A qualitative study on leadership and corporate social responsibility in an emerging economy

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C H R O N I C L E	A B S T R A C T
	The previous research relating to CSR and mindfulness leadership, for the purposes of this study, provides an intersection where both backgrounds come together to invite an opportunity for collaboration. The most critical factor in the implementation of CSR is the development of leaders for a sustainable global society as mindfulness should be relevant to the achievement of organizational and leadership objectives. It is here that we find the inspiration for the current study and the relevance of the research query endeavoring to discover if the framework of mindfulness leadership could prove an effective driver for CSR? For this reason, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted from the middle level managers working in an emerging economy - Pakistan. The conceptual framework of leadership theory guided this study's investigation as it brought to the forefront certain challenges facing organizational leaders endeavoring to facilitate CSR objectives; and explored if the application of mindfulness leadership could prove an effective leadership framework for successful CSR engagement. This supporting data coupled with the study's interview of executive leaders, across industry lines, familiar with CSR initiatives, lent to certain analytical insight that identified mindfulness leadership as a framework for organizations to facilitate the accomplishment of CSR objectives.

1. Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies might very well prove an indispensable component for the 21st century organization and leader that faces various structural, economic, social and political challenges in a fast paced and competitive business environment (Zu, 2019). Society at large has brought significant influence to bear on modern organizations to create sound CSR policies which has led to the pursuit of appropriate and effective leadership frameworks in scholarship and practice (Edgar et al. 2017; Ishaq et al. 2023). One of the emerging frameworks is mindfulness leadership; which has been shown to be an effective approach in leading organizations in contemporary challenging business environments (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Moreover, Pless et al. (2021) purported that mindfulness leadership allows one to adopt more productive and positive ways of acting and responding to situations; and offers a practical means by which to achieve organizational objectives. According to Harget et al. (2009) mindful leadership is about the "mindful process" that provides leaders with a strategic means to guide their organizations through uncertain challenges. These findings are among those that provide the very foundation upon which the present study rests as it endeavors to discover the role mindfulness leadership might play in achieving organizational CSR objectives (Zhao et al. 2019; Franzoni et al. 2021).

Although there is considerable data on CSR and mindfulness, the conspicuous absence of a direct link between CSR and mindfulness leadership provides the scholar with the opportunity to address a gap in research so as to affectively add to the current body of knowledge (Philips et al. 2019). Moreover, synthetization and integration of literature, in the early stage of research, provided an analytical insight revealing a potential link between a framework of mindfulness leadership and the organizations' ability to meet the ever-increasing demands of CSR. The descriptive nature of the mindful leader is as follows:

"a mindful leader is one who is attentive and open to the experiences around them, keenly aware, and non-judgmental" (Langer, 1989, p. 11); a leader who can recognize subtle environmental clues (Seiling & Hinrichs, 2005), one who is capable of reacting in a timely and appropriate manner (Gao et al. 2021), meaningfully engage and communicate with others (Khatak et al. 2019), and capable of responding to situations more effectively (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

Furthermore, mindfulness generally promotes greater concentration and ability to focus, something that leaders can draw upon to enhance creativity, innovation, communication, and change readiness (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Langer, 2005). In a similar fashion, Chaskalson (2011) argued that mindfulness leadership allows one to adopt more productive and positive ways of acting and responding to situations; cultivate an environment of continuous learning; and provides a practical way to achieve organizational objectives. Yamak et al. (2019 study showed that mindfulness results in greater external awareness at work and provides a means by which one can better cope with situations; increases ability to remain calm under challenging circumstances; and generally, make way for more positive relationships with all stakeholders. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an indispensable component of modern public and private organizations. Informed consumerism has influenced customers and the public, in such a way, that they have come to value organizations with attractive CSR policies. Moreover, pressure for organizations to adopt socially responsible policies is on the rise. For example, environmental concerns, legal and regulatory demands, economic pressure, and the expectations of society at large have more influence than ever before (Chaudhary, 2021). Inasmuch as this is the case, organizations are finding it increasingly challenging to keep up with CSR demands of a marketplace gone global (Schultz & Wehmeier, 2010; Sarwar et al. 2020).

Although an economic case for adopting CSR has emerged, many organizational leaders have not been able to establish meaningful and effective CSR policies and practices (Nejati et al. 2020). One problem that has arisen over time is that far too many organizations and leaders have increasingly been associated with the emergence of CSR hypocrisy that has manifested in skepticism, opportunism, and cynicism (Shah et al. 2021). This resulted, at least in part; given businesses and leaders alike found themselves ill-equipped to effectively respond to the pressure for them to comply with market demands for CSR. Resultantly, the controversy over the importance and benefit of CSR continues today and will undoubtedly remain a point of concern for contemporary leaders, as organizations bent on success look to the future. Some scholars have argued that skeptical leaders and managers often feel that CSR is a waste of resources, while opportunist leaders and managers communicate CSR intensively but selectively depending on pressure brought to bear on them (Fassin & Buelens, 2011). In other cases, organizations may pursue CSR initiatives passively after the initial adoption of CSR models because of the various challenges such as economic, legal, and budget constraints (Saha et al. 2020). Other scholars suggested that further CSR inconsistencies may include practicing social responsibility as a corrective measure for negative publicity and establishing ceremonial CSR in which stakeholder participation remains minimal, resulting in a reactive rather than proactive approach to CSR (Saha et al. 2020; Shah et al. 2021). If current trends dictate the future, organizational success might very well become synonymous with CSR; and in such a case contemporary leaders will simply have to rise to the occasion.

The problem analysis, from the outset, suggested effective leadership could prove fundamental in countering CSR hypocrisy and reactionary rather than proactive CSR policies and strategies (Cheng et al. 2021). Inasmuch as this is the case, the present study addressed the literature gap that appeared between CSR and a leadership framework of mindfulness as an effective driver for CSR. Given CSR remains an important consideration for today's organizations, this study by exploring the experiences of executive leaders to discover the ways mindfulness leadership might contribute to the accomplishment of CSR objectives promises, in addition to filling a gap in the literature, to provide relevant information for contemporary organizations and leaders alike (Luu, 2019). The purpose of this exploratory qualitative inquiry was to probe the experiences of executive leaders familiar with the implementation of socially responsible policies to discover how mindful leadership might enhance an organization's ability to achieve CSR objectives. Exploring the experiences of executive leaders, across industry lines, provided an opportunity to glean data from executives with exposure to a wide range of leadership competencies fundamentally associated with driving CSR performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Mindfulness

Although mindfulness in some ways is an ancient concept and in some form or fashion reaches back in time over two millennia (Brown et al. 2008), it has nonetheless only relatively recently made its debut in the scientific arena as a worthy construct for scholarly investigation (Leroy, Anseel, Dimitrova, & Sels, 2013). The concept of mindfulness brings with it any number of related benefits that are said to contribute to people's behavior and performance; and such benefits can, with very little difficulty or imagination, apply equally to organizational cultures that necessarily rely on performance outcomes.

Brown et al. (2008) concurred that mindfulness provides one with conscious awareness of internal and external environments. This sustained awareness provides heightened sensitivity to current situations without critical evaluation or judgment, inasmuch as mindful individuals decouple themselves from events, thoughts, and emotions (Leroy et al. 2013). Some of the most immediate and evident benefits of mindfulness is that it allows one to be more attentive and aware of what is going on around them at any given time; and people report having greater mental acuity and focus, while being more positive, feeling more

physically alive, and mentally alert (Zou et al. 2023). Mindfulness has, to some extent, been adopted by any number of disciplines, making its transition through other fields of study such as: psychology, education, health, philosophy and religion.

2.2 Mindfulness Leadership

Organizations, across industry lines, could clearly benefit from leadership frameworks that provide an alternative means by which to face the ever-mounting pressure upon leaders engaging in day-to-day business activities that bring with them challenges threatening organizational success and longevity. Although a clear and concise definition of mindfulness leadership proves somewhat illusive; for the purpose of this study, "a mindful leader is one who is attentive and open to the experiences around them, keenly aware, and non-judgmental" (Langer, 1989, p. 11); a mindful-creator and innovator who can read the organizational environment with openness and attentiveness, addressing situations and conditions as malleable experiences (He et al. 2021). A mindful leader is capable of reacting timely and appropriately (Seiling & Hinrichs, 2005) while, at the same time, remaining positively and meaningfully engaging with others (Dai et al. 2023). Additionally, the attributes of a mindful-leader makes way for responding to situations more effectively (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Furthermore, mindfulness generally promotes greater concentration and the ability to focus; which in turn, leaders can draw upon to enhance their decision-making skills, improve communication, and change readiness fundamental to innovation and creativity (Ilyas et al. 2023).

In further support Gehani (2011) examined the influence of mindfulness leaders on individual innovation and creativity. Gehani's exploratory research study found that leaders not only have significant influence on performance outcomes, but "set the contextual environments under which their employees express creativity" (p. 82). In summary, the study found that "mindfully conscious leaders get extraordinary things done from the many ordinary employees in their enterprises" (p. 87). Furthermore, there are numerous and complex challenges presented by today's global market where more mindful leaders and innovative individuals can have significant creative influence. More mindful leaders and their creative followers can help identify new opportunities and more innovative products and technologies to meet the previously mentioned global challenges (Gehani, 2011). In a similar fashion, Chaskalson (2011) found that mindfulness allows one to adopt more productive and positive ways of acting and responding to situations; cultivate an environment of continuous-learning, open communication, change readiness, and effective decision making; all of which provides a practical means by which leaders achieve organizational objectives; and continues to reveal the potential for mindfulness as an effective leadership framework to drive performance. Moreover, Hunter and McCormick's (2008) exploratory study interviewed eight professional managers and found that mindfulness results in greater external awareness at work, provides a means by which one can better cope with situations; increases ability to remain calm under challenging circumstances; and generally makes way for more positive relationships. Resultantly, mindfulness and its potential contribution to performance outcomes would necessarily include its relevance as a leadership framework and driver for the achievement of CSR objectives.

Regardless of the noted increased attention mindfulness has received, it has primarily been studied in other than organizational settings and therefore offers little empirical evidence as to its value within the workplace (Chandra et al. 2023) or as a leadership framework, which provided a gap in scholarly literature that gave invitation to the current study. Although research addressing mindfulness within organizational scholarship is somewhat sparse, if not scant, it is nonetheless beginning to show some promise as a leadership framework to drive performance outcomes such as those associated with the achievement of corporate social responsibility (CSR) objectives. Although leaders can and often do provide a positive influence, it comes as no surprise to anyone that negative influences come into play as well (Javed et al. 2020). Leaders at all levels have a measure of influence by the very nature of their position; and are observed by all stakeholders who more often than not watch them for clues as to how things are going. Wang et al. (2020) viewed leaders who are psychologically healthy and effective as "mindful" and those who are not as "mindless." Although mindfulness has been shown to influence employee well-being, stress-reduction and overall health; comparatively little has been shown in relation to its potential value as a leadership framework (Moin et al. 2023). However, the benefits of mindfulness found in the literature review along with the challenges facing contemporary leaders, provide a modest connection that gives way to the potential of mindfulness as a leadership framework to drive performance.

The conspicuous absence of direct research on mindfulness and how it relates to task performance within organizational settings provides an opportunity to fill a gap in research and contribute to the field of organization and leadership studies. Once again, it is here that the current study, by interviewing executive leaders, across industry lines, experienced with the implementation of CSR initiatives, promises to shed some light on the value and application of mindfulness for today's organizational leaders. If the framework of mindfulness leadership is discovered to be an effective driver for performance outcomes, organizations will be provided with yet another leadership framework by which to achieve CSR objectives.

2.3 CSR Overview

Drawing from empirical historical data, one continues to see evidence supporting the development of the somewhat malleable and evolving conceptual definition of CSR. For example, the European Commission (2010) defined CSR as "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with

stakeholders on a voluntary basis." Furthermore, Davis (1973) provided what has become a rather common definition emanating from the management and organizational leadership literature, defining CSR as "the firm's considerations of, and response to, issues beyond the narrow economic, technical, and legal requirements of the firm to accomplish social benefits along with the traditional economic gains which the firm seeks" (p. 312). Ishaq et al. (2023) purported that the general idea is that CSR is the mutual responsibility of both the organizational community and society since such obligations are interwoven rather than distinct from each other.

Corporate social responsibility has developed in such a way as to intertwine both internal and external organizational activities while embedding and functioning within a distinctive social environment. Carroll (1999), along with many others, tracked the development of CSR in scholarly research literature from the middle 1950s which has continually outlined and discussed the development of CSR in great detail since that time. Bowen (1953) viewed CSR as a social obligation incurred by organizations. Davis (1960) offered a similar view describing CSR as decisions and actions taken by organizations for reasons other than strictly economic interest. Moreover, CSR has been described as an organization's actions designed with society in mind to strategically extend the potential benefits to the organization and its stakeholders (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Liu et al. (2022) argued that CSR rests upon principles of credibility, integrity, trust, communication, and transparency, all of which guide the interactions between organizations and stakeholders.

According to Fox et al. (2020) scholarly research regarding the role organizations play in society at large has been an ever-increasing area of interest for close to 95 years. Carroll (1999) purported that as society's mistrust of organizations became evident as the Great Depression made way for national economic hardship, CSR began to appear in business literature expediently. Deng et al. (2022) argued that as people's hardship increased, so did their mistrust of business. All of which provided fertile ground for CSR as organizations were encouraged to focus on, in addition to profitability, stakeholder needs; and business leaders were starting to become more responsive to the desires and goals of society (Kim et al. 2022).

2.4 Mindfulness and CSR

After considering the somewhat complex nature of CSR, the need for effective CSR leadership comes to the forefront. One question that comes to mind is, what leadership framework might be seen as adaptable for the contemporary application of CSR? That is, for example, could an organization benefit from the application of a mindful-leadership framework to drive the accomplishment of CSR objectives? Research associated with the perpetual scholarly interest in mindfulness continues to transcend traditional leadership frameworks and has birthed new and expanding lines of inquiry. Resultantly, the following discussion will span any number of leadership constructs and influences so as to identify leadership performance factors that show a linkage with mindfulness and support it as a leadership framework suitable for driving CSR objectives.

Mindfulness research, for example, by spanning lines of inquiry and identifying links between physical stress, psychological well-being, personal vitality, optimism, job satisfaction, and work performance, has identified factors fundamentally of value to leadership as a driver for performance outcomes (Ullah et al. 2022). In support, scholars have found mindfulness positively linked to task performance, ability to view events more objectively by better regulating thoughts, emotions, and psychological reactions (Brown et al., 2008;). Such research, not only found mindfulness positively linked to better judgment, enhanced problem solving, and improved cognitive flexibility, but found a decisively positive influence upon social behavior that complements leadership stakeholder engagement skill-set needs (Edgar et al. 2017). These factors, instrumental to performance, fit quite well into a mindfulness leadership framework suitable for the CSR challenges facing contemporary organizations. Such qualities not only prove fundamental to task performance across a number of disciplines, but positively correlate with the leadership and stakeholder attitudes necessary to promote socially responsible agendas.

According to Zu (2019) the role assumed by leadership is extremely important with regard to CSR; and there cannot be socially responsible organizations without socially responsible leaders. Such leaders must be willing to sacrifice, to some extent, the organization's immediate needs to make room for socially responsible actions and related long term goals so as to realize the benefits from CSR (Pless et al. 2021). If mindfulness-leadership is ever to be an effective tool or driver for the achievement of organizations CSR objectives, the contemporary organizational leader must necessarily have a clear understanding of what a CSR leader looks like. Gao et al (2021) purported that CSR leadership involves, at the very least, a conscious and consistent commitment on the part of those who have the power and influence within an organization. Moreover, such influential individuals would necessarily understand and respond constructively to society's most critical social, ecological and economic concerns as part of good business. Under such circumstances, effective CSR leadership would need to assimilate a distinct mix of knowledge and skills (leadership framework) that drive performance outcomes in support of organizational success and sustainability (Yamak et al. 2019).

Review of the literature finds that organizational leaders endeavoring to successfully drive CSR would necessarily involve leadership's ability to effectively engage employees and stakeholders alike. Shah et al. (2021) found that when engaging employees and stakeholders within the scope of CSR leadership one of three approaches are best taken: the transactional approach, the relational approach, and the developmental approach. The model's three drivers were found to promote a work climate of mutual support where everyone works together to further CSR ideals which are also seen to develop cultural norms

and values that promote the common good. In support of the model, all three drivers were seen to reflect an ethical mindset that governed leadership's involvement in CSR (Cheng et al. 2021).

Breaking down the models three approaches, so to be more specific: the transactional approach looks at employee and stakeholder interactions in terms of "quid pro quo" (Mirvis, 2012, p. 23). For example, if people expect an organization to be socially responsible, that is precisely what leadership will provide so to meet their expectations agreeably. The relational approach comes into play when leadership, employees, and stakeholders share a common commitment to CSR. Finally, the developmental approach appears as proactive; where employee and stakeholder support or engagement is readily available, but guided by higher ethical values (Russell, 2013). In the final analysis, it was found that at the very least, sustainable CSR requires a relational approach, although the developmental approach was shown to be superior .

When it comes to knowledge and skills, the CSR leader would have an in-depth understanding of both the "global" and "domestic" context in which their organization does business. Moreover, such a leader would be very much aware of the issues that drive change, within and without, their organization. All of which would lend to their ability to remain adaptable to the ever increasing demands associated with CSR. These leaders would be capable of navigating through complex and demanding business environments; and finally, such socially responsible leaders would necessarily exhibit the ability to provide short term and long term solutions to pressing problems related to today's competitive and evolving markets (Saha et al. 2020).

Further complementing their skills, it was found that such leaders would find it necessary to communicate in a manner that motivates others to "buy-in" to the CSR agenda in such a way as to promote effective change and adaptation without the typical stress and anxiety associated with such transformation. According to Nejati et al. (2020) CSR awareness and knowledge produces the conviction and understanding required to craft a new direction and future for the organization through effective communication, decision making, change readiness, and continuous learning. In addition to suggesting the need for flexibility and adaptability, such competencies were found to be complemented by leadership's ability to apply them to real time circumstances within the workplace.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The exploratory qualitative inquiry methodological research design was utilized to explore executive leaders and probe their experiences as seasoned professionals familiar with the implementation of CSR initiatives. This approach provided the opportunity of closing the aforementioned gap in research relevant to the leadership framework of mindfulness as a driver for CSR by allowing access to the attitudes, beliefs, opinions and reflections of participants' description of their leadership experiences. The qualitative methodology well supports discovery, and allows the researcher to learn from the participants' experiences related to the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). More specifically exploratory qualitative inquiry is generic in nature and as such provided the present study with a measure of flexibility through its investigation of little known phenomena; offering an effective means for the researcher to explore the external experiences of participants. The qualitative methodological approach typically utilizes constructivist perspective from which to focus on "how" individuals make sense out of their experiences (Prince, Manolis, & Tratner, 2009). The literature generally indicates that research viewed through a constructivist perspective emanates from an ontology that remains rather neutral when it comes to any one particular view of the world so as to foster subjective interpretations. Therefore, the value of understanding the subjective meanings of people in studied domains proves essential to the interpretive paradigm (Cooper & Endacott, 2007).

3.2 Sample

The present study utilized a purposive sample of 20 business executives of small to midsized organizations across industry lines; and the concept of saturation was applied, that is, the collection of data was terminated when no new information was forthcoming. It is in making such decisions related to primary research and syntheses that the concepts of data saturation and data sufficiency become relevant. The study employed the use of interviews that play an important role in collecting data for exploratory studies; and these studies use a small sample and focus on one particular area of interest by investigating one or two variables. This interview method allows researchers and participants to glean greater understanding from responses by drawing out additional thoughts and reactions that reveal applicable insights; and this lends itself well to the probative nature of qualitative inquiry (Seidman, 2013). The selection process provided the researcher with greater understanding of executive leaders and their experiences with CSR performance outcomes. After all, organizational leadership significantly influences the accomplishment of CSR objectives. Resultantly, executive experiences and attributes associated with a leadership framework suitable for driving CSR becomes inextricably linked to the current studies probative inquiry. The executive leaders were chosen based on their ability to satisfy the criteria for participation; that is, executive leaders, across industry lines, with experience or knowledge relating to the achievement of CSR objectives.

3.3 Date Collection

During the course of the first phase of the interview, participants were asked about themselves and their leadership experience generally in preparation for deeper probative inquiry that produced more expansive and in-depth responses; the objective of which was to draw out more detailed and pertinent data relevant to the current study. The second phase of inquiry entertained more current reflections specifically relative to leadership experiences associated with CSR. The objective of this phase of inquiry, not at all unlike the first phase, was, at least in part, to glean meaningful and detailed feedback relevant to the current research endeavor. When engaged properly the first two stages provide a solid foundation of pertinent details upon which to proceed to the third and final phase. During the third and final stage of inquiry, after establishing a measure of trust and rapport, participants were ultimately free to express any thoughts, ideas, reflections, or meaning derived from their leadership experiences relevant to the phenomenon under study.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used for this exploratory qualitative study. The goal of which was to help identify themes and patterns from the data collected so to find repeated meanings. The analysis was initiated by reviewing the transcribed data collected from the audiotaped telephone interviews to identify and list recurring words and phrases to see if patterns emerged. The data was then entered into ATLAS.ti 7 qualitative software program, providing a Field Test was conducted with 3 experts, recruiting email letters and questions were sent out upon confirmation of participation. Furthermore, this process took place for each participant until saturation and redundancy was reached. In other words, the interviews were continued and data collected until saturation was confirmed.

Finally, redundancies were eliminated to bring forth major themes; and synthesizing the data provided a general summary in support of further analysis so as to arrive at certain conclusions from the participants' responses. According to Bowen (2008) there are three types of thematic approaches in support of qualitative research, theoretical analysis, thematic analysis with constant comparison, and the process utilized for this exploratory qualitative inquiry, inductive analysis. The inductive analysis approach is a commonly used qualitative analysis process that is data driven; and although it does not attempt to fit such information into any pre-existing categories, it is, however, used to identify themes and patterns that emerge from data.

4. Results

The formulation of the research questions proved invaluable inasmuch as they provided flexibility for participants to expand and reflect on their experiences in greater depth. The objective of which was to allow the value of the probative nature of the research questions to be realized. The progressive analysis of participants' description of their leadership experiences with the promotion and accomplishment of CSR objectives provided greater understanding about the phenomenon under study. The robust and detailed responses of participants revealed in no uncertain terms that first, CSR remains a fundamental concern for contemporary organizations and second, that leadership frameworks that drive performance outcomes, such as mindfulness leadership, could prove invaluable for modern organizations' concerned with CSR. As the analysis progressed it became evident that exploratory qualitative inquiry aligned quite effectively with a constructivist approach.

The constructivist perspective played an indispensable role in investigating the phenomena under study, and provided the means to focus on personal meaning associated with participants' CSR and leadership experiences. Moreover, the constructivist perspective was particularly applicable to the identification of themes and patterns that support the development and interpretation of meaning (Creswell, 2013). The process, in no small way, was inductive given that any relevant interpretation was grounded in the data although mediated by ideas and assumptions emanating from observations and interpretations.

The exploratory design provided the ability for the researcher to identify mindfulness as an effective leadership framework for driving performance outcomes generally and CSR initiatives specifically. The study's exploratory qualitative inquiry approach facilitated a hypothesis that developed and evolved as the study progressed. It was particularly suitable for the current research project since it lent to value creation from participants' experiences, insights, and reflections as identified by inductive analysis involving the identification of repeated patterns of meaning.

4.1 Themes & Responses

Interview Question 1: How would you describe and rate your organization's CSR strategy? The participants' description of their organization's CSR strategy was separated by two distinct categories: written and unwritten. Eight of the participants (P1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 16, 19 and 20) reported unwritten CSR policies or strategies. These participants indicated that it was difficult, at best, to measure the effectiveness of CSR initiatives that were unwritten, stating that differing and often contradicting opinions and individual interpretations of such policies or strategies proved disruptive, and often thwarted leadership's effort to develop a consensus in support of CSR strategies. Contrastingly, twelve of the participants (P2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 18) reported that written CSR policies provided a target at which all stakeholders could aim, and offered tangible

guidelines as the malleable nature of CSR evolves as the organization adapts to meet the ever-changing demands of the marketplace.

Whether written or unwritten policies are in place, all the participants indicated the importance of effective communication and continuous learning in the successful promotion of CSR strategies. Furthermore, eighteen of the participants stated that such factors were primarily the responsibility of leadership. The participants also indicated that regardless of socially responsible policies being written or unwritten, it fell to leadership to get "buy-in" to CSR policies if there was to be any chance for successful implementation. Moreover, four of the participants indicated that they have adopted a CSR policy of avoidance without necessarily realizing it given the time and cost often associated with developing formal CSR policies. Three of the participants stated that given the long-term transition associated with the development of cultural norms and values in support of CSR, the importance of change readiness is often overlooked. Furthermore, in the cases where deliberate CSR policies are in play, all participants indicated the importance of leadership's ability to be adaptable, continuously learn from past decisions, and effectively communicate plays an indispensable role in the successful implementation of socially responsible policies.

Interview Question 2: How do leadership, policy, and economics affect your organization's CSR activities? All participants indicated that leadership, policy, and economics were fundamentally important to the implementation and achievement of CSR activities. Participant 18 purported that "leadership sets the example for others to emulate, economics often determines behavior, and when communicated effectively, policies set an example for all to follow and buy-in to, all of which contributes to an active CSR strategy." Participants 2 and 17 provided additional information regarding the economic influence or pressure that can be applied by certain stakeholders that the organization has contracts with. In light of the economic benefit associated with contracts representing substantial revenue for the organization, when faced with disagreement related to any given policy, it can prove extremely difficult to not compromise, and the driving force behind the organization's policies is all but lost except for verbal assent.

Interview Question 3: Would you consider your organization to be reactive or proactive in CSR policy making; and why? Out of the twenty executive leaders interviewed, fourteen participants indicated that their organizations were both proactive and reactive in CSR policy making; of the remaining organizations, three were reactive, and three were proactive. Although three participants indicated that their organizations were satisfied with the extent to which they were proactive, the remaining seventeen participants indicated that their organization's goal was to become more proactive, and were happy to report, although change is slow to come, that progress was being made to that end. Seventeen participants identified a number of influential factors that were responsible for their organization making progress in becoming more proactive; among those were effective leadership, communication and decision-making, all of which were seen to facilitate the development of CSR policies and strategies. Moreover, all the participants agreed that CSR activities should have a permanent place in the budget; and that formal CSR policies that were part of the budget garnered greater support from stakeholders. Furthermore, all participants indicated that a positive organizational image encouraged buy-in and support for CSR policies; and a number of key words were associated with the promotion of an organization's good will: trustworthiness, transparency, team-work, and community involvement. Leadership observation skills and non-judgmental skills were seen to encourage followers to dedicate themselves to CSR in a genuine and proactive way.

Participant 9 added that "at times his organization is proactive, and at other times reactive, as a result of external pressures brought to bear on the organization. Such pressure often contributes to the CSR policy making process given the organization wants to, at least, appear socially responsible." One of the challenges that emerged, with which participants could agree was the importance of developing genuine and not hypocritical attitudes towards CSR. Participants commented that hypocritical attitudes associated with leadership, not only undermined CSR policies and strategies, but can negatively impact an organization's image and thereby prove detrimental to its success and sustainability.

Interview Question 4: Does your organization value innovation, creativity, change, and continuous learning? If so, please provide examples. Seventeen of the participants stated that their organization valued innovation, creativity, change, and continuous learning. Whereas one participant commented they valued innovation, creativity, and continuous learning, but not necessarily change. Two participants responded that although their organization valued creativity, continuous learning, and change, there appeared to be little, if any, interest in innovation given the perceived risk involved. Participant 15, for example, stated that "my organization is not comfortable with innovation inasmuch as it requires a certain level of risk that we are not willing to take." On the other hand, participants 1, 2, 6, 10, 13, and 20 indicated that innovation, creativity, change, and continuous learning provides the means by which their organization can remain "flexible and change-ready" so as to effectively adapt to the ever-changing dynamics of the global market.

All the participants indicated that their leadership experience left them aware of the inherent value of CSR for contemporary organizations; however, translating this value into benefiting the organization requires commitment to continually drive and promote CSR once it has been undertaken. Although three of the participants indicated that their organizations were not necessarily willing to commit to any socially responsible agenda without fully knowing the risks and costs associated with the development of a comprehensive CSR strategy.

Moreover, participant 10 surveyed managers to determine what kind of support they would like to see from the organization to expand socially responsible business activities. A number of responses were received, which included the following: CSR workshops and training programs, internal and external communication in support of innovation, creativity, and continuous learning. Finally, respondents indicated that it was important to have access to support networks and resources that define CSR, and identify socially responsible opportunities for contemporary organizations.

Interview Question 5: Have you observed any link between the development and sustaining of effective CSR strategies and leadership competencies or style? Nineteen participants purported that based on their experience; leadership plays an invaluable role and provides the link in the development and promotion of CSR strategies. These participants indicated that there are many obstacles and challenges organizations face when designing and implementing effective CSR policies; and having a leader who remains flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances, as well as, aware and attentive to the needs of stakeholders, including the community they serve, will provide a greater chance for successful outcomes.

Participant 18 stated that "leadership must possess character, seen as trustworthy, be an open and effective communicator, someone who leads by example, remembering that the first form of flattery is duplication of behavior." The executive leaders that participated in this study recognized that in no uncertain terms, it was leadership's responsibility to set the tone for the development and application of CSR policies. They were keenly aware that it fell to them to drive performance to achieve organizational social responsible objectives.

Interview Question 6: What would you consider the most effective/influential leadership traits as a driver for achieving CSR objectives? First and foremost, the participants' responded that "leading by example" was the most effective leadership influence. Secondarily, leaders who are effective communicators, seen as transparent, trustworthy, and non-judgmental, are astute observers and listeners who value feedback, prove to be the most effective leadership drivers for CSR. Participants 13, 17, 19, and 20, although agreeing with the importance of leading by example, added the value of leaders being perceived as ethical, confident, and capable; traits that should not be underestimated given their influence on followers.

In addition to being an effective communicator and problem solver, participant 6 further indicated that "it is critical for leaders to be good listeners who value feedback for clarity and better understanding in support of problem solving. After all, mistakes are costly and usually come as a result of lack of understanding." Moreover, participants indicated that genuinely caring about employees made way for merging their needs with those of the organization; promoting a synergistic culture better suited for socially responsible activities.

Interview Question 7: What do you consider the greatest barriers and sources of conflict to the effective implementation and sustaining of CSR policies? Although in no order of priority, and some leaders' verbal tones emphasized some responses over others, it was typically indicated that the responses below cover the areas considered to provide the greatest hindrance or stumbling block to the successful implementation of CSR policies. Participants generally agreed that the greatest barriers and sources of conflict to the effective implementation and sustaining of CSR policies are the following: ineffective leadership, lack of communication and complacency within the organization, inconsistency between policy and actions, absence of formal written policy, unclear objectives and resistance to change, short-term thinking, economic constraints, absence of strategic planning, and generally misalignment of CSR with the organization's purpose.

Interview Question 8: Do your organization support prevailing business operations considering your CSR policies? The participants overwhelmingly agreed that their organizations typically acted in accordance with CSR policies. Sixteen participants indicated that more often than not, their organization's actions aligned with its CSR policies and strategies; and purported the importance of having some manner of evaluation in place to measure effectiveness. Four of the participants indicated that, although their organization desired to perform in accordance with CSR policy, far too often internal or external pressures of one kind or another, usually economically related, prevented adherence to CSR initiatives, requiring a temporary deviation from current policy so as to overcome some challenge or resistance to compliance. Participants 9, 18, 19, and 20, agreed that a formal written CSR policy can often provide the impetus necessary to overcome the temptation to divert from or temporally disregard CSR policy. All the participants reflected on the importance of adhering to policy in theory, however, all but two indicated that, for any number of reasons, it was not always possible to completely comply with CSR policies depending on pressures being brought to bear. Participants agreed that, in the best case scenario, complying with the organizations professed socially responsible policies was the ideal course of action.

Interview Question 9: How does your organization effectively partner with stakeholders to align its CSR policies with the overall goals, strategies, and vision of the organization? For an organization to effectively partner with stakeholders, so to align its CSR policies with the company's overall goals, strategies and vision; 16 participants indicated that it falls to leadership to drive CSR performance by effectively communicating goals, and making timely decisions that not only support CSR policies, but also align with the organizations purpose. Moreover, participants agreed that it is crucial to prepare stakeholders for needed change (change-readiness) through education and training, along with other forms of continuous learning that provides the foundation for creativity, innovation, and adaptability that lends to the achievement of CSR objectives.

Seventeen of the study's participants further indicated that CSR is a collaborative effort; therefore, active listening becomes a critical factor in better understanding stakeholder expectations and perceived needs, which if met, can facilitate the achievement of CSR objectives. Furthermore, 18 participants indicated that team building activities that create meaningful relationships with stakeholders also are an effective means for leadership to promote buy-in and get support for CSR policies and initiatives; and under the most favorable conditions this would all strategically align with the organizations purpose, mission, vision, and overall goals.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

Although there have been additional studies associated with mindfulness in the workplace, and CSR performance outcomes, there has been no new findings published. This exploratory qualitative inquiry bridged a gap in research and by doing so contributed to the field of organizational leadership and management studies. More specifically, the present study provided organizations and scholars alike with the opportunity for experiential learning from the insights and reflections of the executive leaders participating in the study. The exploratory qualitative inquiry approach was instrumental in probing the experiences of 20 executive leaders, across industry lines, familiar with the implementation of CSR initiatives. Moreover, thematic analysis played an indispensable role in the identification of emerging themes and relevant patterns associated with the phenomenon under study. The emerging themes were further linked to other performance competencies and attributes identified with the leadership framework of mindfulness. Analysis of the emerging themes along with the identification of subsequent factors also linked to a framework of mindfulness leadership (i.e., engaging employees, being aware, trustworthy, transparent, attentive, adaptable, non-judgmental, innovative, and effective team builder) further supported the phenomena under study.

The review of literature coupled with participant responses to the open-ended interview questions, not only directly identified the importance of leadership frameworks that drive performance generally (Zou et al. 2023) but, by so doing indirectly identified the leadership framework of mindfulness as an effective driver for the accomplishment of CSR objectives specifically. The allusive and malleable nature of mindfulness lends itself to being adaptable for contemporary leadership frameworks that are needed to drive CSR performance. The executive leaders interviewed for the present study expressed no reservations about seeking out effective leadership frameworks that were shown to drive CSR performance outcomes (He et al. 2021; Moin et al. 2023). However, such support did not come without voicing some concerns. Although the inherent value of CSR and the leadership frameworks that drive such policies was evident, the main concerns of such leadership frameworks, expressed by both the review of literature and the study's participants, were the cost, time, and training required for development and implementation (Javed et al. 2020).

The executive leaders participating in the study represented varying levels of formal education, worked in a variety of industries, occupied various supervisorial positions, and brought significant leadership and CSR experience to the study. The researcher developed and field tested 10 open-ended interview questions to explore the experiences of executive leaders participating in the study. The interview questions were intentionally of a probative nature, and were intended to facilitate a detailed understanding of the participants' experiences.

5.1 Implications of the Study

The results of this study provide additional knowledge to discover how mindfulness leadership might enhance an organization's ability to meet the demands of corporate social responsibility objectives. This exploratory qualitative inquiry was the methodological approach used to explore the experiences of 20 executive leaders familiar with CSR. The study provided rich and detailed data to inform contemporary leaders and organizations as to the applicability of mindfulness leadership as a framework to drive the accomplishment of CSR objectives. The probative nature of the interview questions made way for participants to contribute practical insight to the field of organization and leadership studies. Furthermore, the themes and patterns that emerged from the study identified important challenges confronting organizations endeavoring to drive CSR initiatives. The participants in the study made up a sample population of executive leaders from small to midsize organizations across industry lines. The participants brought 600 years of combined leadership and significant CSR experience to the research study. As organizations prepare to meet the leadership and management challenges of doing business in the 21st century, the implications of the study can be far reaching. More specially, organizations endeavoring to meet the CSR demands of a market place gone global might appreciate the implications of this study for contemporary organizations and leaders alike.

5.2 Limitations to the Study

Although the executive leaders participating in the study provided considerable data, nevertheless, one limitation might be seen as the sample size. The purposive sample consisted of 20 executive leaders from organizations across industry lines that were familiar with the implementation of CSR initiatives. The probative nature of the interview questions gleaned insightful and meaningful data in support of the study, however, an even larger number of participants would be expected to provide even greater insight and meaning from additional experiences of executive leaders relevant to the phenomenon under study. Moreover, the researcher might consider a mixed-method or quantitative methodological approach. Quantitative researchers have long questioned empirical data resulting from qualitative methods, typically considering such data unreliable, subjective,

and often vague (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Another limitation was that only small to midsize organizations participated in the study; and resultantly this limitation did not provide the opportunity to interview executive leaders of larger organizations that could have provided further insight relevant to the study. Additionally, the present study was limited to businesses within the United States, and therefore offered a limited domestic leadership perspective that may invite bias. Finally, data was collected from phone interviews without any physical interaction with participants; and a face-to-face interview might have provided the opportunity for the researcher to glean greater insight and meaning associated with the participant's physiological reactions as they reflected on their leadership experiences.

6. Conclusion

The exploratory qualitative inquiry approach was used to answer the research question: "How might mindfulness leadership enhance an organization's ability to meet the demands of corporate social responsibility objectives?" Applicable background research indicated that CSR is a valid concern for modern organizations striving for success and sustainability. Stakeholders, as never before, are playing a major role in the development of CSR; and society at large has brought to bear significant pressure and expectations regarding organizations' social responsibility. These influences have come together in such a way that organizations can no longer avoid their presence. Mindfulness, on the other hand, was researched and a literature review made a compelling case for its validity and use as a leadership framework for contemporary organizations endeavoring to develop environments that support positive performance outcomes.

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