

Employee engagement in CSR, the role of works councils

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Acknowledgment

Dear reader,

After months of hard work, I proudly present my Master Thesis ‘Employee engagement in CSR, the role of works councils’. And besides that, with this writing my time as a student of the Master Business Administration with the specialisation of Organizational Design and Development comes to an end. Through this acknowledgment, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all those who have supported and contributed to the completion of this Master Thesis.

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Abstract

This Master Thesis fills a gap in the literature about the role of the works council with employee engagement considering CSR in organizations. Due to the increasing importance of CSR in the society, employee engagement has found to be crucial to initiate the change regarding CSR in organizations. The most traditional form of employee engagement is the works council. The research question that is answered in this Master Thesis is; *What is the role of the works council in employee engagement with CSR?*

By doing nine semi-structured interviews in three different cases and coding them according to the Gioia method this research was done in an inductive manner based on the grounded theory. The findings of the interviews showed that employee engagement considering CSR is rising. However, it is found that the employees do not approach the works council very often about certain topics. It is concluded that in these organizations the employee engagement with CSR is more directly with the management and not through the works council. Although the works councils are seen as a traditional form to link the employee engagement with the management, the employees and management discuss CSR topics more directly.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Cause

Widely recognized and actively integrated into the strategic framework of modern corporations, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) pervades global businesses, as studied by many researchers (Klein, 2015; Shabana et al., 2017; Wright & Nyberg, 2015). Robust sustainability business models are distinguished by their recognition of nature as the principal stakeholder, the firm's local roots, establishment of diversified income sources and deliberate limitations on economic growth (IPCC, 2022). CSR refers to a set of corporate ethics and guidelines for businesses' practices (Aguilera et al., 2007). Related concepts are the terms corporate sustainability, corporate citizenship or concepts from the field of business ethics as "ethical leadership" (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Campbell, 2007). A lot of different actors like directors, CEO's and owners of an organization play a role in the corporate governance of CSR activities, among these actors are the employees of the organization in which the activities take place (Aguilera et al., 2021).

Previous research state the importance of employee engagement in CSR developments to make them aware of the activities, and to make sure they engage in the CSR activities which could positively influence the firm (Glavas & Willness, 2020). Employees engaging with the CSR policies and practices is essential for organizations to improve the job satisfaction of the current employees but also to attract new employees with their good business reputation regarding CSR (Aguilera et al., 2007; Cohen, 2017). In addition, employees can engage with personal and organizational CSR activities, aiming to derive value for themselves through social fulfillment, societal benefits, and personal satisfaction (Slack et al., 2015).

Despite the increased focus on CSR, and the importance of employee engagement, most organizational initiatives remain at the level of top management. Works councils are established for the purpose of employee engagement (Kaufman, 2013). These works councils are the embodiment of collective representations, they are required in organizations with more than 50 employees and have three main rights: consultation on proposed decisions, codetermination in the decision-making process and monitoring the organization (Ruck et al., 2017; Visser, 1995). This results in a possible shift of authority where there is an increase in direct participation of employees in management decision-making through works councils (Looise & Drucker, 2003).

Concluding, companies are becoming more aware of their corporate social responsibility (Aguilera et al., 2007; Wright & Nyberg, 2015). The study of Aguilera et al. (2021) and Glavas and Willness (2020) mentioned the importance of the employees' part in the corporate governance in CSR. And since works councils are established for the purpose of employee engagement this is the focus of this Master thesis, the role of the works council in employee engagement with CSR.

1.2 Problem definition

Numerous studies indicated that employee engagement through works councils can enhance organizational performance by introducing new ideas to decision-making and advising the management (Grund & Schmitt, 2013; Looise & Drucker, 2003; Wigboldus et al., 2008). Beyond organizational performance, works councils' influence on employment conditions have also been researched a lot (Grund & Schmitt, 2013). However, not much research has been conducted on the role of the works council considering employee engagement in CSR related matters (Geels, 2011). The importance and awareness with CSR in organizations is increasing (Aguilera et al., 2007). However, current studies highlight that there is a lack of research on employee engagement with CSR (Aguilera et al., 2021; Houeland & Jordhus-Lier, 2022). Since the works council is seen as the most traditional form of employee engagement this will be the focus in this Master Thesis (Kerkhof et al., 2003).

The goal of this thesis is to elaborate on the role of works councils in employee engagement considering CSR. That creates the research question that will be answered in this Master Thesis; *What is the role of the works council in employee engagement with CSR?*

This research question will be answered in a qualitative inductive multiple case study where the employees of three organizations are interviewed. Within the three different cases three participants are interviewed; an HR-manager, a works council member and an employee that has no direct role in the works council. These interviews are semi-structured to make sure all the core themes of the research are discussed but there is still room for flexibility during the interview to discuss matters that are seen as important for this research. The interviews are transcribed and coded according to the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013). Eventually, the aggregate dimensions of the Gioia method were used for an across case analysis that led to a theory about the phenomena and provide an answer to the research question.

1.3 Scientific and practical relevance

The rising significance and recognition considering CSR has led to an increasing interest in employee engagement with CSR (Aguilera et al., 2021; Aguilera et al., 2007). Employee engagement with CSR developments of an organization is considered important, nevertheless the topic is not studied enough yet (Glavas & Willness, 2020). The most traditional form of employee engagement, works councils, have been researched considering their impact on the management decision-making, and their influence on various fields have shown to be evident (Kerkhof et al., 2003). However, the impact of works councils on CSR policies and practices has remained relatively unexplored in previous research (Kaufman, 2013). Concluding, there exists a notable gap in the literature focusing on the role of the works council in the employee engagement with CSR. This can be considered interesting as the impact of works councils has shown to be of significant importance before, similar to employee engagement with CSR. But the role of works councils in employee engagement with CSR is left out. This makes it a scientifically relevant focus of this Master Thesis, because this study will create new scientific insights of the impact of works councils on employee engagement with the CSR policies and practices of the organization.

Through answering the research question organizations can become more aware of the role of works councils on employee engagement with CSR. This research provides more reasoning about the role of works councils and employee engagement in CSR. After this study it becomes more explicit for organizations how to engage employees with CSR topics, and how or whether works councils can play a role in creating this employee engagement. Increased knowledge among organizations about how to engage their employees in CSR could result in greater productivity and effectiveness of social responsibility efforts within organizations. Adding to this, researching CSR is beneficial for society as a whole as research about CSR creates awareness for climate change and social responsibility (Lee et al., 2015).

1.4 Outline

After this first introductory chapter follows the second chapter, the theoretical framework, which provides an outline of the current literature about CSR, employee engagement and works councils. Thereafter, the third chapter elaborates the research method; a qualitative, inductive, multiple-case study with nine semi-structured interviews from three different cases that are analyzed according to the Gioia method. The fourth chapter provides

an overview of the findings of the interviews and an across case analysis based on the aggregate dimensions. After that the fifth chapter provides the discussion with an answer on the research question, an elaboration of the scientific and practical contribution, the limitations of this research and recommendations for future research.

2 Theoretical background

This chapter provides an outline of the relevant findings and perspectives regarding CSR, employee engagement and works councils. This to create an overview of the current state of the literature. Increasingly, organizations are engaging in CSR as they are seen as key actors in tackling environmental effects to ensure long-term sustainability for their organization (Aguilera et al., 2021; Crowther, 2018). The concept of CSR is well-established in academic literature and has evolved over time. Common threads across diverse CSR definitions include its voluntary character, focus on managerial efforts and managing social impact, and the recognition of stakeholders with vested interests that demand consideration (Justice, 2002). Aguilera et al. (2021) state that the development of CSR activities starts in a group with corporate governance actors; owners, board of directors, CEO's, TMSs and employees. A fundamental aspect of CSR is the recognition that companies bear responsibility around environmental sustainability issues to a broad set of stakeholders (Justice, 2002; Uddin et al., 2008). This aligns with the growing emphasis on stakeholder theory, aiming to fulfill the needs of all stakeholder groups by addressing the three dimensions of CSR: economic, social and environmental (Chow & Chen, 2012; Currás-Pérez et al., 2018; Jones, 1980; Uddin et al., 2008). So, both among these stakeholders and the corporate governance regarding CSR are the employees of the organization focusing on CSR (Aguilera et al., 2021; Jones, 1980). Prior studies emphasize the significance of employee engagement in CSR initiatives, ensuring their awareness of these activities, and creating engagement could positively impact the firm (Glavas & Willness, 2020).

2.1 Employee engagement with CSR

This research focuses on employee engagement with CSR, because employee engagement in the corporate governance and CSR activities is crucial to make employees aware of CSR issues, and to make sure they do engage in the CSR activities which could positively influence the organization (Aguilera et al., 2021; Glavas & Willness, 2020). Employees play a significant role in corporate governance of CSR mostly through three mechanisms; their voice at the governing table, their power in collective bargaining rights and their collective representation (Aguilera et al., 2021).

Aguilera et al. (2007) describes engaging employees with the organizational CSR practices as a relational motive for CSR. CSR activities positively influence social relationships both within and between organizations and employees. Therefore, executing CSR activities is essential for organizations to create employee engagement, but also to attract new employees with a good business reputation regarding CSR (Aguilera et al., 2007; Cohen, 2017). Aguilera et al. (2007) outlines three individual-level motives for employees to participate in organizational CSR activities: the need for control (instrumental), the need for belongingness (relational), and the need for meaningful existence (moral). In addition, the study of Slack et al. (2015) mentions that employees can engage with either or both personal and organizational related CSR activities. This to achieve value to themselves through social fulfilment, societal gain and personal satisfaction. These three values align with the notion of meaningful existence by Aguilera et al. (2007), as employees increasingly engage in various CSR initiatives, aiming to contribute to both personal impact and the creation of moral community. Employees perceive their involvement in CSR as a representation of the social exchange with the organization, exemplified by their citizenship behaviour showcasing dedication to the organization and its wider social responsibilities (Aguilera et al., 2007; Slack et al., 2015).

The article of Glavas (2012) describes mechanisms that influence the employee engagement with the organizations' CSR practices. Firstly, there should be value alignment throughout the whole organization, secondly employees should feel free to be their whole self and express their opinions, and finally organizations should focus on the needs of all individuals. As a result, this might benefit organizations as employees use more of their full potential and they will engage more with CSR in the organization (Glavas, 2012). Furthermore, internal communication is seen as a tool to engage employees with CSR, however this is hard for organizations to accomplish because of the complex narrative process (Glavas & Willness, 2020). Haski-Leventhal et al. (2020) also mention three key themes that influence the employee engagement with CSR in an organization. The three key themes identified by Haski-Leventhal et al. (2020) are; alignment of the values of the organization and its leaders, the organizational practices and the support for CSR by the supervisors and the organization. In conclusion, while both theories emphasize the importance of aligning values within the organization, Glavas (2012) primarily focuses on the individual employees as a base for the key mechanisms, whereas Haski-Leventhal et al. (2020) places greater emphasis on organizational structures influencing employee engagement with CSR.

Concluding, it is extremely important to create employee engagement with CSR, because when employees become engaged with the CSR policies and practices of an

organization this leads to positive outcomes for both the organization and its employees (Aguilera et al., 2007; Slack et al., 2015). The social relationships within and between organizations and employees will improve and it is found that employee engagement with CSR also fulfils personal values like meaningful existence, societal gain and personal satisfaction of the employees. It became clear that aligning values within the organization is important to create employee engagement (Glavas, 2012; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020). The most traditional form of employee engagement where the focus is on value alignment within the organization is the works council (Ruck et al., 2017).

2.2 Works Council as traditional form for employee engagement

The concept of employee engagement and involvement in management decision-making traces its usage in the context of collective representation of employees through works councils (Kaufman, 2013). Works councils are the most traditional form of employee engagement focusing on value alignment because works councils provide a permanent basis for voice that includes workers across the whole organization or facility (Kaufman, 2013; Ruck et al., 2017). The works council is seen as the embodiment of collective representation due to its comprehensive set of rights, encompassing information access, consultation, participation and codetermination rights (Addison, 2009). So, to investigate employee engagement it is important to consider the role of the works council in the creation of employee engagement because the works council is seen as the most traditional form of employee engagement through its rights regarding the employees' voice.

There is a limited amount of research on the role of works councils in CSR activities, the focus on CSR and industrial relations has introduced the idea that organized labour could play a role in CSR discussions in organizations (Flanagan & Goods, 2022). Works councils are considered to stimulate industrial democracy, improve working life and benefit economic performance (Addison, 2009). A main managerial advantage of the creation of works councils is that commitment problems can be solved because works councils create trustful employment relations, effective communication and increases the legitimacy of management decisions (Mohrenweiser et al., 2012). However, employee involvement also gives employees a stronger bargaining position to influence management decision-making, which gives employees some protection against uncertainty (Mohrenweiser et al., 2012). So, the creation of a works council creates commitment and engagement among employees in ways that they get a stronger bargaining position at the management table. It creates the ability for employees to let the

management hear their voice about certain topics and decision-making processes (Addison, 2009; Flanagan & Goods, 2022; Mohrenweiser et al., 2012).

Research has been conducted on the impact of employee engagement through works councils across various fields. It can be stated that the presence of a works council has impact on economic performances in terms of productivity, labour turnover and innovation of an organization (Wigboldus et al., 2008). In addition to these functions, Streeck (1995) notes that works councils have other benefits, such as improving the quality of the decision-making, aiding the implementation of decisions through their involvement, and providing feedback to top management through middle management. Besides the managerial advantages of the works councils there also are advantages for employees. Works councils positively influences the job satisfaction of employees. Employees in an organization with a works council report a higher level of job satisfaction (Grund & Schmitt, 2013). Furthermore, the works councils give the employees more bargaining power, these are advantages for the employees (Grund & Schmitt, 2013; Mohrenweiser et al., 2012). Summarizing, prior research shows that employee engagement through works council benefits both the management and employees, improving policy outcomes. This suggests that works councils might also impact CSR policy and its effectiveness, which is the focus of this Master Thesis.

The study of Skorupińska-Cieślak (2021) identifies factors influencing the extent of impact works councils have on managerial decision-making. For example, the age of the works council, the underlying motives for its establishment, and notably, the management approach, which emerges as a pivotal determinant of the works council's effectiveness (Skorupińska-Cieślak, 2021). The significance of the management approach lies in its capacity to define the information and consultation process, thereby influencing the frequency of the meetings of the works council and the intensity of the process during the meeting (Skorupińska-Cieślak, 2021). In line with this, Houeland and Jordhus-Lier (2022) emphasize the imperative for management to establish a clear role and position for the works council. When the members of the works councils do not feel assured in their role as representatives they have little incentive to take on new issues and perspectives (Houeland & Jordhus-Lier, 2022).

Furthermore, Kerkhof et al. (2003) examined factors shaping the management-works council relationship, emphasizing trust as most important, based on respect and fair procedures. So, several determinants influence the works council's impact on managerial decisions with the management approach emerging as most important determinant (Houeland & Jordhus-Lier, 2022; Kerkhof et al., 2003; Skorupińska-Cieślak, 2021). The literature underscores the necessity for management to establish a clearly defined role and position for the works council

to create respectful treatment and fair procedures which will lead to trust between the works council and the management.

Concluding, CSR has become an important topic in a lot of organizations. Previous research showed the importance of involving employees in CSR activities and decision-making process of an organization because it will improve the social relationship (Aguilera et al., 2021). Creating employee engagement with CSR is beneficial for the organization and the employees itself, as the engagement will fulfill values of the employees which will lead to a better understanding of the policies and practices of the organization (Aguilera et al., 2007; Slack et al., 2015). Traditional channels for employee engagement, in this case being works councils, which focus on value alignment in the organization, have demonstrated a positive impact on specific organizational aspects (Ruck et al., 2017). This leads to the idea that employee engagement through works councils can also influence the CSR policies and practices of an organization. Notably, the management's approach towards the works councils significantly shapes their impact on management decisions (Houeland & Jordhus-Lier, 2022; Kerkhof et al., 2003; Skorupińska-Cieślak, 2021), forming the central focus of this Master Thesis on exploring the role of works councils in employee engagement with CSR, while considering the management approach regarding the works council.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

The purpose of this Master Thesis is to elicit further understanding about the role of the works council with employee engagement on CSR. Morgan and Smircich (1980, p. 491) state that the appropriateness of qualitative methodology in social research “derives from the nature of the social phenomena to be explored”, specifying that qualitative studies go deeper into the reasons for employees and organizations to act sustainable (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). So, to research this phenomenon a qualitative inductive approach is used based on the grounded theory (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). Inductive study approaches focus on the emergence of theory from data, in contrast with deductive study approaches that start with hypotheses and test them with data (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). This research is inspired by the grounded theory which is a qualitative research method focusing on developing a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). According to Martin and Turner (1986) grounded theory is ‘an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data’. In this study, a theoretical overview was created based on the current literature about employee engagement through works councils and it was seen that a minimal link has been made with CSR so far. This theoretical overview illuminated the focus of this thesis, which is to investigate the role of the works council in the employee engagement with CSR. A qualitative inductive research approach is thus most appropriate for this study to create a general theory about the role of the works council in the employee engagement with CSR (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Eisenhardt et al., 2016; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

This study is supported by nine in-depth interviews in three different organizations, which makes this Master Thesis a multiple case study. Given the scarcity of research done about this particular topic, a multiple case study was used because their replication logic creates a more robust and generalizable theory than single cases (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). In line with the principles of an inductive research design, a multiple case study and aligning with the research question, at first a within-case analysis and finally an across-case analysis is done aimed at identifying a consistent theory based on the findings of the interviews regarding the discussed phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003).

3.2 Data collection

For this study, qualitative interviews were conducted with three cohorts of employees at three different organizations/cases. Purposive sampling is used to recruit interviewees as it is crucial in inductive research to select participants who possess specific knowledge and perspectives related to the phenomenon being studied (Daymon & Holloway, 2010).

The interviews done, are focused on the employee engagement with the CSR policies and practices of the organization, and the role of the works council in this engagement. Besides, the management approach regarding CSR and the works council was questioned during the interviews. In line with the grounded theory and the inductive approach, the interviews are conducted in a semi-structured manner that are adapted to each interviewee group (Kallio et al., 2016). This gives the interviewee the flexibility to explain their thoughts, intentions and actions towards employee engagement through the works council with CSR freely. The semi-structured interviews are supported by an interview guideline, which can be found in Appendix 7.2. The guideline exists of an introduction part, a part focusing on the CSR policies and practices in the organization, the employee engagement with CSR, the works council and eventually the employee engagement with CSR through the works council. The guideline was the same for each interview group, however flexibility was contained through the different answers and approaches of the interviewees. The overall guideline helped to create a direction in the interview. This to make sure the interviewee talked about all the important topics, when they did not come up naturally during the interview. Following a topic list and using purposive sampling to recruit interviewees positively improves the dependability of this research, because it increases the ability to repeat the study with the same data collection procedures (Yin, 2003). All interviews were recorded for the transcriptions made afterwards. These recordings will be deleted one year after finishing this Master Thesis. After all the interviews are conducted, the analysis of the data started.

3.3 Research context

In the next part a description of the different cases and data collection through interviewees will be given. A comprehensive description of the different cases can be found in Appendix 7.1. Three organizations in the IT-industry were researched in this study. These organizations are ordinary firms without a strong sustainable profile. This to create a more general perspective and not focus solely on organizations that have CSR as a high priority in

their day-to-day activities. As some organizations have different standards for CSR policies than others. Unfortunately, due to limited accessibility all the three cases are organization within one ecosystem. However, the corporate organization and the different organizations have mentioned to all have a different focus, policy and practices, also regarding CSR. Although there is an overarching holding, informing the organizations about CSR possibilities and activities, all organizations have different approaches towards CSR decision-making which makes them suitable for this research. This study focuses solely on the independent organizations, specifically, considering their own CSR policies and their own works councils. The use of three different cases in this research improves the transferability (Yin, 1994). Besides the three different cases, there are multiple levels of analysis in each case, as there are three interviewees per organization. Within these three organizations, three employees are interviewed; the HR-manager, an employee that is participating in the works councils and an employee that is not in the works councils. In the findings section they are referred to as HR1, WorksCouncil1 and Employee 1, 1 standing for the organization. An overview of the interviewees is presented below in Figure 1. By interviewing three groups of interviewees in each case, the credibility of this research increases. This is the case because multiple sources/interviewees are used to create an overall view of the case (Yin, 2003).

Figure 1

Participants overview

Organization	Function	Referred to as:	Gender	Years of experience in the organization
1	HR- manager	HR1	Female	10
1	Employee and part of the Works Council	WorksCouncil1	Male	9,5
1	Employee (not part of the Works Council)	Employee1	Male	2,5
2	HR-manager	HR2	Female	4
2	Employee and part of the Works Council	WorksCouncil2	Male	15
2	Employee (not part of the Works Council)	Employee 2	Female	1
3	HR-manager	HR3	Female	8
3	Employee and part of the Works Council	WorksCouncil3	Male	23
3	Employee (not part of the Works Council)	Employee3	Male	7

3.4 Data analysis

3.4.1 *Transcribing*

After conducting the interviews, they are completely transcribed to stay as close as possible to the interpretations and experiences of the interviewees. Using the transcribe mode of Google Docs made the process significantly easier and more accurate. This enhances the confirmability of the research, as the goal is to maintain objectivity and neutrality to the fullest extent possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1990).

3.4.2 *Coding*

Because the goal of this inductive study is to develop a theory of general features grounding the account in empirical data, the transcriptions of the interviews were coded (Martin & Turner, 1986). In line with the inductive study approach based on the grounded theory the Gioia method is used to code and analyse the transcripts (Gioia et al., 2013). This method uses three dimensions to structure the data from the interviews. Starting with first-order codes where an attempt is made to distil categories, but these are very specific and close to the quotes of the interviewee. The first-order codes are visualized by highlighting the important quotes in the interviews, each function group got a different colour for highlighting to make it clear who said what. The second-order themes are translated from similarities and differences among the first-order codes. These second-order themes are inspired by theory in order to generate a new theory about the explained phenomena. Finally, the second-order themes are investigated to distil the emergent second-order themes into aggregate dimensions. So, the second-order themes are combined into three aggregate dimensions. These three stages of analysing create a data structure that provides a graphic representation of how there has been progressed from raw data to terms and themes in conducting the analysis (Gioia et al., 2013).

During the interviews the focus was on the CSR policies and practices of the organizations, the employee engagement with CSR, and the role of the works councils in this employee engagement with CSR. The transcriptions formed the first aggregate dimension based on examples of CSR in the organization and the employee engagement. The second aggregate dimension highlighted the works council's involvement with CSR and the employee engagement with the works council. And the last aggregate dimension was based on other employee engagement forms with CSR. The Gioia model can be seen in Figure 2 below. This

graphic representation of the analysis increases the reliability of the research, because it provides a clear presentation of the coding process (Lincoln & Guba, 1990).

In addition to the Gioia model presented below, Appendix 7.4 provides a codebook that includes illustrative quotes and explanations regarding the development of the first-order codes and second-order themes and aggregate dimensions. As can be seen not all second-order themes from the codebook are presented in the Gioia model or discussed in the findings section as some specific codes and second-order themes were employed to create a comprehensive case description for the three different cases. The second-order themes shown in the Gioia model and discussed in the findings section are specifically valuable for answering the research question.

Figure 2
Gioia Model

First-order codes	Second-order themes	Aggregate dimensions
Awareness about CSR	Awareness about CSR	Employee engagement in CSR
CSR as a point of discussion	Employee engagement with CSR in the organization	
Employees acting corporate socially responsible		
Representability of the works council	Works council in general	Employee engagement with CSR through the works council, and the management approach regarding the works council.
Works council meetings		
Main goals of the works council		
Accessibility of the works council	Employee engagement with the works council	
Issue selling by the employees		
How often is CSR on the agenda of the works council	CSR in the works council	
Employees issue selling CSR in the works council		
Ideas from the works council towards the management	Relationship between the works council and the management	
Ideas from the management towards the works council		
Employees speaks to the management directly	Other ways how employees engage with CSR	Other forms how employees engage with CSR than through the works council
Management speaks to the employees directly		
Social aspects of CSR discussed with confidant		

3.4.3 *Within-case analysis*

With a multiple case study an within-case analysis allows unique patterns of each case to emerge before the focus gets to generalizing patterns across cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). So, after coding the transcripts, the first focus was on a within-case analysis. In Appendix 7.5 the within-case analysis is shown, focusing on the differences and similarities between the answers given by the different interviewees within one case. During the analysis of the specific interviews per case it became clear that all the interviewees within one case gave similar answers about their works council, and the employee engagement with CSR. These similarities within each case gave a good overview of the overall organization. So, since the within-case analysis did not reveal notable distinctions or trends that could impact the research questions' outcome, the foundation for an across-case analysis was established using this overview of the cases.

3.4.4 *Across-case analysis*

So, in line with the inductive research design and question the findings section will provide across-case analysis looking for new constructs as well as likely ones (Eisenhardt, 1989). To strengthen the across-case analysis the data is analyzed in different ways (Eisenhardt, 1989). At first an analysis was done focused on the different employee groups across the different cases. Afterwards to create a general conclusion per case, an overall vision was created per case considering the topics including the viewpoints of all the different interviewees. These overall views were the base for the findings section. When analyzing the codes of the different cases considering the important topics, a pattern of similarities emerged in terms of policies and practices across the different cases concerning employee engagement with CSR and the works council. It became clear that the different cases showed significant similarities regarding the role of the works council in the employee engagement with CSR. These similarities across the cases are significant for answering the research question and creating a generalizing theory. Because of the large similarities, the focus of the findings section will be on the similarities across the different cases, and only the most important differences will be mentioned.

3.5 Research Ethics

This research is conducted in an ethical way and is carried out in accordance with the recommendations and approval of the Radboud University research ethics committee (REC). The Radboud University's REC assess the following criteria; scientific relevance, proportionality, methodological soundness, risks and safety, execution, data management and autonomy (Research Ethics Committee Faculty of Science, 2021). The scientific relevance is mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis. This study contributes to the lack of research about works councils in relation to employee engagement with CSR activities. This by building a theory considering the role of the works council in employee engagement with CSR. The expected gains and expected efforts of this thesis are proportional, because of the multiple cases and the outcomes of the research. The methodological soundness is captured in this method section. Every effort is made to ensure the safety and minimize the exposure risk for the research participants. This is done by completely anonymizing the interview transcriptions. As mentioned a difference is made in the findings section between the HR-manager, the works council members and the employee that is not in the works council. Adding to that, recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be deleted one year after the end of this research. Until that time the recordings and transcription are stored on a separate computer, where no one else has access to. As mentioned in the data collection section of this chapter, the research and interviews are executed by qualified personnel found by purposive sampling. Logically, the overall autonomy of the participants of this research will be respected. All interviewees signed a consent form, so they are aware of the conditions of participating in this research. This consent form can be found in Appendix 7.3. As can be seen in the consent form the interviewees fully informed that their participation in this study was entirely voluntarily. They retained the freedom to decline answering any question and had the option to discontinue their involvement in the study at any moment.

I, as researcher, have tried the best as possible to stay close to the research ethics of the Radboud University. Furthermore, I assumed responsibility for the participants in this study, ensuring their rights were acknowledged and their dignity was respected. Although, I did as much as possible to stick to the above methodology, the last chapter of this Master Thesis will provide an overview of limitations considering the research method, the findings and my role as researcher. By reflecting on the research process, the reflexivity of this study increases and it becomes clear what could have done differently to improve this research or what can be done in further research to extent the findings of this research.

4 Findings

4.1 Employee engagement with CSR

The aggregate dimension employee engagement with CSR creates a vision considering if and how employees engage with CSR. As mentioned in the method section and case description (Appendix 7.4) all three organizations do not consider CSR as a number one priority. Based on the outcomes of the interviews it can be stated that there is lack of significant focus on CSR in the daily operations and decision-making in the organizations. However, there are some examples given considering CSR activities in the organizations. For example, all organizations are moving towards a fully electric vehicle fleet. So, the organizations are thinking about CSR and how to implement it in their organization however it is not yet included in the daily operations.

During the interviews, questions were asked about the employee engagement in the CSR activities of the organization. The various organizations and interviewees presented distinct but similar viewpoints regarding employee engagement with CSR. During the interviews in Organization 3 it became clear that CSR is a topic in the conversations between the employees. Employee3, notices the increase of CSR as a topic during their walk around the office. Employee3; *“We take a stroll every day, and what you notice is that many people are somehow engaged and actively thinking about it.”* The HR-manager (HR3) notices that new employees and applicants show more interest in CSR activities and decisions. HR3; *“You can notice that there is an increasingly awareness about CSR. Recently I was sitting with a job applicant and indeed, they expressed a desire to contribute to the environment in their work when they are assigned to a project.”* This shows that in organization three the employees are increasingly engaged with CSR.

Also, in Organization 1 and 2 it is seen that an increasing part of the employees in the organization show awareness and interest in CSR. The HR-manager of Organization 2 (HR2) mentions that a large percentage of the employees act based on CSR policies and practices in the organization. HR2; *“Yes, a significant or rather, a large percentage of employees actually take action on it.”* The works council member of Organization 1 mentions that CSR is taken into account and that the employees are critical to changes considering CSR. WorksCouncil1; *“Yes, it is definitely taken into account. It’s great because the employees within this*

organization are extremely critical, so any small change that can be made is changed. This shows that also most of the employees in Organization 1 and 2 are (becoming) engaged with CSR.

The responses provided by the interviewees regarding employee engagement with CSR were quite similar in all three organizations. Across all organizations, there was a consistent mention of increasing engagement and awareness with CSR. This growth can be attributed to factors such as new employees joining the organization or a growing awareness about CSR-related changes. In these organizations it is seen that employees take actions based on CSR reasoning and that they are critical to the changes made within the organization.

4.2 Employee engagement with CSR through the works council

This aggregate dimension centers on the processes, meetings, discussions of the works council and the dynamics among the works council, the employees and the management. Comprising four second-order themes, this dimension covers works councils in general, employee engagement with works councils, CSR within the works council and the works council's interaction with the management.

4.2.1 The works councils in general

During the interviews a few general questions were asked about the works council in the three organizations. Every organization and interviewee emphasized that the works council comprises a diverse group of representatives who advocate for the employees' interests in their interactions with the management, as can be seen in the following statements.

“It is really covered from all the parts of the organization, so I think there is enough representation so to speak.” (HR1)

“Absolutely without a doubt. It's a good mix of young and old from various teams.” (Employee2)

According to the interviewees the main goal of the works council is to ensure responsible business practices. They discuss topics to create advice and consent on management requests and create employee engagement on topics that affect the collective interests of the employees. WorksCouncil1; *“We discuss things such as advice and consent requests related to changes that the management presents, and we provide our*

input on upcoming changes where we may need to have an opinion on.” They are the speaking partner of the management and represent all employees. Employee2; “The works council is the participation body and acts as the counterpart for the management on topics that affect the collective interests of the employees.”

So, in all the cases the works council was a representative group, discussing the ideas and opinions of the employees considering policies or practices with the management.

4.2.2 *The works council’s interaction with the management*

Interviews in all the organizations highlighted a robust works council-management relationship, where management values and incorporates ideas discussed in the works council meetings. Interviewees indicated that these ideas significantly influence subsequent decision-making, as exemplified by the HR-manager of Organization 2.

“Yes, the management considers it very important, and although they have the ultimate decision-making authority, they often seek alignment and consensus with the works council because it involves a large number of employees. It is crucial for the management to ensure that decisions have the support of the workforce.” (HR2)

This is also the case in Organization 3 where the employee mentions: *“The management definitely takes that [the opinion of the works council] into account, as evidenced by the final decisions, adjustments and arrangements that result from it.” (Employee3)*. Also, in Organization 1 the management and the works council are very much aligned. Employee1: *“Yes, there has been a very good balance, and we actually have very constructive discussions between the director or management and the Works Council.”*

So, in all three cases, works councils serve as representatives of employees, informing and advising management with ideas and opinions. Moreover, the management consistently demonstrates openness to employees’ and works council’s perspectives, frequently seeking their input.

4.2.3 *Employee engagement in the works council*

To research the employee engagement with the works council, questions were asked about the contact between the employee and the works council. Each works council highlights the availability of an email address for submitting ideas or discussion topics facilitating discussions during meetings and granting insight into employee's sentiments, as noted by the works council member of Organization 1.

"We have a mailbox where they can send emails with questions or suggestions, and they can also approach us directly. They know who we are, and we always have a point on the agenda for additional information from the organization. So essentially, during the works council meetings, we go around and ask each member if they have heard anything from the people in the organization."
(WorksCouncil1)

The availability of these email address and direct access to works council members cultivates an open environment for employees to share their thoughts openly, this aligns with the works councils' shared goal across all cases to stay informed about employee and organizational matters. This sense of freedom was questioned during the interviews. The interviewees mentioned that they feel the freedom and ability to talk to the works councils about their ideas and feelings considering organization wide topics. Employee1; *"They want to know what needs to be different from the perspective of the employees and make the barrier as low as possible to gather as much information as possible. So yes, it is very accessible."* HR1; *"But it is definitely nice to have a channel to discuss certain matters that are not going well, and it does not have to sound too heavy, but where there is a question it can be asked there.* This freedom is also mentioned in Organization 3 where the works council member mentions that he/she gets approached often by employees asking about the works council or their topics.

"I can't speak for everyone, but I personally feel the freedom, and I know that some colleagues feel the same way. As a member of the works council, I am often approached and asked if I can arrange certain things or if we can create a policy for them, so that is definitely the case." (WorksCouncil3)

Also, in Organization 2 the employees feel the ability to talk with the works council about certain topics. Employee2; *“Yes, I do think that if I want to report something, I would prefer to first bring it to the attention of the Works Council.”*

So, in all three organizations the employees feel the freedom and ability to discuss topics with the works council. However, the works council member of Organization 1 has the idea that there will always be some kind of barrier.

So, to further investigate the employee engagement in the works council, interview questions covered the frequency of employee-initiated discussions with the works council. The subsequent quotes indicate a consistent trend across all organizations, wherein employees infrequently bring forth topics they deem worthy for discussion. The works council member of Organization 1 mentions that once every three meetings there will be discussed something significant brought up by another employee. WorksCouncil1; *“I think about once every three meetings, there is something significant we delve into, and often the conclusion is that further research needs to be done. Then it becomes an agenda item for the next works council meeting.”* The works council member of Organization 2 states that they receive one or two mails per week, but that it does not happen that often. WorksCouncil2; *“The only thing is that we quickly check our inbox. And usually it’s just one or two emails per week, but that is already quite a lot.”* In Organization 3 as well, not many employees come up with ideas for the works council meetings. As the works council member mentions the employees also see other way to engage with CSR than through the works council. *“They know we exist. But on the other hand, a lot of employees also have this feeling like, you know, I don't really need the Works Council for that, I can handle it myself.”*

Concludingly, while employee engagement with the works councils appeared substantial, the number of ideas contributed by employees in works council meetings is limited. To boost the employee input, all organizations strive for close employee-works council relations. For instance, Organization 1 employs an ‘open seat’ policy, allowing employees to join meetings of interest alongside the works council and the management. In Organization 2 the HR-manager elaborates that, to increase the employee involvement and engagement the management wants to make it clear that they really consider the opinion of the employee important. HR2; *“It is truly a collaboration between the employees and the works council. So, it is a real conversation between us, and we definitely take their opinion into account.”* Organization 3 also tries to increase the number of ideas from the employees by letting them

know they can always ask questions about certain topics and that a conversation or a mail to the works council is really without any further obligations.

“So, you can bring up your own topics, but you can also ask questions in between like, “Hey, I heard you’re discussing something about this topic. What does it entail?” And of course, they have a level of confidentiality, so not all details of ongoing discussions can be shared. But yes, you can inquire about them, and in practice, it does work.” (Employee3)

The findings regarding employee engagement with the works council reveal that in all three cases, the works councils prioritize an open and inclusive relationship with employees, minimizing barriers to communication and encouraging free expression. While employees interviewed seemed engaged with the works council, they typically refrain from initiating discussions or proposing topics for the works council meetings, although such input is desired by the works council to stay informed about organizational matters.

4.2.4 CSR within the works council

Given the focus of this Master Thesis on employee engagement in CSR, investigating CSR in the works council meetings was crucial. The works council member of Organization 1 mentions that CSR has a limited presence on the agenda, with infrequent discussions of CSR-related concepts.

“There is one person in the works council who recently came up with an initiative regarding CSR. It happened to come from this person because he/she may have a stronger affinity with CSR. However, we have not seen much of that initiative from others yet.” (WorksCouncil1)

“It does not happen very often; we don’t get overwhelmed with such ideas from the employees.” (HR1)

Also, in Organization 2 CSR is not a major topic for the works council meeting. The employee interviewed from Organization 2 mentions to not have witnessed the works council focusing on CSR. Employee2; *“Anyway, no, I have not yet witnessed the works council focusing on CSR.”* The HR-manager however did witness the works council

discussing about the upcoming mobility plan, but not everyone agreed in line with the CSR policy. HR2; *“Of course, there is also the upcoming mobility plan that we are working on together with the works council. However, there are also colleagues who ultimately do not agree with it for various reasons.”* The interviewees of Organization 3 told no different, also in Organization 3 there has been little CSR related topics in the works council meetings. The HR-manager HR3; *“Well there has been little so far, but it’s challenging. I have never heard of anyone approaching the works council and saying, “Hey, I think we should work more in a socially responsible manner.”*

So, the findings in all three organizations considering CSR topics in the works council were really clear. There are not many CSR-related topics mentioned during the works council meetings. So, neither did the management came in with CSR related questions nor were there much ideas raised by employees for the meeting.

4.3 Other ways how employees engage with CSR

From the earlier findings, it is evident that employees are increasingly conscious of CSR policies and practices, although the works council infrequently addresses these topics with the employees. This notion suggests that employees find alternative routes to engage with CSR in the organization. Interviews revealed that many employees directly engage with their managers or the CEO to discuss CSR concerns. Given the management receptivity to both works council and employee opinions, an open atmosphere encourages employees to approach the management directly with ideas and concerns regarding CSR. The HR-manager of Organization 2 mentions that most of the employees feel free enough to discuss CSR topics directly with the management, either in group discussions with the management or in one-on-one conversations.

“We are quite an open organization and the connections between the employees and their manager are actually very good. So, when you encounter any issues, people often feel free enough to discuss them in those one-on-one conversations. So, in that sense, we are very happy with the open culture we have, where these things can even be brought up directly to the management, either in group discussions or one-on-one.” (HR2)

This also is the case in Organization 3. The HR-manager states that almost 90% of the time employees address their concerns or opinions to the management and they don't approach the works council. Most of the lines of communication go directly.

“Actually, I can say that most lines of communication go directly within the organization, more towards the management or HR directly instead of going through the works council. The CEO himself is very approachable, so if there is something, people usually go directly to him. I think that 90% of the time, they address their concerns to the management and don't approach the works council.” (HR3)

Also, in Organization 1 the employee mentions to have never felt any hesitation to approach the management or anyone else. Employee1; *“I am just one of the employees, and I have never felt any hesitation to approach anyone, including the management, to ask a question or to make a comment.* Besides, during the interviews the HR-manager of Organization 1 also mentioned that the management directly asks or speaks to the employees when they want to know their voice or opinion.

“But generally, if the management really wants to know how employees feel about something, we just ask them directly. If we were to go through the works council, it would add an extra layer to the flat organization that we value so much.” (HR1)

So, in all three organizations the management is very open towards works council's and employees' ideas and opinions, cultivating a sense of freedom that encourages direct communication between employees and management, including discussions about CSR policies and practices. These organizations describe themselves as 'open and flat', facilitating open dialogue throughout the entire organization, and this communication is reciprocal, as management also seeks direct input from the employees.

5 Conclusion & Discussion

5.1 Conclusion

The findings in the previous chapter showed that the overall answers and findings across the different cases were quite similar. That is why the focus is on the similarities to create a theory considering the role of the works council in employee engagement with CSR.

Considering employee engagement with CSR, the theoretical framework showed the significance of foster such engagement for enhancing social relationships with and between organizations and their employees (Aguilera et al., 2007; Slack et al., 2015), fulfilling values like meaningful existence, societal gain and personal satisfaction of the employees. The alignment of organizational values is important in cultivating employee engagement (Glavas, 2012; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020). Despite CSR not being a central focus of all the organizations, findings consistently indicated increased employee engagement and awareness with CSR, demonstrating employees' actions based on CSR reasoning. Considering the literature this could be the case because of the employees seeking meaningful existence, societal gain and personal satisfaction.

As the most traditional form of employee engagement the focus of the works council is on value alignment within the organization (Ruck et al., 2017). The impact of the works council is affected mostly by the management approach towards the works council. Research suggests that creating a clear role and fair procedures for the works council fosters trust (Houeland & Jordhus-Lier, 2022; Kerkhof et al., 2003; Skorupińska-Cieślak, 2021). Observed during the interviews, findings revealed the works council as a representative of employees, were striving for an open and inclusive relationship with high employee engagement. Employees mentioned feeling comfortable discussing concerns and ideas with the works councils. However, despite this engagement, limited employee input was observed across all the cases regarding CSR topics for the works council discussions. Overall, while employee engagement looked rather high and the discussions seemed open, significant employee input for the works council regarding CSR topics was lacking in all organizations.

Given the research's emphasis on the significance of management's approach in influencing the works council's impact, this aspect was also questioned during the interviews (Skorupińska-Cieślak, 2021). The findings showed that across all three cases, the management exhibited a high degree of openness, frequently seeking ideas and opinions from the works

council. The management involves the works council in decision-making processes due to their desire to seek input and ideas from the employees. Notably, employees in all organizations expressed a sense of freedom to directly engage with the management regarding their CSR-related concerns or ideas, bypassing the works council. This open communication dynamic, described by the organizations as ‘open and flat’, facilitated easy interaction between all levels within the organization, including management and employees. Considering the research of Skorupińska-Cieślak (2021) that the management approach was found out to be the factor that mostly affecting the impact of the works council, the cases showed that this management approach was so open that the employees did not use the works council to engage with CSR and that they expressed their employee engagement directly towards the management. This created the situation that CSR is not a big point in the agenda of the works council and that the employees did not bring up ideas considering CSR for the works council to discuss during their meetings.

The main question of this research is: *What is the role of the works council in employee engagement with CSR?*

The three cases researched in this Master Thesis showed that the overall employee engagement with CSR is increasing. The works council is the most traditional form of employee engagement that creates alignment between the values of the management and the employees. The impact of the works council is mostly affected by the management approach. The cases in this study demonstrated an exceptionally open management approach, leading employees to bypass the works council and instead directly communicate with the management regarding CSR policies and practices, showing their high level of employee engagement. This creates the theory that in exceptionally open organizations the role of the works council in the employee engagement regarding CSR is quite small. The works council was not used by employees to show their engagement regarding CSR. This employee engagement with CSR was shown in direct communication between the management and the employees.

5.2 Practical and scientific contribution

The outcomes of this study are partly in line with the theoretical background discussed before. In the theoretical framework it was mentioned that employee engagement with CSR improves the social relationships in the organization (Aguilera et al., 2007; Slack et al., 2015). The findings in this research showed that there was employee engagement with CSR and an open and inclusive relationship between the management and the employees, especially

regarding the employee engagement with CSR. This is thus in line with the theory of Aguilera et al. (2007) and Slack et al. (2015). Furthermore, this research contributes to the current literature about the impact of the works council which state that employee engagement through works councils increases the job satisfaction of employees and improves the productivity, labour turnover and innovation of an organization (Grund & Schmitt, 2013; Streeck, 1995; Wigboldus et al., 2008). This Master Thesis contributes to this literature by stating that the works council has a small role in the employee engagement with CSR. So, although the works council has been seen to positively influence these other fields, in this research the works council does not have a large impact on the employee engagement with CSR. In contrary the employee engagement with CSR is directly reflected towards the management instead of through the works council. So, this is in line with the literature of Skorupińska-Cieślak (2021) which considers the management approach as the most important factor on the impact of the works council.

Additionally, this Master Thesis contributes practically by raising awareness about the works council's role in employee engagement with CSR. A direct connection between employee and management regarding CSR can enhance such engagement, as the research shows rising employee involvement with CSR. Moreover, employees in open and flat organizations are inclined to communicate directly with management about their ideas rather than involving the works council. For other organizations it could be interesting when creating a clear role for the works council whether to insert CSR in their field of action or not, as the management could also directly ask the employees for their input regarding CSR as seen in this research.

5.3 Reflection and Limitations

There are some limitations to this research that can be identified. These limitations and reflections are categorized in three subtopics, a critical reflection on; the results, the method and my role as researcher.

5.3.1 *Critical reflection on the method*

A potential limitation of this study arises from my current employment within an organization that is also part of the ecosystem that includes the three researched organization, possibly introducing bias and subjectivity. However, it is important to clarify that the organization I am working for was not part of this research. Moreover, the distinct CSR

practices and works council dynamics in each organization, combined with the new insights gathered during the interviews, contribute to a more holistic perspective, further enhanced by thorough transcription to ensure accurate representation of interpretations and experiences.

A second limitation regarding the method of the study is the fact that only interviews were used in this multiple case study. However, normally in multiple case studies it is eligible using several data sources, for example archival data (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Although the fact that for this Master Thesis only interviews were used, the interviews already gave important insights in the form and context of the organization, this led to the possibility to extend the case description with important information.

A third limitation concerns the complexity of summarizing the extensive data collected from three cases and nine interviews within this multiple-case study. The qualitative richness of this data adds to the challenge (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Additionally, while mostly similarities exist across the three cases, it is crucial to acknowledge potential distinct dynamics, like insider activists or issue sellers, which might impact the findings of this Master Thesis.

5.3.2 *Critical reflection on the results*

As a result of the difficulty summarizing the richness of the data, the conclusions drawn in this Master Thesis may not be comprehensive enough to fully understand the complexities of employee engagement with CSR as there are a lot of factors influencing the employee engagement. Nevertheless, by concentrating on particular aspects of employee engagement with CSR, such as the works council and the management approach towards the works council, the conclusion became significantly evident.

Another limitation raised from the interviews revealing limited HR-manager insight into employee engagement with CSR. Although initially they were included for their knowledge considering employee engagement, this group primarily contributed to the management link, sharing valuable perspectives on the management-works council-individual employee relationship, significantly impacting the findings and conclusions of this Master Thesis.

5.3.3 *Critical reflection on my role as researcher*

Reflecting on my Master Thesis process, I take pride on my achievements, yet I would approach future theses differently. One key lesson is to initiate contact with organizations and potential interviewees earlier, considering the challenges of coordinating interviews due to busy

schedules. Nonetheless, I am pleased to have successfully conducted interviews with nine employees across three distinct organizations. Employing the Gioia method for interview coding proved beneficial, gradually forming a structured findings section and addressing the research question. While navigating the unfamiliar territory of a multiple case study, I initially debated between within-case and across-case analysis, ultimately opting for the latter after observing the lack of significant patterns or theories emerging from within-case analysis.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

Given the outlined limitations, several recommendations for future research arise. Primarily, to strengthen the current findings, it is advisable to validate the developed theory across additional cases. Additionally, an intriguing avenue for further exploration involves conducting a new inductive study incorporating archival data. This approach has the potential to enrich the study outcomes by offering a broader view of the organization's CSR policies and practices, potentially enhancing the conclusions and providing valuable contributions to the field.

Another alternative for research could involve conducting interviews with the managers or directors themselves instead of HR-managers. Such an approach could provide a more insightful perspective on employee engagement with CSR, as well as on the organization's policies and practices. Given the realization during this Master Thesis that HR-managers might not have a clear view of employee engagement with CSR, involving other managers, and potentially even the CSR manager if applicable, could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

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7 Appendix

7.1 Case description

In this Master Thesis three organizations are researched. In this Appendix a brief description will be provided about the different organizations and their services. All three cases researched are part of a bigger ecosystem of 25 organizations. Together, all organizations focus on business transformations and IT-services. With these organizations the holding of the ecosystem believes in the value of diversity in terms of both expertise and people. The unique combination of organizations and people create solutions that are different from others. The uniqueness and differences of the Conclusion companies makes them suitable for this research.

The first organization where three interviews are held is focussed on strengthening a business operation by utilizing data as productive capital. The organizations approach contributes to performance improvement, cost reduction, risk reduction and facilitating new business models. This organization of course has its own works council. During the interviews it became clear that the works council is seen as a clear representation of the whole organization (HR1). WorksCouncil1, who is a works council member mentions; “We discuss things such as advice and consent requests related to changes that the management presents, and we provide our input on upcoming changes where we may need to have an opinion on.” Which gives the idea that the whole organization, in a represented form gets a chance to give their opinion about management ideas and discussions. Considering CSR in this first organization HR1 mentions the following; “The holding is very aware of CSR and acting responsibly and we gladly hitch a ride on it. However, it is not true that we are actively pursuing it; we do try to address it, but it is not our priority.” The works council member of this organizations also mentions; “For example, you can relatively easily obtain a public transportation subscription if you want to use public transport. However, there isn’t a massive push to be extremely environmentally conscious overall. I think this example is more of coincidence.” This creates the idea that CSR is a part of the agenda, however it is not the main priority of the organization. The employees can get a public transportation subscription but it is not marketed by the organization to use the public transportation.

The second organization exists 17 years and provides SAP services. This organization explicitly mentions to take responsibility for achieving effective operational support in organizations through the implementation of SAP solutions and low-code. They strive to be the organization they would want to be a customer of. Considering CSR in this second organization, the member of the works council mentioned that he/she thinks CSR plays a role in the organization, but more in common sense. It is not a driving force, not a real objective (WorksCouncil2). The most common example by the interviewees of case 2 about CSR in the organization are about the fully electric vehicle fleet they are converting to. When discussing the works council during the interview it became clear how the role of the works council is seen by the employees. The employee that is not part of the works council mentions that the works council is a good mix of young and old employees from various teams of the organizations. “The works council is the participation body and acts as the counterpart for the management on topics that affect the collective interests of the employees” (Employee2). The HR-manager that was interviewed in Organization 2 confirms this by giving the example that the management considers the works council very important, and although the management has the ultimate decision-making authority, they often seek alignment and consensus with the works council because it involves a large number of employees. “It is crucial for the management to ensure that decisions have the support of the work force.” So, in Organization 2 CSR is not the main priority as well, although there are some policies and practices considering CSR. The works council is described as a good mix of people from the organization with whom the management seeks to find a consensus about policies and practices.

The third organization mentions to assist their clients in designing, implementing, and maintaining automated platforms that effectively facilitate innovation. These systems are scalable and resilient in this unpredictable world. Also, in this organization it is mentioned that the power of the organization lies in the passion for the profession. During the interviews it became clear that this organization is not doing much about CSR. The HR-manager of this organization mentioned “I believe that if you stand for something, in this case CSR, you should actually follow through with it. However, we are far from that point, I think.” The member of the works council that was interviewed agreed; “Well, acting according to the different aspects of CSR sounds like a conscious choice, but that simply is not the case in our organization.” So CSR is not a big point of attention in this third case. When considering the works council during the interviews the employee (that is not part of the works council) mentioned that the management definitely takes the works council into account, as evidenced by the final decisions,

adjustments and arrangements that result from it. This shows that the management is very open for the opinion and ideas of the works council.

	Main operations	Perspectives of CSR in the organization	Main perspective on the works council of the organization
Case1	Strengthening a business operation by utilizing data as productive capital	CSR is part of the agenda, however not the main focus.	Clear representation of employees that discuss management topics and ideas.
Case2	Take responsibility for achieving effective operational support in organizations through the implementation of SAP solutions and low-code	There are some policies and practices, however also not main priority.	Good mix of people representing the employees. The management considers the works council really important and often seeks alignment with the members of the works council.
Case3	Designing, implementing, and maintaining automated platforms that effectively facilitate innovation	There is not much done about CSR in this case.	Mixed group of people taken representing employees. Taken seriously by the management as evidence for future decision-making or adjustments.

7.2 Interview guideline

The same interview guide was used for all the interviews. Although during the interviews per function group the interview got a different turn as the interviewees had more knowledge about specific parts of the interview guide.

Introductie

Interview

- Background of the interviewee
- The organization
- CSR in the organization
 - a. Economic aspects of CSR
 - b. Social aspects of CSR
 - c. Ecological/ environmental aspects of CSR
- Engagement of the organization with CSR
- Employee engagement with CSR
- The works council
 - a. What does the works council look like?
 - b. Who is in the works council?
 - c. Is there a lot of contact with the works council?
 - d. Do you know what is discussed in the works council?
- Link between the employee engagement, works council and management
 - a. What is the influence of the works council on the management (decisions)?

7.3 Informed Consent

TOESTEMMINGSFORMULIER (INFORMED CONSENT)

Betreft: Master Thesis over de medewerkersbetrokkenheid met maatschappelijk verantwoord ondernemen, waarbij gefocust wordt op de rol van de ondernemingsraad of medezeggenschapsraad. Hiervoor is een interview afgenomen van ongeveer één uur waarin deze zaken zijn besproken.

Ik verklaar hierbij op voor mij duidelijke wijze, mondeling of schriftelijk, te zijn ingelicht over de aard, methode en het doel van het onderzoek.

Ik begrijp dat:

- Ik mijn medewerking aan dit onderzoek op ieder moment kan stoppen en zonder opgave van reden.
- De opname van het interview na de uitwerking verwijderd en vernietigd zal worden.
- Alle gegevens anoniem verwerkt zullen worden zonder herleidbaar te zijn tot de persoon.

Ik verklaar dat, ik:

- Geheel vrijwillig bereid ben om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek.
- Toestemming geef om het interview op te laten nemen door middel van een (type telefoon).
- Toestemming geef dat de uitkomsten van dit interview verwerkt mogen worden in desbetreffende Master Thesis.

Handtekening:

.....

Naam:

.....

Datum:

.....

Onderzoeker:

Ik heb mondeling toelichting verstrekt over de aard, methode en doel van het onderzoek. Ik verklaar mij bereid nog opkomende vragen over het onderzoek naar vermogen te beantwoorden.

Handtekening:

Naam:

Datum:

7.4 Codebook

Aggregate dimension: CSR in the organization and among the employees			
Second-order theme:	Description second-order theme	First-order concepts:	Example first-order concepts:
Perspectives on CSR in the organization.	This theme is about how the employees consider CSR in the organization.	Personal affinity with CSR	Employee2; <i>“So, those are things that I myself believe in like CSR, and the term itself shouldn’t be necessary. If we were all decent people, we wouldn’t need to talk about it, but we are not all decent people.”</i>
		Personal idea about CSR in the organization	WorksCouncil2; <i>“So, I do think CSR plays a role in the organisation, but more in common sense. It is not a driving force, not a real objective.”</i>
CSR activities in the organization	This theme really focuses on examples of CSR activities in the organization.	Social aspects of CSR	Employee 3; <i>“When I see all the efforts being made to help people with burnout symptoms, a lot is being done for the employee, let me put it this way, to ensure that he/she feels good and can perform their work well. It’s not just about staying updated in terms of knowledge, but also about your mental well-being.”</i>
		Ecological aspects of CSR	WorksCouncil1; <i>“For example, you can relatively easily obtain a public transportation subscription if you want to use public transport. However, there isn’t a massive push to be extremely environmentally conscious overall. I think this example is more of coincidence.”</i>
		Economical aspects of CSR	WorksCouncil3; <i>“Well, acting according to the economic aspects of CSR sounds like a conscious choice, but that simply is not the case in our organization.”</i>
Employee engagement in CSR	This second-order theme is based on quotes about employees being or not being engaged with CSR	Awareness about CSR	HR3; <i>“You can notice that there is an increasingly awareness about CSR. Recently I was sitting with a job applicant and indeed, they expressed a desire to contribute to the environment in their work when they are assigned to a project.”</i>

	within or outside of the organization	CSR as a point of discussion	Employee3; <i>“We take a stroll every day, and what you notice is that many people are somehow engaged and actively thinking about it.”</i>
		Employees acting corporate socially responsible	HR2; <i>“Yes, a significant or rather, a large percentage of employees actually take action on it.”</i>

Aggregate dimension: Employee engagement with CSR in the works council			
Second-order theme:	Description of second-order theme:	First-order concepts:	Example first-order concepts:
Works Council in general	This theme considers general quotes about the working of the works council	Representability of the works council	HR1; <i>“It is really covered from all the parts of the organization, so I think there is enough representation so to speak.”</i>
		Works council meetings	Employee3; <i>“During the works council meeting, we discussed the future of the company. How is it currently performing, and what can be improved? We discuss the signals received from the employees.”</i>
		Main goals of the works council	Employee2; <i>“The works council is the participation body and acts as the counterpart for the management on topics that affect the collective interests of the employees.”</i>
Employee engagement in the Works Council	Employee engagement in the Works Council is questioned as how often do employees come up with ideas for in the discussion of the Works Council.	Accessibility of the works council	Employee1; <i>“They want to know what needs to be different from the perspective of the employees and make the barrier as low as possible to gather as much information as possible. So yes, it is very accessible.”</i>
		Employees issue selling ideas to works council	WorksCouncil2; <i>“The only thing is that we quickly check our inbox. And usually it’s just one or two emails per week, but that is already quite a lot.”</i>
CSR in the Works Council	This theme focuses on examples of CSR	How often is CSR on the agenda of the Works Council	Employee2; <i>“Anyway, no, I have not yet witnessed the works council focusing on CSR.”</i>

	mentioned during the meetings of the Works Council	Employees issue selling CSR in the Works Council	WorksCouncil1; <i>“There is one person in the works council who recently came up with an initiative regarding CSR. It happened to come from this person because he/she may have a stronger affinity with CSR. However, we have not seen much of that initiative from others yet.”</i>
Relationship between the Works Council and the management	This theme is about the relationship between the works council and the management, does the works council have something to say in management decisions.	Ideas from the works Council towards the management	WorksCouncil3; <i>“I strongly feel that the management and works council are very much aligned on that issue. I strongly believe that our management genuinely prioritizes the well-being of the employees.”</i>
		Ideas from the management towards the Works Council	HR2; <i>“Yes, the management considers it very important, and although they have the ultimate decision-making authority, they often seek alignment and consensus with the Works Council because it involves a large number of employees. It is crucial for the management to ensure that decisions have the support of the workforce.”</i>

Aggregate dimension: Other forms how employees engage with CSR			
Second - order theme:	Description of second-order theme:	First-order concepts:	Example first-order concepts:
Other ways how employees engage with CSR	This theme shows quotes of employees seeing other ways to connect with the management about CSR	Employees speak to the management directly	HR3; <i>“Actually, I can say that most lines of communication go directly within the organization, more towards the management or HR directly instead of going through the works council. The CEO himself is very approachable, so if there is something, people usually go directly to him. I think that 90% of the time, they address their concerns to the management and don’t approach the works council.”</i>
		Management speaks to the employees directly	HR1; <i>“But generally, if the management really wants to know how employees feel about something, we just ask them directly. If we were to go through the works council, it would add an extra layer to the flat organization that we value so much.”</i>

		Social aspects of CSR discussed with confidant	WorksCouncil2; <i>“And if you feel the need for a more in-depth conversation that nobody within the organization should know about, there is an online psychology platform available for that.”</i>
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7.5 Within-Case analyses

This within case analyses creates an overview of the findings found per organization per second-order theme. Per case/organization there is an overview of the most important quotes of the different employees considering the second-order themes. The rightmost column of each row shows an overall conclusion of what is said by the different interviewees of that organization. These quotes and overall conclusion show that the different interviewees within one case almost every time had a similar answer/opinion considering the topics.

7.5.1 Organization I

	HR-manager	Works Council member	Employee	Overall
perspectives on CSR in the organization	"Yes, the corporate organization is actively involved as the big player; they are very consciously engaged in it, and we gladly align ourselves with that. However, it's not like we, well, we do try to contemplate on it ourselves too, but it's not the main focus, so to speak.	That's not something we specifically made a top priority, but you do sometimes see it in the assignments we undertake.	We do try to onboard clients that align best with our values. Currently, the organization is doing very well, so we can be more selective. However, if the organization faces challenges in the future, we may become less critical in evaluating CSR and the clients we take on.	There are some initiatives regarding CSR however these are mostly initiated by the corporate organization. However, CSR is not the main priority.
CSR activities in the organization	If we can do something ourselves, if we can steer them (customers) in a certain direction that ultimately benefits the environment and is the best option for both the customer and us, then we definitely want to go for it. However, for the most part, our offerings are driven by the customer demands presented to us.	10 years ago, we installed a roof with solar panels, so in that regard, we were already doing such things. Another area where we have made significant progress is with subsidies for electric cars, which have been immensely helpful.	Yes and no. So, yes, in the sense that you can relatively easily get a public transportation subscription if you want to use public transport. But, no, there isn't a huge push to be very environmentally conscious or anything like that.	There are some examples of CSR mentioned, however not many.
Employee engagement with CSR	Following an employee satisfaction survey, we organized sessions with a different theme each time, focusing on topics from the survey where we noticed either high or low scores. The goal was to delve deeper and gain insights into those areas.	We are a team of 100 people, and I think around 70% responded to the survey, so there is quite a high level of engagement.	Yes, people are definitely engaged; they pay close attention. It's interesting because the employees in the organization are extremely critical, so even the slightest changes are thoroughly examined by them.	The employees definitely show engagement with CSR.

Works council in general	But it's certainly nice to have a channel to discuss certain issues that might not be going smoothly – that might sound a bit heavy, but where people might have questions about.	The most important thing about the works council is the focus on careful entrepreneurship	Well, you know, sometimes there are things that we see, like what advice and consent requests are still pending, what changes are coming up that we might need to have an opinion on. Those kinds of things are discussed there.	The works council discusses issues that might be hard to discuss personally, focusing on careful entrepreneurship in the organization.
CSR in the works council	Well, I do think, considering the people who are in the Works Council, that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is something they highly prioritize. However, it's not like we are overwhelmed with such ideas.	x	So, there are some things that come from the female OR member, those things happen to come from her because she might have more affinity for CSR. But indeed, we haven't seen much of it yet.	CSR is considered in the works council. However, not very much.
Employee engagement with Works council	There are elections, but they don't receive much response. I think they were only looking for one or two people, and that was also the number of candidates who expressed interest or had applied for it.	The goal of the Works Council is to understand what needs to be different from the perspective of the employees. So, let's keep the barrier as low as possible and gather as much information as we can.	Yes, I do think there is some kind of barrier, but we are trying to make it as free and open as possible.	The works council focuses on keeping the barrier for the employees low to create more employee engagement. However, it is mentioned that there is some kind of barrier
Relationship between the works council and the management	The Works Council has the right of consent or the right of advice, and that information really goes directly to the management. If they give written consent, then they go to the management, and from that position, they are included or involved.	We are almost always involved, even when it's not necessary. The director also once mentioned that he would take care of certain matters, but he didn't know much about it, so he suggested that we could take the lead on those issues.	Yes, there has been a very good balance, and we actually have very constructive discussions between the director or management and the Works Council.	There is a strong relationship between the management and the works council, as the management almost always involves the works council in corporate decision-making.

<p>Other ways how employees engage</p>	<p>There is a confidant. I may not have the official title of a confidant or something similar, but I do notice that people feel comfortable confiding in me quite easily.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>But in general, when we truly want to know what employees think about something, we just ask them directly. If we were to do it through the Works Council, it would add another layer to the flat organization that we cherish so much.</p>	<p>Yes, the Works Council is indeed the formal institution through which participation and assessment are regulated. However, fortunately, our work doesn't solely depend on it. Thankfully, there are plenty of other possibilities. Because if that were the only way, it would lead to a very formal and almost adversarial process to achieve things, and I wouldn't want that.</p>	<p>x</p>	<p>The works council is definitely not the only way how employees engage with CSR. They also ask the management directly, and the management also directly asks for the opinions of the employees about CSR.</p>
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7.5.2 Organization2

	HR-manager	Works Council Member	Employee	Overall
Perspectives on CSR in the organization	From the corporate organization, CSR policies are monitored, and programs are developed based on them. However, as organization, we are also actively engaged in this, as these pillars are the ones we collectively find important.	Yes, I assume we are working on that because they do want to engage in corporate social responsibility here. So, yes, we are considering it with energy suppliers and similar matters. However, I haven't personally witnessed it since I've been here.	I do think it's relevant, but more on a common-sense basis. It's not a driving force; no, it's not an additional objective.	Most of the CSR policies in this organization are based on the policies of the corporate organization. However, they also consider CSR themselves but it is not a driving force or additional objective.
CSR activities in the organization	Yes, for example, we focus on sustainable employability, which naturally has many aspects, including physical well-being and mental health, and how you feel at work.	Yes, definitely. Yesterday or even the day before, they announced that from January 1, 2024, you can only drive electric cars. Personally, I find that a bit complicated, to be honest.	x	Examples mentioned are about the 100% electric vehicle fleet and a project considering sustainable employability.
Employee engagement with CSR	Yes, a significant percentage is really engaging with CSR.	x	Well, we don't necessarily have a specific focus on CSR as a point on the agenda, but the entire mobility issue is on the agenda. Currently, two colleagues are involved in a group with someone from the management and that group will soon expand into a larger one.	Employees in this organization are engaging in CSR. For example through a group of the works council and partners that discuss CSR topics with the management.

Works council in general	With a total of 9 members, coming from all locations and various units within the organization, we discuss things together and also collaborate on many initiatives.	No, I know it exists. I know that the ... is the Works Council of ... and is the dialogue partner for the management on topics that concern the collective interests of the employees.	We create an agenda in advance through consultation, which includes matters relevant to both the work floor and the management level.	The works council has 9 members, as diverse as the organization. They discuss matters relevant to both the work floor and the management level and also collaborate on many initiatives of the management.
CSR in the works council	Also, of course, with the mobility plan that the management will present soon. Yes, we are working on it together. Some colleagues might not agree with it for various reasons, but that's something they can address. I think sometimes it's actually helpful that the Works Council acts as an intermediary between the employees and the management.	In the last few months that I have been working here, I haven't heard anything about CSR issues that were discussed within the Works Council.	I haven't heard much, but what I have noticed is that the Works Council is also trying to encourage employees to limit their travel distances	The mobility plan is topic of the agenda, but CSR is not a big part of the agenda since two of the three interviewees have not heard examples of CSR in the works council.
Employee engagement with Works council	During the employee satisfaction survey, we assess how the Works Council is doing. In the first part, they didn't score very well. However, it is also a role for the Works Council to actively establish their own position and influence.	Yes, we do take the opinions of the employees into account. The only thing we do regularly during a works council meeting is check our inbox. But usually, there are only 1 or 2 emails per week, and that covers most of it.	Yes, I do think that if I want to report something, I would prefer to first bring it to the attention of the Works Council.	The employee engagement with the works council is not very high. This can be seen by the fact that the works council did not score very good at the employee satisfaction survey. Besides, only 1 or 2 emails per week are sent by employees as topics for the works council.

Relationship between the works council and the management	Yes, the management considers the input from the Works Council to be of great importance. While the management can make decisions on their own, they often prefer to coordinate with the Works Council, especially when it concerns a significant number of employees. In such cases, having support and consensus is highly valued.	Yes, sometimes, the management asks the Works Council for their opinion, just to see what they think. They present certain matters to the Works Council and ask, "What do you think about this? Can we proceed in this way or not?"	x	The management considers the input from the works council to be of great importance. Sometimes the management ask the works council for their opinion although it is not required.
Other ways how employees engage	But in practice, we notice that there is a lot of coordination and communication among each other, and it often happens at an early stage of decision-making.	If you feel the need for a more in-depth conversation that doesn't have to be known by anyone within the organization, they also have an online psychologists platform for that.	Yes, you can easily skip a step. If you have something you believe should be addressed, you can just go directly to the director and say, "Listen, Mr. Director, I've heard this and that, and I don't want to bother my boss with it, but could you take a look at it because it will ultimately come to you anyway."	There is a psychologist's platform for more in-depth conversations. But when the content is more corporate related employees easily skip a step and directly talk to the manager.

7.5.3 Organization3

	HR-manager	Works Council member	Employee	Overall
perspectives on CSR in the organization	Yes, if you want to stand for something like CSR, you should go for it. But I think we are still far from achieving that; it won't happen easily.	Yes, so the director is really involved in CSR, and you can sometimes see that reflected in the decisions and actions taken.	The only concrete change I do see is driven by the holding company. They are adapting the building, and, for instance, removing all the printers from the premises.	There is some movement according to CSR however it is mostly driven by the holding. And the HR-manager mentions that the organization is far from working corporate socially responsible.
CSR activities in the organization	Yes, sustainable entrepreneurship sounds like a conscious choice, but at our company, it's just not there yet.	Certainly, the ecological aspect is the easiest one to address, and it's indeed discussed, but it's not imposed or forced from the management.	Regarding environmentally responsible business practices, no, the only thing I can think of is the electric vehicle fleet. For instance, there could be more encouragement to use public transport or bicycles to commute to the office.	It was hard to come up with examples of CSR in the organization. There are some ideas mainly about the electric vehicle fleet.
Employee engagement with CSR	From the employees' perspective, I don't hear much about it either.	We take a walk every day, and what you notice is that many people are somehow engaged with it and are indeed thinking about it.	x	The employee's engagement with CSR is seen differently. The HR-manager thinks the employee engagement with CSR is not very high, but the works council member mentions that it is a topic of conversation during their daily walk.

Works council in general	Yes, it is a diverse group.	During Works Council meetings, we discuss the future of the company, how things are currently going, and what can be improved. We address various signals we pick up, which can be about anything relevant to the organization	But mainly, that's what the Works Council is there for, to act as an organizational intermediary. Yes, you discuss it with the Works Council, explain what you want, and then it will be discussed during the meeting.	The works council is a diverse group of employees discussing the future of the company, how things are currently going and what can be improved.
CSR in the works council	I have never heard from the Works Council that someone approached them saying, "Hey, I think we should work more in a socially responsible manner."	CSR does come up in every meeting, mainly in the social and economic domains of CSR.	As far as I'm concerned, the Works Council plays a role, in my opinion, in the ecological pillar, but less in the social and economic pillars, as those aspects are more individually managed.	The works council member mentions that CSR often is a topic although the other interviewees mentions never seeing any outcomes of the works council meetings regarding CSR.
Employee engagement with Works council	Yes, indeed, the employees do approach the Works Council. Initially, I thought people didn't engage with it much, but when it came to specific questions about harmonization, some employees naturally came to me or directly to the director, while others also went to the Works Council.	I can't speak for everyone, but I personally feel that freedom, and I know that some colleagues feel the same way. As works council member, I am sometimes approached and asked if I can arrange something or create a policy for certain matters, so that happens quite often.	I'm not sure; I don't really have visibility into how often topics are brought up by employees and then discussed by the Works Council with the management. However, the Works Council repeatedly emphasizes that it is definitely a viable path to take.	The employees actively engage with the works council as they often ask the works council member for updates and information. The works council self also repeatedly emphasizes that it they are a path to take to discuss certain topics.
Relationship between the works council and the management	Yes, nothing happens before it goes through the Works Council. As management, we really want to obtain approval from the Works Council.	The Works Council is indeed there to represent the voice of the employees to the management. So, when we feel that things could be improved for the employees or if we sense that they are dissatisfied with certain matters, we do bring it up. Usually, the director responds by saying, "Come up with a proposal, and I'll consider it."	I strongly feel that the management and the Works Council are very much aligned. I also strongly feel that our management genuinely prioritizes the well-being of the employees.	There is a strong relation between the management and the works council. As the director is very open to the opinion and ideas of the works council. The employee also has the idea that the management and the works council are very much aligned.

<p>Other ways how employees engage</p>	<p>Actually, I can say that most lines of communication go directly within the organization, either to the management or HR, rather than going through the Works Council.</p>	<p>If something bothers you, you also have a field manager whom you can approach directly, and the door of the director is always open as well.</p>	<p>Within the organization, you can see that the management is approachable and is close to the employees, prioritizing the interests of the employees.</p>	<p>Most of the lines of communication go directly from the employees to the management or HR. the management is very approachable and is close to the employees.</p>
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