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**THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN A COMPANY'S SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE MISSION  
AND AN EMPLOYEE'S SENSE OF MEANINGFULNESS**

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**ABSTRACT**

In recent years, corporate social responsibility has grown to be an increasingly important topic for companies as well as for employees. Consequently, nowadays, more companies adopt socially responsible goals as part of their missions, and at the same time, more employees desire to work in companies, where ethical values are truly put into companies' practices. The increased desire to work in socially responsible companies might be due to that work and career have taken a more central role in individuals' lives. Therefore, the meaning for life is often discovered through being part of a company, which mission supports an individual's personal mission. Previous researches have shown that employees who act according to a company's mission help a company to achieve its goals. Therefore, understanding how employees make sense of companies' missions, and how this further influence employees' sense of meaningfulness is important to investigate to strengthen the link between a company's mission and an employee's personal mission.

To study the research question, the study was carried out as an inductive study that uses qualitative data, collected through interviews. The interviews were conducted from a single case-company, which offered a suitable research environment because of the company's socially responsible mission. Eleven interviewees, representing various positions at the company, were interviewed on how employees make sense of the company's socially responsible mission, and how this is linked with their sense of meaningfulness.

The findings of the study suggest that the fundamental factor, which enhances employees' ability to gain a sense of meaningfulness from a company's socially responsible mission, is employees' strong environmental and communal values. Based on the findings, if an employee's set of values does not contain these values, gaining a sense of meaningfulness from the mission appears to be unlikely. The findings also state that the values solely are not enough to generate a sense of meaningfulness for employees, but employees further need to sense a trust towards the mission, which appears to be greater if an employee perceives their own level of knowledge of the mission as high.

The study contributes to the existing research by extending the research on employee-centric CSR. As the existing research lacks on qualitative research, the study, focusing on individuals as active actors, contributes by placing individuals in the center of the research, and by focusing on the variance across individuals.

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**KEYWORDS:** Corporate social responsibility, employee-centric CSR, mission, sense of meaningfulness, sensemaking



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally researchers argue that the main reason for a company to exist is to maximize its shareholder value (Friedman 1993). However, in recent years, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has grown to be an increasingly important topic for companies as well as for employees (Heslin & Ochoa 2008; Sharma & Mehta 2012; Mishra 2017). Employees are more concerned about (Rupp, Ganapathi, Aguilera & Williams 2006), want to contribute (Bauman and Skitka 2012), and react to companies' social responsibility activities (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski 2010). Employees judge companies' efforts to invest in socially responsible actions based on their sense of fulfilment (Glavas 2016) and psychological needs (Gond, Akremi, Swaen & Babu 2017).

As a company's socially responsible and irresponsible actions influence employees' attitudes towards a company (Rupp et al. 2006), nowadays trends force companies to act socially responsible to be successful (Mishra 2017), and because of this, companies have been improving their socially responsible actions by implementing CSR in their strategies and mission statements (McWilliams & Siegel 2001; Verboven 2001). CSR is seen as strategic when it generates business-related benefits to a company by supporting its core business activities, and therefore, by acting according to a company's mission (Burke and Logsdon 1996). A company's mission is a representation of the basic goals, values, purpose (Thompson and Bunderson 2003), and the company's competitive strategy (Chou, Chen, & Conley 2015). Therefore, when CSR actions and mission are strongly related, CSR actions benefit companies financially and therefore, act according to the business's main mission, maximizing shareholder value (Burke et al. 1996; Friedman 1993).

In addition to the fact that a company's mission has a strategic meaning for the company itself (Thompson et al. 2003; Chou et al. 2015), researchers have stated that companies' mission can affect employees in a way that it creates them a sense of meaning. This sense of meaning arises from employees' own perceived congruence between their core values and ideologies, and those of their company. (Thompson et al. 2003.) Gratton (2000: 218)

states the following: “*We as individuals search for meaning, we want to be part of something that has a purpose, in which we can engage and where we feel inspired*”. Since in the course of time, work and career have taken a more central role in individuals’ lives, the meaning for life is nowadays often created and found through being a part of an organization (Bartlett & Ghoshal 1994). The increased importance of meaningful work can be seen in a fact, that one of the most important reasons for an employee to change their place of work these days is a desire to discover more meaningful work, which better supports an individual’s values (Holbeche 2004.) and connects them emotionally with a company’s mission (Campbell et al. 1991). To connect emotionally with a mission, employee’s feeling that a company’s mission helps in fulfilling an employee’s personal mission, and contribution that they personally want to make in society, is crucial (Marimon, Mas-Machuca & Rey 2016). This kind of meaningful work can be, for example, working in a company, which’s mission is not just to maximize shareholder value, but also to contribute to social problems by taking responsibility for the company’s actions, and setting corporate social responsibility policies. It is seen that employees are increasingly drawn to work in socially responsible companies, where ethical values are truly put into a company’s practices and policies. (Holbeche 2004.)

For decades, researchers have been examining CSR from a company perspective and focused on finding how CSR affects companies' bottom line. At the same time, researchers have almost forgotten a stakeholder group, who are the ones' planning, participating in, and witnessing companies CSR – the employees. (Rupp & Mallory 2015.) During the year 2012, employee-centric CSR research was only 4 percent of the CSR research, which reflects the need to examine the employee-centric research area of CSR (Aguinis & Glavas 2012). The demand has been regarded by researchers, and employee-centric CSR research has been increasing during the past years. According to Aguinis and Glavas (2019), 50 percent of employee-centric CSR researches has been done after the year 2010, which illustrates how fresh this area of CSR research still is. Despite the expanded research focusing on employee-centric CSR, Aguinis et al. (2019) point that the existing research focuses mainly on individual and organizational drives of why, when and how CSR engages, what are the outcomes of this CSR engagement, and how CSR engagement and outcomes of CSR engagement are in relation to each other.

Aguinis et al. (2019) state that still the perspective of: “...*how employees take on an active role making sense of CSR as they search for and find meaningfulness through work.*” is left out from the employee-centric CSR research. In their study, Aguinis et al. (2019) create a framework to observe, which factors influence how individuals make sense of CSR, and how the sensemaking is related to individuals' sense of meaningfulness at work. However, they highlight the lack of qualitative research around this research area, as the prior studies examining the topic have solely focused on researching the subject by utilizing data gathered through questionnaires (Raub et al. 2013; Glavas et al. 2014; De Roeck et al 2015; Leal et al. 2015; Chaudhary 2019). Hence, the research often treats individuals as passive actors, and therefore, variance across individuals is ignored. Therefore, Aguinis et al. (2019) suggest further studies to focus on qualitative approaches when studying individual experiences of CSR and the resulting meaningfulness since this would most likely yield interesting insights on individual differences. (Aguinis et al. 2019.)

This gap in the CSR research gives a theoretical motivation and justifies the relevance of studying from the employee-centric perspective how being part of a company, which mission is known as socially responsible, affects employees' sense of meaningfulness. Also, Gond et al. (2017), who review 268 earlier studies focusing on employee-centric CSR, highlight the need for future researches to study relevant individual differences, which influence individuals' attitudes towards companies' social responsibility. Therefore, the thesis focuses on studying how the individual characteristics, as a study variable, affect both, making sense of a company's socially responsible mission, and individual's sense of meaningfulness, and the link between these two.

As stated, the existing employee-centric CSR-research still lacks an understanding of how individuals take an active role in creating perceptions about companies' social responsibilities, and how individual differences affect this process (Aguinis et al. 2019). Therefore, this thesis contributes to the existing research by placing individuals in the center of the research and analyzing with a qualitative approach individual variation, which influences on individuals' sense of a company's socially responsible mission, and how that further effects on individuals' sense of meaningfulness. This thesis contributes

to the research therefore by treating individuals as active actors, instead of passive actors, and linking CSR, sensemaking, and meaningfulness by placing people and their search for meaningfulness at the center of the research. By doing this the thesis contributes by broadening the existing frameworks of meaningful work constructed by Chalofsky and Cavallaro's (2013) and Aguinis et al. (2019). Also, since the previous research studying the subject of meaningfulness gained through work mostly focuses on the job design (Aguinis et al. 2019), the thesis also contributes to the research by studying other sources for meaningfulness.

Since the research around CSR, mission and meaningful work still lacks on focus on individual differences (Gond et al. 2017), different sources of meaningfulness (Chalofsky et al 2013), and qualitative approach (Aguinis et al. 2019), the study aims to answer to the following research question:

**RQ:** *The role of an individual's perception of a company's mission, which is known as socially responsible, in an individual's sense of meaningfulness*

The research question is studied through a single case-study, which is justified by the fact that in the previous micro-CSR research data collection from employees from a single organization is widely accepted (e.g., De Roeck, El Akremi & Swaen, 2016; Lee & Chen, 2018; Jung & Ali, 2017; John, Qadeer & Jia 2019). Collecting data from a single organization allows examining how individual experiences of the same mission, which is known as socially responsible, vary.

Keeping in mind the purpose of the thesis, as the case-company a company, which is widely known from its aims to grow while being sustainable, is selected. The case-company is a multinational company operating in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry, and it has a variety of consumer goods brands in its brand portfolio. Different environmental and communal social responsibility goals of the company are extensively implemented into a variety of its brands' missions. The sustainability goals at the global level, as well as the goals at the brand level, are communicated both inside and outside the company. These goals are highlighted extensively in the company's media

and marketing channels. As the company's mission is recognized widely as socially responsible, the company offers a suitable environment to investigate the thesis's research question.

Next the structure of the thesis is introduced. First, the relevant theoretical backgrounds are introduced to understand the concepts the study examines and how the concepts are connected. First, the chapter presents the theoretical background of a company's mission, how it is defined, and how it relates to a company's strategy. Second, the theoretical background of employees' sense of meaningfulness, the elements of meaningfulness, and which factors influence a sense of meaningfulness, are defined. Third, this chapter presents the theoretical background of sensemaking. The third chapter presents and defines the concept of corporate social responsibility. Since this study focuses on social responsibility and how the concept is perceived from an employee's point of view, literature describing micro-CSR, which focuses on how corporate social responsibility is experienced by individuals, is presented. After presenting the relevant concepts of CSR, the existing literature studying the link between a company's socially responsible actions and an individual's sense of meaningfulness is presented to display the established results, which will be compared to the results of this study in the discussion part of the thesis. The fourth chapter presents the research methodology. Then the strategy and context of the research are explained and justified. The chapter also contains the description of the method used in data collection and the description of the sample. Lastly in the fourth chapter, the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the study are discussed. The fifth chapter consists of the empirical analysis, results and key findings of the research. In the sixth and final chapter, the theoretical contribution and managerial implications are presented. Following these, the limitations of the study are stated, and suggestions for future research are presented.

## 2. MISSION, MEANINGFULNESS AND SENSEMAKING

This chapter of the thesis looks into three concepts that relate closely to the research question, and define the context of the study. The focus of the study is on understanding, how an individual *makes sense* of a socially responsible *mission*, and how this links to the individual's *sense of meaningfulness*. Therefore, first, the concept of a company's mission and its impact on employees are presented. Second, the concept of sense of meaningfulness, from the employees' point of view, is presented. Third, the concept of sensemaking is presented. The presenting of the concept of corporate social responsibility is excluded from this chapter and presented in the following chapter due to the concept's extent.

### 2.1. The concept of a company's mission

According to Pearce (1982), a company mission is a purpose for it to exist. The terms mission and purpose, in a company context, can be understood as equivalent, since for example, Collins and Porras (1996) state that a company's purpose is the most fundamental reason why the company exists. Collins et al. (1996) definition for a purpose aligns with Pearce's (1982) definition for a mission, and therefore, both a company's mission and purpose can be seen to explain why the company exists.

The research streams defining what the concept of mission is, are divided into three different approaches: 1) The mission is seen as a formal statement, 2) the mission is seen as a dynamic practice, and 3) mission is seen as a source of motivation (Rey and Bastons 2014). The first approach defining the concept of mission views the mission as a company's formal statement. According to this approach, a company's mission answers the question "What is our business?". Mission and purpose are the foundation for a company's priorities, plans, work assignments, how a company's managerial structure is designed, and essentially, for its strategy. Since strategy defines a company's key activities, it is important to first define a company mission - that is to say, what our

business is, to be able to define a strategy through which the mission is achieved. (Drucker 1986.) Leuthesser and Kohli (1997) state that a mission statement is even a necessity for a company if it wants to form its identity, purpose, and direction. Fred R. David, Forest R. David and Meredith R. David's (2016) view of the mission statement is aligned with other researchers, and they state that every company has a reason for existing and mission statement describes what a company wants to be and whom it wants to serve. All in all, a mission according to a formal statement approach sees a company's mission as something, which defines the essence of a company's business (David et al. 2016).

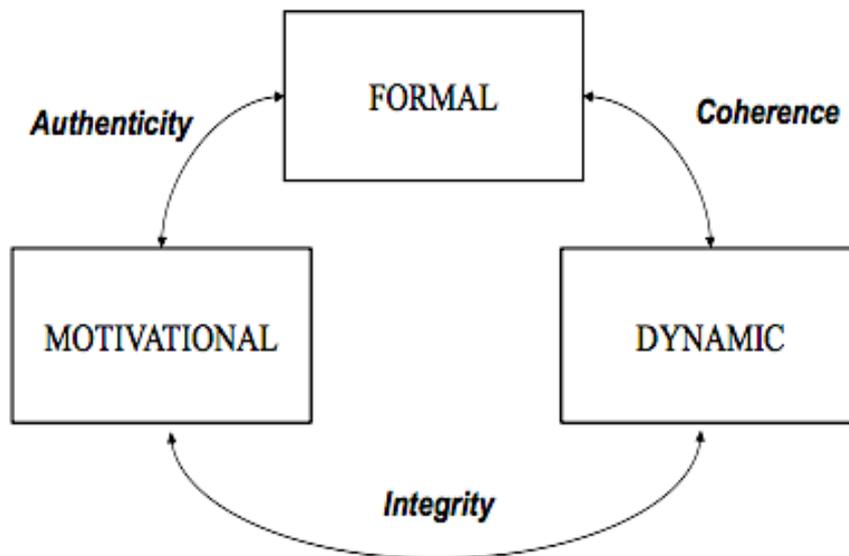
The second approach views the concept of mission as a company's dynamic practice. This approach sees that in addition to the fact that a mission explains why a company exists, it also explains other elements in a company. These other elements in a company's mission are products and services, the market in which a company is operating, the technology a company and its rivals are utilizing in the market they are operating in, and how a company's growth and profitability are created. (Pearce 1982.) According to Campbell and Yeung (1991), a company's mission includes a company's purpose, values, and strategy, but also a company's behavioral standards, which are an essential part of explaining how employees are acting inside a company. Suh, Houston, Barney, and Kwon (2011) state that the mission statement and how a company fills its mission statement can also affect its employees' engagement and organizational identification. Thus, Suh et al. (2011) also note that the mission strongly links to a company's employees' practices and company culture as a dynamic element that can influence companies' actions. Therefore, the mission should be seen not just as a statement, but also as a company's action of executing what it is stated in the mission statement. (Suh et al. 2011.)

The third approach views the concept of mission as a source of motivation. In this approach, a company's mission is seen as something that affects employees' behavior. Bart and Baetz (1998) were the first researchers who noticed that there is a link between a company's mission and employees' behavior. According to them, 1) when a company is satisfied with the mission statement they have formed, 2) when a company's mission statement development process is something that employees are satisfied with, and 3) when a company has a high level of employee involvement in mission statement

development process, the research results showed that a mission statement has a positive effect on employees' behaviors. (Baetz et al. 1998.) Bart, Bontis & Taggar (2001) also see a company's mission statement as something that motivates employees to act according to certain behavior standards to achieve a company's goals. Through a well-formulated mission statement, a company can utilize employees' strengths and capabilities efficiently and therefore, utilize mission as a strong management tool (Brown and Yoshioka 2003). However, Bart et al. (1998) highlight that employees need to feel "the heat of the mission" and have "a sense of mission" since, without this, a company isn't able to utilize its employees' to the maximum level. In order for mission to act as a tool through which employees can be motivated to work towards a company's goal, employees need to understand the content of the mission (Nonaka 1994), and employees need to be able to connect their values with the mission to internalize the importance of the mission (Campbell et al. 1991). Also, management needs to be committed to the mission as well as all the co-workers for an individual to recognize and feel the comprehensive commitment to the mission (Marimon et al. 2016). Lastly, a company's day-to-day practices must align with the mission for the mission not to lose its credibility in the eyes of the employees (Bart 2001).

Desmidt's (2016) study's results also align with previous researchers, and his study shows that high-quality mission statements create higher employee mission engagement. However, his study also notes that other factors further affect this positive correlation between a mission statement and an employee's mission engagement, such as an employee's hierarchical position in a company, cognitions regarding mission communication, and an employee's self-efficacy. Thus, it is important to understand that even with a precisely formed mission statement, there is no real certainty for a company to achieve a high level of employee mission engagement. Therefore, although a company's mission is proven to be an effective tool in communicating a company's goals and purpose to its employees, the mission does not necessarily make a similar impact on each employee. How an individual is affected by the mission depends on an individual's cognitions and characteristics, as well as on an individual's cognitions towards a company and its mission. (Desmidt 2016.)

In sum, the formal dimension approach represents a company's members' explicit knowledge about a company's mission. This approach consists of defining why a company is doing what it is doing and translating this knowledge of a company's mission to concepts and ideas. The dynamic dimension highlights the practical side of a mission and focuses on how a company can fulfill its mission. The motivational dimension focuses on in which way a company's members are attached to a company's mission and how these members can be motivated to act according to a company's mission. (Rey et al. 2018.) These three approaches towards a company's mission create an interrelated concept of mission, which is presented in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1.** Interrelated concept of mission (Rey et al. 2018).

Rey et al. (2018) have developed the concept above to explain the consistency between the three dimensions of the mission. The researchers have selected three different terms to describe the relationships between dimensions: authenticity, coherence, and integrity.

*Authenticity* is the form of consistency between two mission dimensions: motivational and formal. It refers to how well a company's formal mission is adopted by its members.

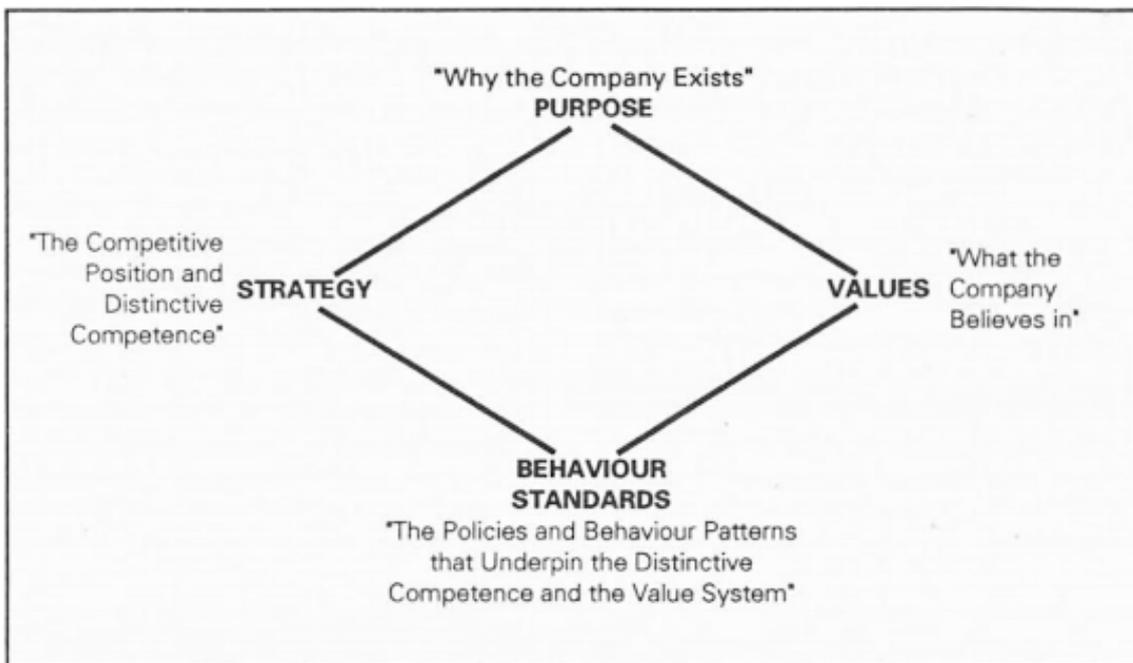
Rey et al. (2018) describe a mission to be authentic when a company's mission is truly lived by the members of a company. The level of a mission's authenticity is depended on how well a company's developed formal mission and a company's members' sense of motivational mission are aligned together with each other. (Rey et al. 2018.)

*Integrity* is the form of consistency between motivational and dynamic dimensions of the mission. Integrity refers to the consistency between what a company's members are motivated to practicing, what these members are actually practicing, and how well these two factors fit together. Rey et al. (2018) state as following: "*integrity expresses the integration of the desired mission (motivational) and the mission in practice (dynamic).*". Researchers also argue that problems between the two dimensions are the reason for the mission to fail. Inconsistencies between the dimensions arise, for example, if an employee is not fully motivated by the mission, or if an employee is forced to perform a certain action when there is no personal motivation to this action. (Rey et al. 2018.)

*Coherence* is the consistency between dynamic and formal dimensions. This consistency refers to how well a company's developed mission (formal), and how the mission is practiced by a company's members (dynamic), fit together. The consistency between the two dimensions is simplified by Rey et al. (2018) as to how well a company practices what they preach. Inconsistencies between these two dimensions often emerge if a company is not able to create a meaningful link between what a mission formally states, and how a mission is executed in practice by employees. Marimon et al. (2016) state that although a company's formal mission can motivate employees, if there is inconsistency between a formal and dynamic mission, which indicates that employees' actions are not coherent with the formal mission, as a result, a company is not able to harness their employee resources efficiently to achieve their business goals.

The conceptualization of a company's mission presented above helps in understanding a mission as a whole. Presenting the different dimensions of a company's mission extends the definition of mission further and explains how a mission influences inside a company. (Rey et al. 2018.)

As stated above, companies have a variety of ways of seeing a mission. Some view it as a company's strategic tool, which defines a company's business strategy, and some view a mission as something, which defines a company's philosophy and ethics. To define a mission and its building blocks, Campbell et al. (1991) developed the Ashridge Mission Model, which presents four different elements from which a company's mission is formed. Figure 2 below presents how the four different elements are connected.



**Figure 2.** The Ashridge mission model (Campbell et al. 1991).

The model includes four elements that Campbell et al. (1991) argue to be the building blocks for creating a strong company mission. The first element is the *purpose*, which answers a company's question: "Why do we as a company exists?". Researchers argue that companies fall into three different categories when asking this question from themselves. Some companies' idea of their purpose aligns with Friedman's (1970) shareholder theory, which states that a company's main purpose to exists is to maximize its shareholder value. Other companies' idea of their purpose is more aligned with a

stakeholder theory, in which a company's only purpose is not just to create value for its shareholders, but a company also acknowledges other stakeholders such as its employees, customers, suppliers and a community it is operating in. These companies' purpose is to satisfy all its stakeholders. (Freeman 1984.) The third view sees that a company's purpose is more than just satisfying shareholders' or stakeholders' needs. In this viewpoint, the purpose is seen as something greater, which supports some higher-level goals. (Campbell et al. 1991.)

The second element and building block for a company's mission is a *strategy*, which Campbell et al. (1991) state to provide logic to a company, which explains how it will achieve its mission. If a company's mission is to maximize its shareholder value, the company needs to create a strategy, which defines how this goal can be achieved. To achieve the mission, the company needs to gain a competitive advantage, through which the mission of maximizing a company's shareholder value can be achieved. Therefore, a strategy also includes the factors through which a company can gain a competitive advantage and achieve its mission. (Campbell et al. 1991.)

The third building block of a mission is *behavior* standards inside a company. According to Campbell et al. (1991), when a company's purpose and strategy are implemented into employees' level, behavioral guidelines are born, and these guidelines help employees' day-to-day actions. For example, if a company aims to be the best among competitors, this aim needs to reflect on the company's employees' actions and policies for the company to achieve its goal. However, employees as human beings drive from emotions, and therefore, desire moral rationale from a mission to validate why they should behave according to a company's business mission. (Campbell et al. 1991.)

The fourth building block of a mission is a company's *values*, which Campbell et al. (1991) describe as beliefs and moral principles in a company's culture, which give employees a moral rationale to behave according to a company's mission. According to Campbell et al. (1991), similar to a company's strategy, also a company's values can provide strong guidelines for employees' behavior. Behavioral guidelines created by values emerge from emotional, moral, and ethical factors and guide employees' behaviors

in ways such as guiding how to perform and treat people the right way. In comparison, the behavioral guidelines that a company's strategy creates guide employees to act so that a company can achieve its business goal, which can vary from maximizing shareholder value to sustainably expanding a business. (Campbell et al. 1991.)

In sum, a company's mission defines the key goals, characteristics, and philosophies that ultimately create the foundation for a company's strategy. A company's mission differentiates the company from other companies, but it also communicates the vision and self-concept that a company wants to achieve. (Pearce 1982).

## 2.2. Employees and meaningfulness

This study aims to understand how employees' experience of a company's mission affects employees' sense of meaningfulness. Therefore, the section first focuses on defining employees' sense of meaningfulness and how it is constructed. Second, how employees gain a sense of meaningfulness at work is presented. Since the thesis studies how employees' sense of meaningfulness is affected by a company's mission, and how employees' differences affect how a mission is made sense of, third, the concept of sensemaking is presented.

Frankl (1984) states that "*Man's search for a meaning is the primary motivation in his life*". Campbell et al. (1991) state that a person asking, "why do I exist?" is an equivalent for a company thinking a reason for their company and business to exist, in other words, their mission. Gratton (2000: 218) continues adding to states as following: "*We as individuals search for meaning, we want to be part of something that has a purpose, in which we can engage and where we feel inspired*".

As seen above, for individuals, fulfilling the mission and gaining a sense of meaningfulness is an essential part of life. Before, institutions such as churches, communities, and families provided this sense of meaningfulness by offering individuals a sense of identity, affiliation, support, and meaning for life. However, over time, work

and career have taken a more central role in individuals' lives, and the workplace has become one of the primary means for many. Thus, individuals' sense of meaningfulness is nowadays often created by the personal fulfilments gained by being part of a company. Since the career plays such a central role in individuals' lives nowadays, requirements for work have increased. Individuals do not want to work or be part of just any company, but they want to feel a real sense of belonging and meaning from being part of something worthwhile. (Bartlett & Ghoshal 1994.)

According to Baumeister (1991), individuals have four needs according to which they search meaning for life: 1) Need for purpose, 2) Need for values, 3) Need for a sense of efficacy, and 4) Need for self-worth. Cartwright and Holmes (2006) argue that work can fulfill three of the needs through which the meaning for life searched: the need for purpose, sense of efficacy, and self-worth. However, they state that work often fails to fulfill the need for values.

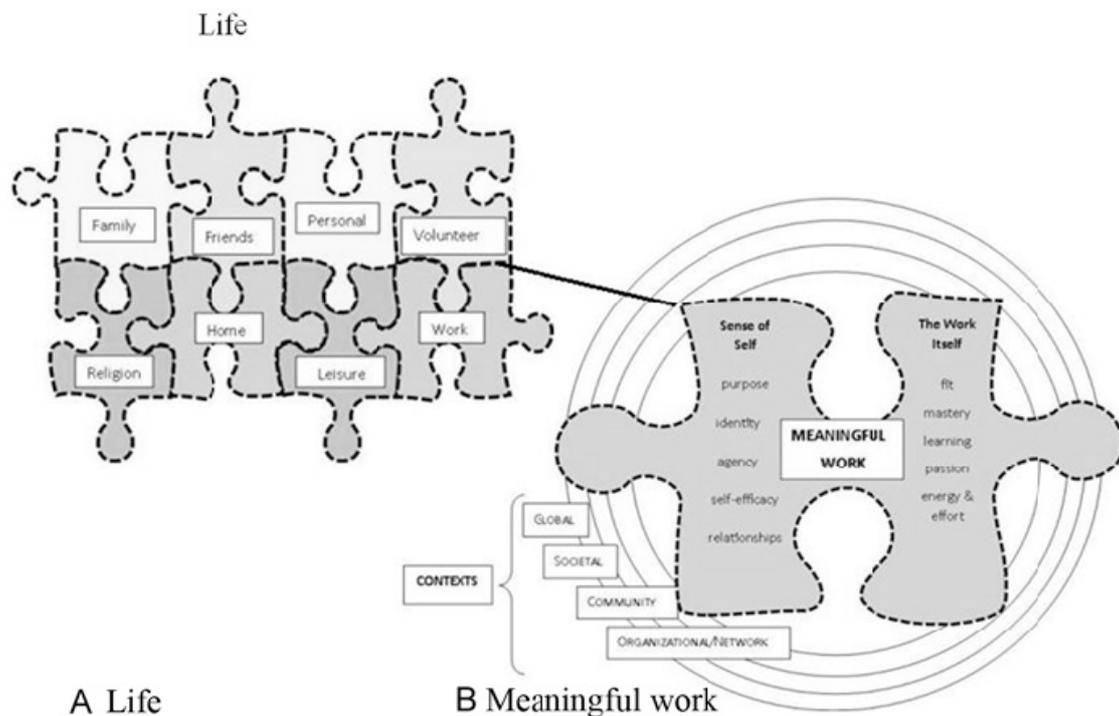
Chalofsky (2003) has created a concept that presents three elements through which individuals gain a sense of meaning at work: sense of self, work itself, and sense of balance. The concept is presented in Figure 3, below.



**Figure 3.** Meaningful Work (Chalofsky 2003).

The first element, *the sense of self*, includes individuals' capabilities such as understanding own purpose in life and how that purpose fits together with the work one is doing. Also, a sense of self includes elements such as recognizing own potential and being capable of developing it, believing in own purpose and having a vision of how it can be reached, and being completely present for work. (Chalofsky 2003.) The second element, *the work itself*, holds the idea that individuals are capable of achieving their purpose through working, and that individuals can challenge, learn, and grow at work while performing their duties. A crucial factor that helps individuals to find meaningfulness at work is an ability to sense autonomy and empowerment while working. (Chalofsky 2003.) The third element, *the sense of balance*, includes an individual's feeling of balance between work self and individual self, and also, a balance between giving oneself and giving to others. (Chalofsky 2003.) According to Chalofsky (2003), for individual achieving a sense of meaningful work, all of these three elements interplay is needed.

Chalofsky and Cavallaro (2013) reviewed the construction of Chalofsky's (2003) about the meaning of work and developed the construction by taking into consideration an individual's rest of the life, not just work. The construction illustrates the work as part of a puzzle, which in total represents an individual's life. Chalofsky et al. (2013) state that this illustration portrays the connections between different dimensions better since all the pieces in the puzzle need to fit together for an individual to achieve a sense of meaningfulness. The researchers state the need for this more complex constructions since it well illustrates the complexity for individuals to find harmony between all the different elements in life since these elements constantly change their shape and level of importance in once life. Below, Figure 4 presents the evolving construct of meaningful work.



**Figure 4.** The evolving construct of meaningful work (Chalofsky et al. 2013).

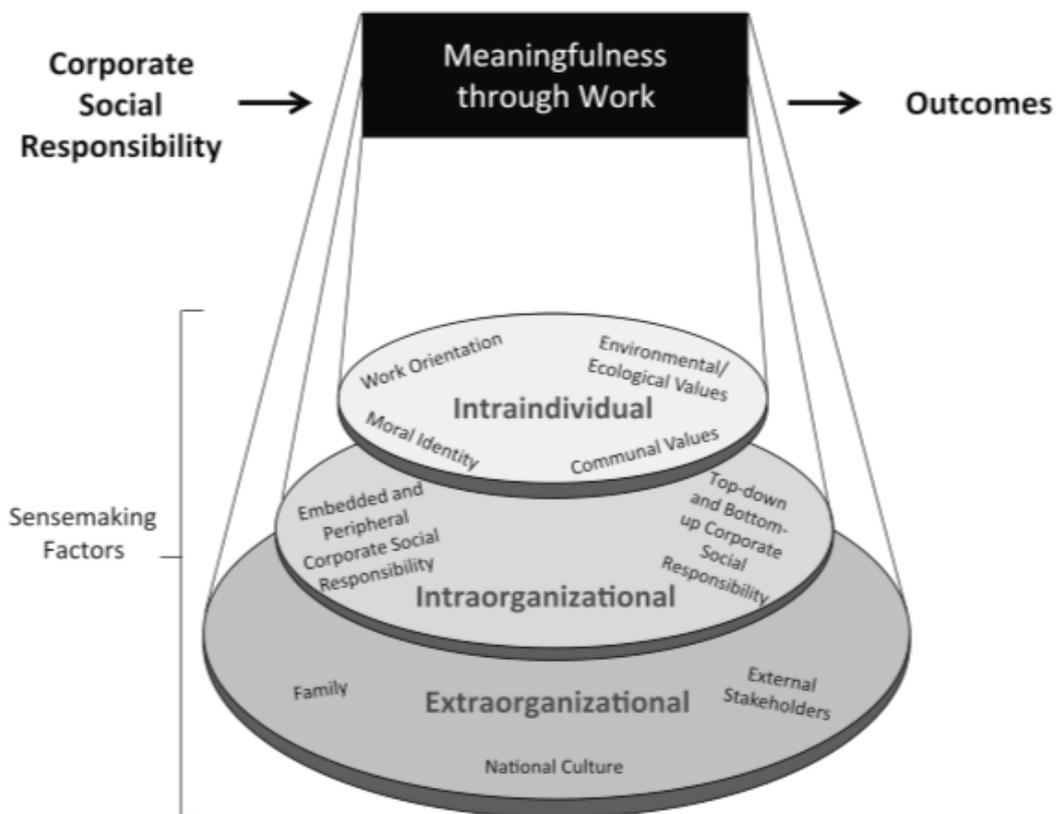
Two themes from which Chalofsky et al. (2013) argue meaningful work to construct, are the sense of self and the work itself. *Sense of self* constructs from five different elements: purpose, identity, agency, self-efficacy, and relationships. Purpose describes who an individual is, what is an individual's purpose in life, and what kind of work fits with an individual's purpose. Identity describes how an individual perceives oneself. Agency describes an individual's independence to act according to one's desires. Self-efficacy describes nearly the same sense as the agency, and it relates to an individual's desire to fulfill own aspirations. Despite the desire for an individual to achieve the feeling that the work and life are worthwhile, an individual also desires that the people in their lives, the community and the society, also feel that an individual's work and life are worthwhile. Therefore, an individual's relationships are also part of creating an individual's sense of self. Especially for a younger generation, doing something that matters also for the others is seen as an important factor influencing a sense of meaningfulness at work. (Chalofsky et al. 2013.)

The second theme of work is *the work itself*, which is the other influencing half affecting an employee's sense of meaningfulness gained at work. The work itself describes characteristics of work that are seen to affect employees' sense of meaningfulness. The characteristics of work are the work fit, how an individual can master the work as well as learn at work, passion towards the work, and energy and effort used to work. (Chalofsky et al. 2013.) Chalofsky's et al. (2013) description of the influencing elements of work is consistent with other researchers. Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model (JCM) states that core dimensions affecting the meaningfulness of work are skill variety, task identity, and task significance. The JCM model, which focuses on explaining the meaningfulness of work through job design and how individuals view their job, well represents the research stream of meaningfulness of work, which lacks on taking on notice the other possible factors, which possibly affect the meaningfulness of work (Aguinis et al. 2019). Therefore, the thesis aims to contribute to the research and broaden the construction made by Chalofsky et al. (2013) by focusing on analyzing how an individual's sensemaking of a company's socially responsible mission affects an individual's sense of meaningfulness. To understand the sensemaking process, in the next section, the concept of sensemaking suitable for this study is presented.

### 2.3. Sensemaking

Sensemaking can be seen as a process through which individuals interpret and explain for themselves the meaning of ongoing experiences, such as work (Weick 1995). Sensemaking takes place when an individual faces an event, which differs from the standard or disturbs the balance. In this kind of situation, an individual makes sense through their beliefs by which they rationalize the situations. The sensemaking process is also a highly social process where individuals reflect their own beliefs from others' actions and surrounding circumstances and based on these, individuals gather cues and shape the way they are making sense of situations. (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2013.)

Aguinis et al. (2019) state that since sensemaking takes place when an individual faces a situation, which differs from the standard or disturbs the balance: “*CSR is a fertile ground for sensemaking (research) because it often creates tensions and social dilemmas*” (Aguinis et al. 2019: 1064). And since this study focuses on understanding how an individual’s experience of a company’s mission, which is known as socially responsible, affects individual’s sense of meaningfulness, the sensemaking framework, which explains how individuals experience corporate social responsibility and find meaningfulness through work is presented below in Figure 5.



**Figure 5.** Sensemaking of CSR (Aguinis et al. 2019: 9).

In the model developed by Aguinis et al. (2019) the sensemaking factors are divided into three different levels: 1) intraindividual, 2) intraorganizational, and 3)

extraorganizational. These levels include factors, which explain how individuals experience corporate social responsibility in different ways depending on individual differences.

The first is the *intraindividual* level, which explains the factors that occur in the individual itself and explains how individual differences affect the experience of a company's socially responsible actions, and how that further affects how meaningfulness is sensed differently through work. The first level includes the following four factors through which individuals make sense of their surroundings: First is *work orientation*, which is noted to affect the sensemaking process through individual differences in "internalized evaluations about what makes work worth doing" (Pratt, Pradies & Lepisto 2013: 4). In other words, individuals make sense of the work according to what they want to gain from work, whether it is career development, material rewards, or feeling of impact. In Aguinis et al. (2019) model, individuals who have a strong calling orientation, meaning that they perceive the work they are doing as impactful, sense positive correlation between working in a socially responsible company and the level of meaningfulness. The second factor is *moral identity*, which affects an individual's sensemaking process through the individual's search of "Who am I?". The third factor is *environmental values*, which are seen as an important factor influencing the sensemaking process since individuals' values are the foundation, which they reflect on when evaluating situations (Wrzesniewski, Dutton & Debebe et al. 2003). Aguinis et al. (2019) especially highlight the impact of environmental values because of the proven positive relationship between individuals, who retain these kinds of values, and socially responsible companies. The fourth factor is *communal values*, which describe an individual's desire to act in a certain way to ensure the well-being of others (Aguinis et al. 2019).

The second level is intraorganizational, which describes the social effect of work, which influences individuals' sensemaking process. According to Aguinis et al. (2019), there are two sensemaking factors in the intraorganizational level, and the first of them is *embedded* and *peripheral* CSR. A company is considered to have embedded CSR when socially responsible actions are truly implemented into a company's core competencies, values, and practices. In comparison, peripheral CSR focuses only on secondary operations such

as voluntary work, excluding core activities. Whether CSR is embedded or peripheral effects on sensemaking because employees judge the authenticity of why a company is implementing CSR in its operations at a certain level. (Aguinis et al. 2019.) Individuals' sensemaking process is influenced by the level of which companies are implementing CSR into their practices through CSR skepticism, which means that individuals question a company's true motivation to engage in CSR (Skarmeas & Leonidou 2013). Therefore, Aguinis et al. (2019) claim that the more a company is truly implementing CSR in their practices, or other words, the more CSR is embedded, the more individuals gain a sense of meaningfulness through work.

The second sensemaking factor of the intraorganizational level is the top-down and bottom-up CSR. The top-down approach refers to a process where practices are planned and implemented in the strategy by a management team, and employees have a zero influence. In the literature, this is described as sense giving, since management highly influences employees' sensemaking process by giving employees the model of how they should think (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991). As opposite, bottom-up CSR refers to a process where employees have an authority to influence CSR since they are involved, for example, into the planning phase of CSR activities (Sharp & Zaidman 2009). This according to Aguinis et al. (2019) yields more sense of meaningfulness among employees since they can live out their purpose better through given the author to impact their surroundings.

The third level is the extraorganizational, which observers how an outside context influences an individual's sensemaking process and through that, to a gained sense of meaningfulness at work. The first factor influencing the sensemaking process is the *family* of an individual. Aguinis et al (2019) suggest that an individual's family's values and morals guide what an individual senses as meaningful. Therefore, when what the family values align with an individual's work, a sense of meaningfulness is greater. The second influencing factor on sensemaking is *external stakeholders*. External stakeholders influence an individual's sense of meaningfulness through how stakeholders' lives are affected by a company at which an individual is working. Aguinis et al. (2019) argue that the sense of meaningfulness is the higher, the more an individual is in contact with the

external stakeholders, and the more positively the external stakeholders are affected by the actions of a company. The third influencing factor in the extraorganizational level is *national culture*. The factor influences the sensemaking process through the culture an individual belongs to, collectivistic or individualistic, and therefore, which kind of values an individual possesses (Aguinis et al. 2019). In collectivistic cultures, individuals define themselves as part of a group, and therefore, personal goals and emotions are strongly linked to the ones of the group. In comparison, in individualistic cultures, individuals define themselves, their goals, and emotions as separate from others, and highlight individual achievements. (Triandis, Bontempo & Villareal, 1988.)

Aguinis et al. (2019) note that the factors presented in the model do not give a comprehensive illustration from all the possible factors affecting how a company's socially responsible actions are made sense of by different individuals, and how that further impacts to their sense of meaningfulness. However, Aguinis et al. (2019) justify the use of the factors included in the model since a variety of other studies have noted the importance of these same sensemaking factors (see e.g. Wrzesniewski 2003; De Roeck et al 2014; Glavas et al. 2014;). In this section, the focus is on understanding the sensemaking factors that affect the sense of meaningfulness, and therefore, the effects of corporate social responsibility on meaningful work are presented more in detail in the next chapter of the thesis.

### 3. CSR AND MEANINGFUL WORK

In recent years' corporate social responsibility (CSR) has grown to be an increasingly important topic for companies as well as for employees. Nowadays trends force companies to act socially responsible to be successful, and because of this, companies have been increasing their socially responsible actions. (McWilliams & Siegel 2001.) The following section first presents the concept of CSR from a company's point of view, and second from an individual's point of view. After that, research around meaningful work is presented, with an especial focus on studies studying the link between meaningful work and CSR.

#### 3.1. Macro CSR

Although the term CSR was not yet distinguished in 1916, Clark, M. J. state in the Journal of Political Economy “...if men are responsible for the known results of their actions, business responsibilities must include the known results of business dealings, whether these have been recognized by law or not” (Clark 1916: 223). The actual evolution of the term CSR began in the 1950s, and it has had a long and varied history. Before the term CSR was developed, in the early writings, the term social responsibility (SR) was more often used. It is said that the modern era of social responsibility begun in the 1950s by Howard R. Bowen's publication. (Carroll 1999: 268-269.) Bowen (1953) set a definition for the social responsibilities of businessmen: “*It refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society*” (Bowen 1953: 6). Davis (1973) continued defining CSR by stating that the social responsibility begins where the law ends, that is to say, a company is not being socially responsible if it merely complies with the minimum requirements of the law (Davis 1973: 313). Carroll (1979) suggests that companies have four responsibilities: 1) the economic responsibility to be profitable, 2) the legal responsibility to abide by the laws of society, 3) the ethical responsibility to do what is right, just and fair, and 4) the discretionary responsibility to be a good corporate

citizen by contributing resources for various kinds of social, educational, reactional or cultural purposes (Carroll 1979: 500). A more recent definition of corporate social responsibility, by Aguinis et al. (2011: 855), states as follows: “*context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders’ expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance*”. Aguinis et al. (2011) definition of CSR is developed further from Carroll’s definition and highlights the importance of social and environmental responsibility. The description well reflects nowadays perception of CSR, in which environmental and social aspects of the responsible operation are more highlighted. (Aguinis 2011.)

Freeman’s (1984) stakeholder theory offers a different viewpoint for defining CSR by highlighting the importance of a company's stakeholders. Stakeholder theory instructs managers to try to satisfy the range of a company’s interest groups such as customers, workers, and local community organizations thus these groups could influence the company’s bottom line. According to this view, managers should not only focus on the needs of shareholders nor the owners of the company. Instead, companies should engage in certain CSR activities that these other interest groups than shareholders value. If a company ignores these CSR activities, interest groups might reject the company, and this would have a negative impact on its profits. (Freeman 1984.) Also, Thomas M. Jones (1980) defines CSR as a voluntary and broad obligation to the company to its interest groups in society other than shareholders and beyond that prescribed by the law or union contract (Jones 1980: 59-60). In Jones’s (1980) definition of CSR, one can see the same base idea that Freeman (1984) has; taking into account all of the company’s stakeholders is an essential part of CSR.

Besides the literature highlighting the importance of taking stakeholders into account when defining CSR, an extensive part of the research around CSR has also recognized the financial benefit of adopting CSR into companies' operations. Through this, the research around CSR has moved to a more strategic direction (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir & Davídsdóttir 2019). Lantos (2001) added strategy in the definition of CSR, which begun the use of the term Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility, SCSR. According to Lantos (2001), SCSR takes place in a company, when the motivation to implement CSR activities

steams from gaining business growth and generating profits. In other words, if CSR does not yield extra profits to a company, it is implementing socially responsible activities just from pure altruism. In the SCSR approach, a company aims to benefit from socially responsible actions financially. (Lantos 2001.) Besley and Ghatak (2007) state that as a matter of fact, CSR is in various circumstances consistent with companies' profit maximization goals in competitive markets. They argue that when a company sells ethical or neutral brands, in equilibrium, consumers self-select according to their valuation of the public good. Thus, only those consumers who prefer ethical brands are willing to buy the product, and as long as the other consumers are neutral, there is no disadvantage on those who do not care. This way, CSR creates a Pareto-improvement, where no one loses when one gains. (Besley et al. 2007: 1646-1647.) Heslin and Ochoa (2008) note that strategic CSR, in addition to helping companies to benefit financially, brings benefits to external stakeholders as well, although this would not be the motivation why a company implements CSR. Heslin et al. (2008) note was a start for the concept of shared value, which states that when a company is creating value for itself, it can also create value for its stakeholders, and for the social contexts in which a company operates.

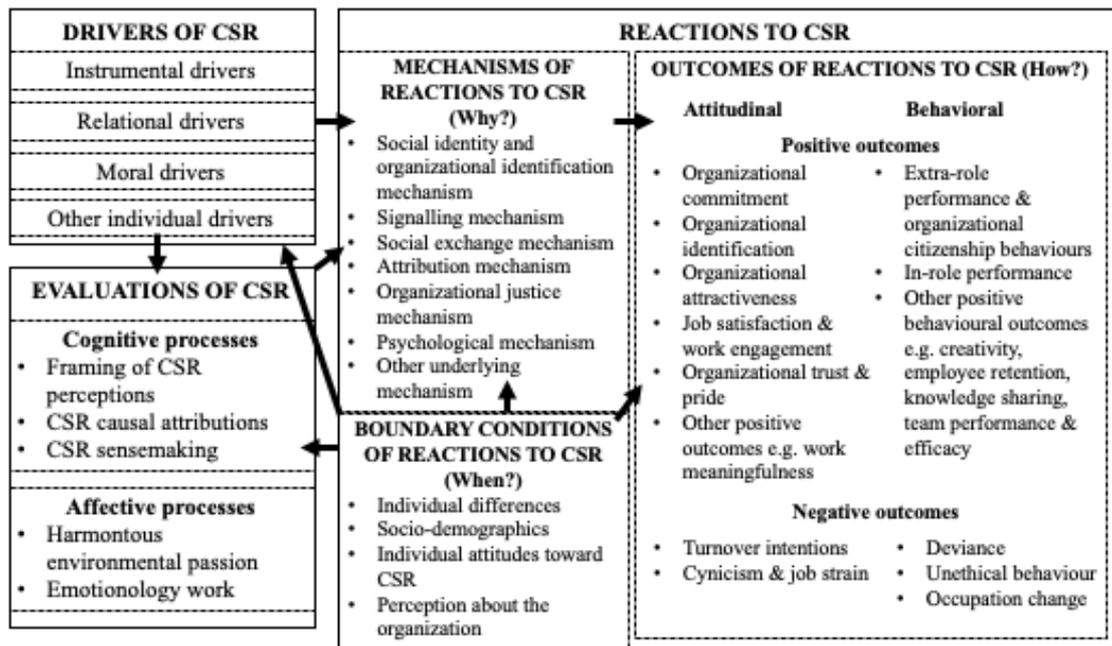
Porter and Kramer (2011) state that creating shared value would be an essential part of future businesses since it improves companies' competitive advantages while also benefitting society. Companies have started to gradually recognize the importance of CSR mainly because of the increasing awareness of various factors such as environmental degradation, human rights, and social-ethical issues. These factors are likely to affect a company's image and through that to a company's financial performance. Through this, increasing awareness of the field of social responsibility forces companies to rethink implementing CSR in their strategy because of the change in the consumers' requirements. (Sharma & Mehta 2012: 71.) Burke and Logsdon (1996) state that corporate social responsibility is seen as strategic when it generates business-related benefits to a company by supporting its core business activities, and therefore, by acting according to a company's mission. How aligned corporate social responsibility and a company's mission are, can be measured with centrality, which measures according to Burke et al. (1996: 496) "*the closeness of fit between a CSR policy or program and the firm's mission...*". A high level of centrality between a CSR and a company mission

generates financial benefits to a company since when CSR actions support a company's mission, it also supports a company's goal of maximizing its shareholder value. (Burke et al. (1996). Sharma et al. (2012) similarly advise that by implementing CSR in the strategy, a company can gain in many different sectors. According to them, through CSR, a company can help to reduce wastage of resources and this way lower costs. CSR also helps to improve the reputation of a company and as a result, improve its brand value. Finally, Sharma et al. (2012) state that a company's long-term success depends on both a company's well-being as well as its position with the social and natural environment in which a company operates. Because of the hunt for success, many proactive companies have implemented CSR initiatives in their strategies in the hope of gaining from being good. (Sharma et al. 2012: 73-74.)

### 3.2. Micro CSR

Micro CSR focuses on how corporate social responsibility affects individuals and how it is experienced by individuals. Although in this study, the focus is on employee perspective, as a whole, micro-CSR research does not limit to only employee perspective but includes other stakeholder perspectives such as consumers. (Rupp, Mallory 2015.)

Micro CSR can be divided into three major streams of research, and the division has been done by Gond et al. (2017), who in their study gathered and evaluated 268 person-focused CSR studies. Based on the previous studies, Gond et al. (2017) developed a Figure presented below, which explains the psychological micro-foundations of corporate social responsibility and divides different streams of research according to three core components: 1) drivers, 2) evaluations, and 3) reactions.



**Figure 6.** Psychological micro-foundations of CSR (Gond et al. 2017).

The first employee-centric research stream focuses on individual *drivers* of CSR engagement, which means the factors that motivate individuals to engage with CSR. This CSR engagement can occur through individuals' believe that they must engage in CSR or individuals' own will to engage in CSR. Drivers of CSR engagement have been divided into four categories: 1) instrumental drivers, such as ego-based motives, need for control and self-serving concerns, 2) relational drivers, such as need for belongingness and social and relationship-based concerns, 3) moral drivers, such as need for meaningful existence and care-based concerns, and 4) other individual drivers, such as personality traits and socio-demographics. (Gond et al. 2017.)

The second research stream regards individual processes of CSR *evaluations*, which means an individual's process of understanding companies' CSR initiatives. The research regarding the process of understanding can be divided into two categories: First is the cognitive process, which explains how individuals create perceptions about companies' CSR efforts' different dimensions, how individuals evaluate a company's motives to invest in CSR efforts, and how individuals make sense of a company's CSR efforts.

Second CSR evaluation process is called affective, which concerns emotions effect on evaluation process. (Gond et al. 2017.) Emotions that affect how individuals evaluate companies' CSR efforts often arise from issues that individuals are also concerned about in their personal lives. For example, climate change can create emotions that can affect how individuals evaluate companies' CSR efforts. If an individual works for a company, which aims to solve a sustainability issue such as reduce emissions, which individual is also personally concerned about, this provides the individual “emotional harmony” or in other words, satisfaction from being able to fulfill their personal and work goals at once. (Wright & Nyberg 2012.)

The third research stream regards individuals' *reactions* to companies' CSR efforts. Researchers studying individuals' reactions to CSR is divided into three different research streams: First is *mechanisms* of individual reactions to CSR. Gond et al. (2017) raise three of the most used mechanism to explain individuals reactions to CSR: The first is the social identity and organizational identification mechanism, which states that individuals seek to work in companies, which they see as high-status organizations to gain sense of pride and enhance their self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael 1989). The second is signaling mechanisms, which regards two parties and signals sent between the parties. For example, in a signaling mechanism, a company (a sender of a signal) communicates its CSR efforts to a possible future employee (a receiver of a signal) who then makes sense of a signal, and based on that, creates anticipations of a company. (Connelly, Ireland & Reutzell 2011). The third is social exchange mechanisms, which explain individuals' reactions to CSR through a relationship between a company and an employee. Because of an employer-employee relationship, an employee believes to benefit from the good actions of an employer, and therefore, feels a need to give something in return (Gond et al. 2017).

The second stream of research studying individuals' reactions to companies' CSR efforts is the *boundary conditions of individuals' reactions* to CSR, which affects individuals' reactions depending on individual differences. The individual differences can be in, for example, cultural and moral values, socio-demographic differences, and personal beliefs regarding the importance of socially responsible actions (Gond et al. 2017). Depending on employees' social and cultural backgrounds and values, employees react

differently to companies' CSR actions. For example, collective employees are more concerned about a company's CSR actions focused on external factors, such as the environment. (Farooq, O., Rupp & Farooq, M. 2017). If an employee sees being socially responsible as important, through working in a company that invests in CSR efforts, an employee can get satisfaction for psychological and developmental needs (Glavas 2016).

The third stream of research studying individuals' reactions to companies' CSR efforts is the *outcomes of individual reactions* to CSR. This stream of research can be divided into *behavioral* outcomes and *attitudinal* outcomes. (Gond et al. 2017.) Heslin et al. (2008) state that a company's attitude of fairness often influences how employees feel (attitudinal) about the organization, as well as how they act (behavioral) while performing their work. Researchers studying the link between a company's CSR and employees have identified many positive outcomes, and CSR is seen to attract and retain talented employees (Heslin et al. 2008), effect positively on employees attachment and performance (Lee, Park & Lee 2013), employees' commitment (Mory, Wirtz & Göttel 2016) and job satisfaction (Dhanesh 2014).

### 3.3. Meaningful work

Since in the course of time, work and career have taken a more central role in individuals' lives, and a vast amount of adults spend their waking hours at work, the meaning for life is nowadays often created and found through being part of an organization (Bartlett & Ghoshal 1994). The increased importance of meaningful work can be seen in a fact, that one of the most important reasons for an employee to change their place of work these days is a desire to find more meaningful work, which better supports an individual's values (Holbeche 2004).

Because the focus of the thesis is to study employees sense of meaningfulness and how that links to being part of a company, which mission is known as socially responsible, next studies focusing on meaningful work from the perspective of a company's mission and then from the perspective of CSR efforts are presented.

### 3.3.1. Mission and meaningful work

Researchers have stated that companies' mission can affect employees by creating them a source of meaning. This sense of meaning arises from employees' perceived congruence between their core values and ideologies and those of their company. (Thompson and Bunderson 2003.) Thomas's (1990) states that one of the most important reasons for an employee to change their place of work is the desire to find more meaningful work, which better supports the individual's values. This meaningful work can be, for example, working in a company, which's mission is not just to maximize shareholder value, but to also participate in social problems through taking responsibility for a company's actions and setting corporate social responsibility policies. It is seen that employees increasingly want to work in these kinds of ethical companies, where ethical values are truly put into a company's practices and policies. (Holbeche 2004.) Campbell et al. (1991) focus on studying employees, who work in a company with a high sense of purpose, and strong company culture. According to their study, employees who had a sense of the company's mission saw a connection between their personal values and believes of the company's values, which connected them emotionally to the company's mission. Campbell et al. (1991) state that a sense of mission is often sensed through a company's behavioral standards and an individual can find a sense of meaning at work if the behavioral standards at work match with what an individual values. Aligned with earlier results, Marimon et al. (2016) show that one of the most crucial factors, which makes an employees live according to a company's mission, is the level of employee's feeling that a company's mission helps in fulfilling an employee's personal mission, and contribution that they personally want to make in society. To achieve this, Marimon et al. (2016) state that a company needs to ensure that its employees' personal values are consistent with a company's mission.

Despite the faint amount of previous research studying the connection between a company's mission and employees' sense of meaningfulness, a clear connection between the two is highlighted in all of the researches: An employee's personal mission and values must align with a company's mission for an employee to feel connected to the company's

mission, and feel that working in a company is worthwhile (Thomas 1990; Campbell et al. 1991; Thompson et al. 2003; Marimon et al. 2016). Since the thesis's focus is on understanding how a company's socially responsible mission is linked to employees' sense of meaningfulness, and since the very source, a company's socially responsible mission, has not been previously studied as a source of employees' sense of meaningfulness, studies regarding CSR's influence on employees' sense of meaningfulness are presented next.

### 3.3.2. CSR and meaningful work

This section presents the previous studies examining a link between CSR and employees' sense of meaningfulness. The previous researches studying the subject seem to be yielding surprisingly similar results, from which a good example is a study conducted by Rupp et al. (2006). Rupp et al. (2006) study employees' reactions to corporate social responsibility and the study's results state that employees are concerned about, want to contribute to, and react to a company's social responsibility activities. The researchers believe that this is because employees judge companies' efforts to invest in socially responsible actions based on their sense of fulfillment and psychological needs while searching for a meaningful existence. (Rupp et al. 2006.)

Bauman et al. (2012) state that how a company's social responsibility is visible at one's everyday work has a distinct influence on how easily an individual can find meaningfulness at work. For an individual, whose everyday tasks are directly connected with socially responsible matters, finding meaningfulness at work may be easy. In comparison, for an individual, who works in a company, which operates in an industry, which is not commonly viewed as socially responsible, and socially responsible matters are not related to an individual's tasks, finding meaningfulness at work may be difficult. (Bauman et al. 2012.) Bauman et al. (2012) propose that being a part of a company that invests in CSR can allow employees to fulfill their personal mission through acting according to their values, contributing to society, and being part of making greater good and lasting legacy. Contributing to greater good emerges also in research conducted by Allan, Aurin and Duffy (2014). The study examines, through two separate studies, how

social class affects employees' sense of meaningfulness at work. The first study involved 351 employed adults and studied a link between a level of meaningfulness at work and social class. The second study involved 252 employed adults and studied work volition. Both studies' respondents represented diverse samples when considering respondents' culture and age. In the study, the degree of work meaning was measured with a 10-item questionnaire on a 7-point scale, and the source of meaning was inquired from the respondents through an open-ended question: "We want to know what makes your work meaningful?" (Allan et al. 2014: 549). Although the results show that individuals who belong to a higher social class experience meaningfulness at work more often, the results also show that the primary source for a sense of meaningfulness gained at work, despite the social class, was an opportunity to contribute to the greater good. (Allan et al. 2014.)

The research made by Glavas and Kelley (2014) also contributes to research by studying the source of employees' sense of meaningfulness and purpose gained at work. Researchers state that since research around this area has been slight, their study contributes to the CSR literature since till the date, a sense of meaningfulness has not been studied as a potential mediator of CSR-outcomes relationship. Their study gathered 827 respondents through a web-survey. The respondents were employees from eighteen different food and agricultural companies. The industry was selected because, in the industry, the commitment to CSR varies from high to low. In the study, a perceived corporate social responsibility is measured by a scale that the authors developed based on the previous CSR literature. The meaningfulness is measured by a 3-item and a 7-point scale: 1) "The work I do is very important to me", 2) "My job activities are personally meaningful to me" 3) "The work I do is meaningful to me" (Glavas et al. 2014: 193). The result of their study presents the following contributions: First, the sense of meaningfulness gained at work is seen to originate from how a company treats others, not how a company treats its employees. Perceived CSR only creates employees a sense of meaningfulness when a company's socially responsible actions are directed to external stakeholders, and therefore, Glavas et al. (2014) result states that employees gain a sense of meaningfulness based on how a company treats others.

The same year than Glavas et al. (2014), Allan et al. (2014), De Roeck, Marique, Stinglhamber, and Swaen (2014) study how CSR can have a positive affects employees' attitudes. Their study sample involved 181 hospital employees, who answered the survey, which's all items used a Likert-type scale. In the study, employees' perceived CSR is studied by splitting CSR in internal and external actions: CSR to employees, which measures perceived internal CSR, and CSR to customers, which measures perceived external CSR. Slightly opposite to what Glavas et al. (2014) results state regarding external CSR being the crucial factor that creates employees' a sense of meaningfulness, De Roeck et al. (2014) argue that both, external CSR as well as internal CSR, such as investments directed to employees' well-being, help to satisfy employees' search for purpose and meaningful existence. According to their results, external CSR creates a sense of pride, whereas internal CSR creates organizational identification, which together creates employees' sense of attraction towards a company because of shared identity, and this helps employees to find meaningfulness in their work. Rosso et al. (2010) add that being a part of a socially responsible company, which are often seen as more prestigious, creates pride and makes employees identify strongly with a company since through working in a company, employees can contribute to the greater good, which further creates a sense of meaningfulness.

Leal, Rego, and Cunha's (2015) research studies employees' perceptions of companies' CSR actions, and how the perceptions predict employees' psychological capital through a sense of meaningful work. Their study sample involved 279 employees from 21 different companies, and the data was collected from the employees simultaneously and anonymously with a survey. Perceived CSR is measured by a 40-item and a 7-point scale, in which employees evaluated how well CSR related statements applied to their organization. A sense of meaningfulness was studied by a 4-item and a 5-point Likert-type scale. One of the study's hypothesis suggests that employees who see their company as socially responsible, also sense stronger meaningfulness at their work. Leal et al. (2015) findings support the hypothesis and state that the better perception an employee has of a company's CSR, the stronger a sense of meaningfulness. They, therefore, highlight the importance of investing in CSR initiatives because it will most likely yield positive outcomes in employees' work, and through that in company performance.

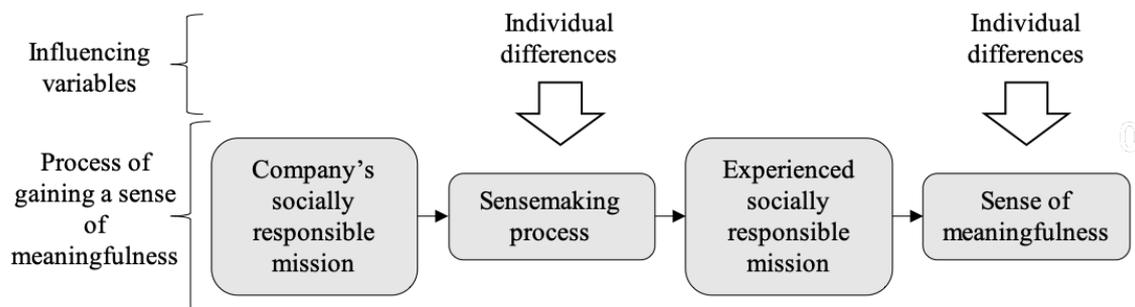
Results of a study made by Raub and Blunschi (2013), who in their study examine how a sample of 330, gathered by questionnaire, employees' awareness of CSR affects employees' attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, align with Leal et al. (2013). The results show that when employees are aware that their company invests in CSR, this generates a sense of unity, and creates employees' a feeling that together with a company employees can contribute to the society and the environment, and through this, a stronger sense of meaningfulness through work is gained.

The more recent study conducted by Chaudhary (2019) focuses on examining how employee engagement, yielding from CSR, links to factors such as psychological meaningfulness. The study involves a sample of 187 employees, collected by an online questionnaire. The sample involves employees from junior, middle and senior levels, and a variety of companies. CSR was measured with a 17-item Likert-type scale, which involved different aspects of CSR such as CSR to social and non-social stakeholders, CSR to employees, CSR to customers, and CSR to government. Meaningfulness was studied with a 5-item Likert-type scale, and as an example, with the following sample item: *"The work I do on my job is valuable and worthwhile"* (Chaudhary 2019: 640). Chaudhary's (2019) study's results state that when employees perceive a company they are working in as socially responsible, they also sense greater meaning and purpose at work. Therefore, Chaudhary's (2019) study results also align with the previous studies.

Based on the previous studies examining a link between CSR and meaningful work, it seems to be clear that the more positive view an individual perceives of a company's CSR efforts, the stronger the meaningfulness sensed at work is. (Raub et al. 2013; Glavas et al. 2014; De Roeck et al 2015; Leal et al. 2015; Chaudhary 2019). However, what seems to be inconsistent in the studies is what kind of CSR actions create a sense of meaningfulness in employees (Glavas et al. 2014; De Roeck et al 2015). What might be the factor explaining incoherent results is the individual differences. Rosso et al. (2010: 120) state that *"individuals ultimately must decide for themselves what is or is not meaningful..."*, which supports the idea that individual differences might have a crucial effect on how different kind of CSR actions are made sense of and therefore, this might explain the inconsistency in the previous researches. However, Rosso et al. (2010: 120)

continue by stating that: “*individuals are also strongly influenced by the social and cultural forces and environments around them*”, which suggest that by collecting data from employees inside a similar environment and cultural context, some differences influencing how employee’s make sense of a company’s CSR could be minimized.

By building on these prior studies, from which Aguinis et al. (2019) study stands as the greatest inspiration for the thesis, I have developed a theoretical framework, which describes the process of gaining a sense of meaningfulness, which is presented below.



**Figure 7.** Theoretical framework: Process of gaining a sense of meaningfulness.

The framework assumes that how an individual makes sense of a company’s socially responsible mission effects on how the company’s socially responsible mission is experienced, which further effects on an individual’s sense of meaningfulness. In the framework, it is assumed that how a company’s socially responsible mission is made sense of by an individual, and how much an individual gains a sense of meaningfulness from the experienced mission, is affected by individual differences in this process.

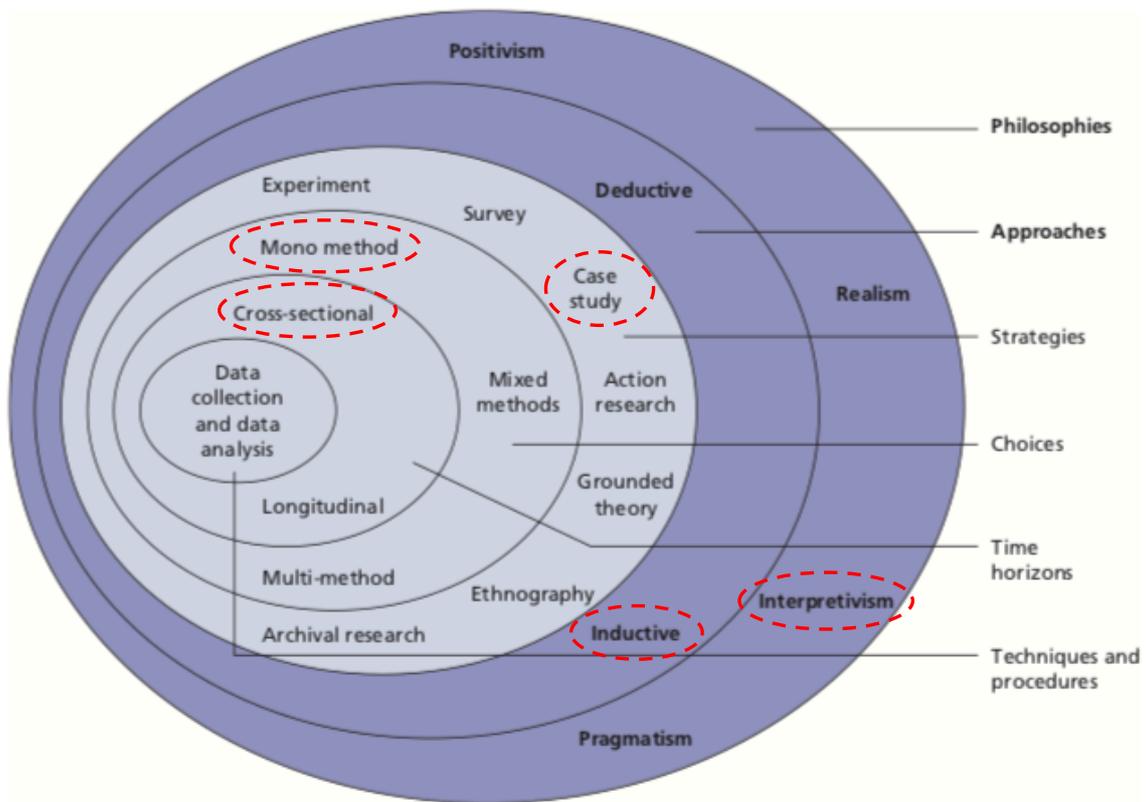
## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section introduces the research methodology of the study. First, the research design and research context are introduced and justified. Second, data sample and collection are described, and the methods used for analyzing the collected data are elaborated. Lastly, the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the study are discussed and evaluated.

### 4.1. Research approach, design and methods

To illustrate the methodologies utilized in this study, the research onion constructed by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009) is used as a tool to present the methodology of the study. The observation of the research onion starts from the outer layer of the Figure where research philosophies, which describe the way the researchers view the world around them, are presented. The second layer presents two different research approaches, deductive and inductive, which determine whether research tests or builds on top of previous theories. The third layer describes the research strategy, which is selected according to which method the research question can be examined the best. The fourth layer describes, by which method the data is collected, by a mono method, which describes a single data collection technique, or by multiple methods, which describes the use of multiple different data collection techniques to answer a research question. These mono or multiple methods can be qualitative, which generates non-numerical data through data collection methods such as interviews, or quantitative, which generates numerical data through data collection methods such as questionnaires. The mixed-method describes the utilization of both qualitative and quantitative methods in the same study. The fifth layer describes a time horizon of a study, and it can be a cross-sectional, in which a particular phenomenon is studied at a particular time, or longitudinal, in which a study observes study's object/s during a longer time so that change and development in the object/s can be observed. The sixth and last layer of the onion is techniques and procedures used in data collection, whether it is primary or secondary data, the way

research sample is selected, and the way data is analyzed. (Saunders et al. 2019.) Below Figure 8 shows the research onion in which the study-specific methods are circled.



**Figure 8.** Research onion (Saunders et al. 2009: 138).

In the study, the interpretivism as a study **philosophy** seems like the most appropriate to select since in interpretivism study philosophy: “...it is necessary to explore the subjective meanings motivating the actions of social actors in order for the researcher to be able to understand these actions.” (Saunders et al. 2009: 111.) And since the purpose of the study is to understand the meanings that interviewees ascribe to various phenomena, in this case, how interviewees make sense of a company’s socially responsible mission and how that affects their sense of meaningfulness, interpretivism as a study philosophy seems the most suitable.

When selecting a research **approach** for a study, one should select a deductive or inductive research approach. The deductive approach bases on verification and testing an already developed theory by developing and testing hypotheses around the theory. The deductive approach, therefore, focuses solely on testing previously built theory, whereas the inductive approach bases on building the theory. (Saunders et al. 2009.) For the study's research approach, the inductive is selected since the study aims to gain a better understanding through qualitative interviews on how individual differences affect sensemaking and a sense of meaningfulness. Therefore, inductive approach offers a suitable method to build on top of the earlier researches and contribute to previous literature by observing certain situations and further developing broader generalizations.

The research **strategy** selected for the study is to examine the research question through a single case study. The use of a single case study is justified by the fact that in the previous micro-CSR research data collection from employees from a single organization is widely accepted (e.g., De Roeck, El Akremi & Swaen, 2016; Lee & Chen, 2018; Jung & Ali, 2017; John, Qadeer & Jia 2019). Collecting data from a single organization allows examining how individuals' experiences on the same socially responsible mission vary, and therefore, social and cultural forces influencing individuals (Rosso et al. 2010) can be minimized. Also, Piekkari, Welch, and Paavilainen (2009) state that a single case study can usually provide more richness and deepness than a multiple case study, and since the thesis aims to gain a deeper understanding of the research questions, the single case study fits well with the thesis's aim.

Further, a **qualitative approach** is selected since the previous literature focusing on the same subject has stated the need for a qualitative approach (Aguinis et al. 2019). Qualitative interviews are used to get a more profound understanding of how working in a socially responsible company affects an individual's sense of meaningfulness. With the qualitative research method, individuals' values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts can be taken better into consideration. Therefore, it can be also better analyzed why being a part of a company, which mission is known as socially responsible, affects differently on different individuals' sense of meaningfulness. Also, the previous studies examining the same subject have only focused on studying the subject utilizing data collected

through questionnaires (Raub et al. 2013; Glavas et al. 2014; De Roeck et al 2015; Leal et al. 2015; Chaudhary 2019). By doing this, individual differences effect on sensemaking process and sense of meaningfulness that has been left aside. The interviews, or in other words, the study's data is collected during a short period of time, and therefore, the study is **cross-sectional**.

#### 4.2. Data collection and sample

Keeping in mind the purpose of the thesis, multi-national Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) company is selected as a case company since the company is widely known from its CSR actions and these actions are also stated to be part of the company's mission, and part of achieving the goal of maximizing shareholder value. The case company states that their mission is to operate sustainably since the company perceives this as the best way for the business to grow. Therefore, the case company offers an ideal environment to study how the company's mission, which is known as socially responsible, links with individuals' sense of meaningfulness at work.

A total of 11 interviews were conducted. Of the 11 interviewees, seven were women, and four were men. The job title of the interviewees varied from employees completing an internship at the company, to Senior Managers, to ensure a diverse sample. Most of the interviewees were middle-level managers, which again describes well the hierarchic distribution inside the company, a large portion of the employees being at the middle management level. Also, most of the interviewees belonged to marketing or sales functions, since the case company in Finland mainly focuses on marketing and sales operations.

Interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews, in which the same list of themes and questions is aimed to be covered. However, the order and amount of questions may vary depending on the interviewee, which makes it possible to explore new themes emerging during the interviews to answer the research question profoundly. The semi-structured interview provides an opportunity to request an explanation for a certain

response as well as build on interviewees' responses. This is crucial when research focuses on understanding the meanings that interviewees ascribe to various phenomena, in this case, how interviewees make sense of the company's socially responsible mission and how that affects their sense of meaningfulness. (Saunders et al. 2009.)

At the beginning of each interview, a following terminating question was asked: "Do you think that the company's mission is socially responsible?". This was done to ensure that all of the interviewees saw the company's mission to have socially responsible aspects in order for the interviews' responses to be valuable when considering the research question.

Nine of the interviews were executed as face-to-face interviews and two as phone call interviews because of the schedule issues. The interviews lasted from half an hour to approx. 45 minutes. Since the interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews, the same themes were gone through with each interview, but the order of the questions varied depending on each interviewees' responses. Also, additional unique questions were asked depending on an interviewee's responses, to gain the needed information from each interviewee. Below Table 1 informs each interviewees' employee level, operating field, year in the case company, and gender.

**Table 1.** Sample information.

<i>Employee</i>	<i>Employee level</i>	<i>Operating field</i>	<i>Years in case company</i>	<i>Gender</i>
1	Junior	Marketing	1,5	Man
2	Trainee	Operational	0,3	Woman
3	Junior	Analytics	0,6	Woman
4	Junior	Marketing	0,5	Woman
5	Senior Manager	Marketing	6	Man
6	Manager	Human resource	2	Woman
7	Senior Manager	Marketing	6	Woman

8	Manager	Sales	1,5	Man
9	Manager	Sales	7	Woman
10	Manager	Sales	5,5	Man
11	Manager	Marketing	4	Woman

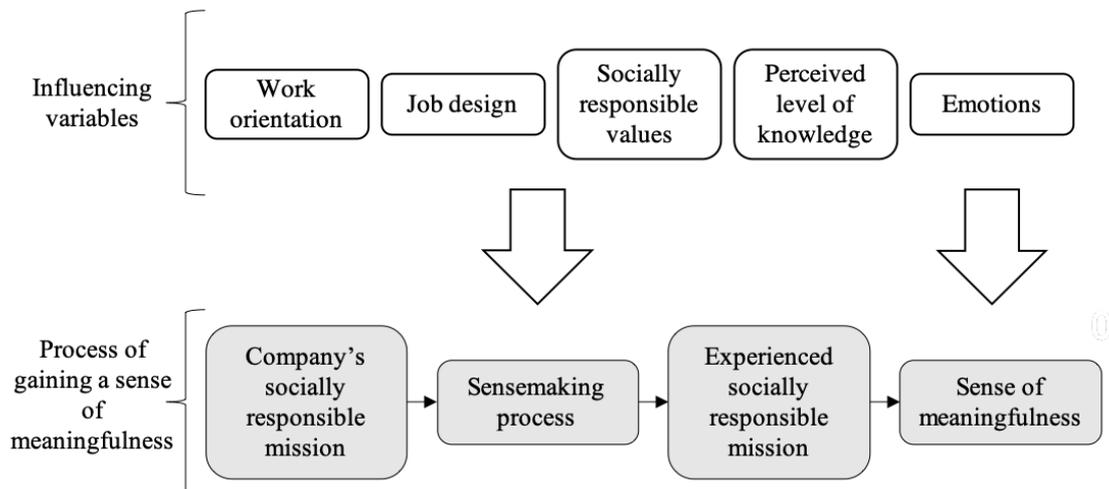
### 4.3. Data analysis

During the face-to-face interviews, short notes were taken, but the main focus was on understanding each interviewee's responses to be able to ask additional questions if necessary. All the interviews were recorded with the permission of interviewees. The recording of the interviews enabled the researcher to return to the interviews later and analyze the responses more in detail. After each interview, transcription of the interviews in a text format was performed immediately during the same day to be able to remember the nature of explanations provided by each interviewee (Saunders et al. 2009: 334). While transcription of each interview, the information directly linking to the research question was highlighted to ease the deep analysis process.

In the data analysis, the coding was performed by inductive coding. The coding process was first begun by scanning through all the interview transcripts, highlighting relevant parts, and taking notes on ideas and topics that emerged from the transcripts. After reading through all the interviews, specific codes were defined, and following that, larger categories including codes were gathered. Codes and categories were defined by combining related themes regarding the research question that emerged from the data. Both codes and categories were revisited multiple times while analyzing the transcripts.

After coding and categorizing, five categories were formed, which describe different variables that might influence how the company's mission, which is known as socially responsible, is made sense of by the interviewees, and how this is linked to interviewees' sense of meaningfulness. The five influencing variables categories are: 1) work orientation, 2) socially responsible values, 3) perceived level of knowledge, 4) job design

and CSR, and 5) emotions towards the socially responsible mission. Figure 9 below presents the influencing variables, which according the data analysis affect the process of gaining a sense of meaningfulness.



**Figure 9.** Influencing factors on process of gaining a sense of meaningfulness.

After identifying the influencing variables from the collected data, a pattern was aimed to identify, to understand, which influencing factors affect a sensemaking process and individuals' sense of meaningfulness, gained from the company's socially responsible mission. The findings of the study are presented in the next chapter.

#### 4.4. Reliability, validity and generalizability

*Reliability* describes the consistency of the findings, which will be affected by the researcher's data collection and analysis techniques. A threat to reliability arises due to participant and observer error, which means that there is a possibility for an error due to when and which way the data is collected and due to the way the observer poses questions. These both should be done in a neutral manner, and abnormal factors that might affect the findings should be minimized to ensure that the data collection would yield similar

results when repeated. (Saunders et al. 2009: 156). In the study, participant and observer error has been minimized by arranging each interview in a similar, neutral setting, and one to three weeks apart from each other. Also, certain questions and themes were asked from all the interviewees, and the questions were worded similarly. Also, in data analysis, similar techniques were applied to each data set. (Saunders et al. 2009: 329.)

Other threats to reliability may arise due to participant and observer bias. From a participant's perspective, the bias may appear as responses that are not truthful due to the pressure to answer certain questions in a way that the interviewee sees as generally acceptable. (Saunders et al. 2009: 157). In the study, this threat has been minimized by collecting the data anonymously and therefore, protecting the identities of the participants. Also, participants were encouraged to answer the questions honestly by highlighting that there was no "right answer" since the interview focuses on understanding how each respondent themselves make sense of the company's mission, which is known as socially responsible, and how the sensemaking influences respondent's own sense of meaningfulness. (Saunders et al. 2009: 326-327). From the observer perspective, the bias might appear due to the way a certain observer interprets the respondents' answers. This was aimed to reduce by being aware of the threat the observer bias poses to the reliability of the study, and by evaluating the interpretations and conclusions critically. (Saunders et al. 2009: 298.)

*Validity* describes the accuracy of whether the findings are rightly observed to be yield from the reason, which is the real reason for the findings (Saunders et al. 2009: 157). A threat to validity may appear if the observer fails in understanding the true intention behind the interviewee's responses. In the study, this threat was minimized by presenting additional, clarifying questions to interviewees, if the observer felt that certain responses and intentions behind responses were unclear. Also, topics were discussed from a few different perspectives, which allowed the observer to understand each interviewee and the language they used in a way, which made it easier for the observer to analyze responses with a high level of validity. (Saunders et al. 2009: 327.)

*Generalizability*, which can also be referred to as external validity, describes whether the findings of the study are also applicable in other settings. In the thesis, the generalizability issue arises from a semi-structured qualitative case-study research method since, in this type of research, the data is gathered from a small and unrepresentative sample (Saunders et al. 2009: 335). However, since a single case company has been utilized as a source of data by the previous researchers (e.g., De Roeck, El Akremi & Swaen, 2016; Lee & Chen, 2018; Jung & Ali, 2017; John, Qadeer & Jia 2019), this was seen as an acceptable method for this study as well. Also, due to the interpretivism study approach, the study places a higher value on understanding a certain phenomenon and individuals' actions, than on the generalizability of the study. Therefore, the generalizability of the study is not the purpose of this study.

## 5. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter of the thesis presents the empirical findings of the study. First, the influential factors influencing both the sensemaking process and what is meaningful for each individual, are presented. In the second part of this chapter, it is discussed how the individuals made sense of the company's mission, which is known as socially responsible. In the third section of this chapter, the link between the company's mission, in the eyes of the interviewees, and interviewees' sense of meaningfulness is presented.

### 5.1. Influential factors

#### 5.1.1. Work orientation

From the data three employee work orientations were identified during the analysis of the data: 1) job orientation, 2) career orientation and 3) calling orientation. The identification of the orientations was executed by analyzing the interviewees' responses as well as the language used during the interviews. The first of these three orientations towards work is defined as follows: for employees whose orientation towards work is referred as job orientation, the work is mainly seen as a source of material benefits, which enable employees to fulfill their desires outside work. Certain interviewees' job orientation towards work could be identified clearly by the interviewees' way of describing their work and life.

*“I work mainly to get money so I would be able to spend it on things that are meaningful for me.” “In my career, I have advanced to the point where I earn enough, but the work is not my priority one anymore at this point in life.” (Employee 8)*

As opposite to job orientation, career orientation refers to an orientation towards work where employees strive for advancements and achievements such as status, higher salary,

and being part of a prestige company. The interviewees who were identified as career orientated, the importance of developing and learning as well as the possibilities given to career advancements were highlighted by the interviewees as the most meaningful aspect of their work.

*“What I have come to gain from here is the internationality and learnings, so that I can all the time keep myself up to date about the market and marketing trends, and that has been the most important thing.” (Employee 5)*

*“There were definitely a lot of meaningful aspects in my work but maybe since I am young and the job at the company was a really big step in my career, small projects were extremely meaningful for me during the summer since I was able to learn and those took me forward in my career.” (Employee 4)*

Employees who retain the third work orientation, calling orientation, aim to contribute through work to a greater good. From the interviewees, the ones that were identified as calling orientated, the characteristics of the orientation could be identified throughout the interview.

*“It is actually important to me that the company is socially responsible globally. I like that working in responsible ways is in the center of our business.” (Employee 9)*

*“One thing that is extremely important for me is that since I feel that I am able, I should contribute to the greater good.” (Employee 9)*

*“The whole mindset bases on the idea that everyone should try to contribute to making the world a better place. And I think that links to the corporate social responsibility and because of that I want to work at a company, which I feel that contributes positively to society, not negatively.” (Employee 9)*

The distribution between the interviewed employees' work orientation is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2.** Work orientation.

<i>Employee</i>	<i>Job orientation</i>	<i>Career orientation</i>	<i>Calling orientation</i>
<b>1</b>			X
<b>2</b>		X	
<b>3</b>	X		
<b>4</b>		X	
<b>5</b>		X	
<b>6</b>	X		
<b>7</b>			X
<b>8</b>	X		
<b>9</b>			X
<b>10</b>		X	
<b>11</b>	X		

As seen, the vast amount of the employees interviewed, four out of eleven, orientation towards work is identified as career orientation. All the interviewees who were identified as career orientated as well as all the interviewees, who were identified as calling orientated, highlighted that they were able to learn, develop and advance in their career while working at the company. Career orientation of the vast amount of the employees working in the company also arises from the descriptions of the employees interviewed.

*"There are a lot of young professionals working in the company, who will get a kick-start for their career from the company, and after five years they will change the company and move forward with their career."* (Employee 1)

*"I like my colleagues here, and the atmosphere is quite dynamic, efficient, and processes advance fast, which means that there's really a lot going on and you're able to do a lot and get a lot of responsibilities, which is really nice."* (Employee 7)

The descriptions of the interviewees well represent the atmosphere of the company, which, based on the interviews, supports career orientated employees by allowing employees to develop and advance in their careers. Base on the interviews, the offered possibilities to learn, being part of the prestige company, and advance in career were also the aspects that attracted most of the interviewees to apply to the company in the first place.

In addition to the fact that possibilities to develop and advance in career were highlighted as significant factors in the company by most of the interviewees, ten of the eleven interviewees stated that making an impact and helping others, which are common characteristics for calling orientation, were also significant matters. However, when speaking about the most meaningful aspects of their job, the career and job orientated employees highlighted either aspects such as possibilities to develop or the possibility for a steady income over responsible practices.

*“No, it was not the social responsibility aspect of the project that in the end was the most meaningful aspect for me, but it was my own personal development and that I was given responsibilities.” (Employee 2)*

*“With a career, well, I’m more that kind of person who seeks security, so career advancement is not that important for me, but a steady income is.” (Employee 6)*

Despite many of the interviewees saw the company’s socially responsible mission as important and something to be proud of, for many, it was not the main source for a sense of meaningfulness.

#### 5.1.2. Socially responsible values

The case company’s socially responsible mission aims to support the environmental state as well as human well-being. Therefore, employees’ environmental and communal values were selected under the observation since the values were highlighted by many of the interviewees. Also, the relation between socially responsible companies and employees'

environmental as well as communal values has been identified by the previous researchers. This, together with the thesis's data, predict the significant role of socially responsible values in gaining greater meaningfulness from socially responsible initiatives.

As stated in the previous section, most of the interviewees saw socially responsible actions of the company as significant. However, the interviewees, whose set of values were identified to include strong environmental or communal values, described the values as being an important part of their career as well as their daily life. For example, Employee 6 described environmental values to be meaningful aspects both in and outside work.

*“It is extremely important for me that the company puts a lot of effort into being socially responsible and that it is truly part of the company's purpose and at the heart of the business. I could never work for a tobacco company or for anything like that.” (Employee 7)*

*“But when I think about my personal life, then the fact that I am a vegetarian brings me also a sense of meaningfulness since by that I can choose to support the firms producing vegetable protein so that these firms could produce more plant-based products and by that the consumptions of these products could be increased.” (Employee 7)*

Strong communal and environmental values reflected distinctly from the descriptions of the interviewees whose set of values were identified to contain strong socially responsible values. However, since many of the interviewees did mention socially responsible values as important, this made identifying whether these values were truly part of the interviewees' set of values challenging. Drawing the line between the individuals, who truly had strong communal and/or environmental values, and the individuals, who just saw these values as important, was done by the extent of the interviewees' descriptions of the importance of the values. If an interviewee only described socially responsible values of the company as important and did not express that the values were also a significant part of an individual's everyday life, it was suspected that the values were seen as

important due to the reasons such as social pressure, and the company culture, which highlights the importance of socially responsible values:

*“If I go back ten years when I started my studies, I remember thinking that “yeah, international companies are a pretty great thing” and I didn’t really care about companies’ responsibilities, but now I see it as a very meaningful thing. And what has influenced that, well I would say it is my experience that now I have seen a bit how this is and how companies operate. Then, of course, the discussion on the media has influenced that.” (Employee 10)*

*“Now there are fear and threats and even though so has probably been also in the past, now these things are more under discussion. And I don’t know if it is because of nowadays the use of the media that these things come up even more. Because before these were just local events and now the events spread worldwide instantly and in seconds the news is around the world. Surely the nowadays world guides to that kind of thinking, but I’m not entirely sure if the change has happened now. And therefore, I’m not entirely sure if I’m that concerned about the environment, but still, I want or it would feel wrong to steal it from the future generations.” (Employee 5)*

Some of the interviewees' set of values were without difficulties identified to lack strong communal and/or environmental values. This was due to the lack of mentioning these values as meaningful, or because of interviewees' responses clearly stated that these values were not an important part of individuals' set of values:

*“I did not even mention in my cover letter when applying to the company that the company’s level of responsibility is something that is important for me.” (Employee 3)*

*“Why the environmental values are not that important for me...” (Employee 11)*

Below Table 3 presents how the employees were divided according to whether their set of values were identified to include strong environmental and/or communal values.

**Table 3.** Interviewees' values.

<i>Employee</i>	<i>Strong communal or environmental values</i>	<i>Job orientation</i>	<i>Career orientation</i>	<i>Calling orientation</i>
<i>1</i>	Yes (c, e)			X
<i>7</i>	Yes (c, e)			X
<i>9</i>	Yes (c, e)			X
<i>2</i>	Yes (c, e)		X	
<i>4</i>	No		X	
<i>5</i>	No		X	
<i>10</i>	No		X	
<i>3</i>	No	X		
<i>6</i>	Yes (c, e)	X		
<i>8</i>	Yes (c,e)	X		
<i>11</i>	Yes (c)	X		

c = communal values, e = environmental values

Strong communal and/or environmental values appear to be positively connected with the calling orientation because all of the interviewees identified as calling orientated were also identified to have strong communal and environmental values. These interviewees described the values, both communal and environmental, as an essential part of their everyday life as well as an essential part of their work throughout the interview.

As opposite, with interviewees identified as career orientated, the values did not appear not to be connected to the job orientation. Only one of the interviewees, Employee 2, was identified as career orientated and at the same time identified to have strong communal and environmental values. The interviewee, however, stated clearly that the values are an essential part of work as well as everyday life for the interviewee, but at this stage, at the beginning of a career, opportunities to develop and advance in career are more important, which placed the interviewee into the career orientated category.

The interviewees identified as work orientated yield mixed results regarding the connection between job orientation and the values. One of the interviewees, Employee 3, clearly stated that the values were not important nor influencing factors in the interviewee's life, whereas Employee 6 described both, communal and environmental values, as being an important part of the work as well as everyday life. Employee 11 also stated clearly that environmental values were not important, whereas communal values were described as important and reasoned by having children, which according to the interviewee had changed the set of values drastically. Due to the mixed results, it seems that job orientation does not foretell as clearly as the two other work orientations, career and calling, if an individual's set of values includes environmental and communal values.

### 5.1.3. Job design and CSR

The job design topics, concerning CSR, that emerged during the interviews varied from interviewees either agreeing or disagreeing whether they were able to contribute to the company's socially responsible mission through performing their work. Whether an interviewee felt that they were able to contribute to the mission in their work varied a lot. Below, Table 4 presents the distribution between the interviewees' feelings of being able to contribute to the mission.

**Table 4.** Interviewees' feeling of being able to contribute to the mission.

<i>Employee</i>	<i>Employee level</i>	<i>Felt ability to contribute to the CSR mission at work</i>
<b>1</b>	Junior	Yes
<b>2</b>	Trainee	Yes
<b>7</b>	Senior Manager	Yes
<b>8</b>	Manager	Yes
<b>9</b>	Manager	Yes
<b>11</b>	Senior Manager	Yes
<b>5</b>	Senior Manager	Moderately
<b>6</b>	Manager	Moderately
<b>10</b>	Manager	Moderately

3	Junior	No
4	Junior	No

For some employees, whether an employee felt that they were able to contribute to the socially responsible mission did not seem to be dependent on the hierarchical position at the company nor the level of how comprehensively due to their position at the company an interviewee could influence on the mission being accomplished. For example, one of the employees in junior positions described feeling a strong ability to contribute to the socially responsible mission of the company by acting as a messenger for the company's socially responsible mission:

*“In marketing, you can communicate very well to consumers our company's values and the things that the company sees as important, and through that, you can in a way civilize and educate people about these things, which hopefully then spreads the knowledge of acting responsibly so that we can get people to pay more attention to these things.” (Employee 1)*

On comparison, some of the interviewees with tasks, which could be seen as much more comprehensive when considering how greatly an employee could contribute with their work to the company's mission, still did not have a feeling that they could contribute to the mission greatly.

*“Do you feel that you have been able to contribute to the company's socially responsible mission?” (Interviewer) “Well, maybe not that concretely. In my current position we have been working towards using post-recycled plastic with some brands, and for that, I have been creating story-formed material for our customer, and I have also informed our Key Account Managers about how we should communicate it and how the message should be visible in the stores. And in stores, we will also consider which materials we are going to use since we usually print material to support a launch or a campaign, and in this case, we would only use completely recyclable materials.” (Employee 10)*

Base on the mixed results between the interviewees feeling of being able to contribute to the mission, the influencing factor on how strongly employees felt that they were able to contribute to the company's mission with their work might be dependent on factors such as how long an employee has been part of the company as well as how long an employee has been part of the working life. This is argued as an possible influencing factor because, in comparison to the employees in junior positions at the company who felt strong ability to be able to contribute to the mission, employees who did not feel such great ability to contribute to the mission with their work were all in higher positions at the company and therefore, had also been longer part of the working life. Hence, although for an outsiders eyes it might seem that through these higher positioned employees' tasks they could be able to contribute to the company's mission on a much higher level compared to the lower positioned employees, the higher positioned employees saw contribution to the mission as much more challenging and observed their abilities critically. To see themselves to have an ability to contribute greatly to the company's mission, these employees would demand more authority and projects where they could concretely see the results of their contribution to the mission.

*"I have already worked with that quite directly, but I still do not have a feeling that I could truly and greatly influence." "I can influence to a certain level but not to the very end result." (Employee 6)*

However, for some of the interviewees, the feeling of whether being able to contribute to the company's socially responsible mission was connected with how much the employees' tasks or the position at the company allowed them to work with socially responsible aspects. For example, Employee 4, who because of the lower position at the company did not feel that contribution to the socially responsible mission was possible, described the situation as following:

*"Well, my experience is that the questions considering the social responsibility of the company are quite big and therefore, those are decided together with the global team. And therefore, in the end, I'm not the one who's deciding on those." "With global brands, there are usually a lot of these kinds of obstacles" (Employee 4)*

As a comparison, Employee 11, who works in the same department, but in the higher position, felt an ability to contribute to the socially responsible mission of the company:

*“Yes, I feel that I can very much actually (contribute) since I have my products and product development, which I’m managing.” (Employee 11)*

It seems that the more concretely interviewees could see the results of their contribution to the company’s socially responsible mission, the more strongly they felt about their ability to contribute to the mission – despite the position at the company.

#### 5.1.4. Perceived level of knowledge

One factor that clearly differentiated the interviewees was how confident they were in describing the company’s socially responsible mission as well as how they verbally described their knowledge about the company’s socially responsible actions. On a side note, all of the interviewees showed a relatively good knowledge of the company’s socially responsible mission, but the interviewees that were identified to have a great level of knowledge also showed a greater amount of knowledge and interest towards the company’s actions that went above and beyond the call of duty at work. Below Table 5 shows how the interviewees have been divided according to the identification of their perceived level of knowledge regarding the socially responsible mission of the company.

**Table 5.** Interviewees' perceived level of knowledge.

<i>Employee</i>	<i>Individual perceives having a great knowledge about the company’s socially responsible mission</i>
<b>1</b>	Yes
<b>6</b>	Yes
<b>7</b>	Yes
<b>9</b>	Yes
<b>10</b>	Yes

2	Yes
5	Yes
11	No
4	No
3	No
8	No

Especially the interviewees who doubted their level of knowledge brought that up.

*“Well mmm... Yes, I would say the mission is socially responsible in some of its operations, yes. However, I must say that I do not know that much about that, so this is just my feeling, which bases on what I have been told.” (Employee 3)*

*“I have not familiarized myself too much with this, but what I have seen on the news and read from different firms’ articles, I have understood that all the other firms are just as responsible as us. And I have not gotten a feeling that Company X would be somehow extremely responsible. I feel that the company is responsible for a standard-level. It, however, might be that Company X is more responsible than other companies normally are, and I’m just not aware of that.” (Employee 8)*

In comparison, the interviewees who were identified to feel that they have great knowledge about the company’s socially responsible mission, were identified so since they described the mission confidently, comprehensively, and showed no doubts about their knowledge regarding the company’s socially responsible mission.

*“When I first started at the company, I reviewed the company’s sustainability plan in my internship report for school, and through that, got into it better and understood how it differentiates from what other firms have done.” “Often people suspect, that is this truly present in our daily operations, but as a matter of fact, we discuss these themes a lot.” (Employee 9)*

It seems that the interviewees who were identified to perceive that they have good knowledge about the company’s socially responsible mission also felt more positive

emotions, such as pride, towards the company's socially responsible mission. In comparison, three of the four interviewees who considered that they did not have such good knowledge, felt more negative feelings such as lack of trust in transparency or genuineness of the company's actions. Therefore, it seems that the level of knowledge through emerging emotions might influence how employees at the company make sense of the company's socially responsible mission. Since the level of knowledge seems to be linking to interviewees' emerging emotion towards the mission, interviewees' emotions towards the company's socially responsible mission are discussed more in detail in the next section.

#### 5.1.5. Emotion towards the company's socially responsible mission

One emerging theme that divided interviewees was how strongly they believed in the company's socially responsible mission and what kind of emotions this caused. By this, it is meant how strongly interviewees believed that the company was genuineness with adapting socially responsible aspects into the mission, and how embedded the socially responsible activities of the mission were perceived as. Below Table 5 shows the distribution between the interviewees regarding the trust towards the company's mission's authenticity.

**Table 6.** Trust towards the company's mission's authenticity.

<i>Employee</i>	<i>An individual trusts the company's mission's authenticity</i>
<b>1</b>	Yes
<b>6</b>	Yes
<b>7</b>	Yes
<b>9</b>	Yes
<b>10</b>	Yes
<b>2</b>	Moderately
<b>4</b>	Moderately
<b>5</b>	Moderately
<b>11</b>	Moderately

3	No
8	No

Most of the interviewees showed no skepticism towards the level of authenticity of the company's socially responsible mission.

*“Company X is rightly rewarded as its’ industry’s most responsible company for several years in a row.” (Employee 1)*

However, the two interviewees who were skeptical of the authenticity of the company's socially responsible mission, questioned whether CSR is truly embedded into the mission. These interviewees especially questioned the authenticity because of the industry in which the company operates, and because of the products the company produces were seen to produce a lot of plastic and other negative impacts on the environment. Therefore, the company calling and highlighting itself as an extremely socially responsible company did not feel genuine for these interviewees.

*“I think this is just a normal job. As I said, I don’t think that the company is extremely responsible.” “I definitely do not think that this is a bad company, I just think this is a normal company like all the others. And why I’m talking about this is because the company communicates that they are responsible, and says they are this kind of company and brags with it, and therefore, I feel that there’s a small inconsistency.” (Employee 8)*

When observing why the two employees felt negatively towards the genuineness of the company's mission, it was noticed that both of these interviewees had described their knowledge of the company's socially responsible mission to be poor. Therefore, how interviewees felt of their own level of knowledge, and how genuine the interviewees felt that the company's socially responsible mission is, were decided to compare with each other. Below, Table 7 shows side by side how interviewees' emotion versus knowledge of the company's mission is divided:

**Table 7.** Interviewees' emotions vs. knowledge.

<i>Employee</i>	<i>An individual trusts the company's mission's authenticity</i>	<i>An individual feels they have a good knowledge about the company's socially responsible mission</i>
<b>1</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>6</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>7</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>9</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>10</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>3</b>	No	No
<b>8</b>	No	No
<b>2</b>	Moderately	Yes
<b>4</b>	Moderately	No
<b>5</b>	Moderately	Yes
<b>11</b>	Moderately	No

As seen from the Table above, all of the interviewees who believed in the company's mission's genuineness also were identified to have a good level of knowledge of the mission. In comparison, as stated above, the two interviewees who suspected the genuineness of the mission were also identified to have a feeling that their level of knowledge of the mission was poor. The perceived good or poor level of knowledge cannot be argued to be the sole reason for interviewees' positive or negative emotions towards the company's socially responsible mission, but it seems that the level of perceived knowledge plays a part in influencing the emerging emotions. The high level of knowledge appears to strengthen the employees' trust towards the company's operations since employees' have a perception that they know well the company's CSR goals, how the goals are aimed to reach, and how reaching the goals will help the environment and community, and this reduces the feeling that the socially responsible actions would be just peripheral. In comparison, a lower level of knowledge reduces the employees' trust towards the company because these employees feel like lacking the understanding especially on how reaching the CSR goals truly helps the environment and society.

When observing the link between emotions and knowledge with other interviewees, who were identified to have a moderate trust towards the genuineness of the mission, the results were not coherent. For the Employee 2 and 5, the reason why the company's mission's genuineness was slightly questioned, though both of the interviewees showed a good level of knowledge of the company's mission, was not because of these employees questioned whether CSR would not be embedded. For both Employee 2 and 5, the factors that decreased the positive feelings towards the genuineness of the mission were external. Both interviewees mentioned negative emotions they had encountered due to external factors, whether it was other co-workers' lack of commitment to the socially responsible mission inside the company, or criticism towards the genuineness of the mission that emerged outside of the company.

*“I noticed that not all people think the same way as I, and there are a lot of people who do not feel that the company's responsibility is something meaningful since there are a lot of different drivers for performance, and those drivers can be seen to dominate in some situations pretty clearly, for example, money vs. social responsibility” (Employee 2).*

*“Do you think these external attitudes towards the mission influenced your sense of meaningfulness?” (Interviewee) “Yes, they did. It was slightly shocking for me at first that these kinds of things happen, but it also reminded me about the performance drivers, and how some may not be so embedded and that some things might seem a bit different from the inside point of view.” (Employee 2).*

Although Employee 4 and 11 were similarly identified to have a moderate view towards the genuineness of the company's socially responsible mission, different to Employee 2 and 5, the two employees were identified to have a poorer level of knowledge of the company's mission. For Employee 4 and 11, the moderate attitude towards genuineness seemed to be linking to the poorer level of knowledge in aspects such as how the company is executing their socially responsible goals, which decreased the interviewees' trust towards the genuineness of the mission.

*“You could see from the brands how important sourcing raw materials in socially responsible methods was, but maybe the transparency was something that did not become clear to me. Or I was thinking that if raw material X comes from a place X, it did not really become clear to me that what was the whole supply chain for the product” (Employee 4).*

As noted, there are also other factors than the level of knowledge that might have an influence on which kind of emotions employees sense towards the genuineness of the company’s mission. However, based on the thesis’s data, employees’ feeling of their own level of knowledge seems to be one crucial factor influencing on emerging emotions.

## 5.2. Experienced socially responsible mission

In the section, it is reviewed how the mission, which is known as socially responsible, is perceived differently or similarly by the interviewees. The influencing individual factors, described in the previous section, shape individuals’ sense-making process of the company’s socially responsible mission. Therefore, the company’s mission is perceived differently by each individual. The emerged theme, according to which the interviewees have been sorted out according to their sensemaking processes outcome, is how socially responsible the interviewees have been identified to experience the company’s mission. Below Table 8 shows the distribution between the interviewees according to the identification.

**Table 8.** Perceived level of mission’s social responsibility.

<i>Employee</i>	<i>A level of how socially responsible individuals perceive the company’s mission to be</i>	<i>An individual trusts the authenticity of the company’s mission</i>
<b>1</b>	High	Yes
<b>6</b>	High	Yes

7	High	Yes
9	High	Yes
10	High	Yes
2	Neutral	Moderately
4	Neutral	Moderately
5	Neutral	Moderately
11	Neutral	Moderately
3	Low	No
8	Low	No

The identified level of perceived social responsibility of the company's mission imitates the interviewees' emotion of how genuine the company's socially responsible mission is seen as. It seems that when an individual has a strong positive feeling such as trust towards the socially responsible mission, they are also identified to perceive the company's mission as highly socially responsible. As opposite, when an individual feels negative feelings, such as lack of trust, towards the genuineness of the company's socially responsible mission, the individuals are identified to perceive the mission's level of social responsibility as lower.

The additional theme, according to which the interviewees were sorted out when considering the perceived level of the socially responsible mission, is how the interviewees described the socially responsible mission, and what aspects of the mission they highlight as meaningful for themselves. Below Table 9 sums the interviewees' descriptions of the socially responsible mission, and the important factors of it.

**Table 9.** Perceived socially responsible mission.

<i>Employee</i>	<i>How the socially responsible mission is described by an individual</i>	<i>Important factors of the mission for an individual</i>
<i>1</i>	Big global goals, which are supported by different brands socially responsible missions	Ability to make an impact through a big company

2	The company's mission is aimed to reach through different brands' missions	Ability to contribute to the mission and through that make an impact
3	It's a way of marketing and communication	None
4	Social responsibility plan	Responsibility is made visible through brands, which have a purpose
5	Social responsibility plan, which guides the company's operations partly	Reducing plastic and being a pioneer in that because the company can make a huge impact because of its size and position
6	Making an impact and increasing the quality of life through brands' missions	Brands' projects, which support equality and fairness especially in the developing countries
7	Social responsibility plan through which we can make a huge impact because of the scale of the business	Big global goals as well as being able to contribute with own work
8	An essential point to communicate for the consumers since a big part of the sales comes from the brands that have a responsible mission	Contributing to communal and environmental issues. However, this should be done on a bigger scale
9	Making products in more sustainable ways so that through the big scale we can make consumers lives more responsible	The company's high goals to contribute to environmental and communal issues
10	Responsibility is linked in the strategic thinking of the company	Responsibly produced products
11	Products are aimed to produce responsibly and brands have socially responsible goals	Contribution to communal issues

The socially responsible mission was described relatively similarly by most of the interviewees, and with a vast amount, the only thing differentiating in the descriptions was how extensively the mission was described. The only distinctive point emerging when observing the interviewees descriptions of their perceived socially responsible mission was that the Employee 3 and 8, who were also identified to have a low level of knowledge and low level of trust towards the genuineness of the mission, described the socially responsible mission to be a marketing gimmick or just a communicative based interest for the company.

*“In my opinion, it is some kind of marketing, for example, when Brand X was launched, it was communicated that this is made from natural materials, and it is recyclable.” (Employee 3)*

*“It (socially responsible mission) has been communicated through internal meetings, and it is highlighted as an important factor for the company, and a big part of the sales comes from these so-called responsible brands. So it is, of course, a good business.” (Employee 8).*

With the two employees, the criticality towards the company was also recognized in a way the employees described the important aspects of the socially responsible mission for themselves. In comparison, with other interviewees, who were identified to have more positive or neutral emotions towards the company, the descriptions of what was important for them in the socially responsible mission were quite similar and focused on the importance of contributing to the greater good.

### 5.3. Employees’ sense of meaningfulness

This section focuses on describing the emerged findings regarding the sense of meaningfulness that employees perceived according to their descriptions. Based on the interviews, all of the employees gained a sense of meaningfulness through being part and working at the company. However, the sense of meaningfulness was nowhere near only originated from the company’s socially responsible mission. Although all the interviewees recognized the company’s mission as socially responsible, and although all of the interviewees recognized that being part of the company supported their personal mission, and therefore, brought them a sense of meaningfulness, the sources, from which the sense of meaningfulness was gained from, varied. Below Table 10 presents the division between the individuals, who were identified to perceive gaining a sense of meaningfulness at the company, and the individuals, who were identified to perceive gaining a sense of meaningfulness from the socially responsible mission.

**Table 10.** Individuals' sense of meaningfulness.

<i>Employee</i>	<i>An employee feels that being part of the company brings them a sense of meaningfulness</i>	<i>An employee feels that the company's socially responsible mission brings them a sense of meaningfulness</i>
<b>1</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>6</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>7</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>9</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>2</b>	Yes	Maybe
<b>11</b>	Yes	Maybe
<b>3</b>	Yes	No
<b>4</b>	Yes	No
<b>5</b>	Yes	No
<b>8</b>	Yes	No
<b>10</b>	Yes	No

As stated earlier and seen from Table 10 above, all of the employees experienced that they gained a sense of meaningfulness because they were part of the company. On the other hand, only four employees described experiencing that the social responsibility of the mission was the key source for their sense of meaningfulness. For all the four employees, the other influencing factors, that were described earlier on the thesis, were almost identical. All four employees' set of values were identified to include both environmental and communal values. Also, each of the employees was identified to have a feeling that they had a great level of knowledge of the company's socially responsible mission, and these employees were identified to have positive emotions of the genuineness of the company's mission. The employees were also able to find connections between the factors, from which they generally gained a sense of meaningfulness, and the company's socially responsible mission, and felt that working at the company supported their own personal mission in life.

*"What is meaningful to you?" (Interviewer)*

*“Maybe it’s important to me that I feel that I can contribute positively. I want somehow feel that what I do has a meaning for other people as well, not just for myself.” (Employee 9).*

*“How do you feel that the company’s mission is linked to your personal mission?”  
(Interviewer)*

*“Well since it has become clear to me that making a positive impact is something that I feel motivated by, and at the same time the whole company’s socially responsible mission is based on making a positive impact, and how we are operating, and how that affects our other operations, so these two clearly support each other. And then again here at the company, you are yourself able to make a change and make positive impacts.” (Employee 9).*

For the two employees, Employee 2 and 11, the sensed meaningfulness from the socially responsible mission is identified as *maybe* since the sensed meaningfulness did not seem to be at such a high level than with the four employees, who saw a clear connection between their personal mission and the company’s mission. For both of these employees, the reason why the gained sense of meaningfulness was marked as *maybe*, depended on different reasons. For Employee 2, the socially responsible aspect of the mission did create a sense of meaningfulness, but the factor that brought more meaningfulness for the employee was the ability to advance in the career due to being part of the company that was seen as prestige. Likewise, for Employee 11, the socially responsible mission did bring a sense of meaningfulness, but since the areas of social responsibility, which the company includes to their mission, did not rank as the most important values in the employee's set of values, the experienced meaningfulness was not described as great as it would be if the employee would have been part of the company, which would contribute to the socially responsible aspects that the employee values the most.

The employees, who did not seem to gain a sense of meaningfulness from the socially responsible mission, gained meaningfulness from other sources of the company. For these employees, the sense of meaningfulness was gained from factors, which connected closely with the individuals' job orientation. This was recognized especially with the

employees, who were identified as career orientated. These employees emphasized gaining a sense of meaningfulness from being able to learn, develop, and get responsibilities, and because of that, advance in their career at the company.

*“What is meaningful to you?” (Interviewer)*

*“Well, for me it is important that I can always learn something new. I was in a training last month, and there was one of the company’s directors who gave an introduction in which s/he stated that “remember that when you don’t want to learn anymore, you will stop, and I never want to stop”. And by that s/he meant that you should always keep learning so you won’t be stuck in a rut. And I think that was pretty well said.” (Employee 10).*

*“The field, in which the company operates as a responsible employer, is that here at the company, people can get opportunities to develop themselves. During my time at the company, I have been in three different positions, and it has brought me a lot. I have been able to develop myself, and I have never needed to stop in here, and at least for me, at this point in career, it is an extremely important thing” (Employee 10).*

When observing other influencing factors, most of the career orientated employees were identified not to hold a high level of environmental nor communal values in their set of values. With other influencing factors, there was no such coherency. However, the lack of a high level of socially responsible values together with the career orientation, indicates that these employees do not gain a sense of meaningfulness from socially responsible factors since these factors do not play a central part in the employees' lives or personal missions. Also, since these employees did not feel strong negative emotions, such as suspiciousness, towards the genuineness of the company’s socially responsible mission, which was noted as a factor eliminating the possibility to gain a sense of meaningfulness from the socially responsible mission, it seems that just a neutral or positive view towards the company’s socially responsible mission is not enough to bring the employees a sense of meaningfulness.

For the two employees, who did not describe gaining a sense of meaningfulness from the socially responsible mission, and who were not identified as career orientated, but as job orientated, the reason why a sense of meaningfulness was not gained from the socially responsible mission was not entirely coherent. For both employees, Employee 3 and 8, the emotions towards the genuineness of the social responsibility of the mission were negative. Since otherwise these employees were not identified as similar by their responses nor personality traits, it appears that the lack of trust towards the genuineness of the company's socially responsible mission immediately rules out being able to gain a sense of meaningfulness from the socially responsible mission. Both employees, however, described gaining a sense of meaningfulness through being part of the company, but the sense of meaningfulness appeared to be gained from being part of the community, environment, and being able to perform tasks, which were enjoyed.

When observing how the job design, regarding how well the employees perceived being able to contribute to the company's socially responsible mission, influenced a sense of meaningfulness, it seems that there are no coherent results. For example, Employee 8, who did not gain a sense of meaningfulness from the company's socially responsible mission, still experienced that contributing to the company's mission was possible at work. In comparison, Employee 6, who was identified to gain a sense of meaningfulness from the socially responsible mission, did not experience that contributing to the mission was entirely possible at work. However, other employees, who were identified to gain a sense of meaningfulness from the mission, described being able to contribute to the mission at work. Based on their descriptions, it seems that when an individual's set of values includes socially responsible values, and due to the calling orientation employees want to contribute to the greater good, being able to experience an ability to contribute to the mission strengthens the level of sensed meaningfulness.

#### 5.4. Summary of the key findings

In the study, it is noted that the most positive link between the perceived socially responsible mission and employees' sense of meaningfulness is born when employees'

set of values includes strong environmental and communal values. This is because these employees feel that through being part of a company, which is perceived as having a strong socially responsible mission, the employees can fulfill their own purpose and gain a sense of meaningfulness. The findings of the study are aligned with the previous researches, in which values as well as being able to fulfill own personal mission are noted as important factors creating a sense of meaningfulness for employees (see e.g. Thomas 1990; Campbell et al. 1991; Thompson et al. 2003; Marimon et al. 2016). Chalofsky et al. (2013) framework, the evolving construct of meaningful work, states that employees' own personal mission and values must align with a company's mission, for employees to feel connected to the company's mission and feel that working in the company is worthwhile. Rosso et al. (2010) study state that since values are seen as the fundamental source of meaningfulness, values can, therefore, be viewed as one of the most influencing aspects of an individual's sensemaking process of the company's socially responsible actions and whether these are seen as meaningful for an individual.

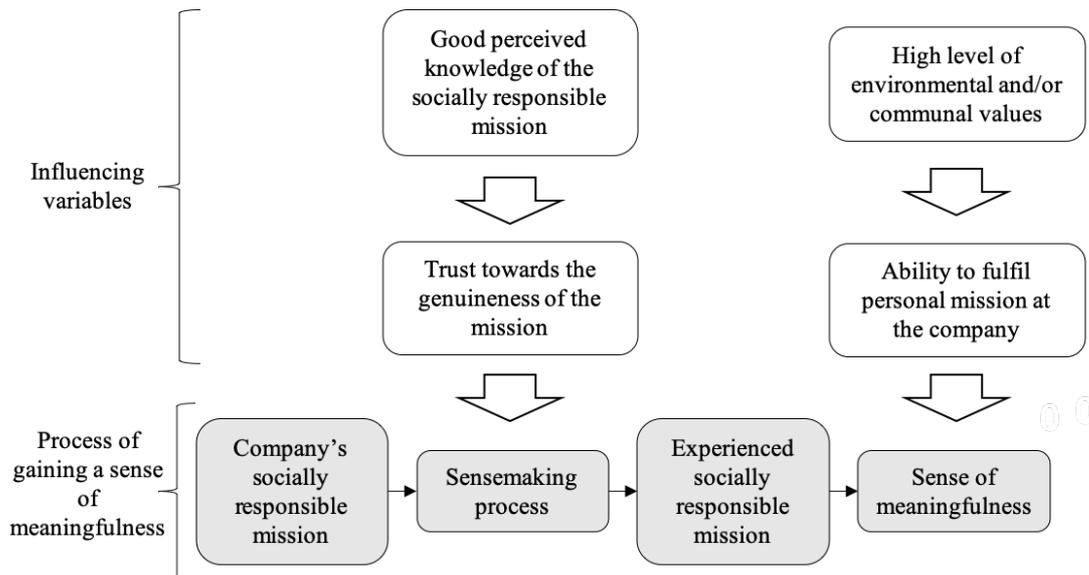
The other key finding of the study notes that the influencing factor that affects employees' sensemaking process profoundly is the perceived level of knowledge of the socially responsible mission, and emotions towards the genuineness of the socially responsible mission. The findings state that when employees perceive having a good level of knowledge of the company's mission, this creates them a sense of trust towards the company's socially responsible mission. The trust towards the genuineness of the socially responsible mission appears to be crucial since due to the trust, employees' can gain a sense of meaningfulness from the mission through being able to believe that by being part of the company, which with its socially responsible mission truly contributes to the greater good, the employees' are also truly able to fulfill their personal missions. This finding is also supported by previous researches. Leal et al. (2015) findings state that the better perception an employee has of a company's CSR, the stronger is the sense of meaningfulness. This supports the finding that because the trust towards the mission's genuineness, employees' have a better perception of the company's socially responsible mission, and because of this, employees can gain a stronger sense of meaningfulness. Similarly, Raub et al. (2013) results show that when employees are aware that their company invests in CSR, this creates a sense of unity that together with the company

employees can contribute to the society and the environment, and through this, a stronger sense of meaningfulness through work is gained. Also, Chaudhary's (2019) study's results state that when employees perceive the company they are working in as socially responsible, they also sense a greater meaning and purpose at work.

The previous researches' results (see e.g. Raub et al. 2013; Leal et al. 2015) also support the study's finding, which states that when an employee has a feeling that they do not know whether the company is genuinely including social responsibility into their mission, this creates negative emotions towards the company's socially responsible mission. According to the study, these negative emotions towards the socially responsible mission rule out the possibility to gain a sense of meaningfulness from the socially responsible mission – even if an employee's set of values would include environmental and communal values.

It needs to be noted that the study's results show that employees' who perceived possessing a good knowledge of the socially responsible mission, and who felt trust towards the genuineness of the socially responsible mission, did not gain a sense of meaningfulness if their set of values did not incorporate strong environmental and communal values. As stated by the previous researchers (Rosso et al. 2010), values seem to be the fundamental source for a sense of meaningfulness, and according to the study, if not retaining the socially responsible values, employees did not gain a sense of meaningfulness from the socially responsible mission.

Below, Figure 10 summarizes the main findings of this study. The topmost part of the Figure, highlighted with white, presents the individual influencing factors that, according to the study, influence whether there is a link between a company's mission and an individual's sense of meaningfulness. The bottom part of Figure 10 presents the process of how a sense of meaningfulness is gained from a socially responsible mission, and in which the individual influencing factors affect.



**Figure 10.** The link between a socially responsible mission and an individual's sense of meaningfulness.

Work orientation and job design did not seem to play a crucial part in determining whether an individual can gain a sense of meaningfulness from the company's socially responsible mission. The finding is slightly inconsistent with the previous literature since job design has been often under the research when studying meaningful work (Pajo & Lee 2011; Bauman et al. 2012; Aguinis et al. 2019). According to the study, work orientation can indicate whether an employee gains a sense of meaningfulness from socially responsible aspects, but it is not the fundamental factor, which determines whether an employee can gain a sense of meaningfulness from the socially responsible mission.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This thesis studies how an individual's perception of a company's mission, which is known as socially responsible, is linked to an individual's sense of meaningfulness. The final chapter of the thesis describes the theoretical contributions and managerial implications of the study. Lastly, the limitations of the study are discussed, and suggestions for future research are presented.

### 6.1. Theoretical contribution

Existing employee-centric CSR-research still lacks an understanding of how individuals take an active role in creating perceptions about companies' social responsibilities and how individual differences affect this process (Aguinis et al. 2019). This thesis contributes to the research by analyzing the subject with a qualitative approach when prior studies have mainly studied the subject through quantitative approach (see e.g. Raub et al. 2013; Glavas et al. 2014; De Roeck et al 2015; Leal et al. 2015; Chaudhary 2019). By selecting a qualitative approach, the thesis contributes to the research by treating individuals as active actors, instead of passive actors, and linking CSR, sensemaking, and meaningfulness by placing people and their search for meaningfulness at the center of the research. By doing this the thesis contributes by broadening the existing frameworks of meaningful work constructed by Chalofsky and Cavallaro's (2013) and Aguinis et al. (2019).

With the result, the thesis contributes to the research by verifying prior studies' notions of values (Thomas 1990; Campbell et al. 1991; Thompson et al. 2003; Marimon et al. 2016), and positively perceived CSR actions (Raub et al. 2013; Leal et al. 2015; Chaudhary 2019) being crucial influencing factors in a process of gaining a sense of meaningfulness. Prior studies (see e.g. Glavas et al. 2014; De Roeck et al 2015) have had inconsistent results regarding whether internal or external CSR actions create more sense of meaningfulness, and the study contributes to this conversation by not noting that there

would be a different impact between these factors. The study also challenges previous studies that highlight the impact of job design in gaining a sense of meaningfulness at work (Pajo et al. 2011; Bauman et al. 2012; Aguinis et al. 2019). By this, the study challenges earlier researches and suggests alternative factors that play a more fundamental role in determining whether an individual gains a sense of meaningfulness.

## 6.2. Managerial implications

The study's results confirm the link between a company's socially responsible mission and an employee's sense of meaningfulness, and since the meaningfulness is seen to yield positive work outcomes for companies (see e.g. Heslin et al. 2008; Lee et al. 2013; Mory et al. 2016), the topic is relevant to consider for a variety of companies. First of all, according to the study, the employees' perceived level of knowledge of the socially responsible mission seems to play a crucial part in determining whether employees' emotions towards the company are positive and if an employee can gain a sense of meaningfulness from the socially responsible mission or not. Therefore, the findings of the thesis recommend companies to communicate their CSR actions clearly, and concretely inside their organization. By doing this, negative emotions, which might emerge from a lack of transparency or suspicions of the true intention of the company to invest in CSR actions, might be avoided. Therefore, when setting new socially responsible goals or utilizing CSR as a part of a strategy, companies should focus on informative implementation to ensure employees from the true intentions of the company.

Second, as the study's findings state that an individual's values are a fundamental factor, which makes it possible for an employee to gain a sense of meaningfulness from socially responsible missions or CSR in general, companies should take this into account when recruiting employees to the company. By selecting candidates, whose values support the mission of the company, the company can benefit from employees, who gain a sense of meaningfulness from the mission and who, according to a variety of previous researches (see e.g. Heslin et al. 2008; Lee et al. 2013; Mory et al. 2016) are more engaged, perform better, and are satisfied with their job.

### 6.3. Delimitations, limitations and future research

There are certain delimitations in the thesis. First is a relatively short description of the subject of corporate social responsibility. Although there is a lot of debate around the specific definition of the social responsibility-related terminology, this thesis will not take a stand on this. The thesis aim is to introduce the themes, not extensively, but to ensure that the contexts of the study are clear for the reader. Also, the term CSR and social responsibility are used in the thesis to describe universal actions that companies include in their operations to do business responsibly. Doing responsible business in the thesis is defined as a company's way of operating so that it takes into account economic, social, and environmental performance (Aguinis 2011).

In addition to the delimitations of the study, there are certain limitations to the study as well. First, because the data collection was executed through interviews, the conclusions drawn from the data needs to be examined critically, since the limitation of an inductive method is that it can never be proven, but it can be invalidated (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton 2012). Although the interviewees of the study are observed as people in the organization, who know what they are doing and can, therefore, explain their thoughts, intentions, and actions, it is important to note that the interviewees described perceptions of the study's topic are unlikely to be within the thesis's conclusions only. Since the data was analyzed by only one interpreter, future studies may consider investigating the same topic with multiple interpreters, through which a higher level of reliability of the conclusions could be ensured.

Second, although the study presents the influencing factors that were observed to create a positive link between the socially responsible mission and an individual's sense of meaningfulness, this does not mean that alternative explanations for the relationship between a socially responsible mission and an individual's sense of meaningfulness are not plausible. For example, since the thesis focuses on understanding how a company's

socially responsible mission is made sense of, and how it is linked to an individual's sense of meaningfulness, and since a deep understanding of an individual's set of values can be hard to grasp (Aguinis et al. 2019), the thesis did not focus on studying other values that might have affect a sensemaking process and a sense of meaningfulness. Therefore, future studies may look into finding other influencing factors, which affect a sensemaking process and a sense of meaningfulness.

The study knowingly selected to study the research questions by collecting the data from one case company to minimize environmental, cultural, and other possible factors influencing a sensemaking process. Therefore, future studies may test whether these same influential factors hold up in different environmental or cultural contexts. Also, future studies should continue to observe and test individual factors influencing how a socially responsible mission or CSR, in general, is perceived, and aim to solve other possible linkages between CSR and a sense of meaningfulness.

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**APPENDIX 1.** Semi-structured interview questions

Terminating question:

- Do you think that Company X's mission is socially responsible?

Demographic and employment specific questions:

- Age: What is your age?
- Background:
  - Where are you from?
  - Where do you live?
- Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
- Employment:
  - How long have you been working for Company X?
  - Describe your current role, and possible past roles in Company X

The research question specific questions:

- What do you like about your company?
- Would you say that the company's mission is socially responsible?
- How would you describe the company's socially responsible mission?
- What factors of the company's socially responsible mission are meaningful to you and why?
- What do you see as meaningful in your life?
- What factors have an impact on what you see as meaningful?
- Do you feel that working at the company is meaningful to you?
- Why do you feel that working at the company is meaningful to you?
- How is your company's mission aligned with your personal mission?