

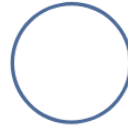
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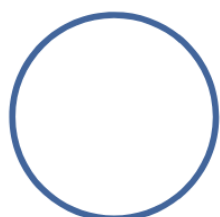
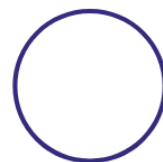
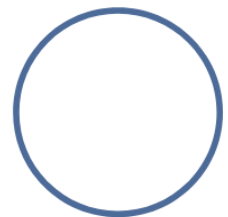
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Conceptualising:

**The Interrelationship Between
Corporate Social Responsibility,
Employer Branding and
Co-creation**



Master's thesis

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Abstract

Retaining employees, and the costs hereof, is an increasing international challenge that organisations face. This thesis specifically focusses on the retention of employees belonging to Generation Y and Z since an increasing share of today's international workforce is made up of employees belonging to these generations, and their generational characteristics make them prone to leaving organisations within few years of being employed.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse how to retain employees belonging to these two generations and how a combination of the three theoretical fields of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), employer branding and co-creation can help provide a solution to the international challenge of retention. With this analysis, this thesis contributes to assisting in filling a knowledge gap concerning the combination of these three theoretical fields.

Filling a knowledge gap requires extensive knowledge of the existing literature in the given field. To gather the data that constitutes the theoretical foundation for this thesis, a systematic literature review is conducted, hereunder seven elaborate literature reviews concerning different and related theoretical fields. Firstly, three of the literature reviews concern each of the three theoretical fields separately, followed by a literature review of the literature combining CSR, employer branding and co-creation. Because there is a call for more research combining these three theoretical fields, three additional literature reviews are conducted to clarify the interrelationships between each of the possible combinations of these three fields, e.g. CSR and employer branding. The literature reviews are used in order to analyse the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation and conceptualise a possible solution to the challenge of retaining employees from Generation Y and Z.

The analysis shows that a combination of the three theoretical fields has the ability to affect employee retention positively by including employees in the act of co-creating CSR values. By making it a part of an internal employer branding process, employees become more motivated and engaged, which affect their job satisfaction and therefore, theoretically, increase employee retention. To support the theoretical findings of this analysis, this thesis includes suggestions for and discussions of future research, where methods for collecting empirical data are elaborately discussed. With the focus of this thesis being on theory development and thereby being a solely theoretical contribution, a future study including empirical research would provide a means for testing our conceptualisation in practice.

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1 Introduction

Since the early 1900s, organisations have attempted to identify the underlying reasons behind employee's level of interest in order to combat employee retention challenges (Wright, Rowland and Ferris 1994). With digitalisation and globalisation making it easier than ever for employees to search for new job opportunities and to relocate for a position, employee retention is a growing issue for organisations in the twenty-first century (Tanwar and Prasad 2016). According to Allied Workforce Mobility Survey (2012), 25 % of all new employees in the United States leave their current employer within a year of being employed and 46 % leave within 18 months (Allied Workforce Mobility Survey 2012).

Today, employee turnover is referred to as '*one of the largest costs in different types of organisations, yet it's also one of the most unknown costs*' (Blake 2006, 1) meaning that organisations are not aware of the fact that it is an inescapable cost of doing business that most organisations underestimate. According to Society of Human Resource Management, it costs US\$ 3,500 to replace an employee who is paid US\$8 per hour (Tanwar and Prasad 2016, 192). Considering the cost of hiring and training new employees, and the fact that it typically takes six months for an employee to break even with this cost for the organisation, early turn-over is very expensive and something organisations wish to bring down (Watkins 2003; Allied Workforce Mobility Survey 2012). Ultimately, when employees choose to leave an organisation, the organisation suffers a great loss in intellectual and human capital, which subsequently leads to a loss in the workforce and reduced productivity. Inevitably, this impacts the organisation's revenue, which makes employee retention an important aspect of conducting business.

Considering this growing issue for organisations, the overall purpose of this thesis is to conceptualise a combination of three different theoretical fields that each has the ability to affect employee retention positively. Therefore, we commence by presenting some common factors that impact employee retention. Hereafter, we elaborate on the specific generations of employees who are prone to causing high turnover rates today, and we explain some of the factors that have the ability to affect employee retention of these generations positively.

Factors impacting employee retention

Several factors come into play when it comes to ensuring a high rate of employee retention.

Generally, factors like organisational commitment and organisational prestige have the ability to affect employees' desire to stay with their current employer (Hausknecht, Rodda and Howard 2009). Additionally, job satisfaction, motivation and engagement are amongst the most prominent factors affecting employee retention (Tanwar and Prasad 2016). Ultimately, a high level of job satisfaction leads to more motivated employees, who are less likely to seek other jobs. The correlation between job satisfaction, motivation and employee retention is simple to understand, however, it can be an extremely challenging task for managers and human resource professionals to ensure the motivation and satisfaction of employees in practice. One of the main reasons for this challenge is that individual employees are motivated by different things and experience different triggers for job satisfaction. Common for most employees is that an alignment of personal values with the values of the organisation, which they work for, has an impact on these factors (Chatman 1989). In the following, personal and organisational value congruence is explained.

Value congruence

A key aspect of achieving job satisfaction and organisational commitment is to have some foundational values in common with the organisation one works for (Hearn 2018). The similarity between values held by individuals and organisations is referred to as value congruence (Chatman 1989). A combination of value congruence and shared individual and organisational goals results in a Person-Organisation (P-O) Fit, i.e. the compatibility between people and organisations, which occurs e.g. when both entities 'share similar fundamental characteristics' (Schneider 1987; Psychology n.d.). Value congruency is common in the organisational behaviour literature and refers to '*the compatibility of work values between the focal person and other organizational entities such as supervisors, interviewers, coworkers, work group, and the entire organization*' (Bao, Dolan and Tzafrir 2012, 5). Ultimately, a perceived value fit between the employee and the organisation is important to many job seekers because the organisation, in which they work, can become an important part of their social identity and self-concept (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail 1994).

According to Belasen (2008), organisations can utilise their mission statement to strive for an alignment of values, both in terms of showing prospective employees their values before the recruitment process, but also because it can help unify an organisation by 'producing a co-creation of values' (Belasen 2008, 105). In relation to values, the concept of co-creation

is one of the three theoretical fields that we are interested in combining in this conceptualisation, and it is elaborated in a subsection in our literature review (section 3.4). As mentioned, the co-creation of values is particularly relevant to this thesis, however, the specific values that affect an employee's job satisfaction or organisational commitment can vary greatly from individual to individual and is generally different from generation to generation, as they have been raised with different values and beliefs (Würtzenfeld 2020). In the following, we specify which generations are most difficult to retain today and in the subsequent subsection, we clarify some of the values that are important to these specific generations.

Most difficult generations to retain

The specific generations, which organisations are especially struggling with retaining, are employees belonging to Generation Y (millennials)¹ and Generation Z (centennials)² (Naim and Lenka 2018; Stevenson, Rise of Gen Z: Attraction and Retention 2019). Studies conducted by Deloitte in 2016 and 2018 show that 44 % and 43 %, respectively, of employees belonging to Generation Y and Z, who have a university or college degree and are in full-time jobs, envision themselves leaving their current employer within two years (Deloitte 2016, 4; Deloitte 2018, 17). These numbers are up to 66 % and 72 %, for 2016 and 2018 respectively, for employees who envision leaving their current work within the next five years. From these numbers, we deduct that new, young employees consider leaving their employer within the first few years of employment.

Deloitte's studies are based on newly graduated academics from +30 different countries, which shows that retention is indeed a global issue; it is even seen as one of the biggest talent management challenges of global organisations today (Jarman 2017; Randstad Risemart 2018). Therefore, the focus of this thesis is on international organisations without delving into different nationalities or specific national cultures. Considering that an increasing share of today's international workforce is made up of employees belonging to Generation Y and Z, the challenge that organisations face is significant – as an example, around 50% of the population in the US is comprised of Generation Y and Z (Business Insider

¹ Generation Y (millennials); born in 1981-1996 (Business Insider 2019)

² Generation Z (centennials); born in 1997-2012 (Business Insider 2019)

2019). In the following, we briefly present some of the values that are important to Generation Y and Z, and in section 1.3, we elaborate on specific factors that have the ability to affect the retention of these generations.

An example of values that are particularly important to Generation Y and Z, when choosing an employer, are those related to Corporate Social Responsibility (hereafter CSR) (Leveson and Joiner 2014; DI Business 2018). Individuals from these generations are increasingly interested in doing their best to help combat climate change, equality and other CSR related issues, but many believe that companies and organisations have greater responsibility and ability to impact some of these issues due to their size than individuals alone (McCright et al. 2016). Organisations' approaches to CSR are still highly relevant to this thesis as it has the ability to affect employee retention. Therefore, CSR is the second of the three fields that constitute the foundation of our literature review and conceptualisation, and it is elaborated further in a subsection in our literature review (section 3.2). In the following, we present organisations' approaches to CSR and the young employees' opinion about this.

Organisations' approaches to CSR

In the earlier mentioned study from 2018, Deloitte found that 75 % of employees from Generation Y and Z believe that multinational organisations have the *potential* to help solve societal challenges such as environmental, social and economic challenges, but that there is a significant gap between the priorities that these employees believe that their organisations have and the ones that they believe organisations ought to have (Deloitte 2018). This gap between what employees believe that organisations should prioritise and what they believe that they do prioritise affects the employees' intention to stay with their employer because of the mismatch between their values and the values they believe that their organisations have (Deloitte 2018). Overall, highly skilled employees want to work in an organisation where they thrive, and for an organisation that exhibits good corporate citizenship³ (CC) (Bhattacharya, Sen and Korschun 2008).

When combining the increased focus on CSR with the tendency that employees seek jobs with which they identify themselves, it has led to employees becoming increasingly interested in choosing their employer based on the employer's approach to climate change and other CSR related issues (Backhaus, Stone and Heiner 2002). Many job seekers are attracted

³ Corporate citizenship (CC) refers to an organisation's responsibility toward the society

to organisations based on their CSR initiatives because they believe that these organisations are seen as prestigious, that they show values that fit with their own, and that they treat their employees well (Jones, Willness and Madey 2017). This has resulted in more and more organisations having a clearly defined CSR policy, which becomes part of their employer branding and thereby benefits the organisation in terms of both employee attraction and retention. Until recent years, CSR policies and employer branding were rarely seen in the same context, but the increasing focus on CSR amongst both individuals and organisations has led to this combination of fields. To ensure an understanding of this connection, employer branding is briefly presented in the following, hereunder how it has the potential to affect employee retention positively.

Employer branding is traditionally referred to in the context of attracting new employees, focussing on external stakeholders, i.e. prospective employees. However, it also plays an important role in terms of retaining employees, which focuses on internal stakeholders, i.e. current employees (Ambler and Barrow 1996; Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). When focussing on current employees, a strong employer brand can affect employee loyalty and organisational commitment, which can, in turn, affect high performance (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Additionally, employer branding can help create a strong organisational culture, which can affect job satisfaction (Tanwar and Prasad 2016), which, as mentioned above, has a positive impact on employee retention. The field of employer branding is the third theoretical field that constitutes the foundation for our literature review and conceptualisation, and it is elaborated further in section 3.3 in the literature review.

To sum up; the three fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation each has the ability to affect job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, organisational commitment, etc., which in turn has the ability to affect employee retention positively. Therefore, we are interested in combining these three fields in this conceptualisation. What makes this thesis highly relevant is that the fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation have not yet been combined in research with employee retention as a goal. With the focus of this thesis being on theory development, we conceptualise the combination of these fields and hereafter present suggestions for future research that can include empirical studies. However, the focus of this thesis is purely theoretical.

1.1 Problem statement

Employers worldwide experience an increase in new employees, particularly those belonging to Generation Y and Z, who leave the organisation within the first few years of employment. Financially, this is an issue for employers since it typically takes six months for a new employee to break even in regard to hours spent on hiring and training. Therefore, employers seek ways of increasing their employee retention rate.

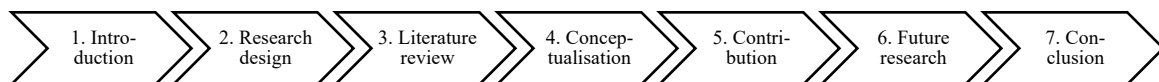
Research shows that both CSR, co-creation and employer branding each has a positive impact on employee retention. However, there is a call for more research that combines these three fields, especially in relation to employee retention. It is our proposition that these three theoretical fields are capable of not only being combine but that the combination of the three fields will also potentially be able to have a more significant impact on employee retention rate than each of the fields on their own.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to conceptualise the combination of CSR, co-creation and employer branding in relation to employee retention. In other words, how can co-creation of CSR values impact the process of internal employer branding in relation to employee retention?

In order to provide an overview of how this conceptualisation is conducted in order to allow for the most thorough answer to this question, the structure of this thesis is presented in the following section.

1.2 Structure of thesis

To increase the readability of this thesis, the structure of this thesis is presented in this section in order to provide an overview of the different sections and how each section is related to one another, as seen in the model below.



After the relevance of this thesis is presented and specified in the introduction, section 1, a brief presentation of Generation Y and Z is provided in section 1.3 in order to clarify the values that have the ability to affect the retention of employees from these generations. Thereafter, the research design is presented in section 2, outlining the scientific foundation of the research and our methodological considerations. In combination, these two sections

create a thorough background for the extensive literature review presented in section 3. The literature review is more extensive than usual for a master's thesis because the aim of this thesis is to conceptualise a new theoretical concept and a thorough, in-depth knowledge of the three separate topics Corporate Social Responsibility, employer branding and co-creation is required. In addition to knowledge about the different combinations of these fields in existing research, this literature review functions as the foundation of the conceptualisation presented in section 4.

In section 4, we build upon existing research combining all three fields and analyse the interrelationship between them with a focus on retaining employees belonging to Generation Y and Z in section 4.3. In section 4.3, we discuss the findings of the analysis and conceptualise the combination of the three theoretical fields. In section 5, we discuss the contribution of our conceptualisation, hereunder both implications and limitations, and in section 6, we provide our suggestions for and discussion of future research that our conceptualisation can provide the foundation for. Lastly, we conduct our conclusion in section 7, where we respond to the challenge posed in our introduction and answer the proposition stated in our problem statement.

1.3 Presentation of Generation Y and Z

As mentioned in the introduction, this section presents Generation Y and Z, and it elaborates on some of the factors that affect these generations' motivation, job satisfaction, etc. which in turn affect their intention to stay with their current employer.

Generational cohort theory describes generations as a group of individuals who are born in the same time and have, therefore, experienced common formative events during their upbringing, which lead to having a similar value system, attitudes and perceptions (Kupperschmidt 2000). Despite being two different generations, Generation Y and Z have many commonalities in terms of what affects their intention to stay with an employer, which are presented after the individual presentations of each generation.

Generation Y, those born from 1981 to 1996, are raised to embrace technology and digital solutions, which has fundamentally changed the way they live and work – and resulted in the reputation of being 'job hoppers', which is believed to have killed a number of industries (Business Insider 2019). Additionally, they are the first generation to be born into a truly global, networked world (Erickson 2008), which can be one of the reasons why they are

willing to relocate for the right job opportunity, as mentioned in the introduction. They are also goal-oriented and ambitious, and they have a strong sense of self-worth and are confident in their abilities (Twenge 2010).

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, grew up with technology, the internet and social media, which has earned them the reputation of being addicted to technology and of being ‘social justice warriors’ (Business Insider 2019). They value work-life balance, diversity and their work ethic highly when deciding which organisation to work for, which also means that their morals are more important for them than for any other generation (Stevenson, *Rise of Gen Z: Attraction and Retention* 2019).

Generation Y and Z’s commonalities are presented in the following where employees from Generation Y and Z are treated as one group due to their similar characteristics. First and foremost; it is common for both generations that they are increasingly difficult to retain, as mentioned in the introduction. Thomas Rex, an expert in personal leadership, supports this claim from a leadership point of view by highlighting that the individual leaders, often belonging to the generation of Baby Boomers⁴, are struggling with retaining the young generations (Würtzenfeld 2020), especially because they have different values or simply due to lack of knowledge about what the next generations desire (Erickson 2008). A survey from Allegis Group found that 49 % of senior-level human resource decision-makers are concerned with their organisation’s ability to attract and retain these two generations (Allegis Group 2018).

As an example of the differences caused by this generation gap, employees from the generation of Baby Boomers are used to and content with having an annual performance and development review, but employees from Generation Y and Z find it tremendously important to get frequent feedback on their performance in order to feel seen and appreciated (Würtzenfeld 2020). Additionally, the aforementioned study by Deloitte (2016) shows that one of the specific factors that impact employee retention for Generation Y is having a mentor and/or a good relationship with their closest manager because this greatly affects the employee’s satisfaction rates with regard to motivation (Deloitte 2016; Hearn 2018; Würtzenfeld 2020). One of the outcomes that these generations also wish to achieve from

⁴ Baby Boomers; born in 1946-1964

having a close relationship with their manager is transparency. It is important for these employees to feel included and ‘in the know’ about decisions in the organisation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004).

For Generation Y and Z, it is important to experience a sense of meaning and purpose in their jobs and to find jobs with which they can identify themselves (Hearn 2018; DI Business 2018). This is related to their increased emphasis on morals when choosing an employer, which makes it highly important for both generations to work for an employer with a strong commitment to CSR (Allegis Group 2018). According to Allegis Group⁵, 82 % of Generation Z employees consider CSR to be a major factor when choosing their employer (Stevenson, Rise of Gen Z: What HR Should Know 2019; Stevenson, Rise of Gen Z: Attraction and Retention 2019). It is recommended that employers offer a compelling employee value proposition that supports these generations’ desire for meaningful work, hereunder aligning their CSR policy with these generations’ desire to do meaningful work (Njemanze 2016).

The specific preference of Generation Y and Z presented in this section are included in section 4.3 in order to conceptualise a possible solution to the challenge of retaining employees belonging to these generations. In order to provide an overview of the methodological considerations made in regard to conducting this conceptualisation, the research design of this thesis is presented in the following section.

⁵ International talent management firm with headquarters in the US

2 Research design

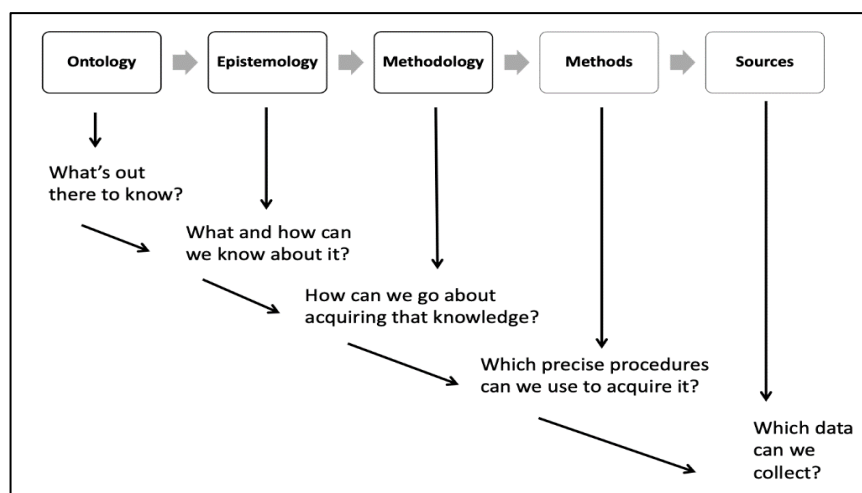
In this section, the research design is presented, under which this thesis' position in relation to theory of science is stated, and it is explained how this position affects the choices made during the research, in accordance with Grix's (2002) five levels of research design, including both considerations, selections and deselections.

2.1 Theory of science

Our position in relation to theory of science is aligned with the social constructivist point of view, through which we see the world as a place where everything is socially constructed. Hereunder, we view the three theoretical fields of Corporate Social Responsibility, employer branding and co-creation from a social constructivist perspective, which allows deconstructing and constructing a new phenomenon (Collin and K ppe 2014).

The primary reason that this research is conducted from a social constructivist point of view, is that the three theoretical fields of Corporate Social Responsibility, co-creation and employer branding, which we combine into one theoretical concept, we believe are socially constructed through interactions. Additionally, we examine socially constructed processes that occur through social interactions between an organisation and its employees.

In order to systematically cover all areas of our research design, this section is structured in accordance with Grix's (2002) five levels of research design, i.e. *ontology*, *epistemology*, *methodology*, *method* and *sources*, as seen in the model below. However, some of the levels are explained more thoroughly in other sections of the thesis where they are directly relevant, in which case we refer to in the given section.



'The interrelationship between the building blocks of research' (Grix 2002, 180; adapted from Hay 2002, 64)

2.1.1 Ontology

The first level of our research design is concerned with our *ontology*, i.e. how we see the world. As social constructivists, we believe that one single truth does not exist and, as a consequence hereof, that multiple realities exist (Collin 2015). These realities are created by individuals in groups by verbalising and discussing any given discourse. An example hereof is the different aspects of the ‘truth’ different individuals experience when discussing the aspects of CSR, like sustainability or climate change, where every individual human being has his/her understanding, and his/her own reality, of what CSR is. As shown in the model by Grix, ontology affects the next section, namely epistemology, which refers to the-ory of knowledge.

2.1.2 Epistemology

After stating our worldview, the next step is to clarify our *epistemological* stance. We believe that knowledge is subjective and created by people in interaction with their environment and the people around them. This entails that knowledge must be interpreted in order to discover the underlying meaning of anything. In this thesis, it affects how we understand the process of combining CSR, employer branding and co-creation as de-naturalising three separate theoretical fields and constructing it into a new understanding of the combination of the three. Here, we refer to de-naturalising as the act in which one realises that a phenomenon is socially constructed and thereby construct it into a new phenomenon through social interactions (Collin and K ppe 2014). This stance also affects the choices made with regards to methodology and methods, both in relation to the collection of data and data analysis, which we elaborate below.

2.1.3 Methodology

Our *methodology*, i.e. the specifics of how we acquire the given knowledge, concerns our literature review, hereunder data collection and presentation of data, our conceptualisation and our suggestions for future research. Our primary data consist of existing literature in the fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation respectively, which is subjective knowledge created by other people. Wanting to examine and understand the existing literature combining two or all of these fields, our primary methodology is qualitative because we seek to interpret existing knowledge. Collecting and interpreting our data qualitatively aligns with our social constructivist position because it emphasises the importance of meaning, context and absence of one ‘truth’. The collection, interpretation and analysis of our

data are qualitative while the presentation of our data is a combination of qualitative and quantitative because we structure our data in a table (cf. section 3.1), which is an approach primarily used in quantitative research. As mentioned before, each of Grix's (2002) levels affects the other, meaning that our methodological standpoints affect our choice of specific methods, which are clarified in the following.

2.1.4 Methods

Regarding our specific *methods*, we differ between the methods used for collecting our primary data, i.e. the existing literature combining two or all of the three fields, our method of conceptualising and our methods discussed in our suggestions for future research. In order to collect the existing literature in the three fields, we conduct a systematic literature review where we follow a clearly defined protocol in order to identify, select and critically appraise the research (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart 2003; Hook, Baxter and Kulczynski 2018). We elaborate on the specifics of this method in our literature review in section 3.1, where we go into depth with our method of data collection.

In relation to presenting our data, we create an overview of the existing literature, with the aim of clarifying the potential lack of research, we present the literature in a structured table. In this table, it is possible to see the number of research articles combining employer branding and CSR, employer branding and co-creation, and co-creation and CSR respectively. Additionally, we determine the quality of the research by tracking how many times the individual sources have been quoted. This structured overview entails counting and mapping of the existing literature, which are approaches typically used in quantitative research, however, we have chosen a pragmatic approach to our methodology since this allows us to present and illustrate our findings in a way that provides a simple overview of a large amount of qualitative data.

In relation to conceptualising the interrelationship between the three theoretical fields, we have chosen to follow Whetten's (1989), Kilduff's (2006) and Corley and Gioia's (2011) understandings of what constitutes as a theoretical contribution. An elaborate presentation of the method is presented in section 4.1. Lastly, in relation to our suggestions for and discussion of future research, we have chosen to primarily use Kvale's (2007) understandings of conducting interviews, which is presented and discussed in section 6.

2.1.5 Sources

The last level of our research design is concerned with our *sources*, meaning which data we are able to collect. Since we aim to conceptualise a new theoretical concept, which we build on the foundation of existing literature combining two or all of the three areas mentioned above, our sources are primarily peer-reviewed articles. Because we are exploring a new combination of these three fields, we have decided to include all the research which has already been conducted in the three different fields despite scientific stance, in order to ensure that we do not limit our data to only including research conducted by researchers with a similar scientific stance as us.

One of the primary reasons for this decision is that because we are examining three different fields, the research also stem from different world views and hereunder scientific positions. An example is literature about CSR, which often takes a functionalistic or post-positivistic approach due to the fact that CSR has its origin in accounting back when the goal was to measure different things. That is why, even if the articles take another scientific position than social constructivism, we still determine that they are credible sources, however, we interpret them from our social constructivist point of view. These different scientific positions also entail different methodologies since e.g. post-positivism often takes a quantitative approach. However, this does not affect our interpretation of the literature. Since research in the combination of these three fields is so sparse, we choose to include all relevant sources to ensure a thorough and exhaustive literature review, which functions as the foundation for our conceptualisation.

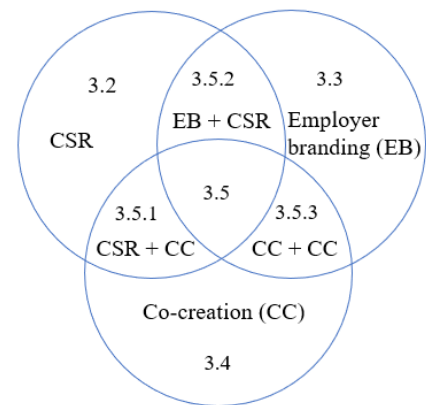
After presenting the methodological considerations for this thesis, the following section concerns the elaborate literature review, on which the conceptualisation is based.

3 Literature review

Due to the extensive nature of this literature review, this section commences with a presentation of the structure of the literature review in order to enhance the reading experience, followed by an elaboration of the method used for conducting the systematic literature review in section 3.1, which is utilised in the subsequent sections. The method is presented at the beginning of this section because it is directly relevant to the following subsections, i.e. the actual literature review.

This section consists of multiple subsections, neither being more or less relevant than others. Due to the complexity of the structure of this literature review, we provide an overview of the theoretical fields and the section numbers for each in the model to the right.

The three circles symbolise each of the three theoretical fields, i.e. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), employer branding and co-creation, covered in sections 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4, respectively. The overlaps between the circles are the sections on literature combining the different theoretical fields, e.g. section 3.5.1 concerning the combination of CSR and co-creation.



The sections concerning the three individual theoretical fields are structured so they provide a historical overview of the given field and present different definitions provided by acclaimed researchers, which are discussed in relation to the specific focus of this thesis. Ultimately, we clarify the standpoint taken in this thesis with regards to definitions. It is important to note that in this paper, CSR, employer branding and co-creation are viewed as social constructions and, as such, it is not possible to develop an unbiased definition (Berger and Luckmann 1966). These three sections are each concluded by a subsection concerning the given field in relation to employee retention since it is the primary aim for this thesis to discover how the combination of these three areas might affect employee retention.

Hereafter follows section 3.5, where the sparse literature combining all three fields is presented and discussed, where focus is on the elements which are directly applicable to our conceptualisation and more importantly, where there is a call for more research. This section is then divided into three subsections, where literature combining two of the three fields is

presented. This allows for one subsection per possible combination, meaning that the literature combining CSR and co-creation is presented and discussed in section 3.5.1 while the literature combining employer branding and CSR is presented and discussed in section 3.5.2, and lastly the literature combining co-creation and employer branding is presented and discussed in section 3.5.3. In order to provide a clear overview of the articles referred to in section 3.5 and the three subsections, the articles are presented in a table. Throughout section 3.5, it is explicitly stated which articles are utilised in the conceptualisation in section 4.

The aim of this extensive literature review is to identify strengths and weaknesses in existing research and theories in order to combine and build upon the most relevant theories and hereby analyse the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation in order to conceptualise this understanding. As mentioned earlier, this literature review commences with a presentation and discussion of the method for conducting the literature review.

3.1 Method of systematic literature review

As mentioned in section 2.1, we conduct a systematic literature review as our method of data collection in order to identify, select, and critically appraise the existing research relevant to our thesis. A systematic literature review requires a structured, reproducible approach (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart 2003; Hook, Baxter and Kulczynski 2018; Bryman and Bell 2011). This ensures a comprehensive and transparent search, which could potentially be replicated by other researchers despite the fact that, from a social constructivist point of view, it would almost certainly result in different findings. This is simply due to the fact that every researcher assesses data subjectively and will, therefore, potentially identify and select slightly different research to form the foundation of the systematic literature review. However, the purpose of conducting a systematic literature review is to provide an unbiased overview of all available ‘evidence’ concerning a given topic, which can then be used as the basis for e.g. decision making (Bryman and Bell 2011) or as in this case; to analyse in a conceptualisation. The approach is often taken in instances where there is ‘conflicting evidence’ concerning a topic, such as in management and business (Bryman and Bell 2011). The four steps of this approach are elaborated in the following.

Scope of study

The first step in the process of conducting this extensive systematic literature review is to

establish guidelines for the scope of the research in order to define inclusions and exclusions of topics, areas and fields (Hook, Baxter and Kulczynski 2018). The three fields of interest in this thesis are CSR, employer branding and co-creation. Besides conducting literature reviews concerning these three topics, and the literature combining two or all three of these topics, we also seek to discover the effect each of these fields has on employee retention. It has proved particularly important to set limitations when it comes to popular topics that much research has been published about, which is the case regarding CSR and employer branding in particular, in order to ensure inclusion of only the most relevant literature to this specific topic. The specific limitations for each search are identified in the introduction to each of the three literature reviews concerning each of the three topics, i.e. CSR (section 3.2), employer branding (section 3.3) and co-creation (section 3.4).

Search of literature

The second step in the process of a systematic literature review is to search for research articles in order to find the most highly relevant literature (Hook, Baxter and Kulczynski 2018). Carrying out this ‘comprehensive, unbiased search’ entails choosing relevant search terms, including synonyms and related terms (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart 2003, 215). Naturally, these search terms change and evolve over time as we learn more about the given topic and discover related terms used in relevant research (Bryman and Bell 2011). The specific search terms for each topic are also outlined briefly in the introduction to each subsection. This decision is made in order to increase readability, while still being transparent about our considerations; because this literature review covers several topics and combinations of those topics, going over all details in this section would cause confusion and increase the probability that the specifics are forgotten before reading the concerning literature review.

In order to find relevant literature, searches are made on Google Scholar and also in multiple journal databases to identify literature that includes any of the defined search terms, as mentioned above. When relevant articles are found, their bibliographies also serve as inspiration for further search, both in terms of search terms, journals and specific articles. Additionally, we utilise Google Scholar’s ability to show related articles to the ones we deem relevant.

To ensure including articles from a variety of disciplines and fields, we conduct our searches in the following journal databases: JSTOR, ResearchGate, SAGE Journals, Proquest, Science Direct, Elviesier and SpringerLink. Besides peer-reviewed articles, a few books are

used as sources because they consist of peer-reviewed articles and therefore showed up on Google Scholar searches.

Selection of literature

The third step in the systematic literature review is the selection of articles, which include specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (Hook, Baxter and Kulczynski 2018). For articles to be included in the first sample, the following criteria have to be met: 1) must be peer-reviewed, 2) published in English, 3) full-text version was available to download, and 4) must be published in a scholarly journal. Additionally, the date of publishing is taken into consideration, while allowing for both recent articles with updated information and older, seminal papers to be included. This process is followed by a second process of analysing the literature in order to determine which ones to include in the review. The criteria in this process are different for the different fields, e.g. while many articles mention CSR and employer branding in the abstract, the specific angle may not be applicable to the particular focus of this thesis. These criteria are presented in the introduction to each subsection of the literature review, in correlation to the specific search terms.

Structuring and analysis

The fourth step of this process is to examine, orchestrate and analyse the relevant literature in order to provide a comprehensive overview (Hook, Baxter and Kulczynski 2018). The aim of this analysis is to achieve a cumulative understanding of the topics through applying techniques of research synthesis, which in our case includes meta-ethnography due to the qualitative nature of our data. Meta-ethnography is a method used to achieve ‘*interpretative synthesis of qualitative research and other secondary sources*’ (Bryman and Bell 2011, 99). The purpose of meta-ethnography is not to develop generalisations but rather ‘*translations of qualitative studies into one another*’ (Noblit and Hare 1988, 25). The researcher translates existing studies into his/her own world view, which creates a reading of other researchers’ readings about a given topic.

Due to the complex structure of our literature review, where the first three sections present each of the three individual theoretical fields, in order to provide thorough background information about the fields, and the following sections cover the literature combining the fields, this particular part of the method about *structuring and analysis* only pertains to the part of the literature review concerning the combination of the three fields because it is in this part of the literature review (section 3.5) our conceptualisation is built.

In order to orchestrate the information from the vast number of articles, the information is structured in a table to create an extensive summary of all literature used in this part of the literature review. Here, it is important to note that the table is limited to including only the articles used in the analysis of the interrelationships between the three theoretical fields in section 4.2. To provide the visual overview as an introduction to the literature review combining two or all three fields, a screenshot of this overview is presented in the introduction to that particular section (section 3.5). The information extracted from each article to be presented in the overview includes the names of author(s), year of publication, title, the journal in which it is published, the keywords presented by the article's author(s) and our categorisations in terms of which of the three theoretical fields it concerns.

Having elaborated on our method of conducting our systematic literature review, we present the literature review in the following subsections, commencing with each of the three individual theoretical fields – i.e. CSR, employer branding and co-creation – followed by a section concerning the combined theoretical fields – i.e. CSR and co-creation, employer branding and CSR, and co-creation and employer branding.

3.2 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

As mentioned in the section above, the search terms, limitations and criteria for selection for each topic of the literature review are presented briefly as an introduction to each of the subsections. This provides clarity and transparency about the considerations and decisions made when searching for literature about the given topic. In this section about CSR, the primary search terms include 'corporate social responsibility', 'corporate social responsibility + definitions', 'CSR (sustainability)', 'CSR literature review', 'CSR + employee retention', 'the effect of CSR on employee retention', 'how does CSR affect employee retention' and 'CSR in relation to employee retention'. Because this field is so well researched, the biggest challenge is not to find relevant articles; instead, it is to find the most relevant articles through setting distinct limitations. In this case, we have set a limitation that excludes literature concerning the strategic implementation of CSR, so this literature review instead concerns literature concerning CSR definitions, understandings and the development in this theoretical field.

There are two main approaches to CSR; *responsive* and *strategic*. *Responsive* CSR meets stakeholder concerns in order to become better corporate citizens, whereas *strategic* CSR

refers to when an organisation⁶ conducts CSR activities in order to go beyond evolving stakeholder concerns and use CSR as a competitive advantage (Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood 2015). Besides *responsive* and *strategic* CSR, literature also distinguishes between *embedded* and *peripheral* CSR. *Embedded* CSR refers to an organisation's competencies and how CSR is an integrated part of an organisation's strategy, routines and operations, and *peripheral* CSR refers to activities which organisations do that are not an integrated part of the organisation (Aguinis and Glavas 2013). In this literature review, we do not distinguish between the different approaches, but instead, review all relevant literature concerning CSR despite which approach it takes.

The concept of CSR can be traced back to Bowen (1953), who defines CSR as what can be expected from businessmen in relation to CSR: *'It refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society'* (Bowen 1953, 6). Before that time, CSR and related activities were a focal point for a philanthropic character (Schmeltz 2012). Back then the most dominant question was what can businessmen do for society and what can be expected from them. Heald (1957), another acclaimed theorist in the 50s, provided the definition of CSR a societal value as well, by stating that CSR *'is recognition on the part of management of an obligation to the society it serves not only for maximum economic performance but for humane and constructive social policies as well'* (Heald 1957, 375). As briefly mentioned above, Heald gives CSR a societal value and focuses on what businesses can do for society. Besides only focusing on economical factors, they focus on the obligations that businesses have to society and what society demands from the businesses in relation to values and policies.

Societal pressure

During the 1960s, businesses felt a bigger pressure from society to change and rethink the way they were doing business, and many products were unsafe and unhealthy for the environment. Theorists during this time follow the same basic understandings as Bowen (1953) and Heald (1957), and Davis (1960) defines CSR as something that refers to *'businessmen's decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm's direct economic or technical interest'* (Davis 1960, 70). This definition follows the same

⁶ The literature refers to both *companies*, *corporations* and *organisations*, however, we use the term *organisation* since it encompasses both of the other terms. An organisation is defined as *'a social unit of people that is structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals'* (BusinessDictionary n.d.)

principals as Bowen and Heald, where the action of not only focussing on economic advantages and more on social responsibility is in focus. Businesses give in to the demands and obligations from society and feel the need to obey the requirements. In relation to this, McGuire (1963) argues that *'the idea of social responsibilities supposes that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations, but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations'* (McGuire 1963, 144). This relates to the concept of the 'Social Contract' that emerged in the US in the 1970s, which is an 'agreement' between business and society, declared by the Committee for Economic Development in 1971. It is based on the idea by the Association of Corporate Citizenship Professionals (ACCP) that *'business functions because of public "consent", therefore business has an obligation to constructively serve the needs of society'* (ACCP n.d.). This concept has later been referred to as 'social license to operate', which means that businesses should contribute more to society than solely focusing on economic benefits and sales (ACCP n.d.). The agreement between business and society creates a relationship between corporations and society, which Walton (1967) describes in his definition of CSR: *'the new concept of social responsibility recognizes the intimacy of the relationships between the corporation and society and realizes that such relationships must be kept in mind by top managers as the corporation and the related groups pursue their respective goals'* (Walton 1967, 18). Walton's definition states the interrelationship between businesses and society and how they together can pursue their respective goals.

Voluntary assumption of obligations

During the 1970s, the aspect of CSR grew from an obligation from society, and the interrelationship between business and society in pursuing goals related to social responsibility, to a voluntary assumption of the obligations. Eibert and Parket (1973) believe that the best way to perceive CSR is as *'good neighbourliness'* (Eilbert and Parket 1973, 7). They state that this concept involves two different understandings: the first one includes not doing things that spoil the neighbourhood, where the second one refers to the act of expressing the organisations CSR actions in a positive way, and as doing something good to help solve the neighbourhood problems. The difference is that the first aspect is doing something because you are required to, and the second one is to put a positive spin on the organisation's good actions (Eilbert and Parket 1973). As presented by Eilbert and Parket, broad social problems had arisen within the field of CSR theory during the 1970s. In order

to incorporate all societal factors into the CSR concept, Carroll defines the following seminal 'four-part definitional framework': *'The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time'* (Carroll 1979, 500). During the 1970s, businesses become more engaged in corporate philanthropy and community relations, which both Eilbert and Parket, and Carroll state in their definitions of CSR. It became clear that CSR has a long-term benefit for society; where the focus had previously been on responding to the requirements from society, it evolved into solving neighbourhood problems and improve quality of life by focussing on the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary responsibilities of businesses.

Stakeholder involvement

During the 1980s, there was a deeper focus on CSR as a voluntary action. Jones (1980) argues that following the law and requirements for CSR was previously not a voluntary act and states that *'[CSR] is the notion that corporations have an obligation to constituent groups in society other than stockholders and beyond that prescribed by law and union contract. Two facets of this definition are critical. First, the obligation must be voluntarily adopted; behaviour influenced by the coercive forces of law or union contract is not voluntary. Second, the obligation is a broad one, extending beyond the traditional duty to shareholders to other societal groups such as customers, employees, suppliers, and neighbourhood communities'* (Jones 1980, 59-60). It became clear during the 1980s that stakeholders play a vital role in how business conduct CSR and which stakeholders are important. In his seminal paper, Freeman (1984) proposes that stakeholders are *'those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist'*, hereunder including customers, competitors, employees, trade associations, suppliers, government, consumer advocates, local communities and the business community (Freeman 1984, 31). He states that in order for a business to implement CSR successfully, stakeholders need to participate actively. Stakeholder involvement grew rapidly in the sense of conducting CSR during the 1990s as well. During this decade, Hopkins emphasised on treating stakeholders ethically correct: *'Corporate social responsibility is concerned with treating the stakeholders of the firm ethically or in a responsible manner'* (Hopkins 1998, 10). By 'ethically or responsible', Hopkins refers to treating stakeholders in a manner that is socially acceptable. He points out that stakeholders exist both inside and outside of the organisation and that by having a wider aim for CSR in

the organisations, it can improve standards of living, while also preserving the profitability of the organisation.

CSR as an expectancy

In recent years, CSR has become a concept which all businesses are expected to include in an organisation's strategy, implementation and reporting (Islam 2018; Erhvervsstyrelsen Samfundsansvar 2019). The European Commission defines CSR as '*the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society*' (European Commission n.d.). This implies that in order to be responsible businesses, they must conduct CSR activities to minimise the negative impact they have on society.

As briefly stated earlier, CSR has over the years become a mandatory part of conducting business (Islam 2018). Businesses have since the 1950s felt growing pressure from society, which will, if not fulfilled, have a negative impact on the business; e.g. in the form of governmental interventions, consumer sanctions, negative press and so forth. However, if organisations succeed in fulfilling the societal pressure and expectations, it can offer opportunities such as enhanced reputation, reduced costs, prevention of government regulation, etc. (Rahbek and Pedersen 2015).

In relation to the positive outcomes CSR initiatives can have on an organisation, Werther and Chandler (2014) define CSR as: '*A view of the corporation and its role in society that assumes a responsibility among firms to pursue goals in addition to profit maximization and a responsibility among a firm's stakeholders to hold the firm accountable for its actions*' (Werther and Chandler 2014, 5). They further argue that organisations should pursue responsible goals in addition to maximising profit and not only focusing on financial gains, but instead focus on initiating CSR related goals and activities. It states that the stakeholders are responsible for keeping the organisations accountable for their actions. In addition to stakeholder involvement, which is also a focal point in Werther and Chandler's CSR definition, The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (1998) also includes stakeholders in its definition and more specifically, the internal stakeholders: '*[CSR] is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large*' (WBCSD 1998). This definition takes the lives of the workforce, i.e. the employees, into consideration, and since the focus of this thesis is on the retention of employees, this is the CSR definition this thesis aligns with.

In addition to focusing on the well-being of the organisation's workforce, Hick (2000) states that: *A focus of CSR is also developing relationship between business, society and its key stakeholders such as employees, customers, investors, suppliers, communities, and special interest groups* (Hick 2000, 72). To this statement, Sarmah, Islam and Rahman (2015) add that *'stakeholders can play a vital role in maintaining norms and ethical codes of conduct through engagement with companies towards protecting the environment, human rights and resources of the local communities'* in order to successfully implement CSR strategies and activities (Sarmah, Islam and Rahman 2015; Reich 1998). 1, Islam and Rahman focus on how stakeholders, such as employees, can improve and help keep organisations accountable in relation to creating and maintaining CSR strategies and initiatives since employees have the opportunity to help, engage and motivate organisations to conduct business in a more ethical and environmentally focused manner. Organisations can benefit greatly from including employees in their CSR activities; when organisations fulfil the societal pressure, it can offer great opportunities such as enhanced reputation, reduced costs, prevention of government regulations, etc. (Rahbek and Pedersen 2015).

3.2.1 CSR in relation to employee retention

After covering the broad theoretical field of CSR, this section focusses on the literature relating to CSR and its impact on employee retention.

To look more specifically at the opportunities that CSR gives organisations, Rahbek and Pedersen (2015) mention enhanced reputation, and with the focus of this thesis being on the internal stakeholders, reputation can have several meanings, e.g. brand reputation and reputation in relation to attracting potential employees, where the latter is more relevant in this case. According to Lee and Chen (2018), CSR activities can make organisations more attractive to prospective employees, since the CSR activities have the ability to positively alter the perception of an organisation for both external and internal stakeholders, i.e. employees.

Besides making organisations more attractive to potential employees, CSR activities also have a positive effect on current employees. According to Lee and Chen (2018), CSR activities increase productivity and decrease retention costs, since the turn-over rate decreases. Studies by Bauman and Skitka (2012) and Onkila (2015) have shown that CSR can be a source of employee satisfaction (Lee and Chen 2018, 948). In connection to this, Vinerean, Cetina and Dumitrescu (2013), refer to the act of implementing CSR initiatives in an

organisation and how that will positively affect employee motivation and retention (Vinerean, Cetina and Dumitrescu 2013).

The act of including CSR initiatives has been discussed throughout the years. Here, Aminudin (2013), whose article aligns with the CSR definition from The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2000) presented above, argues that organisations have focussed on the positive impact CSR has on customers but paid little attention to the impact it can have on employees (Aminudin 2013). She states that CSR can have a positive impact on employee turnover and that there is a lack of research in those fields. She argues that organisational identification in relation to CSR has an effect on employees since employees tend to identify themselves with the organisation, they work for, this can be put in relation to P-O fit, which refers to the compatibility between people and the organisation (cf. section 1). She also argues that Social Identity Theory '*provides an explanation for the link between corporate social activities and employees*' (Aminudin 2013, 769). In relation to this, Bode, Singh and Rogan (2015) argue that Corporate Social Initiatives⁷ (hereafter referred to as CSI) affects both individual employee motivation and identification with the organisation. Bode, Singh and Rogan's journal article concerns CSI and not CSR, however, it is still relevant for this literature review because CSI is a form of CSR, where no deeper CSR approaches are taken, however, activities that go beyond generating business income are implemented. They found '*a strong link between retention rates and participation in a corporate social initiative ... being run by the firm as a business integrated with the rest of the organisation*' (Bode, Singh and Rogan 2015, 1717). Furthermore, Du, Bhattacharya and Sen (2015) argue that organisation can generate favourable employee-employer outcomes by including CSR programs. This results in outcomes such as '*job satisfaction and reduction in turnover intention, by fulfilling employees' ideological and developmental job needs*' (Du, Bhattacharya and Sen 2015, 319). In relation to this, Skudiene and Aurskeviciene (2012), argue that there is a difference between conducting *internal* and *external* CSR activities. *Internal* CSR activities relate to socially responsible activities related to employees' issues, whereas *external* CSR activities relate to activities related to community, customers and business partners. Skudiene and Aurskeviciene argue that both *internal* and *external* CSR activities have the ability to positively affect employees' motivation since employees

⁷ Corporate Social Initiatives refer to '*major activities undertaken by a corporation to support social causes and to fulfil on commitments to [CSR]*' (Kotler, Hessekiel and Lee 2012, 21)

are motivated by being an to have a stronger impact on employee motivation and retention (Skudiene and Auruskeviciene 2012).

In relation to this, Carnahan, Kryscynski and Olson argue that employees search for meaningfulness in their job, and when that is not found, they tend to switch jobs. However, they argue that *'CSR will be most effective at reducing turnover that is motivated by a preference for more meaningfulness at work'* (Carnahan, Kryscynski and Olson 2017, 1932). When employees find that their current job is lacking that important, meaningful dimension of CSR, they tend to look for jobs that are better suited for them. Carnahan, Kryscynski and Olson support Aminudin's claim that there is a call for more research on the field of how CSR affects employee retention (Carnahan, Kryscynski and Olson 2017).

This thesis supports Aminudin's, and Carnahan, Kryscynski and Olson's call for more research in the field of how CSR affects employees and more specifically employee retention. Businesses can benefit from including employees in the act of conducting CSR activities since it gives employees a feeling of belonging to the organisation identity – furthermore, businesses can take a step back and create CSR initiatives with their employees.

Having presented the literature concerning the theoretical field of CSR and more specifically CSR in relation to retention, which is used as a base for understanding the literature reviews concerning the combination of the fields later in this thesis, the following section presents a literature review of employer branding and employer branding in relation to retention.

3.3 Employer branding

As mentioned earlier, this section commences with presenting search terms and criteria for limitations and selection, which are used in the search for the literature for this part of the literature review, in order to provide clarity about considerations and decisions. In this section about employer branding, the primary search terms are, of course, 'employer branding', 'definition of employer branding', 'employer branding literature review', 'employer branding + employee retention', 'the effect of employer branding on employee retention', 'how does employer branding affect employee retention' and 'employer branding in relation to employee retention'. From these searches, we discovered that some researchers distinguish between internal and external employer branding, where the term internal employer branding relates to already employed employees and therefore also to employee retention – the

distinctions and definitions are elaborated in this section. However, this discovery led to the inclusion of the search term ‘internal employer branding’ in combination with the previously mentioned search terms. Since the focus of this thesis is on employee retention, the internal aspect of employer branding is particularly interesting to examine because it focuses on current employees. However, not all research distinguishes between internal and external employer branding, and for this reason, this thesis does not focus specifically on ‘internal’ employer branding but rather on employer branding in general, and then dedicate a subsection of the literature review to the aspects of employer branding that concerns employee retention specifically, regardless of which term is used to refer to it in the research.

When discussing and researching employer branding, the related term ‘employer brand’ is often used, however, these terms are not interchangeable. As an introduction to this section, these two terms are defined, and it is specified how these terms are understood in the context of this thesis. Afterwards, employer branding is defined and the difference between external and internal employer branding is elaborated. Lastly, it is clarified which kind of employer branding is relevant to this thesis.

Employer brand vs. employer branding

The term ‘employer brand’ was first defined in 1996 by Ambler and Barrow as ‘*the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company*’ (Ambler and Barrow 1996, 187). Simply put, the aim of an employer brand is to become an employer of choice of employees (Armstrong 2007). Prior to Ambler and Barrow’s research, the term ‘brand’ was mostly used about products and companies in a marketing sense. According to Ambler and Barrow, the benefits that an employer brand offers employees are similar to those a product brand offers a consumer in terms of being functional, economic and psychological. For an employer brand, functional benefits can be developmental and/or useful activities while economic benefits can be monetary or material rewards, and psychological benefits can relate to feelings like e.g. belonging, purpose and direction (Ambler and Barrow 1996). The distinction between employer brand and employer branding is simply that the employer brand is the identity of an organisation as an employer while employer branding, with the ending ‘ing’ grammatically referring to something that is ongoing, is the process of creating this brand.

Employer branding combines the fields of HRM and marketing with the goal of attracting and retaining talented employees (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Overall, employer branding

can have these two different focuses, i.e. attracting and retaining, which are oftentimes referred to as external and internal employer branding respectively (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004; Smith 2018). While external employer branding focusses on attracting and recruiting new employees and internal employer branding focusses on employee satisfaction, performance and employee retention, there can be some overlaps between them. The overlaps occur whenever a strong internal culture functions as marketing for the organisation (Saini, Rai and Chaudhary 2014).

The literature concerning external and internal employer branding is discussed in the following two subsections.

External employer branding

When Ambler and Barrow (1996) introduced the concept of employer branding, the primary focus was on how an organisation was represented to an external audience (Edwards 2010). This can be categorised as ‘external branding’ and is also the focus of Cable and Turban’s (2001) definition of employer branding as being a job seeker’s memories and associations regarding an organisation as a (potential) employer. The external employer branding has been researched for the past 20 years, where the focus has been on employee recruitment (Aaker 1991; Whetten, Lewis and Mischel 1992; Turban and Greening 1997; Rampl and Kenning 2014).

Researchers have also attempted to specify the important aspects of employer branding in order to attract employees, such as Knox, Maklan and Thompson (2000) who argue that employers should clarify what is referred to as ‘unique organisational value proposition’ which is what differentiates one employer from the other and thereby shows the identity of the organisation (Knox, Maklan and Thompson 2000, 216). The concept of positioning an organisational brand by clarifying its ‘unique organisational value proposition’ is borrowed from marketing literature where the term ‘unique selling proposition’ was coined by Rosser Reeves in the 1940s and has been used to position product brands since then (Sealey 1999).

In relation to positioning the organisation, Backhaus states that *‘a well-differentiated employer image enables job seekers to understand the organization’s values and to find similarities between themselves and the organization. The desire for person-organization fit is compelling, and has been shown to be strongly related to organizational attraction’* (Backhaus 2016, 194). This statement by Backhaus states that the same way as a product can seem ‘right’ to a customer, so can a job feel ‘right’ to a potential employee. Therefore,

external employer branding is an important factor in recruiting employees since it encourages potential employees to apply for a job. Besides that, external employer branding communicates the 'organisation's employment personality', which, if it seems like the 'right' fit, attracts potential recruits (Backhaus 2016, 194).

Internal employer branding

When the right talent is attracted to the organisation, it is important for organisations to retain them – and as mentioned in the introduction, employee retention is a increasing and expensive issue for many organisations. This leads to the other aspect of employer branding, namely what can be categorised as 'internal employer branding'. The first few years after the term 'employer branding' was coined, the primary focus was on the external aspect of employer branding but then researchers, HR professionals and managers began taking a more integrated approach, which research shifted towards a more integrated approach, which included existing employees as well (Mosley 2007). Where external employer branding focusses on prospective employees, internal employer branding focusses on existing employees.

As mentioned above, the original focus of employer branding was on attracting the right talent. However, Lloyd (2002) acknowledges existing employees as well as the prospective employees and defines employer branding as the '*sum of a company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work*' (cited in Kashive and Khanna 2017, 2014). In their seminal paper from 2004, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) also include the aspect of external versus internal employer branding, and state (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). This relates to the idea of positioning the organisation through a 'unique organisational value proposition' as mentioned above, however, includes the aspects of existing employees. This purpose of this 'unique organisational value proposition' is to distinguish the identity of the organisation from others.

Ambler and Barrow also identify employer branding as an organisation's identity and how employees, as well as prospective employees, understand the identity of the organisation. This is supported by Lievens et al. (2007) who further state that employer branding can also be used to manage organisational/corporate identity: '*Employer branding is a specific form of managing corporate identities by creating both within and outside the firm an image of the firm as a distinct and desirable employer*'. This is defined more specifically by The

Conference Board⁸ in 2001, stating that employer branding is *‘the identity of the firm as an employer, ... [the] firm’s value system, policies and behaviours toward the objectives of attracting, motivating and retaining the firm’s current and potential employees’* (Conference Board 2001, 2). This definition adds the benefits from conducting employer branding and states that it can be used to attract, motivate and retain employees. As employee retention is the focus of this thesis, internal employer branding is particularly relevant for us to include in the analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation and later in the conceptualisation of the three theoretical fields.

Contrary to employer branding being a static position, Branders (2009) argues that *‘employer branding is an “ongoing process”, it focuses “not just on staff recruitment and retention” but “has a positive effect on corporate culture and employee motivation, corporate brand positioning”, in other words, on company success’* (cited in Kashive and Khanna 2017, 5). Within the field of employer branding, this thesis focuses on employer branding as a process, as explained by Branders (2009), rather than a static outcome.

Creating the employer brand

Even though employers have a say in the organisation’s employer branding, employer branding can also generate itself (Mayo 2001). This means that when employer branding happens unconsciously, without any impact from the management or employer branding specialists, the employees in a company naturally generate the organisation’s employer branding unconsciously. Minchington and Thorne (2007) argue that *‘every organisation has an employer brand. Whether you own it or not, your organisation is influencing its employer brand 365 days a year’* (Minchington and Thorne 2007). They also argue that employers have the opportunity to affect their employer branding, however, an organisation’s employer brand exists even if the organisation is not actively creating it. Therefore, it is an important part of business, since it is self-generating and requires active participation from the organisation in order to manage it in the most effective way.

As described by Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000), the external employer branding is constructed internally by the employees and is then conveyed to outsiders (Gioia, Schultz and Corley 2000). Therefore, internal employer branding has an effect on external employer branding and vice versa. Backhaus (2004) describes it as follows: *‘Employer branding feeds*

⁸ The Conference Board, Inc. is a non-profit business membership and research group organisation (Conference Board 2001)

perceptions of organization identity and organizational culture, which leads to employee brand loyalty and ultimately employee productivity' (Backhaus 2016, 8). This highlights that employer branding is not only used to produce a positive image to outsiders but also to insiders, i.e. existing employees.

Since the focus in this thesis is on the internal aspect of employer branding, we align with Branders (2009) understanding of employer branding, where the emphasis is on the ongoing process of employer branding and how that affects employee motivation. However, this thesis also aligns with the seminal understanding presented by Ambler and Barrow (1996), where the focus is on a more general understanding of what employer branding encompasses.

3.3.1 Employer branding in relation to employee retention

As mentioned above, employer branding, particularly what we refer to as internal employer branding, can affect the retention of current employees. Organisations should understand employer branding as a tool to differentiate themselves from others, and by that be able to not only attract and recruit employees but retain them as well (Ito, Brotheridge and McFarland 2013). This is supported by Tanwar and Prasad (2016), who acknowledge that *'employer branding is fast emerging as a long-term human resource (HR) strategy to attract and retain talented workforce'*, while they highlight the call for more research in the field of retaining employees: *'Most studies are dedicated to the examination of employer branding as a talent technique among potential employees'* (Tanwar and Prasad 2016, 186). Tanwar and Prasad examine the impact of employer branding on retention of the existing workforce and find that employer branding has a lot of positive outcomes that affect employee retention. The outcomes that are affecting employee retention in accordance with Tanwar and Prasad are job satisfaction, psychological contract and productivity, brand advocacy and organisational commitment (Tanwar and Prasad 2016).

Employee job satisfaction

In relation to the abovementioned outcomes by Tanwar and Prasad, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that employer branding increases job satisfaction and commitment by creating a strong organisational culture, it is possible to see how pleased an employee is with his/her work, which ultimately affects the intention to stay or the intention to leave (Tanwar and Prasad 2016). Research conducted by Robinson and Barron (2007) shows how job satisfaction is linked to employee retention by focusing on standardisation and deskilling issues,

which results in a decrease in employees' job satisfaction among employees, ultimately drove them, to leave the organisation. This research shows that if employees' job satisfaction is not high, it can negatively affect employee retention (Tanwar and Prasad 2016).

Employer branding in relation to the psychological contract

Tanwar and Prasad also argue that the so-called 'psychological contract', which refers to the relationship between employer and employee, influences employee retention and is generated by employer branding. Employer branding helps to formulate the psychological contract, including the expectations and obligation they have to one another, e.g. if a company, through its employer branding expresses that its works with freedom under responsibility, the new employee will expect to have a certain degree of freedom, such as flexed working hours, when they start. Furthermore, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that organisational culture and employer branding has the power to create the psychological contract between the employer and employee.

Studies have shown that a breach of the psychological contract has a direct link to employees' intention to stay in an organisation (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler 2002; McInnis 2012; Turnley and Feldman 2000). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) further argue that employee loyalty, which stems from a good employer brand, helps organisations achieve a higher level of performance. Employer branding affecting employee performance is also studied by Robertson and Khatibi (2013), who proved a relationship between a strong employer brand and employee productivity. Productivity influences retention which in turn affects a high employee turnover affects productivity negatively.

Employee loyalty

As mentioned earlier, the overall focus of internal employer branding is employee satisfaction, performance and employee retention. Davies (2008) found that employer branding has an impact on employee loyalty and satisfaction, which is validated by Bodderas et al. (2011) who state that employer branding affects employee satisfaction and identification with the company. After employees have been recruited, they have an experience of the organisational brand, based on the perception of the organisation's employer branding. If, after the recruitment process, the employer branding experience and perception hereof are consistent with the experience of the internal organisational brand, a bond between the organisation and the new employee is created, which leads to employee loyalty (Backhaus 2016). Backhaus refer to employee loyalty as an employee's devotion to an organisation's success, and

states that it is an important factor when it comes to retention. When an employee establishes loyalty towards an organisation, a bond is created between the employee and the organisation based on the perception of its internal employer branding and organisational identity (Backhaus 2016). In addition to employee loyalty, internal employer branding has an effect on other aspects as well, such as organisational culture and employee productivity (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

As mentioned earlier, Tanwar and Prasad (2016) have found that employer branding influences employees' job satisfaction, the psychological contract between an employer and an employee and the productivity of a company's employees. Besides the study by Tanwar and Prasad, Gaddam (2008) proposed an 'Employer Brand Model', where retention is seen as an element that can be traced back to employer branding. Gaddam argues that the employer brand should be present in every aspect of employment, such as development, social and mental satisfaction, work environment, and benefits. This can ultimately result in retaining the employees. This research has been supported by Huczynski and Buchanan (2013), who developed a model called the 'Employment Cycle', which focusses on the aspect of every single employee going through the stages of the employment cycle; recruitment, introduction, training and performance appraisal. During all these stages, the employer gets the opportunity to expose the new employee to the corporate brand and promote itself as an employer of choice, which is a successful method of retaining employees (Huczynski and Buchanan 2013). The research and model by Huczynski and Buchanan (2013) follow the same thoughts as Tanwar and Prasad (2016); that the complete employment experience, including organisational commitment, job satisfaction and engagement, lead to retaining employees. Gilani (2017) further discusses that organisational commitment and brand loyalty result in an inclined feeling to stay, which suggests *'that employee retention is positively influenced by the employer branding process within an organisation'* (Gilani 2017, 250).

All the above-mentioned factors affect employee retention as explained above. However, this thesis supports Rosethorn's (2009) call for more research on the field of employer branding and retention: *'It has been too much about recruitment and not enough about life beyond on-boarding'* (Rosethorn 2009, 23).

After presenting the literature concerning employer branding and employer branding in relation to retention, which is used as a base for understanding the literature review later in

this thesis concerning the combination of the different theoretical fields, the next section concerns the literature about co-creation and co-creation in relation to employee retention.

3.4 Co-creation

To follow the structure from the previous sections, this section commences with presenting the key terms used in the search of literature for this specific literature review. Compared to the two previous sections, this search entails more challenges because the field we are interested in is not very well-researched. Our primary search terms are ‘co-creation of values’, ‘co-creating values’, ‘co-creation of values + employee retention’ and ‘co-creating values + employee retention’. However, it is quickly discovered that in the field of co-creation, most existing research concern value instead of values, where value relates to e.g. monetary value and values relates to principles and beliefs. Additionally, almost all research about co-creation of value concern co-creation between an organisation and its customers. As mentioned in the introduction, the focus of this thesis is on co-creation of CSR values within an organisation, and how these values can impact the employer branding process in relation to employee retention. Therefore, our search terms evolve to include ‘+values’, ‘+staff’, ‘-customer’ and ‘co-creation of values with employees’. None of these searches result in literature concerning the process of co-creating values, but they do provide results concerning the related terms ‘shared values’, ‘co-production’ and ‘co-destruction of value’ which we, unfortunately, do not find applicable for this particular thesis.

Due to the lack of peer-reviewed literature about this particular topic, we include all relevant literature about co-creation of value/values in this literature review, regardless of whether ‘value’ or ‘values’ is used. This inclusion is possible because value and values are sometimes used interchangeably so we distinguish between the underlying meaning of the word to select the literature relevant to the focus of this thesis. The literature concerning value/values is elaborated later in this section. Since this thesis concerns values and particularly the process of co-creating these values with employees, which is not well-researched, we borrow the well-researched concept of co-creation from the literature concerning customers because the concept is used in the same context in terms of creating value in general, which is also relevant in this thesis. This literature review concerns the broader concept of co-creation because we believe that this concept can apply to employees and their organisations as well.

The understanding of co-creation

The understanding of the concept of co-creation in itself is complex, which has resulted in different researchers attempting to map the existing literature and understandings over time (Grönroos 2012; Ind and Coates 2013; Galvagno and Dalli 2014). However, the existing literature can be traced in different directions of research, entailing different theoretical perspectives and approaches, making it more complicated to give an unambiguous answer to what it entails (Galvagno and Dalli 2014; Cantele and Vernizzi 2015). While most existing literature has emerged from the service management field, fields such as innovation management studies and marketing research have also made important contributions (Galvagno and Dalli 2014). According to Galvagno and Dalli (2014), the concept of co-creation is developing a new paradigm in management literature, with an increased focus on employees (Galvagno and Dalli 2014). This is relevant to this thesis, where focus is on organisational studies which relate to management literature.

In relation to business, co-creation originally refers to interacting with customers in order to improve products and thereby create value for both company and customer (Kambil, Friesen and Sundaram 1999; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000; Sarmah, Islam and Rahman 2015). The term was popularised by Prahalad and Ramaswamy in 2000, stating that co-creation makes the customer an active player rather than a passive audience in relation to businesses, which is one of the most important factors responsible for the change in the ‘traditional’ industrial system as we know it (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000). The notion that co-creation is ground-breaking is supported by Arora (2015), who states that it represents one of the most emergent paradigms in relation to the value-creation process (Arora 2015).

The definition(s) of co-creation

Despite the vast amount of research conducted in the field of co-creation, one univocal definition of co-creation does not exist (Cantele and Vernizzi 2015). Further, the widespread use of the concept in different fields makes it challenging to narrow down one specific definition fitting the topic of this thesis, which is why we, in this section first present all existing, relevant literature and ultimately clarify our own understanding of the concept.

One definition of co-creation is put forth by Galvagno and Dalli (2014), defining co-creation as *‘the joint, collaborative, concurrent, peer-like process of producing new value, both ma-*

terially and symbolically' (Galvagno and Dalli 2014, 644). Even though this definition focuses on material and symbolic value, which is attributed to objects or ideas and is therefore not the definition of values that this thesis focuses on, emphasises of this definition is still on the importance of the *process*, which is highly relevant to this thesis.

External vs. internal stakeholders

As mentioned above, most existing research focuses primarily on co-creation with customers because business is dependent on customers and many believe that a business's activities should revolve around the needs of the customers (Biggemann, Williams and Kro 2014; Sarmah, Islam and Rahman 2015). While this is not untrue, more organisations have realised in recent years that it is also crucial to keep their employees satisfied; first and foremost because employee satisfaction translates to engagement and motivation, and because it is costly to replace trained employees (Blake 2006; Tanwar and Prasad 2016). Focus has since shifted to involve the broader definition of stakeholders in the co-creation process, hereunder employees (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004; Lee and Trimi 2012; Carlini et al. 2018). This has led to the concept of multi-stakeholder value co-creation which includes the employee (Payne, Storbacka and Frow 2008; Frow et al. 2014; Carlini et al. 2019). However, little research has addressed this perspective (Hult et al. 2011; Vallaster and von Wallpach 2013). Multi-stakeholder models of co-creation have been criticised for not elaborating on how employee-organisation relationships are defined and developed in the value co-creation process (Al Habsi 2018). In general, literature viewing value co-creation from the employees' perspective is still very sparse (Al Habsi 2018). Additionally, this literature primarily focusses on the employees' perspective in co-creation with customers.

Co-creation within an organisation

Despite the sparse amount of literature concerning organisations' co-creation with employees, some researchers have touched upon co-creation within an organisation. Ramaswamy (2009) states that it is necessary for the organisation to focus on the process of creating and negotiating as a mutually beneficial dialogue between employees and management if they wish to become a co-creative organisation (Ramaswamy 2009). In relation to this, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) also address the importance of an organisation being transparent, when it comes to co-creating with customers. It is arguably equally as important to be transparent when co-creating with employees since they argue that having transparency is critical in order to have meaningful dialogue.

According to Cantele and Vernizzi (2015), strategic management plays an important role in co-creation. It is crucial that organisations focus on creating environments that facilitate co-creation in order to create better experiences for employees, which will entail better co-creation experiences throughout the organisation (Ramaswamy and Gouillart 2010). As Ramaswamy (2009) points out; *‘in reality, the co-creation journey always begins inside the organization’* (Ramaswamy 2009, 32). Ramaswamy and Gouillart (2010) define the following four basic principles that organisations need to adhere to in order to achieve successful co-creation: Despite the majority of existing research revolving around customers, they highlight the importance of the focus being on the experience of all stakeholders. They add that the organisation should provide a platform for stakeholders to share their experiences and that stakeholders need to be able to communicate and interact directly with one another. Lastly, they state that there must be value for stakeholders in order for them to be willing to participate (Ramaswamy and Gouillart 2010).

Ramaswamy and Gouillart (2010) suggest that the value, which employees expect to gain from co-creation, can be either psychological, e.g. greater job satisfaction, or economic, e.g. opportunities to advance or acquisition of skills. Despite their research concerning customer co-creation, it still focusses on all the stakeholders in the co-creation process, including the employees. The idea that participants in co-creation might anticipate some benefits from engaging in co-creation is supported by Etgar (2008) and Hoyer et al. (2010), who also suggest that these benefits might be psychological, economic or social. While both Hoyer et al. and Edgar’s research revolve around customers, we believe that it is possible to draw parallels with co-creation within an organisation because their focus is on all stakeholders, including employees. Besides the value that employees can gain from co-creation, it is also relevant to look at the values that can be co-created, since these values can add value for employees as well.

Co-creation of value(s)

The concept of co-creation in connection to value(s) is much discussed and is commonly used in relation to several different terms, the most common ones being ‘co-creation of value’ and ‘value co-creation’ (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000; Grönroos and Voima 2013; Sarmah, Islam and Rahman 2015). In the existing literature, the terms ‘value’ and ‘values’ are oftentimes used interchangeably when referring to something that is created in the co-creation process, however, sometimes ‘value’ pertain to e.g. economic value and ‘values’

pertain to beliefs, morals, etc. The specific term most relevant to this thesis is ‘co-creation of values’ with the focus being on values, i.e. beliefs, principles and morals, rather than value, i.e. financial gain. As mentioned in the introduction, values can be created during employment in a co-creation process between the employee and the employer (Belasen 2008).

Values

In an organisational context, values first became the focus of research in the 1980s when Edgar Schein proposed a model of organisational culture, where values played a big part – until then, businesses had solely focussed on creating value, i.e. primarily economic, because values were seen as being ‘too soft’ for businesses to focus on (Schein 2004). However, in the last decades, values have been acknowledged as an important component in the literature about organisational culture (O'Reilly and Chatman 1996). An example hereof is how McDonald and Gandz (1992) argue that shared values in an organisation give an overall sense of direction to the organisation (McDonald and Gandz 1992). However, they describe shared values as something the organisation defines and that employees ‘buy into’, which does not align with the concept of co-creation, where the focus is on the process of co-creating the values. Despite this lack of focus on the process, shared values still entail some of the same benefits that co-creation do; employees experience a sense of meaning, which can increase effectiveness because they have values in common with the organisation (McDonald and Gandz 1992).

Porter and Kramer (2011) present a Creating Shared Values (CSV) framework, which links sustainable business outcomes and strategic CSR with an appreciation of societal needs in order to achieve combined social and economic benefits. While this framework is highly relevant in a business context, it is not directly applicable to this thesis since our focus is organisational and on employees rather than overall business strategies.

Organisational values

As mentioned above, values have been acknowledged as being important in an organisational context in the past few decades. Particularly, organisational values are seen as part of an organisation’s identity (Aust 2004; Belasen 2008). Rubino (1998) defines organisational values as ‘*guiding principles used by organizations to provide the direction and focus that govern all operations and disciplines*’ (Rubino 1998, 24). With organisational values providing direction for all operations and disciplines within an organisation, it is important

to ensure that employee's values align with an organisation's values (Williams 2002). When looking at values as principles, beliefs and morals as explained above, every individual has his/her own set of values that are important to him/her and to the organisation as well. Achieving value congruence between the employee's personal values and the organisational values is important for the employee's sense of organisational commitment and increases job satisfaction. This goes hand in hand with the finding that employees want to feel that they are making a meaningful contribution to the organisation they work for, which energises the employees by building common ground between them and the organisation (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

After elaborating on both co-creation and values, we present our understanding of the concept of 'co-creation of values' in the following.

Our understanding of 'co-creation of values'

In this thesis, we consider co-creation as a rather general concept, however, with a primary focus on internal stakeholders, specifically employees. We are particularly interested in the *process* of co-creation and ideally the co-creation of values. To promote the understanding of the concept defined in our conceptualisation (in section 4.3), we provide our own understanding of the concept of 'co-creation of [CSR] values' below, where we in the sense of social constructivism, deconstruct the term of co-creation and construct it with a focus on co-creating values, which emphasis on values and why that is important to define. Deconstruction relates to the act of taking an established understanding of a concept and construct a new understanding (Collin and K ppe 2014).

As mentioned first in this section, the concept of co-creation in connection to value(s) is much discussed and rarely refers to values in the sense that this thesis concerns. In the existing literature, the terms 'value' and 'values' are oftentimes used interchangeably when referring to something that is created in the co-creation process, however, sometimes 'value' pertain to e.g. economic value and 'values' pertain to beliefs, morals, etc. The specific term most relevant to this thesis is 'co-creation of values' with the focus being on values as beliefs, principles and morals, rather than value like e.g. financial gain. By 'co-creation of values' we refer to the process of creating these values in cooperation between employer and employees. Sometimes we use the term 'co-creating' values, which is simply referring to the ongoing process, i.e. the ending '-ing' – just like the case of 'employer brand' vs. 'employer branding' (cf. section 3.3). By the term 'co-creation of CSR values', we refer to the

act of a co-creating process including the organisation and the employees, in which values pertaining to CSR are created. This is the term used in our conceptualisation in section 4.3.

Since the concept of ‘co-creation of values’ is not a well-researched phenomenon in the sense that we understand it, the term used in the rest of this literature review is ‘co-creation’ in the broader sense since this term is used in relation to the two fields of CSR and employer branding. Therefore, the term ‘co-creation’ in combination with the other of our relevant fields, i.e. CSR and employer branding respectively, is further elaborated and discussed in later sections of the thesis where relevant literature has combined these theoretical fields (section 3.5, 3.5.1 and 3.5.3).

3.4.1 Co-creation in relation to employee retention

Since the existing research in the field of co-creation primarily revolves around customers, it results in a lack of research concerning co-creation with employees, which again entails a lack of research about how co-creation with employees affect employee retention. However, in the search for literature on the topic, we discovered articles concerning the effect that co-creation has on employee motivation, job satisfaction, engagement, etc. which ultimately affects employee retention (Tanwar and Prasad 2016). In this section, we draw on the fact that, in relation to retention, employees can benefit greatly from organisational values and particularly from experiencing an alignment between the organisation’s values and their personal values. Since the focus of this thesis is on how CSR, employer branding and co-creation can be combined in order to retain employees, we believe that values, such as organisational values, are important to discuss in relation to co-creation and retention.

Alignment of values

In relation to organisational values, Rubino (1998) argues that ‘*the organization and employees must work together to develop business and human resources processes that continually strive to align both sets of values*’ (Rubino 1998, 24). Here, Rubino implicitly argues that co-creating values together with an organisation is an important factor and that the organisation and the employees must work together in aligning their values.

Aligning core values within an organisation can lead to internal integration, which tends to increase organisational commitment and employee satisfaction amongst other things (Schein 1985; Merrilees, Miller and Yakimova 2017). The experience of having spe-

cific values in common with the organisation one works for also leads to greater engagement and a thereby higher level of motivation and job satisfaction, primarily because the employee experiences a sense of co-operating with the employer towards achieving a shared goal, which additionally gives the employee a sense of purpose (Chatman 1989).

In relation to aligning values with employees, Belasen (2008) argues that organisations can utilise the organisational mission, i.e. the mission statement, for achieving this alignment because it can help unifying an organisation by ‘producing a co-creation of values’ leading to employees being able to maintain strong relationships and to achieve organisational goals (Belasen 2008, 105). When supported by employees, a clear mission, in combination with a strong vision, are vital building blocks for a consistent organisational identity, which leads to employee loyalty and ultimately productivity as mentioned in section 3.3 (Belasen 2008; Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). As previously mentioned, these factors ultimately have the potential to positively affect employee retention (Tanwar and Prasad 2016).

In relation to having values in common with an organisation, P-O fit, as mentioned in the introduction, also affect employee retention (Schneider 1987). Since Schneider’s study of P-O fit, much research has been conducted, by e.g. Chatman (1991), Sheridan (1992) and Van Vianen (2000) who argue that when employees and employers have value congruence it affects job satisfaction, organisational commitment and intention to stay, which influence employee retention positively (Chatman 1991; Sheridan 1992; Van Vianen 2000).

Most literature concerning co-creation focus on the process instead of the outcome. While the outcome of a co-creative process is equally important, this thesis focusses on the process itself in which, e.g. values, are socially constructed. Co-creation can be put in relation to the social constructivist term ‘construction’, where the organisation and its employees construct, e.g. values, through the social interaction of co-creation (Collin and Kørpe 2014).

As mentioned earlier, through conducting this literature review, we found that literature concerning co-creation is most often related to customers, resulting in a lack of research concerning co-creation in relation to employee retention, and therefore, this thesis supports Al Habsi’s call for more research on co-creation in relation to employee retention (Al Habsi 2018). However, we found that more relevant research has been made concerning employee retention and co-creation in combination with the other fields, i.e. CSR and employer branding. The literature revolving around these combinations of the fields are included in the

sections of the literature that concerns those specific combinations (section 3.5 and the three subsections).

This literature presented in this section concerning co-creation and co-creation in relation to employee retention is used as a base for understanding the literature reviews combining the different theoretical fields, which are elaborated in the following section.

3.5 Literature combining CSR, employer branding and co-creation

As mentioned in the introduction to the literature review, literature combining the three fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation is very sparse. However, different researchers have touched upon different combinations of the three fields, for example, the relationship between CSR and employer branding without mentioning co-creation. Therefore, we review the existing literature concerning the different combinations of these three fields, which we present in the following.

To find all the relevant literature, that we would be able to build upon to analyse the inter-relationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation, we used both broad search terms like ‘co-creation, employer branding and CSR’ and more specific search terms like ‘co-creation of CSR values with employees + affect internal employer branding’ and every variation in-between. All search terms are also used in combination with the search term ‘employee retention’ since this is an important aspect of the focus of this thesis. The primary limitation set for finding this literature is that it concerns employees as the only stakeholder, i.e. not customers.

In order to provide a clear overview of the articles referred to in this section, they are presented in the table below, where the most important information about each article is included, hereunder the names of author(s), year of publication, title, the journal in which it is published, the keywords presented by the article’s author(s) and our categorisations in terms of which of the three theoretical fields it concerns. In the table, the articles are grouped according to the theoretical fields they concern, and these groups are listed in the same order as the sections in this part of the literature review, commencing with the literature concerning all three theoretical fields.

As seen in the overview below, the search for existing literature concerning the combination of three fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation led to three peer-reviewed, academic articles, which are presented and discussed in this section. Additionally, we found

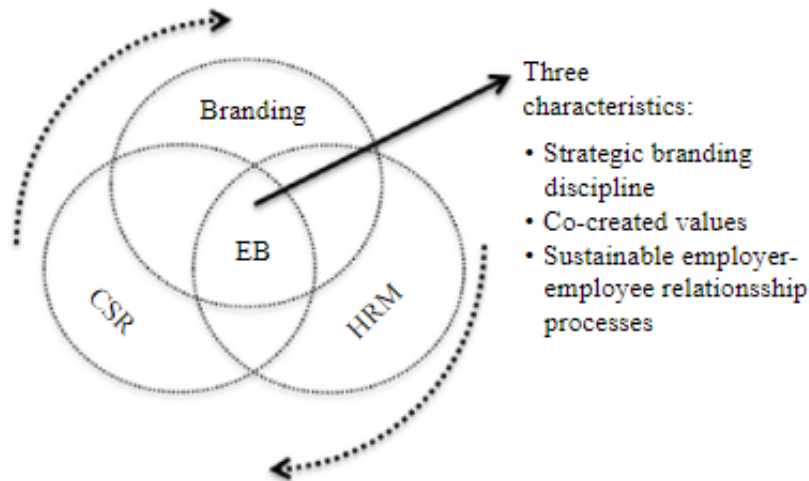
three relevant sources for each of the three combinations of the fields, which can be seen in the overview below. As mentioned earlier (section 3.1), the table is limited to including only the articles that are used in the analysis of the interrelationship between the three theoretical fields in section 4.2. Therefore, the literature that is used solely to support statements in the analysis is not included in the table.

Author(s) and year	Title	Journal	Article Key Words	Theoretical fields
Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen (2010)	Conceptualising employer branding in sustainable organisations	Corporate Communications: An International Journal	Corporate communications, Employers, Branding, Corporate social responsibility, Human resource management	CSR + employer branding + co-creation
Al Habsi (2018)	Analysing the interrelationship between CSR activities and the value co-creation process to enhance employer branding within the Omani hotel industry	No: PhD	No key words presented	CSR + employer branding + co-creation
Al Habsi, Hackney and Dey (2017)	The Dynamic of Value Co-Creation and its interrelationship with employer branding- a study on the hotel industry in Oman	No: Academy of Marketing, University of Hull	No key words presented	CSR + employer branding + co-creation
Bhattacharya, Sen and Korschun (2011)	Co-creating CR Strategy	No: Book: Leveraging Corporate Responsibility - The Stakeholder Route to Maximizing Business and Social Value	No key words presented	CSR + co-creation
Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood (2015)	Exploring human resource management roles in corporate social responsibility- the CSR-HRM co-creation model	Business Ethics: A European Review	No key words presented	CSR + co-creation
Simpson, Robertson and White (2019)	How Co-Creation Increases Employee Corporate Social Responsibility and Organizational Engagement: The Moderating Role of Self-Construct.	Journal of Business Ethics	Corporate social responsibility (CSR), Co-creation, Sustainability, Engagement, Self-construct	CSR + co-creation
Carlini, Grace, France and Lo Iacono (2019)	The corporate social responsibility (CSR) employer brand process: integrative review and comprehensive model	Journal of Marketing Management	Corporate socialresponsibility employerbrand, CSR, employer brand, internal CSR, CSR branding	Employer branding + CSR
Kashikar-Rao (2014)	Role of CSR in Employer Branding: Emerging Paradigm	Review of HRM	Employer branding, Corporate Social Responsibility, Recruitments Process, Internal Branding	Employer branding + CSR
Lindholm (2018)	The Use of Corporate Social Responsibility in Employer Branding	No: Book: Developing Insights on Branding in the B2B Context: Case Study from Business Practice	Corporate social responsibility; CSR; employer branding; employer-branding elements; employee value proposition	Employer branding + CSR
Dean, Arroyo-Gamez, Punjaisri and Pich (2016)	Internal brand co-creation: The experiential brand meaning cycle in higher education	Journal of Business Research	Brand identity, Co-creation, Internal branding, Brand meaning, Higher education	Co-creation + employer branding
Hatch and Schultz (2003)	Bringing the corporate into corporate branding	European Journal of Marketing	Branding, Strategical planning, Organisational culture, Brand image	Co-creation + employer branding
Baldry, Bain, Taylor, Hyman, Scholarios, Marks, Watson, Gilbert, Gall, Bunzel (2007)	The Meaning of Work in the New Economy	No: Book: The meaning of Work in the New Economy	No key words presented	Co-creation + employer branding

Overview of academic articles used in section 3.5 and 4.2.

Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen (2011) re-conceptualise employer branding in sustainable organisations, where they specifically focus on the combination of branding, strategic human resource management (HRM) and CSR. They argue that the theoretical framework of CSR, HRM and brand management, which they present, shows a new way of understanding CSR, HRM and brand management as an interrelated entity, where the focus is on the process, rather than the outcomes (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011). This led Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen to re-conceptualise the understanding of CSR and employer branding in a co-creation process and define employer branding in sustainable organisations as *‘strategic branding processes which create, negotiates and enacts sustainable relationships between an organization and its potential and existing employees under the influence of the varying corporate contexts with the purpose of co-creating sustainable values for the individual, the organization and society as a whole’* (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011, 113).

In addition to letting employees contribute to the creation of CSR values, Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen (2011) emphasise that employer branding is no longer a one-way communication tool to attract and retain employees but has evolved into a communicative and facilitating process in order to support development and value creation within an organisation. They further argue that strategic HRM gives organisations an opportunity to use tools such as the psychological contract and organisational identity to ensure that the employees are aligned with the overall corporate brand. Using strategic HRM tools ensures that employees, together with the management, can dialogically co-create the employer brand through a two-way communicative process. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of continuously addressing the employer brand, since the needs and desires of society, stakeholders and employees changes over time, which is also why they stress the importance of perceiving co-creation as a process and not an outcome (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011). This theoretical conceptualisation by Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen is used in our analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation since it provides a foundational model, as seen below, on how to combine the three theoretical backgrounds. However, as Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen re-conceptualise employer branding as a co-creative process and as an integrated part of a CSR strategy, they look at it from a management perspective, whereas we build upon their model in order to conceptualise the three theoretical fields from an organisational perspective.



'Employer branding processes in sustainable organisations: characteristics and reflections' (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011, 116).

In relation to that, Al Habsi, Hackney and Dey (2017) assess how the co-creation of values influences employer branding, with a focus on corporate citizenship (CC), which they explain as *'an outcome of socially responsible corporate culture and practices'* (Al Habsi, Hackney and Dey 2017, 1). They argue that an organisation's engagement with its employees, hereunder the communication to the employees about CC and CSR activities, is central to the organisation's success in making the employees feel more motivated, which in turn influences co-creation of value (Al Habsi, Hackney and Dey 2017). They also state that awareness of their organisation's CSR motivates employees in terms of implementing sustainable approaches in their work, which results in employees feeling what Al Habsi, Hackney and Dey refer to as *self-satisfaction*. Self-satisfaction refers to the act of organisations welcoming the contributions from employees in relation to CC, and by that, the employees contribute to their own job satisfaction. This process of including employees can be categorised as a form of co-creation with employees (Al Habsi, Hackney and Dey 2017). In addition to this, Al Habsi (2018) argues that *'value co-creation enhances employers' branding through the engagement of organisations' corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities and employees' behaviours, such as performance, loyalty and satisfaction'* (Al Habsi 2018, 1). Through an elaborate literature review of all three fields, she determines the importance of including employees in the co-creation process of implementing CSR initiatives and how that affects employee behaviours such as performance, satisfaction and loyalty. Through this, she established a clear link between CSR, co-creation of value and employer branding (Al Habsi 2018).

In order to provide a deeper and broader understanding of the interrelationships of the three theoretical fields, the following three sections present and discuss the existing literature combining the three fields, i.e. CSR and co-creation, employer branding and CSR, and employer branding and co-creation respectively. As this thesis focuses on employee retention as the end goal, each of the following sections are put in relation to employee retention as well.

3.5.1 CSR and co-creation in relation to employee retention

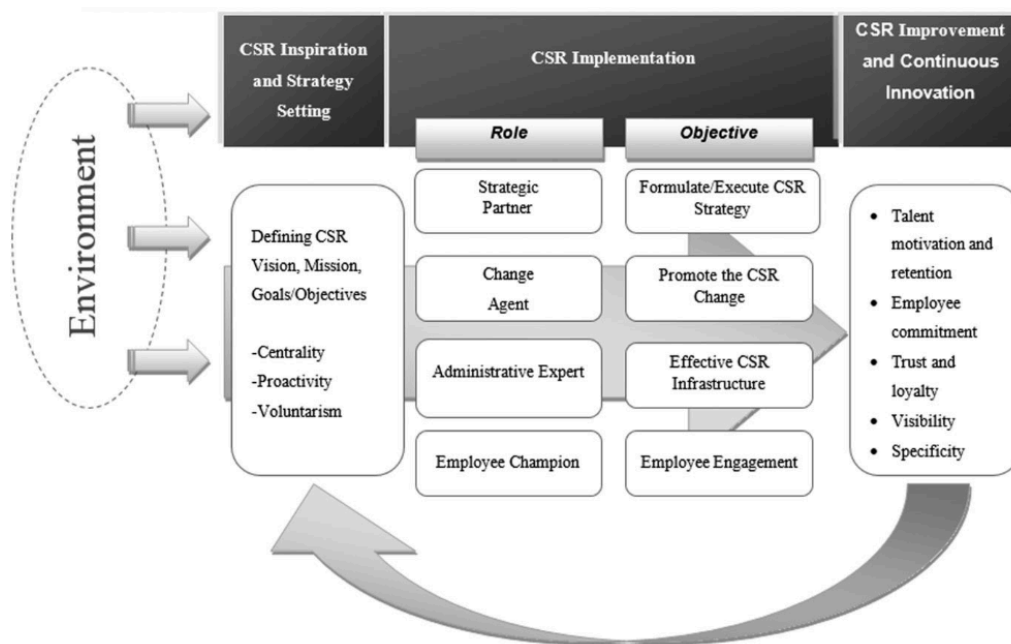
In research, the combination of the fields CSR and co-creation have mostly been put into connection with external stakeholders, particularly focusing on how organisations can co-create value(s) with customers (Biggemann, Williams and Kro 2014; Sarmah, Islam and Rahman 2015). As mentioned in the introduction, another type of created value(s) stems from Porter and Kramer (2011) who argue that Creating Shared Values (CSV) with society can have many benefits, not only to the economical part of business but also to the societal part of business and society. However, the primary focus is creating financial value for businesses, such as employee productivity and lower employee absence (Porter and Kramer 2011), which is why we do not find it relevant to the focus of this thesis.

Some researchers place emphasis on the importance of including all stakeholders in the act of creating values, such as Miller and Monge (1986) who argue that any kind of decision-making participation in relation to CSR activities can increase ties with an organisation, hereunder all types of stakeholders, such as customers, investors, suppliers and vendors, communities, governments and employees (Miller and Monge 1986). In relation to that, anyone who participates in co-creation will experience a positive effect on their level of engagement as seen in employee-engagement literature (Schaufeli et al. 2002). In relation to employees, Bhattacharya, Sen and Korschun (2011) argue that employees must be seen as the primary stakeholders and enactors when it comes to the co-creation of corporate responsibility (CR)⁹ (Bhattacharya, Sen and Korschun 2011). They add that when including employees in the co-creation of CR initiatives, organisations create a sense of unity, which has an effect on employee retention and the feeling of doing something meaningful as mentioned in section 3.2.1.

⁹ Bhattacharya, Sen and Korschun (2011) refer to CR instead of CSR, which is a term related to CSR where the social aspect is not included. Therefore, their research is still relevant in this literature review because it is closely related to CSR.

This assumption is also described by Simpson, Robertson and White (2019) who examined *‘when and why participating in the co-creation of a CSR program positively impacts employee CSR perceptions, and subsequently CSR and organizational engagement’* (Simpson, Robertson and White 2019, 2). They argue that the study of co-creation has been well researched in the marketing field, and building on the findings from this research, they hypothesise that co-creation of CSR values can have a great impact on employees and organisations as well (Simpson, Robertson and White 2019). They find that the co-creation of CSR initiatives with employees can enhance employees’ CSR engagement by including them in the decision making, which ultimately affects their organisational engagement and their willingness to participate in the CSR activities as well. Additionally, they also argue that when employees are involved in the co-creation of CSR initiatives, they become more engaged in their work tasks, since they feel that they are becoming a part of something meaningful. By being a part of something meaningful one must assume that this affects employee retention (Simpson, Robertson and White 2019). Furthermore, research shows that positive CSR perceptions are linked to turnover intentions and retention (Hansen et al. 2011; D. Jones 2010).

In connection with employee engagement, Saks and Gruman (2014) argue that employee engagement is an individual aspect and that it is a reflection of the organisation in which one works. Some of the influencing factors of employee engagement and thereby employee retention are organisational goals, values and beliefs, which are all factors that can be influenced by CSR approaches (Saks and Gruman 2014). Similarly, Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood (2015) have created a CSR-HRM co-creation model, where CSR initiatives are combined with co-creation with the influence of HRM. Here, they argue that the outcome of the co-creation of CSR initiatives with the employees can have an impact on employee commitment to the organisation: *‘we argue that there is an important role for HRM in CSR and employee commitment to the organization and that both HRM and CSR converge around these common goals and outcomes within a co-creation framework’* (Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood 2015, 138). In relation to that, they argue that there are several worthwhile outcomes by co-creating CSR values with employees, such as e.g. increasing employee commitment and building trust and loyalty, which all have an effect on employee retention. This is presented in the model below:



'The CSR-HRM co-creation model' (Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood 2015, 133).

The understanding of including employees in the process of co-creating CSR initiatives from Simpson, Robertson and White (2019), as well as Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood (2015) and Bhattacharya, Sen and Korschun (2011) are elaborated further in section 4. In section 4, they are used as one of the building blocks for analysing the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation. The next section includes a presentation of the literature combining the fields of CSR and employer branding, in order to deepen the knowledge of the existing combining literature of the three theoretical fields.

3.5.2 Employer branding and CSR in relation to employee retention

The fields of employer branding and CSR are mostly connected in the act of *attracting* new employees since CSR is often connected to the reputation of the company (Verčič and Čorić 2018). However, in the literature combining employer branding and CSR, focus is rarely on how they affect *retaining* current employees, i.e. internal employer branding. Since the overall focus of this thesis is on employee retention, this section is concerned with the sparse literature focussing on retention of current employees rather than attraction of new employees.

When employer branding is put in relation to CSR, literature shows that when an organisation is socially responsible and has a socially responsible image, it influences stakeholder engagement positively (Greening and Turban 2000). Employees are important and often

overlooked stakeholders, who have the ability to both contribute to and represent an organisation's corporate brand (Lindgreen, Maon and Vallaster 2016). In relation to that, Suliman and Al-Khatib (2014) argue that the process of developing CSR projects can have an impact on an organisation's reputation both in relation to the internal and external stakeholders, i.e. when CSR is put in relation to attracting, motivating, recruiting and retaining, it can help build the employer brand (Suliman and Al-Khatib 2014).

As mentioned above, CSR can affect many different employer branding outcomes such as enhanced reputation, stakeholder engagement and brand image. In relation to that Carlini et al.'s (2019) understanding of CSR and employer branding focuses on two different journeys, namely the *potential employee CSR journey* and *current employee CSR journey*. This literature review only includes their understanding of the *current employee CSR journey* since the focus of this thesis on current employees and how to retain them. Carlini et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of aligning the organisations CSR strategy with its employer brand identity within this journey. If an organisation does not align its CSR strategy with the employer brand the employees' expectations of how the employer brand should be, in relation to the organisation's CSR strategies, it creates a gap, which can have consequences such as intention to quit, reduced job satisfaction, reduced organisational trust and decreased job performance (Carlini et al. 2019). In order to align the organisation's CSR strategy with its internal CSR initiatives, Carlini et al. (2019) argue that four main internal initiatives are important: '*(a) CSR socialisation, (b) workplace benefits, (c) corporate ethical empowerment and (d) equitable human resource practices*' (Carlini et al. 2019, 192). Carlini et al. (2019) argue that when organisations take these initiatives into account, it can help them avoid the gap and related consequences, and instead let them practice the CSR strategy in real life (Carlini et al. 2019).

Lindholm (2018) also proposes an understanding of the links between CSR and employer branding. She argues that there are both strategic and operational links between CSR and employer branding. In relation to the strategical link, she argues that '*a strategic integration of HR and CSR is further supported by the fact that the strategically most important CSR stakeholders are the employees*' (Lindholm 2018, 80). Lindholm uses the term HR in this quote, however, she refers to HR as the altogether function, where employer branding is a part of it. She further argues that the link between CSR and employer branding is clear since a long-term commitment from every employee is needed – from the top management group

to employees in all the business functions, in order to achieve a successful CSR implementation (Lindholm 2018). In relation to the operational link between CSR and employer branding, Lindholm argues that the Global Reporting Initiative¹⁰ uses CSR categories that can be utilised to formulate employer branding elements. These categories include: *'employment-related indicators such as monetary compensations and work arrangements with respect to work-life balance, labor-management indicators, health and safety indicators, training and education indicators, and diversity and equality indicators'* (Lindholm 2018, 80). Lindholm argues that these six CSR categories can be classified in relation to Ambler and Barrow's (1996) definitive categories of employer branding, namely economic, functional or psychological employer branding elements (Lindholm 2018, 83). All of these categories positively affect employee engagement, motivation and performance, if they are implemented in the employer branding process. Through her research, Lindholm discovered that *'employment-related CSR compromises both economic and functional employer branding elements'* (Lindholm 2018, 88). Here, Lindholm refers to actions such as labour-management CSR, which is linked to functional elements of employer branding, such as communication, management, and work procedures. Besides these elements, she also refers to health, safety and education as CSR areas with a clear functional link. Whereas areas of diversity and equality are linked to the psychological employer branding element. This shows that a focus on CSR in relation to employer branding can add value to the relationship between the employees and the employer. It can make a big difference to employees and their quality of life, which will affect the intention to stay (Lindholm 2018).

Another aspect Lindholm (2018) draws on is community CSR, which is when an organisation works for a specific cause. When companies choose this approach as part of their CSR strategy, it has an impact on employer branding as well. Lindholm argues that *'for employees, participation in cause related community CSR can add to a feeling of purpose of work'* (Lindholm 2018, 81). As mentioned in the section on CSR in relation to employee retention (section 3.2.1), a feeling of being part of something bigger has an effect on an employee's motivation, which can affect his/her job satisfaction and intention to stay. The feeling of being part of something bigger is also an aspect that Kashikar-Rao (2014) takes into con-

¹⁰ Global Reporting Initiative is an *'independent international organization that has pioneered sustainability reporting since 1997'* (Global Reporting Initiative n.d.)

sideration as she states that implementing CSR strategically in the employer branding process gives the employee a feeling of belongingness towards the organisation (Kashikar-Rao 2014, 194).

In relation to what Carlini et al. (2019), Lindholm (2018), and Kashikar-Rao (2014) argue, Kompella (2014) states that an organisation that acts responsibly towards the community and includes the employees in the act will make the employees feel more appreciated by getting a chance to participate in doing something good for the world. This can be seen as a type of internal employer branding, where the organisation arranges certain CSR related activities for the employees. This creates higher trust in the organisation, which strengthens the positive feeling towards the organisation and hereby improves employee retention (Kompella 2014).

This literature review shows that literature concerning how the combination of CSR and employer branding has the potential to affect employee retention is sparse. However, of the above-mentioned theories, we find Carlini et al. (2019) and Lindholm's (2018) understandings particularly relevant to this thesis as their understandings combines the CSR strategies with employer branding processes in order to improve employee retention. We elaborate on and use Carlini et al.'s and Lindholm's understandings of the combination of the two theoretical fields in section 4, where we analyse the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation. The next section includes a presentation of the literature on co-creation and employer branding in order to advance the knowledge on the literature combining the three theoretical fields.

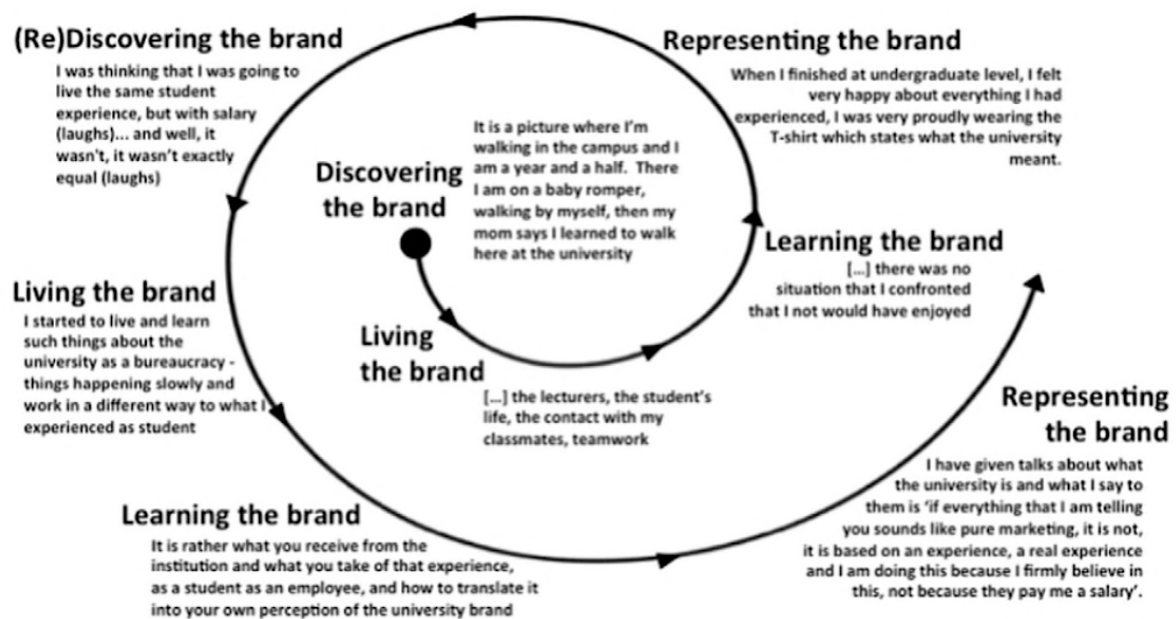
3.5.3 Co-creation and employer branding in relation to employee retention

As mentioned in the earlier sections concerning co-creation (section 3.4 and 3.5.1), the concept of co-creation has mostly been put in connection with customers, and how they can co-create e.g. brand, products, etc. together with an organisation (Biggemann, Williams and Kro 2014; Sarmah, Islam and Rahman 2015). As there is a call for more research in the field of co-creation with focus on employees, research concerning the combination of co-creation and employer branding is also sparse. While employer branding is, of course, related to employees and not customers, most existing research is put in connection with *attracting* potential employees rather than *retaining* current employees, as described in section 3.3. However, several studies also revolve around how employer branding can affect retention,

as mentioned in section 3.3.1. In the following, we present the existing literature concerning the combination of co-creation and employer branding.

The literature concerning managing a brand, as part of employer branding, focusses on the fact that an organisation has to think about its stakeholders, with the most relevant ones, in relation to the focus of this thesis, being their employees. The same goes for co-creating, where the purpose is to create a process in which an organisation includes stakeholders, hereunder also employees. Ind and Bjerke (2007) argue that organisations create a brand by including and involving stakeholders, such as employees in the branding process. According to Mack (2004), this allows stakeholders to *'take a peek behind the scenes and have a say when decisions are made ... Smart brands will welcome the [stakeholder's] role as a natural partner in a collective process of ... brand development'* (cited in Ind and Bjerke 2007, 140). They indicate that it is a smart move for organisations to incorporate and involve the employees when constructing the employer brand. In addition to that, Fournier (1998) argues that brand meaning is negotiated in social settings, which means that when co-creating an employer branding process with employees, organisations construct a social setting in which the organisational brand is created (Fournier 1998). By introducing co-creation to the field of employer branding, the result is a continuous dynamic process where the employer brand is negotiated between the employer and employees due to the dynamic nature of co-creation. This ensures that the relationship between the employee and the organisation keeps developing and it lets the employees be a part of the organisation in a new way. In relation to that, Hatch and Schultz (2003) argue that employer branding is tied to an organisation's values, which are continuously discussed, created, and constructed through stakeholder dialogues (Hatch and Schultz 2003; Morsing and Schultz 2006). This ensures that the employer branding communication is not just a one-way communication form where the organisation dictates the outcomes, but instead a two-way communication where employees are used as co-creative partners. Here, it is important to note that employer branding is a continuous process which regenerates without the influence of management. In relation to this, we only comment on the communicative part of the employer branding process and how that can be carried out. This lets employees express what is important to them through a dialogical co-creating dimension instead of a linear transmission (Baldry et al. 2007). By letting employees verbalise their expectations in relation to employer branding, organisations get the opportunity to affect not only employee productivity, motivation and brand but also employee retention (Rao 1999).

In addition to the above, and building upon the findings in the section on employer branding (section 3.3), employer branding takes place with or without the influence of the organisation itself. Dean et al. (2016) propose a model called ‘The arc of internal brand co-creation’ (Dean et al. 2016, 3044) as seen below.



‘The arc of internal brand co-creation’ (Dean et al. 2016, 3044).

While the example stated in the model concerns a university as an employer brand, the process is applicable to the process that employees in other industries experience in regard to an employer brand as well. The model proposes that an employee discovers the brand before working at the organisation, then they live the brand by following the norms, learn more things about the brand and start representing the brand – these are all factors of a self-running employer brand. Hereafter, employees start co-creating the brand identity through their own personal interpretation of the employer brand and how they interact with other employees. They then begin to re-discover the brand, and by that co-creating the employer brand unconsciously with other employees (Dean et al. 2016). This shows that employees are constantly co-creating the employer brand without the influence of the organisation. However, it is important to note that the act of combining co-creation and employer branding is a fairly new approach (Smith 2018). With the limited amount of research of the com-

bination of co-creation and employer branding and since there is no profound theory combining the two fields, it is not possible to choose one particular theory to use as basis in the following section, where we analyse the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation (section 4). Instead of choosing one specific theory to use in our conceptualisation, we use the overall understandings of these combined fields uncovered in this literature review.

After the presentation of the two-and-two combinations of the literature concerning CSR, employer branding and co-creation, the next section concerns the analysis of the different combinations. In section 4, the interrelationships between the three fields are analysed in order to create a foundation for the conceptualisation in section 4.3.

4 Conceptualisation

As explained in the research design, the method of conceptualising is explained as an introduction to this section in order to clarify and justify the approach taken in the subsequent sections (cf. section 2.1). After elaborating on the method in section 4.1, the majority of this section is an in-depth analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation in section 4.2, which leads to our conceptualisation of the three theoretical fields in section 4.3.

4.1 Method of conceptualisation

As a means to structuring our conceptualisation, we have chosen to examine three seminal papers concerning theoretical contributions, namely Whetten (1989), Kilduff (2006), and Corley and Gioia (2011). A combination of these three articles functions as the method of our analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation in section 4.2 and the following conceptualisation in section 4.3.

Whetten's (1989) understanding of what constitutes a theoretical contribution is the foundation of the structure of the conceptualisation and theoretical contribution in this thesis. His framework is a good fit for the approach taken in this thesis because it addresses theoretical contributions in the organisational sciences, which aligns with our analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation and the following conceptualisation, as this thesis concerns organisational studies as well, and because a conceptualisation is one type of theoretical contribution (Whetten 1989). Whetten states that a complete theory must contain four essential elements, namely *what*, *how*, *why*, and *who*, *when and where* (Whetten 1989, 490). He refers to these elements as the building blocks of the theory development, where *what* concerns which concepts should be included, which in this thesis corresponds to the three literature reviews on CSR, employer branding, and co-creation, respectively, where we state the included concepts and cover the literature in the three different fields and the concepts and definitions hereof.

How concerns the causal relationship between the aforementioned concepts, i.e. how they are related to one another, which in this thesis is the section concerning the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation (section 4.2), which combines the three theoretical fields and analysis the interrelationships between them, which is pointed out as an important part of a theoretical contribution by both Kilduff (2006) and Corley and Gioia

(2011). Kilduff adds that an elaborate literature review is needed in order to provide plausible arguments in the analysis and shows that work has been put into the theoretical contribution. Whetten's recommends to visually depict these relationships between the concepts, which we do in model in section 4.3, in order to increase the reader's comprehension. In agreement with that, Kilduff (2006) also argues that it is important to structure one's theoretical contribution and examine and explain the interrelationship between the ideas in the field (Kilduff 2006). In relation to that, Corley and Gioia (2011) argue that theory in itself *'is a statement of concepts and their interrelationships that shows how and/or why a phenomenon occurs'* (Corley and Gioia 2011, 12). In order to follow the definitions based on Kilduff and Corley and Gioia, Whetten uses the *what*, *how* and *why* to explain the relationship between the elements.

Whetten's third element, *why*, is concerned with the underlying reasons for justifying the selection of the concepts (in *what*) and the proposed causal relationships (in *how*) (Whetten 1989, 491). In this thesis, the *why* is the conceptualisation in section 4.3, where the justification is made, analysed and discussed. Here, it becomes visible why these three different fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation work together in order to create internal employer branding process and ultimately retain employees. In short, the *what* and *how* describe the underlying thoughts and reasoning for the theory development, while *why* explains the justification of the theory development.

Whetten's last element, the *who*, *when* and *where*, concerns the limitations and the context of the theoretical contribution, meaning that they set the boundaries of generalisability of the theory, which constitutes the range of the theory (Whetten 1989). In this thesis, the *who*, *when* and *where* is the section on contribution (section 5) where implications, limitations and generalisability of this conceptualisation are discussed.

In relation to how Whetten (1989) defines theoretical contribution and what should be a part of one, Kilduff argues that before making a theoretical contribution, the most important aspect is to have a good idea. A good idea is found *'though an engagement with problems in the world that you find personally interesting'* (Kilduff 2006, 252). He argues that good theoretical contributions do not emerge from finding gaps in the literature. However, it is important to examine existing literature and that *'a careful explication of relevant prior theory and research helps build causal arguments and signal the value added to your work'*

(Kilduff 2006, 252). In relation to structuring our conceptualisation and hereunder the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation, we have chosen to look at Whetten’s (1989) and Corley and Gioia’s (2011) terminology in terms of theoretical contributions.

Adding value to the existing field of research

Corley and Gioia (2011) argue that every theoretical contribution must have *‘the ability to provide original insight into a phenomenon by advancing knowledge in a way that is deemed to have utility or usefulness for some purpose’* (Corley and Gioia 2011, 15). Additionally, Corley and Gioia argue that *originality* and *utility* are the most important factors when contributing theory. However, the two terms can be sub-categorised into two more elements: *‘Originality can be categorized as either (1) advancing understanding incrementally or (2) advancing understanding in a way that provides some form of revelation. Whereas the utility dimension parses into (1) practically useful and (2) scientifically useful’* (Corley and Gioia 2011, 15-16). This has been designed as a 2x2 matrix, as seen below:

Originality	Revelatory	4	1
	Incremental	3	2
		Practically useful	Scientifically useful
		Utility	

‘Current Dimensions for Theoretical Contribution’ (Corley and Gioia 2011, 15).

In terms of *originality*, *incremental insight* refers to the act of advancing people’s knowledge and understandings on a certain topic, where *revelatory insight* refers to the act of contributing theory that reveals what would not otherwise have been seen, known or conceived (Corley and Gioia 2011, 16-17). However, this perspective has fallen out of favour with many editors and reviewers over the years, since it is difficult to know and determine how knowledge and understandings must be provided in order to contribute with a ‘good’ theory (Corley and Gioia 2011, 16). This analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation falls under *incremental originality*, as it provides

a new view on how co-creation can be combined with both employer branding and CSR and how this combination affects employee retention. Determining whether research provide a significant contribution of knowledge and new understandings to a theoretical field, is subjective and difficult to answer (Corley and Gioia 2011). However, we believe that by providing a new understanding of the combination of three theoretical fields, in order to answer a global organisational challenge, this thesis provides both *incremental* and *revelatory insight*.

Besides categorising theory in terms of *originality*, Corley and Gioia (2011) also distinguish between *practically useful* and *scientifically useful* in terms of *utility*. *Practically useful* is when ‘theory can be directly applied to the problems practicing managers and other organizational practitioners’ face’, whereas *scientifically useful* refers to the theory that ‘improves rigor or the specificity of an idea and/or enhances its potential to be operationalized and tested’ (Corley and Gioia 2011, 18). This study primarily falls under *scientifically useful*, since it is primarily theoretical and therefore not applicable to practical use. However, by recommending future research on the topic, and by that include practical information on the conceptualisation, the aim is for this study to also be *practically useful* for organisations. Corley and Gioia designed the matrix in order to categorise contributing theories by their likelihood of succeeding at being published in the top management journals, such as the Academy of Management Journal, as indicated by numbers (Corley and Gioia 2011). In order to succeed with a theoretical contribution, it is important that you add value to the knowledge and understandings of existing, or new, theoretical fields.

Additionally, Whetten also establishes standards for the process of theory development in order to determine whether a theoretical contribution adds value to the existing field (Whetten 1989). He points out that while adding or deleting concepts (*whats*) from existing theories in principle can result in an important theoretical contribution, the value is added in the clarification of *how* the causal relationships have changed due to this addition or deletion, i.e. the underlying logic of the theory. As previously explained, the *why* explains the justification of the theory development, which entails that the greatest value is created in the *why* in the theory development process. Here, it is not uncommon to borrow perspectives from different fields in order to alter understandings and challenge the underlying logic of the existing theory (Whetten 1989). The *who*, *when* and *where* does not in itself add value to a theoretical contribution because it merely points out the limitations to an existing theory, e.g. by pointing out the sample size or selections and stating which limitations these

choices have on the findings. Whetten's *who, when and where* also answers the question of *utility*, in relation to Corley and Gioia (2011); who cares about this theory, who can utilise it and when is it useful for them, and where is this useful or limited to, e.g. specific areas of the organisation? Even though this insight does not in itself add value, understanding these limitations will give the theorist the opportunity to revise the *what* and *how* of the contribution and hereby add value (Whetten 1989). In relation to that, Kilduff (2006) argues that it is important to discuss and debate one's theoretical contributions with one's peers in order to add value through one's conceptualisations. Therefore, this thesis also includes an implication section which will include a discussion of the findings and a discussion of and suggestions for future research section, in order to gain as much knowledge and add as much value to the field as possible without collecting empirical data.

In relation to the analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation and suggestions for future research, the use of a social constructivist approach is taken, since co-creation emerged from social constructivism which impacts the way we see and understanding CSR and employer branding as socially constructed phenomena as well (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011). By applying a social constructivist approach to the field of employer branding and CSR, it becomes possible to look at a more social aspect of the field, namely the strengths from co-creation and how values can be created through constant dialogue discussion through the social interrelationship between employer and employee. By taking a social constructivist approach, it opens up new perspectives to the two fields of CSR and employer branding and adds a focus on relations, attitudes, interactions, negotiations and identities (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011).

In the following section, we present our analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation, which qualifies as a theoretical contribution and therefore contains the elements explained above. Whetten's (1989) understanding of what elements should be included when contribution theory, as well as Corley and Gioia's (2011), is used in the following section, where we analyse the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation and later in the conceptualisation of the three theoretical fields.

4.2 Analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation

In order to increase the readability, this section is structured in accordance with the literature review concerning the combination of the three theoretical fields (section 3.5), which this

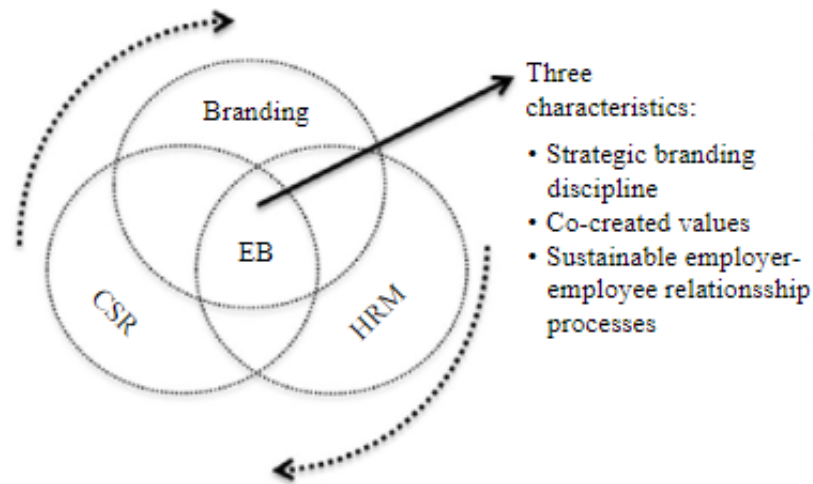
analysis is based on. The first section includes an analysis and discussion of the three articles concerning all three fields, namely Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen (2011), Al Habsi, Hackney and Dey (2017) and Al Habsi (2018). The interrelation between the three articles and how they deviate from and supplement each other is discussed. Possible weaknesses are identified and used in the next sections, where literature from the last part of the literature review, i.e. the three sections concerning the combined fields, are analysed and discussed in order to determine why and how the theoretical fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation are capable of being combined.

4.2.1 The interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation

As mentioned in section 3.5, only two journal articles and one PhD dissertation combining all three theoretical fields were found, namely Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen (2011), Al Habsi, Hackney and Dey (2017) and Al Habsi (2018). In order to increase the readability of this section, considering the many references made to this literature, we have chosen to shorten them and hereafter refer to Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen as ‘Aggerholm et al.’ and to Al Habsi, Hackney and Dey as ‘Al Habsi et al.’ as this is less interrupting to the reading experience.

Aggerholm et al. (2011) describe the combination of CSR and employer branding in a co-creating process, with emphasis on the process. They believe that the most important aspect of including CSR in employer branding is the continuous process of renegotiating, discussing and co-creating the sustainable employer branding with employees, in order to have a good employer-employee relationship. Aggerholm et al. emphasise the fact that when a sustainable employer branding co-creation process is functioning, it will have a great impact on the organisation as a whole. It will contribute to the organisation’s vision, mission and strategic goals, since the employer brand, from a corporate brand perspective, can be translated into brand values as well (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011). Aggerholm et al. propose a model called ‘Employer branding processes in sustainable organizations’ and explain what characterises a sustainable employer branding process. They present three characteristics: *‘(1) the anchoring in and supporting of the overall corporate strategy, thus being a strategic branding discipline; (2) the co-creation of values, i.e. continuous renegotiation of values with stakeholders according to their stakes and expectations; and (3) the establishment of sustainable employer-employee relationships oriented* (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011, 114-115). Seen below is Aggerholm et al.’s (2011) model,

including the three employer branding characteristics, which is used in the analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation, and later in the section concerning the conceptualisation of the three fields.



'Employer branding processes in sustainable organisations: characteristics and reflections' (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011, 116).

Aggerholm et al. propose a new way of understanding employer branding and CSR in a co-creative process, with the most important stakeholders being employees. While their specific focus is on the organisational benefits from the co-creative process, the focus of this thesis is on the employee benefits and how co-creating CSR values can affect internal employer branding. Thereby, we add a different focus to the current understanding of the combination of the three theoretical fields. By providing an understanding of the interrelationship between the three fields, with a focus on the employee benefits, we extend the knowledge from Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen's (2011) conceptualisation and provide a new way of understanding the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation.

In connection to Aggerholm et al.'s (2011) conceptualisation, Al Habsi et al. (2017) propose that when an organisation engage with the employees in relation to the organisation's corporate citizenship and CSR activities, it does not only affect the organisation and its sustainable values but also makes employees feel more motivated, which in turn influences co-creation of value (Al Habsi, Hackney and Dey 2017). Additionally, communicating to the employees about the organisation's CSR values makes the employees more aware of the

organisation's CSR approaches which in turn motivates employees to implement sustainable approaches in their own work, which again makes the employees satisfied with themselves and their job, and as mentioned earlier, job satisfaction is one factor leading to employee retention. This process of including employees can be categorised as a form of co-creation with employees (Al Habsi, Hackney and Dey 2017). Additionally, Al Habsi (2018) analyses the process in which the co-creation of CSR initiatives with employees affects employee behaviours, such as performance, satisfaction and loyalty. She argues that value co-creation is a process that has three major elements: *dynamic*, which means that co-creation should be seen as an ongoing process, including input, process and outcome. *Dialogical* refers to the fact that it should consist of continuous interaction between stakeholders, in this case the organisation and its employees. Whereas, *dualistic* refers to that the co-creation process of implementing CSR initiatives with employees can either result in a positive outcome, which is co-creation, or a negative outcome, which is known as co-destruction (Al Habsi 2018).

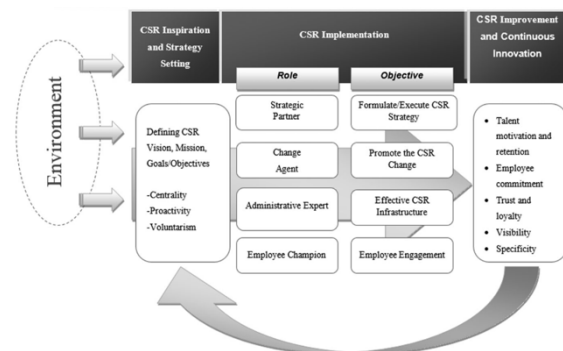
Al Habsi et al.'s (2017) and Al Habsi's (2018) understandings of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation are used as an addition to Aggerholm et al.'s conceptualisation of the combination of the three theoretical fields. Here, Al Habsi et al.'s and Al Habsi's findings and understandings of the combined fields are used to support the understanding of the positive outcomes from co-creating with employees and how that affects employee retention. Having added these findings and understandings to Aggerholm et al.'s conceptualisation, this conceptualisation is used as the foundation for the following analysis of the interrelationships between the three theoretical fields.

In order to examine the co-creation of CSR values with employees and how that process affects internal employer branding difficulties, such as employee retention, this thesis now draws on understandings and conceptualisations presented above and the understandings from the sections concerning the combination of the three fields: CSR, employer branding and co-creation (see section 3.5.1, 3.5.2 and 3.5.3). Below, the discovered benefits of the combination of CSR, co-creation and employer branding respectively, and the effect that these different combinations have on employee retention, are discussed in relation to Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen's (2011) conceptualisation and understandings.

4.2.2 The interrelationship between CSR and co-creation

In the literature combining CSR and co-creation, Simpson, Robertson and White (2019) propose that when including employees in the co-creation of CSR values, employees do not only become more aware of the organisation's CSR perceptions, but it also affects the employees' organisational engagement. This is supported by Al Habsi et al. (2017) who state communication to employees about CSR activities is central to the organisation's success in making the employees feel more motivated, which in turn influences co-creation of value. They add that awareness of the organisation's CSR motivates employees in terms of implementing sustainable approaches in their work. Employees become more engaged in their work tasks and gain a feeling of participating in something meaningful, through which they become more engaged in CSR participation as well. When adding Simpson, Robertson and White's findings to Aggerholm et al.'s (2011) understandings of the co-creation of sustainable employer-employee relationships and the employer branding process the employee aspect of engagement towards the organisation and towards CSR perceptions. As explained in the literature review about CSR (section 3.2) and more specifically in section 3.2.1 about CSR in relation to employee retention; when employees become more aware of an organisation's CSR perception and values, it affects employee retention and the employee's 'intention to stay', since they become more engaged when they find themselves doing something meaningful (Du, Bhattacharya and Sen 2015). In relation to this, Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood (2015) also contributed with findings illustrating the positive outcomes from including co-creation in the act of creating CSR values. Some of the similar outcomes, as described previously, are presented by Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood which include: motivation, commitment, trust, loyalty and retention (Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood 2015, 133). These are all benefits from taking part in co-creation of CSR values with an organisation.

As mentioned earlier, Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood (2015) present the model seen to the right, where the organisation presents the CSR inspiration and strategical setting of the CSR related goals/mission to the organisation. Hereafter, the HR management implements it in the organisation and thereafter the employees co-create the CSR strategy by improving and continuously innovating the CSR strategies (cf.



section 3.5.1). The model illustrates with an arrow that after the co-creation with employees, it functions as a continuous process (Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood 2015, 133). This ensures what Aggerholm et al. (2011) see as a vital aspect – that co-creating CSR values is an ongoing process and that focus should not be on the end goal. To put the new findings in relation to Aggerholm et al.'s conceptualisation, it shows that when including employees in a sustainable employer branding process, it can also affect the internal employer branding itself, which means that by including Simpson, Robertson and White's (2019) findings concerning improved organisational engagement, and Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood's (2015) understanding of CSR and co-creation, and how it provides the employees with motivation, loyalty and trust, it contributes to a fourth characteristic to Aggerholm et al.'s conceptualisation. This fourth characteristic concerns how 'co-creating CSR initiatives affect internal employer branding and employee motivation, commitment and engagement, and ultimately employee retention'.

However, CSR and co-creation is only one of the three parts that constitutes our analysis of how the interrelations between the three fields affect employee retention, and it is therefore not elaborate enough on its own. Therefore, the next section concerns the interrelationship between employer branding and CSR in relation to Aggerholm et al.'s (2011) conceptualisations and understandings and why the combination of these two fields contribute to the understanding of internal employer branding and ultimately employee retention.

4.2.3 The interrelationship between employer branding and CSR

After having established how theories involving co-creation and CSR can contribute to Aggerholm et al.'s (2011) conceptualisation and understandings, this section examines how theories involving employer branding and CSR can contribute to this understanding as well. As described in the section concerning the combination of employer branding and CSR (see 3.5.2), Lindholm (2018) proposes an employer branding and CSR theory with a focus on both strategic and operational links between the two. She argues that in terms of employer branding and CSR, employees are the most important stakeholder. She refers to Aggerholm et al.'s (2011) statement on how employer branding should be a part of an organisation's CSR strategy and therefore, employer branding is strategically linked with CSR and strategy planning (Lindholm 2018). However, Lindholm also looks at the operational link between employer branding and CSR and argues that CSR categories, presented by GRI and The

European Commission Green Paper, can be operationally connected with Ambler and Barrow's (1996) elements of employer branding, namely: economic, functional and psychological. As previously explained, these indicators include compensation and benefit, work-life balance, labour management, health and safety, education and training, empowerment of employees, diversity and equality (Lindholm 2018, 80). Here, Lindholm argues that the indicators have parallels to employer branding elements, where compensation and benefit can be linked to the economic element; training and education, and labour-management can be linked to the functional element; and work-life balance, empowerment of employees, and diversity and equality can be linked to the psychological employer branding element (Lindholm 2018, 88). Lindholm adds that implementing CSR in the employer branding process can affect the employer-employee relationship, which is also mentioned in the third characteristic by Aggerholm et al. (2011).

As mentioned, Lindholm (2018) also refers to Aggerholm et al.'s (2011) statement on how employer branding should be a part of the strategic planning of CSR. However, Lindholm looks at this from a different perspective and argues that CSR can be included in the operational part of the employer branding process, where employer branding elements and initiatives are infused with a CSR related mindset. By that, organisations can draw from the positive benefits that successful employer branding processes can contribute with. Lindholm (2018) believes that *'the purposes of internal employer branding are to ensure that the personnel wants to remain with the company and that they can identify themselves with corporate values. This has a positive impact on employee engagement, motivation, and performance'* (Lindholm 2018, 77). From this statement, it is evident that Lindholm focusses on the employer branding process as opposed to the strategic planning of CSR. Additionally, Lindholm (2018) argues that when employees participate in CSR related activities, it gives them a feeling of purpose in regard to their work and adds to the feeling of belongingness and the employees' intention to stay.

Another important aspect of the interrelationship between CSR and employer branding, is the act of including employees in community CSR and give them a chance to be a part of doing something good. In relation to this, Kahikar-Rao (2017) adds that by including CSR initiatives, such as community CSR activities, in the employer branding process, it gives employees a feeling of belongingness towards the organisations, which in turn affects employee retention (Kashikar-Rao 2014).

Furthermore, Carlini et al. (2019) argue that implementing certain employer branding related CSR initiatives will help organisations reduce the gap between the organisation's CSR strategy and what is being communicated externally, and their employees' perception of the CSR employer brand. By following the four initiatives organisations can avoid the gap between their CSR goals and what they do in practice. The four initiatives are: *CSR socialisation*, *workplace benefits*, *corporate ethical empowerment* and *equitable human resource practices*. *CSR socialisation* refers to the act of employees learning and identifying an organisation's CSR values, beliefs and expectations. *Workplace benefits* refers to when an organisation provides the employees with benefits that go beyond financial and legally required benefits, which shows that the organisation is committed to its employees. *Corporate ethical empowerment* (CEE) is the act of letting employees participate in and influence the CSR strategies and how they are managed, implemented and maintained, which has a direct link to co-creating CSR with employees as discussed in the previous section. Lastly, *equitable human resource practices* (EHRP) refers to the degree of which the employees perceive that the organisation they are working for is committed to creating a fair and impartial work environment (Carlini et al. 2019).

This adds another dimension to Aggerholm et al.'s (2011) conceptualisation, where Lindholm believes that the interrelationship between employer branding and CSR provides the same positive outcomes as Simpson, Robertson and White's (2019) and Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood's (2015) understandings. In addition to that, Carlini et al. (2019) propose utilising employer branding in relation to CSR initiatives in order to create coherence between an organisation's CSR strategy and external communication, and its internal CSR values and employer brand. This can help close the gap between what the organisation's CSR goals are and what they do in practice, which ultimately affects how the employees view the organisation and through that affect employee retention.

Therefore, Lindholm's and Carlini et al.'s understandings of the combination of internal employer branding and CSR complement the fourth characteristic presented in the previous section (section 4.2.2), concerning how co-creating CSR initiatives affect internal branding. However, Lindholm focusses on the employer branding process and propose that CSR can be operationally linked to the employer branding processes. In terms of that, the fourth characteristic can be altered into including the employer branding process by changing it to 'co-creating CSR values by using the internal employer branding process as a tool and by that

improve employee motivation, engagement, performance, and ultimately employee retention'. The difference from the previous version of this fourth characteristic is that in this altered version, there is a focus on employer branding as a process and that it can be utilised as a tool for co-creating CSR values, where the previous version focussed on how the co-creation of CSR initiatives affect internal employer branding, motivation etc.

This concludes the second of the three parts of our analysis of the interrelationships between the different theoretical fields in relation to Aggerholm et al.'s (2011) conceptualisation and understandings. The last section focusses on the third and final part of this analysis, i.e. the interrelationship between co-creation and employer branding and the value that this adds to the already analysed and discussed interrelations between the fields.

4.2.4 The interrelationship between co-creation and employer branding

As mentioned above, this section concerns the third and final part of our analysis of the interrelationships between the three theoretical fields. In this section, the literature review combining co-creation and employer branding is utilised in order to analyse and discuss the interrelationship between these two fields and the prior understandings and conceptualisations presented previously in this section.

As mentioned in the section concerning the literature combining co-creation and employer branding (section 3.5.3), there is no profound definition of the interrelationship between these two theoretical fields. However, some theorists have shared their understandings of the combination of the fields; Hatch and Schultz (2003) argue that employer branding is constructed through continuous discussions and dialogues with stakeholders, which indicates that when creating employer branding, co-creation can be used as a two-way communicational manner, and by that include employees in the co-creative process. Baldry et al. (2007) argue that when letting employees state their opinion and express their needs it adds to a dialogical co-creative dimension. By letting employees verbalise their needs, Rao (1999) believes that it affects employee productivity and motivation. These are all different understandings of how co-creation can be used in order to co-create an organisation's employer branding together with the organisation.

Dean et al. (2016) propose a way of understanding how employees can co-create an organisation's brand, without the influence of the organisation. They argue that objects such as brand logos and buildings can trigger an employee's perception of a brand, which leads to

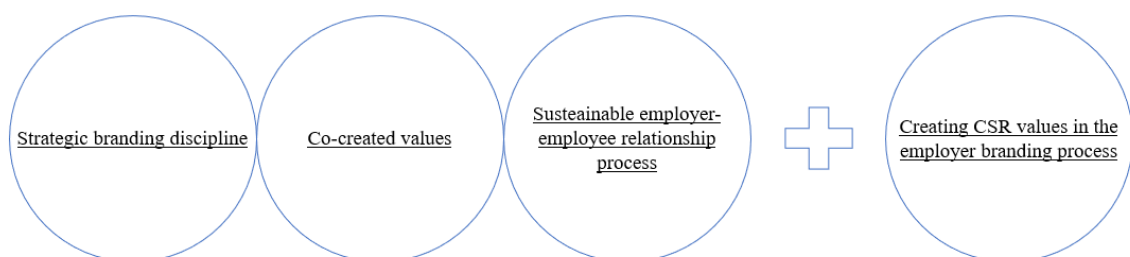
an employee's awareness of a brand, which then continues into brand interpretation where employees begin to interpret and evaluate the brand based on brand interactions and social interactions. Through social interactions, employees tend to share their own interpretation of the brand, which can then influence colleagues' interpretation. This act can be seen as a co-creative process, where the employer brand is communicated, discussed, and evaluated between employees. By co-creating the employer brand between colleagues, employees begin to reflect on their own internal and emotional understanding of the brand. When the co-created employer brand aligns with an employee's understanding of purpose and values, it can create brand engagement, commitment and trust (Dean et al. 2016).

This shows that the process of co-creating employer branding can happen without the influence of the organisations, however, it shows a continuous process of how an employer branding process is constantly being created through social interactions. Here, one can draw parallels to the deconstruction in social constructivism, where individuals construct new ways of understanding a phenomenon through social interactions (Collin and K ppe 2014). This is something that organisations need to be aware of since employees can transform the employer brand through continuous social interactions with colleagues. However, from an organisational perspective, employees should be provided with relevant brand messages and brand experiences that will lead them to the interpretation that the organisation desire (Dean et al. 2016). This is an important aspect that organisations must be aware of in order to gain the employer branding outcomes, that they desire.

This understanding of co-creation and employer branding puts emphasis on how the employees can co-create the employer brand between them, and not in combination with the organisation, where the organisation simply provides the framework in terms of physical interactions and then facilitate the social interactions. However, this understanding of co-creation and employer branding is similar to the understanding of co-creation and CSR in that they both emphasise the ongoing process of co-creation. When putting that in relation to the understandings from above about how co-creation can affect employee productivity and motivation, it adds to the understanding of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation. By letting people express their own personal opinions to each other or in a co-creative dialogue with the organisation, employees feel more motivated and engaged in the organisation, which in turn affects employee retention positively.

The understandings by Rao (1999), Hatch and Schultz (2003), Morsing and Schultz (2006), Baldry et al. (2007) and Dean et al. (2016) presented above, concerning how employer branding can also be co-created with or without the organisation present, adds a new dimension to the fourth characteristic created in the previous sections. To recap, the previously described fourth characteristic concerns the ‘co-creation of CSR values by using the employer branding process as a tool, and how it affects employee motivation, engagement, performance, and ultimately employee retention’. After including the research from the field combining co-creation and employer branding, this adds to the understanding of how the employer branding process is already a co-creative process between the organisation and the employees. Therefore, the fourth characteristic can be altered into concerning the ‘co-creation of CSR values as a part of the employer branding process has the potential to affect employee motivation, engagement, performance, and ultimately employee retention’. By including the co-creation of CSR values in the employer branding process, it becomes a natural part of the employer branding strategy, instead of being two separate organisational actions. Thereby, the fourth characteristic evolves from concerning how the co-creation of CSR values can affect internal employer branding to concerning how the internal employer branding process can be used as a tool for co-creation of CSR values, and lastly, to concern how the co-creation of CSR values becomes an integrated part of the internal employer branding process.

It is illustrated in the model below how this fourth characteristic can be added to Aggerholm et al.’s (2011) three previous characteristics:



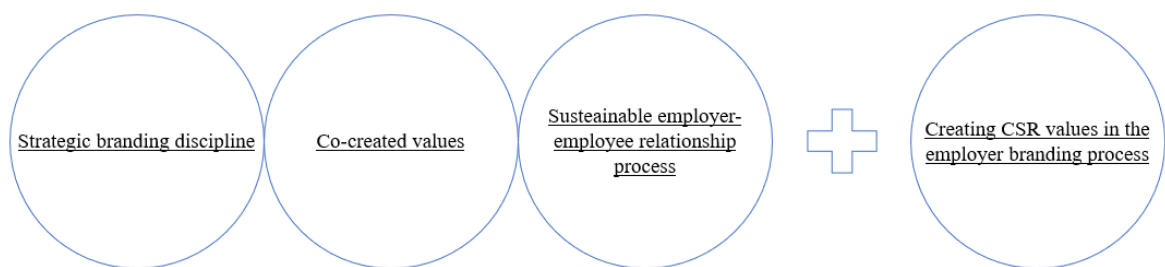
‘The four characteristics of a sustainable employer branding process’ (developed by the authors of this thesis on the basis of Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen (2011)).

The model presented above, and the findings elaborated in the analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation are further discussed in the next section. The next section includes a conceptualisation of the characteristics established and analysed in this section.

4.3 Conceptualising co-creation of CSR values in an internal employer branding process

Through the analysis in the previous section, we established why the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation is important for organisations to understand. As mentioned above, the interrelationship between the three fields, and the combination of them, has led to an addition of a fourth characteristic to Aggerholm et al.'s (2011) understanding of the co-creation of sustainable employer-employee relationships and the employer branding process. In this section, the characteristics analysed in the previous sections are discussed in order to conceptualise a new phenomenon including the three theoretical fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation.

As a starting point, Aggerholm et al.'s conceptualisation includes three characteristics, namely *'(1) the anchoring in and supporting of the overall corporate strategy, thus being a strategic branding discipline; (2) the co-creation of values, i.e. continuous renegotiation of values with stakeholders according to their stakes and expectations; and (3) the establishment of sustainable employer-employee relationships oriented towards a continuous reflection on mutual needs as well as current and future expectations'* (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011, 114-115). In the following, we explain and discuss these three characteristics, followed by an elaboration of our additional fourth characteristic, which is seen in the model below. This model is used to express the ongoing process of the conceptualisation visually.



'The four characteristics of a sustainable employer branding process' (developed by the authors of this thesis on the basis of Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen (2011)).

Strategic branding discipline

As stated above, the first of Aggerholm et al.'s (2011) characteristics is *'the anchoring in and supporting of the overall corporate strategy, thus being a strategic branding discipline'*, which concerns the support of the corporate strategy (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011, 114). In relation to this, Dean et al. (2016) emphasise the importance of supporting

the employees and informing them of the corporate brand strategy, as a part of the organisation's strategy in order to gain the desired outcome of a co-creating process of the employer brand. However, since the focus in this thesis is on the effect that combining CSR, employer branding and co-creation can have on employee retention and not on the overall corporate strategy, we argue that this first characteristic is irrelevant to our conceptualisation.

Co-created values

The second characteristic is *'the co-creation of values, i.e. continuous renegotiation of values with stakeholders according to their stakes and expectations'* (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011, 115), which states that continuous renegotiation of values in relation to stakeholders' expectations is an extremely important part of co-creating. This is supported by Hatch and Schultz (2003), and Morsing and Schultz (2006), who believe that an employer brand is established through continuous dialogues with stakeholders. In relation to this, Simpson, Robertson and White (2019), and Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood (2015) also believe that there are many positive outcomes from co-creating with employees, including but not limited to employee engagement, motivation, commitment and retention. In relation to Generation Y and Z, this second characteristic applies to the fact that individuals within these two generations appreciate continuous feedback from the employer. As mentioned in the section concerning Generation Y and Z and how to retain them (section 1.3), Würtzenfeld (2020) argues that this is an important distinction between Baby Boomers and Generation Y and Z. Therefore, this second characteristic, where the employer continuously renegotiates with the employees will help retain employees from Generation Y and Z. Ultimately, this characteristic concerning stakeholders is relevant to our conceptualisation, however, particularly when it is slightly altered to explicitly concerning internal stakeholders, i.e employees.

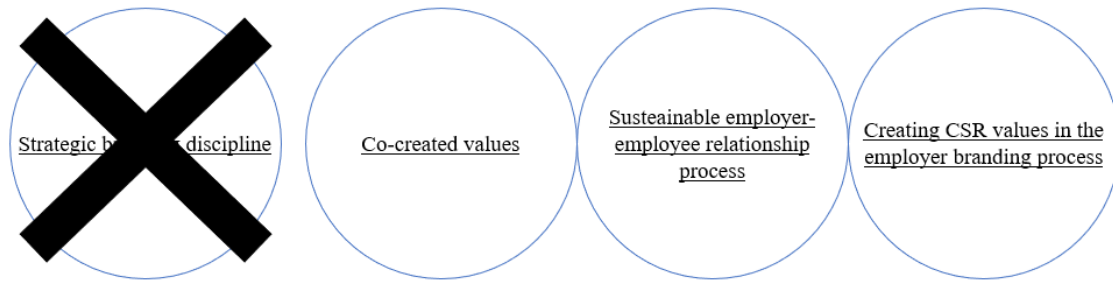
Sustainable employer-employee relationship process

The third characteristic by Aggerholm et al. (2011) is *'the establishment of sustainable employer-employee relationships oriented towards a continuous reflection on mutual needs as well as current and future expectations'* (Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen 2011, 115). This characteristic focuses on the employer-employee relationship and how it should serve as a means to continuously reflect upon mutual needs and expectations. This is an important aspect of co-creating as well since the employees are seen as a partner in the co-creative

process (Carlini et al. 2019; Ind and Bjerke 2011). By continuously realigning with the employees, organisations create transparency which makes employees feel seen, heard and included in the decisions instead of feeling like initiatives concerning the employees are decided by management without including the employees (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). By including employees in the decision-making process, the creation of CSR values is replaced with co-creation of CSR values, which make employees more motivated, engaged, committed, productive and loyal to the organisation. All of these benefits ultimately affect the employees' intention to stay with the organisation. Since the focus of the third characteristic is on the employee's needs and expectations in relation to their employer and the organisation, this characteristic is highly relevant to this thesis, since this thesis focuses on employees' needs and how organisations can meet the employees' needs and by that make them more motivated, engaged and hereby retain them. In relation to that, individuals from Generation Y and Z are positively affected by having a good relationship with e.g. mentor and/or closest manager. Having a close relationship with one's manager makes individuals from Generation Y and Z more motivated and in terms of that, it increases their job satisfaction (Deloitte 2016; Würtzenfeld 2020).

Creating CSR values in the employer branding process

The fourth characteristic, which we created and adapted in the last section, is defined as: *'co-creation of CSR values as a part of the employer branding process has the potential to affect employee motivation, engagement, performance, and ultimately employee retention'* (see section 4.2). This characteristic focuses on the inclusion of creating CSR values as a part of the employer branding process. By doing so, the CSR values will not only be an added effect but instead be a part of an organisation's employer brand. As established by Lindholm (2018), CSR initiatives can be operationally linked to employer branding processes, and as argued by Dean et al. (2016) when the employees are provided the means to create an employer brand, they tend to co-create that with colleagues or potentially the organisation. Therefore, organisations can benefit from having their CSR values included in the employer brand. In relation to employees from Generation Y and Z, Stevenson (2019) argues that they value an organisation's CSR initiatives highly when choosing a job, and that doing meaningful work is important to employees belonging to these generations (Stevenson 2019; Njemanze 2016). The model below visually depicts the results from the conducted conceptualisation, where the first characteristic from Aggerholm et al. (2011) has been omitted, and the fourth characteristic from this thesis has been included.



‘ The three new characteristics conceptualised in this thesis’ (developed by the authors of this thesis on the basis of Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomsen (2011)).

As an outcome of this conceptualisation of the combination of CSR, employer branding and co-creation, and the interrelationship between them and why they are important for organisations to be aware of, this thesis provides a re-conceptualisation of the characteristics provided by Aggerholm et al. (2011) where they are combined in a new context with the added characteristic mentioned above. This conceptualisation has led to the following understanding:

The co-creation of CSR values in the internal employer branding process occurs by continuous renegotiation with the employees in terms of current and future expectations and mutual needs. This process has the ability to affect employee motivation, engagement, commitment and productivity, all of which can lead to increased job satisfaction, which ultimately leads to employee retention.

In the above understanding, Aggerholm et al.’s (2011) second and third characteristics have been merged with our fourth characteristic. We believe that by merging those three characteristics, the importance of combining the three theoretical fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation becomes clear. By merging all three into one, the interrelationship between the different interchangeable components becomes clear, and it is possible to see why these characteristics, as a whole and not only as separate units, affect employee retention. This combination of the three theoretical fields provides an opportunity to define the outcomes, which an organisation can benefit from, while taking this interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation into consideration. Including co-creation in this process adds the social constructivist perspective to CSR and employer branding, as elaborated in section 4.1. Through co-creation with employees, organisations have the

opportunity to socially de-construct their original CSR values and employer branding process, and thereby reconstruct new CSR values in the employer branding process.

By including the interrelationship of co-creating CSR values in the internal employer branding process, the organisation should, as implied in the above definition, continue to renegotiate and co-create with employees. By doing so, organisations create transparency, and instead of making a corporate decision regarding CSR values without the influence of the employees, they include them in the ongoing decision making process. This results in employee motivation, engagement, commitment and productivity since they feel like they are a part of something meaningful, which affects their intention to stay with their employer, which thereby affects the overall employee retention (Al Habsi, Hackney and Dey 2017; Carnahan, Kryscynski and Daniel 2017; Jamali, El Dirani and Harwood 2015). In relation to employees from Generation Y and Z, the combination of the three characteristics ensures continuous renegotiation with their manager, which makes them feel seen, heard and appreciated, and gives them a better relationship with their manager. Furthermore, they get the opportunity to affect the CSR initiatives within the organisation, which in turn affects their desire to do meaningful work.

5 Contribution

This section includes a presentation and discussion of our findings, hereunder how the findings contribute both in terms of practical implications for organisational use and research implications for future research. Lastly, we discuss the limitations of this thesis.

As mentioned in the introduction, the aim of this thesis is to contribute to solving the issue organisations experience with employee retention. All three theoretical fields affect employee retention in their own way, as mentioned in the literature reviews concerning each field. However, there is a lack of research combining the three fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation and how the combination of them affect employee retention, to which this thesis contributes with a conceptualisation combining these three fields.

Through the conceptualisation of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation, it became clear that when we combine the three different theoretical fields which theoretically affects employee retention positively since the act of co-creating CSR values in the internal employer branding process affects employee motivation, engagement, commitment, and productivity, which leads to increased job satisfaction and thereby employee retention.

5.1 Implications for research

With an increased focus on HRM and a more humanistic approach to conducting business has emerged over the last couple of decades, there has been an increased focus on the employees as one of the most important stakeholder groups and an increased understanding of the importance of keeping employees' job satisfaction high, and through that try to avoid an inevitably high price to pay, when employees choose to leave the organisation (Blake 2006).

In relation to the increased focus on employees, academic fields such as employer branding and co-creation have grown over the last couple of years as well. These two fields have previously been discussed in relation to each other, as seen in the section combining the literature combining employer branding and co-creation (section 3.5.3). Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, the interests and importance of CSR have grown rapidly over the last decade, and people, as well as organisations, have realised the urgency for paying attention to the act of being sustainable and socially responsible. As a result of that, potential employees tend to be more aware of an organisation's CSR strategy, both as a consumer

and as a potential employee. As a result of that, employees tend to feel more motivated when the organisation they work for have a clearly defined CSR strategy.

While conducting the three separate literature reviews concerning the three fields and the three literature reviews combining the fields, it became clear that these three fields, separately as well as intertwined, affect the employees' motivation, engagement, commitment, and job satisfaction, which theoretically leads to employee retention.

5.2 Implications for practice

One main practical implication derives from the conceptualisation of the understanding of CSR, employer branding and co-creation, where this thesis has extended the understanding in a co-creative manner, and through that elaborated on the positive benefits that an organisation can experience by co-creating CSR values in the internal employer branding process. By continuously renegotiating with employees on what and how CSR should be a part of the internal employer branding, organisations can experience several positive outcomes, as previously described.

This thesis has been conducted with a focus of how employees can benefit from the conceptualisation of CSR, employer branding and co-creation and therefore, it provides managers with a new way of understanding the interrelationship between these three fields, how these can be understood together and why they are important for organisations. Therefore, this conceptualisation of CSR, employer branding and co-creation serves the purpose of looking at how organisations can benefit from including employees in the act of co-creating CSR values in the internal employer branding process. Additionally, it also adds to the understanding of employee retention, specified as Generation Y and Z, and how organisations can use the re-conceptualised interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation in order to make employees more motivated, engaged, committed and through that increase their job satisfaction, and ultimately affect employee retention positively.

5.3 Limitations

In relation to limitations, this thesis focusses on employees and how co-creating CSR values in the internal employer branding process can affect the motivation, engagement, commitment and ultimate employee retention. However, seen from a social constructivist point of view, everything is subjective: Therefore, every country, business area, organisation and even individual employee might have a different understanding of what is important to

them, in relation to e.g. CSR. For that reason, one has to be aware of the fact that everybody has a subjective understanding of their socially constructed world, and that it is therefore not possible to generalise what makes someone motivated, engaged and committed. As an example, this thesis has an international focus and does not take national cultures into consideration. This makes it more generalisable, and therefore, less particular in terms of national cultures.

It is also important to note that this thesis focusses on Generation Y and Z and what motivates and engages those generations in relation to CSR, employer branding and co-creation and the interrelationship between them. Therefore, this thesis is limited to those two generations and does not include specific literature and research on previous generations such as Generation X and Baby Boomers. Therefore, this thesis and its contribution, both academically and practically, might not be applicable to other generations, even though both Generation X and Baby Boomers are still present in the workforce today. In relation to this, it is important to note that generational cohort theory might not always be applicable in relation to retaining employees. By this, we refer to the fact that individuals, from a social constructivist point of view, do not necessarily fit into one predefined cohort and they might relate to and have characteristics prominent to other generations.

Another limitation to be aware of is the fact that this thesis is conducted on the basis of an elaborate literature review, however, we, as researchers, potentially risk to have missed relevant literature – either literature that has been written in another language or literature that is, right now, in the process of being published. In addition to this, we believe that CSR, employer branding and co-creation are socially constructed phenomena, and every aspect of the three fields are being deconstructed and constructed as we speak (Collin and K ppe 2014). This means that our analysis and conceptualisation are based on the currently constructed understandings of CSR, employer branding and co-creation, which might change tomorrow. Therefore, the subjective understanding of how we understand the co-creation of CSR values in the internal employer branding process might have changed in a year, e.g. if new ways of understanding the interrelationship between the three have been published. In relation to this limitation, we are also aware of the fact that we might not have found every, single relevant article through our systematic literature review, and since individuals interpret meaning differently, other researchers might be able to find other relevant articles that have shown up in our searches.

The conceptualisation of CSR, employer branding and co-creation proposed in this thesis has, as explained above, practical implications for organisational use, and research implications for future research as well. On the basis of these implications and limitations, the next section includes a discussion of our methodological considerations for suggested future research the section concerning Future Research, includes an elaborate presentation of how one can continue to research the importance of co-creating CSR values in the internal employer branding process and to positive practical implications, it implies. Following these limitations, is our suggestions for and discussion of future research, where we discuss suggestion for how future research can help to diminish the limitations.

6 Suggestions for and discussion of future research

As mentioned above, this section includes our suggestions for and discussion of future research, that other researchers can potentially conduct at a later point in time, based on our findings in this thesis. With the focus of this thesis being on theory development, and thereby being a solely theoretical contribution, a future study including empirical research would provide a means for testing our conceptualisation in practice.

Taking our social constructivist approach into consideration, we suggest conducting qualitative research in order to gain insights into the subjective truths of the interviewees. Qualitative research is often conducted in instances where relatively new topics are being examined or where there is little existing knowledge about the particular area of the study (Yin et al. 2014). We first considered the following qualitative methods:

Observation: Conducting observations in a group setting, where the actions of the participant(s) are monitored, has the potential to reveal the socially constructed truths experienced and constructed by the participants (Altmann 1974). This method is favourable when the aim of the study is to analyse the participant's reaction to e.g. a certain object. However, this method does not provide insights into the thoughts of the participants, which would be particularly relevant in this case. It also does not assist in exploring the depth of the concept created. Therefore, we do not suggest using observation as part of the study in future research.

Survey: Conducting surveys provides the researcher with the possibility to ask a broad range of questions to multiple respondents by distributing questionnaires relatively broadly (Romm 2013). While surveys provide the researcher with insights into how respondents view a given topic, they do not provide deep insights into the thoughts of the respondents since follow-up questions are not possible (Romm 2013). Additionally, it can be challenging to ensure the relevance of respondents since questionnaires are oftentimes distributed broadly online and the researcher cannot ensure that it is the most relevant respondents, who answer. Therefore, it would not be possible to gain the intended knowledge through this method and we do therefore not suggest including surveys in future research.

Besides *observation* and *surveys*, which we do not suggest for future research, we also made the following considerations in order to thoroughly test the findings from our conceptualisation, i.e. how co-creation of CSR values in the internal employer branding process affects

retention of employees from Generation Y and Z. We believe that conducting three different types of interviews would provide the best insight into how our conceptualisation can be perfected and used in practice. We suggest to first conduct a *conceptual interview*, where a ‘subject matter expert’ is interviewed in order to gain expert insights into the fields which we have conceptualised (Kvale 2007). Our suggestion is to follow this interview up with *narrative interviews*, where the focus is on the stories the interviewees tell. This type of interview has the ability to provide insight into the employee’s perspective, particularly from Generation Y and Z, which are the main concern as explained in the introduction (Kvale 2007). The findings from these *narrative interviews* can then be used as the basis for a *focus group interview*, which has the added benefit of being able to simulate the co-creation process. Each of these interview variations is elaborated and discussed in further detail under section 6.3.

Due to the extensiveness of our suggestions for a future study, we suggest commencing with conducting a pilot study prior to the actual study. The term ‘pilot study’ refers to a mini version of a full-scale study which is often conducted in order to test the research method, e.g. a questionnaire or interview guide (Van Teijlingen and Hundley 2002). By doing this, it is possible to test the prepared questions and methods on fewer interviewees and adjust the study on the basis of the initial learnings before conducting a more comprehensive study including more interviewees.

Because our overall suggestion for future research includes conducting three different types of semi-structured interviews, this section is structured in accordance with Kvale’s (2007) internationally recognised work on semi-structured interviews. He presents seven stages of an interview inquiry, which helps the interviewer retain their initial vision throughout the interview process. Following this structure ensures a thorough presentation of our methodological considerations regarding the suggested future study – from beginning to end. The seven stages are *thematising*, *designing*, *interviewing*, *transcribing*, *analysing*, *verifying* and *reporting* (Kvale 2007, 33). The stages concerning *designing*, *interviewing* and *analysing* are elaborated further than the other stages since they cover important decisions like choice of interviewees, interview variations and method of analysis. Additionally, we have chosen to omit the stages concerning *transcribing* and *reporting* simply because they are straight forward and does not include any aspect which can be discussed in relation to suggestions for future research. *Transcribing* merely refers to the act of preparing the empirical data

from the interviews for analysis, by audio recording the interview and later transcribe it, and *reporting* refers to how the researcher communicate the findings of the study.

In the following subsections, our methodological considerations regarding the five of these seven stages are elaborated and discussed. Throughout this section, we present our suggestions as if we were to provide guidance to the executors of this hypothetical future study.

6.1 Thematising

As described previously, we have decided to follow Kvale's (2007) seven stages of a semi-structured interview. He argues that '*a significant part of an interview project should take place before the tape recorder is turned on for the first actual interview*' (Kvale 2007). Here, he refers to the act of *thematizing* one's study. When thematising a study, the focus is on the entity of the study and not on the different interview variation, and therefore, this subsection on thematising focuses on the overall study rather than the three different interview variations.

When thematising an interview study, there are three key questions one should ask oneself: *why*: clarifying the purpose of the study, *what*: obtaining a pre-knowledge of the subject matter to be investigated, and *how*: becoming familiar with different types of techniques of interviewing and analysing interviews, and deciding which to use in order to gain the intended knowledge (Kvale 2007).

In relation to *why* and the clarification of the purpose of the study, we refer to this conceptualisation can provide more knowledge on the combination of CSR, employer branding and co-creation and how it affects employee retention. In relation to the *what* regarding obtaining pre-knowledge of the subject matter to be investigated, we here refer to the elaborate literature reviews conducted in this thesis. However, if the suggested future research is conducted e.g. a year from now, we believe that a research of existing literature published after the publication of this thesis should be taken into consideration. As for the *how* and the act of becoming familiar with the different techniques and analysing methods, we refer to the following sections in which we present and discuss Kvale's ways of interviewing and hereunder state what we believe is relevant to take into account for the future research of this topic.

6.2 Designing

According to Kvale (2007), the second stage of the interview, *designing*, concerns the planning of the design of the study and takes all seven stages into consideration (Kvale 2007, 33). This stage is particularly important because it ensures that the study is undertaken with the goal of acquiring the intended knowledge. On a macro level, this whole section on future research can be seen as *designing* the study, and on a micro-level, within this section on future research, *designing* pertains to our considerations regarding the choice of interviewees, whereas the considerations regarding different interview variations are discussed in the next subsection, *interviewing*.

In terms of specifying the interviewees relevant for a future study, it is necessary to take the three different variations of interviews into consideration before determining which interviewees are best suited to provide the intended knowledge. As mentioned briefly in the introduction to this section, the first interview we suggest is a conceptual interview, and for this type of interview, a ‘subject matter expert’ is interviewed. Therefore, it would be required to find an expert within the field, however, because the three fields have not been combined this way before, finding an expert on this specific topic can be challenging. A solution can be to find experts with knowledge of each of the combinations of the fields, e.g. one expert in CSR and employer branding, and another expert in CSR and co-creation etc., and thereby gain insight into their extensive knowledge about those specific fields and get their opinion about the combination with the third field. Since experts with the acquired knowledge can potentially be difficult to find, we do not require that they have a specific nationality, since the most important aspect is their knowledge in these fields.

With regards to the two other interview variations, i.e. narrative and focus group interviews, the knowledge intended to achieve is fairly similar, in terms of being interested in the stories told by the interviewees. Therefore, the group of interviewees relevant for these two interview variations are the same. As elaborated in the introduction, the primary focus of this thesis has been on employees from Generation Y and Z, since they constitute an increasing share of the workforce and will continue to do so in the future until the next generation takes over (Naim and Lenka 2018; Stevenson, Rise of Gen Z: What HR Should Know 2019). We know from Deloitte’s surveys that 66-72 % of millennials and centennials with university or college degrees, who work for private companies with 100+ employees, envision leaving their current employer within the next five years (Deloitte 2016, 2018). Therefore, these

individuals would be very suitable interviewees for both the narrative interview(s) and the focus group interview. We base the selection of interviewees on the knowledge about Generation Y and Z presented in the introduction (section 1.3).

Because our conceptualisation is not culturally bound, we recommended choosing interviewees with different nationalities in order to get a multitude of different perspectives on the topic. Choosing interviewees from different cultural and national backgrounds has the ability to provide a broader understanding of the topic. However, the interviewer needs to be aware of the cultural differences that can occur, which should be handled with care. When interviewing internationally, the interviewer should be aware of the fact that cross-cultural interviews bring forward a multitude of cultural factors that can affect the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale 2007, 68). Therefore, the interviewer should set time aside to research and familiarise him/herself with the given culture and learn some of the verbal, as well as non-verbal factors that can lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretations.

Besides choosing interviewees with different nationalities, we also suggest choosing interviewees from larger organisations because there might potentially be a bigger gap between employees and top management, which can potentially cause a loss in information or lack of transparency. Deloitte's (2016, 2018) above-mentioned findings concern employees in companies with 100+ employees, which is another reason it would be interesting to look at organisations with more than 100 employees.

6.3 Interviewing

This section concerns Kvale's (2007) third stage, *interviewing*. The importance of having and following an interview guide is covered, and the three earlier mentioned interview variations are discussed, hereunder our methodological considerations and the limitations for each of the three suggestions.

Prior to the interview itself, Kvale emphasises the importance of the interviewer setting the interview stage. When setting the stage, the first couple of minutes are extremely important in order to create an atmosphere in which the interviewee feel secure enough to share their viewpoints. The interviewer can set the stage by e.g. briefing the interviewee about the purpose of the interview, the use of a tape recorder and so forth. Ensuring that the interviewees have sufficient knowledge about the concept(s) prior to the interview helps facilitate validity

and reliability as well (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis 2000). As part of ending an interview, the interviewer can debrief the interviewee, e.g. by re-explaining the purpose of the interview and sum up what the interviewer sees as the main points put forth by the interviewee, which invites the interviewee to add a comment if he/she believes that something has been left unsaid or misinterpreted (Kvale 2007).




Interview guide

In order to ensure a successful semi-structured interview, Kvale argues that it is essential to prepare an interview guide prior to conducting the interview. An interview guide typically includes the research questions of the study, in which questions for the interviewee are created. According to Kvale, interview questions should contain both a *thematic* and *dynamic* dimension. By *thematic*, Kvale refers to the ‘what’ of the interview, i.e. the questions which will give the interviewer answers to the research questions, whereas the *dynamic* dimension of questions refers to the ‘how’ of an interview, i.e. where the interviewee has the opportunity to express experiences and feelings (Kvale 2007, 57). These questions are important in relation to building positive interactions between the interviewer and interviewee.

When preparing an interview guide, Kvale argues that there are different types of questions when it comes to interviewing. Firstly, it is important to start with *introductory questions*, where the interviewer invites the interviewee to share experiences and promote positive interaction. An example could be asking the interviewee in a conceptual interview about their previous knowledge or considerations about the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation. Of course, these questions differ depending on the interview variation and hereunder the interviewees. *Follow-up questions* refer to the act of a curious, persistent or critical attitude toward the provided answer, in order to get a more elaborate explanation of the answer given (Kvale 2007, 61). Similar to this, the interviewer can also use *probing questions* in which he/she asks for further explanation, by pursuing the answer actively. *Specifying questions* refers to when the interviewer asks the interviewee to specify something in order to get a more precise description or explanation. *Direct questions* introduce the topics and dimensions of the research directly, and can be used later in the interview, when the interviewee has already stated his/her descriptions and opinions of the topic. An example could be in a narrative interview, where the interviewer includes a question asking directly about the interviewee's perception of his/her own job satisfaction and

which factors have the potential to affect it. As opposed to *direct questions*, *indirect questions* can be utilised in order to get the interviewee's subjective opinion and attitude on the topic without probing the purpose of the study (Kvale 2007, 61). The interviewer can also benefit from using *silence* as an interview strategy. By doing so, the interviewer invites the interviewee to associate and reflect on what has been said and then fill out the gap of silence with significant information. Lastly, the interviewer can benefit from the strategy of *interpreting questions* by rephrasing what the interviewee has said in order to let the interviewee elaborate on any misinterpretation or add something to the explanation (Kvale 2007, 61).

Kvale (2007) argues that it is important that the interviewer indicates when one theme has been exhausted and when it is time to move on to a new theme in the interview. The interview guide can be helpful in order to keep focus and structure of the interview. Below is an example of how an interview guide can look according to Kvale. As can be seen, the research questions of the study all refer to multiple relevant interviewer questions, which are asked in the interview:

Researcher questions		Interviewer questions
		Do you find the subjects you learn important?
Which form of learning motivation dominates in high school?		Do you find learning interesting in itself?
		What is your main purpose in going to high school?
Do the grades promote an external, instrumental motivation at the expense of an intrinsic interest motivation for learning?		Have you experienced a conflict between what you wanted to read (study) and what you had to read to obtain a good grade?
Does learning for grades socialize to working for wages?		Have you been rewarded with money for getting good grades?
		Do you see any connection between money and grades?

'Research questions and interview questions' (Kvale 2007, 59)

Interview variations

Besides preparing an interview guide prior to conducting interviews, the interviewer also needs to consider the different interview variations thoroughly since the different interview variations are useful for different purposes (Kvale 2007). As mentioned earlier, the three

interview variations we suggest for a future study are *conceptual interview*, *narrative interview* and *focus group interview*. Each interview variation is relevant for obtaining different kinds of empirical data. In the following, we elaborate on these three variations, hereunder how they supplement each other and discuss the limitations to each of them.

Conceptual interview

We believe that conducting a *conceptual interview* with expert(s) within the fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation would provide an opportunity to discuss with ‘subject matter experts’ and gain even more knowledge than we have found through our literature reviews (Kvale 2007, 71). Through a conceptual interview, the interviewer is able to discuss and conceptualise a phenomenon, which in this case is how to co-create CSR values in the internal employer branding process and the effects that this can have on employee retention. Here, the interviewer can utilise the questions to explore the meaning and different conceptual dimensions behind the terms CSR, employer branding and co-creation, and the interrelationship between the three (Kvale 2007). This type of interview can be used to deepen the conceptualisation made in this thesis by including subject matter experts’ understandings of the dimensions and the interrelationship between the three theoretical fields. The aim of this conceptual interview is that the interviewer and the interviewee together construct a shared understanding and conceptualisation of the phenomenon of retaining employees through co-creating CSR values in the internal employer branding process. By sharing individual understandings of the interrelationship between the three fields, the interviewer and interviewee together de-construct the existing knowledge of the three fields separately and socially construct a new way of understanding the interrelationship between them through the social interaction of interviews (Collin and K ppe 2014).

As important as it is to be aware of cultural differences when it comes to the specific interviewees, as explained previously, there are some factors that it is equally as important to be aware of when interviewing ‘elites’, i.e. leaders or experts on a subject, in conceptual interviews (Kvale 2007, 70). The biggest obstacle that the interviewer can risk experiencing in this situation is *power asymmetry* (Kvale 2007, 70). In order to stabilise the power asymmetry, Kvale (2007) argues that the interviewer should ‘*be knowledgeable about the topic of concern and master technical language, as well as being familiar with the social situation and biography of the interviewee*’ (Kvale 2007, 70). By doing so, the interviewer gains

respect and achieve an extend of symmetry in the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale 2007).

The findings from a conceptual interview provide the interviewer with complementary insights to our original findings from this thesis, which can then be used as a basis for preparing the next interview, i.e. the narrative interview. What a conceptual interview does not provide is empirical data concerning experiences, feelings and personal opinions from individuals from Generation Y and Z. However, a conceptual interview will make the conceptualisation even stronger and more elaborate, and prepare it for the next step, namely the narrative interview.

Narrative interview

Following the re-conceptualisation of the co-creation of CSR values in the internal employer branding process, based on the findings from the above-mentioned conceptual interview, the suggested future study can benefit from a second interview variation, namely a narrative interview. As an example, our analysis showed that alignment of personal and organisational CSR values is an important motivational factor for Generation Y and Z – in relation to this, a narrative interview can be utilised to gain more insight into this theoretical finding in practice.

When conducting a narrative interview, the interviewer focuses on the stories told by the interviewees, in which they express their understandings and opinions about a given topic (Kvale 2007). In this case, the main focus group is Generation Y and Z, as explained earlier. Individuals from these generations are in some way also ‘subject matter experts’ in terms of being the ones that this thesis focuses on when seeking to provide a possible solution to employee retention. Therefore, by conducting narrative interviews with interviewees belonging to Generation Y and Z, the interviewer gets the opportunity to research their understanding of the importance of CSR, employer branding and co-creation, the interrelationship between them, and why it is potentially important to them.

Through narrative interviews, the interviewer obtains empirical data on individuals’ perceptions, experiences and feelings on how CSR, employer branding and co-creation can help increase their job satisfaction through raising their motivation, engagement, commitment, and productivity. During a narrative interview, the interviewees share their individual understandings of the importance of the three fields. Here the interviewer gets an opportunity to experience how the interviewees have socially constructed their understandings of the

three fields, by listening to their experiences, feelings and perceptions. It is important to note that when conducting narrative interviews, the empirical data is limited to the interviewees' objective opinions and world views, therefore, the interviewer might need to conduct several narrative interviews in order to get a more generalisable outcome.

With the empirical data conducted through narrative interviews, the interviewer would gain more knowledge on the importance of this conceptualisation and why organisations should start to focus on the benefits of co-creating CSR values in the employer branding process.

Focus group interview

Following the conceptual interview(s) and the narrative interview(s), future research on this thesis could benefit from testing the conceptualisation in a manner that is similar to the actual situation in which this conceptualised process is supposed to take place. We believe that this can be done through a focus group interview, where a group of interviewees are interviewed simultaneously (Kvale 2007, 72). A focus group interview usually consists of six to ten people and what sets focus group interviews apart from the two above-mentioned interview variations is that it is not directed by an interviewer. However, the interviewer encourages the interviewees to express their viewpoints on the topic. Here, the interviewer works as a facilitator, by introducing the topic and encourage discussion. Through this discussion, the focus group constructs a new shared understanding of the importance of co-creating CSR values in the internal employer branding process. As with conceptual interviews, focus group interviews provides the opportunity to socially de-construct the understandings of CSR, employer branding co-creation and construct a new way of understanding the interrelationship between them. The difference from a conceptual interview is that the interviewer is not actively participating in this interview, but instead, he/she functions as a facilitator. Here, the interviewer also gains knowledge of how, as with narrative interviews, the interviewees have socially constructed their understanding of the fields, prior to the focus group interview.

The purpose of a focus group interview is not to reach consensus; instead, it is to discuss and bring forward different viewpoints (Kvale 2007, 72). For that reason, we believe that this type of interview variation can be used in order to simulate the process of co-creation. During a focus group interview, the interviewer can provide the individuals with the topic of co-creating CSR values in the internal employer branding process and will thereafter be

able to observe how individuals come together in the process of co-creating their understandings and opinions. However, the focus group interviews can be affected by the choice of interviewees; for example, if one or more interviewees are of a dominant character, it can affect other interviewees' opinions. In relation to interviewees changing each other's opinions and views on the topic, Ellis (2018) argues that it is a part of conducting focus group interviews, which is avoided in one-to-one interviews, such as conceptual and narrative interviews (Ellis 2018).

To sum up; by including all three interview variations in a future study, the interviewer would be able to first gain more knowledge and conceptualise with 'subject matter experts' on the three theoretical fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation and the interrelationship between them, and the effect that a combination of them can have on employee retention. The knowledge gained from the conceptual interview(s) can then be used as a basis for conducting the narrative interviews, which will provide insights on why the combination of these three fields is important for organisations and researchers to be aware of. Lastly, focus group interviews can help simulate a realistic co-creative process and give the interviewer knowledge about how organisations can benefit from and use the conceptualisation of co-creating CSR values in the internal employer branding process.

6.4 Analysing

After conducting the interviews, the researcher needs to consider the different methods of analysis based on the purpose and topic of the study (Kvale 2007). Therefore, this section includes a discussion of potential methods for analysing the empirical data collected through the three different interviews. This section focuses on the empirical data as one unit and does not differ in the way of analysing the different types of interviews.

After transcribing the spoken language into written empirical data, the interviewer can analyse it by using different methods. The different methods can be seen as a toolbox for helping the interviewer find meaning in the interview. With that said, Kvale (2007) emphasise that the interviewer should use *'his or her craftsmanship, knowledge of the research topic, sensitivity for the medium he or she is working with – language – and mastery of analytic tools available for analyzing the meanings expressed in language'* (Kvale 2007, 103). This means that the interviewer already has the most powerful tools for analysis and that methods for analysing interviews should be seen as a way of structuring it.

According to Kvale (2007), there are two different approaches to analysing interviews; one focusing on *meaning* and one focusing on *language*, and within the two, there are different types of methods (Kvale 2007, 106). When analysing the *meaning* of an interview, the interviewer can choose between the methods *meaning coding*, *meaning condensation* and *meaning interpretation*. When analysing the *language* of an interview, the interviewer can choose between *linguistic analysis*, *conversation analysis*, *narrative analysis*, *discursive analysis* and *deconstructive analysis*. For the future research of this thesis, we recommend focussing on analysing the *meaning* of the interviews. By doing so, the interviewer focuses on *what* is being said and the meaning behind that, rather than *how* the meaning is expressed, which is the main point when focusing on language (Kvale 2007, 106).

As mentioned above, there are three different methods of analysing the *meaning* of an interview. These three methods are: *Meaning coding*, where the interviewer attaches keywords to a text segment in order to identify the different segments and categorise them; *meaning condensation*, which refers to the act of transforming the interviewee's long meaning expressions into shorter formulations and *meaning interpretation*, which is a method used to go beyond structuring meanings and expressions in order to go deeper into a more critical interpretation of what is being said (Kvale 2007, 107). For the future research of this study, we recommend using *meaning condensation* as a method in order to analyse the complexity of e.g. a conceptual interview and construct long expressions of meaning, also called natural units, into smaller central themes, which are relevant for the research questions provided in the interview guide (Kvale 2007). When using *meaning condensation* as the method for analysing phenomenologically based research, like this one, it is extremely important to be aware of obtaining rich and nuanced descriptions from the interviewees, in order to be able to utilise it in the act of conceptualising and constructing a phenomenon (Kvale 2007).

6.5 Verifying

According to Kvale (2007), it is important that researchers, particularly in the field of qualitative research like interviews, are aware of the *reliability*, *validity* and *generalisability* of their research (Kvale 2007). When discussing these three factors in the following, this section focuses on the empirical data as one unit instead of three different sets of data.

Reliability has previously been put primarily in relation to quantitative data, where it refers to credibility and trustworthiness. However, Kvale argues that in the sense of qualitative data, it refers to whether or not the empirical data from interview and transcriptions are

reproducible at other times, by other researchers. As an example, we refer to the systematic literature review conducted in this thesis, where the focus is on describing the process in detail, so other researchers are able to replicate the study. It is important to keep in mind that everybody interprets data differently, and therefore, the interviewer needs to be aware of objectivity and subjectivity and the craftsmanship of being objective when it comes to conducting qualitative empirical data such as interviews (Kvale 2007).

In relation to *validity*, Kvale refers to the truth, correctness and strength of a statement (Kvale 2007). Here, the interviewer must be aware of having sound, well-grounded, justifiable, strong, and convincing arguments. Kvale argues that '*validity in the social sciences pertains to the issue of whether a method investigates what it purports to investigate*' (Kvale 2007, 122). In terms of social constructivism, this relates to the act of providing well-grounded and justifiable arguments for how this has been socially constructed through the empirical data provided, and that it does, indeed, investigate the purpose of the study.

Lastly, in terms of *generalisability*, Kvale argues that when a research is reasonably reliable and valid, the last question is whether or not it is only of local interest or if it can be transferred to other subjects and situations (Kvale 2007). Because this suggested future study builds upon the findings from this thesis, the findings from that study are more or less as generalisable as the findings from this present study (cf. section 5.3 concerning limitations). Therefore, the findings will presumably be generalisable in terms of being international and not being limited to any specific national cultures, however, in terms of concerning specific employees, it is primarily limited to employees from Generation Y and Z but not taking specific industries into consideration.

In summary; we suggest conducting a future study consisting of three different interview variations, i.e. *conceptual*, *narrative* and *focus group interview*. The aim of the study should be to test the conceptualisation conducted in this thesis in practice, and the findings hereof would provide additional knowledge about the interrelationship between the fields of CSR, employer branding and co-creation, and the effect that this combination of the fields can have on retention of employees from Generation Y and Z. The finding from this thesis, which should serve as the foundation for the suggested future research, are presented in the following section, where we conclude on the challenge and proposition stated in the problem statement.

7 Conclusion

In this section, we respond to the challenge posed in our introduction regarding retention of employees from Generation Y and Z, and we answer the proposition stated in our problem statement. These conclusions are made on the basis of our findings in the analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation, and our conceptualisation.

The purpose of this thesis is to conceptualise the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation, and more specifically examine how co-creation of CSR values can impact the process of internal employer branding in relation to employee retention.

To answer the challenge posed in the introduction concern the increasing international challenge that organisation face in terms of retaining employees from Generation Y and Z, we first consider the characteristics of Generation Y and Z and the values that are important to these generations in relation to employee retention. Through our research, it became clear that employees belonging to these generations prefer continuous feedback from their employer in order to feel included and appreciated, and they value a close relationship with their managers and/or organisation. These factors promote transparency, which is greatly valued by employees from Generation Y and Z as well. Lastly, they value an organisation which engages in CSR activities and that actively seeks to align those values with its employees (cf. section 1.3). All of these factors combined result in higher motivation and increased job satisfaction. In theory, these factors improve employee retention.

In order to provide a theoretical solution to the above-mentioned challenge, this thesis provides a conceptualisation including an analysis of the interrelationship between CSR, employer branding and co-creation in order to conceptualise a phenomenon, which contributes theoretically to the challenge of retaining employees belonging to Generation Y and Z. Below is the finding from our conceptualisation as presented in section 4.3:

'The co-creation of CSR values in the internal employer branding process occurs by continuous renegotiation with the employees in terms of current and future expectations and mutual needs. This process has the ability to affect employee motivation, engagement, commitment and productivity, all of which can lead to increased job satisfaction, which ultimately leads to employee retention.' (cf. section 4.3).

By the ‘internal employer branding process’, we refer to the act of motivating, engaging and retaining current employees within an organisation as defined in the section on employer branding (section 3.3). Here, we refer to the ongoing process of co-creation, where the focus is on renegotiating, communicating and motivating employees through a well-established employer branding process with a co-creative mindset of an ongoing process. Through our analysis we find that CSR values can be implemented in the employer branding process.

Therefore, we conclude that organisations can benefit from implementing co-creation of CSR values in the internal employer branding process because this will affect motivation, engagement and performance, which in turn affect job satisfaction and ultimately employee retention. In theory, the retention of Generation Y and Z can be impacted by co-creating CSR values in the internal employer branding process. Practically, this can be implemented by a continuous renegotiation of mutual needs and current and future expectations of their CSR values. This process has the ability to affect factors related to internal employer branding, which in turn affects employee retention of Generation Y and Z.

8 Bibliography

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