if employees are involved and can understand what CSR means in their organizations, where it is going moving forward, and the rationalizations behind these movements. Thus, the discursively open (Christensen et al., 2015) and ambiguous nature of CSR (Guthey & Morsing, 2013) may allow for its fluid and evolving nature to continue from a practical standpoint, which can give practitioners and leaders an opportunity to consider how CSR can continue to shift and adapt in response to contextual (i.e., social, economic, political, cultural) expectations,

pressures, and issues in order to fulfill stakeholder expectations. Conceptually, then, CSR truly does mean “different things to different people in different times, and new issues can easily be included in existing definitions” (Pedersen, 2006, p. 139).

Third, it is clear that employee relations is increasingly becoming an element of CSR efforts. For one, those organizations named to the 100 Best Corporate Citizens (2018) list by *Corporate Responsibility Magazine* are ranked on a variety of factors based on disclosure efforts and performance measures, including employee relations. This specific category covers practices implemented by organizations including: (gender) diversity strategies, labor rights policies, disclosure of internal practices (e.g., gender and ethnic group representation), employee satisfaction monitoring, and overall safety. Thus, this acknowledgment in particular shows how stakeholders and the public are interested to see what and how much information companies disclose related to their business practices, and specifically those focused on corporate responsibility.

More broadly, CSR is *not* seen as additive or “nice to have” from employee perceptions and from organizational rhetoric and communication of such efforts—as many participants admitting to being skeptical of such programs if seen only as a PR or one-off move. Many employees credited their company’s CSR as recruitment and marketing strategies in response to an increased interest in such practices from a generational standpoint. As Doerr (2019) stated, “millennials care less about a paycheck and more about the opportunity to be a part of something that’s making a difference in the world” (para 1.). Pressures on organizations to engage in CSR and be altogether more socially responsible alters the way in which they do, and can stem from: institutional pressures stemming from external entities such as the environment, competitive nature of the industry, at the organizational level by external publics and stakeholders, and bottom up

from the micro level in terms of employees within the organization who clearly often drive CSR initiatives and rely on them for retention.

In fact, Deloitte's (2018) recent survey of over 10,000 Millennials across nearly 40 countries, as well as almost 2,000 participants from Generation Z, found these individuals to be particularly skeptical when it comes the motivations and ethics of business—with a “mismatch between what Millennials believe responsible businesses should achieve and what they perceive business' actual priorities to be” (p. 2). From this, the survey reported diversity and inclusion, as well as work flexibility are vital in keeping young employees happy. Deloitte (2018) concluded that “Young workers are eager for business leaders to be proactive about making a positive impact in society—and to be responsive to employees' needs” (p. 2). Therefore, it would be wise for companies to implement or continue implementing a stakeholder involvement strategy of CSR communication (Morsing & Schultz, 2006), and take the “inside-out approach” to ensure employee commitment and awareness. This dissertation found that employees clearly care about their company's CSR efforts, as it is a contributing factor when it comes to retention, morale, and engagement. As Zoe put it, “these concepts matter to people, and CSR might be, if it isn't already, another category people consider when selecting a job.” As Schoenenborn and Trittin (2013) argued, “the constitutive view emphasizes that CSR practices come into being communicatively and that third parties (such as NGOs and other stakeholders) co-constitute organizations through their involvement in CSR communication” (p. 204). Thus, keeping employee involved from a communicative and participatory standpoint is crucial so that they are not only made aware of CSR programs in order to get involved, but can also voice their opinions or ideas to further facilitate or jumpstart those “grassroot” initiatives.

Fourth, what became evident in their sensemaking of CSR was that employees believed CSR efforts needed to align with core business strategies. For them, it needs to make sense. More broadly, “building social impact into your company’s core value set is not only the right thing to do - it also has a positive correlation to scaling your business and resonating with potential consumers and employees alike” (Doerr, 2019, para. 3). Thus, CSR as a contextual practice is perhaps necessary and crucial. While the focus of CSR has been historically outward in nature towards external publics, it has been relatively “common for CSR practices to be undertaken as an extension of traditional business practices, without substantively changing the internal dynamics of culture of the organization” (Fyke, Feldner, & May, 2016, p. 226). However, as Fyke et al. (2016) observed, and as this dissertation confirms, companies have increasingly “begun to integrate CSR into strategic decisions and operational practices” (p 226). In fact, as of 2016, the PwC Global CEO Survey reported 64 percent of CEO’s reported that “CSR is core to their business rather than being a stand-alone program” (p. 16). Thus, viewing CSR from a cultural and identity standpoint makes sense. In other words, interviews suggested that “creating a culture of corporate social responsibility” (Ruby) was vital—particularly in terms of internal engagement while also actively responding to employee needs.

Therefore, it would suggest that employees, although not naïve in terms of the self-serving nature of CSR, are looking for their companies to be altruistic in their CSR agendas—particularly those internal or employee-focused whereby the employee’s well-being, happiness, and satisfaction is prioritized. In taking a CCO perspective, “whether or not CSR communication has an impact within the organization depends on the extent to which it is resonant with and becomes connected to other communicative practices” (Schoenenborn & Trittin, 2013, p., 204). Pragmatically, then, I recommend organizations be purposeful and strategic in incorporating CSR

information throughout internal and employee-based communication such as employee orientation, routinized training sessions, and town hall gatherings that include leadership, while continuing to advertise through traditional channels (e.g., e-mail, newsletter, intranet).

5.3 Methodological Contributions

In terms of methodology, this dissertation offers three specific contributions to qualitatively exploring the nature of CSR. First, this project draws on and contributes to little work yet to follow Fairhurst and Putnam's (2018) proposed integrated methodology connecting a constructionist grounded theory approach (see Charmaz, 2014) and organizational discourse analysis (ODA). Throughout collection and analysis, I stayed close to the data in identifying the interplay between little "d" discourse and big "D" Discourse through a grounded, constant comparison methodology, and explored how d/Discourses of CSR complemented or opposed each other in organizational contexts. In first employing a grounded theory framework, the researcher can "discern oppositions and responses to them, but contextualizes and sources them with a sociohistorical/cultural analysis drawn from big "D" Discourses and operationalizes them in the performative dynamics of little "d" discourse" (p. 6). This study extends the use of this integrated methodology beyond instances of (organizational) oppositions in exploring the discovery (through grounded theory) and construction (through ODA) of meaning around the organizing of organizational phenomena more broadly, particularly in terms of sensemaking, and through a multi-methods approach.

Relatedly, this dissertation extends emerging work that explores paradox, tensions, and the sometimes contradictory nature of CSR from a constitutive view in both theory and practice. Future scholarship may then continue using an integrated grounded and discourse analysis approach (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2018) to CSR in understanding how actors, such as employees,

can respond to paradoxes and contradictions in organizational settings. It would be particularly relevant to further consider the issue of time and socio-historical contexts, while taking a “zoom in and zoom out” approach to understanding how paradoxes and tensions play out between instances of micro-processes of interaction and macro-level processes (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016).

Second, this study extends the limited work and call for a micro-level analysis of the sensemaking and experience of CSR by individuals and, most notably, employees. Interviews were fitting and valuable for attaining the rather limited “insider’s view” (May, 2011, p. 96), that has been difficult to attain due to accessibility challenges (i.e., “gaining access to employees working on or affected by CSR initiatives,” May & Roper, 2014, p. 775), or skepticism felt by largely critical scholars in organizational communication. Additionally, as called for by May (2011) and May and Roper (2014), my methodological approach included employees of all levels of an organization from contract employees to those in mid-level managerial roles, and those at the VP level and even in the C-Suite.

Third and finally, this multi-methodological approach compared and contrasted organizational documents with employee interviews to explore potential micro-meso-macro nuances around CSR in various organizations and industries. As May (2014) suggested, scholars have an opportunity to explore how cultural and societal discourses impact and are used in CSR programs by corporations. Thus, the analysis of “discursive logics, rationales, and framework might provide more nuanced insights regarding whether corporations are, in fact, ‘walking the talk’ of CSR” (p. 102). My simultaneous consideration and comparison of internal and external dimensions of CSR communication and perceptions held by employees began to fulfill this opportunity.

5.4 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Of course, this dissertation has limitations which offer an opportunity for further research in exploring the understudied internal dimension of corporate responsibility. First, my goal was to initially conduct a longitudinal analysis through an in-depth case study approach in order to understand the potentially changing nature of CSR within one organization and industry. For example, engaging in ethnographic methods would allow for a multi-level analysis and true observation of CSR language-in-action within organizational walls. Additionally, a case study approach would enable a deep exploration into the localized and situated nature of CSR.

Second, I was only able to analyze organizational documents that were publicly available—relying heavily on digitally accessible information. Whereas this was relevant and useful in investigation how companies communicated and framed their CSR externally and on a macro level, it would have been interesting to also include internal documents provided by employees to further explore how various texts on a micro and/or meso level aided or hindered sensemaking for those inside organizations. Solely relying on external documents did not get at the inner-workings of CSR via internal messages beyond employee perceptions. A productive approach and one that would promote more complex and nuanced theoretical insights might be the examination of both internal and external CSR rhetoric. Due to time constraints and the necessary approval needed by each employer, I was unable to collect from this potential data source.

Lastly, the initial idea for this dissertation was sparked by recent social movements (e.g., #MeToo, Time's Up) in considering how issues and Discourses of unethical and inequitable workplace environments or practices (e.g., workplace harassment, discrimination) may be reflected more explicitly in companies' CSR initiatives, and particularly framed as employee-directed. While many organizations did have some sort of employee CSR with a particular focus

in equitable work cultures (i.e., safe, diverse, inclusive), the clear connection to more specific issues as a result of these movements was not evident in interviews nor documents per se. Thus, it might be too early to witness these concerns reflected in CSR efforts (i.e., policies, practices, reports, functions). As Georgallis (2017) noted, “little attention has been paid to how social movements lead firms to engage in corporate social initiatives” (p. 735). However, as noted in the findings of this dissertation, employees began to consider the changing nature of CSR and where the focus of it might be moving towards in the future. Further research may then consider longitudinally exploring if and how CSR foci may shift and reflect societal discourse and contention around workplace environments. Additionally, given the political nature of various social movements, it may be worth exploring if and how CSR can be applied to the public service organizations. One of my participants, a firefighter, reflected on issues of social responsibility from the perspective of government and the public sector as a whole. While extremely scant in current literature, “the relationship between the concepts of public service obligation and CSR” might be worth exploring (Ates & Büttgen, 2011, p. 347).

5.5 Concluding Remarks

This study began fulfilling a gap in research in further understanding corporate social responsibility from the employee perspective, particularly given the evolving and growing (i.e., in terms of popularity and size) nature of these efforts and suggesting that CSR starts initially for and with employees. Findings confirmed that participants felt companies need to act responsibly toward internal audiences, and thus began considering if and how organizations are doing so through their CSR efforts. This study brought to light the ambiguous, convoluted, and contextual nature of CSR d/Discourses as perceived by employees. Furthermore, it gave attention to CSR practices aimed at those within the organization—ranging from health and wellness initiatives to

training and development; from diversity and employee resource opportunities to transparency at all levels. This dissertation contributed extensively to CSR scholarship, theory, and practice, but has only scratched the surface in terms of exploring the micro-foundations and internal processes around such efforts. I hope future research can further explore the changing nature of CSR and the role of business in society amidst macro-level political and social movements in which organizations are placed at the center.

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APPENDIX A. INVITATION E-MAIL

Hello,

My name is Katharine Miller I am a PhD candidate in the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue University in the United States. We are conducting a study exploring your understanding and feeling of your employer's corporate responsibility (CSR) efforts, particularly those that are internal or "employee-directed." Thank you for your willingness to participant and for reaching out to me.

I write today to ask for your participation in our study. I wonder if you would be willing to participate in an interview that would last approximately 30 minutes to one hour. We can conduct the interview at a private location of your choosing (e.g., your office or conference room), including via phone or video call (e.g., FaceTime or Skype) if that is easier or preferable for you. If you are able and willing to participate, please let me know of a date, time, and location that is best for you.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Katharine E. Miller

APPENDIX B. RESEARCH PARTICIPANT ONLINE CONSENT FORM

Exploring the implications and sensemaking of employee-directed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Stacey Connaughton, Ph.D.
Katharine E. Miller, M.A.
Brian Lamb School of Communication
Purdue University

Key Information:

Please take time to review this information carefully. This is a research study exploring how employees construct knowledge and make sense of their organization's possible internal or employee-directed CSR efforts. The entire project is planned to take approximately five months from beginning data collection to completion of writing in manuscript form. Versions of the final paper may be submitted to conferences or journals for publication. Additional explanations may be more detailed in the sections below.

Your participation in this study is voluntary which means that you may choose not to participate at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may ask questions to the researchers about the study whenever you would like. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign, or agree to this form, and be sure you understand what you will do and any possible risks or benefits.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to explore employees' perceptions and sensemaking of employee-directed, internal Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts and policies. This will take approximately five months in order to complete data collection, writing, and completing of the dissertation. Findings will ultimately be published in academic journals following completion.

What will I do if I choose to be in this study?

Katharine Miller, the co-investigator, will interview you at a time of your convenience via FaceTime, Skype, or e-mail capabilities. You will be audio taped during the interview using a recording application on the interviewer's mobile or recording device to ensure accuracy. The tapes will later be transcribed and destroyed following the completion of this study. For confidentiality reasons, your name will not be recorded and the recording will not be shared with other parties. If you do not wish to have the interviewer use an audio recording device please inform the researcher. Potentially controversial or damaging questions will not be utilized. At any point you are not comfortable with a specific question, you may choose to skip it. The interview is planned to take approximately thirty to sixty minutes based on your availability and responses.

How long will I be in the study?

Your participation will consist of one interview session conducted in-person, over the phone, or

via Skype or some form of video conferencing platform. Ideally, this interview will last between 30-60 minutes. The length of the session is completely at your convenience and can be shorter or longer in depth based on your comfort and responses.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?

Breach of confidentiality is always a risk with data, but we will take precautions to minimize this risk as described in the confidentiality section. In order to minimize and hopefully eliminate any potential risks, pseudonyms will be created by the researcher when including position titles and direct quotes from the interviews. During and after the interview, only the pseudonym will be used to reference you. Any collected data will be stored electronically and will be password protected by the co-investigator (Katharine). Again, interview recordings will also be destroyed following the completion of this study. If you do not feel comfortable releasing your role title or specific responsibilities under that role, please let the researcher know and the question will be skipped.

Are there any potential benefits?

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

All information you as the participant reveal in this study will be kept confidential. All study materials (e.g., consent forms, hand-written notes, transcripts) will be kept on a password-protected computer and on a secure, password protected site (i.e., Dropbox and Google Drive). Again, your data and name will be assigned a pseudonym instead of using your real name in order to protect your identification. When this study is completed and published, you will not be identifiable. The data from your interviews will be destroyed by deleting audio recordings, interview notes, transcriptions and other related electronic or paper files within three years of the completion of this study. Data may be used for additional studies following this, but again your identity and other information revealed in interviews will be protected and confidential. All correspondence, such as e-mail, will be destroyed after the completion of the interview barring any follow-up questions, comments, or concerns. Your research records may be inspected by the Purdue University Review Board and state and federal agencies, as legally allowed.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

The participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. After the completion of this interview, a follow-up email should be sent to you thanking you and verifying that this information may still be used.

There are no anticipated costs to participate in this research.

Who can I contact if I have questions about the study?

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about this project, please contact PI Dr. Stacey Connaughton at sconnaugh@purdue.edu or Co-PI Katharine Miller at mill2005@purdue.edu at any time. If you have questions about your rights while taking part in the study or have concerns about the treatment of research participants, please call the Human Research Protection Program at (765) 494-5942, email (irb@purdue.edu) or write to:

Human Research Protection Program - Purdue University
Ernest C. Young Hall, Room 1032
155 S. Grant St.
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2114

To report anonymously via Purdue's Hotline see www.purdue.edu/hotline

Documentation of Informed Consent:

Please read and agree or disagree to the following statement:

I HAVE READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY.

Please read and agree or disagree to the following statement:

I AGREE TO HAVE MY INTERVIEW AUDIO RECORDED.

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Introduction/Background Questions

- a. Tell me a little bit about yourself
- b. How long have you been at ____?
 - i. What is your role title?
 - ii. What role/s have you been in?
 - iii. How long in those roles and current role?
- c. Take me through a typical day or week for you?
 - i. What are your responsibilities or tasks?

II. Company Thoughts

- a. How do you describe your company to others?
- b. What are your company's priorities? How do you know?
- c. What does your company value? How do you know?
- d. Is there something (e.g., change) that your organization just went through?
 - i. If so, explain.
- e. When has your company done something embarrassing?
- f. When has your company done something that you're proud of?
 - i. That's employee directed?
- g. How 'responsive' do you feel your employer is to employee concerns?
- h. How 'responsive' do you feel your employer is to social concerns?
 - i. To society?

III. Thoughts and Knowledge on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Conceptualization

- a. What kinds of responsibilities do you think corporations or companies have?
 - i. To the broader community? Society?
 - ii. To stakeholders?
 - iii. To employees?
 - iv. Why do you think this?
- b. How familiar are you with corporate social responsibility?
- c. How would you describe or define CSR in your own words?
 - i. How did you come to that definition?
- d. What does CSR mean to you?
- e. What do you think is the point or goal of CSR?
 - i. What do you believe are the long-lasting, positive impacts of CSR?
 - ii. What are some potential drawbacks or challenges to CSR?
- f. How have you learned about CSR?
- g. What does it mean for organizations to engage in CSR?
 - i. Specific activities? Efforts?
 - ii. What kinds of organizations to associate with CSR?
 1. Why?

- h. When I say ‘internal’ or ‘employee-directed’ organizational efforts, policies, etc., what does that mean to you?
- i. Do you think CSR can be ‘internally’ or ‘employee’ focused?
 - i. Why or why not?
 - ii. Should it be??
 - iii. What would that mean to you? How would you operationalize it? Provide examples?
- j. What are some examples of CSR outside your company or in general that you can list?
 - i. What are some companies that you think are well-known for CSR?

IV. Thoughts/Perceptions on CSR: Operationalization

- a. To your knowledge, what are some CSR initiatives that you are aware of at your company?
 - i. How do you know?
 - ii. Give participants an example of a CSR initiative at their company or in general (diversity & inclusion, anti-harassment, etc.) (employee-focused)...ask them about it. Is this CSR? Why or why not?
 - 1. What are some employee-directed initiatives...
 - iii. Or, give example(s): Starbucks closed 8,000 of their stores last year in order to conduct anti-bias training following a publicized incident of racial discrimination. Would you consider this training initiative an example of CSR? Why or why not?
 - iv. Does your company’s CSR affect or impact you?
 - 1. If yes, how so?
 - 2. If not, why not?
- b. How do those CSR activities help your company?
- c. Why do you believe your company takes on those initiatives?
 - i. How are they of benefit to your company?
- d. How does your company communicate CSR to you?
- e. How *should* CSR be communicated?

V. Concluding Questions

- a. If possible, could you provide me with some sort of document, photo, artifact, etc. that you believe depicts, communicates, encapsulates, or describes your company’s CSR (no other specifics for this, can be anything)? Must be publicly available/accessible.
- b. What do you think is the future of CSR? In other words, what do you think will be the activities or initiatives moving forward that companies will execute as CSR?
- c. Is there anything else you would like to say about CSR? Your company?
- d. Would you be willing to pass along my contact information to others you believe would be worth me talking to regarding this topic?

APPENDIX D. LIST OF CODES

Bringing social change or issues in

Communication

- External CSR communication
- Internal CSR communication
- How CSR should be communicated
- There is such a thing as too much communication

CSR General

- Aligning CSR with organizational core
- Business case for CSR
- Consumer behavior and expectations
- CSR activity example external
- CSR activity example internal
- Contextual differences
- Definition
- Definitional Understanding
 - Never heard
 - Via media and public discourse
 - Via another company's
 - Via professional association
 - Via education
 - Via work or organization (past or present)
- Future
- Rationale
- Shift
- For good PR
- For recruitment and/or retention
- Generational
- Inside shows externally
- Lasting positive impact
- Optimism
- Skepticism
- Negatives or challenges
- Relevance and importance
- Involvement
- Proactive not reactive

CSR External

- Impact
- Community
- Diverse communities
- Education

Environmental
 Image
 Philanthropy
 Responsible business practices
 Societal (social issues)
 Stance (activism)
 Sustainability
 Transparency

CSR Internal

Impact
 Actor
 Beneficiary
 Added benefits
 Conduct or ethics
 As grassroots
 Culture and environment
 Diversity and inclusion
 Education
 Engagement
 Health and wellness
 Parental leave
 Resource groups
 Safety
 Satisfaction or happiness
 Structure (sustainability)
 Training (T&D) and professional development
 Transparency
 Work-life balance

Response to employee concern
 Response to societal concern
 Instance of confusion
 Instance of sensemaking
 Internal organizational policy
 Organizational pride
 Organizational priority
 Organizational value(s)
 Organizational reputation
 Organizational embarrassment
 Organizational responsibility
 Organizational change
 Organizational (dis)identification
 Training scenario (e.g., Starbucks)

APPENDIX E. IRB APPROVAL LETTER (ORIGINAL)



HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARDS

To:	STACEY CONNAUGHTON BRNG
From:	JEANNIE DICLEMENTI, Chair Social Science IRB
Date:	03/04/2019
Committee Action:	Expedited Approval - Category(6) (7)
IRB Approval Date	03/04/2019
IRB Protocol #	1811021365
Study Title	Exploring the implications and sensemaking of employee-directed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
Expiration Date	02/28/2022
Subjects Approved:	50

The above-referenced protocol has been approved by the Purdue IRB. This approval permits the recruitment of subjects up to the number indicated on the application and the conduct of the research as it is approved.

The IRB approved and dated consent, assent, and information form(s) for this protocol are in the Attachments section of this protocol in CoeusLite. Subjects who sign a consent form must be given a signed copy to take home with them. Information forms should not be signed.

Record Keeping: The PI is responsible for keeping all regulated documents, including IRB correspondence such as this letter, approved study documents, and signed consent forms for at least three (3) years following protocol closure for audit purposes. Documents regulated by HIPAA, such as Authorizations, must be maintained for six (6) years. If the PI leaves Purdue during this time, a copy of the regulatory file must be left with a designated records custodian, and the identity of this custodian must be communicated to the IRB.

Change of Institutions: If the PI leaves Purdue, the study must be closed or the PI must be replaced on the study through the Amendment process. If the PI wants to transfer the study to another institution, please contact the IRB to make arrangements for the transfer.

Changes to the approved protocol: A change to any aspect of this protocol must be approved by the IRB before it is implemented, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject. In such situations, the IRB should be notified immediately. To request a change, submit an Amendment to the IRB through CoeusLite.

Continuing Review/Study Closure: No human subject research may be conducted without IRB approval. IRB approval for this study expires on the expiration date set out above. The study must be close or re-reviewed (aka continuing review) and approved by the IRB before the expiration date passes. Both Continuing Review and Closure may be requested through CoeusLite.

Unanticipated Problems/Adverse Events: Unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others, serious adverse events, and serious noncompliance with the approved protocol must be reported to the IRB immediately through CoeusLite. All other adverse events and minor protocol deviations should be reported at the time of Continuing Review.

APPENDIX F. IRB APPROVAL LETTER FOR AMENDMENT



HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARDS

To:	CONNAUGHTON, STACEY L
From:	DICLEMENTI, JEANNIE D, Chair Social Science IRB
Date:	04 / 01 / 2019
Committee Action:	IRB Approval of Amendment, Expedited Category (6) (7)
Approval Date:	03 / 29 / 2019
IRB Protocol #:	1811021365
Amendment Version	Amendment-001:
Study Title:	Exploring the implications and sensemaking of employee-directed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
Expiration Date:	02 / 28 / 2022
Subjects Approved:	50

The above referenced protocol amendment has been approved by the Purdue IRB.

The expiration date for IRB approval has not been altered.

Approved study documents are in the Attachments section of this protocol in CoeusLite.

You are required to retain a copy of this letter for your records.

We appreciate your commitment towards ensuring the ethical conduct of human subject research and wish you well with your study.

VITA

Katharine E. Miller

Purdue University
 Brian Lamb School of Communication
 100 N. University St., West Lafayette, IN 47907
mill2005@purdue.edu

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Communication

Purdue University
 West Lafayette, IN

Emphasis: Organizational Communication

Minors: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) & Mixed Research Methods

Graduation: August 2019

Advisor: Dr. Patrice M. Buzzanell

Committee: Drs. Stacey Connaughton, Josh Boyd, & Robyn Remke (Department of Entrepreneurship and Strategy, Lancaster University Management School)

Dissertation: 'Exploring the foundations, implications, and discursive sensemaking of (employee-directed) corporate social responsibility (CSR)'

Exchange Student, Communication

Copenhagen Business School
 Copenhagen, Denmark

Emphasis: Corporate Social Responsibility,
 Sustainability & Leadership
 Spring 2018

M.A., Communication

Marquette University
 Milwaukee, WI

Emphasis: Communication Studies

Graduation: August 2016

Advisor: Dr. Jeremy Fyke

Committee: Drs. Sarah B. Feldner & Nur Uysal

Thesis: 'Inside the halls and walls: Exploring CSR from the employee perspective'

B.A., Corporate Communication

Marquette University
 Milwaukee, WI

Graduation: May 2014

Minors: Marketing & Writing-Intensive English

RESEARCH

Publications:

- Miller, K. E., & Fyke, J. P.** (accepted with minor revisions). Communication professionals' sensemaking of CSR: A case study of a financial services firm. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*.
- Miller, K. E.** (accepted). Ideographic identity: A critical and rhetorical analysis of the YMCA's organizational identity rhetoric. *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research*.
- Miller, K. E., & Akdere, M.** (forthcoming). Advancing organizational corporate social responsibility (CSR) agenda: Implications for training and development. *European Journal of Training and Development*.
- Miller, K. E., & Kendall, M.** (2018). Blurred (identity) lines: A content analysis of the #deleteuber crisis. *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research*, 1(2), 253-277. doi: 10.30658/jicrcr.1.2.4
- Miller, K.E., & Wieland, M.** (2018). Teaching metatheory through research application and design. *Communication Teacher*. doi: 10.1080/17404622.2018.1530797
- Miller, K. E.** (2018). Book review of Browne (2016) *Connect: How companies succeed by engaging radically with society*. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 81(2), 266-269. doi: /10.1177/2329490618774013

Book Chapters:

- May, S., Fyke, J. P., & **Miller, K. E.** (2019). Ethics, corporate social responsibility, and sustainability. In J. McDonald & R. Mitra (Eds.), *Movements in organizational communication research: Current trends and future directions* (pp. 56-77). New York, NY: Routledge.

Refereed Conference Proceedings:

- Miller, K. E., Zoltowski, C. B., Buzzanell, P. M., Torres, D., Corple, D. J., & Kenny Feister, M.** (2018). Exploring team social responsibility in multidisciplinary design teams. *American Society of Engineering Education 2018 Conference Proceedings*.
- Corple, D. J., Torres, D., Zoltowski, C. B., **Miller, K. E.**, Kenny Feister, M., & Buzzanell, P. M. (2018). Understanding ethical reasoning in design through the lens of reflexive principlism. *American Society of Engineering Education 2018 Conference Proceedings*.

Torres, D., Zoltowski, C. B., Kenny Feister, M., Buzzanell, P. M., Corple, D. J., & **Miller, K. E.** (2017). Investigating the contextual and shifting nature of ethics within engineering design teams across time. *American Society of Engineering Education 2017 Conference Proceedings*.

Manuscripts In Progress:

Miller, K. E. (preparing for submission). Marching ideographs: A rhetorical analysis of the 2017 women's march.

Miller, K. E., Zoltowski, C. B., Buzzanell, P. M., Torres, D., Corple, D. J., & Kenny Feister, M. (preparing for submission). Exploring team social responsibility in multidisciplinary design teams.
*Funded by NSF supported team between ECE and Communication, Purdue University

Miller, K. E. (data collection in progress). Exploring prospective employee perceptions of CSR as meaningful work: A cross-cultural analysis.
*Funded by Cassandra Book Scholarship 2017, Purdue University

Corple, D. J., Kenny Feister, M., Buzzanell, P. M., Torres, D., **Miller, K. E.,** & Zoltowski, C. B., (in progress). Gaining a seat at the table: The role of gender dynamics in design and ethical decision-making. To be submitted to *Management Communication Quarterly*.
*Funded by NSF supported team between ECE and Communication, Purdue University

Conference Presentations:

Martinez, E. K., & **Miller, K. E.** (accepted). Walkout for real change: Digitally constructing resistance and change through #GoogleWalkout. Paper to be presented at the 2019 National Communication Association Annual Conference, Baltimore, MD.

Kendall, M., & **Miller, K. E.** (2018, November). Situating crisis in an online environment: A semantic analysis of the #deleteuber movement on Twitter. Paper presented at the 2018 National Communication Association Annual Conference, Salt Lake City, UT.

Corple, D., Kenny Feister, M., Buzzanell, P. M., Zoltowski, C., **Miller, K. E.,** & Torres, D. H. (2018, November). Engineering gender identities: Women engineers in service learning. Paper presented at the 2018 National Communication Annual Conference, Salt Lake City, UT.

Kuhn, T., Kopczynski, J., Kramer, M. W., Dailey, S. L., Tracy, S. J., Redden, S. M., Jian, G., Fairhurst, G. T., Buzzanell, P. M., Pauly, J., Cheney, G., Sullivan, K., May, S., Fyke, J. P., & **Miller, K. E.** (2018, November). Using LEGO playgroups to address current issues and future directions in organizational communication: Meta-theoretical, conceptual and intergenerational play. Panel presented at the 2018 National Communication Association Annual Conference, Salt Lake City, UT.

- Miller, K. E.** (2018, November). Marching ideographs: A rhetorical analysis of the 2017 women's march. Paper presented during roundtables in research in progress at the 2018 National Communication Association Annual Conference, Salt Lake City, UT.
- Miller, K. E.** (2018, October). Exploring the internal and micro-processes of corporate social responsibility. Poster presented at the Organizational Communication Mini-Conference, Rutgers University, NJ.
- Miller, K. E., & Akdere, M.** (2018, May). Implications and considerations of CSR for training and development. Paper accepted to be presented at the 2018 Eastern Academy of Management Annual Conference, Providence, RI.
- Miller, K. E., Zoltowski, C. B., Buzzanell, P. M., Torres, D. J., Corple, D., & Kenny Feister, M.** (2018, November). Exploring team social responsibility in multidisciplinary design teams. Paper presented at the 2018 American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) Annual Conference, Salt Lake City, UT.
- Corple, D. K. Torres, D.T., Zoltowski, Kenny Feister, M., **Miller, K. E., & Buzzanell, P. M.** (2018, June). Understanding ethical reasoning in design through the lens of reflexive principlism. Paper presented at the 2018 American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) Annual Conference, Salt Lake City, UT.
- Miller, K. E., & Kendall, M.** (2017, November). To delete or not delete: A content analysis of the #deleteuber crisis. Paper presented during roundtables in research in progress at the 2017 National Communication Association Annual Conference, Dallas, TX.
- Miller, K. E.** (2017, November). Exploring community resilience in the aftermath of deindustrialization. Paper presented during roundtables in research in progress at the 2017 National Communication Association Annual Conference, Dallas, TX.
- Miller, K. E.** (2017, November). Inside the halls and walls: Exploring CSR from the employee perspective. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Annual Conference, Dallas, TX.
- Wieland, M., & **Miller, K. E.** (2017, November). Persuasive profits: An engaging influence strategies and appeals activity. Presented as a Great Ideas for Teaching Students (G.I.F.T.S.) at the National Communication Association Annual Conference, Dallas, TX.
- Torres, D. H., Zoltowski, C. B., Feister, M. K., Corple, D. J., **Miller, K. E., & Buzzanell, P. M.** (2017, June). Investigating the contextual and shifting nature of ethics within engineering design teams across time. Paper presented at the 2017 American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) Annual Conference, Columbus, OH.
- Wieland, M., Bistodeau, K., Richards, R., Johnson, R., Hanna, K., **Miller, K. E., & DeRose, D. R.** (2017, March). How to not fall asleep during class: A guide to creative, nontraditional

teaching techniques for the basic communication course. Panel presented at the 2017 Central States Communication Association Conference, Minneapolis, MN.

Miller, K. E. (2017, February). Inside the halls and walls: Exploring CSR from the employee perspective. Paper presented at the 2017 Communication Graduate Student Organization Conference, West Lafayette, IN.

Miller, K. E. (2016, May). Inside the halls and walls: Exploring CSR from the employee perspective (in progress). Poster presented at the 2016 Diederich College of Communication Spring Research Symposium, Milwaukee, WI.

Miller, K. E. (2014, November). Identity rhetoric in the YMCA's annual campaign. Paper presented during roundtables in research in progress at the 2014 National Communication Association Annual Conference, Chicago, IL.

TEACHING

Purdue University, Lamb School of Communication – West Lafayette, IN

COM 253 – Introduction to Public Relations (Spring 2019)

COM 256 – Introduction to Advertising (Fall 2018)

COM 114 – Fundamentals of Speech Communication Online (Spring 2018, Summer 2018, Summer 2019)

COM 324 – Introduction to Organizational Communication (Fall 2017)

COM 114 – Fundamentals of Speech Communication (Fall 2016, Spring 2017)

Awarded the Graduate Teaching Certificate (GTC), Fall 2017

Awarded the Graduate Instructional Development Certificate (GIDC), Fall 2016

Marquette University, Diederich College of Communication – Milwaukee, WI

CMST 1000 – Introduction to Communication (Fall 2014)

COMM 1200 – Media in Society (Spring 2015)

APPOINTMENTS

Research Assistant: Diana Zulli, Ph.D.

Lamb School of Communication, Purdue University (Spring – Summer 2019)

- *Assisted with coding for project centered around media portrayal and reporting of recent political scandals*

Research Assistant: Online MS in Strategic Communication Program,

Lamb School of Communication, Purdue University (Fall 2018 – Spring 2019).

- *Assist with the curriculum development and implementation of courses*
- *Work directly with instructors in further developing course materials and content*

Research Assistant: School of Electrical and Computer Engineering and Lamb School of Communication. Team member for NSF-funded grant exploring the understanding and communication of ethics on interdisciplinary design teams in EPICS, Purdue University (Fall 2016 – Spring 2018).

- *Assist with research-related tasks such as transcript cleaning and coding, as well as editing of manuscripts*
- *Lead author on manuscript focusing on team social responsibility*

Research Assistant: Marquette University. Assisted with research-related tasks for two full-time faculty members (Fall 2015, Spring 2016).

GRANTS & AWARDS

Recipient, PROMISE Award, College of Liberal Arts, Purdue University (2019)

\$750 competitively selected award to support the research of a graduate student in the College of the Liberal Arts

Recipient, Cassandra Book Scholarship, Brian Lamb School of Communication,
Purdue University

(2017)

\$750 awarded toward solo-authored research project by doctoral student

Recipient, Brian Lamb Research and Professional Development Fund,
Purdue University (2017)

\$660 awarded toward conference travel

Service Learning Grant Recipient (\$1,500) in collaboration with Tippecanoe Arts Federation (TAF), Purdue University (2016)

SERVICE

Department:

Grad Student Hiring Search Committee Representative (PR/Advertising), 2018-2019 year
 Mentor for new instructors of the basic course, Purdue University, Fall 2017 – Spring 2019
 CGSA buddy for new students, Purdue University, Fall 2017 – Spring 2019
 Volunteer, NCA Graduate Recruitment Fair, November 2017
 VP of Fundraising and Research, CGSA, Purdue University, 2017-2018 year
 CGSA Conference Submission Reviewer, Purdue University, February 2017
 CGSA Conference Keynote Introduction, Purdue University, February 2017

Discipline:

ICA 2018 Conference Submission Reviewer, Public Relations Division
 ICA 2018 Conference Submission Reviewer, Feminist Scholarship Division
 CSCA Conference Panel Respondent, March 2017, Minneapolis, MN
 CSCA Conference Panel Chair, March 2017, Minneapolis, MN

GRADUATE COURSEWORK (BY MAJOR & MINOR AREAS)

Organizational Communication/Public Relations

COM 600 Foundations of Human Communication Inquiry I (Fall 2016)

- Drs. Patrice Buzzanell & Steve Wilson

COM 574 Organizational Communication (Fall 2016)

- Dr. Robin Clair

COM 601 Foundations of Human Communication Inquiry II (Spring 2017)

- Dr. Patrice Buzzanell

COM 610 Rhetorical Approaches to Issue Management (Spring 2017)

- Dr. Josh Boyd

OLS 577 Organization and Administration of Training and Development (Fall 2017)

- Dr. Mesut Akdere

COM 674 Leadership (Spring 2018)^{20*}

- Dr. Eric Guthey

COM 674 Managing Organizational Innovation and Change (Spring 2018)*

- Dr. Silviya Velikova

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

COM 674 Organizations and Society (Spring 2018)*

- Dr. Jeremy Moon

COM 674 CSR: Managing the Social Impact of Business (Spring 2018)*

- Dr. Steen Vallentin

Mixed Research Methods

COM 585 Qualitative Methods (Fall 2016)

²⁰ * denotes class taken while abroad at Copenhagen Business School

- Dr. Brian Smith
COM 682 Content Analysis
- Dr. Josh Scacco
COM 590 Rhetorical Criticism (Summer 2017)
- Dr. Josh Boyd
EDPS 556 Introduction to Quantitative Methods in Education (Summer 2017)
- Dr. John Gipson
EDCI 616 Advanced Qualitative Methods in Education (Fall 2017)
- Dr. Steve Burdick
ANTH 605 Seminar in Ethnographic Analysis (Fall 2017)
- Dr. Laura Zanotti

MEMBERSHIPS

National Communication Association (NCA)
Central States Communication Association (CSCA)
Communication Graduate Student Association (CGSA)
American Society of Engineering Education (ASEE)
