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Master´s Thesis

IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC CSR

- Processes, tools and challenges

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ABSTRACT

Corporate social responsibility has become more and more common in business life and it could be considered that without having at least some portion of sustainability in a company, it would be difficult to succeed nowadays. The decision to include and link CSR into company strategy could be highly beneficial for a company, and not only in the sense of improving the company´s financial status on the long run. Well managed, strategic CSR can also give image and brand benefits and attract prospective new talents. Detachment of strategic CSR policies from its implementation could however cause severe problems for a company, turning the benefits of a well-managed strategic CSR to opposite. It is neither an easy process to link CSR to company strategy, and especially the decisions made at the starting point need special attention.

The aim of the study was to discover what is required for a strategic CSR´s implementation to succeed in a large company with multiple units. The challenges, tools and benefits of the strategic CSR process are also explored and discussed in the study. Data for the study was gathered from four case companies by theme interviews conducted online. The results revealed coherence in some specific aspects of the process, even though the organisation structure and culture also have an impact on the development of CSR. For the implementation of strategic CSR to succeed, it would be essential to receive top management support. Also the initial decisions linking CSR into company strategy and communication were found to be highly important for successful CSR.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tänä päivänä yritysvastuullisuudesta on tullut normi liike-elämässä ja menestyminen ilman jonkinasteista vastuullisuutta voi olla haastavaa. Vastuullisuuden sisällyttäminen ja linkittäminen strategiatyöhön voi olla erittäin hyödyllistä yritykselle, eikä pelkästään pitkän aikatähtäimen positiivisten talousvaikutusten vuoksi. Hyvin johdettu, strateginen yritysvastuullisuus antaa myös imago- ja brändietuja sekä vetää puoleensa uusia osaajia. Strategisen yritysvastuullisuuden linjausten ja toteutuksen eriytyminen voi kuitenkin aiheuttaa vakavia ongelmia yritykselle, muuttaen hyvin johdetun yritysvastuullisuuden edut täysin päinvastaisiksi. Vastuullisuuden sitouttaminen yritysstrategiaan on haastavaa ja etenkin alussa tehtävät päätökset vaativat erityistä huomiota.

Pro gradu tutkielman tavoitteena oli selvittää mitä strategisen vastuullisuuden onnistuneeseen jalkautukseen vaaditaan suuremmissa useamman yksikön yrityksissä. Työssä tutkitaan myös strategisen vastuullisuusprosessin haasteita, työkaluja sekä hyötyjä. Aineisto kerättiin neljältä yritykseltä verkossa tehtyjen teemahaastattelujen avulla. Tulos paljasti tietynasteisen yhtenäisyyden vastuullisuusprosessissa, vaikkakin myös organisaation rakenteella ja kulttuurilla on myös vaikutusta vastuullisuuden kehittymiseen. Jotta strategisen yritysvastuullisuuden jalkautus toteutuu yrityksessä onnistuneesti, etenkin ylimmän johdon tuki on tarpeen. Myös prosessin alussa tehtävät päätökset ja valinnat sekä kommunikaatio osoittautuivat tärkeäksi vastuullisuuden toteutuksen onnistumisen kannalta.

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CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSP	Corporate Social Performance
EMS	Environmental Management System
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
RBV	Resource-Based View
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the years, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become mainstream and beneficial for companies even though many aspects of well conducted strategic CSR are still voluntary. CSR does not only give competitive advantage, but it is also expected by the stakeholders of the company. What draws companies to manage their CSR with different programmes and regulations is the fact that most of the stakeholders have expectations towards the company regarding their responsibility. The stakeholders might for instance believe that the company not only understands but also participates to issues concerning the community or social welfare (Fontaine, 2013, 118). There are many different frameworks and standards which should be considered in the initial phase of starting up CSR work in a company. Stakeholder participation and expectations should be considered carefully as well managed CSR generally is based on it. Planning and executing CSR might seem difficult and complicated at the starting point, when a company is struggling to find relevant CSR aspects, establishing ways to find the correct fit and emphasizing on not decoupling company CSR policies with the implementation. Models and frameworks for integrating CSR permanently into strategy is still lacking and companies seldom have a specific CSR strategy, as more preferred way to conduct corporate responsibility is to have different separate CSR programs and initiatives (Guadamillas-Gomez, Donate-Manzanares and Skerlavaj, 2010, 11; Gazzola and Colombo, 2014, 332). Integrating CSR into all strategic decisions can be challenging, but if it done successfully, a company can ensure that gaining profits doesn´t overshadow the needs for behaving ethically towards the stakeholders (Gazzola and Colombo, 2014, 332).

Good intentions and strong relationship aren´t enough in integrating CSR into company operations. For making the integration possible, incentives, adjustments in the organisation as well as reporting are needed. Organisations can differentiate them from others and build competitive advantage if they build and integrate social initiatives in concert with their core strategy. Companies should stop thinking of "corporate social responsibility" and start thinking "corporate social integration".

When a company responds to its own resources, management and expertise and to aspects it understands, it could impact more than a philanthropic organisation would (Porter and Kramer, 2006, 12-13).

CSR and its possible linkages to corporation strategy and performance seems to be well studied and there are many researches connected to it. There are also several linkages of improved financial performance of the company to corporate social responsibility especially on the long term. Connected to strategic CSR, Porter and Kramer (2011) also introduced the concept of creating shared value in 2011. The concept emphasizes on improving the competitiveness of the company and simultaneously acting responsible towards all the stakeholders. The concept has been well applied in the strategic CSR field. Many companies still view CSR action separately from their business practises and operations. It would although make sense to build a link between these two, as it could in fact gain direct financial benefits and improve long term competitiveness. For routinizing CSR, building practise and linkages to company´s operation is essential (Yuan, Bao and Verbeke, 2011, 75). In addition, if the company CSR is not linked to its strategy, the financial gain for the company is not so obvious.

CSR does not only boost societal and business benefits, but it has also been shown in many studies that CSR can give significant advantages to businesses (Camilleri 2017, 4). CSR can improve the usage of resources and for example through this, bring cost benefits to the company. For instance, lowering down energy consumption for resource efficiency would decrease the costs the company has. Well managed CSR also improves stakeholder relations. It is possible to differentiate the company products with sustainability, increasing competitiveness and improving the company´s possibilities in the industry. CSR could also improve the chances for a company to enter specific markets due to laws or regulations in different countries. This way it could help in creating whole new business functions and models (Joutsenvirta, Halme, Jalas and Mäkinen, 2011, 35, 156).

Corporate sustainability could be further divided into explicit and implicit sustainability. Implicit sustainability means the responsibilities the society sets to companies by law or by general opinion. Explicit sustainability on the other hand, refers to company´s aim to take responsibility over large entities such as wellbeing of the employees and the environment (Joutsenvirta et al., 2011, 35, 156). In this sense, implicit sustainability is run by every company, as the laws and regulations are nationally common to each business. Some companies might even think that managing solely implicit sustainability aspects is enough. It would however be more beneficial to include both, implicit and explicit sustainability into the company´s CSR. It is important to understand the formation and challenges of integrating CSR into company strategy. Strategic work in the company also always needs change management.

1.1.   Background and research gap

The initiative for doing this type of study came after long discussions with one of the case companies. The company´s goal was to improve their existing CSR but had challenges in defining the best processes and tools. The research questions for this study were defined in mutual understanding after several conversations with the company, as it was considered ideal to resolve the best practises in implementing strategic CSR. For companies aiming at a well-managed strategic CSR, it is beneficial to have a better vision of the entire CSR process and of its possible challenges. For the companies in the starting phase, benchmarking to more mature companies could also be beneficial, especially if they are in the same industry or closely similar one. Decoupling between policies and their implementation is one of the most concerning problems which might be encountered. This is more likely to be encountered by larger companies with multiple employees and many different business units. This set the original base for the research and helped to form the research questions of the study further.

There are many studies made of the stakeholder demands over company CSR or the organizational responses of the company, but the operative practical models and literature are still quite scarce. The master´s thesis intends to fill in this research gap and offers an insight on the perspectives of the company on the challenges of integrating CSR into company strategy and implementing it in company operations. Not so many studies have been made at the microlevel, focusing on the outcomes of company CSR to individuals. It is evidential that one of the main challenges with company strategy in general lies in its implementation. CSR strategy or CSR embedded into a company´s strategy does not make a difference. The most apparent danger of decoupling is that it may seem greenwashing from the eyes of the stakeholders and through this decrease company credibility or even destroy it. This is one of the most important reasons why it would be essential that decoupling would not happen, and the policy would match the concrete implementation in the company.

1.2.   Research questions

The study aims to open up the complicated forms and processes connected to CSR and its unique nature. It depends on the organisation how CSR is integrated in the company functions, as there are variations regarding size, value chain, industrial and cultural contexts. There is not only one uniform way how a company should integrate CSR (Aagard 2016). There might be different expectations of different stakeholders, different practices and different standards varying not only from company to another, but also from industry to another (Doshi, Pradyumana, Srinivasan and Vohra 2012, 73). These should all be considered when building and planning CSR work in a company. Strategic CSR requires that it would be closely linked to the strategic values and programmes the company has. In this way, it would be the most useful and beneficial for a business.

The effectiveness of CSR is in jeopardy if there are no programs and management systems used implemented by policies. The effectiveness is also impacted when programs are not implemented adequately, as the impacts CSR has, may be insufficient. CSR implementation could be considered as the mediator between the impact and policies. The more CSR programs are integrated into the company´s strategy, more likely it is to be sustainable over time. If the implementation of the CSR policy towards the CSR program is not adequate, decoupling is more likely. Decoupling is also more likely if the policies are low-quality (Graafland and Smid, 216, 233-234, 238). It is important for successful CSR, that the company policies and their implementation would be in line. Especially in companies with several business units, this might be challenging and coherence with these two challenging to execute. This leads to my first, primary, research question:

- What are the key issues in implementing strategic CSR policies?

With this question, the aim is to find out the best possible practises a company has in implementing strategic CSR and whether there are any similarities in companies managing strategic CSR successfully. Even though the study´s priority is to find out the key successful points for CSR implementation, it also gives direction how the process is being built. Also the possible challenges (e.g. change resistance) are aimed to be discovered with the primary research question.

From a practical level, it is also beneficial for a company to be aware of the possible challenges and benefits of integrating CSR into company strategy and implementing this strategic CSR into operations. Especially for companies at an early stage maturity level, it would be beneficial to be aware of the possible obstacles and challenges which may come ahead. There are also many different tools a company could benefit from when building a lasting CSR strategy. In the thesis, also the importance of the different tools are studied and observed; whether they are all

equally valuable in all stages of the life span of CSR and whether some tools more important in different stages compared to others. My secondary questions are:

- *What are the greatest challenges and benefits in implementing strategic CSR into company operations?*

- *What formal tools can assist the implementation of CSR policies into operations?*

The research questions also give frame for seeing the development process of strategic CSR in the company as the case companies have been working with more systematic CSR approach different sets of time and their maturity level varies from each other.

1.3. Delimitations

There are many aspects in building a company strategy and implementing it. The focus in this study was however solely on building and integrating CSR into the strategic frame the company originally has and implementing it in practice to the business operations. The work also focused on challenges and possibilities in implementing CSR and its policies, reflecting to the impacts the company´s CSR policies might or might not have on general public. Well managed CSR is commonly known to rely on stakeholder´s perspectives, but the matrix for building a CSR policy was not included into the study as the main focus was on the operations and outcomes of the CSR. What comes to the concept of CSR, both internal and external aspects were considered, including also social and economic dimension besides the environmental one.

The study was carried through qualitative research and the population of the interviews was not so large, so it also brought delimitations to the research in forms

of comparability and reliability. Interviews were although the best way of approaching this topic. The perspective to the research was in larger companies with several functions and business units. The case companies were also multinational, international, or members of an international network of companies, but the focus was however solely at the Finnish business units. This discarded the SME´s perspective to the topic. The work also consisted of companies which are in different CSR maturity levels or have been working with more systematic CSR approach different sets of time, for bringing a broader perspective to the study.

1.4. Structure of the study

At the beginning of the study, the topic will be introduced further and more insightfully in the literature review. The theoretical structure of the study begins from bigger entities such as corporate strategy, followed by corporate social responsibility and its definitions, strategic CSR and ways for implementing it and tools for doing it.

The most emphasized focus points in the literature review are mainly in strategic CSR management and its implementation, including topics around strategic management, corporate social responsibility, creating shared value, decoupling and tools for implementing CSR. The theoretical perspectives presented in the study are stakeholder theory, institutional theory and resource-based view. A well conducted CSR is always based to the stakeholders´ opinions and this was the main reason why the study could not be conducted without introducing it in this study. Institutional theory refers to the pressure the companies encounter from outside, as in from the industry for example. As CSR has become mainstream and more common nowadays, the pressure it creates from outside has increased over time as well. Within the couple of last years, sustainability and the efforts business life are making has become more and more important. For being successful, it is almost compulsory that a company is also responsible in its line of work and knows how to communicate this to its stakeholders. The resource-based view is also taken into account in the

study. This includes CSR knowledge and expertise inside the company, which is a vital tool in starting and obtaining a more sustainable strategic route.

In the research methods chapter, the methodology of the study is being explained and cases of the study are presented more thoroughly. Data collection and data analysis are also described. These are being followed by findings of the study, discussion and conclusions. In the chapter "Findings", the study would go further in analyzing the interviews and combining the answers of the respondents into more comprehendible matrixes and tables. In the beginning of the chapter, the CSR processes which a company goes through, are also being analyzed based on the respondent´s answers. The "Discussion and conclusions" chapter carries on with the analysis of the findings, going through the linkages found with the theory and findings of the study. Conclusions will wrap all up in the end. In this chapter, limitations as well as the validity and reliability of the study are explored more thoroughly.

2 STRATEGIC CSR AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

2.1. Key concepts

The key concepts of the study and the literature review are strategic management, corporate social responsibility and strategic CSR, which are further explained and discussed in the following three chapters.

2.1.1. Strategic management

Taking a closer perspective to company strategy and its formation in general is important for getting a better understanding on how CSR could be integrated into it.

Strategy gives direction and coherence to a company and helps in its decision-making processes and actions. A well created strategy improves the quality of decision-making process, facilitates coordination and focuses on long-term objectives of the organization (Grant, 2015, 16). All companies function in a competitive environment. This naturally has an effect on the ability to carry out strategy in the long term. In this competitive context, social conditions are an essential part. A company cannot address to all societal aspects, instead, it should choose the ones which intersect with its particular business (Porter and Kramer 2006, 6). In the continuously changing world, a business should continuously find ways of re-inventing its business model to be competitive (Nwagbara and Reid, 2013, 18).

There are three different strategy types which could be identified. These are intended, realized and emergent strategies. Realized strategy means a strategy which is actually implemented, and this is generally only partly related to which was intended. Emergent strategy on the other hand emerge when managers build interpretations of the intended strategy in changing circumstances. In general, this leads that the intended strategy of the company is seldom implemented as it is. Organizations consist of different individuals with different agendas. This leads to multiple goals which can conflict. Even so, creating value is essential in the activities of the members of the organization (Grant and Jordan, 2014, 2, 15-16, 18).

The strategy making process allows that the knowledge of different individuals could be taken advantage of. A systematic input is highly important in strategy process. Solutions to problems will not be generated in the strategy process, as the problems are too complex. Instead of solving problems, the strategy process intends to help to understand different aspects and issues (Grant, 2015, 16,24). Grant explained the process of applying strategic analysis from identification to implementation. Figure 1 represents the Grant´s model of applying strategic analysis.

Figure 1: Applying strategy analysis (Grant 2015, 25)
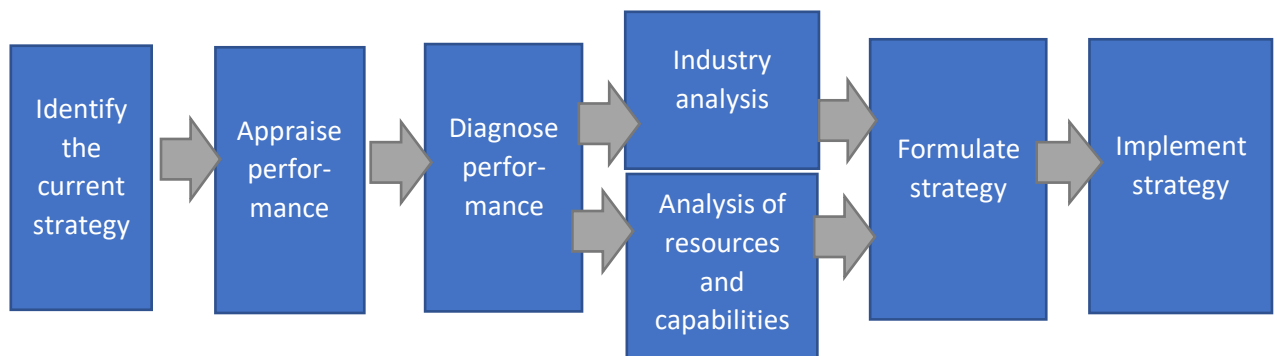
The process starts in identifying the current strategy and after that the performance level of the strategy could be analyzed and diagnosed. If the level is unsatisfactory, the diagnosis will aim to define the reasons for this and if the level would be good, the diagnosis will describe the factors for this. Industry analysis and analysis of the resources and capabilities is the next crucial step for formulating the strategy and finally implementing it (Grant, 2015, 25).

Building a company´s strategy is always a change for a company, nevertheless it would be decided to keep the functions as similar as before (Hackselius - Fonsen 2017,14, 22-23,79). Powerful and rapid changes pressure companies to change, but also bring new opportunities (Kulmala, 2014, 27). The corner stone for change management is well conducted strategy and its open communication throughout the organization. The role of the supervisors is essential in building change in the organization. They need guidelines for operations, resources and performance indicators to be able to work successfully. It the top management fails in providing these, the strategy might have different forms in different parts of the organization. This slows down the operations and the change the strategy would bring will be superficial or non-developed (Hackselius-Fonsen 2017, 14, 22-23, 79).

Multinationality also sets challenges for a company. The problem in large multinational companies is that generally the top management tends to be detached

and separated from the practical functions of the company. In these larger companies, it is although impossible to be involved in everything and it is neither even reasonable to be. Information disconnected from its context might be provided to the top management with large quantities, which does not add understanding or help in decision making (Ala-Mutka, 2008, 81- 82).

2.1.2. Corporate Social Responsibility

The concept of CSR came to public awareness for the first time as early as 1953, when Bowen published "Social Responsibility of a Business Man". After this, the concept started to evolve and develop. There are no conclusive specific definition of CSR and the concept itself is quite vague and subjective (Albdour and Altarawneh 2012, 91; Albasu and Nyameh 2017, 95). Some define it as business decisions including ethical values, respecting people, communities and environment and which are in compliance with all the legal requirements (Albdour and Altarawneh 2012, 91). According to Kotler and Lee (2005, 3), CSR is *"a commitment to improve community well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources".* CSR can also be defined as "*behavior of the companies to protect or promote social welfare beyond the direct interests of the corporations and their stakeholders as stipulated by law"* (Jia, Yan, Liu and Huang, 2019, 3). CSR has also been often used as a synonym for business ethics, relating to company´s environmental policy and philanthropy (Camilleri 2017, 5).

The base to CSR comes from the stakeholder theory. The long-term value of the company lies in the knowledge and ability of the stakeholders, including the company´s employees (Vinerean, Cetina, Dumitrescu and Tichindelean, 2013, 23). Stakeholder satisfaction is in fact an essential element of CSR (Albasu and Nyameh 2017, 95).

Carroll identified already in 1979 that companies have obligations towards the society and finally in 1991 a pyramid was constructed by him, explaining the obligations of a business towards the society. Based on the pyramid, the economic responsibilities were the base of a company and everything else was relying on that. Companies also have legal responsibilities so obeying law and regulations comes next in the pyramid. Ethical responsibilities show the obligations of a company of doing good and avoiding harm. At the top of the pyramid lies philanthropic responsibilities which are basically charitable actions targeted to the community (Camilleri 2017, 5).

Figure 2: Carroll´s pyramid (1991)
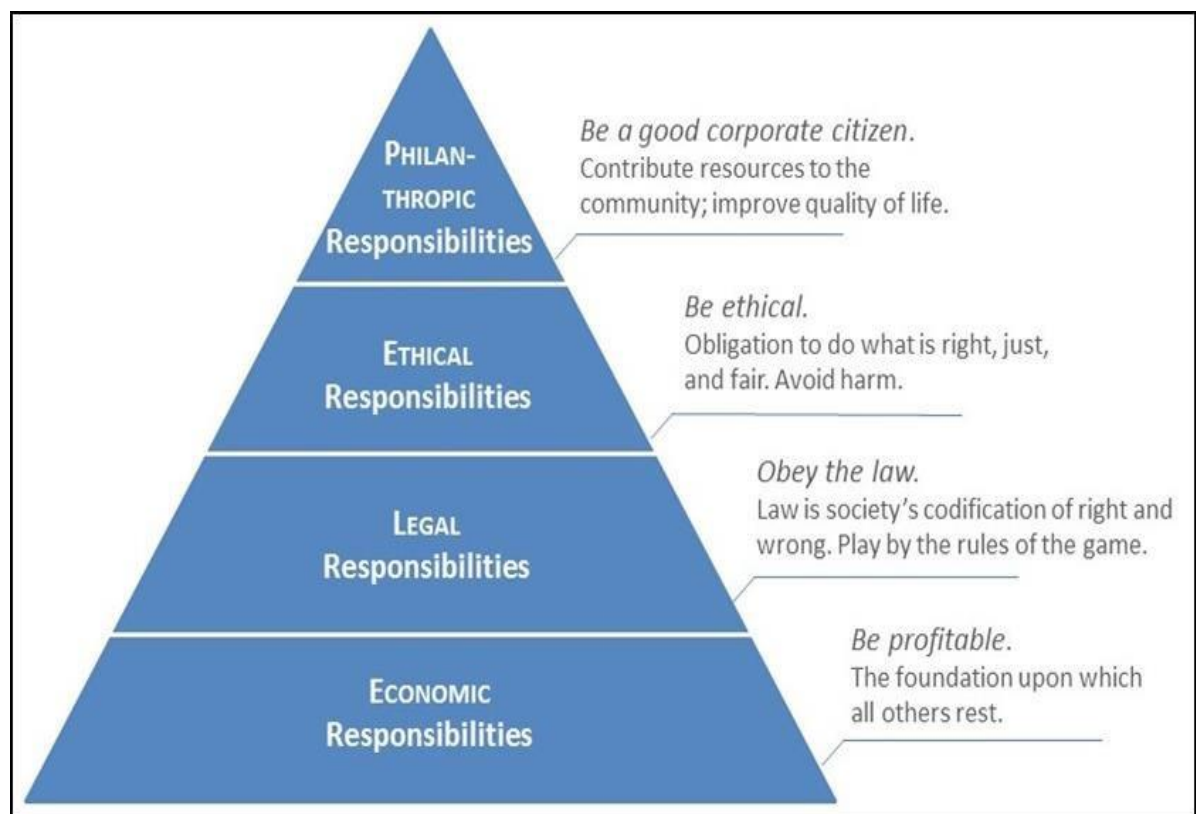
Sometimes the companies might have solely a philanthropic approach to sustainability. In these cases, a company seeks mainly reputative benefits, not benefits to its business directly. Philanthropic sustainability in general is not strategic but a separate task generated to sustainability or communications team. Research

has although shown that strategic sustainability is on average more financially beneficial to a company than philanthropic sustainability (Joutsenvirta et al., 2011, 43, 45). If a company wishes to use philanthropy as a strategic tool, it should remember that the initiatives are complex and require development, communication, implementation, monitoring and sustaining (Fontaine 2013, 114).

Internal CSR refers to actions which are directed to all internal operations of the company and what can be done inside of the company for improving the well-being of the employees, which in turn improves their productivity and, in the end, also profitability. Internal CSR could be further identified into four value classes, which are social equity, health and safety at work, satisfaction and wellbeing of the employee, development of employee´s skills and quality of work. (Obeidat 2016, 365). Examples of internal CSR are for instance providing welfare services to the employees and ensuring work safety on the premises. The core idea of internal CSR is to benefit the employees rather than pursuing corporate interest (Jia et al., 2019, 3).

External CSR refers actions which are directed outside the company. These external stakeholders include customers, local communities and business partners (Obeidat 2016, 365). Besides the economic interests of the company, external CSR provides the company possibilities for better reputation and healthier image. Employees are more likely to identify with organizations which have a good image as it enhances the employees own self value and the needs for self-improvement. Organizational pride can fulfill the needs for social identity and sustain employee engagement (Jia et al 2019, 3).

2.1.3. Strategic CSR

The neoclassical view was that the main responsibility of a firm is to maximize returns to its stakeholders and the environmental actions should be restricted to

those which are in line with this vision. Later on, the view has however been further determined by many different researchers. The conclusion and consensus by many researchers have subsequently been that firms need to bring CSR into their strategy for remaining competitive (Fowler and Hope, 2007, 28). Porter and Kramer brought into notion already in 2002 that companies taking account CSR in their business strategies might outperform their rivals. Integrating CSR into corporate strategy brings intangible benefits such as legitimacy, social capital regarding stakeholders and improvements to firm´s reputation (Guadamillas-Gomez et al., 2010, 10-11). Many of the benefits company CSR brings could be considered as qualitative. These are for instance reputation, image, employee morale, goodwill, public relations and impact on the general opinion over the company. In general, it is difficult to quantify the returns of responsible business (Camilleri 2017, 16).

Strategic CSR refers to a company generating socio-environmental benefits while at the same time contributing to the improvements of firm´s competitiveness. Strategic CSR has been studied on previous occasions, but the role played by formal tools related to the CSR is controversial and there are not any profound research over the managerial and organizational factors supporting companies in their CSR activities. Formalizing CSR activities, introduction of sustainability reports, a well-structured communication over the outputs and initiatives of CSR activities and the adaptation of certified management systems are steps in integrating CSR into strategy. This formalization can however even have countereffects (Contri 2011, 10, 15, 33). For a company to be competitive, their CSR strategy should respond agile to the changing need of different sets of sustainability. The strategy should bring confidence in the eyes of the company stakeholders as well as improve the financial performance of the company at the same time (Nwagbara and Reid 2013, 13).

The efforts of a company to become more sustainable can lead to not so productive results due to two reasons. The first thing is, that they might separate business from society. These two are although interdependent (Porter and Kramer 2006, 1). If the

business core elements and company CSR are built to be separate and they do not interact with each other, they tend to decrease each other´s value over time (Yuan et al., 2011, 78). The second thing is that companies might see CSR as generic and not in a way which would be the most appropriate to the company´s strategy (Porter and Kramer 2006, 1).

The three dimensions of sustainability has been widely recognized also in business world and it has had an impact on the responsibility work done by the companies. The triple bottom line refers to environmental, societal and economical responsibility. It is generally connected with the vision to have all of these aspects in line and balanced when planning and developing a responsible business. (Joutsenvirta et al., 2011,13).

The role of leadership is highly important in strategizing CSR activities. Different stakeholders demand different things. CSR is neither free as it requires time and resources. These aspects may in many instances lead that the companies find it challenging to see CSR as a business case. In some studies, innovation and differentiation has been found as moderators between CSR and performance. For instance, Camilleri (2017, 7-8) refers in his book to a study made by Hull and Rothenberg (2008), who found that corporate social performance was highly correlating to financial performance in companies with low innovativeness and little differentiation. So according to this, if the competitiveness does not come from other differentiating factors, corporate social performance is likely to have a greater impact on the financial performance.

Practices and initiatives of CSR are often disconnected from the operating units. This is a great lost of opportunity. (Porter and Kramer 2006) Within an industry, a special social issue may have different impacts in different companies meaning that companies may consider and emphasize on different societal aspects in their CSR work. This is due to different competitive positioning of the company.

It is only through strategic CSR that a company might have the greatest societal and business performance impacts (Porter and Kramer 2006, 7). Advertising or using external intermediates are tools for informing its stakeholders about its CSR activities. Philanthropic donations are one clear tool impacting on the company image. These kinds of activities could be considered strategically useful and beneficial. Sometimes companies however can be criticized of having a cosmetic approach to CSR without making any material changes in the company. (Vishwanathan, Oosterhout, Heugens, Duran and van Essen 2019, 6)

According to Guadamillas-Gomez et al. (2010), there are three steps in integrating CSR into company strategy. These are introduction, implementation of the CSR plan and generalization of CSR. In the introduction phase, the company´s will, ethical mission and principles should be spread into the organization culture, shared by its members. Organization culture could be seen as rules, beliefs and values shared by the members and having an effect on their behavior. It is not an easy task and the communication should be as clear and understandable as possible. In the second phase, implementation, the formal plans are implemented. Generalization is essential for the success of integration and it is carried out successfully only if the earlier stages are overcome well. In this stage, CSR will be connected into the company´s value, mission and goals (Guadamillas-Gomez et al. 2010, 13,15).

The management plays a crucial role in implementing the ethical change in the company. Especially the commitment of the top management is vital. If the managerial commitment is lacking, the employees might easily feel that the responsibility in the working live is somewhat substantial and easily ignorable. Also, locating the CSP responsibility at the top managerial level is a sign for the external stakeholders of the firm of the company commitment (Graafland and Smid 2019, 242).

In determining the success of strategic CSR into business functions, the most crucial aspect which leads to success is fit. First, is the external consistency, meaning the fit between the CSR initiatives and external stakeholders. Second is the internal consistency. This means the fit between company CSR and core business. Third comes the fit between all the CSR related routines, whether they are coherent or not. The challenge for companies in applying strategic CSR is in applying CSR routines which are all coherent, internally consistent with the company´s core activities and make contributions to both: business and society (Yuan et al. 2011, 88-89).

2.2. Theoretical perspectives to strategic CSR

The theoretical perspective which can be further discussed in connection of strategic CSR and its implementation are the stakeholder theory, institutional theory, resource-based view (RBV) and the shared value model. These theories give perspectives on why decoupling of strategic CSR from its implementation occur and what may impact on the CSR policy to succeed in the organisation.

2.2.1. Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory focuses on the relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders. A stakeholder could be defined as a group or an individual who can either have an effect or be affected by the company´s objectives. In general, there are various stakeholders, which might have conflicting expectations. The organisational accountability is very much highlighted by the theory, beyond the interests of the shareholders and economic and financial performance of the company, but also considering the rights of the stakeholders (Susith and Stewart, 2014, 157, 160). Finding a joint direction with all the stakeholders is not easy. Creating as much value as possible for all the stakeholders is the key. In conflicting situations, the problems should be rethought so that the interests could go together. A stakeholder approach emphasizes on finding ways to make all stakeholders

satisfied without resulting in trade-offs (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar and de Colle, 2010, 27-28).

2.2.2. Institutional theory

According to the institutional theory, organizations consist of numerous different institutions. Institutions refer to pre-defined work position descriptions, standardized policies, incentives, direct rules and nonwritten understandings over the characteristics of the organisation and tasks of an individual employee (Joutsenvirta et al., 2011, 164). Institutional theory is based to organisations respondence to pressure from their institutional environments and their tendency to adopt structures or procedures which are considered to be appropriate in their surroundings (Susith and Stewart, 2014, 164).

Isomorphism and decoupling are dimensions which exist in institutional theory. Isomorphism is a concept which describes the process of homogenisation. It is a force which causes one unit to resemble another in the same environmental settings. Decoupling relates to the separation between the organisations structure and procedures to its external image (Susith and Stewart, 2014, 163, 165). Institutional theory presents that the main reason for a company to decouple its CSR policies and their implementation is the pressure from its stakeholders and its ability to maintain efficiency also internally. As companies operate on different institutional settings, the environment where the company operates may have an effect on the CSP of the company (Graafland and Smid 2019, 232, 248).

2.2.3. Resource- based view

The resource-based view, RBV, on the other hand evaluates that company´s internal capabilities can be the inner force impacting the competitiveness of the company as well as its productivity (Nwagbara and Reid, 2013, 13). Competitive

advantage can be received by an asset which is rare, inimitable, valuable and indispensable. The theory predicts that company intangibles, such as the company´s reputation of CSR, would improve the CSP and this way be a mediator for improving the company´s financial status on the long term (Graafland and Smid 2019, 241, 261). McWilliams and Siegel (2001) also used the RBV model for creating a model of profit maximizing CSR. In the model managers were using CSR as part of their differentiation strategy (Orlitzky, Siegel and Waldman, 2011, 9).

2.2.4. Creating shared value

Porter and Kramer had brought into notion the concept of "creating shared value", in aligning CSR with company strategy. The base of the concept lies in noticing not only economical but also societal needs for defining markets (Bosch-Badia, Montllor-Serrats and Tarrazon 2013,12-13). The concept also highlights that the success of the company and social welfare are interdependent. Profitable and competitive businesses create opportunities to philanthropy by creating wealth, income, and tax revenues (Fontaine 2013, 114).

In the long run, the value chain of a company becomes more sustainable and stronger if shared value is used. There are although also pressure from the capital markets in the short term. The managerial challenge in shared value is to turn it from expense to investment and to show and communicate its benefits to the stakeholders (Bosch-Badia et al., 2013,12-13).

Figure 3: Shared Value Framework (Fiksel, Fulton, Golden, Hawkins, Hecht, Leuenberger, Lovejoy and Yosie, 2012, 67)
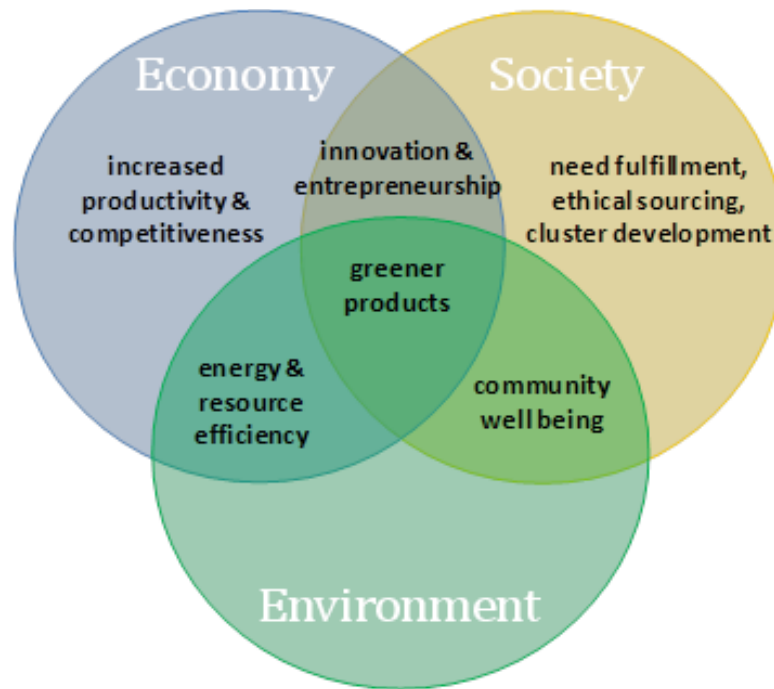
Figure 3, Shared Value Framework, demonstrates the shared value concept further. Porter and Kramer have identified several ways for understanding and identifying shared value. These could for instance be developing "clusters" to supply goods and services, fulfilling unmet social needs and increasing productivity in the supply chain. The framework mainly focuses on the economic and social benefits, but environmental benefits raise from responding to social needs (Fiksel et al. 2012, 67).

2.3. Implementing strategic CSR

It is difficult to create practices without the knowledge of the consequences (Joutsenvirta et al., 2011,165). According to Graafland and Smid (2019), there are three steps in company CSR process which could be defined. These are identifying

company´s CSR policy, deciding on the implementation of the policy and finally proceeding into the impact phase, which would preferably lead to desirable outcomes. A policy could be defined as intentions of the company which have been declared either externally or internally in formal methods. This would for instance include written and published declarations, statements or slogans of the company´s environmental management. It could be considered that the formation and development of the environmental policy is a great step in committing to environmental aspects inside the company. Graafland and Smid (2019, 238) defined the level of the company sustainability policy with three different criterias. The authors defined that a company has a strong CSR policy if it is formal and written, applied all around the company and descriptions in the policy are detailed rather than generic (Graafland and Smid 2019, 234, 238).

From a management perspective, adopting new CSR initiatives might be risky and complicated. The managers are responsible of analyzing whether the new CSR initiatives fit in the company procedures and current practices. If the internal cross-functional coordination isn´t adequate or the company has organizational barriers, can this lead to conflicts and weakly achieved societal and business goals. Routinized CSR planning and control processes which include key performance indicators help CSR to become a part of everyday business decisions (Yuan et al. 2011, 76).

Implementation is the bridge between the CSR policy and its impact, consisting of CSR programs within the company guided by the company policy. The more CSR policies are integrated in the company´s quality CSR programs, the more successful the company would be in its CSR impacts. What on the other hand would make these programs quality ones, would be strict deadlines, scope, and the use of targets (Graafland and Smid 2019, 231, 234).

Companies should emphasize on tailored solutions and proactivity in linking CSR policies to operations. Managers in different units might find helpful in taking a closer perspective to the value chain and identifying the most important societal aspects this way. Most challenging is analysing the impacts which are not easily visible. (Porter and Kramer 2006, 7,10).

As there are many different types of companies with different maturity levels, also the integration of CSR into operations varies. Yuan et al. (2011) presented the following methods of integration:

Born CSR oriented companies: the role of CSR in this type of company´s activities cover all the business operations

Patching: In these type of companies, new CSR core practices are created and around half of the practices are embedded with CSR. This involves changes in the organizational processes and in the value change competences

Thickening: Companies have CSR activities which extend to the core, supporting core activities or reinforcing them

Positioning: Companies have independent CSR practices

Relabeling: Peripheral, core and independent CSR activities

Trimming: Limiting and eliminating practices which are not good for CSR functions

Cooperating: Alliances and cooperation, creating practices through this

(Yuan et al. 2011, 81)

Also Heslin and Ochoa (2008, 131) presented different approaches in implementing strategic CSR. According to the authors, these approaches shouldn´t be seen as a checklist for sustainability initiatives but as an example of identifying and developing strategic CSR. Each of the approach has an example, but the approach may vary a great deal depending on the company and industry. These approaches with the examples of their implementation in practise are:

- *Developing and cherishing talents*: providing new opportunities
- *Developing new markets***:** specializing in green products
- *Protect labour welfare***:** ensure ethical production throughout the whole supply chain
- *Reduce environmental footprint:* Renew and ensure that raw materials are environmentally friendly
- *Profit from by-products***:** make new designs for products for learning and profits purposes
- *Involve customers***:** educate customers and make sure they are engaged
- *Green supply chain*: reduction in packages all over the supply chain

Basically, the implementation in practise depends on the company so the practises can vary quite a lot depending on the company and industry (Heslin and Ochoa 2008,131).

Vishwanathan et al. (2019 18) also presented a conceptual structure for strategic CSR. The model included four empirical mechanisms which mediated between CSR and CSP. These were risk mitigation, innovation capacity, stakeholder reciprocation and reputation enhancement. These activities were achieved by different operative functions. Enhancing the company´s reputation, the company should link its activities with the UN Global Compact, make donations and extent its voluntary disclosure. Stakeholder reciprocation includes activities of employing from minority groups, practicing family friendly HR and having a community benefit agreement. Preventing pollution, reducing waste and employee health and safety programs would reduce firm´s risk level. Finally, improving innovation capacities include investing in renewable energy, having more public-private partnerships and base of the pyramid projects (Vishwanathan et al. 2019, 17-18).

CSR policies which are of high quality, have a great impact on the implementation of CSR in action. In addition, if the CSR polices have high quality, the effects on implementation are strong as well. It is although better to have some kind of policy, nevertheless it would be of low-quality, than no policy at all. In the study made by Graafland and Smid (2019), the quality of the CSR programs is also dependable on the quality of CSR reporting and locating responsibility issues at the board level (Graafland and Smid 2019, 232).

The impacts and results are highly dependable on the overall motivation to adopt the policy and how the resources and rules are integrated in the organization culture. The results are also dependable on the company´s cooperation with other partners. As an example, the supply chain, which cannot be completely controlled or effected by the company itself (Graafland and Smid 2019, 236).

2.3.1. Formal tools of implementing CSR

Many companies use different kinds of tools and policies for implementing CSR in practise. These include for instance codes of conduct, memberships in global initiatives, cooperation with stakeholder initiatives and ISO certifications. The realization of these tools and their reflections to the sustainability goals are not although certain. Many researchers propose criticism against companies for setting the sustainability agenda so that it would support rather than question the company´s business model and practises (Graafland and Smid 2019, 232).

Frameworks for CSR policy

For building a CSR policy, a company may choose guidelines which are most convenient for them. As certain single type and model of CSR does not exist, the framework for building sustainability policy is quite adjustable and may be defined by the company´s own goals and stakeholder expectations. There are although many different guidelines a company could take advantage of when building a

successful CSR policy. These include for instance the UN Global Compact, OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises, European Commission Guidelines and ISO 26000. Most companies rely their CSR policy to the Triple Bottom Line. The model includes three features: Profit, People and Planet and through these include environmental, social and economical sustainability into the model. Only if a company considers all of the three elements, could it be called sustainable (Ksiezak and Fischbach 2017, 99).

Companies might also take an advantage of the UN Global Compact as a frame for their CSR and reflect the principles to the company strategy. The UN Global Compact holds ten principles which are further divided into four areas. The areas are environment, human rights, labor and anticorruption (Ksiezak and Fischbach 2017, 106). The strategy of the UN Global Compact is to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG´s) by generating business awareness and actions (UN Global Compact 2020).

ISO 26000 is a standard which aims at global sustainable development. This includes wealth of the society and takes into account all the applicable laws and norms as well as considering the expectations of the stakeholders. Most of the elements of this standard could however be considered to match and correlate with the Triple Bottom Line (Ksiezak and Fischbach 2017, 107).

Codes of conduct

Codes of conduct could be defined as commitments which the company has voluntarily made and which present standards and principles to the company business. Primarily they are not tools for CSR as they could be considered to be organizational imperatives. There are four different motivational factors why a company might adopt the codes. These are stakeholder regulation, competitive advantage, stakeholder communication and mitigation of risks. A study made by Bondy, Matten and Moon in 2008 however casted a suspicion over whether codes

of conduct is a useable tool for CSR in the end. (Bondy, Matten and Moon 2008, 1-2)

Environmental management systems

Environmental management systems (EMS) such as ISO 14001 provide a framework for a company which is willing to monitor and manage environmental relations. Using an environmental system might help a company in integrating sustainability into company actions. For developing EMS, an organisation has to set its environmental goals, set targets for reducing their impacts and make a plan how to achieve the targets (Khanna, Bhutiani, Matta, 2009, 10,11). A study made by Annandale, Morrison-Saunders and Bouma (2004), found that the implementation of environmental management systems would actually be more effective and influence more on the environmental performance of the company than environmental reporting (Graafland and Smid 2019, 233).

CSR disclosures and reports

Providing CSR information reduces the asymmetry of information. A company can also expect to have some benefits in providing CSR disclosures, these being for instance attracting potential employees, gaining image benefits, attracting more investors, lowering the cost of capital, decreasing the turnover rate of the current employees and also improving the relationship with the stakeholders in general. (Susith and Stewart, 2014, 162).

If the company reporting is effective, it could improve company value and enhance trust. It is important that the company would use standards which are internationally commonly known and appreciated in its sustainability reporting, such as GRI. Ten different principles of reporting has been identified by GRI, some of which became more actionable and important after the emergence of the SDG´s. One example could be the principle of sustainability context. This could be referred to the SDG´s as a framework. The report should include both, positive and negative aspects which

are reflected to the priorities and goals. This would show how the company would cover its responsibilities regarding the SDG´s and how it takes these account. (GRI, UNGC and WBCSD 27).

Other tools for CSR

Other tools for implementing CSR could be for instance memberships in global initiatives, cooperation with stakeholder initiatives and philanthropic actions. In Finland, there is for instance an organization called FIBS a company could join in. FIBS is a leading promoter of sustainable business, offering its members a forum for retrieving and exchanging sustainability information (FIBS ry 2020). A company might also have internal sustainability communication circles which help to define the company´s own goals further, engaging employees simultaneously.

2.3.2. Decoupling

It's a problem for a company if decoupling of CSR policies and their implementation occurs. Two different types of decoupling could be defined. First of all, if the company doesn´t use any CSR programs or management systems, decoupling is more likely, even though the company might gain legitimacy via efficient CSR communication policies. Secondly, if the CSR programs are not well implemented, it influences the impact of CSR (Graafland and Smid 2019, 233). Also greenwashing could be related to decoupling, although their meaning slightly differs. Decoupling consists of good company policies and intentions, but poor implementation and greenwashing on the other hand positive public communication but simultaneous poor performance (Graafland and Smid 2019, 236).

One cause of decoupling is ambiguity. The visibility of the corporate social performance to their stakeholders would decrease this. The more information available and the more transparent the company would be, the easier it would be

for the stakeholders to either reward or punish the company (Graafland and Smid 2019, 241).

Policy-practice decoupling is quite rare as resulted in Graafland and Smid´s (2019, 259) research, as it turned out that companies which have a weak policy still have significantly better programs than companies which do not have any policy at all. In addition, also a weak program is better than no program at all, even though a means-end decoupling increases if the quality of the program is weak. More advantages could be received if the company emphasizes on transparency as reporting narrows the gap between policies and implementation (Graafland and Smid 2019, 259).

Even though the strategic implementation would be patching, i.e. building new CSR core activities, if the coupling is loose, the impacts happen only locally rather than throughout the whole firm. It may be even problematic is there is only one unit which does not apply to new routines and practices and this way threatens the survival of the whole company. In the short term, the effect may not be so obvious but it does have an effect on the credibility of the company´s CSR activities and performance on the long term. Loose coupling also is less likely to make any changes to the core business functions of the company (Yuan et al., 2011, 87-88).

2.3.3. Maturation stages of sustainability

Gazzola and Colombo (2014,334) defined five different stages of the integration of CSR into strategy. These are:

1) Informal and defensive CSR
2) Charitable CSR
3) Systemic CSR
4) Innovative CSR
5) Dominant CSR

From Figure 4. the integration path is more visible. The stages are not always exactly followed, after all, there are for instance companies which start from the dominant stage. It although shows how the CSR maturation path could proceed inside a company (Gazzola and Colombo 2014, 337).

Figure 4: Development of CSR integration into company strategy (Gazzola and Colombo 2014, 337)
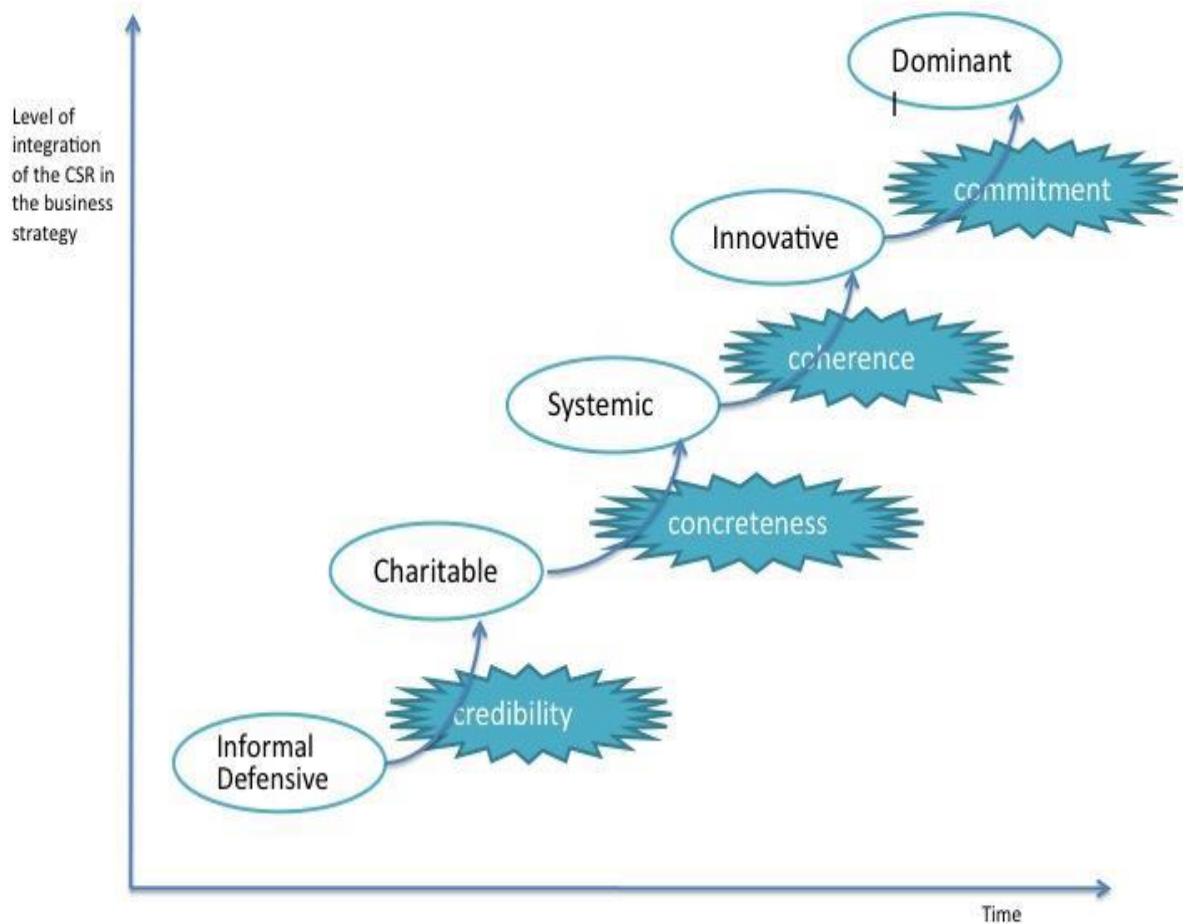
The complexity of integrating CSR into strategy depends rather largely on the size of the company. In SME´s, the integration tends to remain informal and this is the reason why they are in mainly in the first stage, providing informal and defensive

CSR. Companies which want to ensure shareholder value and take CSR actions only if they can ensure this are also in the first stage. The second stage includes donations and sponsorships and having an impact through these means. In this stage, the company generally starts to use CSR communication tools such as sustainability reports. Systemic CSR supports the CSR aspects which are already in line with the company strategy and the focus is at the micro level. The process of the integration of CSR into strategy is completed at the fourth stage, in innovative CSR. The company emphasizes on finding interconnections at the macro level and changes its strategy to optimize the CSR outcomes. The company innovates new business models for tackling the causes of unsustainability. The last stage, dominant CSR, connects the company´s core business and CSR activities (Gazzola and Colombo 2014, 334).

3 RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Research approach

The methodology used in the study is qualitative and inductive. The focus in qualitative research is on the social meanings framed by the experiences, situations and circumstances people have. Qualitative research offers various perspectives and practices generating knowledge (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011, 4, 9, 45 - 46). The starting point in qualitative research is in describing real life and the subject should be approached comprehensively and diversified (Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara, 2005, 152). In this model, the study generally begins with data gathering, leading to a general insight over the topic. The research questions used in qualitative research normally begin with questions such as "why, what and how", which are also a starting point in this study. Qualitative research aims for looking at the process and for the meanings a social situation is attributed by (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011, 4, 9, 45 - 46). As the aim of the study was to learn more of the

CSR process and to discover the aspects which make a strategic CSR successful, choosing a qualitative method was almost imperative.

Inductive approach refers to reasoning the topic from details to generalization. The approach is generally non-structured and solely linked to qualitative methods. In inductive approach, there are three different levels how the material could be analysed. These are: descriptive, empirical and theoretical level (Grönfors 2011, 15-16). The aim of the researcher is to reveal unexpected aspects. The material should be studied from different perspectives and in details (Hirsjärvi et al. 2005, 155).

3.2. Research design

The data for the study was collected by theme interviews from the sample group. Theme interview is not so strictly structured, but it its neither nondirective. The interview focuses on the specific theme by open questions and it is up to the informant to bring up the aspects she or he considers to be important considering the theme. The interviewer does not present own opinions over the theme for objectivity (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 31).

The case companies were all anonymous in the study and the answers of the informants were given confidentially. The positions of the representatives were kept confidential, as some of the respondents might have lost anonymity if the positions would have been revealed. At least one interviewee from each case company was however more involved in the CSR policies of the company. Altogether, seven interviews were made to the case company representatives. At the end, the interviews from each company were wrapped and combined to represent the vision the company was in. The interview videos were destroyed after the study was finished for guaranteeing confidentiality.

3.3.   Selection of cases

Deciding the sample group and informants for the study followed the convenience sample. This sample type means that the choice of informants for the study was resulted by the informants knowledge over the subject, as well as their availability and willingness to participate (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011, 46). The sample group was selected carefully based on specific criteria. This included the company size and the sustainability maturity level. The industry of the company was less important in the case company selection, as the primary question of the study, concerning the development and implementation of CSR could be considered to concern companies regardless of the industry. Thirteen companies were contacted and four of these contacted companies agreed to give an interview. The method for retrieving data from the companies was theme interviews, which is a common method in qualitative research.

The study focused on finding the perspectives of different CSR maturity level companies representatives' perspectives on implementing and integrating strategic CSR and discovering what challenges it sets and what advantages it can give to a company. The study also gave an insight of the vision of the managers regarding the formal tools of CSR and whether the tools vary over time depending on the maturity level.

For establishing a vision which companies to include in the study, a separate company database was created. Suitable companies were included into the database if they matched specific criteria. The idea was to search larger companies, despite the industry they operated in. It was also important to include companies with different maturity stages to the database. As the study was made during the corona crisis, the industries which were less compromised by the crisis were taken into consideration when establishing the database. The basic company criteria included the following features:

- The company had several business units in Finland
- The company was multinational, international or belonged to an international network of companies
- Size of the company was large based on turnover or the amount of employees
- The industries which were contacted were consultancy, accounting, information technology and construction as they were the industries which were less compromised by the corona crisis during the time of the study

The companies to the database were selected based on previous knowledge and by searching information from the Internet regarding responsible companies. Special emphasis was made on the size of the company as the case companies which had several business units in Finland were preferred for comparability reasons. The size criteria followed the definition of large companies in Finland, discarding all the SME´s from the database. The definition of a large company included a company with more than 250 employees, yearly business revenue larger than 50 million euros or balance of the company more than 43 million euros (Tilastokeskus 2020). It was also very important that the company had several business units and a larger number of employees as one could imagine that this could challenge the implementation of CSR policies. Table 1 represents the size of the case companies. All of the case companies had several business units in Finland.

Case company	Company size based on business revenue and amount of employees (2019)
Company A	60,9me/ 600 employees
Company B	163,8me/ 1227 employees
Company C	211,8 me/ 664 employees
Company D	52,2 me/ 405 employees

Table 1: Case company size

The industry of the company was secondary in the study, as the emphasis was on the size and maturity level. Despite of this, special industries were however selected due the economical world circumstances during the time of the study, as the study was made during the corona crisis. Industries which were not so heavily affected by the crisis were selected into the database as many companies were discarded based on layoffs and economic difficulties at the time the interviews were conducted.

The sustainability index for the database was created based on the Gazzola and Colombo (2014) model. Based on this, the companies were analyzed further for finding out the sustainability level. Table 2 represents the model and example company to which the companies were framed and analyzed before even making the initial contact. Sustainability reporting is included in the systematic CSR in Gazzola and Colombo´s model, but this was added in the researcher´s database separate.

COMPANY	Informal and defensive CSR	Charity and philantrophy	Sustainability reporting	Systematic CSR	Innovative CSR	Dominant CSR	EVALUATED SUSTAINABILITY MATURITY LEVEL
Company X	Included	Included	Included	Included			3

Table 2: Analyzing the sustainability maturity level of the company

The information from the companies´ websites and sustainability reports were reflected to the database so that the maturity level of sustainability was as correct as possible. In the beginning of finding cooperation companies to the study, several companies were discarded from making the initial contact based on the evaluated sustainability maturity level they were in, as the aim was to find companies which were in different stages. It was although quite difficult to get companies involved in the study, so contacts were made also nevertheless the maturity level was the same. Especially companies with low maturity level were although quite difficult to get interested of the study. Contacts were made to the most suitable companies and they were all contacted by email or by phone. Thirteen companies were contacted of which four agreed to the interview. This leaves the answer rate to 31 %.

As seen from Table 3, presenting the division of contacted companies, the majority of companies agreeing to be included in the study were quite mature even though many companies with lower maturity level were contacted as well. Companies with lower maturity level would however have gotten substantial advantage from the study by benchmarking and reflecting to more mature companies. The reasons for not participating were in most cases not informed, but if they were, the rejections were caused by many other projects at the time of the study or the lack of sustainability experience in the company. Naturally, the latter one would not have been a problem in this type of study as the idea was also to find case companies with lower sustainability maturity level. The respondents did not however seem to

be comfortable in giving an interview over a topic which they did not were an expert in.

Number of contacts made	Evaluated company maturity level
3 (23 %)	1
2 (15 %)	2
5 (39 %)	3
2 (15 %)	4
1 (8%)	5

Table 3: Contacted companies

The evaluated maturity levels of the four case companies started from level 2 and reached to level 4-5. As the maturity level of the company was based on the researcher´s own background work and literature available of the company online, it was also necessary to include the question of the evaluated maturity level to the company representatives. The answer from the case companies showed that the analysis made by the researcher over the maturity level was generally correct and corresponding the one the representatives analyzed as well. It was clearly easier to find companies with maturity level three to four and it was also more likely that this type of companies were more interested in joining the study as case companies. Large companies, with CSR maturity level one to two were not so easily found, as generally large companies have some kind of sustainability programs nowadays. Also companies with extremely high maturity level were not easily found because reaching the top level would require really high level of sustainability.

All of the case companies were large and had several business units in Finland. Expert companies were more interested to join the study. The sustainability level of the company also had an effect as it was easier to get companies with more mature level of sustainability involved in the study. Two of the case companies had a

sustainability manager and in the rest sustainability management was run by company management or by a person with a position dedicated to also other tasks. This didn´t however straightly correlate with the maturity level of the company.

3.4. Data collection methods

Semi structured theme interviews were made online, due to the corona crisis at the time of the study. Even though some elements would have been better observed if the interviews would have been face-to-face, virtual interviews although offered a possibility to include companies to the study despite the interviewees´ work locations. The interviews were recorded so that they could be analysed and watched later as well. This was helpful in analysing the data further as it was possible to watch the interviews several times before making the final analysis. It also helped the interview process so that the interviewer could only focus on listening instead of writing down the answers. The interviews were kept quite open and some open discussion also occurred during those. Even though there were several questions defined beforehand around different themes, also more specifying and detailed questions were asked if some specific appeared.

The interviews were broken down to written form by using MS Word and analysing and combining the answers with MS Excel. The questions of the interview were left quite open and different parts of the interview could offer answers to others, depending on the interviewee´s talkativeness. As an example, even though the first theme was history and building CSR in the firm, the responds were also reflected to the second part of the interview, which discovered the company´s current CSR practises more thoroughly.

The interviews were conducted as semi structured theme interviews which consisted of three different sections and themes. At the first and second theme, the construction of responsibility was introduced and inspected further by the

company´s history and present-day actions. At the third part, the implementation of responsibility in a company´s every day action was explored more thoroughly. The interview themes and their more specific discussion areas are explained more specifically in the following section. The entire interview questions are also seen in appendices one and two, in Finnish and in English.

Theme 1: Building sustainability in a company- history

The theme was approached via present day sustainability practices which practically linked theme one and two together. The interviewees were given the right to go through over the present-day sustainability functions reflecting this to the past quite freely. The self-evaluation of the sustainability level of the company was discussed, as well as challenges encountered and the companies´ survival from these challenges. Gazzola and Colombo model (2014) of how sustainability develops over time was presented to the interviewees. The development stages of the company and the steps which had carried them there were discussed based on this. The initial start of responsibility management in the case company was discussed, as well as the reasons for starting to operate more responsible. Possible turning points in their history were explored as well as the tools used for operating more responsible. It was also discussed whether there were any tools discarded as useless. This theme included questions and topics such as:

- How the respondent itself experiences the development of CSR in the company and why?
- What sort of challenges the company has faced over the years and how has it overcome these?
- When was the initial start for CSR in the company and why?
- What sort of phases and turning points have been faced in the company in terms of CSR management?
- What kinds of tools have been used and are there any tools which have been given up already?

Theme 2: Building sustainability in the company- presence

The purpose of the second theme was to evaluate the current company policies regarding corporate social responsibility. The aim was to collect data from the interviewees which would help in reflecting the company policies into the sustainability frameworks the company has and to the tools it uses for conducting sustainability. Concepts around the basic theoretical perspectives of the study (including shared value, institutional theory and resource-based view) were discussed with the interviewees, with the aim to discover whether these could be applied in the case company. As it was important to discover how deep the strategic linkage of CSR was, this was also discussed further. This theme included questions and topics such as:

- How the respondent itself experiences the current CSR in the company?
- What frames for CSR are being used currently and why?
- What tools are being used currently and what is the benefit they are experienced to have?
- How much are the stakeholders considered in creating company CSR?
- Is the choice for building CSR based more to the institutional or resource-based choice?
- Is the shared value model being used in the company?
- How sustainability is integrated into company strategy or is it separate from it?
- What are the benefits a company CSR is experienced to have?

Theme 3: Implementing sustainability in the company

Theme three was rather important in finding the answers to the primary question of the study. Challenges of the implementation process were discussed, as well as the most significant tools for implementing CSR successfully. Change resistance and the reasons for it was speculated with the case companies, and also solutions on

how a company could tackle it successfully. Decoupling of CSR policies and their implementation was discussed. At the end, the interviewees´ own opinions concerning the best ways to implement CSR policies in a company were discovered. This theme included questions and topics such as:

- What are the challenges the company had experienced during the years in implementing CSR?
- What are the most significant tools for successful CSR?
- Has there been any change resistance? How has the company reacted to this?
- Has there been any detachment of CSR policies with the implementation and why?
- What are the most important aspects in implementing strategic CSR?

It was essential to get an overall vision over the sustainability situation of the case company, so the interviews also included many questions which aimed to define and evaluate more closely the current situation the company was in. This wasn´t directly linked to the research questions, but linkages between these were found. It was also beneficial when making the final analysis later on.

The number of representatives which were interviewed varied in the companies, as company A had more than one interviewee. This naturally might also influence the reliability of the study, as the comparability is not so reliable this way. In the company in which the number of participants was larger, the entity of CSR situation and maturity level were more visible and not biased by only one sole perspective.

The interviewees unintentionally often replied off the topic to the questions asked, so often more clarifying questions were asked. Especially the question of the tools of CSR seemed difficult to the interviewees so this was in most cases a bit opened up. In general, the pre-conception of the meaning of CSR tools to the interviewees

included only specific software made for CSR purposes, even though CSR tools were referred as a larger concept in the study.

The total number of interviewees was 7 and all of the interviews were conducted during May and June 2020. The platform for the interviews was Teams application, which proved to be rather good for this, with only minor technical problems. The transcriptions of the interview data to written form was done after the interviews in June and July. The structure of the interview was quite long and the interviews lasted depending on the interviewee from 39 to 68 minutes. From Table 4, the length of each interview is mentioned in detail.

Number and company of the interviewee	Duration of the interview
Interviewee 1 (Company B)	68 min
Interviewee 2 (Company C)	46 min
Interviewee 3 (Company A)	56 min
Interviewee 4 (Company A)	42 min
Interviewee 5 (Company A)	63 min
Interviewee 6 (Company A)	52 min
Interviewee 7 (Company D)	39 min

Table 4: Duration of the interviews

The length of the interview was closely linked to the interviewee and his/her questions and comments during the interview. The structure of the interview was although intended to keep as coherent as possible. Staying on the topic and within the themes were at the responsibility of the interviewer. Initially the interviews were aimed at a larger population inside one case company, so that each company would have had more than one interviewee with different position and status. At the end, this was only possible only in case company A. It was although seen from the end results of the interviews that there weren´t any huge differences in the bigger entities

of case company A´s interviewees´ answers, even though the representatives had different positions in the company. Also some questions and topics were not so easily answerable if the interviewee didn´t work in a managerial position or in a position closely linked to CSR, its management or policy creation.

3.5. Case descriptions

All of the case companies had several business units in Finland, and they were multinational, international or belonged to an international network of companies. For reliability reasons, the answers and case companies were left anonymous as some of the questions and topics regarding sustainability of the company could be considered as delicate.

Company A

Company A was founded in 2016 after a business process outsourcing division. The company offers mainly financial services such as accounting and payroll services, but also services connected to human resources and business development. The company is owned by a private company and it has 15 offices in Finland and over 80 all around the world. In 2019, the company had 600 employees in Finland.

The values of the company are the base for the responsibility work in the company. On top of these, the company´s responsibility work is guided by the general responsibility principles of the company and the Code of Conduct guidelines. The UN principles concerning business functions, civil rights and sustainable development are taken into consideration as well. The company considers four principles in its responsibility work. Three of the principles come directly from the Triple Bottom Line. These are economical, social and environmental responsibility. The company has also included the principle of quality and anticipative risk control to their core of corporate responsibility. The management group is responsible for the sustainability policy and the conformation of the principles among the employees

and the focus points are defined yearly. The company has its own inner sustainability network in Finland, including employees with different positions and units.

The company is in early stages in constructing its CSR in the Finnish units and the parent company gives the units quite open hands to organize the CSR work regarding their own perspectives and visions. The company does not create separate sustainability reports in Finland yet and currently the company is aiming to move forward to systemic maturity phase of sustainability. Sustainability reports are going to be added to the business portfolio in the near future and the plan is to simultaneously start sustainability reporting in the company itself as well.

The company started to emphasize more on corporate responsibility after the current CEO was hired, so the initiative to more responsible actions came from top down. The company operates in many different countries and each country has the opportunity to develop its corporate responsibility separately, so no common coherent methods are in force. Developing and creating more responsible actions is rather new in the company as the first concrete actions came during fall 2019, when the employees´ inner network for corporate responsibility was created. This is also currently a significant tool for CSR in the company. Corporate responsibility is in line with the basic foundations of business functions nowadays, motivating the company to become more sustainable.

Company B

The company belongs to an international network of companies, working in 157 countries. In Finland, the company has about 1200 employees and 13 offices. The services the company provides are business consulting, corporate acquisitions, auditing, legal, risk control and sustainability services. Company´s corporate responsibility is based on four target areas where two of these are consistent with the global corporate responsibility targets. These global principles are community

engagement and environmental stewardship. Additionally, locally has been decided to include among target areas also sustainable business and diversity and people.

Creating shared value sems to be in the core of the company´s responsibility work. It has initiatives aiming to grow sustainability knowledge in business life and programmes building bridges between sustainability experts and different business functions. Using data analytics, the company has created a tool for helping its customers to get information regarding the reduction of its own emissions observed against business performance. Sustainability reports are made in the company. Based on these aspects, it would be reasonable to consider that the company is in a mature phase of sustainability.

Even though the organization is an international network of local firms, each country manages corporate responsibility issues also separately with the help given by the global CR organisation. There are although no obligations that these should be used. The company´s corporate responsibility level in Finland is higher nowadays compared to the global level generally as corporate responsibility aspects are more specifically and precisely defined in the Finnish firm. On a global level, there are different kinds of training possibilities regarding sustainability issues, but nationality influences also highly to each country´s units´ own CSR.

The company´s corporate responsibility has developed over the years rather slowly but with concrete actions and this has lead to more lasting results. In the beginning, defining the most important aspects of corporate responsibility to the company and its business functions took time. The concrete starting point for more sustainable actions came in 2011 as the CR Steering Group was developed in the company. Also stakeholder questionnaire and analysis was made the first time in 2011 for clarifying the most significant aspects of sustainability for the company. Over time, the company has added also information given to the employees over CSR as they discovered deficiencies in this. The interactivity of corporate responsibility issues in

the company has increased significantly from the beginning, not only with the employees but also with customers.

Company C

Company C offers products for the construction industry by planning, producing and delivering solutions for building and construction. The roots of the corporation reach back over hundreds of years and the corporation is international, with business units in 67 countries. In Finland, the company employed 664 persons in 2019.

The company helps to decrease the ecological footprint by offering more sustainable construction products and by functioning as an expert partner of sustainable and green building. The company offers certificated products ensuring its customers more ecological and environmentally friendly building possibilities. As a result for finding better and more ecological possibilities for the customers, the company has created a specific program and tools for supporting it. The aim is that the R & D of the company would take more into consideration sustainability, material efficiency, recyclability, and environmental impacts already in the beginning of the development of the product. The focus in the environmental program of the company is in reducing its own environmental footprint, advance and take advantage of the circular economy and recycling. The company is acknowledged by many different scales and indexes, for instance Dow Jones World and Dow Jones Sustainability Index. The company is also committed to the UN Global Compact since 2003, CDP programs, Green Building Council networks and FIBS network in Finland. Based on the data retrieved from the company, it is in a very mature level of sustainability.

The company itself has a very long history and the global parent company currently emphasises heavily on sustainability. The parent company gives the foundations of sustainability to each country in which it operates in. Even though the company does not have such a long history in Finland, from the global perspective, some aspects

of CSR in Finland are more advanced than in other member countries. The social aspects of CSR for instance are further due to basic Finnish legislation, but also environmental aspects. The advance of the latter aspects although include all the Nordic countries. The initial starting point for more sustainable actions in the company was in 2015 as the CEO of the Group experienced an awakening to sustainability. This led to creation of more systematic sustainability network in the company.

Company D

Company D is a part of a global group of companies, which has members in over 150 countries. The company offers advisory services in different business sectors such as consultation, auditing, business arrangements, risk control services and law and tax services. In Finland, the company had approximately 600 employees in 2019.

The corporate responsibility of the company is created by the global organisation to be included into the business model of each country in which it operates in. The Finnish company also complies to the global policies and requirements. The company has recognised the importance of corporate responsibility aspects more significantly within the couple of last year. Due to the recognition, the company has also added new positions focusing on corporate responsibility aspects more thoroughly. The global organisation sets the basic foundations for sustainability work in each member country which the countries are required to obey. Variations naturally come from national legislation and regulations. One turning point for the company in corporate responsibility was the publication of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

3.6.   Data analysis methods

Generally, data analysis in qualitative research begins simultaneously with data collection. There are three different types of qualitative data collection. These are narrative analysis, grounded theory and content analysis. The analysis of qualitative data helps to make a better understanding of the definitions of a specific situation, taking into account themes, categories, regularities and patterns. The traditional model for building an analysis from the qualitative data is to break it into text. This makes it possible and easier to form different codes and categories from it. Qualitative research tends to produce large amount of data which should be minimized in the analysis part to manageable size (Palaiologou, Needham and Male 2016, 178, 190).

Conceptualization and finding key linkages with the theory is in a key role in data analysis. Interpretations and observations were being used in the study as well. The analysis included figures and propositions in order to illustrate the results concluded from the data more profoundly. The analysis of the qualitative research was made by meanings which were expressed by the interviewees in different ways such as words, facial expressions and illustrations. A few interviewees did not have their web camera on, which influenced on the researcher´s possibilities to observe facial expressions and body language in general.

The interviews were aimed to proceed as neutral as possible. This excluded leading questions and discussions. Some open discussion although occurred which might have led to more specific questions over some topics during the interview. Some specific and detailed questions were asked if a topic was answered unclearly or off topic. Some questions and concepts were also more thoroughly explained to the interviewees for clarity.

For more clearer perspective and analysis, specific matrixes were created with the help of Excel. This made it easier to have a coherent perspective over the topic and to the research questions. Some interesting common aspects in the CSR process development came more visible after discussing with the interviewees. After writing the interviews in written form, I searched the interview text for identifying the interviewees answers to the research questions and unified them, finding some connections to each other and framing to the theoretical context the study beholds.

4 FINDINGS

4.1. Strategic CSR in a multinational company

The process of starting and maintaining systematic and strategic CSR in a company was partly found to be time consuming and difficult, but also highly rewarding at the end. Even though there were many differences in the case companies, the process of CSR seemed to go through many similar routes. The time scale of having more systematic approach to CSR varied in the case companies, the longest time with more strategic CSR management was approximately ten years. No quick rewards were found, and the greatest benefits were experienced after several years of systematic CSR approach in the company. In fact, at the beginning, the cost of CSR was noticed more heavily than the benefits it might have. This could although also be linked to the maturity stage of the company as the case company considering this was in the philanthropic stage, with the direction of reaching to systematic level of CSR.

At the beginning, the management plays a crucial role, generally by making the initiatives to start a more systematic CSR approach. The management may push

things forward by hiring or repositioning key persons responsible of the company´s CSR. Co-operation with human resources and communication / marketing department would be ideal already at the starting phase. The boost for starting more systematic CSR approach could also come after including CSR focused service entities to the customers. The pressure would then come from outside, from the request of the customers. For gaining the customers´ trust and loyalty, it would be ideal that the company´s services would go hand in hand with its own values.

The key aspects of CSR should be configurated by the top management and these should be communicated forward by a well-managed control system. A company could also benefit from an internal sustainability network including company employees or key personnel. Networking and partnerships could give more needed knowledge and expertise in this phase as well.

All of the case companies were multinational, international or belonged to an international network of companies. This might set challenges and possibilities to a company CSR creation and management, depending highly on how hierarchical the global organization is. This also effects on the Finnish units´ possibilities to manage and develop CSR. This is why it was found important to take this also into consideration in building the analysis and final reflections to the research questions. The impacts of the global organization to CSR varied highly among the case companies. The impacts of the global organization could be seen from Table 5.

Case company	Impacts of the global organization to the Finnish business units CSR
Company A	CSR aspects defined on the national level and the Finnish unit is mainly responsible of its own responsibility work individually. There are although for instance global funds and volunteering programs which the Finnish unit participates
Company B	The global organisation does not force to anything, gives although guidance regarding CSR aspects. The Finnish units try to take advantage from the global organisation as much as possible. The CSR is more developed in the Finnish units than globally, but even though it is more specified, aspects from the global organisation are partly included.
Company C	The most CSR aspects are common in each country where the company has business units, even though some countries are more specified than others. CSR is very well developed in the Nordics, including Finland, and the approach to CSR is more specified and wider than globally. Global company, but also local.
Company D	High CSR standards already globally. Governance and management systems come from the global organisation. Nationally also affected by the national laws and regulations, which raise differences between each other.

Table 5: Impacts of the global organization to the CSR in the Finnish units

As seen from Table 5, the impacts the global organization gives can vary. Naturally the laws and regulations of each nation define the company CSR further, but in some companies the national CSR are being more specified beyond these and beyond the boundaries the global organisations set. It also depends highly on the global organisation as some might have more higher standards already in the beginning than others. When reaching further in the CSR process, the importance of transparency of information and interaction with different stakeholders are well noted. Especially interaction could give the company tools for becoming more profitable as the linkages between sales and CSR are found.

4.2.   Connecting CSR policies successfully into implementation

The first and primary research question in the study was "*What are the key concerns in connecting CSR policies successfully into implementation?",* which focused on the opinions of the case companies´ representatives over the topic. None of the case companies felt that they would have had severe detaching of policies from their implementation in the past. Problems had however been identified from slowness of pushing CSR policies forward to the concrete level. Also finding linkages between the employees´ daily work and CSR felt problematic time to time. Finding tools for linking this better would be essential for successful implementation of CSR. As one case company interviewee stated, the systematic implementation process requires also change management. This includes gathering data, changing the attitudes of the company policymakers and finally changing the attitudes of the group. According to the interviewee, the last part of the process is the most time consuming and the easiest way to push this forward is to give more information. Another case company interviewee emphasized that agility is also required, as the change process might sometime be quite time consuming. If the situation changes during the change process, the company should be able to make agile decisions and changes to the company CSR policies as well.

The time that the case companies had been involved in more systematic CSR varied, the longest being approximately ten years from the initial starting phase and the shortest just under one year. In most cases, the start was resulted from the initiative of the top management of the company. Also the global organisation might had set pressure and obligations to the units in different countries, which forced the case company to focus more on CSR. This although was not applicable in all case companies. Finding a key person already in the beginning, which would manage CSR forward was essential. Also defining the most significant aspects of CSR were experienced to be difficult and time consuming at the starting point.

Interviewing the representatives, it was extremely interesting to discover that many companies had undergone quite similar phases in building strategic CSR and the reasons and the initial push for becoming more sustainable had resulted from similar aspects. Based on the case companies´ interviews, one major impact for more sustainable actions in the company seemed to be top management support.

None of the case companies had experienced any larger detaching of implementation of CSR from its policy in the company. On the contrary, many had experienced that currently there were several employees and applicants who pressure the company to become more aware of the sustainability aspects. In hiring new talents to a company, well managed CSR could also give competitive advantage to the company.

The case company interviewees gave quite similar responds when considering the linkage between CSR policies and their implementation leading to improved results in the company. If its linked to the company strategy, it could lead to better financial outcomes to the company. Three of the four case companies raised transparency as a vital element in successful implementation of CSR. Two companies also noted that increasing the meaning of CSR to the employees helped in the implementation

process. This was done for instance by increasing knowledge on how CSR might influence on business turnover or business result via different functions. The concreteness of CSR to the employees was important and the managers should make it easier for the employees to understand how CSR work could be done in everyday functions. This aspect was also noted by three of the case companies. Even though slowness of CSR was partly experienced negatively, it seemed that taking concrete steps required this and small steps for keeping everyone on board. For the implementation of CSR being able to function as well as possible, being strongly linked to company strategy and receiving the support of the management was experienced crucial.

Table 6 represents the visions the case companies have over the linkage between CSR policies and their implementation. Company A doesn´t have such a long history yet with its CSR compared to other case companies in the study. Considering the linkage between CSR policies and implementation, this could be seen by the need of more suitable tools and top management support, which probably are the most required aspects in the beginning of CSR work in a company in general. For the other companies with longer history with CSR, the linkage between CSR and core business and its communication was very visible and emphasized.

Solutions for linking company CSR policies to implementation in a company with several business units	
Company A	- Providing adequately resources (by the top management) - Follow up - Transparency - Expertise of sustainability at the top management level - Support of the top management - Meters and tools for monitoring - Concreteness at the employee level
Company B	- The management has knowledge how CSR impacts business and communicates this to everyone, offering more transparency - Bringing the company´s CSR close to employee´s own identity and expertise areas
Company C	- CSR being closely connected to business functions of the company - Concreteness in actions and slowly processing forward
Company D	- Bringing forward the meaningfulness of CSR and communicating this to everyone - Linking CSR to business functions - Concreteness

Table 6: Most important aspects linking CSR policies to its implementation in a company with several business units

It seems, that top management support plays a crucial role in successful implementation of CSR policies. Top management should consider also how to communicate CSR aspects to its employees and customers, providing more transparency and tools for pushing things forward. Also the initiative to manage CSR has come from the management in more than one case company, which also proves that it should be managed top down. It was found highly difficult to go forward if the management wasn´t on board and giving directions to CSR. The management should although have enough expertise and knowledge to give guidance to the personnel. This wasn´t always found to be the case, which causes lack of trust and might at the end even lead to cracks between policies and implementation.

Most of the case companies saw that the most important aspect in linking policies with its implementation is making this as a part of the company functions and core business. Concreteness of actions plays a key role here. It was also important to emphasize the meaningfulness of CSR to the stakeholders. One of the case company interviewees stated this well: *"I would say that increasing and developing the meaningfulness of CSR is a core aspect in successful implementation. So that responsibility would be successfully integrated to business by communicative means. And linked to the everyday functions, so that it would find its place in the daily tasks. Building and communicating the meaningfulness of CSR to the employees is important."*

To the question concerning the shared value model, most case companies agreed to have this in their business and the sustainability and business functions were hand and hand or at least going that way. One case company did not consider to be using shared value model at the moment, but although agreed that strategic CSR could bring business benefits in the form of revenue in the future, if the approach would be more strategic.

4.3. Challenges and benefits of strategic CSR

The second research question in the study was "*What are the greatest challenges and benefits in implementing strategic CSR into company operations?*" As the companies are at different level of CSR maturity and have been working more systematically with CSR different set of times, it was interesting to see the similarities and differences raised from the case company representatives´ answers. This also made the process of CSR more visible. A special challenge matrix was created for finding out the most relevant aspects during the development process of CSR. At the start of strategic CSR management in a company, the most challenging and time consuming seemed to be finding the most relevant aspects of CSR which the company would focus on. A good background work and patience are required in this phase as it would ensure successful CSR results in the future, focusing on the right CSR aspects. These aspects could be defined by stakeholder questionnaire and stakeholder analysis, which were made in more than one case company at the beginning of systematic CSR management. The quality of this naturally has an impact on the end results of CSR, so the persons who are responsible of it should also be familiar with different CSR aspects and frames. Expertise and knowledge of the management regarding CSR has a great impact at this crucial phase. The management should be motivated enough to participate and take an effort for gaining enough expertise whether it is lacking. As one respondent stated "*I still consider that knowledge is a subject which should be developed further. Visions can control the conversation as facts hasn´t been pushed out to the open enough*".

Changing the mindset of the employees was found problematic already at an early stage. This could also be linked to several other challenges as well, such as lack of time and lack of knowledge. Connected to this challenge in the beginning, it was said by one case company representative that "*if people are busy and they are used to doing things in a specific way, it takes time before there are changes in their way of acting*". After several years of CSR management, growing CSR awareness and
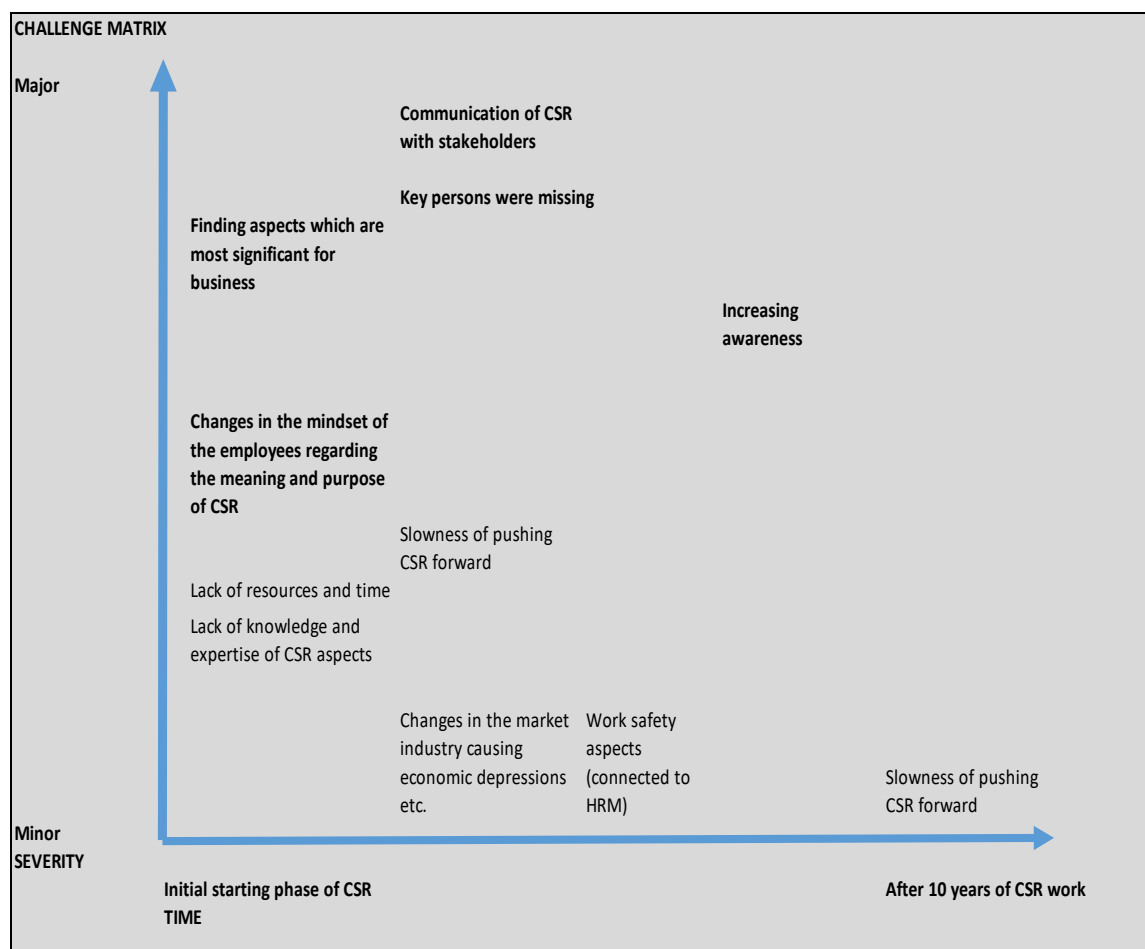
understanding were still experienced to be very challenging in some of the case companies. A case company representative, with several years CSR management experience, stated: *"Growing awareness is perhaps the most challenging for us. It takes time that the message is communicated at the right way."*

All of the case companies identified CSR communication important. Communication however seemed to be more challenging at the beginning of CSR management than later on. At the early stage, this was mentioned by different case company representatives such as: *"Communication to our people and investors has been the challenge for us"* and *"It would be the most important that we would communicate."* Later on, the companies were more likely to have more tools for communicating CSR to their stakeholders better and more interactively, so the significance of this challenge is likely to alter due this. The process of CSR communication development was also very visible from one of the most mature case company´s statement: *"Earlier on, there were not so much communication over our own responsibility. We had our own report, website, intranet, but this was not so interactive as it is nowadays."* Quite normal channel for communication with the employees was the company internal pages. Time pressure of the employees although created challenges for exploring this channel. The company which had done strategic CSR management the longest, found that organising events gave them opportunity to not only communicate their CSR to their stakeholders but also to interact with them so that it made the company´s decisions regarding CSR easier. The slowness of the CSR process was also seen a bit challenging for some of the case companies. Even though the steps the company took for implementing CSR were generally concrete and small, it might have taken them years to link CSR to the company´s strategic efforts. Despite the fact that slowness was found partly challenging, it was also described to be necessary for keeping everyone on board. As stated by the case company which had done CSR management the longest: *"We have been slowly but surely went forward, and the results have been more lasting with this method."*

If was also found challenging if the key persons conducting CSR were missing. This was found problematic especially during the first years of CSR management. This influences on the speed of the CSR process and might even lead that the process doesn´t go forward at all. The management should find the key persons for solving this challenge. Connected to this, one interviewee stated: *"CSR should clearly be a part of a persons´ daily tasks so that it would systematically done forward."*

Special matrixes were created to analyse the results of the interviews concerning the secondary questions of the study. The matrixes concerned the challenges, benefits and tools of CSR and the aspects mentioned here were evaluated based on the interviews. Time and maturity level were also considered in the matrixes as not all of the case companies were at the same level. There could however be variations regarding the significances and time scale depending on the company.

Figure 5: Challenge matrix

CHALLENGE MATRIX

Major

Communication of CSR
with stakeholders

Key persons were missing

Finding aspects which are
most significant for
business

Increasing
awareness

Changes in the mindset of
the employees regarding
the meaning and purpose
of CSR

Slowness of pushing
CSR forward

Lack of resources and time

Lack of knowledge and
expertise of CSR aspects

Changes in the market   Work safety
industry causing   aspects
economic depressions   (connected to   Slowness of pushing
etc.   HRM)   CSR forward

Minor
SEVERITY

Initial starting phase of CSR   After 10 years of CSR work
TIME

The challenges which were experienced by several companies, are highlighted in the matrix for a clearer perspective. This shows that there are some common features which can be identified. Some of the challenges are not time dependable. For instance, changes in the market industry cannot be controlled. Work safety is another aspect which is not time dependable. The challenge of work safety could however be also referred to managerial challenges and affecting the mindsets of the employees.

From the challenge perspective, good managerial tools for change management and measuring CSR are still needed after several years of systematic CSR work. Especially human resources department and communication department should make efforts in finding ways to motivate different kinds of employees and to find ways how to communicate CSR aspects successfully to the stakeholders. The start of systematic CSR work seems to be very crucial in a company, as the most important aspects are considered and pushed forward. If this phase fails, then it would have an impact on the whole process of development of CSR.

The answers regarding the benefits of CSR were quite coherent with all of the respondents. The most important and beneficial aspect which were raised were the effects CSR has on business revenue. Many of the companies had tied or were about to tie CSR more to the business models as well. Also the positive impact of CSR to the personnel and new applicants was generally noted. It seemed that especially millennials and generation Z were more and more interested in sustainability issues and for hiring new talents, this might even become a turning point. As one interviewee stated: *"Responsibility is a huge attraction for the new employees as well as the old ones."*

Figure 6: Benefits matrix

BENEFITS MATRIX

Major

                                    Business revenue benefits

          Well being of the employees

               Attracts new applicants   Brand benefits

Makes decicions easier   Increases awareness   Adds company value   Differentation benefits

Minor
BENEFITS

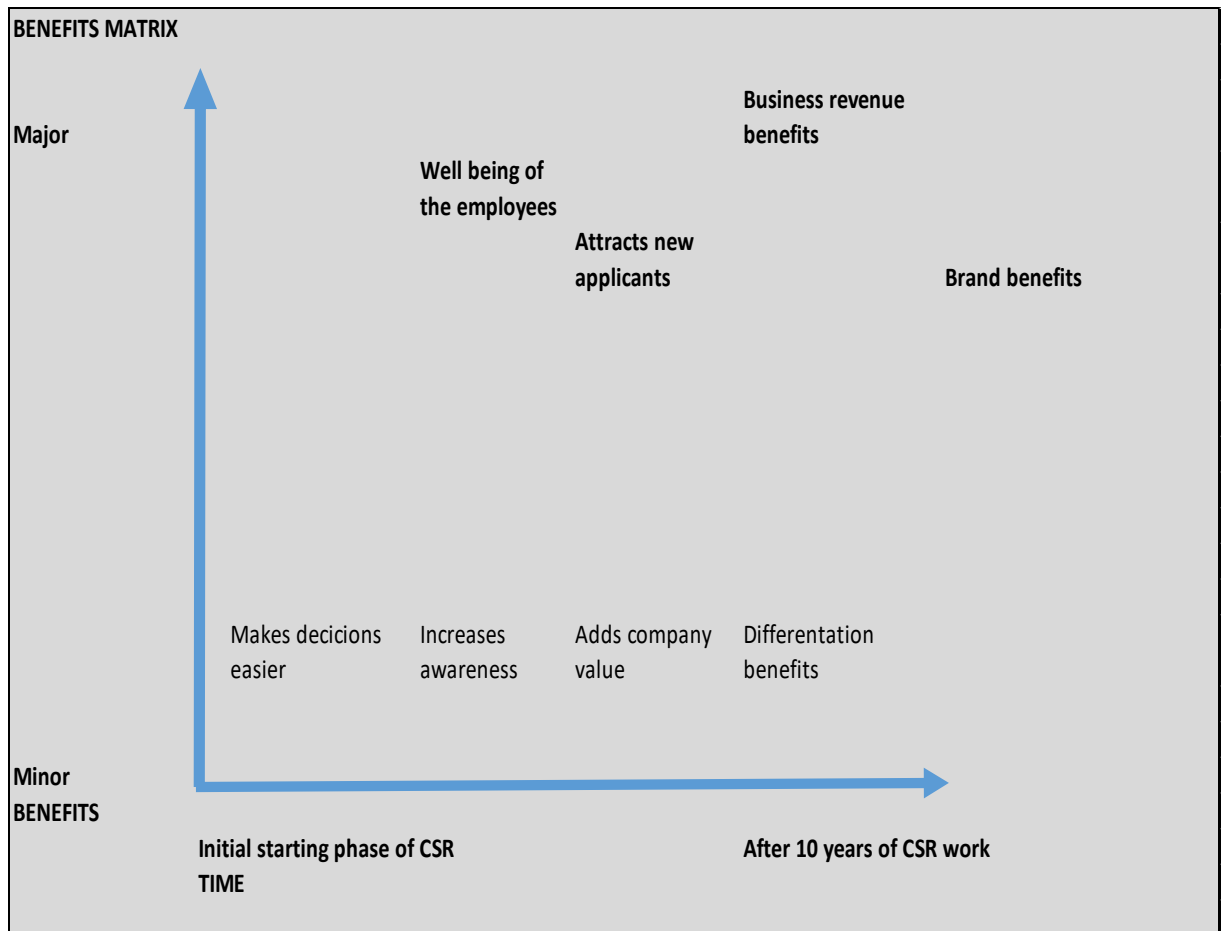Initial starting phase of CSR TIME   After 10 years of CSR work

Figure 6 represents the benefits the company gains after systematic CSR work. All of the companies agreed that CSR can offer benefits to business revenue. Even though one of the case companies hadn´t had such a long experience yet with systematic CSR work, it also agreed that gaining more business revenue is possible in the future if CSR is more linked to the company strategy and business models. Besides the competitive advantages, CSR can also bring benefits by making direct savings for instance to energy consumption. Strategic CSR also brings brand and image benefits. Customers today are more and more aware of sustainability issues. If the CSR aspects of a company are managed and communicated successfully, it could bring image and profit benefits to the company. Communication plays a key role here.

4.4.   Tools in managing strategic CSR

The case companies took advantage of different kinds of tools for managing CSR. The question over the most significant tools and tools which were used nowadays seemed however to be quite problematic for the respondents. The question was opened up more by the interviewer if it wasn´t understood directly. Most of the companies experienced that they hadn´t given up any tools during the years. The tools and systems had although evolved over time to better form and they have been updated to respond better to the companies´ needs. A few of the case companies had given up unnecessary partnerships and co-operations as they were experienced that they didn´t bring enough benefits, or if the benefits from the partnerships were considered to be unnecessary. The significance of different kinds of partnerships seemed to vary during time, as they were found to be more important at the beginning. Most of the case companies were expert type companies, with no need for industrial tools so differences also raised from this, as one case company operated in the building material industry.

Many of the tools mentioned by the interviewees are being used for several years, even though their significance could vary over time. For instance the importance of certain partnerships can be very different at the starting point compared to later stages. Questionnaires to the stakeholders and materiality assessments were created by several companies at the beginning and their benefits were identified. These could, and should, be made later on as well. Some of the case companies identified also inner sustainability network´s as tools. With these companies, it also gave a push for developing CSR further.

Figure 7: Commonly used tools

COMMONLY USED TOOLS

Major effect

Communication tools

Management
system, control
systems

Sustainability
reporting

Follow up systems

Questionnaires and   Partnerships
materiality assesments

Internal sustainability
network

Codes of conduct

Human Resource
Management

Minor effect
SIGNIFICANCE

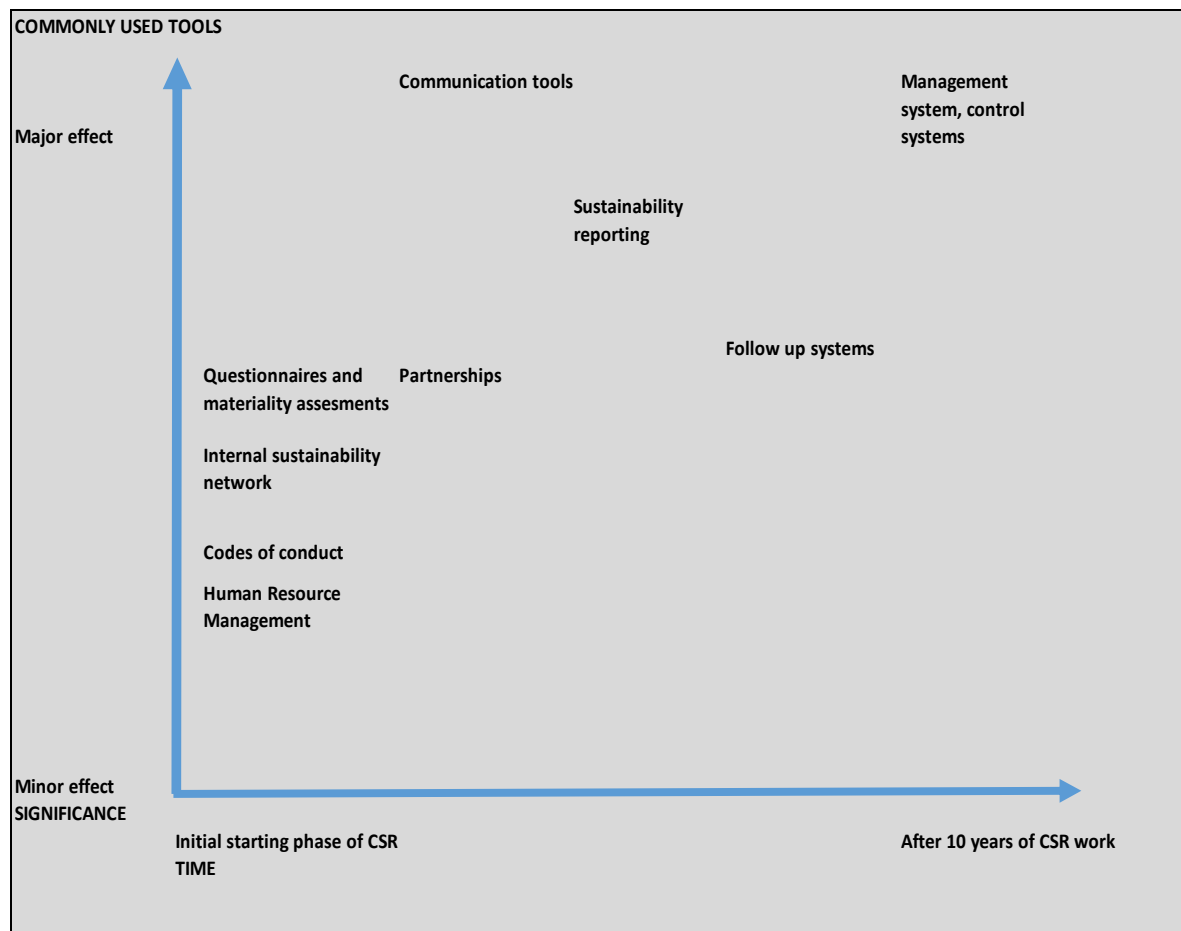Initial starting phase of CSR
TIME

After 10 years of CSR work

Figure 7 represents the commonly used tools in the company over time and it includes only tools which are used by several case companies, discarding the tools which are used by only one case company. If there would have been several companies operating in more industrial settings, the figure would most likely include also different environmental systems. The significance of a specific tool can also vary depending on the company and during time.

Most tools were in line with the challenges the companies experienced CSR was bringing. Even though there were differences due to different industry settings and time scales, especially two tools could be raised from the answers. These were well run management and control system and tools for communication. Communication changes in a quite rapid pace, so social media communication and new channels

for communication should be learned fast. Communication should also be straightforward, honest and transparent, framing to the reality of CSR in the company. One good communication tool was experienced to be interactivity with the company employees but also with other stakeholders, such as customers. The importance of communication tools is likely to be a reflection of the communication challenges experienced by the case companies. This also indicates that communication is considered to be important in managing and implementing CSR.

Right kind of management system refers to managing and motivating the employees in a correct way. The rewarding system could also be linked into this, mentioned by one interviewee. Although, one should remember that extrinsic motivation doesn´t go as far as intrinsic. Controlling and measuring CSR was also found important. It would be easier to make decisions based on CSR results data and also give more information and transparency to the stakeholders regarding this.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed similarity in the CSR maturity process of the company. The management´s role in the process was very obvious as well as the importance of finding and nominating the key persons focusing solely on company´s CSR aspects. It was noted that it had given more boost to the process when these key persons, such as sustainability teams and managers, were found and hired. If the company did not have this, the time pressure was identified to cause slowness and obstacles in pushing CSR aspects forward. It was also experienced that the management should provide enough resources and support for making CSR operations and change possible. If these aspects were not met, the change process would more likely proceed slowly and in the end, even show signs of detaching. The linkage between the lack of resources and slowness could also be seen by the responses

of one of the case companies, which mentioned time obstacles due the lack of resources as one of the challenges they were facing.

The top management efforts and their impact to CSR policies was essential. If this doesn´t exist, it is more likely that the company would have none or poor policies connected to CSR. As one interviewee stated, it was simply not possible that CSR work would start from mid-level. It cannot be run solely by one unit or by one individual in a large corporation. The management team is also responsible of preparing the policies and link these into the company strategy in a suitable way. It would be beneficial for the company if the top management would be motivated and interested in sustainability issues as it would boost the sustainability work in a company further. If the management would be motivated, their own CSR expertise would most likely increase, meaning probably better strategic CSR decisions for the company on the long run. Not all companies have although such hierarchical management model. In a company where strategic management does not come from top down, the effect that the management has on company CSR are not so evidential compared to more hierarchical companies.

Good management systems make CSR more effective in a company. Different managerial tools were found to be important as well, which could be linked to the company´s management system. For instance, company´s reward system, which would give its employees bonuses if certain elements of CSR were met (e.g. safety regulations). Giving positive feedback and incentives to the employees were seen to carry more fruits than punishments and negative feedback. Top management should give tools for managing CSR in a more practical level, so it would function at the company operations as well. The goals and methods of a company should not be so far from the employees that they would feel these to be too difficult to conduct in their daily tasks. In several interviews, it was experienced that CSR was seen as a way to increase business income in the long run as a part of modern-day business. This could also be seen as a tool for increasing employees´ motivation. It could be more emphasized that responsibility does not only offer good and lasting solutions,

but also improves business revenue at the end, which would more likely mean success for the employee itself. Well conducted and transparent communication to the stakeholders of the company is a key element. Also online based education over CSR aspects would probably be beneficial. Moreover, educating operational management and other key personnel and inspiring them over CSR aspects would give a good base for managing CSR successfully in company operations.

5.1. Theoretical perspectives and strategic CSR

The employees´ effect to company CSR was emphasized in all of the interviews. One reason for this is probably caused by difficulties of getting enough interactivity with other stakeholders concerning company CSR. One of the case company even made a CSR questionnaire to partners and community members, but unfortunately had to discard these results from the stakeholder analysis due to insignificant response rate. Second reason for employees´ being an important stakeholder group in company´s CSR, is the fact that the social dimension of CSR mostly includes aspects concerning the employees of the company. Not all of the case companies considered stakeholder perceptions as important, but the ones which valued it, also emphasized the linkage between CSR and business revenue.

It is quite natural that a company´s CSR is impacted by both, institutional pressure and resource-based possibilities. Today there is a huge amount of institutional pressure to become more sustainable and it has become a natural way of doing business in many companies. The resources the company itself has, including for instance knowledge and expertise over sustainability issues, can offer a company valuable tools for creating sustainability forward. The competitive advantages CSR can provide does not although come easily nowadays, as companies´ CSR has become mainstream in many companies. For providing the competitive advantages, a company should find innovative and systematic linkages with the core business functions. Two case companies considered that their CSR is based on both, institutional pressure and resources. One of the case companies considered that

the institutional pressure was stronger than the resources it had for conducting CSR and one case company stated that it is not strictly based on either of these.

5.2. The effects of CSR to business revenue in different maturity stages

It is proven by many different studies that CSR would have a positive impact on the business income of the company at the long run. (Yuan et al., 2011, 75) This although requires that it would be linked to the company strategy. Doing solely philanthropic actions without linking CSR to the strategic decisions is not likely to have an impact. Of course, it might also affect positively on the company image, but on the long run it would be more beneficial to find linkages between strategy and CSR. This is also in line with the statements of Porter and Kraemer (2006) and Joutsenvirta (2011).

if a company wishes to make changes and to improve its business by getting a competitive edge, implicit sustainability just is not enough on the long run. Especially in Finland, there are many regulations and laws concerning for instance employee wellbeing, environmental standards and so on. On top of these, there are standards given by the European Union to businesses and organisations. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) for instance has an effect on each company in Finland and all around the European Union, protecting the rights of the consumers. These all have an impact on the companies and business life. These are although just something which are considered to be self-evident for companies. As all companies are carrying on with these, they are not bringing the competitive advantage to the business which would be possible to be achieved by responsibility and more sustainable results. If a company would like to achieve this, as well as business advantages, their responsibility should consist of more wider level aspects. The bottom in Carroll´s CSR pyramid (1991) lies in the economic responsibilities, and businesses should also take this into account in forming their own CSR strategy for receiving the most advantages possible.

The deeper a company is in its CSR maturity stage, more positive impacts it seems to have to its business revenue. This is also consistent with Porter and Kraemer´s shared value theory. CSR can give competitive advantage to a company if its linked to its core strategy and business functions. Although, when the company´s actions are solely philanthropic, this advantage does not exist, and the impacts may even be controversial as more expenses are formed. Generally, this stage is in the starting phases when the direction is not yet so strongly found and linked to the company strategy. A certain consistency should however remain and CSR work to be continued for achieving the more systematic approach and clear benefits to business.

5.3. Limitations

The sample group sets limitations to the study, as the number of interviewees varied in the case companies. One company agreed to have more than one interviewee and as an end result, a better and more consistent vision of this case company was available to the research as well. The respondents from this company were working in different positions, some more closely with CSR than others. Other case companies had one respondent each, which may give bias insights to the company´s CSR situation. It would have been ideal, that each company would have had more than one interviewee.

It is essential for the researcher to get a deeper vision over the topic as some of its aspects are quite delicate. Also the implementation could have been seen differently by different respondents. It would have been ideal if the researcher would have been for instance working in one of the case companies for better insights over the topic. This was not although possible. The interviews were although considered to be better for evaluation than quantitative research in form of surveys or questionnaires. With the interview, it was possible to get a closer contact with the respondent and

through this, form also considerations via unspoken language by making observations of the respondents´ facial expressions and gestures.

5.4. Summary of the conclusions of the study

Even though there were similarities in many of the case companies CSR process and development, there were also variations due to companies´ background and business environment. Detaching CSR policies from the implementation seems to be also dependable on the organisation structure, culture, management style and processes as well as tools and resources. One essential key element in preventing detaching however seems to be top management support, especially in companies where management structure is rather hierarchical. Well conducted management makes the communication and top down management and processes successful which further on has an impact on the company´s CSR.

The process in becoming more sustainable and integrating CSR more to strategic objectives had quite many similarities, even though companies are different from each other. The benefits for human resources and business revenue on the long run were found in each case. Also the initial challenges in finding the most concerning key aspects for company´s own business were emphasized. If the challenges at the starting point are met correctly, it would have a positive impact to the whole CSR process later on. Also communication was raised as an highly important aspect in conducting CSR successfully.

There were many similar tools the companies were using for managing CSR, but also differences raised. In the case companies, the most valued tools were managerial tools and communication tools. The significances also varied depending on the maturity stage and time. For instance, specific partnerships were more important at the beginning than later on.

5.5. Suggestions for further research

For further research, it would be interesting to study whether there are any differences between industries in decoupling of CSR policies and their implementation. Also a comparative study framing the organizational culture of a company and CSR conducted in the company would be interesting to study further, as it is likely to have an impact on the process and end results of CSR.

It is likely that there are differences between big corporations and SME´s with the decouplement of policies and their implementation. Also the age of the company is likely to have an impact to the process. Young agile companies are still in a search of their place in the markets and it is likely that their progress includes agile change, depending naturally also on the industry they are in. The organisation culture will likely have an impact as well. Also, a study which would measure the importance and effect of the top management support in different companies´ CSR process could be interesting to execute.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: HAASTATTELUKYSYMYKSET (Interview questions in Finnish)

> ### TEEMA 1: Vastuullisuuden rakentuminen yrityksessä (historia)

Vastuullisuuskäytänteiden nykytila pääpiirteittäin ja miten tähän ollaan päädytty? Mitä valintoja ollaan tehty suunnitteluvaiheessa?

Kuinka itse koet vastuullisuuden kehittymisen ja nykytilan?

Mitä on tehty milloinkin ja minkälaisella aikataululla?

Onko ajan saatossa kohdattu minkälaisia haasteita ja kuinka näistä ollaan selvitty?

Ovatko yritykset käyneet läpi kehityksen tutkimuksessa mukana olleen vastuullisuuden kypsymismallin (Gazzola ja Colombo 2014) mukaisesti vai hypänneet tiettyjä kohtia yli?

Milloin ja miksi vastuullisuutta alettiin johtamaan yrityksessä?

Minkälaisia vaiheita vastuullisuuden johtamisessa on käyty yrityksessä?

Tuleeko mieleen käännekohtia vastuullisuuden johtamisessa yrityksessä?

Minkälaisiin haasteisiin ollaan törmätty?

Minkälaisia työkaluja on käytetty ja onko joistain luovuttu? Miksi ovat olleet tarpeettomia?

> ### TEEMA 2: Vastuullisuuden rakentuminen yrityksessä (nykyisyys)

Minkälaiseksi arvioit yrityksen nykyiset vastuullisuuden linjaukset ja minkä vuoksi?

Minkälaisia viitekehyksiä käytetään yrityksen vastuullisuuden linjauksissa tällä hetkellä?

- Millä perusteilla se on valittu?

Minkälaisia työkaluja käytetään tällä hetkellä ja minkälaista hyötyä niistä koetaan olevan?

Miten paljon otetaan huomioon sidosryhmän jäsenet vastuullisuuden rakentamisessa?

- Onko merkittävyysmatriisia rakennettu sidosryhmiin perustuen?
- Painottuuko jotkin tietyt sidosryhmän jäsenet?

Kuinka paljon sidosryhmän jäseniä on huomioitu vastuullisuuden rakentumisessa ja implementoinnissa?

Onko vastuullisuuden rakentuminen ja viitekehyksien valinta perustunut enemmänkin institutionaaliseen vai resurssiperusteiseen valintaan?

Onko käytössä jaetun arvon malli?

Millä tavalla vastuullisuus on integroitu yritysstrategiaan vai onko se irrallaan siitä?

Mitä hyötyjä yritysvastuullisuudesta koetaan?

➢ TEEMA 3: Vastuullisuuden jalkauttaminen yrityksessä

Minkälaisia haasteita on vuosien varrella tullut eteen linjausten jalkauttamisessa? Miten haasteet on selätetty?

Mitkä työkalut ovat olleet merkittävimmät vastuullisuuden onnistumisen kannalta?

Onko esiintynyt muutosvastarintaa? Miksi? Miten tähän on reagoitu?

Onko esiintynyt linjausten ja implementoinnin eriytymistä? Miksi?

- Miten tähän ollaan reagoitu?

Kuinka omasta mielestä saadaan vastuullisuuden linjauksia ja implementointia onnistuneesti jalkautettua yrityksessä?

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH

> **THEME 1: Building CSR in a company (history)**

What is the current stage of sustainability practises in the company? How has the company reached this stage? What are the choices made at the CSR planning phase?

How is CSR development and its current stage experienced by the interviewee?

What have been done and with what kind of schedule?

Has there been any challenges over time? How has the company overcome these challenges?

Has the company gone through the CSR maturity model as it is (Gazzola and Colombo 2014) or skipped certain specific development stages from it?

When and why has the company started to manage CSR?

What are the stages of CSR management in the company?

Are there any turning points in CSR management?

What kinds of challenges have been encountered?

What kinds of tools have been used? Are some tools been given up? If so, why have they been considered to be unnecessary?

> **THEME 2: Building CSR in a company (present)**

How would you evaluate company´s current CSR policy and why?

What kinds of frameworks are currently been used in CSR policy?

- Why has these been selected?

What kinds of tools are being used at the moment and what are the benefits they are experienced to have?

How much are the stakeholders being considered in building CSR?

- Is there a materiality assessment established based on stakeholder opinions?
- Is a specific stakeholder group being emphasized?

How much stakeholders are being considered in building and implementing CSR?

Is building CSR and its framework based on institutional or resource-based choices?

Does the company emphasize on shared value?

What kinds of ways is CSR integrated into company strategy or is it separate from it?

What are the benefits CSR is experienced to have?

➢ **THEME 3: Implementing CSR**

In implementing CSR, what challenges has been encountered over the years? How were these challenges survived from?

What are the most significant tools for successful CSR?

Has change resistance occurred in the company? Why? How has it been reacted to?

Has there been any detachment of CSR policies from their implementation? Why?

- How has it been reacted to?

What are the most successful ways in implementing CSR in a company?