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Inside the Halls and Walls: Exploring CSR from the Employee Perpsective

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Inside the Halls and Walls:
Exploring CSR from the Employee Perspective

by

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ABSTRACT
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EXPLORING CSR FROM THE EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

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This study offered a unique opportunity to explore, more deeply, the internal dimension of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) through the perspective of employees, specifically communication professionals. The primary focus was on how companies are communicating CSR internally through the work of communication professionals while then exploring how these individuals make sense of CSR and what it means within their organization. Therefore, data provided insight into how CSR is understood and made meaningful in an organizational context to see if these activities are really embedded into the culture rather than just promoted for good press seen externally.

Notable findings of this study suggest that employees rely on both external communication through formal reporting as well as internal communication, through the halls and walls of their company, to understand CSR activities and tend to describe CSR in terms of what it means to and at their organization. Additionally, communication professionals define CSR strictly in terms of philanthropy or volunteerism. Further findings show that CSR is tribal, traditional and systemic to the organization's culture. However, the study finds that CSR is seen as an obligation that never gets questioned or entirely explained, what I label as "voluntold," and that these activities may be merely for good press due to their strictly philanthropic focus. Finally, CSR appears to lack rationale in an organizational setting—particularly problematic for those charged with communicating these efforts.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is at the forefront of corporate efforts to be viewed as accountable, responsible and ethical by stakeholder groups and society at large. CSR efforts are the actions taken by organizations that go beyond business interests to further social good (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). These efforts often take the form of volunteerism, philanthropy, cause marketing and community outreach initiatives focused on addressing certain societal needs (Fyke, Feldner, & May, 2016). CSR encourages companies to make a positive impact on their environment, marketplace, communities, stakeholders and investors, while taking responsibility for corporate actions.

Study Rationale

As the demand for CSR by shareholders and surrounding communities has increased, more and more companies have begun implementing these efforts into their business agendas. As the CSR field has continued to grow, so has the scholarship and literature on the topic. While CSR is studied in various disciplines and widely influenced by scholars dating back to the 1930s and 1940s (Fyke, Feldner, & May, 2016), the concept has recently become a popular topic in communication discourse. Typically, the focus of CSR is external as studies have analyzed the outward communication efforts from the perspectives of marketing, public relations and issues management (Fyke et al., 2016). While emerging literature (e.g. Mory, Wirtz, & Gottel, 2016; Haski-Leventhal, 2012; Chen & Hung-Baesecke, 2014) has begun exploring the internal dimension of CSR, what has still been largely neglected is the stakeholder group that occupies the

internal sphere: employees. Specifically, May (2014) argues that scholars lack an incredibly important perspective on CSR—the insider's view. Therefore, this research project focuses specifically on CSR from the employee perspective within an organizational context. Moreover, this research delivers practical recommendations based on sensemaking theory that may help solve communication related problems in terms of CSR.

Research Goals

There is little scholarship devoted to employee thoughts on and understanding of CSR within their organizations. Therefore, this study aims to take an insider's view to CSR by analyzing how these efforts are communicated to employee internally and how these individuals view them as a result. Integrating organizational sensemaking as part of this study's theoretical framework will allow for exploring how this stakeholder group understands CSR generally and how they make sense of it within their company. Specifically, by interviewing communication professionals primarily, this study offers unique insight into how these individuals who are tasked with communicating CSR define these efforts, make sense of them to others and therefore make CSR meaningful and understood within the organization.

Preview

In the subsequent chapters I provide a detailed review on the topic of CSR followed by the methodology and results of this project's data. To begin, I present a broad literature review on CSR as explored and defined by communication scholars. I then provide a more detailed examination of CSR from an organizational communication

perspective. The literature review also presents sensemaking as the theoretical framework that guides the study. Following the literature review and identification of gaps in CSR research, I pose a three-part research question focused on how communication professionals define CSR, communicate their organization's CSR efforts and, then, how they view and understand these efforts within their company. I then discuss the methodological approaches of qualitative inquiry by introducing my use of interviews and rhetorical analysis. I review the results of study followed by a discussion of theoretical and practical implications. Finally, I provide recommendations in terms of CSR communication and offer directions for future research on the topic of CSR.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In order to answer the specific research question of this study, it is important to situate the concept of CSR in a larger context. Thus, I introduce the concept of CSR while presenting an argument for the importance of understanding and studying it. Additionally, I outline the evolution of CSR as explored by communication scholars and corporate professionals. I argue for the importance of exploring the internal dynamic of CSR and why this is best done from an organizational communication standpoint. Finally, I introduce the concept of organizational sensemaking, leading to a specific set of research questions this study aims to answer.

Introduction & Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) fundamentally provides companies a way to consider their complete impact on the world beyond profitability. However, the question around what is the proper role of businesses in society (Fyke, Feldner, & May, 2016) remains, while CSR has become a dominant paradigm in which this relationship is negotiated (Carroll, Lipartito, Post, & Werhane, 2012; Frederick, 2006). As CSR has gained attention, the concept and practice has evolved, and thus, so has the research and attention in both academic and professional contexts.

CSR is defined as "the responsibility of a company for the totality of its impact, with a need to embed society's values into its core operations as well as into its treatment of its social and physical environment" (May, Cheney, & Roper, 2007, p. 30). Though built upon different traditions and ideals, CSR has become a crucial part of an

organization's business model and strategy—a way for companies to benefit themselves while also benefitting the societies in which they function. According to Porter and Kramer (2006), government organizations, activists and the media have become adept at holding organizations responsible "for the social consequences of their actions" (para. 1). As a result, CSR has emerged as a priority for corporate leadership in every country around the world.

Currently, CSR occupies a prominent place on an organization's corporate agenda. More than ever, companies are devoting substantial resources and human capital to various social initiatives—ranging from community outreach and environmental programs to socially responsible business practices. As Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2010) confirm, "by engaging in CSR activities, companies can not only generate favorable stakeholder attitudes and better support behaviors, but also, over the long run, build corporate image, strengthen stakeholder–company relationships and enhance stakeholders' advocacy behaviors" (p. 11). In understanding CSR, it is more than just describing and identifying *what* corporations do within the society around them, but "is also about defining what corporations *should* be responsible for in society" (Ihlen, Bartlett, & May, 2014, p. 48). First understanding when and how CSR emerged as a way for organizations—nonprofits, corporations or governmental entities—to help solve social problems is crucial.

Today social stewardship, the responsible planning and managing of resources, is no longer just an option. Business conglomerates, historically responsible for trading financial and human capital, have suddenly become a source of social capital as the connection and trust that binds society together, rather than separating it through

competition and power (Hanifan, 1916). Marchland (1998) confirms that although many organizations today are assuming this role for a variety of reasons, it is not necessarily one that corporations wanted, knowingly or eagerly signed up for.

Even with hypothesizing how corporations may have taken on this role of responsibility, the main question still facing scholars regarding the debate over corporate social responsibility is: why corporate social responsibility—and why now? McMillan (2007) believes that the modern corporation has taken on the rather unfit role of social responsibility within the larger society because there exists a philosophical disconnect between corporations and social good. The corporate sector has taken over as the primary institution for controlling the "direction of individual lives and influencing social development" (p. 16). In other words, while nonprofit and governmental organizations can attend to certain societal needs, the private sector has been increasingly looked upon to help fill the gaps in solving social issues (Fyke et al., 2016).

Originally referred most commonly as social responsibility, early writings of CSR began in the 1950s. Carroll (1999) notes that Howard Bowen's work centered on the question of "what responsibility to society may businessmen reasonably expect to assume" and the obligation of businessman to pursue those responsibilities (p. 270). CSR literature then expanded in the 1960s and 1970s through the work of Davis, Frederick, McGuire, Walton, Heald, Johnson and Steiner, among others. In the 1980s, the search for developing or refining definitions of CSR led to the work on alternative concepts such as social responsiveness, corporate social responsibility, stakeholder theory and business ethics. Jones then entered the conversation by defining CSR as the idea that corporations have an obligations to societal groups other than shareholders and beyond those required

by law. Subsequently, very few new contributions to defining CSR occurred in the 1990s besides when Wood revisited the idea of corporate social performance and Carroll revisited his CSR definition (Carroll, 1999).

One reason CSR became important is due to the corporate meltdown, dating back over a decade, with the collapse of several conglomerates including Enron, WorldComm, Arthur Andersen, and Global Crossing, among others. Overall, the outbreak of corporate scandals, including the great amount of fraud within public companies, led Congress to respond to citizen and shareholder outrage by passing the Sarbanes-Oxley Act in 2002, which "was designed to impose on companies stricter accountability and greater transparency..." (McMillan, 2007, p. 18). For the past 15 years, Edelman has executed polls, notably its "Trust Barometer," to explore the factors that influence corporate trust, surveying 33,000 people in 27 markets around the world. These polls typically reveal that Americans increasingly distrust organizations, particularly in their ability to be labeled as "good corporate citizens." According to the most recent Trust Barometer (2016), 68 percent of American consumers chose to buy products/services from companies that showed trustworthiness. In contrast, 48 percent refused to purchase from companies that showed distrustful behavior. While trust levels among informed publics, or college-educated individuals, worldwide are higher this year, trust in general for the mass population remains below the 50 percent mark (Giegerich, 2016). Therefore, CSR became an idea for keeping capitalism "in check" by insisting that those corporations taking on social good were kept accountable and responsible. Furthermore, if businesses are not trusted by society, this can become an obstacle to corporate change and innovation.

From its inception, CSR has been used as a way for organizations to focus their efforts toward various programs that include corporate social stewardship, corporate responsiveness, business ethics and corporate global citizenship, among others (May, Cheney, & Roper, 2007; Frederick, 2006). One of the primary drivers behind engaging in CSR activities includes responsiveness to stakeholder influence. Typically, one core assumption of CSR is that engaging in socially responsible activities will "improve businesses' image and reputation which, in turn, strengthens their legitimacy" (Fyke et al., 2016, p. 9). While this remains true, more recently, CSR has also been recognized as instrumental in talent attraction and retention and, in some cases, a way to improve an organization's employee competencies (Fyke et al., 2016). In other words, although CSR theory and practice has traditionally focused its gaze outward at external stakeholders, it is beginning to turn the mirror around to see how it impacts employees. Additionally, the idea of diversity as an organization's moral responsibility has emerged in research, primarily in public relations discourse. Uysal (2013) presents the argument that a corporation and its public relations practitioners "should have a responsibility to represent publics' interests" (p. 16). Therefore, integrating diversity may ultimately help both the organization and its shareholders (internal and external) through the lens of social responsibility.

CSR can be seen as a widely recognized and dominant paradigm for understanding corporations' role in society and creating value among stakeholders, but other iterations have found their way into theory and practice. In a popular review article, Mele (2008) distinguishes four strands of CSR research that have been widely used by

academics in business and management disciplines: shareholder value theory, corporate social performance, corporate citizenship and stakeholder theory.

First, shareholder value takes the view that the sole responsibility of businesses is to increase profits (Friedman, 1970). From this perspective, CSR activities are only appropriate if they contribute to the maximizing of shareholder value, or are legally required. Friedman (1970) argued that the only responsibility of business toward society is the maximization of profits for its shareholders and within the legal and ethical framework of the country. Furthermore, from the shareholder value perspective, CSR should only be pursued if and when corporate initiatives support the bottom line. For example, after polluting the Niger Delta in Nigeria, Shell engaged in a number of "defensive CSR-oriented responses" (May & Roper, 2014, p. 769). These included transparent communication of dedication to environmental restoration (oil clean-up), community development and local partnerships (Burger, 2011). Although considered 'environmental racism' by some activists, "Shell's actions on human rights and environmental justice seemed bound by its focus on utilitarian, expedient outcomes that served its shareholders" (May & Roper, 2014, p. 769).

Second, in contrast, corporate social performance (CSP) directly emphasizes social value, suggesting that in addition to the creation and maximization of wealth for shareholders, businesses are responsible for any consequences, especially negative, that are produced as a result of their actions (May & Roper, 2014). Specifically, Wood (1991) defines CSP as "a business' configuration of principles of social responsibility, processes of social responsiveness, and policies, programs and observable outcomes as they relate to the firm's societal relationships" (p. 693). Wood argues that in order to assess an

organization's social performance, one would examine social responsibility principles, processes and outcomes in terms of social responsiveness, relationships and impacts. Additionally, scholars from this point of view argue that companies pay attention to societal expectations and needs of the time (May & Roper, 2014).

Third, corporate citizenship considers what constitutes appropriate or good citizenship by corporations, relating to the study of philanthropic initiatives of businesses in the community that include donations and volunteerism. This perspective views CSR as a core part of society (Birch, 2001) and businesses take on CSR activities in order to be responsible citizens (Fyke et al., 2016). Scholars from this view see corporations as community citizens and, thus, are responsible to a variety of stakeholder interests that may include community problems. In other words, as Carroll (1998) points out, "corporate citizenship addresses the relationship between companies and all of their important stakeholders, not just employees" (p. 1). Furthermore, the corporate citizenship perspective argues that businesses should collaborate with government and civil society as a duty and necessity for public good (May & Roper, 2014).

Finally, stakeholder theory argues that businesses "should account for any individuals or groups who have a stake in it" (May & Roper, 2014, p. 772). In other words, stakeholder scholars argue for companies to benefit all relevant stakeholder groups including employees, customers, suppliers, owners and communities (Freeman, 1984/2010). This approach suggests that a company owes a responsibility to all stakeholders. The ethical principle of stakeholder engagement is founded in the concept of stakeholder theory. This principle focuses on the nature of the relationship that exists between the corporation and its many stakeholders, primarily concerned with involving

these groups in corporate decision-making and dialogue. A notable corporation that actively takes part in stakeholder engagement is Starbucks. Facing common criticisms centered on sweatshop factories and destruction of farming communities, Starbucks works closely with a range of stakeholders (such as farmers, customers and employees) to identify ethical business practices that are deemed "good" for both the company and the public (May & Roper, 2014).

A subset of the stakeholder perspective suggests that CSR relates to being responsible in business operations, while focusing on increasing value for stakeholders. Therefore, CSR can be viewed as a legitimizing function—a way for organizations to prove or demonstrate responsibility to stakeholders. Most often the focus of CSR research has been on external, thus we must also focus on the internal dimension. A critical stakeholder group worthy of attention then is employees.

Understanding the Internal Dynamic of CSR

Recent research has drawn criticism for primarily investigating the viewpoints of external stakeholders (Chen & Hung-Baescke, 2014) without taking into account one of the most important (internal) stakeholder groups, employees. According to Chen & Hung-Baescke (2014), there has been too much focus on outcomes, rather than processes, and external audiences, rather than internal targets, making CSR within an organization appear to be "a formality requested externally rather than a virtue rooted internally" (p. 211). Because of this void, this study focuses on these internal processes to understand how employees make sense of CSR within their organization. By focusing too much on the outcomes and resulting support from external audiences rather than embedding CSR

into the very culture and identity of an organization, CSR development is inevitability undermined as the public may become suspicious of the company's true intentions, or if the company is trying to hide something (May, 2008; Brown & Dacin, 1997).

Bhattacharya, Sen and Kroschun (2008) argue that CSR programs are extremely effective when the company is the enabler, and the employees are the actual enactors. Previous studies, noted in Chen and Hung-Baesecke (2014), have identified motivational factors for employee engagement and participation in CSR activities, broken down into activity, organizational and personal levels. Those specifically related to CSR activities claim that engagement is generated when CSR is perceived as: (a) being in line with corporate culture (Lee, Park, & Lee, 2013), (b) having a link to the corporate purpose or mission (Sagawa & Segal, 2000), and (c) being jointly created by employees (Dobson, 2011). A few organizational drivers include: (a) effective internal communication about CSR specifically that includes a genuine message (Mamantov, 2009), (b) participation by the organization itself (Haski-Leventhal, 2012), and (c) support from management (The Giving Campaign, 2009). Additionally, two personal motivation factors for employee participation in CSR include: (a) positively perceived organizational commitment; and (b) attitude toward CSR and fewer perceived barriers to participate (Haski-Leventhal, 2012).

Evident in these motivational factors is the importance of employee sensemaking and understanding of CSR. These studies illustrate the need to focus on employee thoughts on CSR. Particularly for those tasked with communicating organizational CSR efforts and enabling how these activities are meant to be understood by others, it is

important to understand the motivation behind these individuals' engagement with and attitude toward CSR.

In turn, although this existing research (Kim, Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2010) has focused on employees' perception of CSR and how CSR initiatives may impact employee-company identification, the understanding or sensemaking of and support for CSR by employees remains unclear. Key to understanding CSR from employees' perspective is to understand their sensemaking about these initiatives, primarily through internal messages that are communicated regarding CSR. Organizational communication provides a lens for exploring this internal dimension by focusing on communication that happens within an organizational setting.

CSR + Organizational Communication

May and Roper (2014) explain that few communication-based reviews of CSR have been developed, even though it is an increasingly popular area of research for scholars in the field and critics of organizations have had long-standing interest in issues of social responsibility and ethics. Organizational communication is a natural home for CSR research with an internal focus because organizational communication has a long standing interest in employee communication and experience internally. An organizational communication approach provides an avenue for analyzing dialogue of CSR (May, 2014) within an organization.

Among the earliest efforts to explore the implications of CSR in the organizational communication sector was a series of essays on the topic in *Management Communication Quarterly* (May & Zorn, 2003). These essays noted that although media

attention regarding CSR has come and gone throughout recent years, the concept itself has always been, at its core, "about the simultaneously contested and consensual nature of the relationship between organizations and cultures" (p. 595).

The focus of CSR research in organizational communication has been largely critical, partly due to the primarily normative (i.e., business results-driven) emphasis by business and management scholars in the earlier years of CSR research (May, 2014). Critical CSR research focuses on "broader sets of social, political and economic conditions with an eye toward critique and self-reflexivity" (May, 2014, p. 96). The aforementioned essay series in *Management Communication Quarterly* represents noteworthy critical approaches to CSR. However, organizational communication CSR research can also take other approaches. Three other strands are particularly salient: normative, interpretive and dialogic. From the normative perspective, communication is viewed as a tool for serving business interests primarily and CSR is seen as a means to strengthen competitive advantage and business innovation; a form of self-interest that can be profitable. Critical approaches are thus skeptical of the over-emphasis on CSR for a means to generate profit. The dialogic approach to CSR focuses on issues of power, domination and asymmetry in organizations. From this view, CSR communication is complex, contradictory and contested. The most pertinent to this study is the interpretive approach, which concentrates on understanding the sensemaking activities of the individuals being studied, such as internal stakeholders (e.g., employees). Because of the emphasis on the sensemaking processes of the organizational members themselves, the interpretive focus relates to the internal and employee-centered emphasis on CSR and

organizational communication. More specifically, most interpretive studies on CSR focus on attitudes and perceptions of CSR among managerial groups.

Overall, scholars have a limited understanding of, and "have shown less interest in" (May & Roper, 2014, p. 775) how rank-and-file employees engage with and understand CSR in their day-to-day work activities, as well as the communication directed toward them about an organization's CSR efforts. One reason for this, as May and Roper (2014) point out, may the difficulty of gaining access to employees—specifically those who are working on or are affected by CSR efforts. From an interpretive perspective in the area of organizational communication, May argues that scholars lack what can be viewed as an incredibly important perspective on CSR—the insider's view (May & Roper, 2014).

May identifies the proposed separation of so-called internal and external realms of organizational communication, claiming these separate fields have been "problematized" due to the fact that corporations pursue a wide range of communication activities that do not clearly fall within one realm (i.e., internal or external). So, not surprisingly, CSR can be seen at the intersection of these boundaries (May, 2014). Specifically, May (2014) calls for research that can simultaneously consider both internal and external dynamics of CSR. Organizational communication scholars would ideally "explore the integration, or lack thereof, between CSR communication that is externally and internally focused" (p. 102).

Theoretical Framework: Organizational Sensemaking

Understanding the internal dynamic of CSR from the employee perspective requires an exploration of how CSR is communicated, talked about, made meaningful and understood by communication professionals inside the organization. Therefore, sensemaking helps take the insider's view, advocated for by May (2014).

Weick (1995) notes that organizations are "social systems where the collective creation of shared meanings socializes participants" (Collier & Esteban, 2007, p. 27). Organizations have their own languages and symbols that have important effects on sensemaking. In other words how messages are communicated, both visually and non-visually, affect the way stakeholders understand processes, events, goals, etc. within their organizations. Employees attach meaning to things within their organization through sensemaking, and this ongoing accomplishment is a constant, reflexive process. In other words, people make retrospective sense of things and situations in which they find themselves; or by discovering their own inventions (Weick, 1995). For instance, if an organization launches a new community giving campaign, they will likely create materials such as newsletters, posters, and memos for employees to learn more about the campaign and related events. The organization will also likely hold meetings to discuss the campaign and ways in which employees can (and should) get involved. In turn, from a sensemaking perspective, these various communications should help employees make sense of the campaign and how it impacts them.

Sensemaking is appropriate for exploring the internal dynamic of CSR because it examines how these activities become meaningful for employees inside the organization.

Whereas previous studies have focused on the content and outcomes (e.g., external reports) of CSR communication, the sensemaking of CSR by internal audiences is critical to understanding how CSR is processed, understood and talked about within an organizational setting. Specifically, this theory is appropriate for exploring the internal dynamic of CSR by examining how these activities have become meaningful and understood by employees. Many scholars (Dunbar, 1981; Goleman, 1985) argue that sensemaking involves "placing stimuli into some kind of framework" (Weick, 1995, p. 4), allowing them to comprehend, understand, explain, predict and connect to. For example, initiatives that an organization takes on perhaps in terms of philanthropic of community outreach efforts may serve as a type of "CSR framework" that audience members refer to when making sense of these activities.

Organizations are complex, often hard to make sense of and understand, and are composed of equivocal concepts and activities. For Weick, equivocality refers to the existence of multiple interpretations of events, actions, processes and so on. Communication reduces equivocality as organizations use internal messages directed at employees to eliminate a variety of meanings and make their environments more predictable. Importantly, sensemaking is an individual and collective activity. First, as a company communicates about CSR in its attempt to reduce equivocality and confusion around these initiatives, employees will attempt to make sense of it using the organizational communication as a lens for understanding CSR efforts. However, organizational attempts to aid sensemaking are necessary but insufficient; sensemaking is also an interpersonal, interactive process. Interpersonal communication between employees, then, creates and reinforces what things mean in an organization. For

example, if a company uses a variety of media to communicate its CSR both internally and externally, such as an employee intranet or annual report, the meaning around CSR within the organization is enacted through employee sensemaking—that is employees read these messages against past organizational experiences in order to attach meaning to them. Beyond this, it is then transacted through employee conversation. In other words, employee sensemaking helps something come into being within an organization by attaching meaning and then talking about it. Interaction is a key part of the sensemaking process.

Expanding on the latter, Weick (1995) argues that sensemaking is inherently social, particularly in an organizational context. Specifically, members make sense of things in their organizations through conversing with others, reading and paying attention to communication messages from others and through exchanging ideas (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). In other words, sensemaking begins with the individual sensemaker, but as meanings materialize in an organization, sensemaking becomes a collective action.

Sensemaking is a central activity in organizations. Specifically, sensemaking "involves the active authoring of events and frameworks for understanding, as people play a role in constructing the very situations they attempt to comprehend" (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 58). Maitlis and Christianson (2014) explain that growing research examines how sense is made by employees within organizations and the impact of sensemaking "on a variety of key organizational processes, including strategic change and decision-making" (p. 58). In confronting organizational issues, sensemaking requires employees to search for answers and explanations in terms of how others see things. Thus, the source of meaning and reason behind these issues, such as CSR efforts, is other

people's way of thinking. Therefore, communication professionals charged with communicating CSR help make sense of these activities to and for others in an organizational context.

Morsing and Schultz (2006) explore three CSR communication strategies that relate to the process of sensemaking: one-way communication (stakeholder information strategy), two-way asymmetric communication (stakeholder response strategy) and two-way symmetric communication (stakeholder involvement strategy). In the stakeholder information strategy, communication is one-way from the company to its stakeholders in the form of telling and not listening. Information is simply communicated with the sole purpose of informing audience members or, in other words, "giving sense to its audiences" (p. 327). In contrast, stakeholder response strategy is two-way asymmetric communication. Simply put, communication flows to and from audience members. As opposed to symmetric communication, however, the engaging of stakeholders by making company decisions and actions relevant to them is only for external endorsement. In other words, the company does not change based on external PR but attempt to change external stakeholders' behavior and attitudes. Communication then is perceived as feedback "in terms of finding out what the public will accept and tolerate" (p. 327).

Finally, stakeholder involvement strategy, also two-way communication based, assumes a dialogue with its audience members. Persuasion and influence occurs from both the company itself and its stakeholders to enable change. This way, stakeholders are actively involved in the development and understanding of an organization's CSR initiatives. This model integrates both internal members' (i.e. employees) CSR concerns but also external stakeholders' concerns in simultaneous dialogue. This study will

provide insight into how one organization is attempting to communicate its CSR efforts, ultimately affecting stakeholder sensemaking.

Summary and Research Questions

This review identified the significance of an organizational communication perspective on CSR and identified gaps in current research. As research shows, CSR matters and has become an increasing imperative for corporations in response to stakeholders and society. To date, most research focuses on external issues and does not seek to understand CSR from an employee's viewpoint. This study seeks to fill this void by examining employees' views and understandings of CSR. A sensemaking perspective is particularly salient when seeking to take employee understanding into account because it allows for a consideration of how employees attach meaning to CSR efforts. Given this, this study addresses the following thee-part research question:

RQ1: How do communication professionals make sense of CSR?

To fully answer this, I will address the following questions:

RQ$_{1a}$: How do communication professionals define CSR?

RQ$_{1b}$: How is CSR communicated?

RQ$_{1c}$: In what ways is CSR meaningful to communication professionals in their work?

Chapter Three: Methodology

Sensemaking is a fundamentally communicative concept. Thus, in order to examine employee sensemaking, I used qualitative interviews. This allowed me to gain insight into the internal sensemaking of employees around CSR. Additionally, due to the external-heavy nature of CSR research, I conducted a rhetorical analysis on the company's external messages to understand the relationship between the company's internal and external CSR communication.

Research Context

Investment Group, or IG, is a financial security organization located in the Midwestern United States. IG is a relatively large company with approximately 5,500 employees nationwide as of 2015 and provides a number of services. These include consultation on wealth and asset income protection, education planning, investment advising, retirement planning, among others. IG's products include a wide range of insurance offerings including life, disability income and long-term care. One of the company's unique elements is its policyowners, as opposed to shareholders. Furthermore, IG prides itself on building and maintaining close relationships with its clients—allowing the opportunity for individuals and families to meet one-on-one with a financial representative.

Participants

I interviewed seven corporate employees, particularly from the organization's strategic philanthropy and communication teams. This provided me with the ability to

interview a population of employees with a strong connection to the organization's CSR initiatives and the communication around it. This is reflected in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Position/Title	Department	Employment Length
Rob	Program Officer	Strategic Philanthropy	10 years
Wendy	Communication Consultant, Finance	Communication	14 years
Lydia	Internal Communications Lead	Communication	5 years
Heather	Foundation Operations Manager	Strategic Philanthropy	29 years
Caroline	Communications Specialist	Communication	2 years
Rena	Director, Strategic Communication	Communication	5 ½ years
Debbie	Communication Consultant, PR	Communication	1 ½ years

Five of these employees are members of the corporation's communication department primarily responsible for developing and publishing both internal and external messages. Specifically, three of these five employees are primarily responsible for CSR communication, while the remaining two are deemed "communication consultants" and work alongside other departments attending to communication-related tasks. The final two individuals are long-standing members of the organization's foundation, its philanthropic arm.

Data Gathering Procedures

In order to investigate and understand how employees talk about, make sense and view CSR in their organization I used semi-structured, open-ended interviews as a specific method of qualitative inquiry. Mayan (2009) argues that qualitative research

allows the researcher to explore evolving and/or complex situations without making prior assumptions. Similarly, Davis (2014) argues that interviews are most beneficial when there are situations or questions that cannot be anticipated, and when data will emerge as a result. Interviews allow for the flexibility of data collection, particularly for the researcher, so that I could gain a deeper understanding from the interviewee in terms of body language, two-way conversation and storytelling. Specifically, these interviews helped to understand and interpret employees' feelings about the internal communication regarding CSR, as well if these individuals find CSR to be important and relevant within their organization.

My access to the company was secured via personal contact with a member of my thesis committee. I first reached out to her via e-mail. After continued communication through e-mail regarding the primary focus and goal of my study, I sent her a copy of my interview guide (see Appendix A) and was directed to her assistant who become responsible for setting up five of the seven interviews—individuals from the communication department. Prior to securing the interviews, I secured appropriate approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). These interviews were scheduled throughout three days in which I went to IG's main campus and met with each individually.

I personally arranged the final two interviews on the same day that worked well for both. I again traveled to IG's corporate headquarters for these interviews. All seven meetings were scheduled for one hour in a few conference rooms or offices, with interviews being approximately 32 to 62 minutes in length, and on average took about 48 minutes to complete. With consent granted from each employee prior to the interview

(see Appendix B for a copy of the participant consent form), I recorded each discussion for later review with my personal mobile phone and took copious notes throughout. All interviews were transcribed, with participant names masked with pseudonyms, resulting in approximately 70 single-spaced pages and 2,583 lines of text. Hesse-Biber (2010) argues that transcribing brings the researcher closer to the data in terms of data analysis. Additionally, transcriptions were read back through alongside my interview notes to ensure accurate and extensive data collection.

The interview guide for this study was constructed into seven distinct categories with corresponding questions. These categories were: Introduction/Background, Company Understanding, CSR Terminology, Company CSR Initiatives/Activities, Employee Involvement, CSR and Society Benefits, and Closing. The three middle categories asked employees specific questions around general individual perception and understanding of CSR, identifying examples of CSR initiatives within the company, and if and how the individual is involved in his or her company's CSR activities. Therefore, general questions regarding the individual's current role and responsibilities were asked first, followed by questions that allowed for the interviewee to describe IG in his or her own words like, for example, in the question, "what is it like to work here?" Subsequently, I asked "how familiar are you with the concept of corporate social responsibility?" And, "how would you define or describe it?" This allowed for the individual to give a general, personal definition of what CSR means to them—inside or outside IG.

The next set of questions asked for the employee to name or identify any or all CSR initiatives he or she was aware of at IG, and how those activities may fit the

company. These categories of questions addressed my overall search for how employees understand and perceive CSR. Additionally, the third main set of interview questions were focused on IG's communication of CSR. First, I asked how and if CSR affected the individual's every day work life, followed by how CSR is communicated to employees internally. Finally, I inquired about how IG may or may not argue for the importance of CSR, and what the individual thought are the best ways for companies to communicate these initiatives either internally or externally.

Incorporating rhetorical methods allowed for a more robust and complete study of IG's CSR communication efforts by considering the external dimension as well. Due to the expanding influence of organizations and organizational activities, rhetorical analysis is necessary to understand corporate "voices" and messages (Cheney & McMillan, 1990). Rhetorically analyzing external messages allowed me to examine what is communicated externally to other stakeholder groups, as well as to the public. Because external communication documents should be linked to the actual interaction and conversations of individuals within an organization, I could see the extent to which the external communication was reflected in employee perspectives by comparing to data collected in interviews. These messages came from the corporate website and the company's character/community and annual reports, as referred to by individuals during interviews. Specifically, three of the seven employees suggested I refer to IG's annual and corporate citizenship report, with one of the three actually providing me with hard copies of both.

I analyzed the company's website due to its influence on both internal and external stakeholders (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008), communicating a desired identity while disseminating information and building relationships with the public (Feldner & Fyke,

2016; Sommerfeldt, Kent, & Taylor, 2012). Since IG utilizes both print and electronic sources as materials for clients, employees and the public, it was appropriate for me to analyze these documents whilst comparing to internal messages. In all, I included approximately 73 total pages of these artifacts in my rhetorical data collection.

Data Analysis

I used constant comparative technique to analyze an organization's communicative approaches to CSR. This method of data analysis incorporates grounded theory in which data is analyzed as it is collected, while looking back and comparing to research that has already been collected previously (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Following each interview, I summarized the conversation while making sure to highlight key pieces I found to be surprising or crucial and would want to include later in the results and discussion sections.

After analyzing, re-reading and comparing a transcript to the handwritten notes I took during the interview, I compared it to other existing transcripts. This allowed me to identify similar concerns or reported information that resulted from the interviews, and perhaps alter my interview guide or approach for future interviews, if needed. I classified the collected data into specific themes and made separate documents for each, copying and pasting quotes from various interviews that best fit the particular theme. Then, I identified which theme(s) best supported or fit with each of my original research questions, as presented in the results. As new interviews were completed, I analyzed each additional transcript alongside existing ones in order to highlight or identify crucial quotes or to gather new insights or recurring themes. Concurrently utilizing data allowed

me to effectively identify insights from one interview that was recognizable to one, or more, of the others I had already analyzed.

Additionally, I used the constant comparative technique and the grounded theory approach to rhetorically analyze the external communication artifacts, comparing these messages to those collected through qualitative interviews. As I paged through each artifact—IG's most recent annual report, corporate citizenship report and corporate website—I took copious handwritten notes specifically on content, text size, accessibility, images and language use. Simultaneously, I made reference to message consistency between the internal and external communication of CSR in the margins of these notes. For example, I would make note if a particular CSR mentioned in the interview was or was not listed on the corporate website, or vice versa, and would refer back when presenting results.

In all, the qualitative and rhetorical methods outlined above allowed for a thorough understanding of CSR programs and communication efforts at IG. Specifically, these methods allowed for an understanding of the sensemaking processes of communication professionals at IG and to answer the research questions posed earlier. Thus, I outline these findings in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Results

In analyzing the data relative to question 1a, How do communication professionals define CSR? Findings reveal that these individuals associate terms such as philanthropy, sustainability and community involvement with CSR. Additionally, they use IG's practices as an organizational lens for defining CSR. Connected to the communication structure of CSR messages, interview responses relates to question 1b revealed how CSR efforts are communicated, both internally and externally. This data is separated into traditional communication through external reports and internal channels and conversation. Additionally, the answers to questions 1a and 1b reveal best practices in terms of how these individuals think CSR should be defined and then communicated. Finally, question 1c considers results from 1b and 1c to see how CSR is viewed and made meaningful. All together these results illustrate how communication professionals at IG make sense of CSR within their organization.

RQ$_{1a}$: How do communication professionals define CSR?

The results for RQ$_{1a}$ illustrate how communication professionals at IG define, describe and understand the concept of CSR. Specifically, these responses come from employees answering the questions of "how familiar are you with corporate social responsibility," "how would you define and describe it," "what does it mean to you," and "what terms would you associate with CSR?"

For all seven IG employees, the most difficult questions for them to answer revolved around defining CSR. Although most expressed familiarity with the concept of

CSR, it seemed particularly difficult for each to put what it meant to them into words. In other words, at the denotative level, CSR has a high degree of equivocality; in other words, there are many different interpretations of it in practice (Weick, 1995). When asked to define CSR, employees almost immediately referred specifically to IG's definition of CSR. Thus, IG was the primary lens or device through which employees reduced any confusion or ambiguity around CSR and made sense of it in their work.

Generally, employees referenced philanthropic or volunteerism efforts in which a corporation gives back to the community it operates in. Therefore, these individuals first think of community involvement and philanthropy when defining CSR. For example, when asked to describe CSR, Heather, the foundation's operations manager, states that it "is an entity's obligation to the communities where it operates and continue the tradition of philanthropy in service to others." However, when asked specifically what CSR means to her, Heather explained that she interprets what it means to IG:

> …it is certainly all of the great work that our foundation does, but even more importantly to me is the volunteer time that our employees dedicate to giving back, the investments we make in the local communities and the communities around the country for investment purposes, the policies we have around being green and conscious of the environment.

This general association of CSR with philanthropy, volunteerism, environmental sustainability and social responsible investing as it relates to IG specifically was consistent with the responses of five other employees. Rena, director of strategic communication, views CSR as doing good for business, which, in her opinion, includes environmental stewardship, financial giving and employee volunteerism. Specifically, she referred to the CSR work at IG that she would consider "good for business:"

It is obviously the causes that we [IG] choose to support and make a difference in this world. It also includes the volunteerism we do as a company in terms of giving back. It is doing the right thing in terms of how we manage our business; it is reducing the amount of paper that is going out in the mail… I think at the end of the day it is us just being conscious as to leaving a better impact on the on the constituents and community than it was before.

Similarly, when asked to define or describe CSR as a general concept, Debbie, IG's PR communication consultant mainly responsible for any external CSR communication, responded by saying:

Here I would define it as ensuring our internal strategy is communicated externally and that gets back to the fact that this [IG] is a company that really puts their money where their mouth is with these things…Seeing a need and being able to make a difference within that need.

The external focus of these CSR definitions is interesting. The activities described by these individuals are primarily philanthropic and include volunteerism, donations and community outreach—efforts targeted outside the organization.

Additionally, Caroline, a communication specialist, defined CSR by referring to the specific work of IG's foundation, such as the various focus areas that the foundation supports and promotes. She states that "here, at IG, the foundation is pretty widespread, so I don't think you would find many employees who wouldn't know what our foundation supports [for CSR]."

When asked to describe CSR, Wendy, IG's financial communication consultant, offered an interesting insight into how CSR should be and is viewed at individual organizations. She began by defining CSR as "the greater good that a company provides and sort of being the conscience of the company. Basically, hopefully every company to some degree does some type of good for the community." It appears that her view of CSR is more or less an obligation of an organization to its surroundings.

Wendy then continued by emphasizing the importance of aligning CSR activities with company business strategy:

> I think you have to look at your specific company and what makes sense for your company. So yes, there are a lot of environmental practices that we do that are good, but for us the greatest good that we [IG] do is from a financial standpoint for people—that is really where we are making the biggest impact. So you really have to look at your business structure, and I think the companies that have the best corporate citizenship or CSR program are those in which it is tied to their business model, instead of just something they do on the side. It should have a more strategic approach.

What is interesting here is Wendy's point that IG's environmental practices, which could be referred to as a CSR initiative, have less of an impact than the outcome of financial giving. This again emphasized the PR or external aspect of these activities at IG.

Similarly, Lydia, IG's internal CSR communications lead, connects her general definition of the concept of CSR to what it means and looks like at IG:

> CSR is… and we say this a lot—doing good is good for business. And we are good as a company to do good... when I'm in my meetings with the foundation, it is a lot of heart and thinking how we can make a certain situation better. It is very strategic... so yes it's good for our business and getting our name out there but we really do it because we care about the health and vibrance of the community.

Here Lydia emphasizes the benefit of initiating CSR programs in terms of increasing business-society relationships and reputation. Interestingly, she does not expand specifically on how CSR is strategic or why, in fact, it is helpful from a business standpoint.

These interviews offered unique insight into how IG employees understand CSR conceptually. Overall, it seems that CSR is defined or described by what it means at a specific organization and, as Wendy argued, should differ according to each company's business model and focus.

When asked what words or terms they associate with CSR, these communication professionals were consistent in their responses. The following data reflects what the individuals feel are best practices in terms of what CSR is and should mean. For Rena, CSR efforts can be in the form of environmental stewardship, volunteerism, financial giving and employee volunteerism. Similarly, Wendy emphasized volunteering, green sustainability and "doing good for the community." This resonated with Debbie, Heather and Rob, the foundation's program officer, who also added corporate citizenship to his list of associated terms. Finally, both Lydia and Caroline described partnership and generosity.

While appearing to have a comprehensive view of CSR especially in terms of their organization, these employees seem to have a narrow understanding and opinion of what CSR really is. So while generally understanding CSR, tend to emphasize philanthropy and community involvement. This narrowing may come from their company's definition and perspective through its specific CSR activities. Additionally, Lydia mentions that CSR is undoubtedly part of "lifting the brand," perhaps referencing the PR and reputational benefit to promoting these activities. Overall, these individuals describe their best practices for initiating CSR efforts in terms of community outreach and philanthropic undertakings. The communication professionals' sensemaking and defining of CSR conceptually is equivalent with what CSR means at their place of work.

The subsequent question asks how CSR is communicated, both internally and externally. In order to comprehend and see how these communication professionals make sense of CSR, it was important to first understand how they define it and then see how this is reflected in their communication practices.

RQ₁ᵦ: How is CSR communicated?

Since these seven employees are primarily responsible for the creating and disseminating CSR communication, it was crucial to analyze these messages as they reflect individual sensemaking and understanding of their organization's CSR activities. Specifically, these communication professionals are charged with talking and making sense of IG's CSR efforts to others; whether it be employees, shareholders or the external public. Sensemaking in organizations requires organizational members to look for explanations in terms of how people see things. Therefore, how these communication professionals define CSR may affect how and in what way these efforts are communicated in an organizational context. In turn, the defining and communicating of IG's CSR activities affect the sensemaking of these individuals in terms of how they view these programs and their role in promoting them.

In order to understand how CSR at IG is communicated, I conducted a rhetorical analysis of three artifacts that reflect IG's traditional reporting. These included the company's 2014 annual report, 2014 corporate citizenship report and corporate website. While primarily external forms of communication, each may influence internal stakeholders as well. Therefore, I was able to consider both communication dimensions by simultaneously considering text and content found in these three artifacts alongside internal messages described by employees. Externally, IG relies on communicating its CSR efforts through formal reports. Internally, the company relies on conversation, signage, internal channels and stories.

IG's external rhetoric emphasized the company's commitment to building stronger families from a financial standpoint. The use of anecdotal stories, images and statistics legitimizes IG's values of doing the right thing, taking a long term approach to business and providing financial security to families throughout the community. The use of storytelling throughout the company's external and internal communication messages allows audience members to feel an emotional connection with the company's priorities and goals. The following section first presents how IG's CSR efforts are communicated in formal reports and then explore how these communication professionals attempt to communicate these activities internally to employees.

Corporate Citizenship Report (2014). IG's 2014 corporate citizenship report begins with the company's "1888 mission statement," commonly referred to by employees in the interviews. This declaration adheres to IG's values and priorities, as aligned with those expressed by employees, related to quality over quantity and dedication to people and policyowners. This statement claims that:

> The ambition of IG has been less to be large than to be safe; its aim is to rank first in benefits to policyowners rather than first in size. Valuing quality over quantity, it has been preferred to secure its business under certain salutary restrictions and limitations rather than to write a much larger business at the possible sacrifice of those valuable points which have made IG pre-eminently the policyowner's company.

Furthermore, the report begins by stating that, as a financial security company, "we feel fortunate that the work we do every single day builds stronger and better communities." This use of "we," referring to a feeling of oneness the employees and executives feel at IG, is used throughout the entire report, particularly when referring to the business and CSR priorities of the organization. This is a clear example of identity

rhetoric using the transcendent or assumed we (Burke, 1984; Cheney, 1983) in which rhetors create a sense that all audience members are important and share the views of the organization.

The next few pages of the corporate citizenship report are dedicated to showing how IG is committed to building brighter futures for families. Again, anecdotes are used to illustrate this value. Additionally, the partnership between small, local businesses and IG is described, an element that was not introduced by any employee in the interviews. This showcases IG's dedication to any local community where the company has representatives present. The following pages include a full, two-page spread entitled "building stronger communities." Through the use of images and statistics, the content of these pages highlight IG's dedication to building financially sustainable families is a cyclical effect—ultimately benefiting the company and community at large, as the first page states:

> We invest in the communities we serve because it's the right thing to do, and because we know it's good for our policyowners and clients. People have a better chance of attaining financial security if they live in a thriving community with access to quality programs, services and resources (IG Corporate Citizenship Report, 2014).

This dedication to local communities with an emphasize on building financially stable families is connected to IG's values, as expressed by all employees in the interviews. However, when asked what IG as a company values and prioritizes, one employee, Wendy, included the value of diversity and inclusion stating, "we have a lot of diversity and inclusion efforts right now, which is fairly new for our company, but it is a big effort to make everyone feel like they are inclusive." However, this value was not included or expressed in any way in either the corporate citizenship nor annual report.

The following sections of the corporate citizenship report include another two-page spread discussing IG's commitment to its hometown. Here, three of IG's four CSR focus areas are included and expanded upon, including: employee volunteering/donating, rebuilding local neighborhoods and dedication to education. These three CSR initiatives align perfectly with those described by employees when asked the question "what are some CSR initiatives that you know your company takes on." Photos include employees donating their time to volunteering. Alongside the company's three primary CSR areas, as also identified by employees, a column entitled "Broadening People's Perspectives" described IG's commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive work environment. Specifically, the company's employee resource groups were highlighted. Although this inclusion of diversity along with IG's other CSR efforts, this priority was not emphasized in employee interviews as a primary CSR focus. Similarly, the idea of Supplier Diversity was not included in the Corporate Citizenship report, although listed online and also mentioned by one employee in an interview.

Additionally, the most pertinent to CSR in the corporate citizenship report was a two-page spread on IG's signature, national CSR platform: fighting childhood cancer. The page is entitled, "we're bringing hope to thousands of children and families through our national philanthropic program to fight childhood cancer." The word "philanthropic" is used to describe the effort. Again, through the use of photos, statistics, emotional appeals and reference to national recognition, IG communicates its dedication to a unique cause that most people can support and get on board with. This also shows the company's commitment to a large CSR focus, showing the internal backing by employees through photos of employee volunteers.

Finally, the corporate citizenship report ends with a full, four-page spread titled "community service: we're leading by example." These pages illustrate the commitment of IG employees to volunteering time and donations. Ten examples showcasing employee volunteerism are included to describe the IGEVP (Investment Group Employee Volunteer Program), providing employees with a unique way to give back to the community through work. This program was emphasized by all seven employees interviewed, all of whom took part in volunteering at IG, primarily through the company's foundation work. The final page of the report includes the mission and total funds donated by IG's foundation.

Annual Report (2014). A company's annual report is a comprehensive document reporting an organization's activities, primarily financial, from the preceding year. By law, public companies in the United States are required to disclose only financial results (Singh, 2011). However, the majority of annual reports today are increasingly including social responsibility, corporate giving and sustainable practices. However, through 2014, IG's report was not one of them. This section includes findings from conducting a rhetorical analysis of IG's 2014 annual report, which primarily communicates externally to policyowners and the public.

In general, IG highlights its accomplishments from the preceding year by including client success stories, video links, personal quotes and, of course, financial results. While incorporating company values and emphasizing company-client relationships, the main focus in the report was on business and financial outcomes. Foundation, or CSR, members/officers, activities, goals and results were mentioned or listed throughout the report. However, on the back of the report packet, a small reference

to the corporate citizenship report was included with a short message stating, "learn about the good we do—for more examples of how we're building stronger families and communities, see our new citizenship report." Additionally, statistics on the success of IG's national philanthropic program to fight childhood cancer since its inception in 2012 were listed. The heading of this back cover states, "Strong Cause. Stronger Families"—once again connecting the CSR platform back to a fundamental company value.

Singh (2011) explains the current big push for non-financial reporting, particularly due to public demand for transparency, the rise of social media and the current economic environment. Consequently, companies can "pick and choose if and how they share their charitable works, community involvement, commitment to diversity or environmental stewardship in their annual report" (Singh, 2011). Companies beginning to include CSR in their reports may realize that this effective, transparent communication is key to engaging current and prospective shareholders while enhancing the company's reputation and brand.

While IG's 2014 annual report did not include any information on CSR efforts, Wendy, IG's financial communication consultant and core contributor to financial reports, assured that this will change moving forward, saying that the company is wanting its clients to know IG is "more than just about financials." What is interesting here is that although IG has a corporate citizenship report primarily dedicated to communicating its CSR efforts, the company is still pushing to include more in its annual report in the near future. Additionally, Wendy echoes the importance of transparency, arguing that annual reports, among others, are great ways to reach a wide audience:

> I do think there is some legitimacy and some benefit to talking about [CSR] in your annual reports and things like that… I think there are cases where people just wouldn't know about it and maybe they are not exposed to it, so you need to tell people about it and I think there is some benefit having information on your website and having it in your reports and integrating it into some of your major touchpoints.

As CSR efforts are advocated for and supported by employees internally, it is crucial to note importance of including CSR in various reports in order for companies to be transparent while extending and connecting those initiatives to the organization's operations, supply chains and business strategies.

Corporate Website. As compared to IG's annual report, the company's corporate website includes CSR initiatives in an easy, accessible way. In fact, one of the tabs on the main page includes "About Us" which leads the user to choose another tab titled "What We Believe," which shares the company's values, priorities and commitments. These values are listed as: Doing What's Right, Putting People First, Providing Financial Strength and Taking a Long-Term View. These values presented align perfectly with those described by each employee interview. The bottom of the page includes links to various company reports. Besides the values tab, "Our People" and "Our Commitment to Our Hometown" are briefly describes and include a link for the audience member to learn more.

On the "Our People" page, several "Corporate Commitments" are listed: diversity and inclusion, IG foundation, urban education and employee volunteers. While three of these four corporate commitments (e.g. the foundation, dedication to education and employee volunteer participation) were included in employee interviews, one was not emphasized nearly as much. The organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion

was only briefly mentioned by two employees in the interviews. Rena referenced to this "corporate commitment" to diversity when defining CSR as a general concept by stating, "an example [of CSR] would be in terms of how we manage our business… an example would be that we are working on a new building project and have specifically selected vendors from areas of our hometown to make sure that we have a very good presence of small and multi-cultural representation from the city." This is an example of supplier diversity, which is noted on the company's website on the "Our Values" page (not alongside other CSR initiatives). On the other hand, Rena did not identify her reference to diversity as one of IG's CSR focus areas, even though, the separate idea of "diversity and inclusion" was referred to in the *corporate citizenship report* alongside three of the company's other CSR efforts.

While the concept of diversity and inclusion is listed as a "corporate commitment" on IG's website and mentioned in the corporate citizenship report, it did was not presented as significant value or CSR effort by employees. Similarly, the corporate website includes a "Supplier Diversity" tab under the "Our People" tab, but it is not easily accessible. This page first includes a "commitment to diversity" statement which reads, "IG firmly believes that developing talented, diverse and sustainable supplier relationships is critical to the success of our vision and mission." Additionally, this tab includes this vision and mission specifically around IG's commitment to diversity; however, this was not disclosed by any employee interviewed, particularly in terms of CSR.

Finally, the "About Us" and "What We Believe" tabs include a page on "How We Help People." Again, the use of "we" is incorporated throughout the entire website, but

particularly in IG's description of the company's values and CSR efforts. This page is comprised of two additional tabs: "Client Stories and Our Annual Report" and "Our Community Impact." The latter contains information strictly on IG's CSR focuses: the company foundation, childhood cancer, education, investing in urban neighborhoods, making our hometown great and employee volunteer work. Additionally, IG's most recent corporate citizenship report is easily accessible and available. Although the "Community Impact" tab is not easily accessible and a bit difficult to locate, the information it contains on IG's CSR initiatives is informative and emotionally appealing while aligning with those activities described by employees.

Overall, the content communicated on these external, formal reports echoes the definitions of CSR expressed by employees—emphasizing philanthropy, community partnership and volunteerism. In other words, employee best practices in terms of defining CSR is reflected in their writing of these efforts. Additionally, each CSR focus presented in the report appeared to be well-aligned with the overall values, priorities, business strategy and mission of the IG. The one value missing from the report, however, as presented in one employee interview, was that of diversity and inclusion efforts by the organization.

The second part of these results explore how CSR programs at IG are communicated internally. This again offers insight into how communication professionals are performing their jobs in terms of communicating IG's CSR activities. As expressed by the seven employees interviewed, CSR efforts are communicated internally through the organizations' "halls and walls," referring to internal channels, signage, meetings and conversations. Additionally, two ways IG communicates its CSR to employees is through

the use of storytelling and connecting these activities to the values of the company. In summary, analyzing the communication efforts and approaches reflects the professionals' best practices when communicating CSR activities. In other words, these are the visible manifestations and best, clearest ways these messages and activities are communicated.

Through the "halls and walls." The how CSR is enacted and understood can be explored by analyzing the various channels used to communicate it. Therefore, this theme explores those channels as identified by employees. Specifically, five of the seven employees interviewed are primarily responsible for creating and distributing communication messages focused on the company's CSR initiatives. More specifically, of a communication department made up of approximately 100 individuals, the four I interviewed were solely responsible for CSR communication—both internal and external. However, all seven employees gave consistent answers when asked the question, "how is CSR communicated to you" by reporting that the use of internal corporate communication channels, such as the employee intranet, internal news releases, volunteer website and social media accounts, were the most common mediums for any communication about CSR. Rena explained how these channels are both direct and effective:

> Our internal news channel allows us to send a quick message or thoughtful stories
> to communicate what we are doing around CSR and our focus areas. We also
> have an internal social media channel that essentially allows people [employees]
> to create a profile and to able to share things… So we use those as kind of those
> quick hits that are more direct from one to one and in groups.

Being able to share internal messages about CSR in the digital space allows for quick, effective communication to a mass of employees. When asked how she, as part of the

CSR communication team, tries to communicate these efforts to employees, she

emphasizes the use of space within the organization:

> We've been known to do a lot of things like in the halls and walls of our campus if we are trying to showcase how many volunteer hours that we had may be in the previous yard. Even if you walked in the lobby of this building there is one of those major signs that showcases that.

This provides insight into the internal dimension of IG's CSR by illustrating that

volunteerism is one of the main internal elements. Similarly, Rena uses the term "halls

and walls" to explain how employees learn, understand and know the company's

foundational values:

> Definitely through the halls and walls, it is the way that we talk to our employees through human resource communication, it's even at the small group level, it is really through the leaders that continue to carry that message and through our history, it is through our brand identity and that brand identity center we are going to be building in the new campus area—those types of values and those types of stories will be a part of that and it is just a part of our history, so it gets communicated through channels like corporate channels but also through touch points with advisors, through teams, through leaders.

Wendy highlighted how some of these internal channels are interactive, allowing

for a two-way connection between employees and CSR activities. She described the

company's newly-launched employee volunteer site, "so you can actually go there and

log your volunteer hours, and see what other programs and things that are going on you

might want to join."

More specifically, Debbie explained how the communication around CSR is done

very tactically, going beyond simply digital channels:

> Internally, everything from signage that you see in the hallways or the elevator…Additionally, the executives here do an incredible job at also ensuring that that communication [CSR] message is thread through all of their own messaging—in formal letters, conversations, and in the company that we keep. I

think using all of those internal channels while also truly ensuring that your top-down is really living those values, priorities and messages is important as well.

Debbie was just one of the employees who expressed the importance of leaders or executives as champions for CSR, an idea often highlighted in extant CSR research. Rob also mentioned leadership buy-in by stressing that, "we (at IG) want our leaders to be champions of the CSR work we are doing." Maclagan (1999) argues that participative leadership in an organization can contribute employee understanding of CSR. Therefore, top-down communication by executives contributes to the overall communicative structure in an organization and can be very effective at sharing CSR messages.

Additionally, Debbie explained that the evolution of CSR communication starts with in-person conversation around employees. When asked how the communication department at IG strives to communicate CSR to employees at all levels, she commented:

I think the way you talk about something or the way I talk about something to my peer groups helps change perspective and understanding. So when you are talking about communicating to a large group of people, that starts from within and from you and how you are talking about it to your peers.

Debbie's response illustrates the role these communication professionals play in disseminating information about IG's CSR efforts while being responsible for making sense of them to others.

As described by employees, communication around a topic, like CSR, is done tactically through digital or non-digital communication channels, through leadership advocacy and messaging, and simply through constant conversation by employees to one another. What makes these messages engaging, however, is the use of stories that these communication professionals create.

Through stories. IG attempts to communicate its CSR efforts through the use of

storytelling. An old Indian proverb seems fitting here, in terms of creating shared value through storytelling: "Tell me the facts and I'll learn. Tell me the truth and I'll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever" (Quinn, 2013). Gill (2015) argues that storytelling is an effective means of communicating internally with employees. Furthermore, he describes the use of stories as a means to motivate people and create a message persuasive and meaningful enough to engage individuals to care about cause and hopefully take action.

When asked "what is the best way for companies to communicate about CSR," most IG employees responded with some reference to storytelling. For Rob, program officer in the strategic philanthropy department, it is all about incorporating an emotional touch:

> I think it is important to tell the story in a very humanistic way, and in a way of who is being impacted and affected. Not just telling a story of giving a certain amount of money because "x amount of dollars" out of context doesn't mean a whole lot to people, but when you tell a story of a little girl, for instance, that is more powerful.

Rob continued by providing a very specific example of a CSR initiative by IG that incorporates elements of storytelling by adding a very personal touch to the company's national CSR platform, fighting childhood cancer:

> We just finished [an event] where we were a presenting sponsor on the business side, but as part of the sponsorship we had a parade float and a young girl rode on the float because she is fighting childhood cancer. So she became the embodiment of why we are fighting childhood cancer—she is a charismatic young girl and the float was designed for her vision of what she wants to be when she grows up. We told this story to our employees so that they could feel that emotional connection to her, and not just because we are giving a certain amount of dollars to childhood cancer research. This is a much more compelling way for employees to understand why this cause is so important.

While being described as a way to engage employees, this specific example was a public event in order to showcase IG as a sponsoring partner. Therefore, the emotional touch to this CSR campaign was also meant to engage the public as an effective public relations move.

Additionally, Rob stressed the importance of storytelling when engaging with and communicating to employees about CSR:

> We [IG's foundation] work closely with two individuals in the communications department to make sure all of our employees know about the good work we are doing. So we make a very cognizant effort to tell our story of our philanthropy to our employees especially because we know and we believe it increases employee engagement when employees feel pride in what their company is doing or giving back to.

Rob's comments connect to Chen and Hung-Baesecke's (2014) study on motivational factors for employee-CSR engagement. Specifically, the idea of employee pride relates to the personal motivational factor of a positively perceived organizational commitment to CSR. Additionally, the storytelling element relates to the organizational driver to employee CSR engagement of a genuine message communicated by the organization internally.

Heather believes CSR in any company is now an expectation, not just an option, and one that she believes will be a critical factor to the next generation of the workforce. Viewing CSR from a recruitment standpoint, targeting external audiences, she argued,

> Being able to tell that story [of our CSR initiatives] in a way that resonates with those individuals is going to be very critical. They won't just want to hear about it, they will want to have the opportunity to get involved—we want to perpetuate a culture of giving back among our employees.

Rena adds that creating a story or emotional element around any of IG's CSR focus areas

can be applied to a wide range of communication channels:

> There are just so many opportunities to share stories—through pictures, through anecdotes, through listening to a leader talk and share a specific story…We [the communication department] really dedicate our resources and our teams to be able to take on most challenges and effectively share the story of what IG supports and prioritizes…So we use our [CSR] platforms here at IG to create and share with our employees a story around community service and social responsibility.

Tying back to communicating CSR through internal channels and conversation, Rena's

comment around sharing stories relates to the previously noted importance of

interactivity of CSR communication. Specifically, the incorporation of storytelling in

CSR messaging engages employees in an emotional way.

For Lydia, communicating values at IG is also most effective through storytelling.

She considers the organization's values "tribal" because they are not always

communicated in writing. Similarly, CSR may be seen as a tribal; a characteristic that is

known but not always written down in every communication effort. Leading internal

CSR messages, Lydia highlighted the importance of connecting any communication back

to IG's values. So when asked how employees know what the values of the organization

are, Lydia stated,

> We reference our mission statement that is etched on the lobby wall, but I think when we are working on communication planning I think the values are inherent in some of the messaging... it's more a part of how we communicate something and we try to ladder it up to doing what's right. So in one of our newsletters, we have this spotlight called "Stronger Together" where we showcase how the field and the home office work together to benefit our clients and showing that value of doing the right thing. So I don't think it's so much staying but it is showing examples, like showcasing a volunteer who's been making a difference in the community who might've been using a resource to do that type of work. So I think it's not saying it but finding those stories and it is all about our storytelling.

As seen evident in these interviews, the element of storytelling is a powerful tool for communicating a company's CSR priorities and goals internally, while connecting to values—a theme that is later explored. Boje (1991) argues that storytelling is an effective strategy for delivering communication that is both engaging and relevant to internal stakeholders, regardless of each employees' individual roles and personal backgrounds, as stories can "resonate with meaning that is true to a receiver's own experience" (p. 666). Therefore, the use of storytelling from an internal communication perspective may aid in employee sensemaking and understanding of CSR within their organizations. Communication professionals may aid employees in making sense of CSR activities through their communication efforts, and storytelling is considered a best practice for them in effectively doing so. Interestingly, these stories are primarily plotted around philanthropy and volunteerism.

Through connecting CSR to the organization's values and mission. Participants indicated that CSR only connects and makes sense to them if it is aligned with the mission, priorities and values of their organization. Thus, for IG employees, a clear relationship between the values, priorities and mission of an organization to its CSR activities contributes to employee sensemaking and understanding of those activities.

After asking employees at IG to identify and describe the various CSR initiatives that the company takes on and supports, they explained why their organization initiates these CSR activities (i.e. how do these activities help or benefit your company?) and whether or not they believed these activities aligned with their company's values. Earlier in the interview, when I asked employees to list in general what the company's values and priorities were, all seven responded with: doing the right thing. Additionally, values

of providing financial security to families, building relationships (collaboration) and

taking a long-term approach to business practices were expressed by employees. Rena's

response reflected the value of supporting families:

> We are all about supporting families, bottom line. So the way that we talk about our foundation and our [CSR] focus areas is really our mission, which is creating that lasting impact in the community, but also do things for children and family so that they have a better tomorrow. And for each of those [CSR] areas, we check the box that they are all aligned with our mission…I think we are a company that has always given back and even the nature of our business is about making someone financially secure, giving them that idea of having a lifetime of possibilities, having them have that sense of going in the positive direction with feeling secure… so there is quite a sense of alignment of what we do for families and what can do to help others in our own community.

Similarly, Rob first emphasizes the importance of IG's value of putting families first

while also adhering to IG as a well-known corporate citizen, and how well this aligns

with IG's CSR initiatives:

> I think our national platform ties into the company values very well in terms of our work at IG, because our work is all about helping families be financially prepared through adversity, through troubled times, and know they will always be financially sufficient for keeping the family maintained… our other platforms ties into our belief that we are a corporate citizen here in [our city]. This is our hometown, this is where our employees are coming from…so if we don't maintain this city, we will not be able to be sustainable ourselves. So we invest in our hometown and in our community.

Here Rob illustrates how the community-outreach effort is mutually beneficial.

Specifically, these CSR efforts are philanthropic-based but also serve as good PR while

benefitting the company's bottom line.

Likewise, Wendy sees the CSR-value alignment as a cyclical relationship, arguing

that the company's commitment to building stronger communities through CSR activities

ultimately benefits the organization itself as a result:

> It is kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy…Helping people is a main value [at IG]—and so a lot of our CSR initiatives are financial related, but they're all about helping people and that aligns with what we are trying to do—help people. We want people to be stronger, self-sufficient, because self-sufficient people make a self-sufficient community… so we are geared toward building stronger people and then you have generations and generations of stronger families. We are a national company, so in every community we have representatives, so every community we are trying to build stronger for our field force and the clients we serve.

For Caroline, the values, priorities and goals of the company are constantly communicated, also creating a disturbance in the messages they are included in.

> Well, I know the values because I am an engaged employee. But, you could try and not know those are the values of IG, but you would have to actively try, and not attend meetings, and not listen to other employees, or read things, and simply not look at the walls… and 'doing the right thing' as a concept and value that lends itself in a variety of ways to all kinds of CSR. So, that is the easiest and best value to connect it [CSR] to.

Connecting the values and mission of an organization to the very core focus of its CSR efforts serves as a way for employees to make sense of, understand and connect to these activities. Additionally, this reduces equivocality around different meanings of CSR as employees understand that these activities in terms of how important it is to the company. After exploring how IG's communication professionals define CSR conceptually, through the lens of their organization, and how they attempt to communicate the company's CSR efforts both internally and externally the final subquestion aims to conclude how these individuals then find CSR to be meaningful in their work. Together, these three parts answer how communication professionals make sense of CSR.

RQ₁c: In what ways is CSR meaningful to Communication Professionals in their work?

After exploring how communication professionals define CSR and how they attempt to communicate IG's CSR activities through their work, this final section reveals how these individuals then view CSR efforts. In other words, how employees define and communicate CSR is what makes these programs meaningful in an organizational context, affecting how they view and then execute their jobs. At the end of the day, exploring how CSR is made meaningful and how it really matters to employees will help advance research by having a complete understanding how CSR is viewed and executed internally, ultimately affecting how it is communicated and promoted externally. Additionally, exploring this internal dimension may also provide answers to why organizations take on certain CSR initiatives.

Together, these three parts can answer the overarching research question of how communication professionals make sense of CSR. In other words, how employees define along with how they communicate CSR helps to reveal sensemaking. The following results are presented in a way that shows how CSR is meaningful and understood. Specifically, the CSR activities at IG are: a) voluntold, b) a constant, positive disturbance, c) entirely philanthropic or community-based and are merely for good PR, d) backed by employees, e) tribal yet programmatic, and f) are lacking rationale, or a reason "why."

CSR participation is "voluntold." An interesting theme that emerged from employee interviews was the importance of a CSR tradition at IG. For Heather, fprioritizing CSR within the company starts with IG's primary value, but then extends to leadership support:

> It (CSR) is part of the culture of doing what's right—it's always been encouraged. For senior leaders, it's not just suggested; they are basically required to get involved in the community. It enhances their leadership skills and we believe that helps build employee skills at all levels when they get involved in the community.

Similarly, when asked how IG argues for the importance of CSR, Caroline used the term "voluntold" to describe the feeling of employee participation and engagement in CSR. She continued by focusing strictly on how she believes employees view CSR in general at IG:

> It's interesting because I feel like for employees that have worked here for even just a few years, let alone the people who have been here for dozens of years, there's this feeling that it is just something that is expected of you to participate in. But, for new employees who don't feel that same level of expectation, like when you're in it and you're doing the communication on it you feel you are hitting people over the head with it, but for new employees, because they don't have that feeling of tradition around being a part of those initiatives, and not having those same feelings, you can be overwhelmed by it. Because you don't have that same tradition.

Thus, it seems that employees at some level feel pressure to participate and buy-into CSR activities, primarily volunteering, at their companies, or feel the pressured by the sense of tradition around CSR held by tenured employees. Comparably, Wendy asserted that there is no real argument to be made about why CSR is important to IG:

> …[CSR] has just always been. Like when you start here, it is always a choice…but the campaigns are highly visible. It is very highly encouraged— you're not forced to do it and they keep your involvement pretty confidential, but it is pretty clear that this is really important to the company. The company really believes in this; we are a leader in the community and want to be [a leader], so it is very much a part of the belief system here.

While these three employees expressed a feeling of "untold expectations" surrounding CSR at IG, only one employee, Debbie, referenced the company's history in describing why IG takes on these initiatives and believes in the importance of CSR:

One reason is because we are a 100+ year-old company and we see the value of it, and it's in our roots… But another one that I find incredibly interesting about the company is that after the founder of the company essentially started it, there was a major train accident. He still paid out on all of those policies by taking out a personal loan on his own dime. So I think when you are founded on something like that, those roots really run deep.

Heather, Caroline and Wendy's responses illustrate an unclear understanding and connection between the importance of CSR within their company (i.e. how well it connects with IG's values and is extremely visible/promoted) and the specific argument behind the reason for pursuing those CSR activities. Debbie was the only employee interviewed to trace this argument back to the company's history, while other employees credited a sense of expectation and tradition, or once again adhering to CSR's alignment with IG's values and mission. Since communication is a way to reduce equivocality in order to aid sensemaking processes, it would seem that effectively communicating the history and reason behind CSR at a company would be crucial. This would provide employees with meaning and purpose to help them make sense of CSR efforts within their organization.

CSR is a constant, positive disturbance. When attempting to understand how these communication professionals viewed CSR, an interesting finding was how communication around these activities were seen as a disturbance. In terms of CSR-specific messages, Caroline's answer was simply, "it's everywhere… I mean, we talk about some of these CSR campaigns until our faces are blue." In fact, she explained how employees are almost overwhelmed with the constant communication around CSR throughout the halls and walls of the organization's infrastructure:

It creates a disturbance, but in a positive way. Like, it is talked about everywhere—it is happening right in front of you. You cannot come to work and

> not know it's campaign week here. It just hits you in the face in a good and exciting way. Especially when we are trying to hit our goals for a campaign, for example, there is a huge chart with every department name and their goal listed on there.

As expressed by employees, the feeling of being overwhelmed by CSR communication at IG was not viewed as a negative, but rather a positive way to encourage employee participation, understanding and awareness. In fact, Rena described how IG argues for the importance of CSR within the company through constant communication of these initiatives:

> It is a message that we just have embedded in our communication efforts. That could be a speech, a story, a "hey did you know" fact…We always share this kind of information [CSR initiatives] to employees to get them motivated and to be mindful and join the causes we support.

Keeping employees constantly aware and updated on an organization's CSR initiatives is crucial to individual buy-in, support, dedication and continued communication. Austin, Leonard, Reficco and Wei-Skillern (2006) argue that if employees are aware of the responsible practices and activities, like philanthropic efforts, of their employer, feelings of pride in the company and increased dedication to CSR efforts are formed as a result. Furthermore, studies (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004; Austin et al., 2006) show that CSR can lead employees to offer more time and energy to their companies. Therefore, since it is crucial for a company's CSR activities to be supported and further communicated by employees, internal communication must be constant, up-to-date and impactful. As a result, as expressed by IG employees like Rena, these communication messages can motivate individuals and encourage them to become active in CSR initiatives. Additionally, these constant messages may be the company's attempt to aid employee sensemaking and complete understanding of its CSR.

CSR is entirely philanthropic and for good PR. Not surprisingly, IG's communication professionals' definition of CSR aligned with the company's definition. Specifically, as described by these employees, IG's CSR activities are primarily philanthropic and community-based. Keeping in mind the terms employees associated with CSR—giving back, financial giving, volunteerism, corporate citizen, philanthropy, generosity, etc.—the following results also demonstrate that CSR efforts at IG appear to be for good PR or image.

When asked what CSR initiatives IG takes on, almost all employees responded by naming four or five focus areas: making its hometown a great destination for prospective employees and tourists, partnering with local school districts, working closely with local neighborhoods, employee volunteerism and curing childhood cancer. Undoubtedly, each of these focus areas are primarily philanthropic or community outreach based. In other words, there is an external element to them. Rena claimed that the mission behind these efforts is "to create a lasting impact in the community and having a bigger purpose." She explained that IG measures its CSR success "around the number of hours our volunteers have given in a year and what we have donated to education around the country because of our matching gifts program." The explanation of IG's CSR efforts by employees suggests a strong philanthropic presence. Additionally, these descriptions reflect the definitions and terms associated with CSR by each individual.

While these CSR efforts are described as meaningful and important to IG by these communication professionals, it also appears that these activities are primarily for good external press or identity. When asked about what CSR means to her and at her company, Caroline references the strong external perception these activities can give:

> You see company's bragging or talking about what they do on a regular basis because it's good. If you do a good thing, you should tell people about it. I mean here [at IG] the foundation is pretty widespread…it is giving back, both financially and with the time of our employees. It is important to them because they enjoy doing [volunteering] and having communicated when they go out and do something to share what happened.

Similarly, Heather said that CSR efforts help IG by helping attract and retain talent—being an employer of choice. Additionally, she stated that "it helps us build a brand of our organization by people hearing about us from a sales or marketing perspective and also a doing good work perspective." For her, the long-term impacts of investing in CSR activities help "build a legacy that a company leaves especially in its hometown." Likewise, Rena explained that initiating CSR programs is "a driver of sales and way to generate awareness around our brand. The hope is that if a potential client hears that we are connected to childhood cancer, maybe they will decide to pick up the phone and want to have a conversation with us."

Later in the interview, Caroline again emphasized the benefit communicating CSR activities in terms of reputation and press while highlighting the company's primary philanthropic effort:

> Especially when you look at Childhood Cancer, it's the kind of CSR that weaves into everyone but it's a problem that's everywhere. So regionally we are considered a good citizen and that's great, but then nationally we are shining light on a cause that affects a lot of people that can maybe help you fix whatever your cause is which is the main goal, but it's all having people say 'IG did a nice thing, that's good.' It would be silly to think that part of this isn't for good PR. It's also nice that people see a good thing out of us.

Echoing points made by other employees, Debbie also described the perceived external benefit to initiating CSR efforts. When asked what the long-term impacts of CSR could be, she responded by saying, "I think for a company it is retaining talent. I really do believe that because when people are motivated to work at a place, they want to stay

longer and that motivation could come from CSR programming." Additionally, Debbie emphasized the importance of "legitimizing" your CSR activities. This likely refers to how these activities will be viewed externally by shareholders and societal members, relating again to this idea that CSR efforts at IG are primarily for good PR. Similarly, Rob said that even ten years ago, "we were much more quiet about giving back, but now our story of philanthropy has gotten louder because we get out there and tell people who we are and also who we are as a corporate citizen as well." Another interesting theme that was found related to how these communication professionals view CSR to be meaningful through their sensemaking of these activities was their own personal support of these efforts.

CSR is backed by employees. As employees make sense of CSR within their organizations, it appears that they start to feel connected to these initiatives and the values that are attached to them. For IG communication professionals, this feeling of connectedness, passion, pride and engagement manifested itself in employees assuming the role of ambassadors or champions for CSR.

Research has established the importance of leadership in an organizational communication context, so it makes sense that employees look to leaders when making sense of CSR within their organizations. For Rob, CSR buy-in and support starts with the company's leadership:

> It is crucial to build advocates on our top leadership levels… They are part of our boards so they are always privy to the decisions we are making, why we are finding what we are finding, and what is success that we are seeing… So that our leaders are champions of the CSR work we are doing… We always get buy-in from leadership for the investment that we are making and the initiatives we are undertaking.

Wendy echoed Rob's opinion on the importance of leadership support, claiming that it will encourage participation and engagement from employees at all levels of the organization:

> One good way for (companies) to communicate about CSR is through their leaders. They have to be the models and if the company is really committed to CSR, they have to live it and set the example. So I think they need to set a good example of themselves and just by doing things and sharing what they are doing I think that reflects well and hopefully encourages their employees to want to do it as well.

However, even though Wendy highlighted the importance of leadership, when asked what the best way for companies to communicate about their CSR activities, she primarily stressed employee presence:

> The best way is through employees. It has got to be genuine, and I think that is the hardest thing with CSR because in so many communications for companies it looks funny or that they are trying to cover something bad and so they are trying to shine a light on something good. So I think it is most authentic when it is through the employees. They are the best ambassadors and when we see them out in the community and doing good work, what an endorsement—there's no stronger way. It is people and they are out there doing things and shining a very good light on the company. So I think that [employees] is probably the best way.

For Rena, IG's lead strategic communication person, "the communication teams are ambassadors [for CSR] specifically"—since these individuals are the main creators and distributors for any and all CSR messages. Similar to Rena, Lydia, IG's lead internal communication consultant, took the time to provide reason behind why IG takes on certain CSR initiatives, like their national platform of fighting childhood cancer. Additionally, her role of communicating anything CSR-related internally deems her a kind of "ambassador" and primary messenger or liaison, connecting IG's foundation and the rest of the employees:

> For me, working for a company but that has a nonprofit arm is really meaningful work; you see that you are making a difference even if you are just communicating to employees about what you're doing. There is a direct impact there—that we are talking about our new volunteer program website and people are using it. So you just know that you are a conduit to change, I guess—good change. So it is definitely meaningful work. There are a lot of high expectations there too, as there should be. And there is a lot of passion behind it as well.

Lydia's description of her work as meaningful, passionate and change-inducing spoke to the fact that her role on the communications team allows her to make an argument for CSR internally. Once again, this is philanthropic-based and limited. Of particular importance is how this passion relates to CSR ambassadorship. Specifically, Lydia's feeling of making a difference in her company, specifically in her role of leading employee communication of CSR initiatives, affirms her role as an ambassador for CSR at IG.

When asked how CSR affects her daily work life, Caroline adheres to the organizational culture of IG, "it is just part of being an IG employee, truly. A message from a leader (about CSR) is one thing, and it's nice and helps, but when your peers are looking at you and saying 'this is really important to us' it is a lot more effective." However, for employees like Caroline and Wendy, whose specific roles in communication do not incorporate CSR on the same level as Rena, Lydia, Debbie, Rob and Heather, CSR does not impact their daily work life. Even though they both appear to be very knowledgeable and up-to-date with IG's CSR efforts and appear to be ambassadors when talking about these efforts, CSR does not necessarily touch their role on a daily basis. When asked how CSR affects her everyday work life, Caroline simply responds with, "I don't know that it actually does. It's just doing the right thing, but does not affect my every day work."

Similarly, Wendy's primary work is not affected by CSR on a day-to-day basis. She finds her only CSR-work connection to be when she puts together IG's corporate citizenship report:

> I am not as deep into [CSR]. However, I am always on the lookout before I do the reports, we do a lot of good and I think one of the challenges for putting together the corporate citizenship report was how to narrow it down and give it some focus… So every day when I come in and I am looking at our own channels and whether it's all the releases going out or our coverage letter to employees, something I'll see something and I think it would be good for the report I will stick it in a file and use it later. So I'm always kind of conscious of what we are doing, but because the majority of my role is focused on financial communication, the report is a unique piece of my role.

Although Wendy's primary role is communicating financial-related information, particularly through her work on IG's annual report, she is aware of messaging around CSR through internal communication efforts. Specifically, she wants to highlight the good her company is doing to external audiences, which will be accomplished by including CSR in IG's various reporting.

While both Wendy and Molly's roles are not focused on CSR communication or execution, they find it to be important to the company and to themselves on a personal level. Throughout all seven interviews, it was clear that employees felt a strong sense of pride and engagement in terms of IG's CSR efforts—something they expressed is fully ingrained in the culture of the company and is strongly supported by employees.

CSR is tribal yet programmatic. As employees describe CSR activities to be foundational, historic and distinct to IG, it appears these efforts are tribal that is a characteristic of the organization's members and system and embedded in the company's culture. However, these are also very programmatic or, in other words, campaign-based and one off. The following results illustrate this tribal-programmatic tension.

When asked how IG's CSR initiatives align with the company's mission and values, Heather referred to organizational culture while touching on the idea of "voluntold" by stating that leaders are basically required to take part in community outreach activities, which influences employees at all levels. Specifically, Heather suggests that IG's CSR initiatives—primarily philanthropic and volunteerism efforts—have always been part of the company's core. Similarly, Wendy echoes this idea:

> It is really part of the culture here and it is all the way from top-down, our leaders, it is almost an expectation that they are giving back to the community because they need to be good role models for employees… and I think one of the reasons a lot of employees are attracted to this company is because it does align with their personal values… [CSR] is really just ingrained in the culture.

Together, Wendy and Heather's responses suggest that CSR is systemic and embedded in IG's talk and culture. However, Wendy later made a point about employee-company fit in terms of CSR, saying "it is just who we are, this is us, this is what we believe in and if you don't believe in it too then you won't want to work here." As previously explored, these activities are very programmatic and campaign-based. In fact, almost all employees interviewed reverted describing CSR efforts back to volunteerism. Therefore, a tension exists. If an employee feels expected and pressured to participate in volunteering or campaign-based events, then these efforts are too programmatic. So while CSR appears to be ingrained in the culture and connected to company values, how can it be if it is entirely programmatic and one-off? Findings illustrate that these activities may be more ingrained in the company's communication and less in its core identity.

CSR is lacking rationale. While CSR is constantly communicated and highly visible throughout the halls and walls of IG's infrastructure, it does not seem to be communicated between employees. In fact, CSR activities appear to be so common, they

are unquestioned. When asked *why* their company takes on these specific initiatives, employees expressed confusion.

For example, Lydia said that CSR initiatives are strategic, but does not explain why or how. Almost all employees could name IG's four or five key CSR focus areas, most were unable to give the strategic reasoning behind why and how those initiatives were chosen. For example, Debbie's response was that "there is some past precedent around it as to why we continue to do it," but did not elaborate. Similarly, Rob responded by saying, "the simple answer is I think this has kind of been part of the company's DNA from the very beginning." So while referencing the company's identity and history, employees were still unable to give a clear, specific reason behind IG's CSR initiatives.

Additionally, Wendy expressed her confusion when considering why, in fact, IG engages in CSR initiatives at all or argues for its execution:

> I don't know that we have ever said why we do it here, or *this* is why we do it. And since I am in charge of the corporate citizenship report, I had to kind of try to think of the strategy—not like I made anything up, but I had to connect the dots, because it is more like there is a reason why we do it and that we think it is the right thing and we have these values, but we haven't quite made that connection... it has never been a 'here's why we should do it.' It is just who we are, this is us, this is what we believe in, and if you don't believe in that too you won't want to work here.

Especially for those individuals tasked with creating communication messages around CSR activities, it would seem important for them to know the company's reasons and strategies behind choosing them. As Wendy's response illustrates, these employees may have to think of the "why" for themselves when creating messages or writing them down in different reports.

In contrast, Caroline automatically refers back to the PR side of initiating CSR programs. When asked why IG takes on these specific activities, her response was,

> They benefit us by getting our name into different communities… so when we are giving back and doing stuff for these communities, you can see the progress and [community members] enjoy it, but that then comes back here in the long run as a positive for us.

What's interesting about this response is that Caroline is a relatively new employee, having joined IG less than two years prior. So her thoughts demonstrate that she has not been communicated the "why" behind IG's CSR. Therefore, her automatic response is to assume or think that these initiatives are taken on merely for building external relationships and a reputable image in the community as a mutually beneficial effort.

Overall, the way that communication professionals define CSR in their own words and through their organizational lens, as well as how they attempt to communicate these activities in their work ultimately affects how they find CSR to be meaningful at IG. As suggested in these results, employees are quite familiar with their organizations CSR initiatives, but have a limited understanding of CSR beyond IG. The subsequent chapter discusses these results in depth in terms of how findings expand on theory and offer practical insights into CSR in practice.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

This study presented a number of findings related to the internal dimension of CSR in an organizational setting. These findings are drawn from in-depth interviews of communication professionals and rhetorical analysis of externally-directed CSR messages from IG, a financial services organization. First, these findings illustrate that communication professionals define CSR through the lens of their organization, but primarily define these efforts in terms of philanthropy, volunteerism, financial giving and community-outreach. These terms reflect best practices in how these individuals believe CSR should be executed.

Second, findings from this study reveal how CSR activities are communicated at IG, first by analyzing formal, external reporting efforts and second by exploring how these employees attempt to communicate CSR internally to other employees. In turn, these communication practices reflect the individuals' definitions of CSR due to the fact that these efforts are primarily philanthropic as volunteerism and community outreach activities are emphasized. For these employees, best practices for communicating CSR activities are through: internal halls and walls, incorporating stories, connecting to organizational values, the company's corporate citizenship report and by planning to incorporate CSR into its annual report in the future.

As presented in the literature review, how CSR efforts are made sense of, defined and talked about or communicated is what makes them meaningful in an organizational context. By exploring how employees at IG define and attempt to communicate CSR

reveals how these activities are viewed and understood to be meaningful within the company. Specifically, this study explored how communication professionals view IG's CSR efforts, which is part of their job. Results reveal that these individuals describe IG's CSR activities to be: voluntold, a constant disturbance, entirely philanthropic and largely for good PR, backed by employees, tribal yet programmatic, and lacking rationale. Altogether results provide insight into how communication professionals make sense of CSR.

As May (2014) calls for, scholars need to address both internal and external functions of CSR. This focus on what have been traditionally separated forms of communication directs organizational scholars to "fully understand the degree to which CSR programs are embedded within the culture of the organization or whether, by contrast, they are designed merely for PR or risk management" (p. 101). Therefore, this study offered a unique opportunity to explore, more deeply, the "internal" dimension from strictly an employee perspective. These individuals are often the first stakeholder group to be introduced and confronted with CSR messages by the organization, asking them to be advocates and communicators for the causes supported by the organization's foundation and strategic philanthropy departments. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, external messages communicated to the public are undeniably preceded by conversations occurring internally within the "halls and walls" of organizations and their employees. Thus, it was important to first explore and understand these internal conversations and how they contribute to employee sensemaking of CSR.

Theoretical Contributions

Findings contribute to and advance theory regarding the internal sensemaking of CSR. Applying sensemaking as a theoretical framework answers May's (2014) call for research that explores internal and external dimensions of CSR. May argues this is the best way to provide a complete picture of CSR's place in the organization. Interviews with IG's communication professionals reflected best practices in terms of defining CSR conceptually and communicating these efforts both internally and externally. Additionally, this study adds to the conversation on the topic of CSR in literature by contributing a glimpse into its internal dimension through the employee perspective. Beyond these general points, three specific theoretical contributions are noteworthy.

One significant theoretical implication centers on the defining and describing of CSR. In general, communication professionals automatically reverted to volunteerism when defining CSR and describing these efforts at IG. Specifically, when providing examples of IG CSR initiatives, volunteerism was the primary filter in doing so. For instance, when asked about CSR initiatives that she knows IG takes on, Wendy responds by referring to the company's foundation work but then follows with,

> I am actually a member of the 'time to read' program which is one of the staples of the literacy program… so they bring kids in from the school districts here and you read to them and they match them up with mentors and tutors and so as an employee it's great.

So while referring to the general work of IG's foundation, she provides a specific example of employee volunteering. Furthermore, when asked how CSR is communicated to employees, Wendy describes the company's employee newsletter and website by once again giving an example of volunteering: "There are always volunteer opportunities and

stories about programs, and the new thing is this volunteer site so you can actually go

there and log your volunteer hours and see what other programs are going on."

Similarly, when asked to describe her role in terms of CSR work at IG, Rena

explained that,

> … my work has really evolved from just media and public relations to now
> leading the team that also does the internal communication to employees and to
> our field. For example, this week we are going to be able to tell employees how
> many volunteer hours took place last year to be able to say that our employees did
> 30,000 hours of volunteering which will give them that pride of what we have
> done collectively.

Additionally, both Caroline and Rena refer to their CSR participation by

describing boards or positions they have volunteered for. When asked if she had a desire

to get more involved from a CSR perspective, Rena responded by saying, "to externally

involve myself in women for [community organization], so making sure that I have

things in my back pocket that I am doing in my community." Likewise, Caroline refers to

one of IG's core CSR focus areas, employee volunteerism by saying, "one initiative that

is more community engagement is stuff about being on boards of like Women in

Leadership and stuff like that… and I was on the executive committee of the United Way

campaign." For these individuals, the best way to describe IG's CSR and their own

personal involvement was by giving an example of volunteering.

So while it appeared through interviews that IG's communication professionals

have a general, comprehensive understanding and familiarity with CSR, these efforts are

still described and activated as volunteerism. In other words, their sensemaking of CSR

both conceptually and in terms of their organization appears to be narrow in the sense

that best practices and examples are automatically filtered through volunteering and philanthropy.

A second theoretical contribution centers on one theme from the results: that there exists a tribal-programmatic tension in terms of IG's CSR. Therefore, CSR appears to be embedded in the company's talk, but not in its culture. At first, hearing the great amount of communication efforts dedicated to CSR was positive and CSR efforts appeared systemic and ingrained in the organizational culture. As employees were unable to answer the "why" question to their company's CSR activities, this gave additional insight into the organization's culture and its incorporation of CSR.

For example, one employee used the term "voluntold" to express how CSR seems to be a tradition and untold expectation. Here, CSR appears to be unspoken, assumed and unquestionable. This relates to Schein's (2004) three levels of culture model, where level three describes the unconscious assumptions and beliefs of an organization. Applying this to IG, the company's CSR efforts and values appear to be tribal and rooted in tradition, while also being constantly communicated, but is a basic assumption of the organization that is so foundational it rarely gets talked about in-depth or questioned. This notion of CSR and values as "tribal" was described by one employee, Lydia, who said these ideas were inherent in communication messages but not really written down anywhere. She explained that for the CSR communications team it is more about telling stories and trying to connect these specific messages back to the IG's main value of doing what's right.

CSR at IG appears to be tribal in how employees describe these activities as foundational to the organization. They are not questioned or doubted, but rather just assumed and supported internally by employees. Additionally, because CSR efforts are backed by employees, constantly communicated and viewed as a common assumption to the company's character, CSR seems to be systemic and cultural. Unfortunately, though, findings of this study reveal a specific tension around CSR at IG. While these activities seem to be foundational as an assumption of the company's culture, they are also very programmatic and one-off. In fact, almost all employees emphasized the philanthropic and campaign-based element to each of the company's CSR focus areas. This seems to be partly due to employees' general understanding of CSR as a concept, commonly referring to CSR as the good work a company does in terms of community involvement, having an impact and giving back. Additionally, IG holds campaign days or week as a way to engage employees, particularly from a volunteering or fundraising standpoint. One specific example are the company's "days on" in which employees are encouraged from taking time out of the office to go out into the community to volunteer. So while technically not a day off, the company dedicates the day "on" to allowing employees time to give back.

On one hand, these activities are tribal—unquestioned and undisputed. Employees support these initiatives because the company's communication of them enables internal sensemaking and, as a result, individuals find CSR to be meaningful and important. One employee even stated that there's never really been a "here's why we do it [CSR]" point made to employees. For her, "it's just who we are, this is us, this is what you believe in and if you don't believe in that too you won't want to work here." In other words, the

company lacks in providing employees with a rationale behind its CSR efforts. This view of CSR as foundational, ingrained in the very culture of the organization, connected to its values and mission and unquestioned makes CSR appear to be systemic. However, IG's CSR activities are almost entirely philanthropic, campaign-based and community oriented, making them programmatic in nature. If true, then CSR would actually not be systemic at this company. Thus, a contradiction and tension exists. While CSR is embedded into the talk of and messages created by communication professionals, it is not truly embedded into the organizational culture. One reason for this, perhaps, may be the lack of rational behind these programs.

A third and final theoretical contribution centers on the fact that IG's CSR does not appear to be part of the organization's identity. Rather, results suggest that these efforts are additive due to the programmatic focus and appearing to be merely for good PR. As a result, IG's CSR activities may not be included in important conversations, connecting to Deetz's (2003) work on the inclusion of social values in the organizational decisional chain. In other words, since these activities are additive, they might not be prioritized in decision-making conversations in order to be truly embedded in the organization's identity. For Deetz, workplaces must become appropriate places for value debate in order to be socially responsible and positive institutions. More specifically, CSR can be made possible within an organization by including multiple social values into the decision-making processes and development of communication efforts and execution. In order for this to be possible with the inclusion of broader social values, like CSR, into corporate decision making, organizations must include stakeholder involvement. In other words, employees, for example, and the social values they represent should be included

in decision-making conversations. The communication and sensemaking practices by internal members are the way in which organizations incorporate values and make decisions.

At IG, only a few employees—three from the CSR communication team—described themselves as having "a seat at the table" in terms of important decision-making conversations regarding CSR efforts. Typically, these conversations happen in meetings with IG's foundation, or strategic philanthropy department. As described by those employees involved, these meetings revolve around strategies for better communicating IG's CSR and finding ways to engage employees. Therefore, employee sensemaking and thoughts around social values, perhaps in terms of CSR, must be represented, especially in the processes of organizational decision-making (Deetz, 2003). Since employee sensemaking is what makes something, like CSR, meaningful within an organization seems important that the values of these individuals be represented. Additionally, as explored in the literature review, employee sensemaking impacts key processes such as decision making.

Moreover, what may aid employee sensemaking and further embed CSR programs into the very identity of the organization is the involvement of leadership. A study by Angus-Leppan, Metcalf and Benn (2010) argue that explicit CSR activities and messages are connected to autocratic leadership. Overall, this study suggests that leadership is needed to successfully formulate implement CSR initiatives within an organization in order to eliminate ambiguity. This idea was demonstrated in results as a few communication professionals mentioned the importance of leadership-CSR advocacy and commitment.

Apart from employee ambassadorship, Wendy believes the other best way to communicate CSR efforts is through leadership: "…they have to be the models and if the company is really committed to CSR, they have to live and set an example… just by doing things and sharing what they are doing I think reflects well." Similarly, Rena said, "CSR is really communicated through the leaders that continue to carry that message." When asked why IG takes on these particular CSR initiatives, Rob accredits leadership by saying, "it has been passed on from leader to leader that it is important for us to continue giving back." This ties back to Basu and Palazzo's (2008) work calling the processes of managers and others in leadership positions the institutional factors or determinants of CSR within an organization.

Practical Implications

In addition to theoretical contributions, this study uncovered interesting findings centered on how CSR is viewed and made sense of internally by employees, specifically communication professionals. In this section I provide practical implications directed at understanding how CSR is understood by organizational members. It is important for organizations to understand how their communication of CSR affects employee sensemaking and how the internal dimension relates to or affects external messaging. This study offered unique insight into CSR from the communication professional perspective as these individuals are responsible for creating messaging around CSR. Therefore, practical implications center on how communication professionals make sense of CSR efforts and how they view and create them to be meaningful within their organizations. I present these implications in three distinct themes as established through employee interviews and the rhetorical analysis of external communication efforts.

Specifically, I suggest that: 1) CSR needs rationale, 2) CSR has evolved and communication professionals must then evolve with it, and 3) CSR is additive.

CSR needs rationale. The first practical implication connects to a theoretical contribution as well as one of the primary themes of question 1c results—addressing the "why" of CSR. It may sometimes be good to question these types of activities and have dialogue centered on the questions of "how" or "why" certain CSR efforts are chosen by a company. Employee interviews revealed that CSR participation at IG appears traditional and expected; one individual even used the term "voluntold" to describe employee involvement. Therefore, being able to answer the "why" question around a company's CSR in order to frame the reasons for these activities may be especially important. Particularly, the dialogue around the specific purpose and history of IG's CSR focus areas is lacking.

Generally, especially for communication professionals, it may be good to question organizational activities and have dialogue around the "why." CSR needs to be part of employee sensemaking and then following in socialization in order to be talked about and therefore made meaningful. While employee support and positively view CSR in their company, there may be a downside to tradition-laden CSR. If CSR within the organization is constantly communicated and feels like an unspoken expectation, employees will not question or think too much about it. Therefore, if these individuals may not know why their company takes on these certain CSR initiatives, or why the focus of these efforts were strategically chosen, this may affect the way employees make sense and talk about CSR, ultimately affecting their job in communicating these efforts. This is particularly pertinent for employees who are new to the company and find CSR

messaging to be overwhelming and equivocal—affecting their inability to make sense of these efforts and their discussions of them.

While CSR is constantly communicated and highly visible throughout the "halls and walls" of the organization, it is not really communicated between employees because it is so common and unquestioned. The fact that things are so deeply rooted in tradition is not necessarily a bad thing, but can be problematic when employees are tasked with explaining it. For instance, in an interview with the employee in charge of bringing CSR into the company's external reports, such as the annual and corporate citizenship report, she described her struggle with identifying and communicating that this is why IG takes on these initiatives. Therefore, it is critical that companies like IG have open dialogue around CSR, perhaps through additional "town hall" meetings between different departments and levels of the organization or through having more conversations between other members of the communication department and the foundation. This would allow for a better understanding of the foundation's CSR activities and priorities, particularly for those individuals tasked with communicating all or part of these efforts.

Related to the "voluntold" element of CSR at this specific organization, one IG employee who has only been with the company for about two years, explained that this feeling of tradition does not resonate as well with newer employees. She stated, "for new employees, we don't have that same level of expectation…they [new employees] don't have that feeling of tradition around being part of those [CSR] initiatives, and not having those same feelings, you can be overwhelmed by it. Because you don't have that same tradition." Another employee attributed this voluntold feeling to the fact that CSR efforts and campaigns are highly visible. While employees are not forced to take part in CSR

activities, it is very highly encouraged. This influences employee sensemaking because they start believing and understanding CSR to be very important to the company.

Since employee volunteerism is one of IG's core CSR areas, internal communication around this is crucial. Specifically, framing messages and explaining to employees why the company chose and supports each focus is essential to employee ambassadorship and involvement. Therefore, employee CSR participation is both symbolic and instrumental in an organizational context. On one hand, employee buy-in and association speaks well to the organization's culture and work environment. On the other, employee participation and, particularly, volunteerism is instrumental in that this involvement is a CSR activity and simultaneously provides the company with social return on investment. This symbolic-instrumental connection perpetuated internally will ultimately project externally as part of the company's image and identity.

Particularly for new employees and especially Millennials who are often attracted to companies with a strong CSR presence, being told "here/this is why we do CSR" is crucial, especially in terms of employee sensemaking and support. For those individuals who want to personally make a difference and feel their company is really committed to these efforts, dialogue and communication of the "why" may be important. While it may be obvious to some that these efforts match perfectly and strategically with company values and mission, it may not be to new employees. Additionally, while it is good for CSR to be ingrained into organizational culture, particularly for tenured employees who view it as traditional, this may be overwhelming to those joining. Therefore, since there is often so much equivocality around CSR within organizations, it is imperative to have explicit discussion around it to allow for sensemaking. Thus, companies need to

internally frame their CSR efforts to employees while also doing the same in their external messages communicated to outside audiences.

As explored in the literature review, CSR must be a virtue rooted internally within the organization, rather than just a formality requested by external audiences (Chen & Hung-Baescke, 2011). Additionally, engagement and support for CSR is generated by employee involvement and sensemaking—seeing a clear link between CSR and company culture, purpose and mission. Therefore, company framing around CSR, providing a clear reason and story behind these activities, will help employees understand that CSR is a true intention and priority of the company which will eliminate any suspicion and confusion employees may have. Ultimately, this will only solidify and further construct the organization's identity that will include CSR.

Fairhurst (2011) describes framing as an act that constructs a reality and views communication as a dialogue that constructs meaning based on a situation. Therefore, framing is the ability to articulate something that translates into action. Fairhurst argues that communication messages must be carefully framed through specific language, stories, etc. In terms of CSR, the framing of these messages will help define these activities in an organizational setting. As a result, framing will aid sensemaking in that employees will understand CSR in the way the company intended them to. Additionally, the way individuals think and talk about these efforts will be shared with other employees as part of the organizational culture. Therefore, companies can address the "why" of CSR through better internal framing and storytelling practices to help their employees, particularly communication professionals, really "get" CSR.

CSR has evolved, so must communication professionals. As explored in the literature review, CSR has evolved. Once referred to as just "social responsibility," CSR has taken on new definitions in the form of corporate responsiveness, citizenship, sustainability, ethics and labor relations, among others. Therefore, the way CSR is talked about, defined and communicated in organizational contexts has also evolved. However, as evident in results, communication professionals still largely define CSR narrowly in terms of philanthropy, volunteerism and community outreach. Thus, these individuals and their work in communication roles have not quite caught up to how CSR is defined and thought of today. In other words, CSR is more than just philanthropy, both in general and in how organizations are starting to view these efforts. Therefore, communication professionals must evolve in their communication practices of CSR activities.

Through analyzing external CSR messages as well as those internal efforts described by communication professionals, I found IG's CSR communication to be two-way, asymmetrical, one of the CSR communication strategies described by Morsing and Schultz (2006). This means that the communication department identifies relevant stakeholders and these individuals are assured that the company is ethical and socially responsible, and will respond to corporate actions if necessary. Additionally, the company attempts to change the audience's attitudes and behaviors in order to have external endorsement of its CSR activities.

What I propose is for IG and like organizations to transition from this stakeholder response or asymmetrical strategy to the stakeholder involvement or two-way symmetric strategy of CSR communication. This strategy assumes that stakeholders, including employees, co-construct a company's CSR efforts in which they participate and even

suggest actions. Unlike the stakeholder response strategy in which communication professionals are charged with identifying which stakeholder groups are relevant, this involvement strategy assumes that the communication department builds relationships with its stakeholders around CSR. Morsing and Schultz argue that "stakeholders need to be involved in order to develop and promote positive support as well as for the company to understand and concurrently adapt to their concerns, i.e. to develop its CSR initiatives" (p. 328). This way, both parties are involved in the dialogue around CSR.

CSR is additive. The final practical implication of this study is that CSR efforts appear to be additive specifically at IG. As communication professionals consistently described these activities to be philanthropic or campaign based and undoubtedly for good PR or press, CSR appears to just be an added function in order for the company to look good to both internal and external audiences including the surrounding public. Additionally, communication professionals and those charged with designing IG's foundational CSR work have a very narrow definition of CSR conceptually, automatically reverting to volunteerism of philanthropy. While these examples are definitely pillars of CSR efforts, Rangan, Chase and Karim (2015) argue that initiating CSR programs must go beyond the philanthropic focus.

As such, CSR efforts should also improve operational effectiveness and transform a company's business model. For example, companies should invest in sustainability initiatives, employee working conditions and addressing real social or environmental challenges. Overall, Rangan et al. (2015) state that companies must develop coherent CSR strategies that should be an essential part of a CEO or other leadership's job. While IG seems to have a secure grasp on the philanthropic pillar, the organization must also

pursue other CSR activities in order to "alter its social or environmental impact and financial performance" (para. 9). Once a company has developed a coherent and comprehensive CSR strategy, communication professionals can better position these programs through two-way, symmetric communication in order to involve stakeholders.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has two primary limitations. First, the small sample of this study did not allow for complete understanding of CSR from a wide collection of employees. Additionally, the small population did not include an adequate representation of employees from different levels and departments. At the beginning stages of this process, I intended to interview approximately fifteen participants from a variety of departments from IG due to its particularly large, well-established community and CSR presence. However, due to the difficulty of gaining access and authorization to employees, as May (2014) credits for the lack of the insider's perspective on CSR, I was only authorized to seven individuals.

Secondly, these seven individuals were all from either the company's communication or strategic philanthropy (i.e. the foundation) departments. Because of this, these employees were extremely familiar with the company's CSR and communication efforts as it is part of their role. While it was beneficial to interview individuals with the most knowledge and familiarity of IG's CSR activities, this was also a limitation. It would be valuable to meet with employees of various departments who are not responsible for CSR messages or general communication in order to gain insight into their sensemaking practices. Therefore, future research could study individuals outside of

the communication or philanthropy functions and perhaps conduct multi-case studies between different organizations in different industries

In conjunction with addressing these limitations, there are additional directions for future research to continue the study of the internal dimension of CSR. Ideally, future research will have a larger sample that is geographically and departmentally diverse. This will allow for understanding the employee perspective of CSR from different companies, industries, organizational departments and levels. Additionally, future research could expand on the focus of leadership ambassadorship of CSR and how influence from leaders affects overall communication efforts as well as employee sensemaking and support of these activities. Furthermore, future studies may expand on employee sensemaking by exploring organizational identity and identification around CSR and once again taking an insider's view.

Conclusion

This study explored the internal dimension of CSR within an organizational setting. Specifically, this research examined the sensemaking processes around CSR by communication professionals in terms of how they define CSR as a concept, attempt to communicate their organization's CSR activities and, finally, the extent to which CSR at IG is meaningful. Throughout this study, I presented employees as influential in what CSR means at and to an organization. Furthermore, I explored how employee sensemaking is fundamental in the creating of meaning around CSR. At IG specifically, employees are both symbolic and instrumental of CSR efforts. The challenges facing CSR communicators center around framing these activities, addressing the "why" behind

them and perpetuating a culture in which CSR is systemic and supported but that also includes open dialogue to aid employee sensemaking. Accordingly, organizational communication scholars are in a unique position to continue to explore how CSR is communicated within the halls and walls of organizations.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Guide

I. Intro/Background

a. How long have you been at Investment Group (company pseudonym)?

    i. What role/s have you been in? How long in those roles/current role?

b. Take me through a typical day/week for you (what are your responsibilities/tasks).

II. Company Understanding

a. How do you describe your company to others?

b. What is it like to work here?

c. What are your company's priorities? How do you know what those are (how are they communicated?)?

    i. What does your company value? How do you know?

III. CSR Terminology

a. How familiar are you with corporate social responsibility (CSR)?

    i. How would you define/describe it?

    ii. What does it mean to you?

    iii. What might be some terms you would associate with CSR?

b. How have you learned about CSR?

c. What are some examples in the world, outside your company, of CSR you're aware of?

    i. What are some companies that are well-known for CSR?

IV. CSR Initiatives/Activities

    a. What would be some CSR initiatives that you're aware of at your company?
        a. *Note:* If need to, define CSR or use other words when asking about CSR initiatives (e. g. sustainability, etc.):
            i. Business practice(s) that involves participating in initiatives that benefit society
            ii. The continuing commitment of a company to contribute to economic development (beyond profit maximization) while

improving the quality of life of the workforce, and their families,
as well as the surrounding community and society at large

b. How do those activities fit your company, align with its values, etc.?

c. How do those activities help your company?

d. Why do you believe your company takes on those initiatives?

    i. How are they of benefit to the company?

V. Employee Involvement

a. How are you involved in CSR activities?

    i. Does your company have people tasked with CSR-related activities/programs?

b. How does CSR affect you overall and in your day-to-day work life?

c. How is CSR communicated to you?

    i. How does your company argue for its importance?

    ii. How has your company helped "train" you on CSR and its importance?

d. What are the best ways for companies to communicate about CSR?

e. Would you like to get more involved in CSR? If so, why and how? If not, why not?

VI. CSR and Society Benefits

a. What is CSR's place in the business world?

b. What do you believe are the long-lasting, positive impacts of CSR? Short term?

c. What are some drawbacks or challenges to CSR?

VII. Closing

a. What do you think is the future of CSR? What will be the activities/initiatives of the future?

b. What else that we haven't covered would you like to add about CSR? What else should we know before we start analyzing our data?

c. Is there anyone else from your department you think I should speak to regarding this?

APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
AGREEMENT OF CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARICIPANTS

Inside the Halls and Walls: Exploring CSR from the Employee Perspective
Katharine E. Miller
Diederich College of Communication
Marquette University Graduate School

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask and address any questions you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research study is to examine Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) from the employee perspective in an organizational setting. You will be one of approximately 7 participants in this study.

PROCEDURES: Katharine Miller, the principal researcher, will interview you at a time and place of your convenience. You will be audio taped during the interview using a recording application on the interviewer's mobile device to ensure accuracy. The tapes will later be transcribed ad destroyed following the completion of this study. For confidentiality reasons, your name will not be recorded and the recording will not be shared with other parties. If you do not wish to have the interviewer use an audio recording device please inform the researcher. During the interview, open-ended questions will be utilized to ask you to discuss experiences, history and beliefs about the position you currently hold, your company's values and priorities, as well as the topic of CSR both generally and specifically in terms of your organization. Potentially controversial or damaging questions will not be utilized. At any point you are not comfortable with a specific question, you may choose to skip it. The interview is planned to take approximately thirty to sixty minutes based on your availability and responses.

DURATION: Your participation will consist of one interview session. Ideally, this interview will last between 30-60 minutes. The length of the session is completely at your convenience and can be shorter or longer in depth based on your comfort and responses.

RISK: The risks associated with participating in this study include any provided information that could affect your employment status or employer. In order to minimize and hopefully eliminate these risks, pseudonyms will be created by the researcher when including position titles and direct quotes from the interviews. During and after the interview, only the pseudonym will be used to reference you. Any collected data will be

stored electronically and will be password protected. Again, interview recordings will also be destroyed following the completion of this study. If you do not feel comfortable releasing your role title or specific responsibilities under that role, please let the researcher know and the question will be skipped. The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than you would experience in everyday life.

BENEFITS: This research may benefit society and the academic world by increasing awareness of the important concept Corporate Social Responsibility, particularly as employees understand and describe it. There are no financial or other incentives provided to interview participants.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All information you as the participant reveal in this study will be kept confidential. Again, your data and name will be assigned a pseudonym instead of using your real name in order to protect your identification. When this study is completed and published, you will not be identifiable. The data from your interviews will be destroyed by deleting audio recordings, interview notes, transcriptions and other related electronic or paper files within two years of the completion of this study. Data may be used for additional studies following this, but again your identity and other information revealed in interviews will be protected and confidential. All correspondence, such as e-mail, will be destroyed after the completion of the interview barring any follow-up questions, comments or concerns. Your research records may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board and state and federal agencies, as legally allowed.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION: The participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. After the completion of this interview, a follow-up email should be sent to you thanking you and verifying that this information may still be used.

CONTACT:
If you have any questions, comments or concerns about this project, please contact Katharine Miller at 920-493-3462 or katharine.miller@marquette.edu at any time. If you have questions or concerns about being a research participant, you can contact Marquette University's Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570 or orc@marquette.edu.

Please read the following statement and sign on the line below:

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE.

_____   _____
Printed Name of Participant   Printed Name of Researcher Obtaining Consent

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date: Date: