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<u>Soft skills effect on organizations</u>

How does learning and development of soft skills enable fostering responsible organizations?

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore how teaching and developing soft skills foster responsible organizations. Being responsible organization means to work towards enhancing social goals, minimizing the negative side effects and enabling human being to live fulfilled life. Organizations are motivated by different reasons to act responsible such as following contingent goals, complying with the law or/and because it is the right thing to do. Organizations use different methods to train those socio-emotional behavioural traits and their spread in the organization starts from individual level and move upwards through group level to reach organizational level. Since any behavioural trait can pretty much be named soft skill, to make this study attainable I focus on exploring two dimensions of those skills namely communication and teamwork. I am conducting qualitative research and taking inductive approach of analysis. My empirical findings suggest that learning and development of soft skills affect the responsibility by: increasing the individual responsibility of the members of organizations; increase their involvement in responsibility practices; and helps employees better serve the community.

List of abbreviations

- o 'L&D' – Learning and Development
- o 'RC' – fictional name of the recruiting company that wished to be anonymous (*can be found in the results section*)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Responsible organisations are an important building block for society. They care about their social, environmental and economic surrounding, and contribute to an abundant community (Stazyk et al., 2016; Achtenberg & Vriens, 2009). It is undoubtable that they carry certain responsibilities for the public good (Gallo & Christensen, 2011, p.318). One way to build such organizations is to create work cultures supportive of sustainability-related behaviours (p.320). That implies that organizations are not born responsible, but instead are built and evolve into, as such. Hence, learning and development is substantial part of creating responsible organizations. Another way is through building the skills of their employees (Stazyk et al., 2016, p.674) because individuals are the smallest unit of the organization and developing them is the way to start.

In the industrial age companies aimed attention to the technical aspects of the individuals mainly because production and manufacturing were the most influential business sectors (Cimatti, 2016). Nowadays, the focus is more on the 'soft' skills of the person because those are the skills that bring companies competitive advantages (Cimatti, 2016).

Effective communication, teamwork, problem solving, adaptability and leadership are examples of what are considered to be the so called "soft skills" (Hendarman & Cantner, 2017; Kechagias, 2011; Dell'Aquila et al., 2016). They appear under different names in literature. Among those are "personality traits" (Heckman & Kautz, 2012), "behavioural traits" (Singh, 2013) and "Transferable skills" (Cimatti, 2016). Soft skills are important for individuals because success in life depends on more than IQ, it depends on personality traits (Heckman and Kautz, 2012, p.462). Moreover, continuous personal development has been acknowledged as vital for organizational success (Wilson, 2018, p.230). Hence, nurturing and developing those skills can prove beneficial to organizations that seek more than financial incentive, organizations that desire to enrich the entire society and to be responsible towards it.

There are previously conducted studies that connect individual soft skills such as leadership (Pearce et al., 2014; Maak, 2007); communication (Yanti et al., 2016; Chaudhri, 2016); and teamwork (Lin et al. 2012) to the responsibility of company practices. The focus of the different papers is either taking one soft skill and connecting it to responsible practices or examining the group as a whole but exploring, for example, the impact on company performance and innovation (Hendarman & Cantner, 2017) or quality (Cimatti, 2016). However, there has been little exploration into what the overall influence soft skills, let alone on their development, can have on a companies' responsibility and practices'.

The accumulative impact of soft skills as category and their relationship to sustainability has not been fully investigated indeed, but there are numerous soft skills and conducting such research is arduous and not feasible for the Master thesis time frame. Since any behavioural trait used to apply hard knowledge can be named a soft skill, to make the study attainable this paper will address only two facets of those personality traits and their impact on the responsibility level of organizations. These are 'communication skills' and 'teamwork'. They are deemed particularly relevant for generating responsible organizations according Singh (2013).

This research is not interested in application of those soft skills but how are they trained and developed because soft skills are ever changing and dynamic. The research question formulated is "*How does learning and development of soft skills enable fostering responsible organizations?*". In other words, what is the effect of communication skills and teamwork on the responsibility practices of the companies and how developing them can help organizations to become more responsible. The objective of this paper is to contribute to the literature with empirical data on this particular problem. The absence of such research is the discrepancy that this paper will address. This study will provide an understanding of the relationship between soft skills and responsible organization. Such study behind the science is needed in business yet it does not exist, and will generate new insights how those responsible organizations operate and train those valuable soft skills. The findings of this paper may benefit organizations that have a desire to be more responsible and help raise awareness of the need to improve and enlarge training of soft skills, because they can be used as a tool to accomplish such endeavours.

Learning and development of any knowledge in organizations is a diligent task. To help structure those processes Nonaka (1994) introduced a 'spiral of knowledge creation'. This entails that information flows upwards from individuals to groups to the higher organisational level. In order to explain the organizational level and the structures and policies, practices etc. that occur on that level it is necessary to look at the individual and group level. In the same manner my analysis will aim to uncover how the responsibility practices occur at organizational level but I will take into account both levels below. Moreover, Nonaka (1994) claims that the enhancement of knowledge is though interactions between individuals. According to Kechagias (2011) organization use many and different methods to refine their employees' soft skills.

The paper is structured accordingly: in the beginning a theoretical background of all the relevant concepts is presented. All relevant definitions by different authors are explored and their relevance to the research is underlined. Afterwards, a conceptual model that connects those concepts is illustrated. The following chapter consists of the method of data collection and data analyses as well at estimated limitations and researched ethics. The final chapters consist of presenting the results and discussing them.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the following section I am going to provide insights from my thorough literature review. First, I am going to provide definitions on soft skills and single out the most important when it comes the to responsible behaviour. Afterwards, I am going to explore the concept of responsible organizations. Subsequently, I am going to dig into the literature of organizational learning, so that I can explore how does the process of developing the soft skills occur. Finally, I am going to present a conceptual framework. By doing so I provide visualization of the link between the different abstractions according to the literature.

2.1 Soft skills

Soft skills are more than just tools for organizational purposes, they are "are seen to be crucial to become a global citizen and contribute to the fostering inclusive, sustainable, and peaceful societies" (Jayaram & Musau, 2017, p.102). Further in their book Jayaram & Musau (2017) mention that soft skills contribute both to individual and collective growth (p.103). Also, these types of skills enhance personal development; participation in learning; and success in employment (Gibb, 2014, p.456). Therefore, their influence has been recognized by literature yet there has been no deeper research on what is their specific tie to responsible organizations.

There are many definitions of soft skills in the literature because each and every discipline, educational sector and country that uses soft skills defines them according to their own needs (Kechagias, 2011, p.55). Moreover, the context in which they are used is extremely important, since they cannot be separated from it (Cimatti, 2016, p.125; Hurrell, 2013, p.166). They appear under different names: Life skills; Transversal skills; Key competences for lifelong learning; Transferable skills ((WHO,1993); (ISFOL,1998); (UE, 2006); (RPIC-ViP, 2011); in Cimatti, 2016, p.101) as well as social intelligence; and interpersonal skills ((Marlowe, 1986; Sternberg, 1985); (Klein et al., 2006; Skulmoski & Hartman, 2010) in Dell' Aquila et al., 2016, p.3). Heckman & Kautz (2012) use the term "personality traits" (p.452), to label this abstract concept which belongs to individuals. Singh (2013) also refers to personality trait while adding behavioural traits like social graces; communication; language; personal habits; friendliness; and optimism (p.21). To this point it is evident that even though the concept is vague the idea behind is very clear. Soft skills are embedded in human behaviour.

Definitions across the literature fill each other's gaps. Hurrell et al. (2013) says that they are non-technical and not reliant on abstract reasoning (p.162). Meanwhile, Kechagias (2011) denotes soft skills as "intra- and inter-personal (socio-emotional) skills, essential for personal development, social participation and workplace success" (p.33). According to him these are communication; ability to work on multidisciplinary teams; adaptability etc. (p.33). Dell' Aquila et al. (2016) defines them as 'behavioural competences' and adds to the list conflict resolution and negotiation; leadership; personal effectiveness; active listening; creative problem solving; strategic thinking; decision- making; team building; influencing skills; and selling skills (p.2). Most of these

are also named by Cimatti (2016) but she also includes "networking and assertiveness" (Engelberg, 2015 in Cimatti, 2016, p.99). Same goes for Deepa & Seth (2013), besides all mentioned so far, they include emotional intelligence, stress management and business etiquettes (p.7). I can go on and on because they are numerous soft skills and pretty much anything that could be considered part of the character can be named above. The tendency for every author to have slightly different perspectives and definitions lies in the fact that soft skills are not static. They are not explicit knowledge which can be put into a box and stored on a shelf. They are acquired thought diligent training and experience (Hogan and Shelton, 1998 in Hurrell et al., 2013, p.165). They are ever changing and dynamic, because human nature is like that and they pretty much depend on it. All definitions presented are similar to each other. Moreover, they build on each other, sometimes overlap so it is not one single definition that covers the concept from beginning to an end. Still, I feel compelled to single Kechagias (2011) definition out because it catches the gist of the concept and outlines why they are important.

These skills should be distinguished from technical, or 'hard skills' because they are different in nature (Kechagias, 2011, p.33). This distinction is also made by Hendarman & Cantner (2017) in their research connected to individual innovativeness. Provided that hard skills are associated with the technical knowledge or aspects of a certain job they are "mainly cognitive in nature and are influenced by an individual's Intelligence Quotient (IQ)" (Rainsbury et al., 2002 in Hendarman & Cantner, 2017, p.141) in contrast to soft skills which are deemed to be "the behavioural skills needed to apply technical knowledge in the workplace" (Weber et al. 2011, p. 98 in Hendarman & Cantner, 2017, p.141). Similar deduction is made by Robles (2012) whereas he writes that soft skills are intangible (p.462). To this point in the literature review one thing is sure - soft skills and hard skills are the two different sides of one coin. Furthermore, Cimatti (2016) makes the statement that soft skills are presumed complementary of hard skills (p.97) because according to her, they are the dynamic process that enables hard skills to develop under different circumstances (p.99). Same belief is hold by Dell' Aquila et al. (2016) with the addition that "hard skills and soft skills are never meant to compete with each other" (p.2). Singh (2013) goes further saying that soft skills are equally important as hard skills (p.1). The distinction between hard and soft skills is necessary because they are clearly distinct. Both are vital for individuals and

organizations, yet without soft skills we are as good as robots. Provided that robots can store information but they do not have the ability to come up with the "soft side" of negotiation for example.

The path to selecting two dimensions of soft skills, which are considered most important when it comes to organizations acting responsibly, has led me to the work of Dell' Aquila et al. (2016) who appoints leadership skills to be crucial because they support both individuals and the organization to achieve shared goals (Conrad, 1999 in Dell' Aquila et al., 2016, p.16). Hendarman & Cantner (2017) adopt the views of several authors that identify important soft skills to be "Problem-solving skills, decision-making skills" (Marando, 2012); "conceptual thinking skills" (Spencer & Spencer, 1993) and "quick study (learning) skills" (Martino et al. 2011) (p.142). Earlier works such as the one of Robles (2012) selects out the ten most important soft skills necessary for work place success which are: integrity; communication; courtesy; responsibility; social skills; positive attitude; professionalism; flexibility; teamwork; and work ethic (p.453). Out those ten, communication is considered the fundamental and most important (Robles, 2012, p.458). Regardless, communication and ability to work effectively in a team are deemed most important according to Deepa & Seth (2012). The findings of their study about the significance of soft skills for finding a job and progress in the workplace suggest that those soft skills among all others help accelerate workplace success (p.16). Tarricone & Luca (2002) also mention problem solving, communication, collaboration, time management etc. to be essential requirement for succeeding at work (p.54). So far, communication and teamwork are mentioned in almost all papers but are deemed important for different reasons than responsibility in the organization. My review concurs with Chaudhri (2016) and Singh (2013) contribution. Chaudhri (2016) deems communication as central to fostering socially responsible behaviour. Moreover, he claims that communication strives for building awareness, sharing information, and garnering support for such behaviour (p.435). Continuing, Singh (2013) paper is about achieving sustainability through soft skills. She claims that 'internal communication' and 'teamwork' are necessary for conducting responsibility practices (Singh, 2013, p. 25). Communication is important according to her because it benefits greater employee satisfaction and gaining competitive edge, efficiency and productivity, as well as linking the various managerial levels (Singh, 2013, p. 21-22). Because of these two contributions I select communication skills and teamwork to revolve my research around.

Unfortunately, the training and development aspect of those skills is not touched upon in these articles.

2.2 Responsible Organization

In this paragraph the idea of responsible organization will be scrutinized. I will present the ideas of the studies that have formed this paper's view of what it means to be and act responsible.

In the past the only responsibilities of organizations were to increase their profit (Friedman, 1970) and attain competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993 in Gallo & Christensen, 2011). Down the road the concept incorporated more aspects particularly economic and/or ecological and/or social aspects (Montiel, 2008 in Gallo & Christensen, 2011, p.316). One of the explanations why companies shifted their perspective is to "achieve social legitimacy" (Ehnert, 2009 in Ehnert, 2014, p.12). Another provided by Campbell (2006) is to keep a good reputation and to have a good relation with unions. Clearly the concept has evolved and nowadays corporations do a bit more than only following contingent goals.

This paper's understanding of responsible organization is derived from the article of Stazyk et al. (2016) and the book of Achtenberg & Vriens (2009). They dig into the topic of what responsible organizations are. According to Achtenberg & Vriens (2009) organizations contribute towards society by creating conditions and societal programs that enable human beings to live fulfilled life (p.351). Also, organizations incorporate themselves into the society by making sure they minimize the negative "unwanted side effects" (p.354). Moreover, Achtenberg & Vriens (2009) suggest that organizations incorporate themselves into the society via different modes – instrumental and responsible. The instrumental mode, also called 'isolating', presupposes that organizations create and treat societal programs as means to reach their contingent goals. The responsible mode, also referred to as 'inclusive', entails that the incorporation of and beyond such programs into the organizations happens because it is "the right thing to do" (p. 358). This 'right thing' is not precisely defined by Achtenberg & Vriens (2009) but the idea it holds is described as

the actions and decisions, which organizations take, that enable people to live fulfilled lives. I can only speculate but I believe that 'the right thing to do' is assimilated differently by the organisations hence their expressions of it are different. Moreover, organizations have to make deliberate choices in which mode they will operate in. To do that they have to apply their moral judgement of what is right and what is wrong. Important to note is that organizations can choose to just stick to the programs or do something above and beyond to contribute.

In a similar vein, Stazyk et al., (2016) define socially responsible organizations as "(a) act in accordance with laws and public policies, (b) behave ethically, (c) avoid socially harmful acts, and, in the best-case scenario, (d) proactively work to enhance social goals" (p.673). The 'b' and 'c' overlap with Achtenberg & Vriens (2009) ideas. This implication is a mere observation, rather than a concrete statement of validity. Furthermore, Stazyk et al., (2016) presents characteristics that help increase company's social responsibility such as emphasis on decision making and strategic planning; treating sustainability as a form of intergenerational social equity; providing education and training to their employees to increase their value etc. (Stazyk et al. 2016, p.675). The third characteristic is important to my paper because it indicates that such programs for teaching are considered valuable for responsible organizations. We can suppose if an organization supports actively the development of skills of their employees the organization will become more responsible. Another way to create such responsible organizations is to create work environments and cultures that are supportive of sustainability-related behaviour (Gallo & Christensen, 2011, p.320). That implies responsible behaviour does not come out of thin air but it is nurtured. That being said the idea of the Achtenberg & Vriens (2009) and Stazyk et al., (2016) are neither contradictory nor competing. My research suggests that they have similar ideas and are completing the image of responsible organizations.

2.3 Learning and development of soft skills

Having explained what is meant by soft skills and responsible organizations I will now move on to discuss the topic of organizational learning and development of soft skills.

As suggested by Wilson (2018) organizational learning is seen as a combination of individual learning in organizational context (Cangelosi & Dill, 1965; March & Olsen, 1976; Simon, 1991; in Wilson, 2018, p.228). Eraut (2000) states that learning occurs when existing knowledge is used in a new context or in new combinations (p.114). There are different levels of learning in the organization: individual, group and organizational (Inkpen, 1998). Each level is associated with different processes "individual level, the critical process is interpreting; at the group level, integrating; and at the organization level, integrating and institutionalizing" (Inkpen & Crossan, 1995 in Inkpen, 1998, p.226). Others like Senge (1990) define five levels namely "personal mastery; mental modes; shared vision; team learning and system thinking" (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2010, p.157; Wilson, 2018, p.228). Another significant contribution to this paper is of Nonaka (1994). He talks about how knowledge acquisition and learning in the organization occurs. He illustrates that by the "spiral of organisational knowledge creation" (p.20). It shows how knowledge floats in the organization. It starts with the individuals and it is the continuous dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994, p.14). It moves upwards through group level to reach organizational level. Furthermore, explicit knowledge is "transmittable in formal, systematic language" (p.16), while tacit knowledge "has a personal quality, which makes it hard to formalize and communicate … is deeply rooted in action, commitment, and involvement in a specific context" (p.16). Moreover, Nonaka (1994) elaborates that tacit knowledge contains cognitive and technical elements and the technical elements cover skills that apply to specific contexts (p.16). That being said, we can deduce that since soft skills are also embedded in the personal traits of individuals and the context, they are part of the technical elements of tacit knowledge, which logically means they are acquired in the organization as tacit knowledge. Therefore, the learning of soft skills, including communication and teamwork occurs in the same spiral. It starts with the individual and moves upwards.

Regarding the enhancement of soft skills Nonaka (1994) claims that this happens through interactions between people (Nonaka, 1994, p.15). Also, I am going to comment on the different forms for teaching and developing soft skills. On an individual level soft skills improvement can materialize in the form of one-to-one training; coaching; and mentoring for example (Kechagias, 2011, p.63; Cimatti, 2016, p.103). On group level Kechagias (2011) emphasizes that informal workplace training is a common way to learn soft skills (Harris, Simons, & Bone, 2000 in

Kechagias, 2011). Other ways include: workshops; experiential learning or role play (p.61); learning teams (p.64); discussion groups or meetings (p.65.). On an organizational level there are certain procedures that can be used: learning guides or activities sheets; recording difficulties and successes; having formal training sessions; establishing self-directed learning activities/ processes such as video, interactive computer software and other learning material (Kechagias, 2011, p.63-65). In regards to training communication skills and teamwork the literature for L&D practices pretty much overlap with already presented. However, Reising et al. (2017) in their study about interprofessional education focused on students suggest "team training through simulation" (p.84) as an effective way to teach those skills. Looking closely this method is akin to what Kechagias (2011) suggest as role play. To conclude there are different ways the organizations can teach and boast those skills depending on the level of focus. As Nonaka (1994) points out those levels are interconnected and in order for organizational level to occur first individual and group level have to take place.
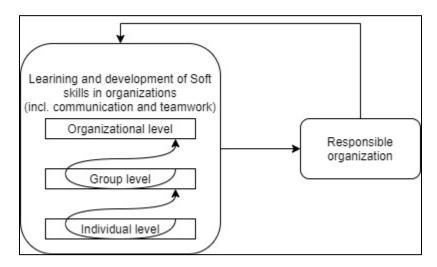
2.4 Conceptual framework

Figure 1: Own illustration of the relationship between learning and development of soft skills and responsible organization

The presented conceptual framework (*Figure 1*) is a representation of the links between the concepts. It is based on the ideas of the examined literature but it is not intended to act as model

which shall be tested. For all intents and purposes, it leaves the door open for novel discovery, which may arise based on the collection of data and information. Main pillars are: learning and development of soft skills, including communication and teamwork, and responsible organization. Starting from the left side, the box named "Learning and development of Soft skills in organization" is illustrating the spiral of knowledge creation. The three levels namely individual, group and organizational show how knowledge floats in the organization. The arrow pointing from this box to responsible organization, designates the explored relationship. Lastly, there is a feedback loop from responsible organization to learning and development because responsible organizations invest in trainings of their employees.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Based on theory provided in the paragraphs above my interest is to explore in depth the answer of the following research question is "*How does learning and development of soft skills enable fostering responsible organizations?*". More specifically, I focus on two kinds of soft skills which, according to the conducted literature review, are considered to be influential when it comes to nurturing responsibility. These are 'communication' and 'teamwork'. Contribution towards my topic is not enough and calls for more extensive empirical evidence, which will examine this hidden link and open the door to new discoveries for both academic and professional world.

For all intents and purposes, my research will use a qualitative approach to address and uncover the ties between soft skills development and responsible organizations and how does the former help foster the latter. Qualitative research is about finding the meaningful relationships between the different concepts and measures non numerical data (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Also, in contrast to quantitative research, its findings arise through gradual interaction between theory and data (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p.109). I aim to perform this type of research because I believe since the nature of soft skills is embedded in the behaviour of individual it is the best method that can be used. Another thing that drives me to choose qualitative study is the curiosity of how meaningful and important are the concepts of communication and teamwork for organizations that call themselves responsible. Since, inductive reasoning is all about the quest for patterns and understating the data collected I am conducting a study that is inductive in nature because I aim at

exploring and making sense of gathered information not validating existing theory (Gioia et al., 2013).

3.1 Data collection

Among the most prominent data collection methods in the qualitative research are semi-structured interviews and documents (Symon & Cassell, 2012). I use interviews because they are deemed reliable resource for gaining insights of organizations and compared to participatory observations, they are convenient and accessible (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Especially during Coronavirus participatory observation is not an option. Another reason to do interviews is to get "both retrospective and real-time accounts" (Gioia et al., 2013, p.19) of subjects' experiences. While the interviews are great way to grasp what is going in organizations, documents are another source of information. One of the main reasons to use such data is that it is a non-reactive method of data collection (Symon & Cassell, 2012). I use them ensure triangulation of the data. Also, since I focus on organizational level processes, documents are meticulous tools providing details on policies and procedures occurring on that level (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p.389).

Regarding the organizations researched, fundament selection criterion was that they consider acting socially, environmentally and economically responsible important. To determine that I checked the company's website for sustainability practices. In addition, I included this as a specific question during the interviews. I deviated from my original plan to examine as many angles as possible at one organization and redirected my approach to collecting data from multiple organizations due to the Coronavirus crisis. At the end I managed to collect data from six organizations in total. Four of them are established in the Netherlands. These are "RC", "Boskalis", "C-type" and "Green Office HZ". Please, be aware that "RC" and "C-type" are not the real names of the companies but since their participants wished to remain anonymous, I came up with fictional names. The other two companies namely "Southwestern" and "GEC" are American and are both under the umbrella of a corporation named "Southwestern family of companies". All organizations have tailored L&D programs for soft skills. I explored how they use these training programs to foster responsibility. I shall note here that organizations I was researching were not struggling but

rather they were unaware of how their L&D programs for soft skills helped foster responsibility. Thus, with this research I shed light on that existing link.

Regarding the participants, I aimed at a variation of the interviewees in terms of nationality, gender and work experience. For detailed information, please refer to *Appendix A*. Please, have in mind that some participants wished to keep their names anonymous, so I have given them aliases. The occupied position of six respondents is a 'Recruiter'. The reason I choose to interview such specialists is because my assumption is that those participants can provide me with insights about communication and collaboration since they use those skills every day. Also, participants vary in age, but most of them are in the group between 25 and 35 years. There is no particular intention behind selecting this age group, I approached people from different age but those expressed interest to participate. One thing all respondents have in common is that their job requires high degree of communication with others outside and within the organization. Furthermore, they all work in a team, which is another important requirement.

The sample size of the interviews I conducted is 10 (*ten*). Minimum non-probability sample size ranges between 5 to 25 (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p.45, Table 3.3). The predominant way of conducting them was on the phone, another consequence of the Coronavirus crisis. I made use of 'interview guideline' with questions to navigate but the actual interview process was loosely allowing me to shift between general and specific questions, which is one of the advantages of using this method. The interviews conducted lasted 45 minutes on average. The shortest interview was about 28 minutes and it could have lasted longer but the participant was in rush. The longest interview lasted 1 hour and 20 minutes but that was only the recorded time. I was conducting this interview in person so after stopping the recording device, there was additional clarification and demonstration of the e-learning platform. I managed to get acquainted with manual that "RC" uses as well, which was extremely helpful when it comes to my understanding how organizations use manual to train and track progress of the employees. The form of questions was 'open ended' to increase probability of revealing novel contributions. I also used close-ended and confirmation questions in situation where it was not clear what the participants wanted to say. I used them to avoid misinterpretation and to make sure that I have actually grasped the idea and the context of the answer. Some of the respondents were straightforward and concise in their answers and others

were broader and therefore provided extra information that I have not even anticipated to hear. For transcribing the interviews, I used a program to save time. The program was only 80 percent accurate that is why I had to go thought the transcripts with the voice recorded interviews another time to make sure conversations was accurate.

I utilized documents and companies' website pages such as: public records of goals and strategies of the company; sustainability reports; mission and vision statements; and code of conduct. The number of the documents collected was 7. Important to note is that some companies did not have public record of their strategies and special documents reporting their responsible practices. The company that had the most information in a form of downloadable documents was "Boskalis". The company "RC" had all of the downloadable documents such as code of conduct and sustainability reports available only in Dutch language. Luckily, the rest of the information available was also in English. The remaining organizations had most of the data provided on their official online webpages.

3.3 Data analysis

I conducted the following steps: firstly, I transcribed the interviews I have collected. Secondly, I did code the interviews with the help of codebook. I made use of 'priori themes' because based on the literature review there were some concepts that were expected to be relevant. Thirdly, after I have collected the raw data from the documents, I did code them in the same way as the interviews. The only difference with the documents was that I did only code the information that is in the realm of my research question. Fourthly, I code the interview second time to create themes. Lastly, I did combine the themes under overarching concepts.

For the data analysis I used 'template analysis', which is a technique rather than a methodology (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p.429). The idea behind this technique is to organize the codes in hierarchical order so that different levels are established and you can zoom in or zoom out depending on the level of detail you need to provide (Symon & Cassell, 2012). The reason I the choose template analysis technique is because it is very flexible, it can be used for qualitative as well as for quantitative research. Also, it can be used for deductive as well as inductive analysis

and it does not insist on a fixed number of codes. Unlike discourse analysis it not used to examine the language but rather the meaning of the overall statement.

Here is a more detailed picture of the process of analysis: During the formation of the codebook I used voice recorder to trace my steps. In the 1st order analysis, I started off by I coding the first interview. I identified important statements and singled them out. This interview generated 45 quotes. Next, priori themes were developed based on literature and the first interview such as "training of soft skills"; "soft skills and responsible organization converging point"; and "responsibility practices". Next, I coded interviews 2 to 10. As expected, I did have a large number of codes at this point. The total amount of all interview quotes exceeded 350 with the most quotes of one interview being 81. The largest number of quotes belongs to the longest interview. I collected all the codes in an excel spreadsheet codebook file. During a second look some of the codes proved not be relevant so I did exclude them. At this point of the analysis, I managed to exclude about 100 quotes that were too short or did not provide any fruitful information related to the research question. For the quotes I had left I gave them labels to better orientate myself in the codebook. Next thing was to code the collected online documents. They acted as supporting source for the themes found. The number of codes from the documents was considerably less, about 40 because as I mentioned I coded only information that was relevant to my research question. There was no contribution towards new themes but they uncovered insights about the themes already developed for example, that teamwork is every member's responsibility. With all the other quotes generated it was still overwhelming that is why I decided to continue my coding on paper.

Following, I went throughout the codes again to identify patterns. I was seeking for similarities and differences between the quotes. I clustered quotes with similar topic in categories under 2nd order analysis. The purpose of the 2nd order analysis is to help explain the phenomenon I am observing (Gioia et al., 2013). At first, I did generate about 25 themes. Indeed, there were a lot of recurring themes close to each other so they were grouped into one whilst other themes that were deemed too far and insignificant from the research question so they were dropped out. The themes that seemed too far-fetched were: "soft skills usage is all the time"; "companies hire people with already developed soft skills"; and "responsibility reports are missing". Then, there were two themes that were excluded because they outlined the initial understanding of the concepts such as "the concept soft skills" and "responsibility definition". Another theme that emerged was "most

important soft skills". I believe that was due to the fact that I wanted to check the opinion of the respondents which soft skills they considered the most important in their line of work. Initially, I thought I may compare them with the literature but I excluded this theme because I am looking for how communication and teamwork affect responsibility so I figured making comparison is not the focus of my research. Other themes such as "Responsibility initiation" were again far from my focus and it also generated too little contribution. In total, approximately 80 quotes were excluded at this point of dropping out.

The themes that I grouped together were for example, "complying with the law"; "achieve competitive advantage"; and "the right thing to do" because they all related to the motivation behind acting responsibly. Under the theme "Expressions of soft skills L&D practices in organization" were themes such as "mandatory trainings"; "optional trainings"; "on the job training"; "e-learning" that were also part of either individual, group or organizational level of training. Since they were considerably smaller in number as well I distributed them among those three levels. Next thing I did was to cluster these three levels of training together because the themes are supposed to be distinct from each other and all these subthemes concur in one similar topic.

To create the final version of the 'codebook' I assembled similar 2nd order categories, that do not overlap, together into 3rd order overarching constructs. These dimensions are 'Soft Skills Effect on organizations', 'Learning and development of Soft skills' and 'Responsibility practices in organizations'. The first dimension contains three themes that are connected to soft skills usage and effect. In the second dimension all the themes have in common that they about the learning and development practices in organizations. The third overarching dimension combines themes that focus on responsibility. I use "data structure" (Gioia et al., 2013) later in the findings section to visually represent the relevant categories and constructs. A fragment of the final version of the codebook can be found in *Appendix B*. Figure 2 depicts my own illustration of the development of the codebook by using 'audit trail'. Audit trail is used to trace the steps of coding and how the ideas were developed, also as a strategy to perform quality checks (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p.433).
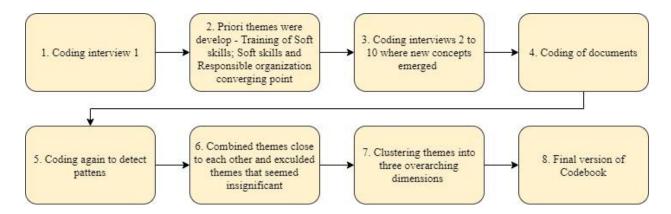
Figure 2: Own illustration of Codebook development

Prior to writing the findings section I reviewed the themes according to the overall collected data to make sure I have not missed an important link. After that I consulted with the literature to compare my data with the existing theories to see if there are any new concepts or novel insights that have emerged. More specifically, I consulted with the literature elaborated in Chapter 2 as well as with additional literature to be able to provide a greater scale view in the discussion section.

3.3 Research ethics

I have followed and executed to the best of my abilities the basic research integrity principles provided by Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2018) namely: honesty, scrupulousness, transparency, independence, responsibility. In this section I am going to elaborate on the specific ways I have done that.

First, I managed to create an environment of mutual trust and comfort for participants to share their experience. I did that by treating them with respect, being transparent about my research goals, main concepts explored and ideas in advance and answering all their related to my research questions. Also, prior to the interviews I have asked for consent to record our conversation. Second, for purposes of accuracy of information I have sent the transcripts back to each interviewee for validation and confirmation of the information. Another reason for this step is to make sure I protect sensitive information. I notified the respondents that if they explicitly state that

they do not want me to share any confidential information such as trade secrets and other sensitive information that I will conceal it form the transcripts. Furthermore, I have asked every respondent whether they would like to keep their and the organization's name anonymous. Next, I complied with the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) act for preserving personal data and sensitive information. More specifically, I am storing the interview transcripts and voice records only on my password protected personal computer, which no one has access to. Lastly, to ensure independence, I have not been influenced by commercial or political pressure nor have I put into a position the subjects of my research to answer in a particular way because of such interests.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In the following chapter I am going to present my empirical findings. I will introduce, explain and draw my conclusions for the recurring themes found and the overarching dimensions they belong to. The results obtained provide insights on how applying soft skills and their learning and development programs effect organizations, how these organization train and develop those soft skills, what cause responsibility practices to materialize and in what form. I will emphasise on those themes that are the most relevant to my research question "*How does learning and development of soft skills enable fostering responsible organizations?*". Please refer to Figure 3, which illustrates is a graphical representation of the findings.

Figure 3: Data Structure

4.1 Soft skills effect on organizations

'Soft skills effect on organizations' is one of the three overarching dimension I have found and even thought it does not directly answer my study's inquiry it provides the readers of this research with greater understanding of concepts used. This dimension contains three recurring themes namely: teamwork gist; soft skills as necessary requirement for organizations; and effect of

application of teamwork and communication on organizations. These themes are distinct from each other, yet they share common root.

The results show particular ways that application of soft skills affect the organization. Indeed, this theme occupied large chunk of the interviews and is its contribution is recognized. Organizations can use teamwork and communication to complete their established goals, spread awareness about responsibility, solve existing problems and minimize the risk of future ones. These are the effects I have documented. For example, Polina from 'Southwestern', a 150-year-old company for direct selling (*For detailed information of all respondents, please refer to Appendix A)* reports:

> Well, when you communicate your idea properly, uh, with the people … let's say for responsibility, they can understand and just act on it. (Polina, Southwestern – interview).

Other respondents like Sammie from 'RC', Dutch company for staffing, claim that these skills help achieve company goals with her stating:

> (…) I think it's very important to have advocacy and good social skills and good communication skills, um, in order to work together and understand what somebody wants from you … To achieve the goals. (Sammie, 'RC' -interview)

Another respondent also claims that investing in a good team working together affects the effectiveness of the organization (Ingrid, Green Office HZ – interview). These statements illustrate the effects that teamwork and communication skills usage have on organization. Actually, the results suggest that soft skills are vital ingredient for some organizations. Therefore, companies like 'RC' where soft skills are the core of the work process, operating without them will be impossible task

> (…) if there are no soft skills, there wouldn't be an organization like 'RC' because it's mainly built on those soft skills. (Fred, 'RC' – interview)

What Fred says shows assertiveness that the members of 'RC' have to possess soft skills in order for the company to continue to exist. Other respondents of that company confirm this proclamation as well. What is more, the findings suggest that team members that do not possess soft skill such as communication and ability to work in team would not fit in and not stay there for long. I want to point out that it is very important to consider the context of quote, because the company 'RC'

is in the service sector where soft skills are used all the time and as a primary tool to conduct business. For companies in other industries that may not be the case. That being said, when it comes to which skills respondents consider to be necessity 'teamwork' was so largely elaborated in the interviews that it gave rise to its own recurring theme dedicate to the essence and different ways the members in organizations express it. Rather than a pure definition, and more as a repetitive topic, participants talked about what it means to work in a team in their companies. I found supporting statements in the interviews that working in cohesive team creates positive atmosphere in the entire organization. The data also shows that teamwork is more than working side by side in an office, it is about empowering each other and "act in a certain way that is sustainable for the whole group" (Sammie, 'RC' – interview).

4.2 Learning and Development of Soft Skills

With great relevance to the research question "*How does learning and development of soft skills enable fostering responsible organizations?*" are the results generated about the L&D of soft skills. In this dimension belong the themes 'Expressions of soft skills L&D practices in organizations', 'Effects of soft skills L&D on organizations' and 'Tracking the progress of trainings'.

In the different companies the trainings for soft skills differ in a way that some organizations have focused communication and teamwork trainings while others incorporate those two dimensions in general sessions. For example, in 'RC' I found that there are general training sessions for soft skills, and when it comes to communication and teamwork, individuals improve them on their own or/and with guidance from their manager. For Southwestern the case is different. Polina, a member from the company, share they have dedicated trainings for communication in a certain period of the year, on all levels. For the teamwork she does not provide specifics. Because of this difference I have generated results for soft skills L&D in general and directly for communication.

I found how training and improving communication skills influences the responsibility behaviour and practices. To provide evidence Fred from 'RC' explains that it will not only lead to positive influence inside the company but it will also benefit the community his company serves. He believes they will help him act more professional and thereby get better results as well.

I think we could take that to a higher level of professionalism. So, we would be better at even better at communication and even better at sales pitches. And I think if you train people and develop new skills or show new theories about how to, um, how to handle particular situations, uh, I think the company will be more professional and also get better results. And, um, when it comes to responsible organization, again, I think mainly, uh, we would be better, even better at helping, uh, our employees, the people that work for us. (Fred, 'RC' – interview)

Moreover, 'helping the people that work for us' is categorized further in the findings as social responsibility practice towards society. Other members of 'RC' company report that L&D of soft skills help them get their ideas across, lead the conversation and be better at sales. Participants claim that they foster creative thinking and increase the overall level of involvement in responsibility practices. Further, Barend from Boskalis, a dredging corporation, believes L&D trainings helps building personal responsibility.

(…) those training's they encourage you to act more freely and take your own responsibility and they make you more enthusiastic about going forward. So moving on and if you have an idea, do it and not waiting years go on. And this kinda goes together with entrepreneurial skills and together with those you can increase your responsibility. (Barend, Boskalis – interview)

To elaborate Barend is stating that by having those trainings, he is encouraged to create new ideas and act on them. Another respondent, Alexander from GEC also shares some insights about the topic:

So just talking about it and promoting it, talking to each other 'why is this important?' It just raises everybody's involvement. You know, the more meetings you do, the more other people start to start doing it. And the more people start doing it, the more other people start doing it. So it just increases the involvement of people. (Alexander, GEC – interview)

This quote is an evidence of one more way that L&D of soft skills influences organizations' responsibility and that it is increasing involvement is such practices. We can say that those trainings provide a platform where responsible behaviour is discusses and encouraged. Promoting and engaging in such activities make more members of the organizations accustomed to join them. Another way L&D of soft skills affects the company is reported by Ybe from 'RC'. He explains that improving his communication will help him do his job better and steer the conversation in the direction he desires.

So, if you improve, your soft skills in the way you, yeah, the way you talk with people, the way you, um, social skills, it will always help you, it helps you with everything actually … If you need someone, uh, to do something for you … It's the easier it is to get those, that person to do the thing that you want him to do. (Ybe, 'RC' – interview)

To summarise L&D of Soft skills foster creative thinking; better equip those employees with the skills needed to help their candidates or clients; increases involvement in responsibility practices; and even help reach individual contingent goals. Moreover, training and improving communication help individual employees act more professional.

It is through variety of tools on different levels of the organization that companies conduct their learning and development practices. For instance, some organizations make use of manuals, other administer workshops or seminars and there are organizations that utilize all methods. Findings suggest that some forms of training are mandatory and some optional. On individual level Robin from 'RC' reports her company has developed their own e-learning platform for enhancing soft skills. She also shares she has individual coaching with her manager as a way to establish her personal development plan. Elena, another member of 'RC' also mentions personal meetings with her supervisor as way to train soft skills:

It's a one on one meeting with your manager and every month, and at that meeting we discussed, uh, my personal, um, development and also, so in soft skills. (Elena, 'RC'- interview)

Another way to teach soft skills on this level is via instruction manual, shares Polina from Southwestern. She is convinced that this method of training is helpful for those wishing to improve this area. The data shows that organizations use different forms for teaching and developing soft skills. However, the results generated do not provide information on what causes companies to prefer one method over another.

Zooming in on group level, 'RC' uses webinars, interactive workshops with speaker and role play sessions:

I think we have webinars, um, and many time, uh, some speaker that comes here and like interactive, so it's really in here and by doing a game or, um, or like, uh, just like practicing, like,

um, when you have a job interview, we practice job interviews with each other. (Ybe, 'RC'-interview).

Ybe speaks from experience because he has participated in those trainings. In Southwestern, Polina shares during the interview that her company has large amount of soft skills training like Q&A, audio learning seminars, webinars and during the Coronavirus quarantine, 'zoom' meetings. She also mentions these trainings for soft skills are mandatory. Another form of mandatory training that Southwestern uses is the so called "sales school", which is a five-day intensive training for soft skills. Though this is actually a tool that is used on organizational level. Alexander for GEC, company that sponsors cultural exchange programs, reports that his company conducts seminar for all employees on recruiting position every year. Interestingly, the data revealed that companies use those forms for development to track the progress of their workers as well. Sammie from 'RC' indicates that she uses a type of training book to set her career goals and then on the one-on-one meeting with her manager, he/she helps her reflect on herself and her progress.

> (…) recently we all got that handed out … this book where you can, um, redo all your goals and then every time you would sit with the manager, uh, they will check whether you achieving your goals or not and why not, and what you could do to achieve them. (Sammie, 'RC' – interview)

4.3 Responsibility practices in organizations

I have noticed that the last three recurring themes all talk about the responsibility practices like in what form they are manifested in the organizations, what triggers them and what inspires the companies to create them. Therefore, I have grouped 'Expressions of Responsibility', 'Motivating factors for responsibility' and 'Responsibility Triggers' under one dimension. This dimension is connected to my research in a way that it recognizes what the concept of 'Responsible organization' is in practice.

I have found that organizations approach the responsibility for the different parties involved in different ways. When it comes its own workers, companies invest in improving their skills, taking care of their health and safety; and proving sense of security on the job. For instance, Robin and other members of 'RC' report that the company has 'life-long employment' policy. In other recurring themes it was mentioned investing in worker's skills by providing them with online

platforms for trainings, coaching workshops, etc. For the community there are different ways, like taking care for environment and producing more sustainable products. Nikola from "C-type", a construction corporation, mentions in out interview that they try to reduce pollution by integrating plastic inside the concrete. When it comes to the members of society companies like Southwestern and GEC do charity work and fundraising for different causes. For the candidates that are looking for a job throughout 'RC' Fred shares:

> I would have like a conversation with them, uh, how they were doing, if they had any tips, if they had any complaints, um, if I could help them in any way or the company, what they were working at, if they could improve on some parts. So actually I think it was maybe 30 or 40% of my total job. Just keep it, just keep contact, keeping contact with, um, our people, our employees. (Fred, 'RC' – interview).

To elaborate, Fred invest almost half of his time at work to maintain long-term relationship with candidates. Ybe, a colleague of Fred, shares in the following theme that during the Corona crisis his company is retaining all the candidate on contract, instead of firing them, which shows another manifestation of responsibility. He says also that they are taking a great risk by doing so because they do not know whether the government will reimburse them. Actually, the findings suggest that this risk-taking practice, is triggered by crisis. For example, Elena, another member of 'RC' is reporting is that the Corona pandemic triggered the company to take measures to show its own employees that their work is secured by providing them with long-term contracts. However, results show that not all responsibility practices are driven by emergency situations.

> (…) I think they, they, they do it, uh, not just because of the crisis, but also, for example, um, some topics are sometimes our heart in this sector, like for some times like racism is something that's, sometimes it's just an the news and then every gun everyone jumps on it. (Ybe, 'RC'- interview)

This quote points out that there is another trigger and that is the ongoing injustice and discrimination that minorities face in the society. To tackle that problem, companies issue diversity and inclusion policies, which can be also found on their websites.

Moving forwards, I found that motivation behind responsibility is important because it reveals the true intentions of the organizations. Fred and Sammie from 'RC' mention that building and maintaining long term relationships is a something the whole company strives for. Of course, the RC's business is built on people so it makes sense that the motivation for acting responsibly is

driven by the desire to keep ahead of the competition and maintain a good image. Barend from Boskalis says that being responsible is part of the business strategy of his company and actually necessity to be able to attract new talents.

> Yeah, very important because to keep ahead of the competition, you need to be a responsible organization. Otherwise, you don't have a good image at all. Besides people don't want to work for you if you don't care of are not responsible for environment and people. (Barend, Boskalis – interview)

The findings also showed that organizations are motivated to act responsibly because otherwise they will not be able to conduct their business activities. This belongs the theme of complying with the law. Robin from 'RC' comments that her organization has been around for 50 years and they have to follow certain rules set up by the government. Alexander from "GEC" mentions that his company "is being monitored and supervised by department of state of US" (Alexander, "GEC" interview). The data also unfolded that even when nobody is breading down their necks, companies take care of their employees and social environment. The incentive behind is because they believe it is the right thing to do and to act as an example for others. Earlier, I mentioned that 'RC' is running the risk of losing a lot of money if they do not get reimbursed from the government regarding the Corona crisis and yet still pay salaries because they feel it is their responsibility to help. This implies that the company is doing something beyond what is expected of them because they care. In 'GEC', Alexander explains why they are doing all the charity knockings and fundraising:

> (…) we've never denied an opportunity to help … that's what we think the right thing is. That's how our company culture knows how we do things. (Alexander, GEC – interview).

This quote indicates that company promotes responsibility activities and fosters responsible thinking in its culture.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCUSION

This chapter contains the following information: a discussion part about the results obtained; conclusion of the research; practical and managerial implications; reflection and more complex

understanding of my role as a researcher and how I have influenced my study; and last but not least, limitations and suggestions for further research. What is more, I am going to elaborate whether my findings are consistent with theory and describe the insights generated.

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Communication and teamwork

This research is concerned with finding out how L&D of soft skills, in particular communication skills and teamwork, help foster responsibility in organizations. I have found the effect of the overall L&D of soft skills trainings on the organizations and their responsibility. My findings showed multiple ways that this happens and enlarge the academic literature world. Also, I have generated findings on how L&D of communication dimension influences responsibility. Unfortunately, the results did not uncover how teamwork training and development specifically influences responsibility.

The results are consistent, but not equal, to the theory. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that most of the studies are concerned with the application of those skills. When it comes to application my findings are consistent with Chaudhri (2016) who claims that communication is vital for fostering responsible behaviour. However, when it comes to Singh (2013) who says that internal communication and teamwork are necessary for conducting responsibility practice my findings did not generate supportive statements of this *exact* proclamation. Rather they suggest that necessity of soft skills as such could be industry dependent**.** I did not set out to do industry comparison, I selected my organizations on whether responsibility is important for them but it turns out that some organization not only use soft skills to enhance performance but need them to survive.

After having the final results, I consulted again with the literature. I was curious to compare my findings to other theories about teamwork since I have entire recurring theme about it. Teamwork in my findings stand for doing right by the team, help other team members succeed and creates positive atmosphere. Regrettably, I did not manage to find a specific study that concurs with these findings. The closest is a research about teamwork in the context of sports which entails the essence of teamwork is commitment of individuals to common shared purpose (Gaffney,

2015). Almost identical definition of the concept is provided by Xyrichis & Ream (2008) but in the context of healthcare – "dynamic process between two or more professional sharing common goal" (p.238). Therefore, the generated insights about the teamwork essence are new contribution to the academic world and can be used by managers and practice to better understand how employees view the concept.

5.1.2 Effect of Learning and development of Soft skills

Turning now to the L&D of soft skills, as described in the previous chapter there are several ways that they enable responsible behaviour in organizations. Just as a reminder what is considered as responsible behaviour, according the literature is serving the community in a way that enables its citizens to life fulfilled lives and enhance greater social goals and etc. First, L&D of soft skills help build personal responsibility in the organizational members. They do so by encouraging employees to act on their ideas. Moreover, as show in the results these trainings help improve and refine employee's communication and leave them better equipped at helping their candidate and clients as suggested by Fred from 'RC'. This result is consistent with the ideas of Jayaram & Musau (2017) who see soft skills as important for fostering inclusive and sustainable societies. Next thing I found, mentioned by several participants, is that L&D of soft skills increases the involvement in responsibility practices. Those trainings provide a platform for exposing and discussing responsibility. The constant reiteration causes employees to become aware of the responsibility practices. Also, because workers see their colleagues acting responsibly, they start doing it as well. Much like the snowball effect. If we take a closer look, we can notice that these findings suggest that responsible behaviour starts at the individual level with personal responsibility and spread out to the entire organization and beyond, which again could be considered consistent with the theory of Nonaka (1994). This is important because the more employees are involved, the more the organizations start putting emphasis on those practice. The effect on larger scale is that organizations start contributing to community in various ways. Results indicates some of those ways are doing charity work, fundraisings, creating more sustainable to environment products. Results also generated other effects of L&D of soft skills besides on responsibility, which are also consistent with the existing literature as well. Workplace success suggested by Kechagias (2011) and Deepa & Seth (2012) and achieving shared organizational

goals by Dell' Aquila et al. (2016) is something that I found out as well in a form of respondents claiming that they act professional and achieve results.

I have also generated findings on the methods organizations use to train and foster these skills. On individual, group and organizational level my findings are in line with Kechagias (2011). For example, on organizational level he suggests "formal training sessions, self-directed learning activities" (Kechagias, 2011, p.63-65) and in my findings these are respectively company organized seminars and manual. I assume this is because companies follow some established 'best practices' in the human resource field. Apart from being used for self-training purposes the manual serves as a way to track progress on organizational level. This as well is consistent with the proclamations of Kechagias (2011) but it also adds new insight because the results show that the manual is also used in the one-on-one meetings to set goals together with the direct manager. This manual is multifunctional, containing broad range of soft skills trainings but there are no trainings about responsibility practices so I can definitely see how if such are integrated this could help increase awareness and foster even more responsible behaviour.

I took another look at the existing literature for learning and development of soft skills to check if my contribution coincides with other existing research. Studies about the general effects of teamwork training are also carried out by Stout et al. (1997) and recently by Suhaimi et al. (2018). In the context of the aviation, Stout et al. (1997) suggest that teamwork training increases team competences such as knowledge, skills, attitudes; leads to more cooperative behaviour which in turn leads to effective performance (Stout et al., 1997, p.178). The results I have generated do not match this contribution except that of increasing performance. Further, Suhaimi et al. (2018) in study conducted among hotel employees in a particular city entails that teamwork training enhances organizational commitment (p.738), Moreover this study also suggests that effective teamwork fosters employees' creativity, confidence and performance (Zincirkiran et al., 2015 in Suhaimi et al., 2018, p.739). I have also found that L&D of soft skills foster creative thinking and help achieve better results, but again my results are not a complete match. These two studies even though outlining interesting effects of teamwork training are not entirely pertinent. They seem relevant to compare my findings but are not theories to base my specific study on. I do not imply that their contribution is not important or valid but because the industries they are conducted in are very different than my research's situational context they are not entirely relatable.

5.1.3 Responsibility practices in organizations

Further from the core of the research question but worth mentioning because it reveals interesting findings, one of the triggers of responsibility is the Corona pandemic. I had the chance to do interviews in the middle of the quarantine period so it is a big factor for the companies, and for the entire society. Yet, this is not an everyday event, so whist it is a big chunk of the recurring theme I believe it has to be taken with a pinch of salt because probably the results would not have indicated the existence of such trigger during 'normal' times. On the other hand, it is actually a blessing in disguise because this crisis did happen and it did trigger creation of new responsibility practices and caused cautious behaviour for the health and safety of the employees, and I was actually there to capture it. Another important trigger is the ongoing injustice towards minority groups, which I classify as more permanent trigger.

Moving on but still on the topic of responsibility because the overarching dimension generated interesting results that I deem worthy discussing, this study show that responsibility is expressed in various ways. Achtenberg & Vriens (2009) suggest that organizations contribute to society by creating condition for the people to 'live fulfilled life'. This statement is very broad so pretty much every responsibility practice I found could fits in this frame. For example, "RC" provides lifelong employment, spends time to maintain long-term relationships and "Southwestern" organizes fundraising. Indeed, all this could fit in the common denominator of "creating conditions to live fulfilled life'. Further, my findings also coincide with Achtenberg & Vriens (2009) statement that responsible organizations try minimizing side effects. For instance, the results show that "C-type" tries to integrate plastic in their products to reduce the pollution. My findings are also in line with the third characteristic of Stazyk et al. (2016) that organizations provide trainings to their workers to increase their value. On the other hand, this study has been unable to provide proof for the other suggested characteristics. As conclusion my findings are not 100 percent match with the presented in Chapter 2 theories.

That being said I conducted another literature review to see if my findings are novel. I stumbled upon Kaler (2002) who calls the different groups to whom organizations are responsible stakeholders. He divides the stakeholder into "claimant", "influencer" and "combinatory" definition (p.91). To elaborate by "claimant" he categorizes stakeholders with some sort of claim to organizations, "influencer" are stakeholders influencing the operations of the business and the

"combinatory" definition incorporates either or both of the previous two. The idea of stakeholder is also elaborate by earlier works such as the one of Mitchell et al. (1997), where he proposes more complex stakeholder typology containing seven types of stakeholders depending on the attributes they possess. Long story short, these contributions shows that organizations are responsible to different types of groups, in my research these are the employees, the community and the clients of a company, which is similar to my findings. Therefore, I have not generated novel contribution for this topic.

This study has also produced empirical evidence on what drives organizations to act responsible. The results show three motivating factors – to keep ahead of the competition and maintain good image; to comply with the law; and because it is the right thing. Comparing to the theory of Achtenberg & Vriens (2009) and their suggested modes of incorporation I can assign the first and the second motivating factors to the instrumental mode and the third motivating factor to the responsible mode. Intriguingly, my findings uncover that organizations can be motivated by two factors, in this case to be compliant with the law and the same time be motivated to help society because of feel it what's right. Alexander from "GEC" mentions that his company is being monitored by the government but he also states that they do all the charity knocking and fundraising because it is their corporate culture and because they believe it is the right thing to do. The case of "RC" is the same, they have to follow the rules set by the government but it is not the only driver of responsible behaviour. Here comes a question, if companies are driven by two factors in different modes of incorporation to which mode shall they be assigned to? This is a more complex question and cannot be answered entirely by the theory of Achtenberg & Vriens (2009). That is why I perform another literature review to see if any existing theories are similar and can explain my findings. I came across the study of Colbert et al. (2003) where they attempt to reconcile corporate social responsibility and stakeholder approach and they create a framework for classifying organizational cultures. The first level is "compliance culture" where organizations comply with law and norm (p.10-11). Level 2 is where organization recognize that having good relationship with stakeholders is important and level 3 is where organizations seek to "maximize creation of value" (Colbert et al., 2003, p.11). Therefore, on different levels organizations are driven by different factors. However, my question remains unanswered. I make a suggestion, which requires further empirical evidence, that in different situations one motivating factor is more dominant than the other and vice versa. Hence, in different situational context and depending on

which motivating factor dominates, we shall assign organizations to the dominant factor's mode accordingly. Which factor will dominate depends on whether organizations see societal programs as a means to an end or as an end themselves. According to the second imperative of Kant the answer is clear. He states that humanity should never be treated as a "means merely" (Bowie, 2002, p.5). What shall be taken away from this discussion is that organizations differ in their ways of contribution to society and motivation for responsibility. My findings illustrate some of the ways but are not general representation of all organizations.

5.2 Conclusion

The learning and development of soft skills help foster responsible organizations by building personal responsibly in the employees and provide platform for exposure and recognition of responsibility practices, which increases the awareness and involvement in such practices. Developing communication specifically helps the members of organizations act more professional and thereby serve the community better. The research conducted answered a question which was not explored by the existing literature as well as helped clarify some attached to the researched topic concepts. At the same time this study generated new questions waiting to be answered by the business science like for which sector exactly are soft skills necessary requirement.

Teamwork and communication are indeed central topics in organizations. Not only their learning and development influences organizations but also their usage. The findings of this research suggest that application of teamwork and communication help companies complete established goals as well as solve exiting problems and minimize the risk of future ones. The results also provide empirical evidence that teamwork is more that recurring topic and has greater meaning for employees.

Organizations are responsible to more than one group of stakeholders and their responsibility is expressed in variety of ways. For their employees' organizations invest in improvement of their skills and provide them sense of security. For the community, some of the ways are to take care of the environment and organize charity events. For their clients they simply spending time to build long term relationships. Moreover, what drives organizations to act

responsible is to keep ahead of competition and maintain and good image, comply with the law and because they believe it is the right thing to do.

5.3 Practical and managerial implications

The findings of my study can be used by all organizations, but I believe they will specifically prove to be beneficial for those organizations where soft skills are core part of making business. Firstly, I provide insights for the different types of trainings in organizations and the importance of the teamwork and communication. The professional world can use the insight for teamwork for example, to better understand its effects. These insights can be quite useful for Human resource department, especially the people in charge of training and development programs. I believe these insights can be used to give guidance and suggestions to organizations who seek to improve their training and development programs. Secondly, this study outlines the importance of those trainings and how they can be used to increase the overall responsibility level in organizations. I can see how sustainability managers can use the data and integrate more information for responsibility practices in them. Next, managers who are in charge of coaching their employees can recognize what large impact they have. Thereby they can consciously try to foster more responsible behaviour in their subordinates if they wish so. Moreover, managers should ensure that all learning tools are utilized such as the e-learning. Since those tools are available in most companies and are self-training method that could be done even at home manager should encourage employees to do the trainings and not leave them as optional.

Additional practical implication constitutes that organizations should take a long hard look at what motivates them to act responsibly and in what form they express this in the society. My findings generated contribution which can be helpful for such organizations that seek to expand their responsibility practices. Moreover, the organizations can use some of the suggested responsibility practices for themselves if they are not doing so already.

5.4 Reflection and reflexivity

At the beginning it was difficult to keep an open mind because I had a vague idea of what the answer of my research question might be. My idea was shaped by the literature I have read and my personal experience with the topic. By taking inductive approach and putting emphasis on the

data has not completely eliminated but definitely reduce the bias form the analysis. I am aware that at the beginning of the analysis I was very messy and I coded almost everything from the interviews. By going thought the coded over and over again I started to focus more on the actual research question and looking the interviews thought that prism. Closer to the end of the research I let the data speak for itself and went throughout the analyses and results with a fine-tooth comb to make sure this is the case.

This research has influenced me as well. I now tend to look phenomena thought a scientific perspective and search for proof instead of assuming that one man's opinion is the truth. Also, it did change my perspective on what it means to be responsible organization. I used to consider concepts such sustainability, corporate social responsibility as something that organizations talk about but do not really do unless the society pushes those concepts on them. But the more I dove into the topic I feel like responsibility is inseparable part of organizations and it should extend way beyond what is now considered to be. In fact, if a company acts responsibility, take cares for the safety, mental and emotional health of its employees; and is aware of the community and environment they are already successful in my opinion.

5.5 Limitations and suggestions for further research

I have identified several limitations this study faces. Firstly, I am limited to be fully objective because my affinity to the researched topic have caused me to form my own opinion. Even though I have strayed away from subjectivity, I acknowledge I may have influenced the research process with my biased perspective. Secondly, I am exploring companies in their specific organizational context and since soft skills are a fluid concept the results of my findings are not a general representation of all organizations. They may not be transferable or applicable to them. Thirdly, I have used only a small sample of interviews and I had short amount of time to collect and analyse the data, so this may not be enough to zealously inspect the researched phenomenon. Actually, one limitation that I faced during the data collection was that I could not perform all the interviews in person due the Corona crisis. I managed to perform only two face-to-face interviews out of desired ten. This did not allow me to experience all the organizations working atmosphere and of course it did drove me away from my original plan to explore one organization on all levels. So, a further research, preferably in person, is needed to be able to grasp the broader situational context.

Fourthly, in terms of data collection, I use reactive method such as interviews. When it comes to the interviews, respondents may have narrow vison of all processes in large organizations, tend to have subjective perspective themselves, whether consciously of subconsciously, which may cause gaps between their experience and organizational reality. Documents wise, online publications may not be up to date with the current practices and could be exaggerated to portray a certain image for the public. Therefore, research performed using another type of data collection method or larger sample size could be handy and could enlarge the discoveries scope.

This study is also limited to explore some interesting recurring ideas because they were not the focus of the research question like the mandatory versus optional trainings. Some companies had most of their soft skills training as mandatory and some had all of them as optional. Findings suggest that if the trainings are optional employees will probably not do them. However, the contribution to that implication is definitely not enough to either support or reject it. I believe it is important to explore this further, especially for companies where soft skills are core part of the business and that seek to achieve higher results.

Another recurring theme generated more questions but this time due to time limit I was not able to get back to the respondents and dig deeper. I found information on tools for tracking progress in organization but question like 'Are those tools efficient in collecting accurate information?' and 'How their data is used to create and improve the learning and development practices?' remain unanswered. That is food for thought for following research in such direction.

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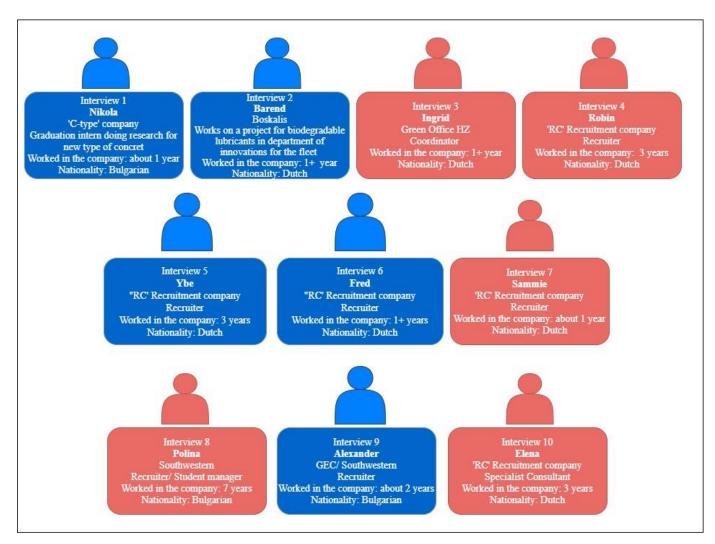
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Appendix A. Participants information

Appendix B. Example of the Codebook

Themes	Code and Quotes
Teamwork gist	*Code: Acting responsibly is acting in accordance to the team, doing right by the team/ teamwork essence* "Speaker 1: Basically, would you say this is important thing, like the responsibility/ sustainability for "RC"? Speaker 2 - Yeah, absolutely, yeah, I think so a lot because you carry a lot of responsibility towards your team and um, yeah, I think it's really important to act in a certain way that is sustainable for the whole group." (Sammie, Recruiter at "RC" - interview)

	Code: Training of soft skills on group level – team initiative to help each other "I have a colleague who has, uh, ADHD so she, uh, has really problems focusing on one thing and with "RC" is a little bit different if you're over sensitive, like for all the things that for sounds and stuff. And then, um, and we made a plan for her as a team to, uh, give her trainings every month like 'what are you doing now?' And help with her planning" (Robin, Recruiter at "RC" interview)
	Code: Responsibility practices implementation is thought collaboration. Collaboration importance and gist "So it's (pause) in the end it's a collaboration between different departments and people in order to achieve something."(Nikola, Graduation intern and researcher at "C-type" - interview)
Soft skills as necessary requirement for organizations	*Code: Soft skills and Responsible organization converging point – Organizations like RC (aka where the soft skills are in the core of the job) need Soft skills to exist* "Well, yeah, I think, uh, if, if there are no soft skills, there wouldn't be an organization like 'RC' because it's mainly built on those soft skills. So yeah, if you're, if you're really bad at talking to people or if you're antisocial or you can't, um, sell anything or it's difficult for you to understand the problems then, then RC is not a place for you to, to work. So for RC the soft skills and responsible organization, yeah, there is a hundred percent link. Otherwise, there wouldn't be an organization like RC, I think." (Fred, Recruiter at "RC" - interview)
	Code: Soft skills and Responsible organization converge *You need soft skills to do your job, mostly teamwork – without it the company will fall apart.* "A lot cause if there would be somebody, um, at 'RC' that don't have those kinds of soft skills you wouldn't survive like if the whole team was made up of people, uh, that didn't have like good communication skills or not really team players, um, then the company would fall apart because we have to work together in order to get everything done." (Sammie, Recruiter at "RC" - interview)

	Code: soft skills are necessary requirement for Responsible organization / first responsible on individual level "Speaker 2: Uhh (pause) I think you can't be responsible, you cannot have a responsible organization without soft skills I think. Speaker 1: Why do you think so? Speaker 2: Because if you want to be a responsible organization, you need responsible people. And for a responsible organization need all to collaborate and work together with each other. So if those skills are not available in your company, it's pretty hard to receive, I think, for us to receive and responsible organization." (Barend, innovations department at "Boskalis" - interview)
Effect of application of teamwork and communication on organizations	*Code: Communication helps mediate relations between clients* "Well, because, um, you know, as an employee, you, you want your employers to yeah, well to be feeling good and right. So if the, if they feel good that the company that they are working for and they can share their problems with you and if something is wrong, you can help them with it, then they also want to work longer for you. And um, for both sides, open communication I think is necessary to get the best results. So for both, for employer and the employee." (Fred, Recruiter at "RC" - interview)
	Code: Using communication helps tackle problems in advance and fosters transparency "If you're more communicative and you, um, constantly, um, um, inform other people what you're doing then other people, um, not all people, but, um, it's better for the company, because if I see something that goes wrong and my boss knows it, then we can do something about it. And if it's in general better, um, for the company, because if you only operate, if something runs wrong already, then that's beforehand. Then, uh, this is really hard to explain in English. Okay. So one part of my job is to, uh, see, um, um, risks or things that go wrong before it really goes wrong, you know, to be, uh, um, um, yeah. And so if we wait until everybody called the stage now 'we're not getting paid and everything's going wrong' then we're too late. So, um, uh, it needs to be communicated if you see something going wrong and to, um, solve this beforehand, instead of afterwards." (Elena, Specialist consultant at "RC" - interview)

	Code: You need to have a strong team to reach any goal "You know, you must really, really invest it in having a good team working together and be strong together. And that really, really affects the effectiveness of your organization. So I would say you would need soft skills for really uhh (long pause) really as one team. And then the team must also apply these soft skills. Yeah. When I'm not there yet we just lounged The Green Office. Yeah. And it's it's still hard because it's dynamic. You know, you have a changing board members." (Ingrid, founder of "Green Office HZ" - interview)
Expressions of soft skills L&D practices in organizations	*Code: Learning via manual, via personal meetings with the manager* "Yeah, I'm a little bit allergic to those kinds of things to be like this, but there is a book, uh, which, uh, which steps with that you have, uh, every, I think two or three weeks you have any other conversation with your manager and you say like 'okay, where am I right now? Why do I want to go and how do I get there?' Okay. 'First step is, uh, follow a trading floor for sales for the coming four weeks. So, after you every day, every week, once you have a training and then you see' like 'okay do I have, uh, improved my skills?' Say like 'okay, maybe yes. Okay, now I want to put it in reality'. So like the get down, going to try to call 50 companies. Like, maybe it's the next goal or whatever, whatever your goal is. So there is those steps are made or you can use it." (Ybe, Recruiter at "RC" - interview"
	Code: Training of soft skills. Group level is via webinars, presentation with speaker, interactive games, role play of job interviews, team building "I think we have webinars, um, and many time, uh, some speaker that comes here and like interactive, so it's really in here and by doing a game or, um, or like, uh, just like practicing, like, um, when you have a job interview, we practice job interviews with each other and like, okay, how do I get the right information and how do someone respond. So, I think in that way, but, so it's a combination. I think we have some webinars that you can, uh, that you can join if you want, that you can sign in for. Um, but like the team building, it's, it's with the team. It's, uh, it's in person." (Ybe, Recruiter at "RC" - interview)

	Code: Training of soft skills on organizational level is mandatory via intensive seminars for the entire organization/ also mentions about individual and group training "Um, when it comes down to the work and travel students go to America, they have 'sales school'. So it's a very five day intensive training that I've been through when I was in the Southwestern program, um, intensive training, um, about sales, about business management, about, uh, psychology a little bit as well. And everything sales related and sales is just the proper, proper communication. So anything that you can find on sales will be communication, pretty much communication, communication training. Before they go. They also have a mentor and those mentors, they have mandatory of average of like 15 meetings that they do personal one-on-one coaching. And they also do at least once a week group coaching in, uh, in Bulgaria before they go to America." (Alexander, Recruiter at "GEC" - interview)
Effects of soft skills L&D on organizations	*Code: L&D of soft skills helps company acts professional and get more results; also better at servicing the clients and employees* "So I think we would be more, um, we are professionals, but I think we could take that to a higher level of professionalism. So we would be better at even better at communication and even better at sales pitches. And I think if you train people and develop new skills or show new theories about how to, um, how to handle particular situations, uh, I think the company will be more professional and also get better results. And, um, when it comes to responsible organization, again, I think mainly, uh, we would be better, even better at helping, uh, our employees, the people that work for us." (Fred, Recruiter at "RC" - interview)

	Code: Soft skills and Responsibility converge. Soft skills encourage you to act responsibly, proactively and make you enthusiastic and therefore can increase responsible behavior "Speaker 1: Would you say they help you specifically develop responsibility, you know personal responsibility, something that you mentioned in the beginning as the five most important skills? So, would you say those training helped you build or improve the personal responsibility? Speaker 2: Yeah. I think so because on those training's they encourage you to act more freely and take your own responsibility and they make you more enthusiastic about going forward. So moving on and if you have an idea, do it and not waiting years go on. And this kinda goes together with entrepreneurial skills and together with those you can increase your responsibility." (Barend, innovations department at "Boskalis" - interview)
	Code: L&D effect on responsibility. By talking and promoting them it raises awareness and involvement in responsibility practices. The more trainings the more people start doing it. "Speaker 1 Like, do you, here's an example, do you feel, because of the trainings, your responsibility to conduct all those practices, like the J-day, taking care of students, the charity knocking, you know, do you feel like it has influenced them? Speaker 2 Of course. Speaker 2 In one way do you feel like in all it has influenced them? Speaker 2 Well, team is very important obviously and being part of a team. So just talking about it and promoting it, talking to each other 'why is this important?' It just raises everybody's involvement. You know, the more meetings you do, the more other people start to start doing it. And the more people start doing it, the more other people start doing it. So it just increases the involvement of people." (Alexander, Recruiter at "GEC" - interview)

Tracking the progress of trainings	*Code: individual evaluation of performance and progress. Manager also provides feedback for improvement* "I think, um, those are like the jobs that we have with our manager, the evaluations because every month, uh, he sits down with us and has a, a personal conversation about our process. And, uh, he will always find out things that you can do better, of course, which is very good because you come aware of yeah, how you behave at work and the, he really holds up a mirror for you. So, uh, yeah, there's always room for reflection and um, also all colleagues are really honest with each other, so they will tell you if you have to improve something, but they will also applaud if you do something right." (Sammie, Recruiter at "RC" - interview)
	Code: the company will used the collected information to the next step for her career. Clear organizational policy to collect data and record progress "I have to fill in this book and then I have to fill in this book and send it to the head office and then the, they are going to check 'okay, what, what's your talents? What can we do for you? What's kind of trainings we can give you?' and then eventually you can have, uh, the, uh, the trainings and, uh, you can have promotion" (Robin, Recruiter at "RC" - interview)
Expressions of Responsibility	*Code: organizations are responsible toward employees via lifelong employment* "They save constantly. Also investing in, uh, lifelong employment. So if you want to start at USG, you will find spot where you eventually want to go. Not for everybody, of course, because it takes a long time. I've been here for two years and I'm seeing this now for, for one year. So, if you have the patience, they will definitely, uh, search for it." (Robin, Recruiter at "RC" - interview)
	Code: Environmental responsibility -the org is having a specialist who teaches recycling of paper and garbage "we had one specialist at the office and she makes sure that we don't waste any paper that we separate the garbage, so, small things, things we try to do at our office." (Fred, Recruiter at "RC" - interview)

	Code: responsble practice towards society. Doing charity events, charity knocking to collect money for Non-profit org such as SOS villages "let's say we do a charity, a charity event when we're here in Bulgaria. We did that. Um, charity run, and then this month actually we'll do a charity knocking and we're starting start working with SOS villages here in Bulgaria to help them, um, you know, raise money for their foundation." (Polina, Recruiter/Student manager at "Southwestern" - interview)
	Code: responsibility towards candidates via platform for online trainings to help them improve their skills "they try to Mmm, Mmm, Mmm. facilitate in, uh, uh, courses or trainings for, uh, our employees. So, um, flex employees, not the people who work for ASA, but the people like yourself. Um, and, and, um, one of, um, uh, what they try to do is to make them, um, um, more experienced so that they can get better jobs and get a better career path." (Elena, Specialist consultant at "RC" - interview)
Motivating factors for responsibility	*Code: Responsible organization complies with the established government rules (the law).* "Yeah, we, we have, um, we are now for 50 years we exist, but we're at 'RC' around I think 10 years. So, uh, yeah, we have to have certain rules, like we have to be within the law that we, uh, work with." (Robin, Recruiter at "RC" - interview)
	Code: Responsibility – one of the reasons is is because the company is being monitored by the state and they have to comply with the law "Speaker 1 Would you say this is an important concept, aka to be responsible, in GEC? Speaker 2 Of course, it's, it's one of the main things, being responsible. Speaker 1 Why? Speaker 2 Well, because if I lie, I will lose my job. If the company lies, they will lose their opportunity to organize programs. So responsibility is key because we take care of students during the summer, and we're pretty much the sponsor companies in America or, or, um, like the parents. And they literally take care of, uh, individually are responsible for participants and mainly exchange students that we have." (Alexander, Recruiter at 'GEC' - interview)

	Code: Motivation behind responsibility practices, in this case cleaning the park, is to do something good for the community, it is embedded in the company culture. "Well, as I said, it's in our company culture to give back and you know, when you do something nice for your community, when you do something nice for somebody else, you feel good about yourself, you feel like you have contributed. So it's not, for me, it's really not a big deal and things like that is something common." (Alexander, Recruiter at 'GEC' - interview)
	Code: Responsibility towards candidate to help them find a job because they feel it is important to help them "Um, um, in some way, yes, I think, um, um, it's very important for, uh, 'RC' to, uh, help people, uh, getting a job, uh, and help, uh, them getting further in their careers and in a personal life." (Elena, Specialist consultant at "RC" - interview)
Responsibility Triggers	*Code: responsibility towards employees is triggered by Corona crisis. they want to create sense of security* "This question right now at the moment it's a little bit sensitive. Um, um, okay. What I can say, uh, that's positive is that they have responsibility towards us right now in the Corona crisis. Uh, one of my direct colleagues, they, uh, got, uh, a contract for, um, not a temporary contract, but the long-term contract. Um, and it's something that they don't do right now because of Corona. um, um, I think that's really good from 'RC. It's also the responsibility they have for the company and for the business to, um, let it work, uh, like we did before, um, this responsibility" (Elena, Specialist consultant at "RC" - interview)

	Code: Responsibility practices trigger is ongoing discrimination and racisms. Also, he explains how they implement it
	"Yeah, yeah. I think, I think they, they, they do it, uh, not just because of the crisis, but also, for example, um, some topics are sometimes our heart in this sector, like for some times like racism is something that's, sometimes it's just an the news and then every gun everyone jumps on it. And when stuff like that happens, there's always a reaction like this. Um, for example, um, we have some documents, uh, when, when people go to work, there are a lot of documents and like back in the days, like years ago, uh, the documentation was not always that good. But then they started realizing like, okay, but if you don't have this and this happens, there is a huge problem. So then they always say like, okay, from this point we're going to do this completely different because we see, we do it wrong at the moment 'How we do it now it's not the way we shouldn't do it' um, of course they will set a meeting and stuff like that." (Ybe, Recruiter at "RC" - interview)

Appendix C. Interview guideline

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Interview Questions Master Thesis

Guidelines

</div>

Interviewer: Viktoria - researcher

Interviewee: …………………….

 I.   **Provide information in the beginning about the research:**

a. The research is about exploring the link between the soft skills and Responsible organizations. By Responsible organizations I mean **social, environmental and economic** environment, and contribute to community. Not a state but evolving through learning and development. Soft skills are also not a state but dynamic and grow the more you use them. That is why I focus on how they are learned, trained and developed in the company. Also, I want to explore the category not as individual skills because my theory is that you use more than one at the same time.

b. I will keep out of my research confidential information that I am specifically instructed not to share such as trade secrets and other sensitive information.

c. Ask for consent to record the conversation.

I. **Introducing the person: (Gender/Age/Nationality/ Position and time spend in the company)**

Name:

Organization:

What is your current position/role?

How long have you been working for …?

Tell me more about the organization you are working for.

I. **Developing a common understanding with the research topic:**
What do you understand by the term responsible organization?   -   Would you say that this is an important concept in your company? Why?   What do you understand by the term soft skills?   Do you thing the two concepts are related? How?

II. **Responsibility level in the organization:**
 	
 What are your company's responsibility practices?
 	
 How involved are you in those practices?
 	
 Who are the key actors involved in creating and implementing them? (individual level)
 	
      -    On what levels of hierarchy in the organization are those people?
 	
      -    Are they implemented bottom up or top-down?
 	
      -    Is your "management culture" oriented toward responsibility practices? How?
 	
 How would you describe the effectiveness of your company with keep up responsible practices in general?
 	
 What are the areas for improvement and pitfalls?
 	
 What are the key policies and processes? (organizational level focus)

III. **Soft skills**   What do you consider to be the most important skills? Why?   -   What about when it comes to responsible organizations, are those the same?   Yes/No Why?   How often do you use soft skills in your line of work? (application)   Do you use your soft skills when working on responsibility practices (use the one he/she named already)? Yes/No Why?   Do you have to deal with problems regarding sustainability?

How would you say soft skills affect the accomplishment of those responsibility practices?

IV. Training/ Learning and development of Soft skills

What are the training and development programs about Soft skills in your organization?

- Who conducts them? How often? In what form?

- <u>What about specifically for communication and teamwork?</u>

- Are those trainings mandatory?

What about those 5 most important skills and specifically Communication and Teamwork?

What is your organization doing to train and develop them?

Do you have individual training sessions/ coaching and guiding? (individual level)

- Are they more formal or informal?

Does your company implement workshops, experiential learning or role play, learning teams, discussion groups or meetings for teaching soft skills? (group level)

- What other practices/ forms of training does your company use?

- Would you say your organization is focused more on individual or group training?

What are the process and practices taken by your company to institutionalize the learning and development of soft skills?

- Does your company make use of learning guides or activities sheets; recording difficulties and successes; formal training sessions? (organizational level)

How would you evaluate the effectiveness of those trainings?

Do you believe learning and development soft skills help you create more responsible organization? In what way?

May I reserve the right to contact you again with additional questions and clarification?