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Unlocking Corporate Social Responsibility: Employee Perspectives and Strategic Recommendations at Mendix

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plays an important role in shaping organizational culture and employee engagement, this is also true for tech firms such as Mendix. This study explores the perspectives of Mendix employees on CSR initiatives, aiming to uncover underlying mechanisms for participation and propose strategies for maximizing CSR impact.

Methodologically, qualitative interviews were conducted with a sample of 20 Mendix employees to capture the insights into their attitudes towards CSR. Thematic analysis revealed that employees perceive CSR as integral to societal well-being, driven by personal values and a desire for positive change. However, findings also highlighted gaps in awareness and understanding of Mendix's CSR efforts among employees.

Strategic recommendations focus on enhancing internal communication to raise awareness and visibility of CSR initiatives. Leadership involvement is crucial, advocating for CSR integration into strategic goals and demonstrating commitment through active participation. Establishing a dedicated CSR team is proposed to facilitate coordination, provide resources, and nurture employee engagement in CSR activities.

By implementing these recommendations, Mendix can strengthen its CSR initiatives, foster a culture of social responsibility, and enhance organizational cohesion and performance. This approach not only aligns with Mendix's mission and values but also gives the company a positive image in the tech industry, driving positive impact both internally and within the broader community.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility | Tech company | Employee level| Policy advice

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Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility

The world is facing more and more pressures on a daily basis, such as rising populations, climate change and resource scarcity. This has led to the increased attention from the government and academia to the concept of corporate sustainability (Cheema et al. 2020). This corporate sustainability, better known as corporate social responsibility (CSR), has therefore been researched a considered amount in recent years (Bauman, & Skitka, 2012).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), defined as “context-specific organisational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders’ expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance” (Aguinis, & Glavas, 2012). But the research done on CSR is mostly focussed to address how CRS affects important external stakeholder groups, especially investors and consumers (Bauman, & Skitka, 2012).

CRS has turned into a well-used operative tool for enterprises to pursue competitive advances and commercial success. That is why the significant increase in CRS was at the organisational level, mainly focussing on CSR’s effects on enterprises’ financial outcomes (Wang et al, 2020).

CSR benefits

Not only is CSR beneficial for society, but it also brings benefits for companies who participate in CSR initiatives. A couple of examples of the benefits that companies get from participating in CSR initiatives is that it improves the relationship with the communities. Socially responsible companies can easily win the approval of local communities and other companies, enabling enterprises to operate smoothly. It also creates a positive image of the company, which makes it more attractive for customers to use your brand, for attracting investors and keeping stakeholders and to differentiate from the competition. Looking at the work environment, it also boosts morale, inspiring employee motivation and loyalty, leading to more work efficiency and satisfaction (Książka, 2016)

Employee CSR level

Even though there has been a lot of research done on the organisational level of CSR and the benefits of it, there is almost to none knowledge about the individual level of CSR in corporates. Until very recently, CSR research ignored the individual level, only 4% of the CRS articles that were published before 2012 examined this level (Aguinis, Glavas, 2019).

That is why there are research gaps in the micro-level of CSR, in particular, limited research has been done on the stakeholder group of employees, who are important resources in contributing to corporate

performance (Wang et al, 2020). This gap in knowledge is surprising, given how well established the idea is that employee attitudes and behaviours have consequences for the overall success of organizations (Bauman, & Skitka, 2012).

Individual employees within a corporate can have a significant impact on the overall outcomes of their employing organization's CSR, therefore it is important to promote employee engagement in CSR initiatives (Cheema et al, 2020). Knowing this, it is still uncertain whether or how CSR affects employees. Because employees are the primary stakeholders who directly contribute to the success of the company, it is important to understand the employees reactions to CSR. This information will help answer lingering questions about the potential effects of CSR on companies as well as illuminate some of the processes responsible for activating CSR behaviours in employees (Bauman, & Skitka, 2012).

Mendix

The company in which the individual CSR levels are going to be investigated for this research is called Mendix. Mendix is a global tech company that uses low-code applications to develop platforms, for other companies all over the world. With their technology, they try to improve communication and collaboration between business and IT. Low-code is described as a process that uses less hand-coding compared to traditional programming coding. This is achieved through the use of visual development tools and pre-built components that companies can use. Rather than a technical coding environment, low-code operates in a model-driven, drag-and-drop interface. This means that developers within a company do not have to build the coding themselves

In June 2023, Mendix established the Social Impact Department, which focusses on the CSR aspects of Mendix. This has only been done for their Rotterdam office. Their CSR initiatives, which is called "Low-Code for Good Initiative" has the goal of empowering socially marginalized groups, regardless of their experience or background, to use Mendix's low-code platform and create innovative digital solutions. They have done this on a project based approach, such as organizing a low-code bootcamp for African women for 6 months in 5 different African countries, to help them become more economically independent. The department also gave donations to charities and is helping non-profit organizations that focus on societal impact with Mendix technology. However, this has only been done using a project-based approach until now. They want to transform this into a strategy-based approach to make it more sustainable.

Current research

With the current knowledge, it will not be possible for a Tech/IT company like Mendix to initiate a successful strategy based approach for their employees. To help Mendix in their endeavors, a research will be done about the CSR care and underlying motives of their employees, to make it

possible for Mendix to implement a CSR policy with the intended purpose.

Previous research mainly focusses on favourable behaviours of stakeholders, customer satisfaction and maximizing business returns, but almost none on employee participation in CSR. The aim of this research is therefore, to clearly examine how the Mendix employees view CSR translated for them in Social Impact Initiatives, to investigate the role of CSR on an employee level, with the contribution of doing this within a Tech/IT company and help determine different underlying mechanisms that play a role in employee CSR.

The main research question in this thesis will be: “How do Mendix employees relate to CSR initiatives within Mendix?” The first sub questions is: “What are the underlying motives of the Mendix employees for their level of care on CSR initiatives?” The second sub question is: “What do Mendix employees believe is needed to participate in CSR initiatives?”

Based on the results of the data, an advice will be written in what is needed to make a strategy based policy for Mendix that will inspire the Mendix employees to participate in the Social Impact Initiatives of the Social Impact Department.

Theory

Looking at the scope of CSR that influences people ideology and behaviour on the matter, it can be seen in three different ways. People who believe that CSR should not be the purpose of a corporate. People who believe that CSR should be intertwined in their corporate. Lastly, people who are influenced by their surrounding for their opinion about CSR.

Negative CSR ideology

Using the institutional theory that was developed by Meyer and Rowan (1977), it can be explained why there is a viewpoint of people that believe that CSR does not have an added value to a company or society in general. The institutional theory explains that the social context in which firms operate influences the behavior in and of organizations. The institutional theorists stress the role of social processes, norms and expectations in explaining firm behavior. This can be showcased in the fact that firms' environments exert pressures towards social conformity, leading firms to display similarities to other firms in their respective fields (Hillebrand et al, 2011)

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) used the institutional theory as their basis for their own theory, the institutional isomorphic theory. This theory is based on three mechanisms. The first is coercive isomorphism, that stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy. It results from both formal and informal pressure exerted on organizations by organizations upon which they are dependent on, as well as by cultural expectations in society. Such pressures may be felt as forced upon the company. The second is mimetic isomorphism, that results from standard responses and uncertainty. Uncertainty is also a powerful force that encourages imitation. When goals are ambiguous or when the environment creates uncertainty, organizations may model themselves on other organizations without the same reason behind it. The last is normative isomorphism, which is associated with professionalization. This entails the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work, in a sense, to control the production of products and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation of their occupational autonomy. But this is in reality not achievable since professionals must compromise with non-professional clients, higher ups and regulators (DiMaggio, & Powell, 1983).

Looking at corporate social responsibility in the lens of institutional isomorphic theory, it can give an explanatory basis on why people have a negative view on this matter. It starts with the lack of CSR activity in general, which may be viewed as the resistance to institutional change of an organization, when it does not adjust to new concepts or corporate social responsibility practices. If companies then take action in CSR initiatives, it is a result of coercive isomorphic pressures enforced mostly by lawmakers and organizational providers in order to minimize corporate irresponsibility. CSR is then a strategy for the companies to avoid regulations and costly repercussions, such as fines,

lawsuits and consumer boycotts and a decrease in sales when they are not actively engaging in CSR practices. CSR programs are also used in order to reduce political costs, such as taxes and fees, as well as also help companies to obtain certain benefits from the government and justify their profits. This translates in focussing on shareholder value maximization, while doing the least that is required either by law or social expectations in CSR activities. The programs are aimed at keeping the civil pressure down and is often accompanied by company's hypocrisy (Roszkowska-Menkes, & Aluchna, 2017).

When sincerity of motive has been called into questions when a firm invests in CSR related initiatives, the term greenwashing comes to mind by people. Greenwashing refers to organization's salient aspects of CSR and neglecting the unobservable aspects. They often 'go green', since nowadays, becoming 'green' is both a necessity and an opportunity for companies. Green products are defined as those that use fewer resources, have lower impacts and risks to the environment, and prevent waste generation from the conception stage (Dangelico & Pontrandolfo, 2010). But companies often do not focus on all the aspects of it, such as that they seem to pay less attention to the working conditions and environmental issues during the production process. Greenwashing has often been associated with negative feelings for consumers (Wu, Zhang, & Xie, 2020).

The demand for green products is expected to continue, but customers still worry about the contrast between image and reality. They still doubt company claims. There is growing consumer scepticism towards companies that take opportunistic advantage of the green movement and therefore CSR initiatives, since they are often linked together (Aggarwal, & Kadyan, 2014). Think for example about the Primark case when it was sued by a customer for greenwashing (NOS, 2023)

These firms occasionally use greenwashing to promote their CSR behaviour without fully divulging destructive information in order to build up encouraging association images (Nguyen et al, 2019). This is due to the wide spread of greenwashing cases, increasingly more disseminated by the media, an impact in green practice credibility in organizations has been noticed overall, increasing the consumer scepticism concerning CSR initiatives such as going green (Andreoli, & Minciotti, 2023).

Because of the insincerity of some corporates that engage in CSR by mimicking other companies without the same purpose of doing good, doing it because of societal pressure or even doing it for financial gain. Which could go in the realm of greenwashing, the scepticism of people arises over CSR initiatives of companies and if these initiatives actually have any values or is it just a gimmick of the current times.

This could also be the case for the employees of Mendix, they can see CSR initiatives done by companies as performative and will lose trust in the concept of what CSR stands for, helping others, which will translate to a feeling of scepticism about CSR in general for them.

Positive CSR ideology

There is also an opposite ideology that believes that it is the duty of people and in extension

of that, corporates, to actively participate in CSR initiatives. CSR actions provide a rare opportunity to positively shape individuals' perceptions of firms, especially employees and prospective employees. Discretionary CSR activities, particularly those demonstrating a prosocial orientation, can be attributed to morality, enhancing social ties between individuals and the organization (Chong, 2009). Consequently, CSR initiatives should increase identification and commitment to the organization, foster organizational citizenship behaviors, and enhance the meaningfulness of work (Glavas, 2016).

One of the theories that addresses why people feel connected to CSR initiatives is moral identity. Hart (1998) definitines moral identity as “a commitment to one’s sense of self to lines of action that promote or protect the welfare of others”. It is a self-regulatory mechanism that motivates moral action. Moral identity can be a basis for social identification that people use to their self-definitions, which are associated with certain beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. This can for example be the emphasis of being fair and just in society (Aquino, & Reed, 2002). This serves as a motivator for moral action, the moral identity of individuals activates their moral self-schema to guide their behaviour (Farmaki, & Stergiou, 2021). A moral self-schema is identified as a self-schema that is organized around specific moral trait associations, such as fair, friendly, generous, caring, compassionate, helpful, honest, kind, which are linked in memory (in the manner of spreading activation). Moral identity has both a private and public aspect. The private aspect of moral identity is a cognitive representation of the moral self which is reflected in moral traits that are central to one’s self concept. Publicly, moral identity can be projected symbolically in the forms of taking action in the world, or, alternatively, the degree to which the traits are reflected in one’s public actions (Narvaez, & Lapsley, 2009).

Looking at the public aspect of moral identity is where CSR plays a role. In the context of Corporate Social Responsibility, recent research has explored the role of moral identity in employees' responses to organizational CSR initiatives. Studies have found that employees high in moral identity exhibit stronger relationships between CSR perceptions and organizational citizenship behaviour. Employees with higher moral identity centrality tend to display greater identification with CSR initiatives (Farmaki, & Stergiou, 2021). Employees with high moral identity, for them moral schemas are chronically available, readily primed and easily activated for information processing. They are more likely to activate moral identity based knowledge to manage their behaviours. This in contrast to people with low moral identity, who care relatively little about ethics or morality and their moral schemas and values are not internalized (Wang et al, 2017). Individuals higher on moral identity symbolization engage in activities and behaviours that signal to others that they are moral beings. These individuals may signal their morality through actions because of a genuine desire to communicate the importance of their moral identity (Ormiston, & Wong, 2013). Such individuals are more willing to help those identified as out-group members. This suggests that individuals high on moral identity would be particularly sensitive to an organization’s CSR because CSR reflects the firm’s actions toward external groups, communities, and environments (Rupp et al, 2013).

On the employee level this could mean that people who believe in a fair and just world, or want to help others out of intrinsic motivation will see CSR initiatives as a must-have, since it will bring a positive contribution to society.

Possible influential factors on CSR ideology

The institutional theory and the moral identity theory are used to understand the different viewpoints of CSR. But in these viewpoints, there are also possible influential factors that can influence an employee CSR behaviour, such as leadership and psychological need.

Leadership theories play a crucial role in connecting leaders to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Early studies, like that by Jones Christensen, Mackey, & Whetten (2014), utilized theories such as resource dependence, stakeholder, and agency theory to propose that CEOs imprint their values onto firms, influencing decision-making processes that prioritize stakeholder claims and impact the social performance of the company. Besides values, CEO demographics and characteristics like compensation, educational background, and job experience are associated with CSR activity within organizations. Additionally, early life experiences of firm founders may predispose them to imprint their firms with a CSR identity, which can persist long after their departure.

Transformational leadership is particularly relevant in CSR discussions, linking leaders to higher firm engagement in environmental and social responsibility. Transformational leaders, by sharing values, inspiring motivation, stimulating innovation, and providing individualized consideration, indirectly influence CSR behaviors within their organizations. Research indicates that firms with greater transformational leadership are more likely to adopt institutional CSR practices (Du, Swaen, Lindgreen, & Sen, 2013). Interestingly, while transactional leadership enhances the relationship between CSR practices and organizational outcomes, it does not directly influence institutional CSR practices. Most CSR strategies are top-down, with senior management, CEOs, and presidents primarily responsible for their creation. Leadership vision, values, guidelines, and training are found to significantly impact employee implementation of CSR initiatives (Aguinis, & Glavas, 2019). This would mean that there is an expectation by employees that a leader can increase employee participation in CSR activities. By a series of behaviors or role-modeling, advocacy and facilitating behaviour. Through matching the words with deeds, leaders showcase their CSR action as role models, proving their belief in the value of such action and advocating them to the employees. This in combination with training, incentives and rewards will be translated into employee CSR initiative participation (Chen, & Hung-Baesecke, 2014).

Psychological needs also play a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions and motivations CSR. These needs include a sense of security and safety, self-esteem, feelings of belongingness, and existential meaning.

Firstly, individuals seek a sense of security and safety, which is reinforced by the belief in the morality of others, because morality is often linked to trust. CSR therefore satisfies the need for security and safety, because companies with strong reputation for CSR exhibit cooperative behavior instead of opportunistic and exploratory behavior. Employees in turn can conclude that companies who participate in CSR initiatives have morality. This morality serves as a basis for trust because people assume that moral actors are less likely to take advantage of their employees. Therefore, CSR initiatives are linked to security and safety,

Secondly, individuals desire to maintain a positive self-image and derive esteem from their social identities and affiliations. CSR activities contribute to positive distinctiveness and enhance the image of the organization, making membership in the firm more attractive. This fosters a sense of belongingness and validation of personal values and beliefs, reinforcing self-esteem.

Moreover, CSR can promote organizational identification by influencing perceived similarity between individuals and the organization. Self-categorization theory suggests that individuals identify with groups when social identity becomes salient, inhibiting the salience of personal identity. CSR initiatives can strengthen the social identity of employees within the organization.

Finally, individuals seek meaning and purpose in their work beyond material comfort and social approval. CSR initiatives that contribute to societal welfare can fulfil employees' need for meaning, especially in work environments where the direct impact of work on others may be limited. For example, learning about CSR efforts by companies like Coca-Cola to improve global living standards can imbue employees with a sense of purpose and meaning in their work (Bauman, 2012).

Meaning that on the employee level, their behaviour towards CSR initiatives could be influenced by leadership or psychological need. If someone has a negative ideology of CSR, but has a leader who showcases how their CSR initiatives positively influence society, the employee will be more willing to also take part in CSR initiatives. The same is also for psychological need, if an employee does not believe in CSR initiatives as sincere, but do want to maintain a positive self-image, they will participate in CSR initiatives to maintain or enhance that self-image.

General Expectations

Taking the information into account from above. I would suspect that in my research people could have a negative viewpoint of CSR initiatives and this is connected towards the institutional theory which describes that they view CSR initiatives more as an enforced aspect instead of an intrinsic aspect of a company. The level of insincerity that some companies have to engage in, this leads to a negative connotation and scepticism for the employees. For the employees, CSR initiatives feel for them more as a gimmick that companies do.

If looked at the positive ideology of CSR, employees can showcase a positive view of CSR initiatives, which is explained by the moral identity theory. This illustrates that it is people's moral duty to participate in CSR initiatives and they draw this intrinsic motivation out to a company level.

Therefore the expectation is that positive CSR views will be related to their own ideology of making a positive change and helping others.

When thinking about the influencing factors that can lead to CSR employee participation, the expectation arises that people will mention that leadership will play an important role. This can be seen as that direct managers and upper management will act as role models, showing the way how to act towards CSR initiatives and employees who will follow their managers, since they set the example of how to behave.

It is also expected that employees will use psychological needs or an aspect of it to explain their motivation to participate in CSR initiatives. This can be done by explaining how CSR initiative are for them seen as a sense of safety and security, how it improves their self-esteem, how it strengthens their organizational identification or even gives them a sense of purpose.

Methods

Participants

For this research, semi-structured interviews have been conducted. The sample of participants exists of employees working for Mendix. Since Mendix does have different locations in different countries, to make the sample more accurate of representing the employees of Mendix, not only EMEA (Europe, the Middle East and Africa) based employees were interviewed, but employees from the Americas (North and Latin America) and APAC (Asia-Pacific) were interviewed as well. The fact that Mendix has different departments also needed to be taken into account therefore, at least one person from every department was interviewed. Participants were recruited by personal connections of my supervisor at Mendix and myself. A mix of C-level employees, managers, team leads and general employees were selected. The participants were reached through the company mail or company slack channels. A total of 20 were interviewed, of which 7 identified as female, 13 identified as male and 0 identified as other. An overview of this is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Interview	Gender	Department	Location
1	f	Operations	EMEA
2	m	Customer Support	EMEA
3	m	IT	EMEA
4	f	Operations	EMEA
5	f	Operations	EMEA
6	f	Sales	Americas
7	m	Software	APAC
8	f	BITS	EMEA
9	m	BITS	EMEA
10	m	Software	EMEA

11	f	Communications	EMEA
12	m	Customer Succes	Americas
13	m	Customer Service	EMEA
14	m	Ecosystems	APAC
15	m	APP Development	EMEA
16	m	Sales	EMEA
17	m	Sales	EMEA
18	f	IT	EMEA
19	m	Customer Support	EMEA
20	m	Design	EMEA

Note. f stand for female and m stands for male.

Procedure

The interviews were conducted at the Rotterdam Mendix office or online through Microsoft Teams. Before the interview, the participants were asked to read the consent form, which was sent beforehand through mail. In this form the participants are informed that the interviews will be recorded with their permission, that they can choose to stop any time they want and can afterwards retract their answers. An introduction letter was also sent to the participant along the consent form, this entailed a brief introduction on the topic of the interview, that their information will be handled with care and will be anonymized and what the ultimate goal is of the interviews they participate in. The participants participated in this research voluntarily, and they did not receive any rewards for it. The interviews took around 45 minutes to 1 hour and were conducted in English. Before the start of the interview, a verbal permission for recording the interview was also asked.

Interview themes

This research aims to understand how Mendix employees think about Corporate Social Responsibility, what their underlying motives are for this, and what is needed for them to participate in Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. That is why during the interviews, a set of topics have been asked to get this insight of the employees. The participants were asked about demographics such as gender and how long they worked at Mendix, as well as what their thoughts were about the company culture and how connected they felt towards the company. This was done to open up with

easy questions and get information about their commitment to the company as a whole, while also looking at the influence of psychological need that was discussed in the theory.

To get insights about their ideology of CSR, questions were asked about their personal investment of CSR, if they believed that CSR should be in a company and why they feel this as well as where the responsibility should lie if they believe that CSR should be in companies. These questions were asked to understand if they more lingered towards the institutional ideology of CSR or the moral identity ideology of CSR.

To understand the underlying motivation CSR specifically at Mendix, questions were asked if they find that CSR initiatives corresponds with their view of Mendix, if they find that Mendix is participating in CSR and what Mendix should do to about CSR initiatives. This showcased if their ideology of CSR changes within a specific context and if that influences their ideology or not.

Lastly, to get an idea of what Mendix employees feel is needed for them to participate in CSR initiatives, questions are asked about what they find is needed for them to be able to participate in these initiatives, what are the current hurdles they believe are in place right now and what would inspire them come up with CSR initiatives that are close to their own values and believes. This is linked to the influential factors, to investigate if leadership and psychological need has an effect on their own CSR behaviour.

Afterwards I also gave the employees the opportunity to talk about CSR in a general sense, to make sure that they also have the ability to talk about CSR topics that were not discussed by the interview themes or if they want to elaborate further on topics mentioned.

Analysis

First, the interviews were transcribed. Afterwards in Excel, the four topics of the interview were separated for all participant and interesting quotes were selected that could be useful to showcase the results. Parallel to this, open codes have been given to the transcriptions, which has been done in the program NVivo 14. After the initial coding, they were clustered together to create themes that will be discussed in the result section.

Results

The purpose of this research is finding out if employees within Mendix relate to corporate social responsibility, while also investigating what possible underlying motives are and what is needed for them to make it easier to take action in corporate social responsibility initiatives. That is why in this part we will be looking at recurring topics that were brought up by the Mendix employees and analyzing the similarities as well as contradictions to get a complete overview on the standpoints of corporate social responsibility.

I care

On a personal level, all the employees that were interviewed found that CSR is an important aspect and felt that it is something that is needed in society. This can be linked back to the moral identity of people. People with a moral identity are more likely to prioritize ethical considerations and engage in prosocial behaviour.

<Honestly, I'm that kind of person who always tries to make people feel positive around me. So I think that's the main value of it, to have a positive impact on someone. Respondent 7>

Their personal values will lead them to promote socially responsible behaviour within a company and take initiative to make sure that the company they work for will participate in corporate social responsibility as well. People want to be proud of the company that they work for and feel their values and beliefs reflected within the company that they work for.

<For me, super important. Honestly. I think you can even, I think it's even on my LinkedIn I think company and community values are two most important reasons why I would choose employer. So for me, it's really a fundamental thing. Because it really it needs to align with who I am. Respondent 11>

They do understand that a company does not need to have CSR as a priority, since the priority of most companies is to be profitable, even then, they believe that CSR should be taken into account for the company strategy.

Linking it back to

<So for me, to a degree a company has a moral obligation, than just to their shareholders.

Although I understand that from a business perspective that's the only obligation they have, but as being part of a larger society, I disagree with this statement. Respondent 9>

Taking it a step to far

But even if the Mendix employees feel connected to CSR on a personal level, that does not necessarily mean that every employee has the same idea about CSR initiatives. Looking at the topic of the boundaries of CSR, there were mixed feelings. There were people who believed that CSR should not have boundaries because CSR could never be enough and that it is not possible that CSR will have a negative effect on a company or its employees. Supporting causes and marginalized communities

only will lead to a more accepting culture within the company and create a safe place where everyone can feel themselves and feel that they matter, regardless who you are.

<I don't. I mean, no, I don't think so. No, I really tried to think how. I think if if, if it's done if you really do it for the right reason, which is actually the goal of CSR, then it shouldn't be possible, it cannot have a negative effect or be enough. Respondent 5>

But there were also other people who believed that companies should be mindful about CSR initiatives and actually think about what they are willing to do and where companies should draw the line. Reasons for this were for example that it can come across as insincere or performative, when you decide to take CSR action as a company without any thoughts behind why a company is doing these initiatives.

< Since CSR is so big, I think that is important you look at things that actually connect to the company, you know. For example, doing the Mendix Hacks, that is helping good cases while also using Mendix tech, which makes sense, but if we are doing a clean-up of bake sale or stuff, what does that have to do with us? Then it feels more just to check a box and what is the benefit of doing that? Respondent 15 >

This quote showcases how the institutional theory influences the viewpoint of CSR initiatives of the employees. Feeling that if there is actually no thought behind the initiatives it is seen as performative and therefore have a sceptical attitude towards the initiatives in general.

But overall, employees do believe that if you are doing CSR initiatives as a company for the rights reason and actually want to help the ecological community that the company is in, it will be beneficial since you are giving back to the community that supported you, which will strengthen the bonds within the community and making it flourish, which in turn makes the company flourish as well. It will not have a negative connotation, because it will not feel performative to support a cause that is not in their own ecological community.

It is not what it should be

Nevertheless, the idea that taking part in CSR initiatives is beneficial does not necessarily mean that the company has the potential of taking part of CSR responsibilities. When looking at the potential of CSR within Mendix, a lot of people believe that this potential is enormous if the company does it well, especially considering that its low-code platform can help organizations in developing countries build applications. It can make a difference by supporting these countries with creating ecosystems in which Mendix trains new developers from the underprivileged individuals are in that ecosystem, providing them with skills and livelihoods. <Like I mentioned before, like, with our platform, you can do a lot. I think we have some smart people working here who can create really nice apps. So maybe you use that for a charity, or I don't know, or collecting data for like, for companies who are already working for, like good projects to make the world a better place, that we can also be

more involved into that to collect data with apps or anything like that, or making apps for this, right.

Respondent 2>

So Mendix employees do feel that the potential is there to do CSR initiatives, but when asked about how they feel about the potential that is being used right now, a lot of Mendix employees felt that a very small fraction of the potential that is there is used within Mendix. <If I would think in percentages, I would say that uhm, that about 20 percent is used right now. Respondent 4>

Knowledge is key

People feel that even if it is said that CSR is a core value for Mendix, it is not implemented in the company strategy. This is also highlighted by the visibility of what Mendix is currently doing or has done in the past on CSR. Most of the people were only able to recount at most two of the initiatives that Mendix had done. For it to reach its full potential, employees feel that Mendix should focus more on supporting CSR initiatives and actually making it part of their company strategy, only then everyone will actively engage with CSR and will it not feel like an add-on that Mendix is doing on the side. This starts with making CSR more visible and making employees aware of it. They feel that they do know about some initiatives of CSR within Mendix and why Mendix is doing it, but they also have a feeling that if you look at the whole company that there certainly will be other people who are not aware about CSR within Mendix, which is something that should be stimulated more to make it resonate with Mendix employees. Otherwise, it can not be transformed into a call to action.

<I don't think that people are fully aware of it. To be honest, I don't think that awareness is really there. I think they definitely don't mind it. I don't, I don't it's hard for me to imagine that someone will say I'm against CSR. Right. Like it's, I don't think so. But I don't necessarily know if the awareness is there that much. And if they understand the importance of it that much, right. I think for how I would see in terms of Mendix, they should be really presented with a clear examples of like, how, how it would strengthen us, right, and what we are already doing on it, because now there's not really much examples, and therefore I don't think people are actively aware. Respondent 3>

Even people who believed to be aware of CSR within Mendix could only name just a few projects that Mendix has taken part in. This shows that the awareness of CSR within Mendix should be highlighted more. When this is done, by for example Mendix socials or by way of success stories, employees will have something more tangible. When they actually can see what Mendix does on CSR and what the positive consequences are because of it for the people who participated in CSR initiatives, it can spark an interest in people who did not think about it before or even be the step in the right direction that they needed for them to take action themselves.

<Well, so essentially I got a mail from the head of Social Impact for managers about that Mendix this year will offer X amount of hours on volunteering cases and during my team meeting we discussed, now we have this team, let's utilize it and then one of the team members said, instead of doing it

individually, why don't we team up and do it as a team, like how you and your manager did.

Respondent 9>

Lead by example

One way of how Mendix can support CSR initiatives is for the C-level managers, managers and team leaders to set an example and take part in CSR, while also stimulating their employees to engage in it as well. This can be linked to the transactional leadership theory, which showed that most CSR strategies are top-down with C-level management responsible for their creation. Leadership by guidance and examples shows a significant employee engagement of CSR initiatives. This belief is also shared by the Mendix employees.

<I think it should start with C level, of course, but man for it to be truly implemented. It lies on managers, and then finally employees because management and C level set examples for employees, right. Respondent 5>

People do feel that CSR initiatives is something that fits within the Mendix culture and that it is possible within Mendix to take part in CSR initiatives if you are willing to do so yourself. Even if upper management sets an example, it should derive from the entire company, employees should actively participate in CSR initiatives and management should show that they support CSR initiatives by actively taking part in it and leading by example as well. This shows that CSR is actually an important value within Mendix and not just a gimmick to do, since every other company is doing it as well. But not only employees feel that it is the responsibility of management to take action and actively participate, people in management positions share this ideology as well.

<For corporate social initiatives to actually work everyone needs to work on it, I am aware that as a person with a team under me, I also should participate and stimulate to do volunteering for example together. Respondent 11>

Drivers for change

Even though support from the C level management is needed to make CSR a success in a company, there are other facilities needed to enhance the success of CSR within Mendix. First, this can be in the form of a specific department within Mendix that focuses on CSR initiatives.

<I wonder if a dedicated team or something like that would help in such a sense, so you can argue that a dedicated team that has CSR as their main goal is needed to make it happen. But it needs to somewhat align on a top level as well, because otherwise it is gonna be a very uphill battle.

Respondent 5>

The reason for this is that a specific team, with that as the main focus, will make it easier for people to actually be able to take part in CSR activities. That is because this team will have the knowledge and tools to support employees with their ideas and make it feasible for them. Especially

when you want to participate in these initiatives but have no clue where you need to start, having a team that supports you will make it easier to find something and take action.

<Like, for example, I do know about the voluntary hours policy. But since I'm not Dutch, I wouldn't even know where to start looking. And where to take the first step. So I think this is, this should be important for them to know what to do exactly. Respondent 7>

This shows two interesting findings. The first one is that there already is a Social Impact Department at Mendix, but that the awareness of this team existing is lacking within the company. The second is that there should be a team that facilitates this, which showcases the importance of someone who is leading the way for others what also can be linked to leadership and setting an example.

But not only will a designated team be able to help people with taking action, it will also help people to be inspired and into taking action, since this team can set an example as well and spur others into action as well. When someone specifically asks you to do volunteering or finding people who may be interested in it and supporting them into taking action, people are more willing to take part in it, than for example when they just see it on the screen or read about it. There is a bit of human connection that can make a difference in taking action or not.

<Finding the right people, I think if you know who to approach so let's say they want to be part of like a social impact projects then that they do, for example, they know to reach out to you or to Cristina or to anyone else who was in that project. But you can also look to find the right people and, like, basically know that if you ask this person they would do it. Because you know them or know who to ask and they can find the right people. Respondent 2>

Discussion

This article investigated Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within tech/IT companies such as Mendix, focusing on the experiences and attitudes of Mendix employees towards CSR initiatives. The aim was to understand how CSR relates to the employees and what are the underlying mechanisms that influence their participation in CSR activities. Despite extensive research on CSR at the organizational level, there is a significant knowledge gap at the individual level. Until recently, CSR research largely overlooked individual perspectives, with only 4% of CSR articles published before 2012 examining this level (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). This gap is particularly notable regarding employees, a crucial stakeholder group that significantly contributes to corporate performance (Wang et al., 2020). Given the well-established idea that employee attitudes and behaviors impact organizational success (Bauman & Skitka, 2012), this research aims to address this gap by highlighting employee attitudes and behaviors towards CSR initiatives.

The findings indicate that Mendix employees value CSR and see it as essential for society. When looking at the reasons behind Mendix employees' interest in CSR, it was found to be primarily driven by intrinsic motivation. They believe that making a positive impact is a core value. However, opinions differed when the topic of boundaries of CSR were addressed. Some employees argue that CSR should have no boundaries, as it can only bring positive outcomes and cannot negatively affect the company or its employees. This viewpoint aligns with moral theory of Hart et al.'s (1998), suggesting that people use social identification for self-definition, associated with certain beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours, such as fairness and justice in society.

Others express scepticism, cautioning that CSR initiatives can lead to exclusion. When a company takes a public stance on a specific issue, it raises questions about other issues the company does not address, potentially leading to perceptions of exclusion or superficial commitment. This perspective is explained by institutional theory, which highlights resistance to institutional change and suggests that CSR may result from coercive pressures by lawmakers and organizational providers to minimize corporate irresponsibility.

What was not a contributing mechanism in my results was psychological needs, which was described in the research by Bauman (2012). I expected that the individualistic desire to maintain a positive self-image and derive esteem from social identities and affiliations would come back in the results as a reason for a positive CSR view or activating behaviour since, CSR activities enhance the organization's image, making membership more attractive and fostering a sense of belongingness and validation of personal values and beliefs. This, in turn, reinforces self-esteem. Additionally, employees seek meaning and purpose in their work beyond material comfort and social approval. CSR initiatives that contribute to societal welfare can fulfil this need for meaning, especially in work environments like tech companies, where the direct impact of work on others may be limited. But this can not be concluded from the results, a possible reason for this could be that the link between CSR

and psychological needs is mostly related to the feeling of meaning and purpose seeking, which also could be linked to the moral identity in my research.

Analysing the results of the research, three main factors emerged as crucial for encouraging employee participation in CSR initiatives, Awareness, Leadership and Facilitation.

Awareness about CSR initiatives within Mendix is vital. While some employees are aware of a few CSR projects, many lack the knowledge about all the company's CSR activities. Increasing awareness through internal communications, social media, and success stories can provide tangible examples of CSR's positive impact, sparking interest and motivating employees to take action. For instance, showcasing specific projects and their outcomes can help employees understand the significance of CSR and inspire them to participate.

Leadership plays a critical role in promoting CSR. C-level managers and leaders must lead by example, actively participating in CSR initiatives and encouraging their teams to do the same. This approach aligns with transactional leadership theory, which suggests that top-down strategies, with C-level management setting examples, will boost employee engagement in CSR according to them. Both employees and managers believe that management's active involvement in CSR demonstrates the company's genuine commitment to social responsibility, making it more than just a trend.

Establishing a dedicated department or team to facilitate CSR initiatives can make it easier for employees to engage. This department would provide the necessary support, resources, and tools to help employees turn their CSR ideas into action. For those unfamiliar with how to start or where to look for opportunities, a supportive team can guide and inspire them to participate. Moreover, having a designated team can foster a culture of CSR within the company, setting examples and spurring others into action.

The importance of leadership and facilitation in promoting CSR participation can be explained by the contributing mechanism of leadership. Employees expect leaders to increase participation through behaviors such as role-modeling, advocacy, and facilitation. By matching words with deeds, leaders showcase their belief in CSR's value and advocate for it, encouraging employees to follow suit. This, combined with training, incentives, and rewards, translates into increased employee participation in CSR initiatives.

Mendix employees recognize the company's significant potential for impactful CSR initiatives, particularly considering what its low-code platform can achieve. For example, Mendix could support developing countries by building applications, creating ecosystems, and training new developers, thereby providing skills and livelihoods. However, employees feel that only a small fraction of this potential is currently being utilized. Many believe that while CSR is said to be a core value, it is not fully integrated into the company's strategy. The lack of funding and visibility for CSR initiatives, as well as the limited awareness among employees, indicate that more effort is needed to realize this potential.

Conclusion

The investigation into CSR at Mendix reveals that employees value CSR and see it as essential for societal well-being. Their interest is driven by intrinsic motivation and the desire for a positive self-image.

While opinions vary on the boundaries of CSR, there is consensus that genuine, purpose-driven CSR can benefit both the community and the company. However, to fully realize this potential, Mendix needs to increase awareness, involve leadership, establish a dedicated CSR team, to foster employee engagement. Therefore, the policy advice for Mendix will be based on these topics.

But this research also has some implications that should be taken into account. For starters, that this research has been done in a very specific setting. It is therefore not possible to take these results outside the scope of this research, which makes it not generalizable for other companies.

Another aspect to take into consideration are the participants, the Mendix employees that participated in this research all did willingly, but this could also mean that only the employees who are interested in CSR were willing to help with this research. Therefore, it is not possible to say that the results show an accurate representation of how all the Mendix employees feel about CSR initiatives and their motives.

For future research, this research should be done on a bigger scale, by using more tech companies and not just Mendix and also trying to get a higher pool of participants. When these adjustments are made, the results will be more generalizable to tech companies and higher amount of participants will give a more representative and robust view about how tech employees relate to CSR initiatives. Additionally, it would also be interesting to look at the differences between departments and the differences on the organizational level, since I found interesting differences on that front but did not have the ability to delve further into that within the scope of this research.

Policy Advice for Maximizing CSR Potential at Mendix

To fully use the potential of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) at Mendix, a comprehensive approach is necessary. This policy advice outlines four strategic recommendations. The first one is aimed at enhancing CSR awareness. The second one focusses on leadership involvement. The third one is about establishing a dedicated CSR team. The last one is fostering employee engagement. Implementing these recommendations will not only help strengthen Mendix's commitment to society but also enhance employee satisfaction and organizational success.

1. Increase Awareness

Enhancing internal communication about CSR initiatives is crucial. Many employees are only aware of a few CSR projects, which indicates a gap in the distribution of information. To address this, Mendix should focus on the following:

- The use of internal communication. Utilize Mendix's social media platforms to highlight ongoing CSR projects. Share updates, achievements, and employees experiences to create a broader awareness and connect with the external community. This can be shared, by using the internal newsletter, the company information page (confluence), during monthly company meetings, such as the Mendix live, as well as dedication specific channels for it, such as a Slack channel focussing on CSR information.
- Use success stories. Regularly share success stories that showcase the positive impact of CSR initiatives. Highlight specific projects, their outcomes, and the benefits to communities and employees. These stories can be shared through internal newsletters, emails, and the company's confluence page.
- The use of internal events. Organize internal events to promote CSR initiatives. Think about specific days in a year in which an event is organized, highlighting the CSR initiatives that were/are or going to be done in that year.
- Provide regular updates on CSR efforts and their impact. Create a CSR report that is accessible to all employees, detailing the initiatives, goals, and achievements. This can be put on the confluence page and the updates could for example be shared in the Slack channel.

2. Leadership Involvement

Leadership plays a crucial role in creating a culture of CSR. The active involvement of C-level managers and team leads can significantly motivate employees to engage in CSR initiatives. To ensure effective leadership participation:

- Set CSR goals. Integrate CSR objectives into the company's strategic goals. Ensure that leaders are accountable for achieving these goals and are recognized for their efforts. When employees see CSR goals as a KPI, they are more likely to prioritize it.
- Lead by Example. Encourage C-level managers and other leaders to actively participate in CSR activities. Their involvement will demonstrate that CSR is a priority for the company and not just a superficial commitment. Employees are more likely to engage in CSR initiatives if leaders are showing them that they also engage with it.
- Advocate for CSR. Leaders should consistently advocate for CSR, aligning it with Mendix's mission and values. They should communicate the importance of CSR in meetings, internal communications, and public forums. This showcases that the leaders actually believe in the cause and not just doing it as a gimmick.
- Visible Participation. Leaders should participate visibly in CSR events and initiatives, showcasing their commitment and inspiring employees to follow suit. Highlight your involvement in CSR during a meeting or use internal communication channels to show the active engagement.

3. Dedicated CSR Team

Establishing a dedicated CSR department or team is essential for coordinating and facilitating CSR initiatives. This team will serve as the backbone of Mendix's CSR efforts, ensuring that employees have the support and resources they need to participate. The team should:

- Provide resources. Offer tools, guidelines, and resources to help employees develop and implement CSR ideas. This can include templates for project proposals, access to funding, and connections to external partners.
- Offer guidance. Act as advisors for employees interested in CSR. The team can help them navigate the process of getting involved, from identifying suitable projects to measuring impact. If specifically looked at the Rotterdam office, for example, employees with a migration background that are not raised in the Netherlands or speak the language, for them, it is harder to find CSR initiatives to participate, since they do not know where to start.
- Coordinate initiatives. Oversee the planning and execution of CSR activities, ensuring alignment with the company's overall CSR strategy. This includes organizing events, managing budgets, and tracking progress.
- Promote Opportunities. Regularly communicate available CSR opportunities to employees. This can include volunteering events, community partnerships, and internal projects.
- Partnership connections: Find possible partnerships that can help facilitate CSR initiatives. Now that Mendix a Siemens business is, look at opportunities for collaborations.

4. Employee Engagement

Fostering a culture of CSR within Mendix requires active employee engagement. To achieve this, the company should:

- Provide training. Offer training sessions on the importance of CSR and how employees can contribute. This can include workshops, webinars, and e-learning modules.
- Incentivize participation. Implement incentives and rewards for employees who actively participate in CSR initiatives. This could include recognition programs, awards, and bonuses.
- Encourage volunteerism. Create opportunities for employees to volunteer during work hours. Allowing paid time off for volunteer activities can significantly boost participation. Such as now in place for the Netherlands, the UK and the US.
- Build a community. Create a sense of community around CSR activities. Organize team-building events focused on CSR, such as group volunteering projects or CSR-themed social events. This can also be translated in the Slack channel, such as mxPride and GEMS, which already exists.
- Gather feedback. Regularly solicit feedback from employees on CSR initiatives. Use surveys, focus groups, and suggestion boxes to understand their interests, concerns, and ideas for improvement. Not only will this make it more engaging, it will also evolve the strategy and create awareness.

Conclusion

Implementing these recommendations will enable Mendix to maximize the potential of its CSR initiatives. By increasing awareness, involving leadership, establishing a dedicated CSR team, and fostering employee engagement, Mendix can create a CSR program that benefits both the company and society. This approach will not only enhance Mendix's social impact but also strengthen its organizational culture, employee satisfaction, and overall performance. Through these efforts, Mendix can position itself as a leader in CSR within the tech industry, demonstrating that businesses can thrive while making a positive difference in the world.

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Appendix 1

Informed Consent

Title Research: What is the belief about CSR in the tech company Mendix

Naam onderzoeker: Shane Samchand(Shane.Samchand@mendix.com)

Research goal

As part of my internship at the Social Impact Department, I am conducting research for my thesis on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its influence on fostering positive social change within organizations. The aim of this research is to understand the role of CSR within Mendix, particularly from the perspective of employees like yourself.

Your participation

Your participation in this study involves participating in an interview to discuss your perspectives on CSR, employee engagement, and strategies for fostering a culture of social responsibility within organizations. The interview will take approximately one hour of your time.

A digital audio recording of the interview will be made for accuracy and later transcribed into written form. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Your personal information will remain confidential, and all data collected will be anonymized and used solely for academic purposes.

If there are any questions or complaints about this research, feel free to contact my supervisor, Cristina Samaniri, head of Social Impact within Mendix (Cristina.Samaniri@mendix.com). For official complaints you can contact klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl.

There are no clear physical, legal, or economic risks or benefits associated with participating in this research.

By signing this document, you indicate that you agree to participate in this educational project. Even after signing, you can still choose to withdraw your cooperation.

I hereby declare that I have read the information letter regarding the research: "What is the belief about CSR in the tech company Mendix."

I also had the opportunity to ask questions. My questions have been adequately answered. I had enough time to decide whether or not to participate.

I agree with the following:

- 1) To participate in this research yes/no

- 2) The collection of my data for this research yes/no

- 3) To make an audio recording yes/no

- 4) The publication, provision, or sharing of the written elaboration of the interview, on the condition that my name or other identifying information is not used. yes/no

I know that participation is voluntary. I also understand that I can decide at any time not to participate in the research and can stop. I do not have to say why I want to stop.

I give consent to participate in this research.

Name: Place:

Date:

Signature:

Appendix 2

Information Letter

Title Research: What is the belief about CSR in the tech company Mendix

Naam onderzoeker: Shane Samchand(Shane.Samchand@mendix.com)

Research goal

As part of my internship at the Social Impact Department, I am conducting research for my thesis on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its influence on fostering positive social change within organizations. The aim of this research is to understand the role of CSR within Mendix, particularly from the perspective of employees like yourself.

Your participation

Your participation in this study involves participating in an interview to discuss your perspectives on CSR, employee engagement, and strategies for fostering a culture of social responsibility within organizations. The interview will take approximately one hour of your time.

Explain in the information letter that you will: (1) transcribe the recordings and while doing this, remove/change all identifying information, (2) destroy the recordings when transcribed, (3) delete their contact details as soon as the interview has taken place, (4) how long you will keep the transcription

A digital audio recording of the interview will be made for accuracy and later transcribed into written form. When doing this, all identifying information will be removed/changed. The recordings will be destroyed after transcribing. After the interview has taken place, your contact details will be deleted as well. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Your personal information will remain confidential, and all data collected will be anonymized and used solely for academic purposes. You also are able to ask for removal of your information after the interview has taken place. The transcriptions will be deleted after the June first.

If there are any questions or complaints about this research, feel free to contact my supervisor, Cristina Samaniri, head of Social Impact within Mendix (Cristina.Samaniri@mendix.com). For official complaints you can contact klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl.

There are no clear physical, legal, or economic risks or benefits associated with participating in this research.