The Loop Effect

A qualitative case-study on how self-reinforcing sensemaking processes can generate different CSR interpretations among employee groups in a born-sustainable organization

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Abstract:

In light of environmental, social, and economical challenges Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become increasingly relevant for businesses. However, CSR is a complex concept, which can make it difficult to implement. Employees play a vital role in this regard since they are the ones that are responsible for enacting CSR. However, employees may struggle to comprehend the meaning of CSR and how it translates into their work-roles. CSR-research focused on employees falls within the field of micro-CSR, and a burgeoning stream of research within this field has adopted a sensemaking perspective to analyze how employees understand CSR as a concept. Although this stream of research is nascent, it has been focused on conventional organizations. This thesis examines how employees of a different type of organization, namely a born-sustainable organization, make sense of CSR. Such organizations have business models that are linked to sustainability and CSR, which could arguably affect how such organizations work with CSR and the subsequent sensemaking processes of its employees. Using sensemaking theory as a theoretical concept, this qualitative single-case study explores how employees of such an organization make sense of CSR. The findings of the study indicate that there are two groups of employees at the case organization that have different interpretations of what is important in terms of CSR in the context of the firm. The study finds that a lack of clarity regarding the CSR-ambitions of the firm and the expectations on employees in this regard elicits sensemaking processes in the employees as they strive to create a meaning of what CSR means for them in their work-roles. Furthermore, the study finds that the members of these groups shared similarities within the groups but also differences between them across the stages of the sensemaking process and that the interlinked and self-reinforcing process of sensemaking has resulted in the creation of these two groups and their interpretations of CSR.

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1.   Introduction

Around the world, people and societies are confronted by a variety of complex and pervasive environmental, social and economic challenges (Underwood & Murray, 2012). The urgency of these issues has placed sustainability high on the agenda for the global community reflected in, for example, the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the member states in 2015 (UN, n.d). National and regional governments have further set ambitious goals related to environmental sustainability which, in combination with increased stakeholder demands, has amplified the pressure for companies to change (Gonzalez-Perez, 2015; Tuominen et al., 2017; Tench, 2014). In response to these developments sustainability in general, but topics such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in particular have become increasingly important to corporations (Tench, 2014; Wagner & Weitz, 2009). Broadly speaking CSR refers to voluntary actions undertaken by a firm which aligns with company values and caters to broader stakeholder expectations (Novisto, 2022). This arguably puts CSR at the forefront of what companies can do to support the transition towards a more sustainable and socially responsible business sphere. However, CSR is a complex subject which tends to create uncertainty and ambiguity when enacted by organizations and employees (Miller, 2022; Sendlhofer & Tolstoy, 2022; Bhattacharya & Polman, 2017). This causes many firms to grapple when attempting to turn their CSR visions into new practices and operations (Bhattacharya & Polman, 2017). Although business leaders understand the importance of this transition, they struggle to make the shift and often have little idea about their initiatives' level of success (Bhattacharya & Polman, 2017; BCG, 2022). One plausibly contributing factor to this challenge is the nature of the topic itself as it is a complex, ambiguous and boundaryless subject constructed and enacted by multiple individuals in organizations (Williams et. al, 2021; Guthey & Morsing, 2014). An important stakeholder group in this process are employees, who hold crucial roles in fulfilling the corporate ambitions (Herremans & Mahmoudian; 2016; Lou & Bhattacharya, 2006). Although getting employees onboard is vital to realize organizational change, the subject's nature arguably makes this a challenging task for management since employees may struggle to comprehend the meaning of CSR and translate it into their work roles. Thus, in order for organizations to successfully make the transition towards more responsible practices it is vital to comprehend

employees' understanding and perception of CSR, as it may uncover clues for how to engage employees in desirable behavior (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Miller, 2022). Prior research has argued that sensemaking theory is well suited to understand CSR-related work as the concept may be seen as discursively open, ambiguous and susceptible to change of meaning over time (Williams et. al, 2021; Guthey & Morsing, 2014). Sensemaking is a process in which individuals give meaning to experiences, which helps them construct their own realities to reduce ambiguity and equivocality and address environmental uncertainty (Weick, 1995). Hence, sensemaking offers an appropriate lens to understand employees' CSR-related perceptions and behaviors (Guthey & Morsing, 2014; Miller, 2022; Onkila et al., 2017).

1.2 Background

The growing urgency and interest in CSR has created opportunities for organizations to integrate CSR into their business models and value propositions. Such firms have further been rewarded by customers, governments and investors for their products, services and positive impact (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006; Harry et al., 2023; Boström, 2020; Säll, 2021; Patagonia; 2021). Many of these organizations also use CSR in their communication for branding and marketing purposes. Some refer to themselves as *"climate heroes"* or *"waste warriors"* while others make bold purpose statements like *"we are in business to save our home planet"* when telling their brand story (Karma, n.d; Too Good To Go, 2021; Patagonia, nd.). Amongst these organizations are a group of companies who are sometimes referred to as "born-sustainable", defined by Dicuonzo and colleagues (2020) as companies who since their establishment have built businesses focused on sustainability. Such organizations are becoming increasingly prevalent in light of the urgent global challenges and positive response from the public and the business sphere. Thus, we define born sustainable organizations as organizations that have built businesses focused on sustainability by integrating it into their value propositions and business models.

Born-sustainable organizations are arguably different in respect to several aspects of their business and operations compared to "conventional" organizations. Such aspects could for example be how CSR is communicated and discussed internally and externally or how the topic is prioritized within the firm. Prior research has highlighted the importance of communication not only for individual sensemaking processes related to individual's organizational roles and

responsibilities (Weick et al., 2005; Weick & Browning, 1986), but also for their CSR-related sensemaking and behaviors (Miller, 2022; Miller & Fyke 2020). Since communication plays an essential role in such processes it is plausible that differences in this respect could affect how CSR is understood by employees. However, prior research scarcity limits our ability to say much about what born-sustainable organizations imply for employees' understanding of CSR. Thus, we cannot say if individuals in such firms understand CSR differently than those of conventional firms. We further lack knowledge about any sensemaking processes leading up to such interpretations.

Researchers have called for deeper exploration of the localized and situated nature of CSR (Miller, 2022). Studies of specific organizations like born-sustainable organizations could cater to this inquiry and uncover possible nuances within and between specific organizations as CSR may be perceived differently by different individuals, firms or in different company functions. In summary we argue that it is crucial to explore how these processes work as it could provide clarity and prescription regarding CSR-related organizational work and operations. Improved understanding of such processes would thus not only contribute to the academic field of CSR research, but also offer value to business practitioners involved in improving the CSR practices of their firms.

1.3 Purpose & Research Question

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how employees in a born-sustainable organization make sense of CSR and to contribute to the CSR literature by applying a sensemaking perspective on the topic. We thus aim to deepen the understanding for how employees in a company associated with, and characterized by, sustainability makes sense of CSR. A study of employees in this particular context could, as described above, provide novel and interesting nuances as employees of a born-sustainable firm might interpret and engage in CSR differently than those of a conventional firm. Exploration of this topic could further generate insights regarding how CSR strategies can be tailored to specific stakeholder needs and contexts to improve the effectiveness of such efforts.

The study was guided by the research question: *"How do employees in a born-sustainable organization make sense of CSR?"*. An interview-based case study of a multinational born-sustainable organization has been conducted to answer said question. Semi-structured interviews with employees at various company levels and functions provide the study's empirical foundation. To our knowledge, no study of this particular focus or setting has been conducted thus far, which further warrants our intended contribution.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction to CSR

The field of CSR research began in 1953 with Bowen's seminal work dealing with the responsibilities that businesses face (Carroll, 1999). Homer & Gill (2022) argue that CSR is conceptually dynamic and ever-changing in the face of the evolving demands on businesses. They outline how the definition of CSR has evolved since the field's inception and argue that CSR definitions have increasingly converged in the twenty-first century and are being used by organizations as a defense measure to ward off scrutiny from various stakeholders. A similar notion regarding CSR's evolution is suggested by Hamidu and colleagues (2015), who divide the evolution of CSR and its definition into distinct stages, arguing that CSR has evolved from a concept of corporate philanthropy to a more strategic orientation where CSR is used as a tool by organizations to cope with their associated demands.

Despite 70 years of research field development, there is little consensus regarding how CSR should be defined. Scholars outline various reasons for this. Dahlsrud (2008) argues that CSR is a socially constructed phenomena, which renders it impossible to define in a way that is applicable in all contexts. Argandoña & Hoivik (2009) argue similarly by claiming that CSR and its associated meaning varies between different firms, contexts, and over time. Okoye (2009) further argues that CSR by its nature is essentially contested due to its different meanings in different contexts. Similar ideas are put forward by Matten and Moon (2008) arguing that CSR is essentially contested since it is a value-laden and complicated concept with open rules for its application.

Despite the lack of scholarly consensus on the definition of CSR, some researchers have attempted to find common elements amongst suggested definitions. In a qualitative review of 37 established definitions of CSR, Dahlsrud (2008) finds the five dimensions of environmental, social, economic, stakeholder and voluntariness to be recurring. In response to Dahlsrud's review, Sarker & Searcy (2016) conducted a quantitative review of 144 CSR definitions, arguing that Dahlsrud underestimated the number of existing CSR definitions. Sarker & Searcy (2016) finds six recurring themes, namely economic, social, ethical, stakeholder, voluntariness, and

sustainability. Thus, we argue that common themes in established definitions of CSR are voluntary actions that entails taking the views of stakeholders into account in considering economic, social, and environmental factors in an ethical manner. A commonly cited definition of CSR (Gond et al., 2017; Miller, 2022; Rupp & Mallory, 2015), that we argue covers the aforementioned dimensions, is Aguinis' (2012, p.855) definition: *"Context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance"*, which is the definition of CSR adopted in this thesis.

2.3. The three levels of analysis in CSR Research

Literature on CSR is fragmented since CSR tends to be studied at one analytical level at a time. Aguinis and Glavas (2012) outline three levels of analysis in their review of CSR research covering 588 journal articles and 102 books and book chapters. The first is the institutional level, which entails studying elements of CSR that are normative, cultural-cognitive, or regulative. Examples of such research are studies on CSR in relation to regulation or external stakeholders such as consumers (ibid). The second level outlined by Aguinis & Glavas (2012) is the organizational level, entailing CSR research focused on firms and organizations. Examples of research on this analytical level includes reasons for firms choosing to pursue CSR initiatives as well as the relationship between CSR and positive financial outcomes (ibid). The third level of analysis outlined by the authors is the individual level, which entails studying CSR at the level of individuals such as employees in an organization. The authors found that CSR had mainly been studied at the institutional and organizational level at that time, highlighting that only four percent of the reviewed articles focused on the individual level of analysis. Therefore, they urged for further research on the individual level and what the authors term "microfoundations of CSR", foundations of CSR that pertain to the actions and interactions of individuals. Going forward, the microfoundations of CSR will be referred to as "micro-CSR".

2.4. Micro-CSR

In a more recent literature review, Rupp & Mallory (2015) focus specifically on micro-CSR. They concur with Aguinis & Glavas (2012) arguing that past CSR research has largely overlooked the individual level of analysis and particularly employees. The authors outline previous research on micro-CSR that for example has found that positive perceptions of a firm's CSR work is linked to increased employer attractiveness (Turban & Greening, 1997, as cited in Rupp & Mallory, 2015), that employees working for companies engaged in CSR show positive behaviors such as increased job satisfaction (De Roeack et al., 2014, as cited in Rupp & Mallory, 2015) and higher work-commitment (Brammer at el., 2007, as cited in Rupp & Mallory, 2015), but also that employees' CSR perceptions predicts improved in-role performances (Jones, 2010, as cited in Rupp & Mallory, 2015) and work engagement (Caliguiri et al., 2013, as cited in Rupp & Mallory, 2015).

There has been an increase in CSR research dealing with the individual level of analysis and micro-CSR since Aguinis' an Glavas' review in 2012 (Gond et al., 2017; Rupp & Mallory, 2015). The increased attention given to this level of analysis is important since individuals such as employees play important roles in enacting, advocating for, and complying with CSR (Crilly et al., 2008). Aguinis and Glavas (2019) concur that although the individual level of analysis of CSR has received increased scholarly attention, the research focus has tended to be on why, how, and when employees engage in CSR. Because of this they encourage research focused on how employees experience CSR and posits that a sensemaking perspective, which as previously mentioned refers to the process whereby individuals give meaning to experiences (Weick, 1995), is a suitable theoretical perspective for examining how individuals understand this topic (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). Miller (2022) similarly argues that previous studies on employee's perceptions of CSR have been mostly quantitative and that sensemaking is a suitable theory to analyze how employees understand, legitimize, create opinions of and interpret their firms' CSR-practices. Sendlhofer & Tolstoy (2022) also highlight the usefulness of sensemaking as a theoretical perspective to analyze CSR. Next follows a discussion of the existing sensemaking research in the field of micro-CSR, before outlining the identified research gap.

2.5. Existing Research on Micro-CSR & Sensemaking

As previously mentioned, sensemaking is considered by scholars to be a suitable theoretical perspective to analyze the internal workings of CSR. It is important to understand how employees make sense of CSR since they are ultimately responsible for enacting organizations' CSR-related initiatives and policies as well as acting and behaving responsibly (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Podgorodnichenko et al., 2021). Since CSR is often a novel concept that can mean different things to organizational members they must create an understanding of what CSR is and construct their own frame of reference regarding the concept, which makes sensemaking a suitable approach for analyzing how employees makes sense of CSR (Van Der Heijden et al., 2010; Štumberger & Golob, 2015). Furthermore, since CSR tends to involve activities falling outside day-to-day operations and involving a different organizational logic than the firm is used to, it can create ambiguity as organizational members might lack knowledge of CSR and thus making them unsure of how to act, which in turn elicits sensemaking processes that determines employee's CSR-enactment (Van Der Heijden et al., 2010; Nazir & Islam, 2020; Podgorodnichenko et al., 2021). Although sensemaking is considered a suitable theoretical perspective for analyzing the internal workings of CSR, CSR-related sensemaking research is still nascent (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Podgorodnichenko et al., 2021) and little research has been conducted on employees' CSR-related sensemaking despite their importance as stakeholders in organizations' CSR activities (Štumberger & Golob, 2015).

Although sensemaking research within the micro-CSR field is nascent, some research has been conducted. Some quantitative research has focused on how CSR can create meaningfulness in employees by adopting a sensemaking perspective, finding that aspects such as work orientation, moral identity, organizational factors and other factors like family and national culture influence employee's experienced meaningfulness in relation to CSR (Aguinis & Glavas 2019; Cunha et al., 2022; Nazir & Islam 2020). Some qualitative research has also been conducted on sensemaking in relation to CSR. Such research has found that formal and informal CSR-related communication in organizations aids in sensemaking and that the meaning of CSR is created through such communication as well as social interactions (Miller, 2022; Miller & Fyke, 2020). Other qualitative work utilized sensemaking theory to explore why organizational members

engage in CSR. Such scholars have for instance found an increased likelihood of CSR engagement if CSR is perceived to be important to the organization (Podgorodnichenko et al., 2021) as well as how ambiguity surrounding the concept of CSR can cause either engagement or disengagement depending on the extent to which such issues are connected to the individual's identity, personal interests, or sense of security (Bataillard, 2022).

3.2. Research Gap

While some research has been conducted on sensemaking in the field of micro-CSR-research, the field is evidently still in its infancy. We argue that the research gap our study aims to fill pertains to the type of organization studied, namely a born-sustainable organization. As previously mentioned, such organizations have value propositions and business models that are linked to sustainability. Due to the similar natures of sustainability and CSR we argue that such organizations provide a unique setting for studying employees' sensemaking processes as the business model as such can be considered inherently linked to CSR. For example, such organizations may discuss or prioritize CSR differently which might affect the CSR-related sensemaking of its employees and thus influence how CSR is understood and enacted in that context. To our knowledge, research on sensemaking within the field of micro-CSR involving such organizations has yet to be conducted. Therefore, we aim to contribute to this particular line of research by exploring how employees in a born-sustainable organization make sense of CSR. Studying CSR-related sensemaking in this context might not only provide new nuances to existing literature on sensemaking within micro-CSR but potentially also provide additional findings that could guide future research within the field. Next follows a discussion of the theoretical concept of sensemaking.

4. Theory

4.1 Sensemaking - History & Background

"Sensemaking as a concept is well named, because, literally, it means the making of sense" (Weick, 1995, p.4). Broadly speaking, it refers to the process through which people attempt to understand situations or matters perceived as novel, ambiguous, confusing or which in some other way violate expectations (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Sensemaking has grown into a popular organizational theory with substantial amounts of associated literature. The theory has its roots in ideas published in the beginning of the twentieth century, but it was not until the 1960's when Harold Garfinkel and Karl Weick published *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967) and *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (1969) respectively, that sensemaking emerged as a distinct topic of study (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Kudesia, 2017). The ideas brought forward in those texts are associated with the so-called contextualist school of behavioral strategy, which is grounded in phenomenological, constructivist and critical philosophies of science (Powell et al., 2011). This school of research understands organizational environments as not objectively defined, but socially constructed and malleable (Kudesia, 2017). According to Weick (1995), sensemaking plays a central role in the construction of both the organization and the environment it exists within. Sensemaking and organization constitutes one another, and organizations emerge through sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking further allows organizations and individuals to create structure and meaning by labeling and categorizing experiences when facing a chaotic or changing environment (ibid).

4.2. Sensemaking Triggers

The sensemaking literature, however, is not homogenous with tensions in respect to some key aspects (Brown, et al., 2015; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). For example, there is no consensus about whether sensemaking is primarily triggered by rare cues from the environment or if it should be considered to be more of a mundane, continuous, even moment to moment process (Ibid). Nevertheless, a commonly adopted view is that of Weick (1995) who sees sensemaking as ongoing but triggered by various different "shocks" which can be understood as informational cues that indicate a deviation from what is expected in a certain situation. What the "shock" is

can vary, but some occasions are more likely to trigger sensemaking. Such occasions are characterized by uncertainty, ambiguity or equivocality which, although similar, comes with slightly different associated "shocks" (Weick, 1995). Ambiguity and equivocality triggers sensemaking because people are confused with too many interpretations, thus becoming unsure of which one to adopt. While noting the conceptual overlap, Weick (1995) prefers using equivocality over ambiguity due to its explicitly stronger emphasis on the presence of two or more meanings. Other scholars have claimed that the main difference between ambiguity and equivocality is that ambiguity assumes that some "true" state of the environment exists, whilst such a state must be invented in the case of equivocality (Kudesia, 2017). However, uncertainty sensemaking is more distinct conceptually and is rather triggered from a lack of possible interpretations or an inability to make accurate predictions (Kudesia, 2017; Weick, 1995). People who face ambiguity or equivocality seek out different information or perspectives by communicating with the environment, allowing them to create and select meanings through joint interpretation (Weick, 1995). People faced with uncertainty are on the other hand likely to seek out more information allowing them to create meaning they previously were unable to create (Ibid). In both instances however, the actors use sensemaking to navigate, act and thus also shape their environment. Maitlis & Christianson (2014, p.58) summarize the overall process in a slightly different, perhaps clearer way: *"When organizational members encounter moments of ambiguity or uncertainty, they seek to clarify what is going on by extracting and interpreting cues from their environment, using these as the basis for a plausible account that provides order and "makes sense" of what has occurred, and through which they continue to enact the environment"*. Sensemaking can be conscious processes, but it can also happen more subtly as individuals' meanings can be modified over time by less salient cues (Weick & et al., 2005). This is common in parts of organizational life which do not require our full attention. However, it is important to note that this does not mean that sensemaking processes are absent in such situations, but that it is rather ongoing albeit in a less conscious manner (Ibid).

4.4. The Seven Properties of Sensemaking

In his seminal book on sensemaking Weick (1995) sets forth seven interconnected properties that make up the sensemaking process. He argues that *"Sensemaking is a process that is (1) grounded*

in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) enactive of sensible environments, (4) social, (5) ongoing, (6) focused on and by extracted cues, and (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy" (Weick, 1995, p.17).

Grounded in identity construction entails that the way in which individuals establish and maintain their identity is central in sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Equivocal or ambiguous situations force individuals and groups to ascertain their identity vis-à-vis the situation as well as how that identity might be affected when they attempt to change the environment (Kudesia, 2017). This entails that the ones we are and the things that have shaped our identity in turn affects how we make sense (Helms Mills et al., 2010), thus a person's sensemaking is affected by their identity (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015).

Retrospective means that sensemaking is done by sensemakers as they gaze backward to past experiences (Weick, 1995). The event unfolding in the present affects what the sensemaker finds when he or she looks backward, meaning that one looks to past events to make sense of the present (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Worth mentioning is that there is an ongoing scholarly debate regarding whether sensemaking can be prospective or future-oriented, or if it is inherently retrospective (Brown et al., 2015; Maitlis & Christenson; 2014; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2005). Whereas classical works such as Weick's have portrayed sensemaking as an inherently retrospective process, some scholars argue that sensemaking can be prospective, meaning that individuals consider what future impact an action might have, which affects their meaning construction (Maitlis & Christenson, 2014). Weick does not deny the possibility for prospective sensemaking, but argues that prospective sensemaking is the result of retrospective sensemaking (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Thus, there is no scholarly consensus on the temporality of sensemaking, but retrospection is nevertheless considered to be a core building block of the sensemaking process, which is why we will focus on the retrospective nature of sensemaking in this thesis.

Enactive of sensible environments entails that the purpose of sensemaking is an enacted environment more orderly to the sensemaker than the environment of the equivocal situation that prompted the process (Kudesia, 2017). Through this process sensemakers become part of their

environments, meaning that they both influence and are influenced by it when enacting their environments via sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

Sensemaking being *social* entails that it is an inherently social process, since what a person does depends on what others do regardless of whether others are physically present or imagined (Weick 1995; Sandberg & Tsoukas 2015). The way we interact with others as well as the language, symbols, routines, and rules of organizations has an impact on sensemaking (Helms Mills et al., 2010). However, sensemaking researchers have had differing views on whether sensemaking is individual or socially constructed. Some scholars argue that sensemaking is best understood as cognitive individual processes, whereas others see sensemaking as socially constructed emphasizing the interaction between people (Brown et al., 2015; Maitlis & Christenson, 2014). The individual view of sensemaking highlights that individuals rely on frameworks, such as schemata or mental maps, in making sense of situations (Brown et al., 2015). The social constructionist approach instead sees sensemaking as occurring in the discourses between people whereby they construct shared meanings. These discursive processes lead to sensemakers creating "narratives", "accounts", or "stories" which are socially co-constructed but not necessarily collectively agreed upon (Maitlis & Christenson, 2014). Thus, sensemaking can be considered to both an individual and a social process, which is also the view adopted in this thesis.

Sensemaking being *ongoing* means that sensemaking is a constantly flowing process (Helms Mills et al., 2010) and that sense is never made permanently since it can always be disrupted thus creating a need for further sensemaking (Kudesia, 2017). As Weick puts it "*to understand sensemaking is to be sensitive to the ways in which people chop moments out of continuous flows and extract cues from those moments*" (Weick, 1995, p.43). Thus, individuals are always immersed in a sensemaking process, but also identify cues and moments in this ongoing process to make sense of the situation they are facing (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

Sensemaking being *focused on and by extracted cues* means that individuals extract cues and use them as reference points for sensemaking since such cues help individuals cognitively process and tie together elements which provides raw material for interpretation and subsequent action (Weick, 1995; Kudesia, 2017). Furthermore, it entails that the sensemaker might only focus on

certain elements and ignore others when extracting cues since past experiences affect which cues are extracted (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

The final property outlined by Weick (1995) is that sensemaking is *driven by plausibility rather than accuracy*. This entails that the accuracy of the sense made is not central, instead plausibility, meaning that cues which make our sensemaking plausible are favored since they help the sensemaker gain enough clarity to act, even if this entails that the sense made is not objectively accurate (Weick 1995; Helms Mills et al., 2010; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2017).

4.5. Enactment, Selection & Retention

Weick and colleagues propose a framework in which sensemaking is regarded as *"reciprocal exchanges between actors (Enactment) and their environments (Ecological Change) that are made meaningful (Selection) and preserved (Retention)"* (Weick et al., 2005, p.414). Kudesia (2017) further links the three stages of *Enactment*, *Selection*, and *Retention* to Weick's (1995) seven properties of sensemaking to describe the sensemaking process.

Enactment is triggered by discrepancies and equivocality and involves how individuals notice and brackets information from the environment as well as how they act based on their interpretations to shape the environment and make it more orderly (Kudesia, 2017; Weick et al., 2005). Thus, *Enactment* covers the sixth, *focused on and by extracted cues* as well as the third property of sensemaking, *enactive of sensible environments* (Kudesia, 2017).

Selection entails that the sensemaker interprets bracketed information retrospectively in light of the past to reduce the numbers of possible meanings it can have and in doing so attempts to make interpretations which are plausible and actionable but not necessarily accurate (Kudesia, 2017; Weick et al., 2005). While plausible, the selected meaning is also tentative and provisional (Ibid). Thus *Selection* covers the second, *retrospective* and the seventh property of sensemaking, *driven by plausibility rather than accuracy* (Kudesia, 2017).

Retention means that the outputs of interpretations become solidified and more substantial as they are connected to identities and negotiated in social interactions (Kudesia, 2017; Weick et al., 2005). In continuous application to the equivocal environment retained interpretations serve to

guide further enactment and selection (Kudesia, 2017; Weick et al., 2005). *Retention* thus covers the first, *grounded in identity construction,* the fourth, *social,* and the fifth property of sensemaking, *ongoing* (Kudesia, 2017).

As indicated by the arrows in *Figure 1* this process is recurring and ongoing. Weick and colleagues (2005, p.415) argue that: *"Sensemaking is not about truth and getting it right. Instead, it is about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism".* However, inaccuracy in the selected meanings is not necessarily bad since organizations and their members do not always need accurate interpretations to solve problems and get closer to their goals. If an interpretation is wrong, this will be salient during *enactment* as actions may give unfavorable results or as new information might become salient. This causes the meaning to be contested and renegotiated in the latter stages generating a likely more accurate, although not perfect, understanding later on (Kudesia, 2017; Weick et al., 2005).
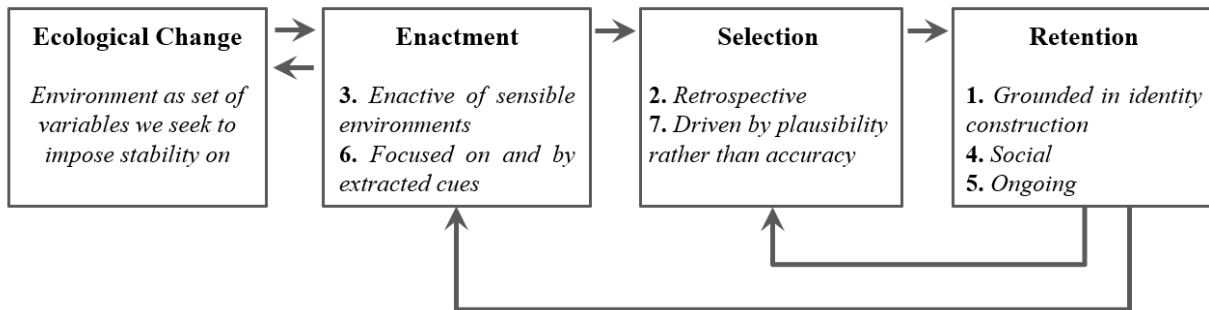
Figure 1. "Organizing as Enactment-Selection-Retention", adapted from Kudesia (2017)

4.6. Research Framework

The theoretical framework utilized in this thesis draws upon a combination of Weick's (1995) seven properties of sensemaking and the *enactment*, *selection*, and *retention* model as outlined by Kudesia (2017). As previously mentioned, *enactment* entails how the sensemaker notices and brackets information from their organizational environment (ecological change) and how they both are affected by and affect their environment through their actions (Kudesia, 2017). *Selection* entails retrospective interpretation of the present in light of the past in order to make plausible and actionable, rather than objectively accurate interpretations (ibid). *Retention* entails the

solidification and negotiation of held interpretations through social interactions, but also the connection between held interpretations and the sensemaker's identity, which both serve to guide further enactment and selection (ibid). Nevertheless, we have altered the model in two ways. First, as previously mentioned, Kudesia (2017) includes the property of *ongoing* in the *retention* stage of the model. However, in line with the definition set forward by Weick et al. (2005) we argue that this property is a characterization of the whole sensemaking process and thus most accurately depicted as a property separate from the model's respective stages. To illustrate this and the continually ongoing nature of the process we have therefore broken out the property of *ongoing*. We have also connected it to arrows pointing in various directions to illustrate that we see this process as non-sequential, meaning that all stages affect and feed into one another without any predetermined order. The rationale behind this is that we, through our interviews, have merely gained a snapshot image of the employees' ongoing sensemaking processes, thus making it impossible to discern the sequencing of its respective stages. Second, to highlight what activates the sensemaking process, we have included sensemaking triggers into the model. We argue along the lines of Weick (1995) that "shocks" of ambiguity and equivocality triggers sensemaking processes as individuals then attempt to make their organizational environment more orderly. Including ambiguity and equivocality as sensemaking triggers in the framework thus makes it clearer what prompts individuals to engage in the sensemaking process. The study's theoretical framework is illustrated in *Figure 2*.
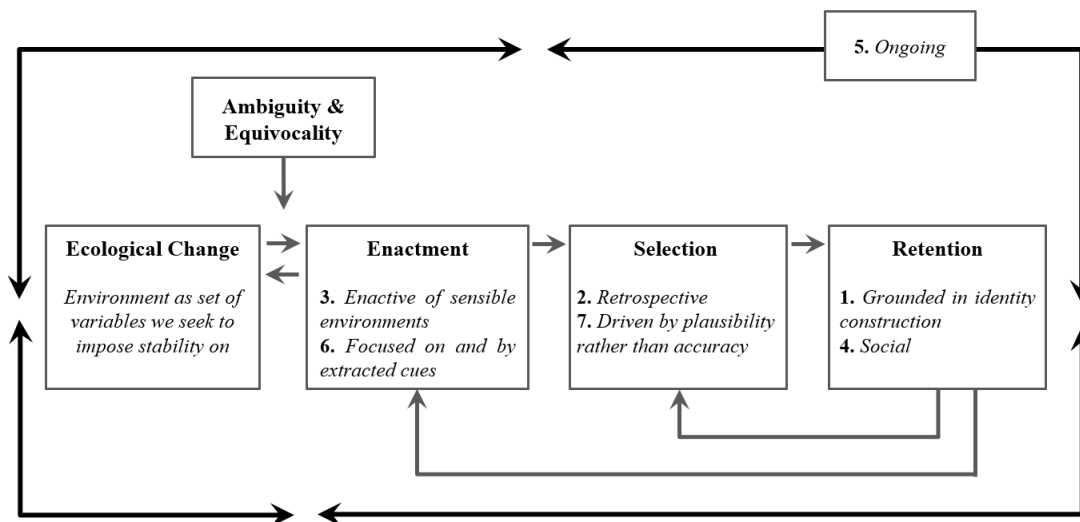
Figure 2. "The theoretical framework of this study"

5. Method

This chapter presents the methodological decisions taken in the study and motivates them with the study's purpose and research question in mind. The chapter begins by outlining the study's research design in section 5.1 followed by section 5.2 describing the method of data collection. Section 5.3 outlines the study's method of data analysis, followed by section 5.4 discussing relevant ethical considerations taken by the authors. Finally, section 5.5 highlights quality consideration in relation to the conducted study.

5.1 Research design

5.1.1 Research Philosophy – Ontological and Epistemological positions

The conducted study has adopted a constructionist ontological position. This entails seeing the world as socially constructed and in constant reconstruction through human actions and understandings (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). The theoretical concept of sensemaking utilized in this thesis posits that organizations are not objective phenomena but rather socially constructed by individual and collective sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995), which is in line with constructionist ontology.

The study has further adopted an interpretivist epistemological position, which entails a focus on understanding as opposed to explaining human behavior as well as *"the how and the why of social actions, including the processes whereby things happen"* (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022, p.32). Since this thesis has aimed to investigate how employees make sense of CSR and the processes through which these understandings take shape, this position was deemed appropriate.

5.2.2 Research Strategy – Qualitative Method

A qualitative research strategy was deemed suitable for the conducted study since the study is rooted in a constructionist ontological position as well as an interpretivist epistemological position. In taking these positions, this thesis focuses on the interactions between individuals and seeks to understand the social world that individuals are immersed in by studying how that world is interpreted by the individuals in question (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). Furthermore, since

the state of sensemaking research within the field of micro-CSR research is nascent (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Podgorodnichenko et al., 2021), a qualitative research strategy was deemed suitable for our study as it favors exploratory research and facilitates collection and analysis of the rich and detailed data needed to shed light on novel or unusual topics (Edmondson & McManus, 2007).

5.1.3 Research Design - Single Case Study

This study has adopted a case study design, which entails deeply analyzing a case and showcasing the unique features that distinguishes it (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). Given that the purpose of this thesis was to examine how employees of a born-sustainable organization make sense of and engage in CSR, a case study was a natural choice since we wanted to study a particular kind of organization. A case study approach was also suggested for future CSR-related sensemaking research by Miller (2022) who argues it facilitates deep exploration of CSR's context-specific nature. Furthermore, we consider a case study to be an appropriate approach as it is provides the opportunity for theory development through deep empirical understanding of the case and its contexts (Dubois & Gadde, 2022) and because it is especially suitable when attempting to answer "how-questions" such as the research question of this thesis (Yin, 2009). As Bryman and colleagues (2022) highlights, a case study can be conducted with either a single case or with multiple cases. Some scholars have criticized single-case studies, arguing that a single case limits formal generalizability (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Yin, 2009). Flyvbjerg (2006) challenges this view by arguing that this is a common misconception in case-study research and that formal generalization has been overemphasized. Instead a single case study can be central to scientific development through the "force of example" (Ibid). This thesis is based on a single-case study of a multinational born-sustainable organization, and we are aware of the potential limitations this entails for formal generalizability. However, we argue along the lines of Flyvbjerg (2006) and claim that conducting a single-case study of such a specific organization was appropriate in order to deeply understand the sensemaking processes of employees in such a firm.

5.1.4 Abductive approach

Dubois & Gadde (2002) highlight the usefulness of a process they term *"systemic combining"* in the context of case-studies. This process follows an abductive logic and involves a non-linear process highlighting the different ways in which research activities are linked to one another. In this process the researcher iterates between empirical observations and theory and thus creates a better understanding for both theory and empirical findings (ibid). Furthermore, adopting such an abductive approach entails that some shortcomings of deductive and inductive approaches can be overcome, namely the difficulty in selecting the theory to be tested associated with deductive approaches and the criticism that *"no amount of empirical data will necessarily enable theory building"* associated with inductive approaches (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022, p.25).

In practice this approach entailed that the authors first developed an understanding of CSR and sensemaking literature and formed a tentative research framework. Throughout the research process there has been a constant interplay between empirical observations and theory, with modifications being applied to both theory and the fashion in which empirical data was collected. For instance, the interview guide utilized to gather empirical data was iterated upon as new empirical findings surfaced in the interviews and as the theoretical framework was refined. In practice this meant that the authors continuously added, removed and altered the emphasis on certain questions of the interview guide throughout the data collection phase. Furthermore, the theoretical framework utilized in the analysis was also iterated throughout the course of the data collection and analysis process. For example, a related concept to sensemaking was initially included in the theoretical framework in order to capture how individuals might try to affect each other's sensemaking processes, but this concept was removed due to a lack of empirical support. This approach has resulted in a better understanding of both the theoretical perspective and the empirical findings of this thesis.

5.2 Data collection

5.2.1 Interview Sample

The data sample for the conducted study consists of 22 interviews with employees of the selected case organization. The selection of the case organization was done through purposeful sampling, meaning that the goal of the sampling is to sample a case that is relevant to the posed research question (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). As previously mentioned, the aim of the conducted study was to study the CSR-related sensemaking processes of employees in a specific type of organization, namely a born-sustainable organization. Thus, the case organization was purposefully selected with the study's research question and purpose in mind. The case organization, hereafter called ResQ, can be described as a multinational FMCG organization with a business model related to reducing food waste. In essence, the case organization sells production surplus that would otherwise be discarded due to, for example, imperfections or best before dates, but also offers a line of private label products.

As previously mentioned, the study's data set is made out of primary data consisting of interviews with employees at ResQ. With the research question in mind, primary data was deemed to be the most suitable type of data for the study. Since we are interested in how employees make sense of a phenomena, secondary data sources were considered to be of little value to the empirics of this study. However, we have accessed some secondary data in the form of marketing campaigns, news articles and the company's website in order to draw inspiration for the interview design and further our understanding of the organization.

The interview sample for the conducted study consists of semi-structured interviews with 22 employees at ResQ with an average length of 40 minutes each. The interviewees were sampled through purposeful sampling with the study's purpose and research question in mind (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). The interviewees were sampled to generate a wide spread in terms of functional roles and hierarchical levels, see *Table 1* for an anonymized overview of the interview sample. This was done as a diverse set of interviewees could allow us to identify and compare possible similarities or differences amongst employees in relation to their CSR-related

sensemaking. In terms of sample size, theoretical saturation was reached in the sense that no new relevant insights emerged in the final three interviews (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022).

Function	Interviewee Name	Interview Length
Procurement	Blake	52min
	Avery	45min
	Riley	36min
	Cameron	38min
	Kyle	34min
Warehouse & Logistics	Harper	33min
	Robin	24min
Tech, IT & Analytics	Jude	36min
	Elliot	42min
	Quinn	49min
Finance, Accounting & Strategy	Charlie	30min
	Rene	47min
	Kerry	31min
Sales & Commercial	Jodie	42min
	Hayden	39min
	Sammie	30min
Marketing	Jamie	44min
	Jessie	49min
	Kris	30min
	Baylor	49min
HR & Legal	Alexis	33min
	Parker	39min

Table 1. "Annonymized overview of interview sample"

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach departing from an interview guide (see appendix 1) outlining a list of questions spanning overarching concepts but at the same time allowing the interviewees a great deal of freedom in responses that deviate from the guide in line with the arguments of Bell and colleagues (2022). The interviews started with general questions concerning the background of the interviewee, followed by a section regarding the general concepts of sustainability and CSR. Interviewees were then asked to answer questions about CSR in the context of ResQ as an organization, before entering a final section where they could bring up aspects that were not captured in earlier stages of the interview. This allowed the authors to follow a somewhat structured approach in the interviews to cover the key topics of interest while allowing enough flexibility to discover and explore findings outside the interview guide. As previously mentioned, the interview guide was iterated and developed during the course of the conducted interviews in line with Dubois' and Gadde's (2002) *systemic combining* approach as empirical findings not captured by the original interview guide emerged and as the theoretical framework was refined.

When conducting the interviews, one of the authors had a more active role in asking the questions whereas the other had a more passive role consisting of taking notes and asking occasional follow-up and clarifying questions. This was deemed suitable as it allowed the passive interviewer to get an overview of both the respondents' reactions and the interview process (Bryman & Bell, 2017). After each interview, the authors further had a discussion in which they shared interesting findings and discussed possible interview guide adaptations and theoretical implications of the data. This allowed the authors to continuously move between theory and empirics while remaining open to any interesting or unexpected patterns in the data.

The interviews were transcribed upon completion as this allowed for a thorough and detailed account of the interviews and repeated examination of the interviewees' provided answers (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). Worth highlighting is that most of the interviews were conducted in Swedish, prompting the need to translate quotes utilized in the study to English. As outlined by Xian (2008, as cited in Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022), translation is as much an interpretative as a technical procedure. This was considered throughout the translation process in order to avoid biases stemming from translations. However, since the data analysis was done before translating the quotes, we believe the risk for such biases to be low.

5.3 Data Analysis

The data gathered through the conducted interviews amounted to over 14 hours of video recordings and 183 pages of transcribed text. The data has been analyzed by conducting a thematic analysis, which is one of the most common approaches for analyzing qualitative data (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022) and involves searching across the collected data to find repeating patterns or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The strength of thematic analysis lies in its ability to provide a flexible mode of analyzing qualitative data in a rich and detailed way (ibid).

The approach utilized in the present study draws inspiration from Braun's and Clark's (2006) six step approach to thematic analysis. The first step is *familiarizing yourself with the data*, which entails immersing oneself in the data through repeated reading. Step two is *generating initial codes*, which means coding interesting features of the data in a systematic way. The third step, *searching for themes*, entails sorting the codes from step two into tentative themes. Step four is *reviewing themes*, which means refining the tentative themes and in doing so first reviewing the coded extracts against the themes as well as revisiting the data set with the themes in mind to ensure their validity and code additional data that might have been overseen in the first round of coding. The fifth step, *defining and naming themes*, is concerned with refining the themes and the overall analysis by clearly defining and naming them. The sixth step is *producing the report* and entails writing the final report using examples from the data and relating the analysis to the literature and research question of the study (Braun & Clark, 2006).

In practice, the analysis process of the study roughly followed the six steps outlined by Braun & Clark (2006). The coding and thematization in the present study was conducted in accordance with what Braun & Clark (2006) term theoretical thematic analysis, which entails that thematization is driven by the theoretical interest areas of the researchers, in this case, literature on CSR and sensemaking. In practice, this entailed that we first familiarized ourselves with the empirical data through repeated readings of the interview transcripts. Next, we coded the empirical material using the software NVIVO with the theoretical perspective of the study in mind. It was decided to individually conduct the initial familiarization with and coding of the data to avoid the risk for bias and groupthink and to capture as much nuance as possible in the data. After the initial codes were produced individually, we together discussed the identified

codes to determine similarities and differences and to discern tentative themes. Once these tentative themes were identified, the theoretical framework and perspective of the study was further refined, which meant that some of the themes were either merged, refined, or removed altogether. Following this step, the interview transcripts were read again in order to further support the refined themes. Throughout this process, the themes were continuously altered and structured to build up the conducted analysis. Finally, we produced the report by writing the analysis using supportive quotes and relating the analysis to the study's theoretical framework. The final codes and corresponding themes are outlined in *Table 2*, which also follows the structure of the study's empirical analysis chapter.

Codes	Themes
ResQ's business model identifed as CSR by the employees	ResQ's business model and other initiatives viewed as CSR
Corporation with an NGO identified as CSR by the employees	
Sustainability reports identified as CSR by the employees	
CO2 calculation of products identified as CSR by the employees	
Employee benefits identifed as CSR by the employees	
Employees percieving there to be different perceptions of CSR outlining two groups	Functional groups with different interpretations of CSR
Some functions priortize scaling ResQ's business model as future CSR-efforts	
Some functions priotize intiatives decopled from the business model as future CSR-efforts	
Employees percieving both CSR-impact and profitability to be investor priorities	Lack of clarity regarding CSR generates ambiguity and equivocality
CSR and proftiability discussed in work-contexts, but with more focus on profitability	
Employees percieve clear expectations on them in regard to proftiability	
Employees percieve lack of clarity on what is expected from them in terms of CSR	
Some functions discuss CSR frequently with a broad stakeholder perspective	Differences between the groups in the *Retention* stage
Some functions discuss CSR less frequently with a commercial focus	
Employees of some functions identify with ResQ's mission and vision	
Employees of some functions identify with commercial and career-related aspects of ResQ	
Employees notice and bracket similar CSR-related information regardless of functional beloning	Differences between the groups in the *Enactment* stage
Some functions enact CSR with a focus on the business model and commercial aspects	
Some functions enact CSR with a focus on CSR-initatives outside the business model	
Some functions provide retrospective examples focused on commercial and business model aspects	Differences between the groups in the *Selection* stage
Some functions provide retrospective examples focused on CSR-intitatives decoupled from the business	
Employees use plausible rather than accurate CSR-interpretations in line with functional interpretation	

Table 2. "Final codes and corresponding themes"

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5.4 Ethical considerations

An important ethical consideration in qualitative research is anonymity to ensure that the findings of the conducted research does not risk the identification of specific individuals or organizations, unless permission has been granted (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). In this thesis we decided to anonymize both the case organization and the interviewees to ensure their integrity and allow them to be comfortable in freely expressing their views.

Extensive care has been given to anonymizing the case organization since a completely accurate representation of it would make identification rather easy due to its unique nature. Furthermore, extensive consideration has also been given to anonymizing the interviewees. One could argue that the sample of this thesis is small and fragmented since the interviewed employees belong to various functions and hierarchical levels. A vital concern particularly pertinent in qualitative research is maintaining anonymity even when sample sizes are small since small samples makes identifying specific individuals easier (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). With this in mind, the interviewed employees have been grouped into functions with similar organizational roles in order to merge functions that, if their actual functional belonging was presented, would have been small enough to jeopardize interviewees' anonymity. Furthermore, in some instances quotes have been slightly altered to ensure that individual employees cannot be identified, albeit in a way that does not change the meaning of the quotes in question.

The interviewees were also given information regarding the purpose of the study so that they could make an informed decision regarding whether they wished to participate in the study or not (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022).

5.5 Quality of Study

It has been suggested that qualitative studies should be evaluated differently than quantitative studies in terms of quality (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). Whereas the concepts of reliability and validity are used to evaluate the quality of quantitative work, some scholars have argued for the use of other concepts to evaluate qualitative research proposing that such research should instead be evaluated on its trustworthiness, which is made up of the four criteria of credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1994, as cited in Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022).

5.5.1 Credibility

Credibility entails ensuring that the research has been carried out in accordance with good practice as well as making sure that researchers' formed understandings about the social world of the research subjects is in line with the views of those studied (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). Bryman and colleagues (2022) outline data triangulation and respondent validation as means of ensuring credibility. As previously mentioned, the conducted study is grounded in primary data since its purpose makes secondary data inapplicable, thus ruling out triangulation as a means of achieving credibility. However, respondent validation has been given consideration in the conducted study. Respondent validation entails that the researchers give participants an account of the study's findings (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). This has been achieved in the present study by providing interviewees access to the thesis prior to publication in order to ensure that the researchers accurately interpreted the data and that the interviewees were quoted correctly in the transcribed material.

5.5.2 Transferability

Transferability entails the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other contexts (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). As previously mentioned, the formal generalizability of the study is affected by the choice of adopting a single-case study design. We argue however, that measures have been made to ensure transferability. One way of achieving transferability is through thick descriptions, which means providing rich and detailed accounts in order to highlight the contextual factors of the study and thus provide others with the necessary information to determine whether the study's findings are transferable to other contexts (Geertz, 1973; Guba & Lincoln, 1994, as cited in Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). This has been taken into consideration by providing as rich and detailed a description as possible of the case-company as well as its employee's views on CSR in the empirical analysis. Worth mentioning however is that transferability is limited by the efforts taken to anonymize the case-company and the

interviewees in question. It was however deemed necessary to anonymize the study to this extent to ensure the integrity of the participants and the case-company.

5.5.3 Dependability

Dependability is concerned with how trustworthy the study is, which is done by auditing the conducted research through a complete and accessible record keeping of the research process (Guba & Lincoln 1994, as cited in Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). The dependability of this study has been addressed by documenting and keeping a detailed record of the research process to enable a potential in-depth evaluation of the conducted research. Furthermore, we have strived to portray the research process as accurately and detailed as possible in this chapter in order to be transparent regarding our choices of method, data collection and analysis process. Throughout the course of our work we have also received continuous feedback on our research process from our supervisor as well as occasional feedback from student peers, which also strengthens the dependability of the thesis.

5.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability entails making sure that the researchers do not let their own personal values or theoretical perspectives affect the study or the conclusions drawn from it (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). To deal with this criterion, we have consciously reflected on and strived to keep our personal values and theoretical inclinations separate from the research process in order to avoid bias in the analysis and our drawn conclusions. Furthermore, the abductive approach entailed that the study's theoretical perspective was continuously revised as opposed to the theoretical perspective creating bias in the empirical findings. Also, the use of semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewees great flexibility in giving their answers (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). This, we argue, further strengthens the confirmability of the conducted study by reducing the risk of bias or the researcher's subjectivity influencing the answers of the interviewees.

6. Empirical Analysis

This chapter will present the empirical findings of the conducted study and continuously analyze and relate those findings to sensemaking theory. The purpose of this chapter is to, in light of our theoretical framework, outline how the sensemaking processes of the employees at ResQ have resulted in the formation of two distinct groups consisting of employees from certain functions holding different interpretations concerning what is important regarding CSR at ResQ. The first section, 6.1, outlines which aspects of ResQ the interviewees relate to the concept of CSR. Thereafter section 6.2 describes the two groups and illustrates how members of the same functional departments tend to adopt similar interpretations of how to prioritize CSR in the context of the organization. Following this discussion, section 6.3 describes how a lack of clarity regarding the firm's CSR ambitions and what is expected of the employees in their work-roles creates a catalyst for sensemaking processes. The following three sections outline how members of the respective groups differ across the stages of our theoretical framework. The final section describes how differences in sensemaking processes might have resulted in a self-reinforcing loop creating and solidifying the two groups and their associated interpretations of CSR at ResQ.

6.1 ResQ's business model and other initiatives viewed as CSR

There was a consensus amongst the interviewees in terms of what could constitute CSR in the context of the organization. Although employees placed varying emphasis on the importance of different CSR aspects at ResQ, they agreed that the firm's business model can be considered CSR. They perceived the business model's circular nature to have a positive environmental impact by ensuring that already produced goods can be sold to consumers instead of being wasted.

"We're a CSR-product. We're the solution to an industry problem where firms have had a challenge with flows of products that they have not been able to sell in their traditional channels. Sometimes it has been thrown away, sometimes it has been brought to the market in different ways, but to a very large extent it has been discarded. And we all know that things that have been discarded that should have been consumed are the biggest losses." Blake - Procurement

Others also highlighted a societal contribution as the business model enables broad access to affordable food.

"Our whole business model is about reducing food waste, which is CSR in and of itself. At the same time we have a people-oriented solution where we offer people cheap food." Charlie - Finance, Accounting & Strategy

Furthermore, the employees also considered initiatives outside ResQ's business model as CSR. Many employees highlighted a collaboration with a non-profit organization where a certain percentage of operating profits from some specific products are donated. Other identified initiatives were the firm's sustainability reporting, private label emission calculations as well as initiatives related to employee benefits.

"It would have to be our corporation with an NGO where we donate a percentage of our operating profits from certain products to an organization working to reduce world hunger. So if we look past the core of ResQ we have also aligned with an organization that works towards similar goals as us." Kris - Marketing

"We have taken an incredible step by doing our impact reporting to lift things to the surface so that we have something to benchmark ourselves against." Rene - Finance, Accounting & Strategy

"I'm thinking about our private label, that we make sure that it's sustainable and that we do these CO2-calculations so that we know how much pollution we contribute with." Alexis - HR & Legal

"On the social side we have just launched a new benefits package with more time off for the employees and the possibility to do volunteering work two days a year." Baylor - Marketing

Thus, the employees at ResQ are aware of the firm's CSR efforts and they all seem to perceive both the firm's business model and initiatives decoupled from it to be CSR. Consequently, at first glance the employees might appear aligned regarding the firm's CSR efforts. In spite of this the employee's views on the CSR efforts of ResQ are far from homogenous.

6.2 Functional groups with different interpretations of CSR

Despite the apparent alignment among the employees about what could be considered CSR at the firm, the interviews made it clear that employees differed in how they understood and believed CSR should be prioritized at ResQ. Employees described how such differences have created two*"camps*" or *"groups"* that differ in how they view CSR, both in terms of the topic's importance and its relation to financial or commercial aspects of the business, as illustrated by the quotes below.

"I would definitely say that there is tension between those who want to develop our CSR and those who think the financials are more important for the company to be successful. One could say that there are two camps regarding this." Kris - Marketing

"I think there's a group of activist employees who couldn't imagine working for a company who didn't do something sustainable at heart. And then I think there's a group of people, who are joining for commercial reasons and because they see an opportunity for career progression." Kyle - Procurement

A similar pattern was observed when the interviewed employees discussed what is most important in terms of CSR at ResQ and what the firm's CSR-ambitions and focus should be going forward. It became apparent that there were two distinct groups holding different interpretations in this regard. One group consisting of the functions Procurement, Tech, IT & Analytics, Finance, Accounting & Strategy, Warehouse & Logistics and Sales & Commercial was more commercially oriented. They argue that ResQ's main CSR-related impact stems from the firm's business model and that scaling it and achieving profitability should be the CSR-related focus going forward. Henceforth, this group will be referred to as the *commercial group*. The other group consists of the functions Marketing and HR & Legal, and adopted a broader interpretation of CSR. According to them, ResQ should and could do more in terms of CSR, stressing the importance of further developing CSR-initiatives decoupled from the firm's business model going forward. Henceforth, this group will be referred to as the *initiative group*. *Figure 3* shows an overview of the two groups and indicates each function's affiliation. Next, we will provide some examples to substantiate and clarify the functions belonging to each group.

Commercial Group **Initiative Group**

Procurement

Tech, IT & Analytics

Finance, Accounting & Strategy   *Marketing*

Warehouse & Logistics   *HR & Legal*
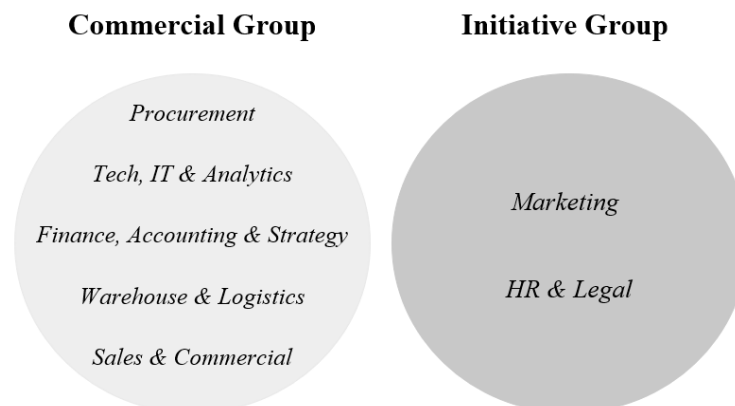
Sales & Commercial

Figure 3. "The two groups and functional affiliation"

First, members of the procurement function tended to express interpretations in line with the *commercial group*, as outlined in the following quote by Kyle discussing the current CSR-related work at ResQ.

"I think our CSR strategy doesn't really matter. It's what we do in our core that matters. So whether or not we donate shovels to Turkey, ammunition to Ukraine, I don't care. It's about us saving food and that comes from us purchasing stuff and selling it. This is our actual CSR contribution. So whether or not we do a CSR strategy for our annual report, who cares? For me, it's about us actually being sustainable at our core." Kyle - Procurement

Similar tendencies were observed within the Warehouse & Logistics function, as outlined by the quote below from Robin discussing his/her views on trade-offs between profitability and CSR.

"Here at ResQ we aim to save food but we aren't profitable yet, although that has always been the goal. Now we are on the way to achieving profitability, but to get there you must make trade-offs in other aspects. You must cut down on some other things in order to achieve profits." Robin – Warehouse & Logistics

The function of Tech, IT & Analytics also subscribed to the CSR-interpretation of the *commercial group*, which is exemplified in a quote from Quinn discussing ResQ's current CSR-related work.

"When the company was founded, it was a bit like "let's just do our thing and save food and everything is going to be great" and then we realized that we wanted to do this at a larger scale. But if we want to do that we need to earn money and we have realized that the larger impact we wish to have, the more important commercial viability is." Quinn – Tech, IT & Analytics

Similarly, the function of Finance, Accounting & Strategy also tended to adopt the *commercial group's* CSR interpretation, as outlined in the quote below where Charlie discusses CSR-initiatives outside ResQ's business model.

"We're not profitable today, so we do not really have a bag of money to spend on a school in India or something like that. We have to reinvest the money in the company so that we can continue operating and thereby helping the planet by reducing food waste." Charlie – Finance, Accounting & Strategy

The function of Sales & Commercial also tended to adopt the same interpretation, as illustrated by the quote from Hayden discussing the need for CSR-initiatives decoupled from ResQ's business model.

"I think fundamentally, our business model is doing good. So I don't think we need to do much other CSR-related activities because doing good for the environment is the natural core of what we do. So I think it makes sense for us just to focus on growing our business." Hayden – Sales & Commercial

Employees of other functions instead argued that ResQ could and should do more in terms of CSR and prioritized CSR-initiatives outside the firm's business model, thus adopting the *initiative group's* interpretation. This interpretation was adopted by members of the Marketing function, as illustrated by the following quote by Jessie.

"Of course we are not doing enough. We have emissions and calculate them but in the end we must be net-zero, so we really have to work on all fronts regarding that. And when it comes to the social aspects I'd say we have a lot of work to do regarding diversity. I don't see that we have that much diversity at all. Overall, I don't know, do we have that many social initiatives?" Jessie - Marketing

The functions of HR & Legal also tended to adopt *initiative group's* interpretation as exemplified in the quote below from Parker discussing whether or not ResQ could do more in terms of CSR.

"I'm one of those boring people who thinks that you can always do more, but I don't have any concrete suggestions or ways of doing so […] but we can always do more, I think we're a long way from being done." Parker – HR & Legal

Taken together, these findings illustrate how the employees of each function at ResQ tend to adopt interpretations of CSR that is held by either the *commercial* or the *initiative group*. This chapter's next section serves the purpose of outlining how a lack of clarity about what is expected of the employees at ResQ in terms of CSR triggers sensemaking.

6.3 Lack of clarity regarding CSR creating ambiguity and equivocality

As Weick (1995) notes, sensemaking is triggered in situations characterized by ambiguity or equivocality. The purpose of this section is to outline how such ambiguity and equivocality is experienced by the employees at ResQ due to perceived lack of clarity regarding the firm's CSR-ambitions and the related expectations on its employees.

Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that employees perceive both CSR-performance and achieving profitability as priorities for the organization. The interviewed employees experienced a twofold demand from the firm's investors in terms of both CSR-performance and profitability creating a sense of urgency to cater to both simultaneously.

"We have many investors who have invested because we're an impact company, and they want to see numbers supporting that. Some of them are green funds wanting to be classified in accordance with certain standards." Jessie - Marketing

"Investors are very interested in our CSR-performance, but the majority I'd say want to have an impact-company in their portfolio but mostly focus on the path to profitability, scalability, etcetera." Rene - Finance, Accounting & Strategy

Thus both CSR-performance, commercial success and profitability are seen as priorities by the employees, creating an impetus for them to consider all aspects as important to the organization. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that both CSR and profitability were recurring topics in company-wide meetings and other work-contexts at ResQ. However, many employees noted that profitability and other commercial aspects tended to be discussed more frequently than CSR.

"If you look at the content of our company meetings, almost all parts are dedicated to sales and the commercial side [...] Which I understand, because it's not knowledge about the food system that makes the business run. I think it's a lot more praise and focus when you present numbers and business things." Jamie - Marketing

"I think for sure the commercial side is dominant. Yes, we're a CSR-related business and we're sustainable at core, but everyday discussions are 99% commercial and 1% of saving the world -stuff. So, the mission is more put forward in the advertisements than in company discussions, those are more about: how do we make money and improve our results?" Kyle - Procurement

Furthermore, employees seemed to experience clarity in terms of what is expected of them in their work roles when it comes to achieving profitability.

"I think we're aligned about how we prioritize between business and impact where business receives most of the focus which I think is very related to the fact that we rely on external funding. We don't have endless resources and the capital market isn't great right now so it's natural that we talk mostly about profitability because if we don't, we will not exist and have zero chances of making any impact." Rene - Finance, Accounting & Strategy

Interestingly, the same clarity was not expressed in relation to what was expected from employees in relation to ResQ's CSR-related work. Many employees wanted more clarity regarding the firm's CSR-related ambitions and the expectations on them as individuals.

"I think it's great that we communicate our impact and CSR initiatives internally, but I really think it can be clearer what's expected from us as employees regarding how we should act to contribute to CSR."
Cameron -Procurement

"Now they're mostly presenting information in company meetings, but I don't really understand the implications of it. I think workshops could help, because right now it's only presented to me, and I don´t understand how it affects me or how I should think and act myself." Harper - Warehouse & Logistics

We interpret this lack of clarity in terms of the firm's CSR ambitions and expectations on employees as a source of ambiguity and equivocality regarding what CSR means at ResQ. As previously outlined in section 4.3, sensemaking is triggered in situations that are characterized by ambiguity or equivocality as it implies the existence of several possible meanings (Weick, 1995). Such circumstances create confusion and prompt individuals to engage in sensemaking processes (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). We interpret the above described lack of clarity experienced by the employees at ResQ as an indicative example of how CSR is an ambiguous and equivocal topic in the organization. Since the above mentioned aspects are not made clear to the employees, they are essentially left to their own devices in creating an understanding of what is important in terms of CSR and how this translates to their work-roles. We argue that this ambiguity and equivocality creates fertile ground for sensemaking processes as the employees strive to create a meaning for what CSR means in the context of the organization and how they should act to contribute to the firm's CSR-efforts. The nature of these sensemaking processes and how they differ between the *commercial* and *initiative groups* will be discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter through an application of our theoretical framework.

6.4 Introduction to the framework

Determining which stage of the framework to begin this discussion is far from straightforward. According to Weick (1995), Weick et al. (2005) and Kudesia (2017), sensemaking is an ongoing process in which all of the stages of our framework link together and feed into one another. Because of this it is easy to fall into "chicken or the egg" discussions about what stage comes first. Although it might not come across as the most intuitive starting point, we have chosen to use the *retention* stage as our entry point to the discussion of the two groups's sensemaking processes. We believe this makes sense for several reasons. Firstly, we argue that it carries significant explanatory value for the differences in interpretations between the *commercial* and

the *initiative groups*. Secondly, since interpretations are solidified in the *retention* stage according to Kudesia (2017), and since our empirics indicate that solidified interpretations already exist within the respective groups, it provides a natural starting point for explaining how these interpretations might have emerged. Thirdly, as Weick et al., (2005) and Kudesia (2017) argue that the *retention* stage links back to influence the *enactment* and *selection* stages of the framework, it makes sense to start the discussion here. After outlining the differences between the *commercial* and *initiative groups* in the *retention* stage, the same will be done for the *enactment* and *selection* stages. This chapter is concluded by outlining how the interconnectedness of the theoretical framework creates a self-reinforcing loop creating and strengthening the interpretations of CSR at ResQ held by the two groups.

6.5 Differences between the groups in the Retention-stage

In the *retention* stage of the theoretical framework interpretations are solidified as they are connected to individuals' identities and negotiated in social interactions. This stage thus covers property *1-grounded in identity construction* and *4-social* of Weick's (1995) seven properties of sensemaking (Kudesia, 2017). Throughout the interviews it became apparent that CSR-related sensemaking at ResQ is a social process which also seems to be affected by employees' identities. Next, we intend to discuss how members of the *commercial* and *initiative groups* differ in relation to these properties.

6.5.1 Differences between the groups in social interactions

As outlined in section 4.4 sensemaking is a social process since what a person does is affected by what others do (Weick 1995; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Individuals' social interactions have also been shown to affect their sensemaking processes (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Furthermore, as highlighted by Maitlis & Christensson (2014), sensemaking is a social and discursive process where meanings are co-constructed through social interactions. Through our interviews it became apparent that such discursive processes were present in ResQ's different functions when CSR was discussed within them. It was evident that the employees discuss CSR differently within their functions in terms of frequency and extent, but also in regard to the nature of these discussions. We will elaborate upon these findings below.

Employees of the *initiative group* mentioned that CSR is frequently discussed within their functions. Those functions further discussed CSR from a broader stakeholder perspective, often related to initiatives decoupled from ResQ's core business model. Discussions were further often related to decisions characterized by relatively high visibility to internal and external stakeholders. Jessie provided one such example when mentioning that there are ongoing discussions regarding CSR-related aspects of ResQ's private label products which are not directly linked to the business model such as working conditions, animal welfare and environmental impact.

"And then for our private label, which is a lot about discussing and screening products based on a set of criteria related to for example working conditions, animal welfare, environmental impact and health aspects." Jessie - Marketing & Communications

Alexis provides another example by mentioning that his/her function frequently considers CSR and specifically discusses it in relation to policies such as supplier codes of conduct or when drafting processes scalable for both ResQ and other actors over time.

"I'd say CSR permeates almost everything we do, but there are also meetings where we discuss it more specifically like in meetings regarding the drafting of some policy [...] we also discuss internally in our team how we in a reasonable way can create processes that are scalable over time both for us and others" - Alexis HR & Legal

Another such example is Parker who describes how s/he tries to incorporate his/her understanding of CSR in all aspects s/he can although it is not directly connected to ResQ's core business model.

"I think we as a bigger actor can make a difference and if I can influence our decisions about for example company travel or the food we eat, I will. I also have strong opinions about representation and diversity and really want to be a person who pushes for such initiatives and if I have a chance to do so, I will." - Parker HR & Legal

Similar tendencies are visible in the quote by Kris where s/he mentions that CSR is not solely discussed within the functions but that other stakeholders are sometimes involved as well.

"If we have meetings with other companies or collaborating partners, we make sure to be clear about what our core is and that we don't engage in any greenwashing and that we expect no less of our partners. Because of this we're also highly selective regarding our collaborations." Kris - Marketing

Employees belonging to the *commercial group* on the other hand seemed to discuss CSR differently in their functions. Those discussions took place less frequently and involved discussing CSR from a commercial perspective, oftentimes linked to the firm's business model. An example of this is Blake who said that his/her function has discussed CSR in relation to purchasing, where they have chosen to assess products from a strictly commercial perspective.

"We have discussed, for example, selling products containing palm oil because it's bad for the rainforest and so on […] My strong opinion is that we should not try to steer the industry in that way, rather that we're a function ensuring that already produced goods come to use […] If we're offered products containing palm oil it's still better if they're consumed then discarded, because no one will benefit from that […] We must stick to what we're without pointing fingers on how the industry should behave, because that's not our task." Blake - Procurement

Kyle offers another example of this when describing how CSR is discussed within his/her function, but from a commercial point of view emphasizing that products must make sense both commercially and in terms of assortment building and branding.

"We discuss it from a product point of view sometimes. For example, we just got offered some recycled apparel which makes sense in a brand extension kind of way, because it's a sustainable product coming from a sustainable platform. Therefore it provides some brand exposure and is aligned with our brand and product. So it's a sustainability discussion, but it's still from a commercial, branding and assortment building point of view. So we discuss it for sure, but it's a commercially based discussion." Kyle - Procurement

A similar example is highlighted by Sammie discussing instances where CSR is discussed from a commercial standpoint.

"In the normal day-to-day business with purchases, it's about trying to get a good price so that we can save more food. […] It's always about us wanting to save as much as possible. But it needs to be the right price. For example, if I push the purchaser to get a lower price I could maybe sell 10,000, and then we save more." Sammie - Sales & Commercial

However, some members of the *commercial group*, like Charlie, stated that CSR was not explicitly discussed within the function but that they still discuss how to ensure that their actions align with ResQ's business model.

"CSR as a concept isn't something we discuss, it's more that the things we push through should land in reduced food waste, that it's aligned with our business model. For example, if we look into a new concept,

we want to assess the potential upside: will customers really want this?" Charlie - Finance, Accounting & Strategy

In accordance with the suggestions of Maitlis & Christenson (2014) such discussions can be seen as the discourses used by sensemaking individuals to construct a sense of shared meanings. This implies that the focus of such discussions has a vital function in the employees' sensemaking of CSR at ResQ. Taken together, there are clear differences in how the *commercial* and *initiative groups* discuss CSR within their functions. The functions in the *initiative group* have frequent discussions about CSR in which their interpretation of CSR at ResQ goes beyond the core business model. The functions in the *commercial group* on the other hand, tend to discuss CSR in line with their held interpretation of CSR, which is more commercially oriented and often linked to the firm's business model.

Our interpretation is that these tendencies can possibly be attributed to the purpose and responsibilities of the respective functions as this arguably guides the focus and discussions within the functions. This was further highlighted by several interviewees as exemplified by Jessie's and Rene's quotes below discussing how such aspects might affect CSR perceptions.

"I'm under the impression that the majority of my co-workers care about the environment etcetera, but in their business roles priorities can shift depending on their own cost-benefit analysis." Rene - Finance, Accounting & Strategy

"I can really notice that different departments have different priorities, which is maybe not very surprising since they're measured on different KPIs. [...] Some teams seem to be much more sustainability-oriented, while others show little interest." Jessie - Marketing

We believe the interpretations held by the *commercial* and the *initiative groups* are very much in line with what we understand to be the responsibilities and focus areas of the respective functions making up these groups. Without knowing exactly what key performance indicators (KPIs) each function strives to improve, we argue it is not farfetched to assume their responsibilities to be in line with the generic meaning of such functions. KPIs are further commonly adopted tools to assist in setting priorities and steering company and business unit efforts. We argue in line with the suggestions of Helms Mills et al. (2010), who states that the rules and routines of organizations impact individuals' sensemaking and social interactions, that KPIs can be understood similarly as they are used to guide the efforts of the group and its

members. Furthermore, the interviews allowed us to form an understanding of the responsibilities of each function as all interviewees described their functional belonging and role at the firm. For example, a purchaser in the procurement function is responsible for buying products at the best possible terms and prices to build a competitive and attractive assortment, while a member of the marketing function can for example be responsible for building a strong brand through marketing and communication efforts.

We argue that CSR could have different implications depending on the responsibility and focus areas of that employee's function. For a purchaser, extensive CSR consideration possibly implies being more selective regarding what products to purchase, generating fewer alternatives which could limit the ability to buy up the full budget, jump on commercially strong deals or build a competitive assortment. Thus, choosing an interpretation like in the quote by Blake above, who believes that all products should be saved, allows more freedom in his/her role and improved ability to fulfill it. Another example is logistics officers for whom broader CSR consideration could imply prioritizing green, possibly more expensive means of transport, which then could reduce the function's ability to meet budgetary goals. Thus, by adopting a more commercial interpretation also they are allowed more room to fulfill their purpose by not solely being limited to green options.

For a functional member in marketing or HR on the other hand, CSR initiatives can be used to communicate that ResQ not only is born-sustainable, but that they do more by engaging in initiatives outside the business model. Such communication likely improves consumers' and potential employees' perceptions of the brand and the organization. Thus, little direct conflict exists between their performance targets and CSR. Further, for the legal team CSR consideration possibly implies reduced risk for legal consequences stemming from misconduct in relation to some stakeholder group. Drafting policies thus becomes a way of not only considering CSR in a broader sense for the sake of it, but also to protect the company from legal reprisals, which fits well with the function's purpose. We believe these implications influence employees' understanding of what CSR means at ResQ as both social interaction in the form of discussions, and the retained interpretations seem to be connected to the function's purpose. So, employees

only discuss CSR from their function's perspective, but they also seem to retain and solidify interpretations favoring the objectives of their functions.

6.5.2 Differences between the groups regarding identity

As outlined in section 4.4, identity plays a role in sensemaking since a person's identity and view of who they are shapes their sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995; Kudesia, 2017; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). We believe that the differences between the *commercial* and *initiative groups* can be partly attributed to the employee's identities. We have chosen to focus specifically on one dimension of identity which surfaced in the interviews. It concerns whether employees identify with either the firm's CSR-related mission and vision or commercial and career-related aspects of the firm.

When discussing why they choose to seek employment at ResQ most employees mentioned the firm's mission and vision of reducing food waste as a reason for joining the firm. However, the interviews revealed nuances which could help explain the differences between the two groups. Some interviewees highlighted that they believe most co-workers identify with the firm's business model and CSR-related mission and vision, but that the extent to this varies amongst employees. This tendency can be illustrated by the following two quotes, as well as Kyle's quote in section 6.2 when contrasting what s/he refers to as a group of *"activist employees"* and those who joined the company for commercial and career reasons.

"People might not have completely different perceptions of it [CSR], but some individuals place higher value on such things. I think some people just don't care too much while some think our CSR initiatives are great." Cameron - Procurement

"In general, I'd say people have similar thoughts about it [CSR]. But I definitely think there are departments which care less and individuals in specific teams who don't care much. However, in general I think many of my coworkers wanted to work here because they've some interest in sustainability." Elliot - IT, Data & Analytics

In line with the quotes above, we found variability in how the employees described their reasons for joining the firm. Some individuals primarily emphasized the CSR dimension of ResQ when motivating their choice. An indicative example of this is the following quote by Jamie stating

that s/he could not work with something that does not align with his/her personal view on CSR and sustainability.

"In my private life, I purchase almost nothing new, I use public transport, I try to purchase food aligned with my view on sustainability and then it felt like I couldn't work with something that doesn't align with that. I cannot act a certain way in my private life and do something completely different at work." Jamie - Marketing

Another example is the quote below by Jessie also emphasizing the importance of the company's mission when choosing his/her employer.

"It has a lot to do with the mission, contributing to reduced food waste. It feels really nice to have a higher purpose in the company you work for [...] I've always been interested in these things, I've done lots of volunteering etcetera before. I think it's that part of me which led me to ResQ." Jessie - Marketing

Such quotes were further, perhaps not surprisingly, more common within functions belonging to the *initiative group*. However, employees belonging to the *commercial group* tended to rather emphasize the commercial potential of ResQ and career prospects above the firm's mission and vision. Examples of this are Kyle and Hayden's quotes which clearly highlight how they value the commercial and career-related aspects of ResQ more than its mission and vision.

"I love CSR and sustainability, but I joined the business because it's interesting, business wise, and commercially, not because I want to save the world. I mean, I do want to save the world, but I joined ResQ because it was a business I was interested in from a commercial point of view." Kyle - Procurement

"The overall reason for me joining ResQ was the combination of the scale up and entrepreneurial journey that I saw could happen here and then also tapping into a greater purpose by doing good at the same time. Those were my two main drivers, in that order. One: an exciting journey, from a commercial and professional perspective and two: I wanted to do, if possible, something good." Hayden - Sales & Commercial

We interpret the different reasons for joining ResQ as an indication of how the respective groups identify with different aspects of the firm. Taken together, members of the *initiative group* tend to identify more with the CSR-related mission and vision of the firm whereas members of the *commercial group* identify more with commercial aspects, which fits well with their respective interpretations of CSR. If identity impacts sensemaking as suggested by Weick (1995), Kudesia (2017) and Sandberg & Tsoukas (2015), it is plausible that these differences in identity have an impact on the CSR-interpretation retained by each group. Furthermore, under the assumption that

sensemaking is a social process, it is possible that such identities can shape other functional members via social interactions.

In line with the arguments of Weick (1995) and Kudesia (2017), our theoretical framework suggests that the interpretation formed in the *retention* stage is neither final nor perfect. It is rather an interpretation which is constantly under construction, continuously becoming slightly more robust to guide new action and understanding of previous events (Kudesia, 2017). In the case of CSR at ResQ, this implies that retained interpretations from social interactions within the functions and the employee's identities allows them to act in relation to CSR but also to understand what it means at the company. Next, we will discuss how the *enactment* stage differed between the groups and its implications for employees' sensemaking processes.

6.6 Differences between the groups in the enactment stage

According to our theoretical framework, *enactment* consists of property *3-enactive of sensible environments* and *6-focused on an extracted by cues* of Weick's (1995) seven properties of sensemaking (Kudesia, 2017). It refers to how individuals notice and bracket information from their organizational environment and how they act based on that information to shape their environments in a reciprocal process. Throughout the interviews it became apparent that there were differences between the *commercial* and *initiative groups* in this stage of the sensemaking process. Although employees tended to notice and bracket cues regarding CSR-related information similarly, the way they act in relation to CSR in their work-roles varied. These findings will be elaborated upon below.

6.6.1 Similarities in noticing and bracketing CSR-related information

As outlined in section 4.4, individuals extract cues from their environments in their sensemaking process which help them cognitively process and tie together elements and provide information to interpret and act upon (Weick, 1995; Kudesia, 2017). Furthermore, it is common that individuals focus on certain informational cues in favor of others in accordance with past experiences (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

Our interviews made it clear that employees notice and bracket information from their organizational environment regarding what constitutes CSR at ResQ. One such example could be the aforementioned instances where CSR is discussed in company-wide meetings and other contexts at ResQ. Such information creates cues that employees can draw upon when making sense of what CSR means in the context of the organization. This finding corresponds with the suggestions of Weick et al. (2005) and Kudesia (2017) who state that individuals draw upon such cues to impose structure on the environment when faced with equivocality or ambiguity. Interestingly, although members of the two groups tended to differ in most stages of the sensemaking process, they share a similarity in terms of what CSR-related information is noticed and bracketed. As previously mentioned in section 6.1, there appears to be consensus amongst the interviewees that both ResQ's business model and CSR-initiatives decoupled from it can be considered CSR. We interpret this as the employees from both the *commercial* and the *initiative group* tending to notice and bracket CSR-related information similarly, namely that both the business model and other initiatives can be considered to be a part of ResQ's CSR-efforts.

6.6.2 Differences between the groups in enacting CSR in their work-roles

As outlined in section 4.4, actions are a way for individuals to reduce equivocality in their environment. Due to the reciprocal relationship between actions and the environment individuals simultaneously affect and are affected by their environments through their actions (Kudesia 2017; Weick, 1995).

Our interviews allowed us to observe differences between the *commercial* and *initiative groups* in terms of how employees act in their work-roles. The employees seemed to act in line with their group's interpretation of CSR in their work-roles, which supports the arguments of Kudesia (2017) and Weick & Sutcliffe (2005) who claim that retained interpretations serve to guide future action and impose structure on the environment.

Employees of the *commercial group* took actions in their daily work which were coherent with their commercial interpretation of CSR. One such example can be seen in Cameron's quote below.

"We want to save food as long as the calculus makes sense and the main focus is that it aligns with our business model." Cameron - Procurement

This quote illustrates how s/he views saving food as contributing to the CSR efforts of ResQ but that it is considered in a way inherently linked to the business model and which makes sense commercially.

Another example of the commercial interpretation of CSR being visible in employee actions is when Robin discuss how s/he sometimes considers *"green"* freight options, stating that such options are sometimes considered from a CSR-perspective, but also from a cost-perspective which overrules CSR when such options are considered too expensive.

"We also need to keep down the costs as much as possible. Sometimes it might be more expensive to use "green" freight options, so it's very much "up and down"." Robin - Warehouse & Logistics

A third example is Sammie's quote in section 6.5.1 talking about the importance of having *"the right price"* and that lower prices means that more products can be saved. This highlights how s/he views ResQ's business model as a means of creating impact through his/her actions while concurrently linking it to commercial aspects by highlighting the importance of purchasing at low prices.

A fourth example is how Rene uses ResQ's business model as a selling point in interactions with prospective investors. In doing so, s/he highlights ResQ's business model as a source of impact in order to attain further funding for the firm.

"Investors are very curious about these things and communicating it to them is crucial since we're an impact-company. That's one of the strengths of our business model. I highlight this indirectly when talking about how we get our products, about suppliers having overstock for various reasons and that this is why we purchase the products." Rene -Finance, Accounting & Strategy

Similar tendencies were observed among members of the *initiative group*. Those employees tended to take actions in their work-roles more related to CSR-initiatives decoupled from ResQ's business model. One such example is how Parker tries to stay true to the firm's brand in his/her daily work and considers CSR in all possible decisions such as when choosing what to serve at company gatherings.

*"I've thought about the brand and what we stand for, and try to consider it in all possible aspects [...]
I've tried to be at the forefront by, for example, making sure we serve vegetarian food at our company
events since it's better in that aspect [...] So, in the things I'm involved in, I try to consider it as much as
possible."* Parker – HR & Legal

A second example is Jamie discussing collaborating with ResQ's private label team and offering suggestions on how to consider CSR in more aspects, such as the choice of suppliers.

*"Me and other members of the marketing function started discussing with the private label team how they
could improve their sustainability checks when choosing suppliers. We always spot things and say: "this
should be improved" or "this must be looked over", and then we bring that up."* Jamie - Marketing

A similar example is Jessie describing how s/he have discussed private label products and then stressed CSR-related aspects over commercial ones.

*"When launching new products some people often say "this will sell really well and be great
commercially" but that product might not be that great from a CSR-perspective. Then I say it's not worth
it, we cannot do it because it doesn't align with our brand or sustainability-aspects."* Jessie – Marketing

Another example is how Jessie uses ResQ's impact-report in corporate communication contexts to answer CSR-related questions from external stakeholders.

*"When working with corporate communication we get CSR-related questions and then we often give them
the impact report. We get questions like "is food really worth saving, there're so many transports, does it
really make sense?" and then we can use our impact report to show them that transport emissions are
small compared to what's required to produce food."* Jessie - Marketing

Taken together, these examples outline how the *commercial* and *initiative groups* differ in how they act in relation to CSR in their work-roles. Employees of the *commercial group* tend to enact their interpretation by considering ResQ's business model and commercial interests in their work-contexts. Employees belonging to the *initiative group* on the other hand, tend to enact their group's interpretation by considering CSR-initiatives not directly linked to ResQ's business model in their work-contexts. We interpret these actions as a means for the employees to reduce the equivocality surrounding CSR in the context of ResQ by taking actions in their work-roles in line with their held CSR-interpretations. By taking such actions employees affect and are in turn affected by their environments. Again, this fits well with the arguments of Weick et al. (2005) and Kudesia (2017) regarding the importance of retained interpretations as guides for future

action. Even though we did not uncover any differences in terms of the informational cues of CSR which the employees notice and bracket, it is likely that their actions could affect the importance ascribed to such cues. Thus, despite information regarding the firm's business model and other CSR-initiatives being noticed and bracketed in similar ways, employees tend to take CSR-related actions either focused on the firm's business model or initiatives decoupled from it. In doing so, it is likely that such information is ascribed greater or lesser importance, which could affect other stages of the sensemaking process. Next, we will discuss how the *commercial* and *initiative groups* differ in the *selection* stage of the process where Weick (1995) and Kudesia (2017) argue that past actions and events are interpreted.

6.7 Differences between the groups in the selection stage

Selection refers to interpretation of bracketed information in light of the past to reduce the number of meanings it can have and make interpretations that are actionable albeit plausible rather than completely accurate (Weick et al., 2005). It encompasses property *2-retrospective* and *7-plausibility rather than accuracy* of Weick's (1995) seven properties of sensemaking (Kudesia, 2017). The interviews allowed us to identify differences between the *commercial* and *initiative groups* in the *selection* stage of the process. Members of both groups tended to use retrospective examples from their work-contexts when discussing CSR at ResQ. Such examples further tended to involve situations and actions coherent with the respective groups' interpretation of CSR. Moreover, there was a tendency for such examples and their associated interpretations to be plausible rather than accurate. These findings will be elaborated upon below.

6.7.1 Differences between the groups in retrospective examples

As outlined in section 4.4, retrospection implies that sensemakers use past experiences to make sense of present events (Weick, 1995; Helms Mills et al., 2010). The retrospective examples given by employees belonging to the *commercial group* tended to be in line with their commercial interpretation of CSR. One such example is illustrated by the following quotes from Riley recalling a situation in which production waste was identified at a supplier site which had previously been made into fossil-free fuel as well as how s/he saw that as a business opportunity to instead sell that waste to ResQ's customers.

"I was at a supplier looking over their operations when I found something in their production that I thought we should look into. Apparently some of the products fell off the conveyor belt and were made into fossil-free fuel. I thought that we could instead take care of those products and sell them to our customers instead." Riley - Procurement

"I mostly see the business-side of this, with hints of sustainability. I'm thinking, "they're making fossil-free fuel out of this", like what's that? What does that process look like? I thought we could take care of these products, save them and make money together instead." Riley - Procurement

This example clearly highlights how Riley retrospectively recalls a situation which is in line with the commercial interpretation held by his group. S/he views saving these products as a way of ensuring that they come to use while also seeing it as a business opportunity.

Another such example can be seen in Blake's quote in section 6.5.1 recalling discussions within his/her function about products containing palm oil. S/he claims that ResQ *"should not point fingers"* and rather focus on their role of saving already produced products. Thus, Blake uses this anecdote to argue for the importance of ResQ's business model and purpose of saving food, even if the saved products are unsustainable. This further aligns with the *commercial group's* interpretation of CSR due to the strong emphasis on the firm's business model.

The use of retrospective examples was also observed in interviews with employees belonging to the *initiative group*. The following quote by Baylor illustrates this tendency where s/he discusses encountering coworkers perceiving there to be a conflict between commercial success and CSR. Baylor uses this as an example when arguing for the importance of being *"steadfast in your principles"* in this regard and that this is what generates long-term success, essentially opposing that any such conflict exists, which is also in line with the *initiative group's* interpretation.

"Surprisingly I've encountered that there's a perceived conflict between sustainability and commercial success and that people sometimes are so commercially focused that they wish to have the cake and eat it too. That they're afraid to follow through and be steadfast in their principles. I think sometimes we've been able to weasel our way around things, but when it comes to sustainability, principles are very important, and you must stick to them. I think that's what makes you successful long-term. Thinking about an international brand, from my perspective, launching another discounter without additional value creates zero reason for people to like that brand. Zero! Who's going to love you?" Baylor – Marketing

Another retrospective example illustrating the *initiative group's* interpretation is a quote by Jessie recalling a discussion about product packaging. S/he used this example to highlight how other

employees sometimes use ResQ's business model to excuse choices that are questionable in terms of CSR. This viewpoint is in line with the *initiative group's* interpretation of CSR as it illustrates how CSR is viewed as not solely connected to the business model, but that there are decisions where other aspects must be considered.

"An example would be some private label products where we had aluminum packaging, which isn't very good from a sustainability viewpoint, so we used TetraPak instead. But then there were production difficulties which meant that we couldn't continue producing them. So we had to purchase other products which were only offered in aluminum containers. Then some people said "it's better that we sell these products even if they're in aluminum containers because then people can save more food and that's what we want, right?", those sorts of arguments, and I feel those are often quite broadly applied." Jessie - Marketing

Thus, it becomes clear that employees use retrospective examples of past actions and situations aligned with the group's held interpretation when discussing CSR. We interpret these examples as support for Weick's (1995) arguments about the retrospective nature of sensemaking since they showcase how employees use past events to make sense of the present. Furthermore, these examples also highlight how the retained interpretations of each group affects the *selection* stage, which is in line with the arguments of Kudesia (2017).

6.7.2 Shared tendency for plausibility rather than accuracy

As outlined in section 4.4, *plausibility rather than accuracy* means that that sensemaking is driven by achieving plausibility and enough clarity to allow the sensemaker to act, but not necessarily meaning that the sense made is objectively accurate (Weick, 1995; Helms Mills et al., 2010; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2017). Although the retrospective examples provided by the employees tended to differ depending on their belonging to either the *commercial* or *initiative group* they shared the tendency to be plausible rather than accurate, which empirically supports Weick's (1995) arguments. Employees had a tendency to interpret CSR in a way which was actionable and relatable for them rather than interpreting it in ways objectively true or accurate. These tendencies can be illustrated in the outlined examples of retrospection in section 6.7.1. For example, using the situation described by Riley, s/he views the identified production waste as a commercial opportunity, which is clearly in line with the *commercial group's* interpretation of CSR. S/he also acknowledges that if the waste was not sold by ResQ it would instead be turned

into fossil-free fuel. Fossil-free fuel is arguably an alternative way of reusing the production waste in an environment-friendly way, but Riley rationalizes his/her viewpoint by saying *"what does that process look like?"* and argues that ResQ can save the products instead so that they can *"make money together"* with the supplier. This allows Riley to simplify the situation based on his/her interpretation of what CSR means at ResQ. By sticking to his/her commercial interpretation, s/he can reduce the complexity of the situation and act on the opportunity instead of getting stuck trying to determine the perfect way to handle the supplier's production waste.

A similar example is outlined in the quote by Blake in section 6.5.1 discussing products containing palm oil and identifying it as a potentially problematic product from an environmental standpoint. However, Blake argues that ResQ's role simply is to save food rather than to exert any moral judgments about what those products should contain or *"point fingers"* regarding what the industry should and should not do. According to him/her, that is up to the industry and not ResQ to decide. We interpret this as a simplification and rationalization favoring the *commercial group's* interpretation of CSR. Deciding to not take a stand in such issues is a simplification that allows for a plausible rather than accurate interpretation of CSR which is more actionable and relatable in Blake's work-context. In practice it means that s/he can purchase any product believed to be commercially competitive, without being limited by any associated moral concerns.

Such tendencies were also found in the interviews with members of the *initiative group*. For example, in the quote by Baylor about some co-workers perceiving a conflict between CSR and commercial success s/he argues that you have to be *"steadfast in your principles"* and that you need to *"stick to those principles"* when it comes to CSR and claims that is what will generate long-term success. This viewpoint is clearly in line with the CSR interpretation held by the *initiative group* due to the emphasis on CSR-initiatives beyond ResQ's business model. The interpretation embedded in this quote can also be considered plausible rather than accurate. Arguably, there can be a trade-off between CSR and commercial success if certain CSR-initiatives are either costly or limit ResQ's ability to operate profitably. Baylor still argues that no conflict exists and that you must stick to your CSR-related principles to be successful. This simplification is relatable for Baylor in his/her work-context and allows him/her to

prioritize and rationalize CSR-initiatives due to the positive impact s/he believes it has on commercial success.

What these interpretations have in common is that they are not objective or flawless. In line with the suggestions of Weick and colleagues (2005), these interpretations are not unarguable or perfect but rather "good enough" to allow the employees to take action in moments of conflicting information or interests and without prompting additional analysis. It thus makes the concept of CSR more orderly and relatable for the employees in their work-contexts. Next, we will discuss how the differences between the *commercial* and *initiative groups* across the stages of the sensemaking process seems to have generated a self-reinforcing loop in which the respective interpretations become increasingly solidified.

6.8 Bringing it all together - A Self-Reinforcing Loop

As outlined in the last three sections of this chapter, differences between the *commercial* and *initiative groups* can be observed throughout all stages of the sensemaking process. Although the analysis has been structured in a sequential manner starting with the *retention* stage followed by the *enactment* and *selection* stages it is important to again highlight that we cannot establish the order in which these stages have occurred or the exact relationships between them. The reason for this lies in the nature of the conducted study as we have only been able to capture a snapshot image of employees' CSR-related sensemaking through our interviews. Furthermore, we have "jumped in" to an ongoing sensemaking process where the employees at ResQ have already formed some sort of understanding regarding CSR. We are thus not able to discern how employees have moved through the sensemaking process, instead we discuss the processes and differences between the groups on a more aggregate level. For example, we cannot say when an employee experienced the equivocality or ambiguity that first triggered their sensemaking process. It is neither possible for us to determine what the initial *enactment* and *selection* stages looked like. Although we do not know what the first *retention* stage included, we can see that employees' current interpretations follow that of either the *commercial* or *initiative group* and that their ways of enacting and discussing aligns with that interpretation. When reflecting upon the framework and how it has been utilized in the present study, we argue that the main strength of the framework in the context of this thesis does not lie in the sequencing of the different stages

of the framework. Rather, we see the different stages of the framework and the framework's interlinked nature as a powerful tool to create a thorough understanding of how the CSR-related sensemaking processes of employees in a born sustainable organization looks on a more aggregate level. Instead of focusing on which stages happened in which order we instead focus on the "big picture" of the framework and how the stages are interlinked. Thus, we see the different stages of the framework not as a strict sequence but rather as pieces in the overall "puzzle" that is sensemaking. Rather than focusing on the sequence of the stages in the framework we discuss how the stages both affect and are affected by each other and how this might have impacted the employee's CSR-related sensemaking, which will be elaborated upon next.

As previously mentioned, there is a coherence within the *commercial* and *initiative* groups across the stages of the sensemaking process. We understand this coherence as a consequence of the stages of the sensemaking process connecting to and impacting both its prior and subsequent stages as illustrated in *Figure 4*. In contrast to the suggestions of Kudesia (2017), who includes Weick's (1995) fifth property of sensemaking, *ongoing*, in the retention stage, our theoretical framework sees it as a characterization of the constantly flowing and interlinked nature of the whole framework. We argue that this creates a self-reinforcing property as each of the respective stages in the framework feeds into both prior and subsequent stages. More concretely this means that in the *retention* stage of the model which according to Weick et al. (2005) and Kudesia (2017) entails the solidification of interpretations held by the two groups are negotiated through social interactions and discussions and are connected to employees' identities, resulting in members of each function prescribing to the interpretation held by either the *commercial* or *initiative group* and thus solidifying it. These retained interpretations are then linked back to the *enactment* and *selection* stages as they serve to guide future actions as well as helping employees understand past actions and events. In the *enactment* stage, concerned with how individuals notice and bracket information from their environment as well as how they act based on those interpretations (Weick et al., 2005), the employees of ResQ enact the retained interpretation of CSR held by their group through actions taken in their work-contexts, thus also affecting the organizational environment from which they extract informational cues regarding CSR. Such

actions are then visible in the *selection* stage as past actions and events are interpreted retrospectively in a way that rationalizes and simplifies the employees' organizational lives and aligns with the retained interpretations of CSR held by their group. These observed dynamics are in line with the suggestions of Weick et al. (2005) and Kudesia (2017), as the individuals' interpretations of prior events contributes to their understanding of CSR in the context of ResQ. The prevailing interpretations are then once again transferred to the *retention* stage where further social interaction within the functions and connection to the employee's identities confirms the interpretation's accuracy before the cycle begins anew as it serves to guide employees future behavior and actions.

We argue that the stages' interlinked nature creates a self-reinforcing cycle as the respective stages both are the result of and are inherently connected to one another. Since the groups' retained interpretations can be seen in each of the framework's stages, we believe this confirms that all stages affect and are affected by each other as suggested by the framework and original model by Weick et al. (2005) and Kudesia (2017). So, in addition to the suggestions of Weick et al. (2005) and Kudesia (2017), we argue that the ongoing nature of the model can serve to solidify and reinforce certain interpretations. In the case of ResQ's employees, we interpret the observed similarities within the *commercial* and *initiative groups* as well as the differences between them as a result of this self-reinforcing property. We argue that it has created a process whereby the held interpretations are continuously solidified and reinforced as employees of the two groups repeatedly move through the stages of the sensemaking process. We further argue this has resulted in the creation of the two distinct groups of employees each subscribing to different interpretations of CSR at ResQ.

Thus, we argue that the theoretical framework adopted in this study can be used as a powerful tool for uncovering employee's CSR-related sensemaking processes in a born sustainable organization. However, we would also like to stress that the framework has its limitations. As previously mentioned, we have disregarded the sequential aspects of the framework in the conducted study. A point of reflection in this regard is the fact that using the framework in such a sequential manner could be quite unwieldy. Whilst the framework makes sense in its sequenced

stages from a purely theoretical standpoint, we argue that fitting actual sensemaking processes observed in practice neatly into the stages of the framework can prove to be quite challenging. As previously stated, through the conducted study we have merely gained a snapshot-image of the ongoing sensemaking processes of the interviewees at ResQ. Furthermore, sensemaking can be considered to be quite a "messy" phenomenon to study in the sense that the different stages in the sensemaking process are tightly linked, making it difficult to discern how the process has unfolded and exactly how the stages are linked to one another. Thus, it can be quite hard to capture exactly how sensemaking processes have unfolded, which in turn makes it difficult to use the framework sequentially in the way that is suggested by authors like Weick (1995) and Kudesia (2017). Further worth noting is that this study has not looked at sensemaking related to a specific event or happening, but rather related to the relatively broad, conceptual topic of CSR. It is possible that this has had an effect on how easily the sequencing of the framework has been to follow, as sensemaking of a specific event arguably has a more clear starting point than an individual's interpretations and understandings of a concept such as CSR.

Taken together, the theoretical framework of this study is a powerful tool for illustrating how CSR-related employee sensemaking takes form in a born sustainable organization, even though it has its inherent limitations. Considering the increased attention given to micro-CSR research in general as well as micro-CSR research focused on sensemaking in particular, this study thus contributes to and advances those streams of research by outlining how sensemaking processes take place in a born-sustainable firm. The key takeaway from the conducted analysis is outlining how such sensemaking processes take form in practice and how the interlinked nature of such processes in turn might result in a self-reinforcing property that solidifies the held interpretations of CSR among employees in the studied organization. The findings of the conducted study thus have implications for further research within micro-CSR as well as practical implications for organizations to consider regarding CSR, which will be elaborated upon further in the conclusion chapter of this thesis.
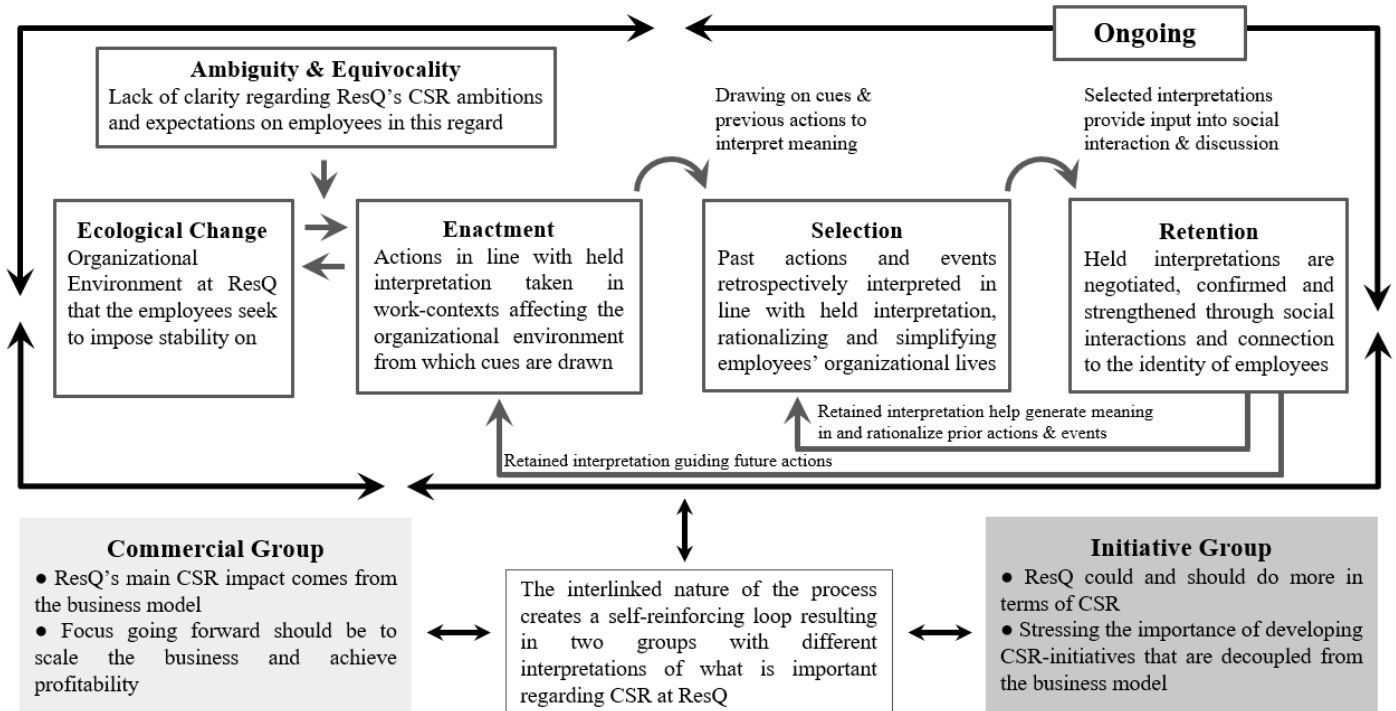
Ambiguity & Equivocality
Lack of clarity regarding ResQ's CSR ambitions and expectations on employees in this regard

Drawing on cues & previous actions to interpret meaning

Selected interpretations provide input into social interaction & discussion

Ecological Change
Organizational Environment at ResQ that the employees seek to impose stability on

Enactment
Actions in line with held interpretation taken in work-contexts affecting the organizational environment from which cues are drawn

Selection
Past actions and events retrospectively interpreted in line with held interpretation, rationalizing and simplifying employees' organizational lives

Retention
Held interpretations are negotiated, confirmed and strengthened through social interactions and connection to the identity of employees

Retained interpretation help generate meaning in and rationalize prior actions & events

Retained interpretation guiding future actions

Commercial Group
● ResQ's main CSR impact comes from the business model
● Focus going forward should be to scale the business and achieve profitability

The interlinked nature of the process creates a self-reinforcing loop resulting in two groups with different interpretations of what is important regarding CSR at ResQ

Initiative Group
● ResQ could and should do more in terms of CSR
● Stressing the importance of developing CSR-initiatives that are decoupled from the business model

Figure 4. "Revised theoretical framework - A Self-Reinforcing Loop"

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore how employees in an organization founded with sustainability as a core part of its value proposition make sense of CSR by answering the research question: *"How do employees in a born-sustainable organization make sense of CSR?"*.

The conducted empirical analysis highlights how a lack of clarity regarding ResQ's CSR ambitions and its expectations on employees in their work-roles in this regard causes ambiguity and equivocality which prompts employees to engage in sensemaking to understand what CSR implies in their work contexts. The study finds that the employees go through the sensemaking stages of *enactment, selection*, and *retention* as outlined in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the study has identified two groups at ResQ holding different interpretations regarding what is important in terms of CSR in their organizational context. One of these groups, the *commercial group*, stresses business model scaling and achieving profitability as the most important CSR-related work going forward. The other group, the *initiative group*, instead argues that the organization can do more in terms of CSR and believes CSR-initiatives decoupled from the business model should be prioritized. The empirical analysis highlights how there are similarities within, but also differences between these groups in all stages of the sensemaking process. Furthermore, the empirical analysis highlights how the divide between the two groups can be attributed to the fact that the interpretations held by each group seems to be present in all stages of the members' sensemaking processes which generates a self-reinforcing loop that solidifies the two groups' held interpretations.

7.1 Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications of this study are threefold. First, it highlights the applicability of sensemaking as a theoretical concept in micro-CSR research. We found that CSR can have different meanings for different employees, which is coherent with previous sensemaking research on micro-CSR by Van Der Heijden et al (2010) and Štumberger & Golob (2015). Furthermore, the study also finds that CSR in the context of our case organization is an ambiguous and equivocal concept which creates fertile ground for sensemaking. These findings are in line with previous research arguing that CSR is an uncertain or ambiguous topic for

organizational members that elicits sensemaking processes (Van Der Heijden et al., 2010; Nazir & Islam, 2020; Podgorodnichenko et al., 2021; Miller, 2022).

Second, our study was conducted in the setting of a born-sustainable organization which has sustainability inherently linked to its business model due to its circular nature. To our knowledge, there has yet to be studies conducted on sensemaking in micro-CSR research in such contexts. The nature of this contribution lies in the value proposition and business model of the present case organization. Since the studied organization has a business model that due to its very nature can be considered CSR by the employees of the organization it makes it possible for them to equate scaling the business model and achieving profitability with scaling the CSR-efforts of the firm. This would not be possible in the context of a "conventional" organization without such a business model. Thus, uncovering the sensemaking processes of the employees of such an organization serves as a theoretical contribution in itself.

Third, through an application of the theoretical framework, the study contributes to sensemaking research within the field of micro-CSR by showcasing how insufficient clarity of the firm's CSR-related ambitions and expectations on employees can elicit sensemaking processes. The interlinked nature of these processes can in turn generate a self-reinforcing cycle creating distinct groups holding different interpretations of how to prioritize CSR in the organization. To our knowledge such findings have yet to be reported within micro-CSR research.

Taken together, considering the nascent stage of sensemaking research within the field of micro-CSR (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Podgorodnichenko et al., 2021; Štumberger & Golob, 2015), the theoretical implications of the conducted study further validates sensemaking as a theoretical concept in micro-CSR research. The study also contributes to this burgeoning stream of research by uncovering how sensemaking in a born-sustainable organization can result in the formation of distinct functional employee groups adopting different interpretations of CSR in their particular organizational context.

7.2 Practical implications

We believe the findings of this study have three primary practical implications. First, they offer insight into how employees use information from their environment to extract cues which allows them to form an understanding of what CSR means to them. It was further evident that the sensemaking processes are inherently social in this particular company, meaning that employees use social interaction to determine what interpretations to adopt. Such insights are foundational for managers and other practitioners as understanding how interpretations are formed can be considered a first step towards the ability to proactively and effectively launch CSR initiatives within their organizations. It further indicates the importance of coherence and clarity in the internal and external communication around CSR. Ambiguous and unclear messages may trigger sensemaking where employees are left to their own devices to interpret what CSR means in their organization and roles. Such confusion can lead to fragmented sensemaking within the organization potentially causing frictions and limiting the effectiveness of CSR-related initiatives. Thus, managers might benefit from setting and communicating clear strategies and by following up on those strategies on a functional level. This, we argue, allows managers to reduce much of the confusion around CSR and influence social interactions around the topic thus reducing the risk for function-specific interpretations.

Second, we discussed potential triggers for sensemaking processes in the organization. The dual nature of investor demands creates pressure on management to actively pursue profitability and CSR performance simultaneously. However, management has not clearly articulated how employees are expected to prioritize between different CSR dimensions nor assigned any clear goals or targets for the organization and its functions to work towards. We argue this has made employees interpret CSR from a functional perspective favoring their abilities to fulfill their organizational responsibilities. This highlights the importance of not only clearly communicating the organization's view on CSR, but to also connect it to goals and targets. However, such communication and target-setting cannot solely be done on a company level but must be translated into functional-level targets and expectations. We believe such measures could reduce the risk of employees interpreting CSR from a functional cost-benefit perspective by instead allowing interpretations to flow from guidelines set by management.

Third, we have not had any deep discussions about what fragmented and functional CSR interpretations means for the company, as this lies outside of the scope of our study. Our study has explored how such interpretations were formed without addressing whether they are to the benefit or detriment of ResQ. Although such dynamics can cause friction and potentially even reduce the effectiveness of CSR initiatives, there could be benefits associated with variation in how CSR is interpreted by employees. For example, having parts of the organization more focused on CSR in a broader sense while others focus more on the commercial side of the business could be a way of catering to dual investor demands and reducing the risk of groupthink. An empirical example supporting this is the interaction between different departments when discussing possible product launches within the private label. By discussing products from both a commercial and more holistic CSR perspective ResQ ensures that their products are not only responsibly produced but also commercially competitive. Nevertheless, it seems important that such divergent focuses are thoroughly considered by management and not a random product of functional sensemaking as that might increase risks for unexpected or unwanted consequences. Thus managers must be clear and coherent in relation to CSR, but deliberately allowing for some functional differences in CSR focus is not necessarily harmful. More specifically, damaging frictions could be avoided by having diverse focus groups dedicated to certain areas of the business. The group's diversity could allow for new, more holistic solutions to the topical issue by leveraging different perspectives. However, managers must communicate the purpose of such groups clearly and ensure members cherish and see the value in having different views on such issues.

7.3 Limitations & Future research

The conducted study has three main limitations which can be considered in future sensemaking research within the field of micro-CSR. The first limitation pertains to the generalizability of our findings. As outlined in section 5.1.3 the study's generalizability is affected by the research design choice of a single-case study. Furthermore, as outlined in section 5.5.2 the transferability of our findings may also be hampered due to the care taken to anonymizing our empirics. Thus, we encourage further research on employee sensemaking in other born-sustainable organizations. Such research could replicate and nuance our findings by uncovering whether or not such processes unfold similarly at other born-sustainable organizations. Furthermore, we also encourage future researchers to, if possible, adopt a multiple-case study design for the purpose of increased generalizability.

The second limitation concerns the choice of a case study approach. As previously mentioned, sensemaking is an ongoing process developing over time. This study has merely captured a snapshot of the employees' sensemaking processes at ResQ in a certain point in time. Despite producing interesting findings, it does not fully capture the sensemaking process' ongoing nature. This could possibly be mitigated through a longitudinal case-study design, as such an approach would allow for capturing changes over time (Bell, Harley & Bryman, 2022). While a longitudinal approach was suitable for this study, we argue along the lines of Bryman and colleagues (2022) that it is time consuming and thus not reasonable considering the limited scope of this thesis. We therefore urge future research to adopt a longitudinal case study design in order to better capture the ongoing nature of sensemaking and how it unfolds over time.

The third limitation pertains to the choice of interviews as the source of data collection. While this provided valuable insights into the sensemaking processes of the employees, it is based on their subjective accounts. Although interesting and valuable, such accounts could arguably be strengthened through other means of data collection such as ethnography and participant observations of employees in their daily work settings. Such observations could complement interview data by uncovering how employees make sense of CSR in practice in contrast to solely relying on accounts of their own conceptual understandings. Thus, we urge future research to consider such data collection methods.

Finally, as our findings outline the creation of two distinct groups holding different CSR interpretations as a result of their sensemaking processes we would also encourage further research regarding the consequences of this and how it could be mitigated. Future research could for example study if the creation of such groups results in organizational tensions or conflicts and what the consequences of that might be. Furthermore, we encourage further research into how managerial means could possibly mitigate the creation of such groups.

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10. Appendix

1. Interview Guide

About us

We are two master students from Stockholm School of Economics who are currently writing our master thesis in business and management. We are writing our thesis about sustainability or CSR and focus on the individuals' perspectives of the phenomenon. To summarize, we are trying to understand how you understand the concept in general and how CSR affects your work. We have decided to conduct a case study on ResQ and are therefore conducting interviews with people in various functions and at various levels of the company.

Your answers are completely confidential and everything you say will be anonymized if used in the published paper. You are further able to abort the interview at any moment if you would like to, without any need for explanation.

Does this sound okay? Do you have any questions?

We also need to ask you to sign a GDPR compliance form, which is needed for us to collect "personal data" via our interviews. This is strictly an administrative issue needed from the university so that it is okay for them to store the material until the paper is published.

Also, is it okay for us to record the interview to facilitate the transcription afterwards? Scripts and recordings are deleted before publication.

Questions

Section 1: Warm-up

- Tell us a bit about yourself, what is your role here at ResQ and for how long have you been at the company?
- What did you do before joining the company? Role and firm?
- Why did you choose to work at ResQ?

- Describe your main areas of responsibility at ResQ?
- What company function do you belong to?
- Do you have any managerial responsibilities in the company?

Section 2: CSR as a concept

- What does sustainability mean to you?
  - How important is sustainability for you as an individual?
  - Does this impact your life and choices in any way? How?
- What does CSR mean to you?
- What do you think is or should be the main purpose of a company? Profit, societal contributions, the triple bottom line?
- How far do you think a business should go to become sustainable? Do they have any responsibilities?
- What role do you think companies and organizations play in the transition towards a more sustainable world?
- What would you say is sustainable business practices?
- What aspect of CSR do you think is the most important one? (People, planet and profit)

Section 3: CSR at work

- What would you say ResQ stands for in terms of CSR? Please elaborate.
  - How have you built your knowledge about this? Internal company discussions, onboarding material, recruitment process, advertising, sustainability reports, etc?
- Are you aware of any CSR related work at ResQ?
  - Is there an explicit CSR strategy that you are aware of?
  - Are there any specific CSR initiatives or guidelines promoted within the company?
  - Do you discuss CSR or sustainability within your company function? E.g., meetings. What are those discussions about? Who is in charge?
  - Do you discuss CSR or sustainability with anyone else within the company? What are those discussions about?

- ○ Are there any discussions about CSR at a company level? E.g., in meetings, workshops, or other gatherings.
- What are your thoughts on the current CSR related work at ResQ? Is the company doing too little, too much or enough?
  - ○ What more do you think ResQ could do? Is there anything they should stop doing?
  - ○ What about in your function or in other functions? Is there anything that can be improved or that should stop?
- What does CSR imply for you in your work role? If anything, please tell us a bit about that.
- Is there anything you do deliberately to contribute to more sustainable or inclusive business practices at ResQ? Please elaborate.