Master's Thesis Internship
Sustainable Business and Innovation

Exploring the Barriers to Employee Engagement
with Corporate Social Responsibility in the Fashion Industry

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wordcount: 18, 597
13th September 2019

"Did you ever expect a corporation to have a conscience, when it has no soul to be damned and no body to be kicked? (And by God, it ought to have both!)"

-Lord Chancellor of England (1731-1806)

"The presumed trade-offs between economic efficiency and social progress have been institutionalized in decades of policy choices. Companies must take the lead in bringing business and society back together."

-Porter & Kramer (2006)

Abstract

The fashion industry is increasingly under scrutiny for its unsustainable practices. Currently, the most accessible tool for businesses to respond to these societal demands is voluntary Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) schemes. These exist in most companies but fail to deliver the desired results to mitigate many of the negative effects of the industry. A prerequisite for a successful CSR scheme or department is that it engages the company's employees, yet the literature on the barriers to achieving this has been sparse. This study explores the levels of employee engagement with CSR and the barriers to such engagement in the fashion industry. The relationship between perceived barriers and the level of engagement was also studied. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 employees at the HQ of the fast fashion retailer WE Fashion in Utrecht, The Netherlands. Employees were placed in categories, namely Indifferent, Curious and Committed- and their perceived barriers to engagement were ascertained. It was found that, although different categories of employee differed slightly on the kind of barriers they perceived to their engagement; the more significant difference was their personal attitude to these barriers.

Keywords: fashion industry, corporate social responsibility, transformational CSR, employee engagement, barriers

Executive Summary

In 2016, WE published its first and only Corporate Social Responsibility report, which outlines four CSR strategy pillars, namely: 1) better products, 2) sustainable supply chain, 3) sustainable operations and 4) community engagement (Willemsen, 2016). Among the sub-goals of the Sustainable Operations pillar was to 'measure CSR engagement among employees' as well as 'develop employee engagement and happiness.' Currently, WE's CSR department consists of two employees and an intern. Given its small size, the department only really has the capacity to keep up with factory audits and sustainable material accounting, with little time left over to advance the sustainability agenda i.e. starting new projects, challenging the current company or industry status quo.

This research addresses these desires of the company. 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with the employees at the WE HQ in Utrecht, in the Buying, Design and Marketing departments. These conversations helped identify the different levels of engagement with CSR present within the company. The categories identified were Indifferent, Curious and Committed. Most employees were shown to be Curious about sustainability/CSR but felt uniformed and unequipped to act. In general, there is a huge difference between how much employees know about sustainability in a global context, the fashion industry or specifically at WE. Indifferent employees are vaguely aware of the problems and have a very shallow understanding of its core causes and how it can be addressed. The Committed employees are very educated on the matter and the true wastefulness of the industry they work in and feel conflicted by their values. These employees were ones who had both a very comprehensive understanding of the issues and acted out on their knowledge at work. These employees were somehow involved in CSR activities.

In addition to measuring CSR engagement, outlined as a goal in the 2016 report, this research helped the company identify what is preventing full engagement and where to concentrate its efforts when given the chance, especially accounting its limited CSR resources. The interviews were therefore also used as an opportunity to ascertain the perceived barriers to CSR engagement. These are outlined visually in *Appendix 2*.

The following recommendations were compiled based on the collected data. They are expanded upon in greater detail in *Section 7* of this report.

1. Power of knowledge
WE's employees felt they lack expertise or even basic knowledge on sustainability to feel equipped to act. They all have different backgrounds and are different generations, so it is important to get the staff on a singular mindset when it comes to the issue. They need the knowledge in order to challenge any status quo at the company or with suppliers. If they do not know what is truly possible, what is technologically feasible or what sustainable production should cost, it is hard to start a discussion.

2. Power of influence
Much of what WE employees mentioned had to do with not being stimulated enough in their work environment to think about sustainability. They emphasised that having individuals who

set an example, whether that be a colleague, a member of management or a guest speaker, is very powerful and could set off a domino effect within the company.

3. Challenging the system

Indifferent employees were discouraged by the rigidness of systematic barriers. It is therefore important that they see that it is possible to bend or resist the current status quo in the industry when it comes to approaches to sustainability. This includes adopting sustainable business models, challenging the current linear production model, as well as the fast fashion consumption mindset and the disposability of clothing.

Acknowledgements

Clearly, I am not the sole force through which this research came to fruition. I would credit myself 20%, at most.

My biggest thanks go to my supervisor Laura Piscicelli, who was truly a great support throughout the entire process. She is calm, extremely helpful and precise in her feedback and simply just great at her job. She has a particular sensitivity that I have found to be quite a rarity among pedagogues. I was never dreading her feedback as I knew it would only ever be beneficial and never reprimanding. This is something that really aided me in my work process.

I would like to thank the SBI network and Simona Negro for advertising every internship opportunity she could find on Blackboard, as this is how I found the vacancy at WE and how I was able to intern there. An additional thanks goes to Simona for taking her time to be my second reader, in place of Maryse.

More thanks are due for Marijke Willemsen and Cintha Kemp of WE Fashion, who though me capable enough to help them in their CSR department. I am grateful to them for letting me contribute to the tireless work they do for the social and environmental challenges that WE faces, for encouraging my research and answering my many, many, questions. They are people who remain hopeful despite facing endless organisational and bureaucratic barriers, who try to go against the grain and fight the good fight. For this, they will remain my role models.

Along with them, I owe my success to all the employees at WE who agreed to participate in my research. I would like to thank them for listening to the kid who hovered awkwardly over their desk asking for their time, for opening up to me and sharing their valuable insights and personal conflicts with regard to the complex problems of sustainability.

Lastly, I owe the maintenance of my mental health to my personal support system. My old housemates Kass and Marion, who saw me stress out over my interview at WE and wished me good luck as I stepped out the door. My loving parents, who kept my head up, as I worked on my proposal on Christmas Day, all the while having to look for a new place to live in Utrecht. Also, for giving me life and the privilege of education, and all that. Endless gratitude goes to Tom, who not only secured me a new house- that I now call a home- during an extremely stressful time, but who has been a constant light in my life, there to talk me through my downs and jump around with me when it was time to celebrate. Same goes to my pillars Anique and Deja, who's ears have bled from my thesis rants, but who have still somehow stuck around and continue to be my friends. They truly keep me sane in this world. For nine long months, I had a nagging voice in the back of my head at all times, telling me to 'go work on my thesis'. Today that voice subsides- thank you to all those who helped me get here.

1. Introduction

Most of us get up in the morning and do some sort of work for an organisation, institution or business. Daily life can be exhausting, and sometimes it is just about getting through the day and getting the job done. But each of us, whether we like it or not, are a clog in a wheel, a part of a bigger system. How does the work you do impact society? Do you care? Why- or more importantly- why not?

1.1. Background

1.1.1 The problem of sustainability in the fashion industry

The fashion industry has been repeatedly called out for its malpractices, especially when it comes to workers' rights in developing countries, environmental impacts and wastefulness (Alam, 2011; Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Claudio, 2007; Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015). It has thus been subject to considerable criticism regarding its contribution to climate change and the humanitarian crisis. Employing over forty million people worldwide, it is currently one of the biggest industries, as well as one of the world's biggest polluters (Farley Gordon & Hill, 2015).

In terms of environmental impact, problems arise along several points in its supply chain: from outsourcing to fibre extraction to dying to transport. These problems have resulted in, for example, the drying up of the Aral Sea in Central Asia- previously the fourth largest inland body of water- due to cotton irrigation as well as critical pollution in India, water pollution of Bangladeshi rivers, as well as soil toxicity and devastation in Uzbekistan (Dalton, 2016).

When it comes to human costs, the fashion industry has been publicly called out for the 'sweatshop' working conditions of some retailers in developing countries, as well as the use of child labour. One can easily recall the lengthy Nike sweatshop scandal that went on for many decades (Greenberg & Knight, 2004). In 2011, over 3 million people were employed by the garment industry in Bangladesh alone, with 85% being women (Alam, 2011). The majority were working for way below the minimum wage, in overheated dangerous conditions and unlawful long hours, often being threatened or beaten to meet their targets (Alam, 2011). In 2013, the Bangladesh Rana Plaza factory collapsed, killing over 1000 people, and injuring another 2,500, making it the largest garment factory disaster to date. This was not an isolated incident, with a similar collapse of the Spectrum factory in Dhaka in 2005 which claimed over 60 lives, as well as the Tazreen factory fire in 2012, killing over a 100 more (Siegle, 2013). According to the Asian Floor Wage Alliance, progress has been limited regarding labour conditions of garment workers (Kasperkevic, 2016). Although around 200 retailers signed the 2013 Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh- a legal document that includes monitoring by independent inspectors- it seems that only a small percentage of the safety plans have been implemented (Butler, 2016). To add insult to injury, the Bangladeshi government is currently trying to force out the Accord, with a Supreme Court ruling to determine its fate being deferred periodically (Weixin, 2019).

Another problem of great interest has been the rapid disposal of garments by fashion consumers, a process partly facilitated by the retailers, who change trends on an increasingly shorter basis (Joy et al., 2012). Figures suggest that from 2000 to 2014, clothing purchased each year by the average consumer went up by 60 percent, but due to the limits of recycling materials, nearly three-fifths of all clothing produced ends up in incinerators or landfills within a year of being made (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2016). As Farley Gordon & Hill (2015) stress, it is difficult to fit sustainability into a system of such planned obsolescence. The need for a return to the valuing and caring for individual pieces of clothing has been stressed, for example, by the Loved Clothes Last magazine produced by the NGO Fashion Revolution (Fashion Revolution, 2018). Retailers are also increasingly encouraged to take responsibility for their clothing in its use phase, for example by providing more thorough care instructions, offering maintenance services or helping dispose of the clothing once it is worn out (Global Fashion Agenda, 2018). But how do companies acknowledge these social and environmental externalities in their business conduct?

1.1.2 CSR: History & Definition

As early as 1946, *Fortune* magazine polled business executives, asking them about their responsibilities for "the consequences of their actions in a sphere wider than that covered by their profit-and-loss statements" (Carroll, 2008, p.8). Over 90% agreed that these responsibilities need to be addressed. Today more than ever- with the worsening conditions of anthropocentric climate change- businesses have to face their impacts beyond their own operations. The 1950s saw the formal introduction of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) divisions to address business impacts on society as a whole. Many early manifestations consisted simply of philanthropic efforts, but CSR progressively became integrated in business strategy (Carroll, 2008). This was aided by a shift from Milton Friedman's strict shareholder view of the firm to a stakeholder perspective, wherein the function of a firm goes beyond profit-maximisation (Banerjee, 2008). The stakeholder model understands the firm as a part of as opposed to separate from society and expects the company to "be aware of and respond to the various demands of its constituents, including employees, customers, investors, suppliers, and the local community" (Pedersen, 2006, p.2). Stakeholders were originally understood as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives", and this definition has since been expanding to include more parts of the internal and external environment, even ecosystems and future generations (Pedersen, 2006). The European Commission went on to define CSR as "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (European Commission, 2002). This definition is closest to how CSR is understood today, with increasing pressure on business to integrate ethical practices within their operations, as opposed to just offsetting part of their profits to charitable causes. Today, most companies participate in some form of CSR, although for many it remains a superficial commitment with little tangible results. As Furlow (2010) discusses, greenwashing- or the marketing of false or incomplete information by an organisation to uphold an environmental public image- remains prevalent.

1.1.3 Failure of CSR to mitigate the sustainability crisis

Despite the institutionalisation of CSR, there remains a lack of commitment and action towards fighting climate change in the business sphere. CSR often only satisfies superficial external pressures and preserves the company image (Yoon et al., 2006). Many companies have been accused of greenwashing and not living up to their sustainability and human rights commitments (Banerjee, 2008). As Visser (2010, p.2) writes: "on virtually every measure of social, ecological and ethical performance, the negative impacts of business have been an unmitigated disaster, which CSR has completely failed to avert or even substantially moderate". Although this statement is a generalisation, it can be widely supported by the exponentially worsening climate and humanitarian crisis (Riley, 2017). Wright & Nyberg (2017) even developed a three-stage model showing how the pressure of the grand challenge of climate change is gradually diluted within companies into business-as-usual. The authors go on to suggest that when such challenges appear, they highlight the tensions between business and society interests, and short-term profitability and satisfying shareholders tends to eventually be favoured. Visser (2010, p.2) also supports this view arguing that "CSR is, at best, a peripheral function in most companies."

Visser (2010) further suggests that the failure of CSR can be attributed to multiple factors, including the pursuit of incremental and peripheral CSR, as well as the perceived lack of a so-called 'business case' for CSR. There has been substantial research trying to identify such a business case, i.e. a positive correlation between CSR and financial performance (Margolis et al., 2009), with varied and inconclusive results. Porter and Kramer (2006) also discuss possible reasons why the introduction of CSR has not been as impactful, including the pitting of business against society despite their interdependence, as well as the interpretation of CSR in generic ways as opposed to tailored to each firm's strategy. They go on to point out that "the prevailing approaches to CSR are so disconnected from business as to obscure many of the greatest opportunities for companies to benefit society" (Porter & Kramer, 2006, p.3).

Many fashion retailers have come forward with CSR initiatives, but have failed to embrace sustainability on a company scale. Kozlowski and colleagues (2012) point out that although the implementation of CSR is a step in the right direction for fashion companies, this response is often focused on one particular aspect of the industry as opposed to a systematic change of the entire lifecycle of garments. Hence, a company might focus on an issue such as pesticide use, workers' rights or clothing disposal (Kozlowski, Bardecki & Searcy, 2012). For instance, H&M has been very vocal about its Garment Collection Program, where customers can drop off unwanted clothing for a store discount (H&M, 2018), while not addressing the wider problem of overconsumption and rapid disposal that the industry's leader is perpetuating (Gould, 2017).

1.1.4 Transformational CSR and employee engagement

Given the above, it seems important that CSR departments are able to better push for and implement the necessary changes. One of the ways to do this is for a company to strive for a transformative CSR strategy. A transformative CSR strategy is one where a company has become a key driver for sustainable business practices and challenges the economic and political framework (Martinuzzi, & Krumay, 2013). This requires effective mechanisms for organisational learning. Based on a three-year study of over 25 public and private organisations, Doppelt (2003) compiled a list of the seven sustainability blunders which companies most often succumb to when trying to implement sustainability- which thus prevent a transformational CSR strategy. These are patriarchal thinking (i.e. blindly following authority), a silo approach (i.e. lack of interaction between different departments), no clear vision, confusion over cause and effect, lack of information, insufficient mechanisms for learning and, finally, a failure to institutionalize sustainability. Rephrased, the seven blunders provide seven instructions for creating a transformative CSR strategy. Many of these blunders could be avoided providing the active involvement of all employees in sustainability at their company. As Du et al. (2013, p.5) point out: "employees' participation in the organisation's CSR activities allows them to be enactors and enablers, rather than mere observers." It follows that a successful CSR strategy involves high stakeholder engagement. The present research explores employee engagement as a subset of stakeholder engagement, given that employees have been identified as a primary key stakeholder due to their high power and legitimacy (Greenwood, 2007). As demonstrated, the desired transformational stage of CSR can only be achieved if the sustainability activities are integrated and understood throughout the whole company so that a common sustainability vision can be pursued. This way, everyone in the company can actively seek sustainable opportunities, and be swift to communicate and integrate these.

1.1.5 Research Gap

Very few studies have explored to what extent employees engage with CSR and sought to explain any lack of engagement. Two main studies have looked at employee engagement with CSR with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of the initiative (most studies focus on how an engaging CSR can benefit company image or general employee engagement- more on this in *Section 2.1*). Hemingway (2005) presented a theoretical employee typology, which has yet to be tested in an empirical setting. Rodrigo & Arenas (2008) went on to develop a similar typology, however, with respect to employee attitudes upon the introduction of CSR initiatives in two businesses in the construction sector. The present study wishes to build upon these and examine, in an empirical setting, how established CSR (as opposed to the introduction of CSR) is engaging employees. Additionally, all the research done to date on the topic tested employee engagement in less consumer-facing industries such as construction (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2008) or energy (Slack et al., 2015) -it is therefore interesting to explore if an industry like fashion could more easily engage its employees as they engage with it both as consumers and employees. The present study looked into engagement with CSR in the fashion industry, in which it has previously not been explored.

The present research also intends to shed light on what is preventing the desired level of employee engagement with CSR. This could help facilitate transformational CSR implementation. Once the employees have been sorted into their respective categories, it is interesting to study what is preventing all employees from being highly engaged. Previous studies have identified some factors preventing such engagement, among them poor communication about the value of CSR (Arvidsson 2010; Duarte 2010; Slack et al, 2015), a weak CSR culture (Collier and Esteban, 2007; Duarte, 2010; Slack et al, 2015); a lack of alignment between organisational and personal values (Hemingway, 2005; Rodrigo and Arenas, 2008; Caldwell et al., 2012, Slack et al 2015), a lack of embeddedness of CSR in the day-to-day (Collier and Esteban, 2007, Slack et al, 2015). The present study builds on this research by aligning these and any additional barriers identified to the corresponding employee types.

1.2 Aim

The aim of this research is to add to the knowledge of employee engagement with CSR in the fashion industry as well as the factors hindering full engagement. More specifically, this study builds on previous research by verifying existing employee typologies and investigates whether different categories of employee can be associated with different corresponding barriers.

1.3 Research question

Given the stated aim, the research question which will be answered in this study is:

> *What are the barriers to employee engagement in established CSR within the fashion industry for different employee types?*

1.4 Relevance

1.4.1. Scientific

Existing literature suggests that engagement of key stakeholders is deemed necessary for successful CSR (see 1.1.4). It is therefore important to investigate how employees engage with CSR and the barriers to higher engagement. Such research is especially important among the debates on the overall worthiness of CSR (Devinney, 2009), as well as the debate on the incompatibility of business and sustainability (Einstein, 2014).

1.4.2 Societal

The wider contribution of the present study is to specify how CSR departments in general can achieve higher employee engagement within a company and, as a result, impact outside of it,

given the dire need for better responsiveness of business to socio-environmental issues (Fabius & Figueres, 2015). The societal urgency of the issue is stressed by the recent IPCC report (IPCC, 2018) stating that we have 12 years to limit the devastating impacts of climate change, and an even more recent BBC article arguing that because of the critical climate summits taking place in the coming year, the events of the next 18 months will actually determine our fate (McGrath, 2019). As Porter & Kramer (2011, p.4) write "companies must take the lead in bringing business and society back together", however "most companies remain stuck in a 'social responsibility' mind-set in which societal issues are at the periphery, not the core."

Currently, the best tool that is in place for businesses to take action is their voluntary CSR departments or projects, therefore it is important that these can be as engaging and therefore as impactful as possible. Pinpointing what prevents high employee engagement with CSR is crucial.

2. Theory: CSR and Employee engagement

As demonstrated above, employee engagement could go a long way in enhancing the CSR performance of an organisation. So, what has literature said so far on the relationship between these two variables?

2.1. CSR enhances employee engagement

Given the ongoing search to identify the aforementioned 'business case' for CSR, the dominant research on CSR and employee engagement explores how the implementation of CSR can be beneficial for business. When it comes to employees, most studies have explored CSR as a tool to address low levels of general engagement in the workplace. Gross & Holland (2011) stress CSR as an increasingly important driver of employee engagement. Indeed, a survey by the non-profit Net Impact revealed that 53% of workers reported that a job where they can make an impact was important to their happiness, with 72% of students about to enter the workforce agreeing. The majority even stated they would be willing to take a pay cut to satisfy this desire (Meister, 2012). Meister (2012) writes that appealing to the triple bottom line is becoming one of the main organisational strategies to attract and retain new employees. Albdour & Altaraweh (2012) found a significant relationship between CSR and both job and organisational engagement, but more strongly with the latter. Mirvis (2012a) has identified different ways companies can engage their employees through CSR, impacting their motivation, identity, sense of purpose as well as inspiring corporate citizenship. He goes on to create a framework for engaging employees as citizens, so that they can be more of their 'full selves' at work (Mirvis, 2012b). Glavas (2016) went on to conduct a study of 15,000 employees and found that authenticity (thus being able to show one's whole self at work) positively and significantly mediates the relationship between CSR and employee engagement.

2.2 Employee engagement enhances CSR

The above angle within CSR research has been covered extensively. Less research has focused on how employee engagement with CSR can benefit the success of a company's CSR initiatives. It would seem, however, that the relationship between employee engagement and CSR is reinforcing, i.e. the presence of CSR in a company makes its employees more engaged in their work life, but the more engaged employees are with CSR, the more CSR initiatives can also flourish. Collier and Esteban (2007) highlighted how employee responsiveness to, and engagement with, CSR is necessary for the effective delivery of CSR programs. Davies & Crane (2010) see employee buy-in (i.e. acceptance by employees of the importance of the CSR cause) as one of the key factors for CSR engagement, and investigated the ways in which SMEs create employee engagement in a strong TPL (triple bottom line) philosophy. As discussed in more detail above (see 1.1.4), the engagement of employees- a key primary stakeholder- has been deemed essential in pursuing transformational CSR, yet the body of research on this has been limited.

2.3 Theoretical framework

2.3.1 Employee engagement with CSR

Two main papers have developed frameworks for employee engagement with CSR. In 2005, Hemingway coined the concept of a corporate social entrepreneur (CSE), referring to those who 'identify and progress opportunity within a corporation for socially responsible activity,' and wished to examine it within the business context (Hemingway, 2005, p.4). She went on to develop a typology of employees with regard to CSR, consisting of four main types (*Figure 1*). Firstly, there are the two types of corporate social entrepreneurs, namely the active: who develops and stimulates CSR initiatives, and the frustrated entrepreneur, who has personal concern for social issues but fails to integrate them due to an uncooperative organizational culture. Then there are the two types of employees who are not considered corporate social entrepreneurs, namely the apathetic type, who does not make efforts to implement CSR at all, and the conformist, who does not engage in CSR unless it is on obligatory orders from the higher levels of the organization. The four types are categorized using two axes, one representing personal values, the other organizational values. The personal values scale (vertical) ranges from a collectivistic mindset to an individualistic value system, while the organizational culture (horizontal) is placed on a scale of unsupportive to supportive to CSR. Hemingway stresses that the typology needs to be tested in an empirical setting.
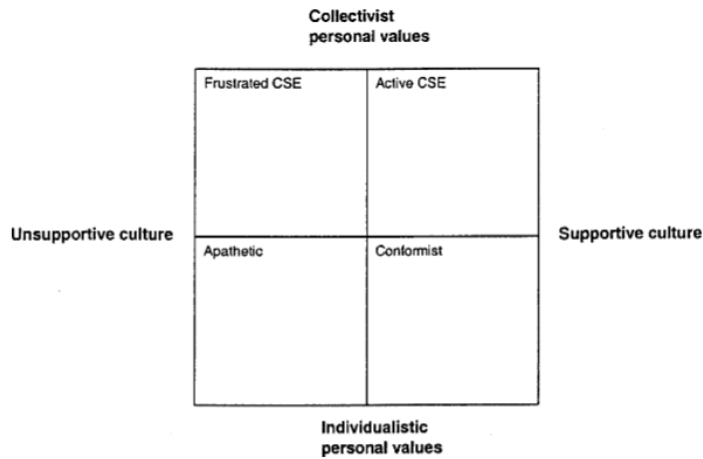
Collectivist
personal values

Frustrated CSE	Active CSE
Apathetic	Conformist

Unsupportive culture   Supportive culture

Individualistic
personal values

Figure 1: A typology of predispositions towards CSR (Hemingway, 2005)

A second, similar framework was developed by Rodrigo & Arenas in 2008. This typology (Table 1) sets apart employees into three main categories: Committed, Indifferent and Dissident. The Committed worker identifies highly with the organization, has a high sense of importance of his/her work and has a highly developed sense of social justice. The Indifferent worker prioritizes progress in his/her personal career and, therefore, does not feel positively or negatively towards CSR. Finally, the dissident worker is likely to protest CSR as a waste of money which could be put towards raising salaries. Dissident workers are not interested in their job having social significance and view it simply as a source of income. Their sense of social justice is manifested in viewing themselves as marginalized, as opposed to the desire of contributing to socio-environmental initiatives.

Characteristics of each type of worker based on the categories identified

Type of worker	Acceptance of the new organizational role	Identification with the organization	Sense of importance of work	Sense of social justice
Committed	Accepted	High	High	Highly developed
Indifferent	Acceptance evolving or not accepted	Low or indifferent	High or intermediate	Poorly developed or not developed
Dissident	Not accepted or does not possess a clear concept of it	Nil	Low or nil	Highly developed (feeling he/she is a victim) or moderate

Table 1: Reactions of the employees after the application of CSR programs (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2008)

Du et al. (2013) also identified three employee segments which vary in their desire for CSR, based on their job needs (economic, developmental and idealistic). The categories were: Indifferents, Enthusiasts and Idealists. The three categories varied in their approach to their work, seeing it either as a job (Indifferents), a career (Enthusiasts), or a calling (Idealists). The categorization by Du et al. (2013) is loosely congruent with Hemingway's Active, Frustrated and Apathetic categories. It also supports Rodrigo & Arenas' (2008) Committed and Indifferent categories. Most significantly, it reinforces support for the existence of a middle category between committed and indifferent.

2.3.2 CSR employee engagement typology

The typologies above will be adjusted for the current study. The basis of the framework will be Rodrigo & Arenas (2008), given that this typology came out of an empirical study. An adjustment to the original framework will be made to take into account Hemingway's (2005) theoretical hypothesis about the Frustrated and Conformist categories and Du et al.'s (2013) empirically found Enthusiast category. These studies suggest a need for a middle way between Committed and Indifferent. Given that Hemingway's categories have not been empirically verified, only one midway category will be included and will here be termed the Curious worker. The curious worker will include workers with a personal interest in CSR who are remaining inactive, presumably due to feelings of organizational constraints. Thus, the framework for the present study combines the theoretical efforts of Hemingway (2005) and the empirical findings of Rodrigo & Arenas (2008) and Du et al. (2013) in the following way:

Type of worker	Identification with the organization	Sense of importance of work	Sense of social justice
Committed/Active	High	High	Highly developed
Curious	Intermediate	Intermediate	Evolving
Indifferent/Apathetic	Low	High or intermediate	Poorly developed
Dissident	Nil	Nil or Low	Highly developed (self as victim)

Table 2: Typology of employee engagement in CSR

2.3.3 Barriers to employee engagement with CSR

The barriers to employee engagement with CSR have been researched in a few studies as well, although none have matched them with type of employee. Firstly, in her theoretical paper, Hemingway (2005) proposed that barriers to CSR engagement include unsupportive (versus supportive) organisational culture and individualistic (versus collectivistic) personal values. Collier and Esteban (2007) discuss how a weak CSR culture and lack of embedded CSR form barriers to CSR effectiveness. Rodrigo and Arenas (2008), who developed the typology in *Table 1*, consider the discrepancy between personal and organisational values to be a major barrier to effective CSR- one with full engagement. They emphasise the importance of the personal values of their employees matching that of the organisation, as even if employees are avid about the importance of sustainability, change will be minimal unless the organisation matches these intentions. The same stagnation occurs when an organisation tries to push changes which its employees are not supportive of. Arvidsson (2010) discusses the importance

of communication of CSR to stakeholders, and its changing trends. The author argues that communication is a major barrier, as management is often clueless on how and how much CSR information should be communicated to stakeholders, given the "lack of established framework for how to communicate consistently about CSR" (Arvidsson, 2010, p.2).

Duarte (2010), who studied the role of managers' values in the maintenance of CSR cultures, re-emphasised the congruence between organisational and personal values as an important barrier to successful CSR. Slack et al. (2015) looked at the impediments to organisational CSR engagement in their study which identified different levels of engagement with CSR in a UK company. The authors identified the following barriers, some in agreement with previous studies: organisational communication; culture and the extent of shared values; the level of embeddedness of CSR within the organisation; and the relationship between CSR and business strategy. These are all interdependent barriers, as communication facilitates a better CSR culture and also brings together personal and organisational values. However, organisational culture is a combination of multiple factors beyond communication. The participants also often cited personal interest and individual gain as reasons for engagement, also supporting personal values as a major barrier.

Finally, Du et al. (2013, p.1) found that "CSR proximity strengthens the positive impact of CSR on employee-related outcomes", hence the more related the goals of a department to CSR, the more the employees of the given department engage with it.

The identified barriers in the various studies can, in general, be categorised into organisational and personal, as Hemingway (2005) originally conceptualised. These were used for the preliminary hypothesis about the barriers in the fashion industry, but the study will be left open to invite new concepts and add to and elaborate on these barriers. Based on the previous research, it is assumed that Curious employees are mainly constricted by organisational culture, while the Indifferent/Apathetic employee is prevented from engaging with CSR due to incompatible personal values. The Dissident worker is also held back due to personal values, but in this case because of their different understanding of social justice.

Type of worker	Identification with the organization	Sense of importance of work	Sense of social justice	Barriers to engagement
Committed/Active	High	High	Highly developed	-
Curious	Intermediate	Intermediate	Evolving	Organizational culture
Indifferent/Apathetic	Low	High or intermediate	Poorly developed	Personal values + Organizational culture
Dissident	Nil	Nil or Low	Highly developed (self as victim)	Personal values

Table 3: Combined framework of types of employee and their expected barriers to engagement

3. Methodology

3.1 Background on WE Fashion

Employee engagement in CSR was investigated in an empirical environment at the clothing company WE Fashion, at its HQ in Utrecht, The Netherlands. The brand WE was officially founded in 1999, after undergoing transformations as a clothing producer since 1917. Today WE has 240 shops and around 3,000 employees throughout Europe, including the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg, Austria and Switzerland. The company has a vertical organisational structure, meaning that a lot of processes take place 'in house' and that employees of different levels of seniority often interact. WE's employees have access to a sales training facility called WE University, which has an excellent reputation in the retail industry.

In 2005, the position of a Quality/CSR manager was introduced at WE at the request of the then-Quality manager. This was followed by a more formal consolidation of a CSR department in 2010. The first CSR report was published in 2016. To date, this is the only CSR report published by WE. The reason for this is likely the small size of the CSR department, for which the priority has been pushing initiatives, rather than compiling reports. Currently, the department is composed of two employees and an intern (the author of this study) but continues to share an office with the Quality Department.

Given the small scale of the CSR department itself, it is important to explore how the rest of the employees at the WE HQ are engaging- be that in thought or action- with social and environmental sustainability of the company. The four pillars of the WE Fashion CSR strategy are: sustainable supply chain, better products, sustainable operations and community engagement (Willemsen, 2017). The present study measured both the CSR engagement, testing out employee typologies existent in literature, and helped specify the barriers to full engagement. This way the embeddedness of the CSR strategy can be assessed and the proliferation of sustainability within WE could be encouraged.

3.2 Research design and data collection

The research design to answer the question *'What are the barriers to employee engagement in established CSR within the fashion industry for different employee types?'* has an explanatory research function. The data to answer this question was obtained using interviews with the employees at the WE Fashion HQ in Utrecht (see *Appendix 1* for the interview guide). The departments at WE are: *CSR, Management, Buying (Women, Men, Kids), Design, Marketing, Sales, HR, Quality, Finance, E-commerce, Merchandising, Import/Export, Warehouse, IT* – listed here in the perceived proximity to CSR by the head of CSR at WE. The possible influence of proximity of a department to CSR was taken into account during data collection and analysis, given Du et al.'s (2013) findings that CSR proximity has an impact on employee-related outcomes. This was achieved by focusing on only 3 departments, namely Buying, Design and Marketing, as these represent a range of proximity to CSR- Buying being the closest and Marketing the furthest. This way the effect of the department could be observed.

3.3 Sampling strategy

Convenience sampling was used in this study- a convenience sample is "one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility" (Bryman, 2012, p. 201) The number of employees needed per department was first set based on the respective size of the departments: Buying (12), Design (5) and Marketing (3). The researcher then visited the three chosen departments and approached people in the open office. Who was approached was determined mainly by whether the employee was available (i.e. he/she was not on the phone or in a meeting) at the time the researcher attempted to schedule interviews. If the chosen employee declined to participate in an interview, another person in the office was approached. The point of theoretical saturation was set at 20-30 interviews, as proposed by Warren (2002), who recommends this amount as the minimum when conducting qualitative interview research. All the interviews were conducted in June of 2019 at the WE HQ. They were all face to face and lasted between 30-45 minutes. 20 interviews in total were conducted; all the collected data about the interviewees is displayed in *Table 4* below. The variables collected were the department, seniority of position, whether the employee works full-time or part time, how long they have worked at the company, and their age.

#	Pseudonym	Department	Seniority	Full/ part time	Time at company	Age
1	Kathy	Marketing	employee	Part	10 months	37
2	Meredith	Design	employee	Full	11 years	48
3	Angela	Buying	employee	Part	10 years	53
4	Jessica	Design	Intern	Full	5 months	22
5	Phillis	Buying	Head	Full	10 months	49
6	Donna	Buying	Senior	Full	5 years	27
7	Jan	Design	employee	Full	4 months	30
8	Pam	Buying	Manager	Part	3 years	48
9	Kelly	Buying	employee	Full	9 months	26
10	Karen	Design	employee	Full	1 year	30
11	Erin	Buying	employee	Full	5 months	27
12	Stacy	Marketing	Intern	Full	5 months	25
13	Nina	Buying	Head	Part	7,5 years	48
14	Jo	Buying	employee	Full	2 years	30
15	Holly	Design	employee	Part	5 years	36
16	Darryl	Buying	employee	Part	2 years	33
17	Jim	Buying	Head	Full	11 months	40
18	Nellie	Buying	employee	Full	4 years	30
19	Brenda	Marketing	employee	Part	2 months	36
20	Michael	Buying	Senior	Full	9 years	59

Table 4: Interviewee Data

3.4 Operationalization / Interview Structure

The concepts for employee types and barriers to engagement with CSR were operationalised in the interview guide which can be found in *Appendix 1*. In the interview, the term Sustainability was used instead of CSR, as the department at WE recently became the Sustainability Department, and this term is more widely understood. The employee category was identified using the three indicators from Rodrigo and Arenas (2008), namely: 1) sense of importance of work; 2) identification with the organisation; and 3) sense of social justice, with an additional measurement of the employee's actual engagement with CSR at work. Both personal and organisational barriers were ascertained. *Table 5* below shows how each concept was operationalised in the interviews. Each response was ranked on a scale of High to Intermediate to Low. If employees only made positive statements, their involvement was noted as high, if they also made a doubtful statement, it was noted as intermediate, if they made a solely negative statement, it was noted as low.

Concepts	Operationalisation
Sense of importance of work	• What do you find fulfilling about your job?
Identification with the organisation	• Is working at WE in line with your personal values? Which ones?
Sense of social justice	• What do you think are the main problems of the fashion industry? • Do you carry out any behaviours in your own life in the name of sustainability? • To what extent do you think WE should care about sustainability?
Actual engagement with CSR	• Do you think your work at WE is related to sustainability? • Are you aware of the activities of the Sustainability department? • Are you currently engaging in any way with activities of the sustainability department at work?
Barriers	• What do you think limits your own engagement/ interest in sustainability at work? • What do you think makes some people care about sustainability and other not? • What do you think would have to happen for WE to develop a stronger sustainability culture among its employees? • What do you think a sustainable fashion industry would look like?

Table 5: Operationalization of measured concepts

3.5 Methods of data analysis

Thematic analysis was used as the dominant form of data analysis. The interview transcripts were analysed using NVivo software in order to identify recurrent themes or codes (Charmaz, 2007). Thematic content analysis was used both deductively (from the framework) and inductively (from the new findings) (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Through the analysis of such codes, the employee categories as well as their respective barriers were ascertained. The method of data analysis for identifying the type of employee was selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), wherein the content of each interview was matched with the categories outlined in *Table 3*. For example, if an employee described their sense of importance of work and identification with the organisation as high, but their sense of social justice and actual engagement as low, they were placed in the Indifferent category. For the identification of barriers to engagement, open, axial and selective coding were used to reaffirm barriers from literature, as well as identify new ones. The relationships between the type of employee and the barriers they mention was then examined and compared to the hypothesised relationships outlined in the *Table 3*.

3.6 Research quality indicators

The present research is of a qualitative nature; hence its validity and reliability are not as easily assured as with quantitative studies. The findings are considered valid if different perspectives of the interviewees are conveyed (Bryman, 2012). Construct validity – that is the congruency between data collected and the developed concepts – was ensured by building the interviews as a direct operationalization of theoretical concepts (Bryman, 2012).

The reliability of a research is the ability to replicate the data collection process and obtain the same results (Yin, 2009). The present research can be deemed reliable given that the methods of the interview process followed the same structure each time. The interviews were also recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The main limitations pertaining to qualitative research were taken into consideration. Firstly, this kind of research rests on the words and perceptions of the participants, which are not stagnant and are susceptible to change as a result of changing circumstances or simply time (Bryman, 2012). Thus, these views cannot be viewed as definitive, but more capture an instance in time, meaning that the generalisability of the data is limited. Secondly, interviewing as a research method is susceptible to social desirability bias, wherein participants try to provide socially acceptable answers or refrain from speaking their mind due to fear of persecution or judgement (Lavrakas, 2008). Additionally, there is room for subject or participant bias during the interviews, given that some answers may have been prompted by the semi-structure of the interviews themselves or by the attitude of the interviewer (Salzmann et al., 2005). The interviewer took care not to use leading questions, not to nudge the participant to obtain any desired answers and lastly not to express any reactions or judgements about the answers of the interviewees.

4. Results

4.1 Demographics

20 interviews were conducted with employees at WE Fashion HQ, from three different departments, namely: Buying (12), Design (5) and Marketing (3). Within the departments, the interviewees had different levels of seniority (the sample included heads of departments as well as interns). 17 out of 20 participants were female, 3 were male; this ratio reflects the predominantly female gender distribution at the HQ (Willemsen, 2016). The time employees had been with the company varied from 4 months to 11 years, with an average of 3.2 years. The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 59 years, with an average of 36.7 years. In terms of time commitment to the company, the sample contained 13 full time workers and 7 part time workers. The demographics are broken down in percentages in *Figure 2* below.
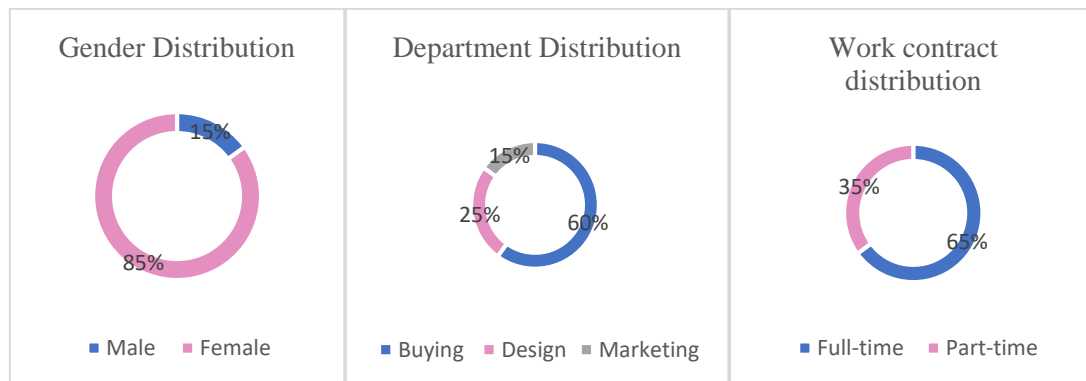

Figure 2: Gender, department and work contract % distribution in sample

4.2 Employee Types

Committed, Curious and Indifferent employee types were identified in the sample. No Dissident category employees were found, as there were no employees who expressed any views specifically against CSR initiatives (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2008). All employees expressed positive sentiments towards sustainability, but some were more engaged than others, as can be seen in *Figure 3*. In the end, 4 Indifferent, 11 Curious and 5 Committed workers were found in the sample. All the Committed workers were in the Buying department, except for one in Marketing. Design only included Curious and Indifferent workers, and Marketing was the most varied department as it contained a Committed worker, a Curious worker and an Indifferent worker.

Figure 3: Employee type distribution in total sample & per department

Age, time spent working at the company or whether the employee worked part time or full time, all had no bearing on their level on engagement. Seniority- or the rank of position of the employee- also did not seem to influence engagement.

Four variables were measured to determine the category of employee. These were: 1) sense of importance of work, 2) identification with the organisation, 3) sense of social justice, and 4) actual engagement with CSR. The first three variables measured the values and attitudes of each employee towards CSR, while the last category measured how much they actually act out on any attitudes they have towards CSR/sustainability at work. This last variable helped differentiate employees, given that for example if an employee expressed a high sense of social justice they would likely be put in the Curious category, but if they then acted on these beliefs at work, they were placed in the Committed category. Below the four variables and the contrasting answers of employees from different categories are explored in more detail.

1) **Sense of importance of work**

The question that explored this variable was 'What do you find fulfilling about your job?'. Employees who were very concise were probed further to discuss whether they feel their work is important and, if so, for whom: for them or for society. This variable was not as revealing as

it was hoped, therefore not much distinction can be observed between the different categories of employees. These differences are most salient in the other three variables. The most significant difference for this category was that Committed and Curious employees were likely to already hint to some doubts about their work. Even though most people said that they liked their work, the more engaged an employee was with sustainability, the more likely they were to point out that although the work itself was fulfilling for them, they felt conflicted about its impact on society and the environment.

Indifferent employees therefore tended to give less nuanced answers and would talk of liking the process of creating a product that sells well and how this satisfied them. An Indifferent employee said of his fulfilment at work:

"It's nice to start from scratch and then you have a realistic item from your brainstorm, which everyone is fond of and it sells as well, that you are the person responsible for the specific item." (Daryll)

The progression towards more concern for the impact for the world can be seen in the answer of this Curious employee:

"My colleagues, I love them, we have a really close cool team. I have to send out the materials to about 190 stores and I really like that it's sort of a challenge or puzzle that everything gets to the right store and meeting your deadlines. It's important for me. For society, that's a difficult one because we use a lot of paper and plastic and I think we could do a lot better recycle-wise. We could use a lot more of previous collections- that's a tricky one. As an example, we made a sign and then I was told that it should be WE-fi, as in our logo and that I should remake it- and I was like: Seriously? For one letter? Yeah it needs to be done, of course I'll do it because it's my job, but I don't agree on it because its wasteful." (Kathy)

Questioning the wider industry, this Committed employee displayed worry about her own involvement:

"I've always been interested in fashion and I like product, especially knitwear. Because you start with the base, the yarn, and it's really nice to watch it grown from yarn to something you can wear. Well…at the moment I have some doubts about my work as buyer, taking sustainability into account as something important for the future- I think the fashion industry is not really the best industry to work in." (Angela)

2) Identification with the organisation

Continuing from the above, employees were asked about their relation to the organisation with respect to their own value system. The questions which related to this variable were 'Is working at WE in line with your personal values? Which ones?'. It was assumed that employees who are highly engaged with sustainability would feel some degree of cognitive dissonance between their sustainability values and their work in fast fashion. All employees spoke highly of the

company and how it cared for its workers but some expressed unease about being involved in the industry. Curious and Committed employees were found to be more likely to bring up this inner conflict. Indifferent employees did not express any such disparity and spoke highly of WE and its caring and honest company culture.

When asked whether working at WE was in line with her values, an Indifferent employee said:

"Yes, otherwise I would not stay here so long. I work in a nice team, that's most important. It's like a football game, you can't do it alone. You need information from everybody, and you work together to make the best product." (Meredith)

Another Indifferent employee simply answered:

"Yeah, I think so. I don't know if it's in line- I just do my thing here." (Darryl)

In contrast to these more concise responses which spoke purely about job satisfaction, Curious employees gave more detailed and conflicted accounts when asked about their values. The clash between personal and organisational values was outlined by several Curious employees:

"I'd say about 80% of it. The 20% is part of our wannabe fast fashion perspective, I'm not really a fast fashion person, I'm more of a one-off purchase that will last a long-time person, whereas our mantra is that if it lasts 6-9 months then we are happy with it. So that the one thing where I slightly differ." (Nellie)

"Yeah, maybe, I'm not sure, I'm a little bit doubting about it, I'm just starting here so maybe I have to develop myself here, but it's not the first company I would work in, and one of the reasons is the sustainability. So, I'm not a WE customer, although the few pieces I bought are very nice, the quality is really good." (Erin)

One employee even outlined her plan to phase out of working in the fashion industry all together:

"Ha! Well, I must say lately when I got older a little bit, I have more and more troubles with the industry in total, not WE specifically, but I think working in fashion as one of the main largest contributors to climate change, I find it more and more difficult to be okay with it. And I also think the intensity and the amount of clothing that we produce in general on the market is too much and everything goes on sale, and you notice things getting cheaper so most of the time it's not about a good product that lasts for a long time. So, I think the way we are working now and the idea that we have about fashion is not okay anymore and I also think that it's going to change, it's reaching a point that it's not doable anymore. And I notice for me, that's why I am thinking to stop my work in fashion within 10 years, that's my plan." (Holly)

Committed employees also expressed this value discrepancy:

"Partly, yes, if I just look at what I do as a job with all my colleagues, I like the way the company works, it's not very formal, very transparent in a way, it's well organised, they are professional, but during the last years you see also the downside of being an employee in the fashion industry and it makes you think about what you can change." (Angela)

3) Sense of social justice

To ascertain the employee levels of social justice, four questions were asked, namely: 'What do you think are the main problems of the fashion industry?', 'Are you personally worried about the climate crisis?', 'Do you carry out any behaviours in your personal life in the name of sustainability?' and 'Do you think WE should care about sustainability? To what extent?' This variable was the most divisive. In general, the more engaged an employee was, the more they showed very nuanced and thorough understanding of the sustainability issues of the fashion industry, they showed a high level of concern for the future of the planet, they took responsibility in their personal lives and also held WE accountable to take responsibility for its negative contributions. Indifferent employees showed very little concern for sustainability and the climate crisis and its relation to their industry. A low sense of social justice was characterised by deflecting responsibility and not acknowledging the scale of the issue. Indifferent employees often expressed no sense of urgency, understanding or displayed any actions in their personal lives for the cause. Curious employees felt more responsibility and pressure to act but felt unequipped to- they saw their personal actions as not being enough. Committed employees showed a high sense of social justice and also acted on this sense at work (see variable 4 below).

When asked 'What do you think are the main problems of the fashion industry?', Indifferent employees gave concise, often quite shallow responses:

"Well, everything what's in the news right now about fast fashion, that the children are working in the other countries for low costs and just environment, the materials and everything like that." (Stacy)

Curious employees tended to give shorter answers which focused on one or two aspects of the problem, but addressed better the core issues that the industry is facing:

"I think it starts also with the customer not being so aware of the effects that it has, that it can have, of course it's getting bigger and everyone is getting more aware but as long as the customer wants to buy the 5 euro t-shirt, it doesn't really create pressure to change real big things." (Jo)

"Sometimes I think we are continuously going and going...we keep continuing with working, with the lowest prices and we are looking for better sustainable products but it's just a tiny subject, I think everybody is just rushing all the time and I think it costs too much energy for people and too many costs and too much time to really have a good look at how we can be more sustainable. I think a lot of companies just think of the keeping up with production and making money." (Erin)

Committed employees generally gave more rounded and holistic responses to this question:

"There's probably quite a few. There's a lack of understanding of what will make a difference. Sometimes, there's a leap from not doing anything to possibly trying to do everything but then taking away the desirability of the garment in terms of how it looks and how it functions, and I think we need both, the clothes need to look good and be wearable but I think we also need to be able to contribute where we can, it's a step process. Some are worried that when they do a little bit, they are advertising that the rest is not sustainable. But we should be a bit more open

to do anything we can. It's not just how you source it; you can do x y z to reduce water and use different treatment to take away use of chemicals and get delivered in a non-recyclable polybag and are aired and planed. So, what's the balance? As all businesses we need to understand what we can change. And it makes me think about my own life too." (Jim)

When asked about whether they were personally worrying about the climate crisis, Indifferent employees expressed a superficial awareness and often admitted that they did not really concern themselves with it:

"Oh that, it's something that's a problem living on earth. We are the ones who make the pollution, mankind. Yeah, so what can we do about it? It starts at home and then yeah…" (Meredith)

"Mmmhhh…well, I am but I don't know much about it so yeah." (Stacy)

"Yeah, of course, but I don't think textiles is the biggest threat for that one, I think other industries are more…of course global warming is real but it's difficult not to…do things." (Darryl)

Curious and Committed employees showed way more personal concern for the climate crisis, expressing that it often weighed on their conscience and that they felt guilt and urgency, but struggled to know how to respond to these feelings:

"Yes, I do. But what to do with it, I find really hard because on one hand I really enjoy my job and I really like what I'm doing, on the other hand I also know how bad it is and that the fashion industry is one of worst industries for the environment. If you look now in the shop there's so much sale, I get sad a little bit. That there is so much clothing and I'm also working in clothing and being a part of it, but on the other hand I also believe people need clothing and also it offers jobs and not everything is bad. So, it's an in-between, it's difficult." (Karen)

"I am, yeah. I think politically countries could be doing more. As with most businesses, there is still quite a big priority on money, where it goes and what it's used for. I think if you look at some of the most powerful people in the world is also quite worrying, that they are not preparing us to come up with solutions. I certainly run my life with my family, wife and children, trying to consider the things that I wasn't exposed to as a child." (Jim)

Building on the above, when asked 'Do you carry out any behaviours in your personal life in the name of sustainability?', it followed that Indifferent employees showed less commitment to sustainability in their personal lives. Most individuals brought up recycling in their homes, but Curious and Committed employees acknowledged that being sustainable meant re-evaluating their consumption patterns and showed intention to go beyond sorting their waste. They mentioned changing mindsets, limiting their consumption, eating less meat, travelling by bike, investing in quality clothing that can last a long time and thrifting.

For example, an Indifferent employee answered:

"In my own place? Yeah, we share the plastic from the greens and the glass but that's it." (Meredith)

In contrast, a Curious employee describes her struggle to balance her personal and work behaviours:

"I believe that this is something that didn't just happen in my lifetime and not something I can change overnight. I do mind, and that's easy to say, but I think as a normal consumer with 2 adults and soon 2 kids in the house, were doing quite ok, when we go for a walk we pick up trash and teach our kids to do that, we recycle what we can also with clothing, our bedsheets are being recycled. So, I think we're doing quite ok for a normal family. Of course, I could commit more, and help out more but as a normal consumer without thinking too much about it I'm doing quite ok. I think it's hard in my job to say that I'm doing good because I'm working in the second most polluting industry in the world. And my boyfriend works in the transport industry, so he flies three times or four times a week to different locations so…there's a conflict in between what we're doing for a living and what we do as a family and try to do in our own small neighbourhood and pick up trash there but yeah I find it hard to save the world as a one-man army and I also need to have a life that needs to be realistic. I won't live outside the city in a farmer's house and do everything myself and grow food myself, that's not realistic for us as a family. But I think we do what we can do when it's quite convenient." (Jan)

The last question in this category was 'Do you think WE should care about sustainability? To what extent?'. All employees agreed that the company needs to take responsibility, so this question was not very divisive. However, Indifferent employees expressed less urgency, and pointed out WE's limitations when it comes to margins and market power. Curious employees also pointed out limitations, but saw that these would dissipate as the market adjusts, one individual saying:

"Yeah, of course. I think eventually, we all need to be fully sustainable and we need to start somewhere so we also have discussion in our buying teams for example for next season there was an idea to do an eco-capsule for women, but then someone said: what does that say about all the other products you do? But I think you need to start somewhere, and you need to let customers know that you are trying and want to do sustainability. And now it's so expensive because it's so new and new technology, but if everyone will use it, it will be cheaper, that's how it is with everything. If something is more common, it is cheaper. I think it's the same with sustainable fashion. Also, in this society now, I think in 20 years it's already a lot bigger, it's getting biggest every year. Everyone should open their eyes and do something." (Donna)

Committed employees spoke more definitively about the importance of sustainability for the company:

"I think it's probably the most important thing for any retail business and for this one. It should always be top of our agenda, if I'm being honest. Because it's the future. I think that we're already making steps towards it, that certainly bringing in ISO2000 suppliers, the other thing, the big thing, is that who is responsible? I am responsible because when I bring in a supplier,

I need to know they are responsible. And we need to disengage with those suppliers that don't meet our standard." (Phillis)

4) Actual CSR engagement

This variable measured how much actual contributions employees have made to CSR at work. The questions which helped ascertain this were 'Do you think your work at WE is related to sustainability?', 'Are you aware of the activities of the sustainability department?' and 'Are you currently engaging in any way with activities of the sustainability department?'. An employee could only be placed in the Committed category if they had taken some action or been somehow involved in CSR. However, employees who did engage in some of these activities but did not display a high sense of social justice, were not placed in the Committed category, as they are not considered truly engaged. These employees are only collaborating with CSR because they were told to do so- it is assumed they would not pursue such endeavours otherwise.

The question 'Do you think your work at WE is related to sustainability?' helped distinguish those employees who had previously considered how they play a part in the problems they hear about on the news. Those who deflected responsibility fell into the Indifferent category. Curious employees agreed that their work is related and described how they could be making an impact. A Committed employee said of his part:

"I think what everyone does is related to sustainability. I think sometimes people use sustainability as a buzzword but it should be taken as the definition, what are we doing that it means we are sustainable, what are our practices that mean things can continue, not diminish, not destroy and I think my position here contributes massively, I certainly make statements in our meetings that they need to be looking at newer sources of fabrics, chemical use, chemical disposal, water use, delivering it, in how close do we source fabrics to the factories, what's the expectation we put on our factories and sources. I think I have a great responsibility." (Jim)

All the above questions were trying to ascertain whether the employees were personally and morally engaging with the values of CSR. The last question in this section differentiates them, as each employee was also asked about their history of practical engagement with CSR at work. When asked whether they were aware or engaging in any activities of the sustainability department, Indifferent employees would answer negatively, often simply with a 'no'. They would also not be aware of the company's CSR report or the initiatives it was involved in. One Indifferent employee explained that the interview for this research was her first interaction with CSR:

"No, it's the first time somebody came to my desk." (Meredith)

Curious employees, although they express a high sense of social justice, also did not carry these values over to their work lives. However, they did express the desire or intention to do so:

"We don't talk about it. But it goes really fast, we have to check if there is biological cotton, but further we do not talk about it. But of course, its related, because we have contact with the suppliers so we are buying the fabrics from there and so yeah of course we could be more involved with them about this. I don't know if it's on the table really, because I'm an assistant, from what I feel, we are not involving enough with them." (Erin)

Committed employees were characterised by physically engaging with CSR in some capacity. This varied from visiting the department to seek advice about their deals with suppliers, discussing the feasibility of innovations with the CSR head, to being involved in projects in collaboration with CSR.

The three employee category profiles are summarised based on their general responses to each variable and its questions in *Table 6* below.

Category	Sense of importance of work	Identification with the organisation	Sense of social justice	Actual engagement with CSR
Committed	Work is important to them but many display doubts about whether they work is having a positive impact on the world.	Express inner conflict and doubt. Like the company but worry about the industry the company functions in.	Highly developed. Understanding of the core drivers is detailed and nuanced. There is an understanding that cosmetic changes are not enough to make a company sustainable and there is a deeper societal problem with overconsumption, especially in fashion.	The defining feature of these employees is that they somehow participate in CSR at work. This separates them from Curious employees who also have a high sense of social justice, but do not act on these values when it comes to their work.
Curious	Work is important for the employees, but they also have some inner conflict.	They like their company, but express doubts about its effects on the world as part of a harmful industry.	Evolving or high, but many doubt their competency in raising the issues at work due to lack of knowledge and training.	These employees are aware of what the company is doing but are not participating in CSR activities.
Indifferent	Find their work important, do not mention any inner conflict. Many claim to thrive in competitive environments.	Identify highly with the organisation. Mention its caring staff and open structure.	Low, and understanding of the core problems is shallow. Many would bring up recycling at the office when asked about sustainability and their work.	None.

Table 6: Summary of the employee categories and their characteristics

4.3 Perceived Barriers

Interviewees stated reasons for personal lack of engagement, but these reasons are deeply intertwined with reasons for the lack of engagement of the fashion industry and WE with sustainability in general. These barriers are therefore a mix of the two kinds of barriers. See *Appendix 2* for a coding tree of all the barriers- it shows the core barriers and the related phrases that were united under that particular barrier. The number under each main theme indicates the frequency with which the perceived barriers in that category were referenced by interviewees (each employee mentioned several). In this section each category of barriers is discussed in more detail. All of these barriers are also interdependent and seep into each other, but for the sake of clarity have been separated into digestible categories. Below are all the barriers perceived by the employees, listed from the most frequently mentioned to least mentioned.

i.   Personality

The most frequently mentioned barrier to engagement was to do with personality. Participants mentioned things like egoism, sensitivity to environment, upbringing, roots and education as facets of personality. As one interviewee noted:

"That's in yourself. Some think: I live today, and not tomorrow. That's like asking why you vote for one party and not on the other, that's the same issue. Your youth, where you come from, your interests, your age, your private situation that you're in, it's a lot." (Pam)

Many also brought up the generational divide as a result of education shifts. Many older employees felt distanced from issues of sustainability, as when they were younger it was never part of their education or forming worldview:

"You have to get used to thinking like that- like when children learn it at school. My generation wasn't learning that, when I was little, they were smoking everywhere you know?" (Meredith)

ii.   Communication & Knowledge

Two separate participants referred to sustainability as a 'buzzword' in the industry, pointing out that it is a fashionable word which has lost meaning as companies attach the word arbitrarily to whatever they are trying to sell. The lack of knowledge, information and communication was brought up by most participants:

"Sometimes I think people believe that when we say a brand or a piece is sustainable there is something really magical in that garment that makes it live forever, that's not the truth, so understanding what it is and how it's an attitude and a choice rather than a piece [is important]." (Nellie)

Lack of clarity around the complex issues of sustainability was also stressed by participants:

"Maybe the idea that it's really complex and that it takes a lot of work. Those are the main things. I would have no idea where to start or what to do or what to think about." (Kelly)

In addition, employees pointed to the lack of official standards on what can be called 'sustainable, 'green' or 'eco', and therefore the difficulty of knowing how much a company needs to be doing to market their products this way. As one employee stated:

"It's also hard to know, what is a sustainable item, when do you have a sustainable item?" (Pam)

Many felt unequipped in terms of knowledge to challenge the status quo in their company:

"If I get more knowledge about it then I would maybe start more conversations at work, so that would be a very good goal for me. I won't start a conversation with the head of buying if I don't know what I'm talking about." (Erin)

It was obvious that knowledge of current advancements or technological innovations which could enhance sustainability was limited at the company. For example, nobody from the design team in the sample had heard of circular design[1]: neither an intern, who was in fashion school at the time, nor a designer who has worked at WE for 11 years. One employee's frustration with the company's lack of initiative in arming its staff with information is exemplified here:

"I think it's the internal communication. Tell us and we will happily do it, give us the opportunities to do so. We have a sustainability report, I've never seen it, send it around, share it, I would also love a business overview of what is our mantra as a business, what does WE believe in, so it can create lifestyle changes for people who are not doing things outside of work- if they are told to do it at work it would spill over into their personal lives." (Nellie)

iii.   Management

Predictably, many employees expressed frustration with the management for their lack of commitment to sustainability. They stressed that without top-down commitment, bottom-up suggestions from employees become extremely difficult or impossible, since price will always be favoured unless the company develops a mantra and targets on sustainability. One employee spoke of the company DNA, in other words she was speaking of the institutionalisation of sustainability:

"I think it should be more implemented into the DNA of the company. I did some projects together with CSR, with recycling and what you can do in your collection, but you notice that when it's not in the DNA, put down from the owner to the CEO and so on, it becomes really hard to change the mentality."(Angela)

Kathy stated simply on the importance of guidance from management:

"I think the whole office [is responsible], but it has to be a leader who guides us in that, one of the big boys" (Kathy)

Two employees pointed out how the power of competition could be used to achieve sustainability targets, one stated:

"But it starts with management, to be honest. Starts with them saying this is our goals, we need to do this, and if you can challenge women with men with kids then you feel a boost that you want to do better so competition can be horrible but also good"(Jan)

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[1] As opposed to linear design where products have a life cycle with a beginning and an end, circular design focuses on designing products so that resources can be reused or recycled in a loop

Phillis talked of a former employer and her experience with how much influence even one person in a leadership position can have:

"Honestly, the real reason M&S backed out was a change in leadership. The guy who was there when they started retired, and he was just a great leader with great vision and could see the future and after he left, because it's a shareholder business, they started to demand more profit and without him to say it's not about profit now but about profit 10 years from now, actually we need to live through this, it just disappeared, there just wasn't anybody there, it can be as simple as that in some businesses…" (Phillis)

iv.   Comfort

Comfort, laziness and complacency were often brought up as the forces of human nature which go against the sustainability agenda:

"People are very used to the way they live, and they are comfortable, and people do not like to be not comfortable." (Holly)

"We are all living in a kind of comfort zone, we tend to live the way we live and if you want to become more sustainable and make changes, you have to get out of your comfort zone to do these kind of things, people are not like that." (Michael)

When asked what could trigger people out of this comfort, interviewees insisted that people will only be forced to act if they are personally affected, especially financially:

"I don't know people who don't care about it- they care, but they don't act, so that's an issue. It's easy to move on like it is already. So, the only way to change it around is to hurt people in their wallet, and ask for higher taxes or whatever, to make the bad decisions more costly. When it hurts, people are changing. When it's not hurting, it goes on like normal." (Michael)

"These bigger climate changes being thrown in your face is doing for some people something good, but a lot of people need it very much in their life, so either they have kids that start seeing stuff or they need to be forced. It's like nobody fears cancer until somebody near you dies of cancer. So, a lot of people need to be affected by it themselves, before it's a problem." (Jan)

v.   Power of influence

Many employees spoke of the power of influence of committed people or of small changes in their surroundings, which serve as a constant reminder of the importance of the issue. The term 'domino effect' was used twice, where employees spoke of the snowball effect that small changes could have. They mentioned that making small changes or commitments as a business would inspire bigger changes: recycling at the HQ, flying less samples, looking into alternative or less packaging and trying to see how 3D technology could help with sustainability.

One employee spoke of being inspired in her previous role at M&S who implemented a sustainability initiative called PLAN A:

"You need to have motivation, motivate people to do it. I got to hear one of my heroes speak about sustainability, Al Gore. But it was the most impactful thing I ever heard, that made you walk out of there and think I'm changing everything I do…" (Phillis)

"When I was quite young I used to find the presentation that the sustainability director used to do at M&S incredibly motivational because he was a great speaker but also he was showing me stuff I didn't know anything about, how a factory could be energy-neutral, I was like what? A factory can be energy-neutral?" (Phillis)

Another employee spoke of a colleague at WE who helped her re-evaluate her priorities:

"And also I have a colleague who lives without waste, so she doesn't use any plastic and I think for myself it really helps if those kind of people are around because then I am also thinking about what I do…and makes me think twice about bringing in my plastic. Yeah, it inspires me." (Jessica)

Influence and the domino effect are important because they make change easier. Once someone sets an example for how to behave or respond to a problem, and people see the results and benefits it brings, this is far more impactful that always being reminded of the problem are that 'something' should be done about it. The importance of clear guidelines or examples to follow became clear with this statement:

"Well, for example with the buying clothes stuff, I saw it with other people and I thought it was a good idea and I could do it myself really easily because I have an example that I can follow, so I think if there are a few people who set the example, it is easier to follow, so that is what inspired me. And then, I saw a few documentaries but still I saw them and thought it's really bad, but after watching it I didn't know what to change directly in my life, so its inspiring but less than seeing someone do something good, for example. It's really easy to follow, you don't have to think about it a lot, you know what and how to do it, and it makes it really simple. I think a lot of people are open to it and it's on the news, so they are aware of the problem, but people just don't know how to react." (Kelly)

vi.   Profit prioritisation

Many interviewees simply attribute the lack of progress in sustainability to profit being the main priority of WE. Buyers often mentioned feeling that they have their hands tied when trying to select a more sustainable material or when trying to pitch a sustainable collection.

"Limit is very easy: price. I feel like our buyers are limited by price and we don't want to pay two more euros for a product to be sustainable, we want it to be cheap and quick and colourful and out in the store." (Jan)

This however also has to do with sustainable materials being more expensive for the time being. Some employees said that they foresee this changing as the market adapts and using sustainable materials becomes more the norm:

"I'm a buyer and that's really about money. That's the number one, you have the target margins and if you want to use recycled polyester or Tencel instead of viscose there's a price ticket on it, you have to pay more, and we have to all be involved whether we want it or not, so it's not something I can decide by myself because it will affect margins. And I know it's going on in the whole board, there's a whole discussion about it and it's something that will change in the coming years. We are going to change, more companies are doing it and the price of the fabrics can go down because the requests will be bigger but also that we have to pay for it and now is coming a moment that we are willing to pay for it." (Pam)

vii.   Systemic

Very closely linked was the systemic barriers, i.e. when employees attributed the lack of sustainability at WE to the rules of capitalism. This is very closely related to profit prioritisation as this is the primary aim of a business in a capitalist system. However, not everyone who mentioned profit prioritisation was convinced that it is impossible to implement change. Some only saw this as the choice of WE and could imagine alternative routes where a company can choose to prioritize other factors. On the contrary, those who saw it as a systemic issue, did not see an alternative way:

"It's not the first goal because the goal is to make money. And that's in the whole world like that. It's not impossible [to do something] but it's impossible to have the whole collection be sustainable." (Meredith)

"I think it's so difficult [to make any changes] as long as money rules." (Holly)

"And money rules so I think we see that margins are very tight, and you need cheap product to get your margins and I think somewhere down the line, if we want cheap products something like sustainability needs to be let go. I think they are not compatible." (Jo)

As a result, some saw government intervention as the starting point of any change:

"Legislation would be the starting point. Without it, we're not going to get anywhere. I think in the UK, it's being talked about. For example, high tariffs on products that are not green, so setting up a green standard. Not immediately but doing it in a decade from now. For instance, we have a diesel car and we cannot drive it into central London, and I think the UK will start to do more of that. That's the kind of thing that will get people to change, I know I'm being cynical, but the reality is money still controls this world, unfortunately." (Phillis)

viii.   Customer Awareness

Linked to communication, many participants attributed the slow progress in sustainability to lack of awareness in the customer. They felt that their own engagement as employees was limited by customers who demand that they produce at the quality level and in the time that they currently do. Nellie speaks below on the seeming incompatibility of the demands that customers make:

"*It's all about general masses, really, and it's not about competition or making money, it's about everyone's attitude changing, because on one hand they want a shirt that says it's sustainable so that they can tell their friends, I mean what does that even mean, really, but on the other hand they want it delivered tomorrow. Doesn't work, does it? So, we need something as an industry, we can only go as far as the customer will let us.*" *(Nellie)*

The fastness of the consumption of clothing was identified as a major issue, forming part of a generally increasingly 'fast' culture:

"Everything in our lives from the IKEA to HM and ZARA to…we are so used to everything in our surroundings being about fastness. I don't know how to reverse it, who starts and when and how. You already see if there's a delivery problem at the supermarket and your favourite product is gone, you are already upset. We are so spoilt and having what we want when we want it and the whole economy is also driving on this fastness so how do you reverse the fastness of things? Or, maybe, use the fastness in a different way? I have no idea how, but maybe instead of going backwards maybe think about using the fastness against itself." (Holly)

The word 'spoilt' was actually also used by another employee, referring to how the fastness and availability of goods has alienated us as consumers from the resources we are using up and the consequences of consuming a product or a service:

"It is good that young kids are thinking differently, you and I are so spoilt, we book holidays, it's so easy, you can do it on your laptop and within 5 minutes you have a flight, so it's so easy." (Michael)

One employee pointed out that the rapid and bottomless demand of customers is being perpetuated by companies themselves to keep sales constant. This customer-company interaction is highly problematic for the sustainability agenda, as it goes against conserving resources and producing durable items:

"In terms of the fashionability side of it, there is so much pressure and demand from customers, to want something immediately, to see different things regularly almost like a hobby, you go on these websites every day on your phone to click new-in and see something new, and that is not how the development process was historically set up… which means that new methods are adopted to get things in quicker, the customer certainly demands it, but businesses have also thrived off of making people feel like they need to see the newest thing. Certainly companies

whose clothes we like the look of like ZARA and ASOS, they are good at marketing sustainable things they do, but at the same time they are the main contributors to creating this demand to not only see the new thing but also to have it the next day."(Jim)

The excess of the industry was brought up several times. In this instance, an employee questions the necessity of new clothing in general, and encourages the second- hand market as the sustainable solution to the fashion industry:

"I think textile business is not sustainable at all, everything that has to do with producing cotton is unsustainable, we are only adding a lot of rubbish to the world, I think. I am not so positive about it. We are producing stuff, adding stuff to the world which is not necessary. It is interesting to see that amongst young people, second-hand clothing is becoming more important to them with the information in mind that it's more sustainable than new clothing, and I like that idea." (Michael)

Another employee spoke from the perspective of a consumer and pointed out why consumer awareness is hard to implement, given that the effort only really works if enough of the population goes through the mindset and behavioural change. The isolation of an aware consumer is described here:

"If you go into a Primark on a Saturday afternoon, it's too cheap and people are buying lots of stuff which they maybe only use one or two times, and that hurts me a lot, because I'm not like that at all. But when I walk into a Primark, I feel like I'm the only one." (Michael)

4.4 Relationships between employee types and perceived barriers

In this section the employee types and perceived barriers are brought together to answer the research question '*What are the barriers to employee engagement in established CSR within the fashion industry for different employee types?*' Although the relationships diverged from the hypotheses made based on theory, there were still patterns to be identified based on different employee types. The categorisation of all employees is outlined in *Table 7* below, along with all the barriers each participant mentioned in the Perceived Barriers column. This way a pattern, or lack thereof, can be studied between the employee category and the mentioned barriers in this section.

Nr.	Importance of work	Identify with organisation	Sense of social justice	Employee type	Perceived Barriers
1	High	High	Evolving	Curious	Lack of domino effect; personal interest; Laziness
2	High	High	Poorly developed	Indifferent	Profit prioritisation/capitalist system; education; generational divide; lack of legislation; lack of management commitment

3	Conflicted/ intermediate	Conflicted/ intermediate	Highly developed	Committed	Profit run/price pressure; not in the company DNA; lack of management commitment/ vision/not included in strategy; it's easier not to do it; egoism/ sensitivity to environment/ education/roots/different priorities in developing countries
4	intermediate	intermediate	Evolving	Curious	Domino effect (separate the trash at HQ to emphasise importance of the issue)/power of influence of others/inspiration/lack of guideline for people to follow/ family/raised with care for nature versus materialistic mindset/lack of government action
5	High	high	Highly developed	Committed	Lack of government action; lack of strategy integration (like PLAN A at M&S); lack of inspirational leadership with a vision; unwillingness to compromise margins; moral/ values; it's easier to not do anything; lack of incentivisation of employees/ sustainability targets; lack of communication, brainstorming, sustainable innovation meetings; it's the exception, not the norm/ state of the economy
6	intermediate	intermediate	Evolving	Curious	Different priorities in developing countries; lack of customer awareness (wanting cheap products)/margin-driven; lack of prioritisation by management; lack of knowledge and clarity on what is greener; small CSR department; speed of production; hiring people who care about the issue; generational gap (older traditional people hard to convince)

7	intermediate	low	Highly developed	Curious	Communication, lack of clear guidelines, lack of room for experimentation; lack of management strategy/vision; incentivising workers through competing with departments; lack of transparency and collaboration and knowledge sharing among departments; not being affected/ harmed personally
8	high	high	Evolving	Indifferent	Pressure of margins; inform about the negative sides but also opportunities to improve; short-term thinking; upbringing; interests; age; personal situation; lack of transparency
9	Intermediate	Low	Evolving	Curious	Lack of information and knowledge; complexity of the problem; inform on opportunities; lack of clear guidelines; personal interest; lack of example to follow
10	high	Intermediate	Highly developed	Curious	Current fast mindset; not prioritized; lack of demand for sustainable items; resistance to change due to habitual human nature; personal interest
11	intermediate	low	Highly developed	Curious	Lack of training, information; generational gap (older people set in their ways); lack of personal effects
12	High	intermediate	Poorly developed	Indifferent	Being used to a certain lifestyle; personal interest; lack of information
13	Intermediate	Intermediate	Evolving	Curious	Lack of customer awareness; higher prices of sustainable materials; minimal order quantity for sustainable materials is high; resistance to change; education; proximity of the product/process (e.g. cotton industry); lack of personal impact

14	intermediate	intermediate	Evolving	Curious	Lack of customer awareness; lack of economic pressure to make changes; competing goals of departments; lack of tools/ guidelines; not prioritizing sustainability
15	high	Low	Highly developed	Curious	Lack of customer awareness; pressure of margins; incompatibility with sustainable progress; lack of training; comfort
16	high	low	Poorly developed	Indifferent	Margins; mindset
17	high	Intermediate	Highly developed	Committed	Lack of understanding of what will make a difference; cost of sustainable production; lack of understanding of definition of sustainability; lack of education; lack of commitment to the idea
18	intermediate	intermediate	Highly developed	Curious	Lack of understanding of definition; internal communication; lack of company mantra on sustainability; personality; education; upbringing; generational;
19	high	high	Evolving	Committed	Consumer awareness; lack of strategy
20	intermediate	low	Highly developed	Committed	Margins; negotiating power of WE; company vision on sustainability; comfort; not hurting people's wallets

Table 7: Results of employee types and their corresponding perceived barriers

The following section will discuss the barriers mentioned per category. Firstly, all the participants which fell in the Committed category mentioned company management as a barrier to sustainability integration. They were also the group which emphasised comfort and ease as a major barrier to non-action when it came to sustainability at work. The common barriers are outlined in bold in the figures below.

Committed
Angela: • Profit run/ price pressure • **not in the company DNA** • **lack of management commitment/ vision/not included in strategy**

- **it's easier not to do it**
- egoism
- sensitivity to environment
- education/ roots
- different priorities in developing countries

Phillis:
- Lack of government action
- **lack of strategy integration (like PLAN A at M&S)**
- **lack of inspirational leadership with a vision**
- unwillingness to compromise margins
- morals/ values
- **it's easier to not do anything**
- **lack of incentivisation of employees/ sustainability targets**
- lack of communication, **brainstorming, sustainable innovation meetings**
- **it's the exception, not the norm**
- state of the economy

Jim:
- Lack of understanding of what will make a difference
- cost of sustainable production
- lack of understanding of definition of sustainability
- lack of education
- **lack of commitment to the idea**

Brenda:
- Consumer awareness
- **lack of strategy**

Michael:
- Margins
- **negotiating power of WE**
- **company vision on sustainability**
- **comfort**
- not hurting people's wallets

Table 8: Barriers named by Committed employees

The Curious employees all stressed the importance of information, awareness and communication, this is in regard to employees, as well as customers and parties along the supply chain, especially in developing countries. Many also brought up the lack of clear guidelines, tools, training and confusion over the definition of sustainability given its complexity. They stressed that clarity on what is actually more sustainable was necessary. In general, they suggested that the lack of consumer awareness is leading to the low demand for sustainable items and hence high costs of production for sustainable materials and processes and hence inaction by WE. Members of this category also suggested that consumer awareness

is also limited due to the lack of harm or inconvenience they personally experience when it comes to the consequences of for example climate change and other consequences of not living sustainably. This is thought to be due to how removed the industry's production process is from its consumers. The domino effect was also brought up by two members of this category, where they discussed the need for small changes to be made which could help inspire bigger ones, for example making sure there is recycling in the office to emphasise the importance of the of sustainability for the employees.

Curious
Kathy: **Lack of domino effect**   - personal interest   - Laziness   Jessica: **Domino effect** (separate the trash at HQ to emphasise importance of the issue)/ power of influence of others/ inspiration/ lack of guideline for people to follow/   - family/ raised with care for nature versus materialistic mindset/   - lack of government action   Donna: **Different priorities in developing countries**   **lack of customer awareness (wanting cheap products)/** margin- driven   - lack of prioritisation by management   **lack of knowledge and clarity on what is greener**   - small CSR department   - speed of production; hiring people who care about the issue   - generational gap (older traditional people hard to convince)   Jan: **Communication, lack of clear guidelines**   - lack of room for experimentation   - lack of management strategy/ vision   - incentivising workers through competing with departments   - lack of transparency and collaboration and knowledge sharing among departments   - not being affected/ harmed personally   Kelly: **Lack of information and knowledge**   **complexity of the problem**   **lack of information on opportunities**

- lack of clear guidelines
- personal interest
- lack of example to follow

Karen:
- Current fast mindset
- not prioritized
- **lack of demand for sustainable items**
- resistance to change due to habitual human nature
- personal interest

Erin:
- **Lack of training, information**
- generational gap (older people set in their ways)
- lack of personal effects

Nina:
- **Lack of customer awareness**
- higher prices of sustainable materials
- minimal order quantity for sustainable materials is higher
- resistance to change
- education
- proximity of the product/ process (e.g. cotton industry)
- lack of personal impact

Jo:
- **Lack of customer awareness**- lack of economic pressure to make changes
- competing goals of departments
- lack of tools/ guidelines
- not prioritizing sustainability

Holly:
- **Lack of customer awareness**
- pressure of margins- incompatibility with sustainable progress
- lack of training
- comfort

Nellie:
- **Lack of understanding of definition**
- **internal communication**
- lack of company mantra on sustainability

• personality
• education
• upbringing
• generational

Table 9: Barriers named by Curious employees

Finally, the indifferent group came up with the least detailed barriers but was quick to stress profit prioritisation or the simply 'margins', meaning the company limits on prices of purchase, as the main barrier from which all others followed. Profit prioritisation was a barrier which was named consistently throughout all categories, but only in the Indifferent category it was named by every person. Personal interest was the main barrier when asked what limits their own engagement in sustainability at work.

Indifferent
Meredith:
• **Profit prioritisation/ capitalist system**
• Education
• generational divide
• lack of legislation
• lack of management commitment
Pam:
• **Pressure of margins**
• inform about the negative sides but also opportunities to improve
• short-term thinking
• upbringing; interests
• age
• personal situation
• lack of transparency
Stacy:
• **Price**
• being used to a certain lifestyle
• personal interest
• lack of information
Darryl:
• **Margins**
• mindset

Table 10: Barriers named by Indifferent employees

5. *Discussion*

Having answered the research question in the previous chapter, the following section is dedicated to a discussion of the findings, with respect to the previous research on the subject (see *Section 2*), as well as limitations of this study and its implications for future research.

5.1 Discussion of past literature and present study

5.1.1 Employee categories

When it comes to identifying employee categories, despite Rodrigo & Arenas (2008) saying that high identification with the organisation would suggest a more committed employee, this study found that the bigger sense of social justice employees had, the less they identified with the organisation and/or the importance of their work. This is understandable given the case study, and the fact that fast fashion and sustainability are often seen as incompatible. Therefore, the employees who displayed higher social justice and concern for sustainability issues, were also the ones to express doubt about their work and industry. Hence, in this research, displaying lower levels on the variables 'identification with the organisation' and 'sense of importance at work' actually helped identify the more committed employees, as opposed to Rodrigo & Arenas' study.

The employee categories that emerged in this study partly reaffirmed and differed from prior research. For example, Rodrigo & Arenas (2008) found that short-term project workers made up their Dissident employee category, whereas this category was not found in the sample at WE, which included interns or part-time workers. It is likely that this result occurred because the original study was done in the construction sector, which is generally less well paid than the employees at WE: as a result they would not express negative views towards CSR as being a waste of money which could be used for raises, as Dissident employees did in the original study.

The Curious category which was added to the Rodrigo & Arenas (2008) framework in this study ended up being the most common in the sample (11 out of 20 or 45%). This makes sense given the empirical rule of the bell curve, where most of data is found in the middle- or between two standard deviation of the mean in quantitative studies. It is likely that Curious employees are more present in the sample from WE than the construction sector that Rodrigo & Arenas explored given that WE employs highly educated and highly skilled workers. It is not surprising that the higher the education of an employee, the more he/she is able to better understand the context of their work rather than just the content. The existence of Curious employees also confirms the existence of a mid-way category, as found by Du et al. (2013) with the Enthusiasts. In Du's study, which categorised employees by their job needs and thus engagement with CSR, Enthusiasts were found to be employees who place more importance on developmental and ideological needs rather than economic needs in their work. Curious employees in this study have some overlap with this definition, given that they expressed doubts about their role in the

industry, and even though they state to like their job, something is missing for them unless they feel like they are making a positive contribution. The fact that most of the employees were Curious also points to a general trend about attitudes to sustainability and climate change: most people are eager but are unsure how to respond and act in response to these topics. They are, as was established in the interviews, grand complex topics that an individual can easily get overwhelmed by and lost in. Committed and Indifferent employees emerged similarly in this study as in previous studies, namely Rodrigo & Arenas (2008) as well as Hemingway (2005) and Du et. al. (2013).

In terms of the influence of department on CSR engagement, the results were partly congruent with findings of Du et al. (2013), which suggested that proximity of the department would have an effect. All the Committed workers were in the Buying department, except for one in Marketing. Design only included Curious and Indifferent workers, and Marketing was the most varied department as it contained a Committed worker, a Curious worker and an Indifferent worker. It did seem that department did have some bearing on the involvement of the workers as Buying was presumed to be closest to CSR, followed by Design and then Marketing. The Marketing sample was likely too small to make any assumptions about this department.

5.1.2 Perceived Barriers and Employee Categories

When it comes to barriers to engagement, this study was congruent with a lot of the themes from previous studies. Many studies identified the difference between personal and organisational values as a barrier and the current study revealed the employees' emphasis on core personality traits as a barrier to sustainability in general and also specifically at work. Interestingly, as well as naming many barriers which were listed in *Section 2.3.3,* the employees at WE alluded to every sustainability blunder identified by Doppelt (2003), namely patriarchal thinking (blindly following authority), a silo approach (lack of interaction between different departments), no clear vision, confusion over cause and effect, lack of information, insufficient mechanisms for learning and, finally, a failure to institutionalize sustainability.

The relationships between the employee categories and perceived barriers relationship was not as definitive as predicted; however, smaller patterns could be identified.

The Curious category showed the most significant pattern, given that these employees were more likely to emphasise a lack of information, knowledge and communication as a barrier to engagement. This category was created as a response to Hemingway's (2005) Frustrated and Conformist categories, however because parameters were used from Rodrigo & Arenas (2008) study, the category profile is different. Conformist employees were found in this category, where people acted on sustainability at work despite having a fairly low sense of social justice. However, Frustrated employees could be found both in the Curious category, but also in the Committed category- referring to employees who were doing what they could at work but did not feel they were acting on their full potential towards sustainability due to organisational constraints.

Committed employees focused on the lack of initiative from management and personal comfort as the main barriers. This is partly in line with Hemingway's (2005) predictions where she hypothesised that Active employees were enabled both by collectivistic values and a supportive organisational culture. In this study however, the Committed employee category overlapped more with her Frustrated category, as many committed employees still felt limited by their organisation in pursuing or exploring sustainability at work.

Employees in the Indifferent categories were likely to perceive larger system barriers, as each one stressed profit prioritisation. It shows that perhaps this perception of the problem creates a more rigid mindset when it comes to sustainability. Those who are more indifferent see the problem as too big and impossible to tackle. If it is systematic, they see little point of making superficial changes and write off the whole endeavour. Personal interest was the main barrier when asked what personally limits their engagement- which is in line with the hypothesis based on theory (see *Table 3*).

Perhaps the most notable outcome of this study is that although perceived barriers to engagement varied slightly per category, most employees perceived similar barriers, and it was their attitudes towards the barriers that determined whether they acted on sustainability at work. In other words, the Curious or Indifferent employees did not lack initiative on sustainability because they perceived more barriers or more difficult barriers than their Committed colleagues. If anything, Committed employees had much more in-depth knowledge about core problems in fast fashion, so were able to observe more barriers. This points to an interesting phenomenon, suggesting that what might actually be more important than the actual barriers perceived, are the collective attitudes and outlook towards them.

5.2 Limitations

Due to time and schedule restrictions, interviews were kept to 30-45 minutes and only 20 participants were secured. It might be valuable to study engagement with sustainability within a bigger sample and within more companies. Similarly, sometimes the formulation of the prepared questions was misunderstood or understood differently by different interviewees, especially due to the varying levels of English proficiency, meaning that the reliability of the study was slightly compromised, although in most instances further explanation resolved the misunderstanding. Because the sample was rather small, the number of departments which could be studied had to be limited, so it would be interesting to see the differences across all departments in a company, and to especially include management which could not be included due to availability constraints of the managers at WE.

The results of this study are limited mainly by their lack of generalisability. Although the framework can be transferred to other studies on employee engagement with CSR, the present results are not representative of the employees of the fashion industry, given the convenience sample and the fact that organisational culture influences how engaged employees are (hence would be vary per company). It is likely, however, that the barriers mentioned by employees of WE can be generalised, given that employees often spoke of systematic barriers pertaining to the whole industry.

5.3 Future Research

Following from the present study, insightful future research could arise from measuring the different personality types of employees and their engagement with sustainability. Due to time limitations, this was not possible in the current study, but the interviews revealed very core personality differences and did seem to indicate that it is internal barriers, rather than external ones, that actually stop employees on acting on sustainable issues at work. It would therefore be interesting to map out the personality profiles of individuals who do and do not naturally engage with sustainability, such as the study by Milfont & Sibley (2012), which studied the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and environmental engagement. The study found that particularly Agreeableness (i.e. concern for social harmony), Conscientiousness (i.e. tendency to self-discipline and act dutifully) and Openness (i.e. curious intellectually, emotionally and willing to try new things) were best predictors of such engagement. Although not specifically measured in this study, many subjects in the Committed and some in the Curious category demonstrated signs of high conscientiousness, namely the trait of wanting to perform one's work or duty well and thoroughly. Many people also spoke of being sensitive to the world around you being a factor, so it would be interesting to test if so-called Highly Sensitive People (HSPs), a term coined by Elaine Aron (2013), are more likely to care about and act on environmental causes. This is especially interesting since it seems that perceived barriers are similar across different employee types, so in order to get all employees on board with sustainability, one might have to target their personality profiles directly.

6. Conclusion

In this section let us return to the research question:

> *What are the barriers to employee engagement in established CSR within the fashion industry for different employee types?*

This research identified three categories of employee at WE, based on their level of engagement with CSR. These were Committed, Curious and Indifferent. Committed employees expressed a high sense of social justice, and as a result expressed inner conflict and doubt about their work and industry. They also actively participated in CSR activities at work. Curious employees had a relatively high sense of social justice but failed to act on these values at work. Finally, Indifferent employees identified highly with their work and their company and felt no conflict with the impact of their industry. They expressed low levels of social justice and did not engage with CSR at work.

In order of highest frequency to lowest, the general barriers identified to engagement with CSR in this study were: 1) Personality, 2) Communication & Knowledge, 3) Management, 4) Comfort, 5) Power of influence, 6) Profit prioritisation, 7) Systemic, 8) Customer awareness. Although there were barriers which were more consistently named by each category of employee, participants in all categories generally perceived many of the same hindrances to

their engagement with sustainability at their workplace. From the findings, it seems that the level of engagement an employee personally experiences is not dependent on the types of barriers he/she perceives. In fact, employees in all categories seem to experience similar barriers, but the Committed employees are distinctive for accepting more responsibility for breaking them down. This forms valuable conclusions about the strength of personality with regard to engagement with sustainability.

This study adds to the existing literature on CSR employee engagement by addressing what might distinguish those who are more or less committed to sustainability at work, as well as showing that perception of barriers varies only slightly based on employee type. It is imperative that understanding of employee segments continues so that the correct incentives can be used and the whole workforce can be triggered to participate in and create a transformational CSR strategy. As one employee noted on the urgency of the matter:

"The scary part is that we know all the problems and it is going faster than we thought it was and we are still going. It's like you are going to see a train crash and we are just letting it happen. As a person, what can I do? I feel so useless sometimes, like a drop in the ocean, we all need to do it, but how?" (Holly)

Let us finally return to the opening lines of this report. We all feel the insecurity of an unsustainable system, and the urgency to act. Yet most of us do not hold the institutions we work for accountable and do not feel we can make a difference. Do you see yourself in the words of the employees at WE- Holly, Michael, Phillis? If this study has achieved its aims, it will reflect at least partially what you also feel as an employee. And if it has exceeded its purpose, a mirror will have been held up to each of us and to the excuses we make to remain stagnant.

7. Recommendations for WE Fashion

These findings can hopefully benefit WE and give the company more insight into what is preventing engagement with sustainability. Of course, WE's limitations have to be considered, as it is not able to influence all of the identified barriers. It is harder to address things like the exact personality profiles of each employee, human nature that favours comfort over change and capitalism, which favours profit over societal benefit. However, below are some solutions that follow from the barriers identified, brought forward by WE's employees:

1. **Power of knowledge**

WE's employees felt that they lack expertise or even basic knowledge on sustainability to feel equipped to act. They all have different backgrounds and belong to different generations, so it is important to get the staff on a singular mindset when it comes to the issue. They need the knowledge in order to challenge any status quo at the company or with suppliers. If they do not know what is truly possible, what is technologically feasible or what sustainable production

should cost, it is hard to start a discussion. Listed below are some more concrete strategies to tackle this barrier:

    a. Go beyond superficial understanding of sustainability. Many employees when asked about sustainability were quick to talk about recycling at the office, before thinking about the sustainability of the fashion industry as a whole. While recycling is important, the scale of the issue needs to be understood. The root causes of how the fashion industry contributes to the climate crisis and environmental and social disasters needs to be understood.

    b. Inform the different departments about their role in the issue and the solutions they should pursue. None of the designers who were interviewed had heard of circular design, even though design is often considered the starting point of all sustainable activity, i.e. designing things with their disposal in mind, making them more easily recyclable/compostable/taken apart and upcycled. Educating designers at WE about circularity through workshops or collaborations could help greatly with its recycling of clothing and redirecting garments from landfills.

    c. Provide clarity and guidelines. Design a fabric guide: what is a sustainable garment? Give clear guidelines, instructions and targets for sustainable work.

    d. Utilise the WE Academy resources for sustainability education. WE has the learning platform WE Academy which is grossly underutilised in terms of sustainability education.

    e. Have a sustainability advisor in each department, this can be a current employee who receives extra training and can give advice/technical expertise on sustainability issues.

    f. Bring the process closer to home. A suggestion from one employee was to engage people more with the supply chain of the clothing, so that they are not so emotionally removed from the process of production and can value their clothes more. Employees who do travel to places where the production takes place can make a video/vlog to then present to other to be able to visualise the process and see the consequences of how we produce. As one employee said of visiting Bangladesh: 'the streets were a different colour depending on what dye was being used in the factory.' That is a profound image, maybe more powerful than saying your garment produces X amount of water pollution in Bangladesh.

    g. Teach customers to care for and value the clothing they buy; guide them to be more prone to buying a quality piece which is sustainable.

2. **Power of influence**

Much of what WE employees mentioned had to do with not being stimulated enough in their work environment to think about sustainability. They emphasised that having individuals who set an example, whether that be a colleague or a member of management, was very powerful and could set off a domino effect within the company. Strategies to address this barrier include:

    a. Start at the HQ. Many employees spoke of the power of small exhibitions of sustainable actions, for example cleaning up things at the HQ; even separating bins and getting rid of one-use plastics raises influence. One employee talked

of her colleague who follows a zero-waste lifestyle and how she finds that this colleague's commitment really impacts her.

b. Start a domino effect. Beyond sorting the rubbish, employees said that if the company made smaller commitments to reduce negative impacts in the supply chain, this would go a long way. For example, to reduce flying samples (utilize 3D technology to eliminate need for sending samples back and forth), reduce use of polybags/packaging to the minimum necessary, invest in recycling returned clothes/redirecting fabric waste. Many retailers already have a recycling scheme, which WE is yet to implement in its stores.

c. Have impactful speakers and workshops. One employee spoke of an experience with past employment where she was extremely motivated by the management's commitment to sustainability: she even got to meet her idol Al Gore, who came to speak at the company. She talked about how the company presented sustainability as the only way, not as an alternative. Interactions with companies and individuals with such a mindset could go a long way to inspire change.

3. Challenging the system

Indifferent employees were dismissing progress due to the systematic barriers. It is therefore important that they see that it is possible to bend or resist the current status quo in the industry when it comes to approaches to sustainability. This includes adopting sustainable business models, challenging the current linear production model, as well as the fast fashion consumption mindset and the disposability of clothing. WE's employees suggested some ways to achieve this:

a. There is no Plan B. To address systematic barriers, WE could take inspiration from companies like Marks & Spencer, which introduced a PLAN A philosophy (see https://global.marksandspencer.com/plan-a/) to foster sustainability culture, or Patagonia, which markets its sustainability practices in an educational way. As it was pointed out by one interviewee, WE lacks the negotiating power of industry leaders like H&M and ZARA to insist on sustainable practices by their suppliers. However, coalitions with such competitors could help to set a new industry standard.

b. Bring value back to clothing. Currently, sustainability is the more expensive, less appealing option. One employee suggested making smaller collections so that their value can go up and the quantity of garments can go down. This solution addresses the wastefulness and rapidness of the fast fashion industry. It is feasible to make the same amount of money, but with more thought-out, better quality pieces. Advertising the advantages of durability over fastness would also be beneficial, as opposed to just trying to sell them the idea of organic or Better Cotton Initiative certified cotton.

c. Adopt and spread a tailor's mindset. One employee, who had a background as tailor, stressed the importance of the tradition. As a tailor, you work hard to make and adjust a piece of clothing, and this kind of care means that you would not throw away an item if for example a button broke off or a zipper tore.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

- Thank you for giving me some of your time.
- The purpose of the interview is to understand how engaged employees are with sustainability and what is facilitating and preventing such engagement.
- The interview is recorded but is kept anonymous in my research so feel free to speak your mind.

Typology

Sense of importance of work

- What are your main job tasks?
- What do you find fulfilling about your job?

Identification with the organisation

- Is working at WE in line with your personal values? Which ones?

Sense of social justice

- What do you think are the main problems of the fashion industry?
- Are you worried about the climate crisis?
- Do you carry out any behaviours in your personal life in the name of sustainability?
- Do you think WE should care about sustainability? To what extent and why?

CSR/ Sustainability engagement

WE has a sustainability department, which tries to manage the social and environmental negative impacts of the company- i.e. the responsibilities of the company to society.

- Do you think your work at WE is related to sustainability?
- Are you aware of the activities of the Sustainability department? Can you provide some examples?
- Are you currently engaging in any way with activities of the sustainability department at work?
  - If so, how?
  - If not, would you be eager to do so? To what extent?

Barriers
- What do you think limits your own engagement/ interest in sustainability at work?
- What do you think would have to happen for WE to develop a stronger sustainability culture among its employees?
- What do you think a sustainable fashion industry would look like?
- What do you think makes some people care about sustainability and other not?

Appendix 2: Barriers Coding Tree

Below is the coding tree for the perceived barriers as created in NVivo. The numbers in the figure represent how frequently a barrier was mentioned.