



**PR PRACTITIONERS' CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE ROLE OF
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION.**

By

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, practitioners and stakeholders have regarded the practice of stakeholder engagement as a non-essential part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The only standard corporate practice was to invest in developing CSR and sustainability programmes with minimal involvement of those they materially affect, also known as their stakeholders (Heismann, 2014). Heismann further argues that the cause of this was organisations not communicating effectively and actively with their stakeholders to the point that stakeholders were not aware of the development of many CSR programmes.

Engaging with stakeholders is no longer optional; it is an expected necessity. In theory, Holmström's (1996) reflective paradigm of public relations emphasises the need for organisations to meet stakeholder and societal expectations, values, norms, and standards by conducting themselves in a socially responsible manner towards the environment stakeholders and the society at large.

Against this background, this study evaluated PR practitioners' conceptualisation of the role of stakeholder engagement in Corporate Social Responsibility planning and implementation. The purpose is to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on CSR and stakeholder engagement within South African and developing countries. The theoretical framework of the study is the Public Relations reflective paradigm conceptualised by Susanne Holmström (1996); the stakeholder approach to CSR formulated by Freeman (1984). The Triple Bottom Line approach also supports the study, a critical approach used to analyse CSR activities by Elkington (1994).

The study's research methodology was qualitative and employed an explorative design to congregate data through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The findings of this study revealed that stakeholder inclusivity and engagement vary for each organisation. However, in many organisations' corporate social responsibility strategies, the most common goal is to engage and put all their stakeholders at the forefront. Compared to the past, PR practitioners performing the CSR role have shown significant progress in considering all stakeholders as an essential part of CSR.

The findings also revealed that stakeholders now play a pivotal role in an organisation's success and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Stakeholders also play significant roles in the relationship between the organisation and its surrounding communities based on its commitment to the partnership and the shared belief that the organisation and the host communities should be good neighbours. The engagement with stakeholders should be viewed as any other organisational planning process, given sufficient analysis, preparation, implementation, reporting, evaluation and follow up.

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

1.1 Background and Introduction to the Study

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a self-regulatory mechanism whereby organisations actively undertake environmental scanning to uncover global trends, ethical principles and legal standards for compliance (Saylor, 2013). According to Taghian, D'Souza & Polonsky (2015), CSR is a voluntary action taken by an organisation and communicated to its stakeholders to benefit social and environmental causes. Grunig (2001) states that CSR, often referred to as a corporate social investment, reflects excellent public relations. Golob & Bartlett (2007) posit that organisations adopt CSR to be perceived as socially responsible and gain investor and other stakeholder support.

CSR has, over the years, become a focal area of debate amongst businesses and academic scholars. This concept has been in existence since the early 1950s. However, it has gained increasing prominence due to increased stakeholder demands, government and civil society limitations to address complex societal issues. Other factors include the awareness by most organisations that their sustained success depends on their ability to address local, sustainable development challenges (Johannes, 2016).

Shahin & Zairi (2007) state that the field has garnered much attention from academics and professionals due to its relation to stakeholder engagement principles. According to (Maignan *et al.*, 1999), the literature in the 1990s was quite extensive. Today, this literature has expanded exponentially. One of the critical issues relating to CSR is the need for organisations to incorporate their socially responsible practices to remain competitive and look after their stakeholders' interests (Napal, 2013).

Over the years, CSR shifted its focus from shareholders to stakeholders by acknowledging the crucial stakeholder roles in every organisation. This shift has resulted in stakeholder engagement being an integral part of CSR. Greenwood

(2007) argues that stakeholder engagement gives the impression of corporate responsibility. She further states that if an organisation shows commitment through policy and practice to stakeholder involvement, it acts responsibly towards its stakeholders. In support of the above argument, (Freeman 2017) posit that the main similarity between stakeholder engagement theory and CSR is that they both emphasise the importance of incorporating societal interests into organisational operations.

Sloan (2009) argues there is a wide range of perspectives in understanding that stakeholder engagement. The academic literature has tended to treat this theory from a moral or ethical perspective, assuming that the more organisations engage with their stakeholders, the more responsible they are. Sloan (2009) further argues that the stakeholder engagement process serves as a sensing mechanism to gather information about the interests and expectations of stakeholders. Organisations that monitor and evaluate CSR and sustainability place heavy emphasis on these processes. Sloan (2009) concludes by stating that the fundamental assumption is that the more organisations interact with their stakeholders, the better they will understand them and address their concerns and interests.

According to Holmström's (1996, 1997) reflective paradigm of Public Relations, CSR is the core of corporate communication practice. It seeks to solve conflicts between organisational behaviour and the public perception of how socially responsible organisations should operate. The goal of the reflective paradigm is to ensure that stakeholders' values, norms and standards are considered by PR practitioners when designing PR interventions.

According to Holmström (2000), the reflective paradigm regards stakeholders and the environment as the essence of the organisation. When put in practice, the reflective paradigm encourages organisations to scan the environment it operates in and engage with stakeholders to understand their issues and concerns before making decisions. It not only regards an organisation as ethical but ensures its legitimacy. This paradigm provides that the practice of CSR is in line with stakeholder interests and responds to environmental issues and societal needs, not only organisational interests (Holmström, 2002). In the current business

environment, effectively engaging with stakeholders is no longer optional. It is an expected necessity and is the only way organisations can achieve legitimation.

Holmström (2002) posits that the prominence of the reflective paradigm in CSR is the ability to carry an outside inward approach instead of an inside outward approach. It implies that an organisation has to find its specific identity and act independently. On the other hand, it figures out how to comprehend itself in its larger societal setting and creates limitations and planning instruments in its cycles to perceive the relationship between social systems. The reflective paradigm enables organisations to balance their interests with their stakeholders to develop and maintain balanced relationships with all their stakeholders and society.

Despite acknowledging the criticality of the reflective paradigm in CSR, academic research that examines whether CSR interventions have evolved to an approach that involves stakeholder planning and implementation from a public relations perspective remains scarce (Ansu-Mensah *et al.* (2021). Furthermore, the paucity of academic research that explores the relationship between stakeholder engagement and CSR from a public relations perspective has led to a situation where stakeholder engagement has been slightly disjointed from CSR despite the two being inevitably bound together (Carroll & Brown, 2018; Harjoto & Laksmana, 2018). Against this background, this study utilises CSR and public relations theories to gain insights into how PR practitioners in South Africa conceptualise the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR planning and implementation.

1.2 Statement of the research problem

According to the Kings Reports (1994, 2002 and 2009), organisations should make it a duty to engage with communities where they operate. One of such ways is through CSR initiatives, which are often beneficial to organisations and their various stakeholders. Numerous studies have established the relationship between CSR and stakeholder engagement (Freeman, 2017; Nikolova & Arsić, 2017; Greenwood, 2007 & Clark, 2000). What remains unclear under-theorised is whether South African organisations engage with their stakeholders during CSR planning and implementation as recommended in academic literature and the reflective paradigm

of Public Relations. It has become clear that any failure to engage with stakeholders will undermine the legitimacy intent of the organisation.

Despite acknowledging the importance of the reflective paradigm in Public Relations and CSR, there is a lack of academic research exploring the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR from a South African public relations perspective. This study, therefore, intends to understand PR practitioners' conceptualisation of the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR practices within a South African context.

1.3 The objective of the study

The study's main objective is to understand how PR practitioners in South Africa conceptualise the role of stakeholder engagement in Corporate Social Responsibility.

1.4 Main research question

How do PR practitioners in South Africa conceptualise the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR?

1.5 Secondary research questions:

The following research sub-questions will seek to answer the primary research question:

- 1.5.1 How do PR practitioners in South Africa conceptualise/understand CSR?
- 1.5.2 Why should PR practitioners in South Africa consider stakeholder engagement to be an essential aspect of CSR?
- 1.5.3 How do PR practitioners in South Africa perceive the role of stakeholders in CSR planning and implementation?
- 1.5.4 How do PR practitioners in South Africa perceive to be the best practice for incorporating stakeholder engagement in CSR planning and implementation?

1.6 Significance of the study

As mentioned above, there is a fair amount of literature on the relationship between CSR and stakeholder engagement. However, the literature on approaches and the

effect of incorporating stakeholder engagement to CSR practices remains under-explored within South Africa. Therefore, a study into CSR practices and strategies of organisations will contribute towards supporting CSR research in South Africa and across developing countries.

In addition, this study will contribute towards South African social responsibility performance by guiding organisations on how and why they should incorporate stakeholder engagement into their CSR strategic planning.

By undertaking this study, the researcher aims to contribute to CSR's existing body of knowledge in developing countries. The study also aims to provide insight into the current implementation of CSR practices and performance to assist organisations in improving or adopting CSR strategies that include stakeholder engagement. The findings of this study will provide a foundation for further research on stakeholder engagement in other organisational aspects.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The researcher categorised the study into six chapters.

Chapter one: Introduction and background of the study

This chapter will provide an introduction and background to the research. It highlights the research problem, objectives and questions, and significance of the study to the Public Relations industry and CSR research.

Chapter two: Literature review

This chapter discusses the relevant literature on CSR and stakeholder engagement. The chapter will further outline the dimensions of CSR, the different approaches to CSR, such as the instrumental, social contract, legitimacy and stakeholder strategy. This chapter will then conceptualise the strategic role of CSR in organisations and distinguish the relationship between stakeholder management and stakeholder engagement. In addition, the researcher discussed the relationship between CSR and stakeholder theory. The chapter also investigates CSR in a South African context and explore the relationship between CSR and Public Relations.

Chapter three: Conceptual framework

The chapter presents and discusses the conceptual framework of the study, which premises on the Public Relations reflective paradigm conceptualised by Susanne Holmström (1996); The stakeholder approach to CSR formulated by Edward R. Freeman in his book "*Strategic Management: A stakeholder approach*" (1984). The Triple Bottom Line approach also supports the study. John Elkington(1994) formulated a critical approach to analyse CSR activities formulated by These theories backed the data collected and understood better PR practitioners' conceptualisation of stakeholder engagement in CSR planning and implementation within South African organisations.

Chapter four: Research methodology and methods

This chapter outlines the research methodology and the research methods used in the study. It seeks to justify using a qualitative research methodology and what influenced the research to adopt a qualitative research methodology. The method of the present study is exploratory. This chapter also describes the reason for selecting the strategies adopted and presents the research design, sample size and procedures, data collection instruments, data analysis and ethical considerations.

Chapter five: Data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings

This chapter presents collected data and discusses the research findings of the study. The chapter relates the results to the literature review and the conceptual framework to understand how PR Practitioners in South Africa conceptualises the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR planning and implementation.

Chapter six: Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter provides a conclusion to the study. It evaluates the key findings of the study. Furthermore, it reflects on the study's limitations and makes recommendations for future research as the research questions are answered, and the purpose of the study is fulfilled.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section reviews academic literature and previous research, which focuses on the relationship between strategic CSR principles and stakeholder engagement/management within an organisation. The literature review consists of a brief definition of CSR, an overview of the strategic role of CSR within organisations and approaches organisations utilise to comply with the code of corporate governance. It briefly outlines dimensions of CSR, the methods to CSR and the interconnected relationship between CSR, stakeholder engagement and public relations.

2.2 Defining Corporate Social Responsibility: an essentially contested concept

Over the years, the concept of CSR has been used interchangeably with Corporate Governance. Grunig (2001) argues that CSR, at times is referred to as Corporate Social Investment (CSI), reflects excellent public relations. However, the concept is perceived differently by different organisations. It relates to supporting the privileges of investors to profit or an organisation's duty to society. CSR is generally associated with an intentional effort by organisations to make positive contributions to communities where they operate to build mutually valuable goodwill.

Okoye (2009) posits that the inception of the CSR in the literature can be followed back to the trade of articles during the 1930s among Berle and Dodd on the role of corporate managers. In those articles, distributed in the Harvard Law Review, Dodd brought up that significant trends made toward a perspective on business as a monetary foundation with both a social-administration and profit-making function (Berle, 1931 & Dodd, 1932). Hopkins (2003) and Okoye (2009) further argue that CSR found its popularity in the 1950s with writers such as Abrams (1951) and Bowen, (1953) exploring the social responsibilities businessman.

Ever since then, the CSR landscape has been characterised by many supportive and critical analysts and writers that have helped broaden the acceptability and popularity of the concept. According to Reeves (2016), the idea of CSR has increased significantly in academic research and professional practice since the 1970s, expanding from the business realm to the public relations field.

CSR is an organisation's commitment to consider the interests of all its stakeholders, the social and ecological results of their business activities. There are countless definitions of CSR, each considered valuable in its own right and conceptualised to fit the specific organisation. A majority of the definitions include three aspects, economic, environmental and social aspects. The European Commission (2014) defined CSR as "an organisation's responsibility to integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and their interaction with the society". CSR ensures that organisations consider the interests of their stakeholders, including the communities in which they operate. To back up this argument, Post (2002) states that CSR encourages organisations to use their power responsibly deemed acceptable in society.

According to Freeman & Liedtka (1991), CSR is a boundary to meaningful conversations about the obligations of being a good corporate citizen and its commitment to society. To clearly define CSR, Grafström & Windell (2011) divided it into three different parts of responsibility. They include financial, social and environmental obligations. According to Grafstrom & Windell (2011), financial responsibility requires organisations to operate in ways that open up an unregulated market system and where the contest is minimal.

The organisation's environment should promote development and growth, abide by existing laws, create and maintain voluntary norms with good financial responsibility and principles. Grafstrom & Windell further argues that social responsibility refers to how an organisation takes greater responsibility for its social work and its responsibilities as "citizens".

For environmental responsibility (Grafström & Windell (2011), organisations should look to grow their environmental and global warming alteration arrangements. Prior,

it was uncommon for organisations to expand their strategies past the current legal necessities. In any case, presently, numerous organisations have an extended policy. It incorporates assuming more noteworthy liability for the external environment, waste management, and projects cultivating the local or global environment.

According to Carroll (1983:608):

Corporate social responsibility involves the conduct of a business so that it is economically profitable, law-abiding, ethical and socially supportive. To be socially responsible then means that profitability and obedience to the law are initial conditions when discussing the firm's ethics and the extent to which it supports the society in which it exists with contributions of money, time and talent.

Adeyanju (2012) states that CSR is a voluntary organisational activity to fulfil some of the needs of the society in which the business operates. It is an organisational act of good corporate citizenship that attempts to solve social issues in the organisation's community. In the simplest form, CSR is an organisation's willingness to spend money on community projects or donate a significant amount of money towards certain community activities such as music, arts, library, or even a school (Margolis & Walsh, 2003). As a symbol of involvement, organisations also encourage their employees to volunteer in community work and create goodwill in the community. The aim of taking part in such a great activity is to enhance the company's reputation and strengthen its brand (Asongu, 2007).

Asongu (2007) also talks about charity being part of CSR; he states that charity is a legitimate aspect of CSR if approached strategically. However, it requires organisations to consider its impact on all stakeholders and the environment when settling on decisions by adjusting the requirements of all stakeholders with its need to make a profit and give a satisfactory reward to investors.

According to Hohnen and Potts (2007), CSR refers to how organisations integrate social, environmental and economic concerns into their values, culture, decision making, strategy and operations. Moreover, it is transparently done, thus

establishing better practices within the organisation to create wealth and improve society.

One of the best definitions of CSR can be found in “A Guide to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)” by the University of Miami (2007). It states that CSR is a way of evaluating the inter-dependent relationships among organisations and monetary systems and the networks within which they operate. CSR is a method of discussing the degree of any commitments an organisation has to its nearby society and proposing strategies to meet those commitments (University of Miami, 2007).

2.3 History of Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR has evolved from the ancient 1700 BC to the 21st century. An overview of the concept and its understanding and implementation over the years shows that it has undergone a vast development and evolution. According to Low (2016), CSR began as the topic of charitable giving, which had been in existence since 1700 BC. To date, CSR is no longer a new concept in the field of management. Instead, CSR has evolved into a business concept widely accepted due to its contribution to organisational success.

2.3.1 Corporate Social Responsibility before 21st century

The concept of CSR has been explored and defined in several ways in the past, but minimal research investigates the evolution of CSR from 1700 BC till the 21st century. Scholars who have examined the historical review of the developments associated with CSR (Tripathi & Bains, 2013 and Asongu, 2007) state that the concept found its origin in ancient Mesopotamia (a region of Southwest Asia) around 1700 BC. It was the period when King Hammurabi presented a code in which contractors, innkeepers or ranchers were killed if their carelessness made the passings of others or critically bother nearby residents.

In the interim, history has similarly recorded the grumblings of antiquated Roman legislators about the failure of organisations to contribute enough taxes to finance their tactical missions. For example, in 1622, disappointed shareholders in the Dutch

East India Company have begun giving leaflets complaining about management confidentiality and “self-enrichment” (Brass Centre,2007; Asongu, 2007).

Asongu (2007) further investigated the African continent, where the hunters of Southern Cameroons and other parts of Africa brought part of their catch to the chief. Meanwhile, farmers in Eastern Nigeria brought their first harvests for a famous communal “New Yam Festival.” Experienced artisans were concierges of history, and a significant number of their fine arts were kept in the chiefs’ royal residences and were not paid for such pieces of art. Asongu states that this kind of gesture is presented in the Bible where there is disapproval for charging interest debts. The sharing of wealth has been made a good example of humanity in some of Jesus’s stories, such as the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. Asongu further argues that CSR can also be seen as a Christian concept as many of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries social teachings of the Catholic Church support CSR. According to Tripathi & Bains (2013), the idea of CSR was recognised in business practices by successful companies in the 18th century. For example, Cadbury chocolate manufacturers introduced a social responsibility practice to benefit their employees, including pension funds, education, and employee training.

Nikolova & Arsić (2017) state that modern-day CSR can be traced back to the start of the twentieth century based upon two philosophical claims expressed by Sims (2003). The main principle is the principle of good cause grounded on religious practices. It recommends that monetarily steady individuals should provide for those with challenges. The subsequent principle is stewardship, which expresses that organisations should serve society and fulfil the public’s necessities since their wealth and influence have sprung through their activities within society.

Nikolova & Arsić (2017) further argues that the turn of the businesses to the society and the development of more societal thinking led the organisations to increase their responsibility and consideration for social and environmental wellbeing. According to Panwar *et al.* (2006), this response to social and ecological matters by the organisations is what it is known today as CSR.

2.3.2 Corporate Social Responsibility during the 21st century

When one looks at CSR in the 21st century, one must consider the concept of globalisation which has brought an extensive development of trade in goods and services worldwide, resulting in increased economic connectivity across the worldwide market. As a result, many countries that have effectively accepted globalisation have seen remarkable financial development and destitution decrease. Nevertheless, this has its incidental antagonistic effects, for example, ecological debasement and irreconcilable situations over commercialising the world's natural resources in developed and developing nations (Feerick, 2015).

In 1994, John Elkington, founder of British consulting firm SustainAbility, came up with the phrase "triple bottom line" (TBL). The purpose of the TBL was to emphasise that the actual cost of doing business reflects in three dimensions of accountability: accountability to profits, or shareholders, accountability to people or stakeholders, and accountability to the planet (Elkington,1994). In addition, expanded understanding and consciousness of ecological and moral issues has propelled the current prominence on the role of organisations in the public eye.

According to Murray (2003), the public discussion on CSR has advanced into a conservative discussion that emphasises one aspect of global financial conduct. It has to do with the treatment of labourers in assembling processing plants in the developing world, delivering merchandise for worldwide organisations regarding fabrics, apparel and footwear. According to Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir & Davídsdóttir, (2019) and Smith (2001), during the early years of the twenty-first century, corporate strategies changed as a reaction to the public interest. Subsequently, this regularly had a positive social effect. It implied that the extent of social obligation (from a business viewpoint) is currently comprehensive to a more extensive arrangement of stakeholders. With that said, Smith (2001) proposed a new CSR definition.

According to Smith (2001), the new definition states that "CSR refers to the obligations of an organisation to its stakeholders. These obligations go beyond legal requirements and the organisation's duties to its shareholders. Implementation of

these obligations minimise any harm and maximise the long-run beneficial impact of the organisation on society.”

2.4 Dimensions of Corporate Social Responsibility

According to Jain et al. (2015), CSR can be conceptualised in the form of a pyramid as formulated by Carroll (1979, 1991); this is one of the most classical typologies in the field of CSR, which includes economic, legal, ethical and discretionary aspects in that order. Economic responsibilities refer to an organisation’s financial performance and profitability, while legal obligations involve compliance with prevailing laws and regulations. Ethical responsibility relates to adherence to the un-codified norms and ethical standards, while discretionary responsibility comprises voluntary contributions towards humanitarian and other causes. When organisations pay attention to ethical principles in their CSR activities, they achieve sustainable social capital, brand equity and trust with stakeholders (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

Carroll’s CSR pyramid formulated in 1991 is famous in academia and the business world because of its pragmatic nature. According to Carroll (2016), the motivation behind the pyramid was to highlight CSR’s definitional angle and outline the structure of the four-part framework. The pyramid was chosen as a mathematical plan since it is basic, natural, and worked to withstand the trial of time.

As briefly stated, above Carroll (1979, 1991) proposed four levels of CSR in the pyramid (refer to figure 1), namely economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities. Economic and lawful duties are key obligations of organisations to investors. Ethical and philanthropic duties help organisations become remarkable and become acceptable corporate citizens by being mindful of different stakeholders other than investors.



Figure 1: Pyramid of corporate social responsibility dimensions (Carroll, 2016)

Carroll (2016) posits that to understand each type of responsibility, one needs to look at the economic responsibility as “required” of business by society. One also needs to look at the legal obligation “required” of business by the community; the ethical responsibility “expected” of business by society; and the philanthropic responsibility “expected/desired” of business by society (Carroll 1979, 1991). Carroll further argues that as time passes, what precisely each of these four categories means may change or evolve as well.

2.4.1 Economic responsibilities

To get into detail on Carroll’s (1979 & 1991) dimensions/principles of CSR, Nochai & Nochai (2014) argue that the economic responsibilities are the fundamental tier of Carroll’s CSR pyramid; this involves being profitable. Organisations’ essential intention is to deliver service and products to society at a sensible cost and benefit simultaneously. Profits from selling services and products go to investors and other financial stakeholders to ensure the growth and survival of the company. In addition, organisations also need to pay their employees, increase value for their shareholders, and take care of the other stakeholders’ interests. Windsor (2006) posits that economic responsibility and legal responsibility are mandatory. Scholars Brown & Foster (2013) and Salazar & Husted (2008) believe that organisations that

consider experience mixed with theoretical lucidity always increase profits, reduce organisational risk, enhance corporate reputation and build mutually beneficial relationships.

2.4.2 Legal responsibilities

Legal responsibilities are the second layer of the CSR pyramid and coexist with economic responsibilities as fundamental principles of the free enterprise system (Nochai & Nochai, 2014). According to Carroll (2016), organisations should comply with society's minimal ground rules, also known as "codified ethics". These are laws and regulations that express important perceptions of fair business practices established by federal legislators, state and local levels. Nochai & Nochai (2014) argue that organisations must operate under the legal system and regulations while creating profits for shareholders and businesses. Thus, organisations fulfil the "social contract" between themselves and society at large by being legally responsible.

2.4.3 Ethical responsibilities

Windsor (2006) states that the "ethical approach to corporate social responsibility argues defects of morally indifferent business conduct and social advantages of morally-sensitive stakeholder management". According to Nochai & Nochai (2014), ethical responsibilities include exercises and practices expected by the general public and done by organisations intentionally concerning decency, equity and respect for or protecting stakeholders' ethical rights. Carroll (2016) argues that society expects businesses to work and morally lead their issues. By undertaking moral obligations, organisations will embrace those activities, standards, norms, and expected practices despite not being classified by law. Ethical obligation likewise perceives that an organisation's uprightness and moral conduct ought to go above and beyond the requirements of rules and regulations. Ethical responsibility means to "do what is expected by global stakeholders" (Carroll, 2004:114).

2.4.4 Philanthropic responsibilities

Philanthropic responsibilities encompass all organisations' activities, such as charitable gestures, to become good corporate citizens. This dimension is standard to CSR. Carroll (1991) contends that organisations regularly believe they are socially

mindful if they participate in optional or charitable activities. Although goodwill is highly desired and prized, it is less significant than the other three areas of social responsibility (Carroll, 1991: 39).

Philanthropic responsibility separates itself from ethical responsibilities by a sense of discretion. Charitable responsibilities are not necessarily ethical or moral. They are located at the most voluntary and discretionary dimension of corporate responsibility and are not linked necessarily to profits or the ethical culture of the organisations (Nochai & Nochai, 2014). Furthermore, scholars such as L'Etang (1994), Schwartz & Carroll (2003) and McWilliams & Siegel (2001) state that philanthropic responsibilities cannot be considered a responsibility. These are activities beyond what duty requires and could be financial returns or ethical reasons.

Consequently, social responsibility is the commitment of decision-makers to take actions that protect and improve society's well-being along with their interests (Davis 1975). Lantos (2001) add to this by stating that these principles guide organisations to respect people, promote 'social good,' and prevent 'social harm'.

2.5 Different approaches to Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR practices are categorised into several approaches: the classical approach, social contract, instrumental approach, legitimacy, and stakeholder approach. This section discusses the instrumental approach, social contract, legitimacy and stakeholder approach.

2.5.1 Instrumental approach

Freeman (1970) opines that the instrumental methodology posits that the core of the organisational PR commitment to clients is to help attract mutually valuable goodwill that would translate into good services and profits. Thus, with an instrumental approach, the organisation is an instrument for wealth creation. But, on the other hand, its social activities are only a means to achieve economic results, characterised by its exclusive focus on the business case for CSR. Therefore, one should engage in CSR practices if, and only if, they are profitable.

2.5.2 Social contract approach

The Social contract approach developed by Sacconi (2000) can be considered an insightful application of incomplete contracts theory, strongly characterised by an ethical perspective. In this approach, CSR is an open governance structure that establishes management duties towards all the stakeholders. It is, therefore, the procedure of definition and implementation of a fair social contract.

2.5.3 Legitimacy approach

According to Dowling & Pfeffer (1975: 121), the legitimacy theory stems from the concept of organisational legitimacy, which they have defined as: “a condition or status which exists when an entity’s value system is congruent with the value system of the larger social system of which the entity is a part. When a disparity, actual or potential, exists between the two value systems, there is a threat to the entity’s legitimacy”. Scholars Deegan (2002) and Deegan, Rankin & (Voght 2000) believe that the legitimacy theory proposes that organisations constantly look to guarantee that they work within the limits and standards of their social orders. For example, in embracing an authenticity hypothesis viewpoint, an organisation would willfully report on activities if the management saw that those activities were expected by the communities it operates.

2.6 The stakeholder approach to strategic management

Jonker & Foster (2002) state that the stakeholder approach as conceptualised by Freeman (1984) encourages consideration of new external stakeholders beyond the shareholders, customers, employees, and suppliers. Organisations utilising a stakeholder approach are expected to responsibly manage an extended web of stakeholder interests across progressively porous organisational limits and recognise an obligation of care towards conventional vested parties and silent stakeholders like nearby communities and the environment (Jamali, 2008 & Simmons, 2004).

According to Freeman and McVea (2001), given the unprecedented levels of ecological turmoil (both political and climate change-related), PR managers adopted the stakeholders’ approach as a strategic response to mitigate the impact. The

customary technique structures were not assisting managers with creating essential bearings, nor were they assisting them with seeing how to set out new opportunities during so much change; therefore, a new conceptual framework was required. Thus, the stakeholder approach came to be.

Freeman (2010) posit that from the beginning, the stakeholder approach outgrew the management practice. He argued that managers needed to completely comprehend the apprehensions of investors, workers, clients, suppliers, banks, and society to foster objectives that all stakeholders would uphold. Consequently, management needed to actively explore its relationships with all stakeholders to develop business strategies.

2.7 The strategic role of CSR in organisations

CSR is a critical and proactive approach to preventing organisational legitimacy issues from arising by responding to social demands in an ethical and socially acceptable manner. However, the strategic role of CSR is still debatable. According to Tam (2016), organisations use CSR as a tool to balance their interests with those of the public. To achieve this, they utilise public relations to play a proactive rather than reactive role in advancing their own goals and their people. On the other hand, Waldman and Siegal (2008) argue that CSR is more about repairing reputation and constructing brand value for the organisation than a commitment to more responsible corporate behaviour following broader societal or environmental objectives.

CSR is committed to developing society's prosperity further, conforming to moral, good and environmental standards, and building relationships (Vaitkevicius & Stukaite, 2009). According to Gallego (2009), socially dependable organisations meet the lawful prerequisites and accomplishes more than anticipated by investing in human resource management, environmental protection innovations, and so forth. In addition to creating CSR, these investments give the organisation competitive advantages. Part of those advantages is gaining community trust and building a favourable corporate image/identity.

Scholars (Meehan et al., 2006; van der Heyden, van der Rijt, 2004) believe that when organisations do not pay attention to ethical and social obligations, more often

than not, they suffer damage to their corporate image. Customers attach emotional sentiments to products from socially responsible companies. When companies are known to support the communities they operate, the chances are that customers would be favourably disposed to them. Maruf (2013) concurs with the positions of Meehan et al. (2006) and Van der Heyden & Van der Rijt (2004). He believes that irrespective of an organisation's primary business, CSR should be a core objective. Maruf opines that CSR can provide organisations with the instrument for improving corporate identity, reputation, and trust if correctly done.

2.8 Stakeholder management and engagement

Stakeholders are individuals and organisations who affect or are affected by the activities of an organisation (Freeman, 1984). According to Saylor (2013), there are two groups of stakeholders: primary stakeholders and secondary stakeholders. With primary stakeholders directly affecting or affected by the success and failure of the organisation. While secondary stakeholders indirectly affect the organisation by taking actions to make it difficult for the organisation to succeed or support its efforts.

Sloan (2009) states that stakeholder relationships have long been a touchstone of CSR. Organisations that adopt CSR have a broader view of responsibilities for their primary and secondary stakeholders' needs wants, and desires (Saylor, 2013). Sloan (2009) argues further, stating that organisations need to consider their stakeholders and oversee contribution, sometimes opposing, interests. The objective is to have relationships that create sustainable, elite organisations financially and, socially and environmentally.

Greenwood (2007), looking into stakeholder engagement, posits that it is CSR in action; it is the impression of CSR. Sloan (2009) defines stakeholder engagement as involving individuals and groups that either affect or are affected by the company's activities. It includes stakeholders close to the company and provides it with essential resources, such as shareholders, employees, customers, and suppliers. Meintjes and Grobler (2014) refer to stakeholder engagement as involving stakeholders as part of the central business process of transforming organisations to adapt to changing environments. Sloan (2009) argues that stakeholder engagement

is one of the critical parameters used by agencies such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Dow Jones Sustainability Index and even the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) that rate companies to identify socially responsible companies.

According to Moloney (2002), stakeholder management ensures positive mutually beneficial connections between organisations and their publics. They also opine that it wittingly or unwittingly debilitates boundaries to the expertise streaming into and out of the organisation and its publics. However, Chinyio and Olomolaiye (2010) go against that by stating that organisations should move toward approach stakeholder management connected with the organisational objectives and guide their agents while engaging their stakeholders. In such a manner, stakeholder management rouses management to develop strategies and guidelines to be followed at the functional level with ultimate stakeholders' expectations instead of just thinking about its advantage (Steyn, 2007).

2.9 The Stakeholder Engagement Process

Grayson & Hodges (2004) state that a stakeholder engagement process should be a reiterative process allowing engagement to benefit from diligent planning, thorough reporting and the application of learning due to appropriate evaluation and monitoring. It emphasises the importance of ensuring that organisations should formulate and use the planned stakeholder engagement process. It is to assist in enforcing a successful two-way communication process. Jeffery (2014) expanded on Sequeira & Warner (2007) stakeholder engagement handbook by articulating the seven steps to be taken for successful stakeholder engagement.

Figure 2 below indicates the model of a '*meaningful*' stakeholder engagement process as conceptualised by Jeffery (2014). This model suggests a proactive two-way communication process between an organisation and its stakeholders. With this process, communication, opinions, and suggestions flow in both directions. Thus, an effective stakeholder engagement strategy is vastly significant as it assists organisations develop and maintain meaningful relationships.

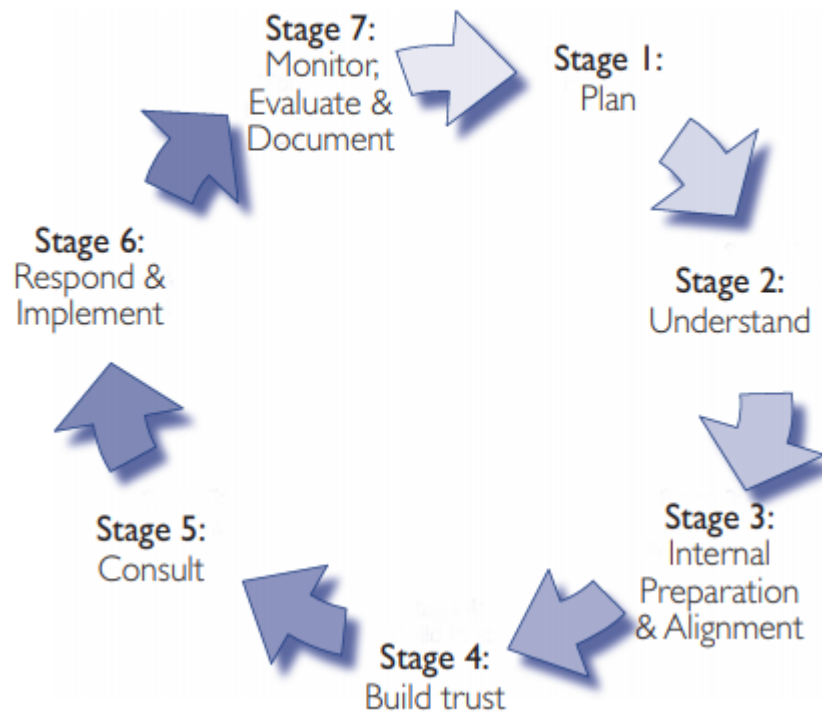


Figure 2: Stakeholder Engagement process (Jeffery, 2009)

2.9.1 Stage 1: Plan

According to Jeffery (2009), this stage involves classifying the primary objectives that an organisation wants to attain, the issues they wish to discuss, and the stakeholders they would like to highlight in the engagement process. It is an overall plan of how an organisation seeks to engage with its stakeholders

2.9.2 Stage 2: Understand

Jeffery (2009) states that at this stage, an organisation should make an effort to understand its stakeholders, from understanding their needs, objectives, issues and interests to understanding the impact they have over the organisation. Organisations start profiling their stakeholders to get a holistic overview of who they are and their contributions to the organisation.

2.9.3 Stage 3: Internal preparation and alignment

It is the process where an organisation starts preparing the engagement process internally. Stakeholder engagement teams are identified as well as stakeholder representatives. Jeffery (2009) further states that building up an internal stakeholder

management team to take on focal management and backing local units on issues relevant to them will assist with making a more organised methodology. This stage also helps in dedicating appropriate time and resources to identify possible commonalities between the organisation and its stakeholders.

2.9.4 Stage 4: Build trust

Building trust is an integral part of the stakeholder engagement process, an organisation needs to trust its stakeholders, and the stakeholders also need to trust the organisation. At this stage, the organisation identifies the different levels of trust and willingness to trust. Building trust enables information to be shared both ways and breaking communication barriers; when trust is present between an organisation and its stakeholders, it allows both parties to respect each other's opinions.

2.9.5 Stage 5: Consultation

An organisation can use a wide range of platforms to consult with its stakeholders; a consultation can happen through personal interviews, workshops, focus groups, public or private meetings, surveys, stakeholder panels etc. It is therefore essential for an organisation to identify representatives who will take part in the consultation process. These need to be the people who are most affected by the organisation's activities. It is also the process where the organisation provides information that responds to the stakeholder's needs/expectations, identified before.

2.9.6 Stage 6: Respond and implement

After consultations have taken place, stakeholders will want to know which of their suggestions were considered. They also want to know and what measures should be put in place to address their concerns. At this stage, the organisation decides on a plan of action for each issue agreed upon. After that, they formulate proposals for action in the light of the possible response from stakeholders to each submission. The response proposal will then assist the organisation in providing fair reactions to each of the issues addressed.

2.9.7 Stage 7: Monitor, evaluate and document

At this stage, the organisation monitors and documents all the information shared through the engagement process. In addition, it assists the organisation in CSR reporting. It is also the phase to gather a broad scope of perspectives to survey the achievement and learning points of the engagement process, particularly to comprehend cost-benefit, including benefits such as reputation, risk management and new plans of action.

2.10 The relation between CSR and stakeholder theory

When investigating the relationship between CSR and the stakeholder theory, it is imperative to also look at the definition of the term stakeholders. The section below discusses the definitions around the concept of stakeholders and further looks at the interlinking relationship between CSR and the stakeholder theory. The broader definitions are discussed below, and the relationship between CSR and the stakeholder theory are discussed below to understand how these two concepts are interlinked.

2.10.1 Stakeholder concept

Freeman (1984) first conceptualised the stakeholder concept. Since then, there have been several definitions propounded by several scholars. Thus, it is near-difficult to agree on a universally accepted definition for the concept. For example, Friedman and Miles (2006) posit that there are more than 55 definitions of the term stakeholder. Notwithstanding the different conceptualisations of the term, Freeman's stakeholder definition (1984) has remained dominant in most theoretical stakeholder discussions, thus its adoption in this study. Freeman (1984) defines stakeholders as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by achieving the firm's objectives".

Similarly, Friedman and Miles (2006) define stakeholders as individuals, groups or communities whose actions or inactions can impact an organisation's objectives and who can also be directly affected by an organisation's activities. Finally, according to Grunig and Repper (1992), stakeholders are individuals or groups whose

relationships with organisations have consequences for both parties. Gibson (2000) also described the stakeholder concept as individuals who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's actions, decisions, policies, or practices of the organisation.

Many scholars (Miles, 2012; Freeman *et al.*, 2010 & Miles, 2017) who have analysed the stakeholder definition argue that the definition is too broad and ambiguous. However, Freeman's conventional definition is the most comprehensive in literature. It leaves the impression of stake and the field of possible stakeholders explicitly open to virtually include anyone and considers them as legitimate stakeholders (Phillips, 2003). Furthermore, according to Preble (2005), Freeman's definition highlights the link and two-way relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders.

Furthermore, Freeman *et al.* (2010) contend that organisations' managers ought not just to consider the interests of investors because numerous parties have explicit stakes in the organisation and can influence its business. In addition, stakeholders are not restricted to living substances. They may incorporate non-living substances or even mental-passionate constituents, such as past generations or the prosperity of future generations (Starik, 1995). Public relations researchers support these broad meanings of stakeholders as those influenced by the organisation in their definition of stakeholders (Grunig & Repper, 1992; Grunig, 2011).

2.10.2 CSR and the stakeholder theory

A vital part of social responsibility and the quest for the corporate triple bottom line is stakeholder engagement. Freeman (2017) avers that CSR and stakeholder engagement are inseparable as both emphasise the importance of taking societal interests into considerations when formulating business operations and strategies. By engaging effectively with stakeholders, organisations can determine the social and environmental issues bedeviling communities and, thus, provide CSR activities that present some form of assistance.

According to Freeman (2017), these concepts may be inseparable, but they tend to focus on two different business aspects down the line. First, Freeman argues that

CSR prioritises its orientation towards society over other business obligations. Then again, stakeholder theory proposes that the embodiment of business essentially lies in building relationships and adding value to all its stakeholders. Therefore, CSR tends to focus on social issues, and stakeholder theory stresses the importance of all stakeholders; this includes actively engaging with stakeholders on all business activities that concern them. Second, Freeman also explains that CSR focuses on moral work rehearses and environmental efforts, while the stakeholder theory attempts to embrace organisation obligations toward its stakeholders fully.

Freeman (2017) further argues that the main similarity between the two concepts is that CSR and stakeholder theory highlights the importance of including societal interests in business operations; as much as there are similarities between the concepts, Freeman and Dmytriiev (2017) state that the two concepts differ. The stakeholder theory suggests the key and overall business responsibilities such as corporate responsibilities. On the other hand, CSR prioritises one aspect of the business: its positionings towards society, such as its social orientation and other business responsibilities.

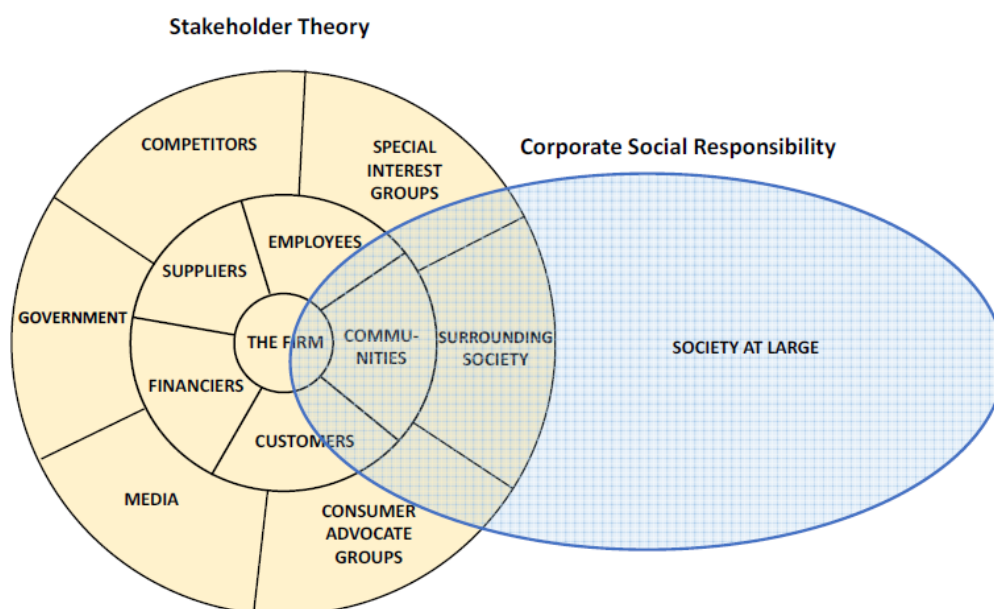


Figure 3: The relation between Stakeholder Theory and CSR (Freeman & Dmytriiev, 2017)

As stated earlier, CSR and stakeholder theory underlines the importance of company responsibility toward communities and society. The above illustration (Figure 2) by

Freeman & Dmytriiev (2017) suggests that stakeholder theory tends to centre its attention within a reasonable reach of a company's activities. Thus, it focuses on local communities where the company operates, the inner circle that stands for primary stakeholders and surrounding society; the outer ring stands for secondary stakeholders. CSR, on the other hand, extends the social positioning of the company much further. For example, it isn't extraordinary to hear from the CSR disciples that organisations need to assist with battling infections and decrease poverty in remote parts of the world, regardless of whether the organisation has no single activity and

According to Freeman & Dmytriiev (2017), CSR mainly focuses on ethical labour practices and environmental efforts. The stakeholder theory attempts to embrace company responsibilities toward its stakeholders and its duties towards the company. Freeman & Dmytriiev (2017) further argue that the stakeholder theory also discourses organisation responsibility toward lenders and suppliers. CSR doesn't stress on these stakeholder groups and sees responsibility.

2.11 CSR in a South African context

The King Reports in South Africa (1994, 2002, 2009) provides organisations that practice CSR with the codes of governance that highlight the responsibilities of stakeholders, the process of risk management and incorporation, what constitutes organisational integrity, sustainability, and the factors that determine the establishment of corporate governance. The King Report's importance in South Africa's CSR milieu became apparent with the authoritative growth in Company Act No. 1 of 2008. The Act provides guidelines for dealing with issues of corporate governance in South Africa. For example, regarding the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), the Act proposes a voluntary foundation for governance that empowers organisations recorded in the Exchange. In addition, the Act requires such organisations to implement voluntary CSR practices (Visser et al., 2010).

According to Fredericksz (2015), the Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) index measures organisation policies, execution and reporting concerning the three mainstays of the triple bottom line, which cover the environment, the economy and social sustainability. However, it is still unclear whether companies incorporate

stakeholder engagement when putting their CSR planning and practices. Organisations that adopt CSR not only have moral, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities added to their economic and legal obligations, they also have a broader view of responsibilities that includes stakeholder's needs, wants, and desires (Saylor, 2013).

In South Africa, CSR is no longer just a mere aspect of a business that an organisation needs to have. It is one of the business requirements recorded in law and regulations to the *Companies Act No. 71 of 2008*. Therefore, it should be at the forefront of every stakeholder's mind. According to Kabir, Mukuddem-Petersen & Petersen (2015), in South Africa, CSR became an essential issue to the economy and the public at large as one of the measures put in place to address the country's socio-economic challenges that surfaced before the country gained its democracy in 1994 (The CSI Handbook, 2008). Therefore, the contribution of businesses, government, regulatory bodies, and other organisations to society is vital to a greater degree for addressing the country's socio-economic problems.

Johannes (2016) states that the South African approach towards CSR consists of policies, the King IV report, the BBBEE scorecard and sector-related guidelines. It is an emphasis on leadership, business ethics, sustainable development, reporting and communication. The South African Companies Act does not force companies to engage in CSR activities. However, the King II, III, and King IV report openly address the need and relevance for organisations to acknowledge stakeholders and adopt a "triple-bottom-line" approach (Dekker A & Esser, 2008).

It is also imperative to state that good environmental and social practices, which are essential parts of corporate governance, are enshrined in the King Report on Corporate Governance (South Africa 2009 — King III). The goal is to develop South Africa's corporate governance environment into global standards. For example, when drafting the compliance document for the listed companies in the JSE, it was ensured that it complied with the King III Report. Also, formulators developed a criterion that took inputs from documents such as the Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact, which branch from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Labour Organisation's Fundamental Principles of Rights at

Work, and the Rio Principles on Environment and Development. According to the CSI Handbook (2008), over fifty companies have willingly adhered to the criteria in line with the JSE's Socially Responsible Investment Index of 2005. Therefore, businesses and communities must work closely with the relevant government departments to achieve the highest impact and ensure sustained success.

2.12 The relationship between CSR and Public Relations

According to Ilieş (2011), CSR was considered a new solution to improve the organisation's image by appealing to the sentimental side of the public that could be touched by the organisation's involvement in solving social problems and could thus feel closer to that organisation. However, according to Davis (2002), Public Relations and CSR perform similar and sometimes interchangeable functions. They both consider (or at least claim to consider) the community in the process of their social activities, and they both strive for common goals, which are organisational reputation, image and identity. Masuku and Mayo (2013) aver that CSR is a sub-division of PR.

Some scholars (Doane & Abasta-Vilaplana, 2005 & Frankental, 2001) have referred to CSR as a device or an "*invention of public relations*" that aims to maintain a good relationship between an organisation and its publics. Clarks (2000) then argues that both CSR and PR represent an opportunity of improving the efficacy of the activity of the corporate world. The simultaneous use of CSR and PR activities is an exercise likely to bring positive results both at a managerial level and the company's public image.

In an attempt of interlinking CSR and PR (Clark, 2000) identifies the processes and responsibilities for both disciplines. For example, Clark (200) states that the public relations discipline involves duties such as:

- Defining the problem or opportunity
- Planning and programming
- Acting and communicating
- Evaluating the program

On the other hand, CSR encompasses the:

- Awareness or recognition of an issue
- Analysis and planning
- Response in terms of policy development
- Implementation

According to Clark (2000), the connection between corporate PR and CSR is still grey. However, both disciplines seek to better the relationship between an organisation and its key stakeholders. Clark (2000) further argues that PR and CSR cultivate and foster organisation-public relations with relevant community groups and individuals through CSR activities and PR tactics.

2.13 Conclusion

This chapter looked into the literature that supports this study. It presented multiple topics, CSR and stakeholder engagement, contested by various scholars investigating stakeholder engagement roles and the importance of CSR in organisational strategies. This chapter also looked into the foundation of the CSR concept and the approaches to stakeholder engagement while identifying the role played by PR practitioners in CSR. Furthermore, the literature revealed the relationship between CSR and public relations and the strategic part of stakeholder engagement and CSR in a South African context.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a conceptual framework supporting the study. The study's theoretical framework is built on the Public Relations reflective paradigm conceptualised by Susanne Holmström (1996). The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach also supports the study. It is a critical approach used to analyse CSR activities formulated by John Elkington (1994), as well as the stakeholder approach to CSR a theory by Edward R. Freeman(1984). The conceptual framework of this study has been used to make sense of the PR practitioners conceptualising the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR planning and implementation within a South African context. The following section also elaborates further on the relevance of each of these theories to this study.

3.2 The Reflective paradigm

The reflective paradigm is a theoretical model which tries to comprehend the states of presence in late modern-day organisations and the function of public relations. It was conceptualised by Susan Holmström (1996). The reflective paradigm characterises insightful marvels like the TBL (People, Planet, and Profit), multi-stakeholder discourse, symmetrical communication, moral records and poly-values orientation.

According to Holmström (1996), the reflective paradigm analytically uncovers the increase and transformation in the complexity between organisations and the environment. It is not a normative but an analytical approach. This paradigm does not claim a norm for a good, right, or most efficient corporate strategy or public relations practice. Instead, the reflective paradigm identifies organisations' conditions of existence in the late modern society, and in this context, analytically uncovers a function for public relations.

Steyn & De Beer (2012) opine that the main crux of the reflective paradigm is that organisations should focus on impacts that go beyond the financial bottom line. The

goal, they opine, is to impact individuals, organisations and stakeholders in communities positively. CSR alone does not build public trust. According to Holmstrom (1996), organisations must ensure that they operate in integrity to attract public understanding and trust. Holmstrom (2012) states that the reflective paradigm rises from a narrow mono-contextual perspective to a poly-contextual one. Mono-context oriented points of view lead to struggle, antagonism and counter-activity, exemplified, for instance, in practice identified with concepts such as manipulation, propaganda and asymmetrical communication. On the other hand, a poly-context oriented viewpoint is perceived in ideas, for example, exchange and balanced correspondence and semantics, such as 'shared responsibility', 'partnerships', 'negotiations', and 'build or engage in relationships. In this manner, a reflective paradigm can be viewed as the centre of organisational authenticity, and PR as a particular intelligent design (Holmstrom, 2004).

Holmström (2004:121) states that the reflective paradigm proposes that organisations see themselves in a poly-logical perspective. When applied to public relations, a poly-contextual perspective considers stakeholder relations, symmetrical communication, and reporting on the TBL (people, planet, profit), enhancing or supplanting conventional regulation. Also, there is a mutually beneficial and viable relationship between organisations and their public when PR is effectively designed and implemented. Holmstrom (2005) and Leroux (2014) argue that effective PR allows for exhaustive discourse and the seamless exchange of valuable data between organisations and their public, thereby empowering organisations to know stakeholder expectations. Thus, it is a win-win situation as organisations can adjust their programmes to suit stakeholder expectations, and stakeholders can also have active voices in the implementation process.

This theory/paradigm is a fundamental theory to support this study as it views an organisation from an 'outside' perspective showing concern for broader societal issues, including stakeholder engagement. However, there is little knowledge about the PR practitioners' conceptualisation of the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR in South Africa. Thus, the reflective paradigm of PR guides the researcher in employing the strategic component of stakeholder engagement. It also helps in exploring the importance of effective CSR planning and implementation to achieve

its objective. This approach assists the researcher in understanding PR practitioners conceptualisation of the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR planning and implementation.

3.3 A stakeholder approach to CSR

The stakeholder approach to CSR is a theory that Edward R. Freeman developed in his book "*Strategic Management: A stakeholder approach*" (1984). This approach encourages organisations to build stakeholder engagement strategies by conducting an environmental scanning of the organisation to identify and invest in all the relationships that will ensure its long-term success. Nikolova & Arsić (2017) explains that the stakeholder approach outlines a new capability for organisations to develop their CSR policy. In addition, the stakeholder approach to CSR emphasises the importance of stakeholder engagement by providing a framework for dialogue.

Nikolova & Arsić (2017) state that stakeholder engagement is a chance for managers to cautiously pay attention to stakeholder issues. Through dealing with the stakeholder and their commitment to CSR, managers could effectively create, coordinate and acknowledge CSR strategy with more substantial impact. Nikolova & Arsić (2017) argues that CSR stakeholder engagement can vary. Still, its primary purpose is to provide a context for a discourse in which fervent stakeholders bring concerns forward and discuss agreeing on a policy designed to address a particular issue.

From a South African context, the stakeholder approach was first outlined in the 2002 King Report chapter on '*Managing Stakeholder Relationships*', which states that the inclusive stakeholder approach is built on governance, sustainability and strategy (De Beer & Rensburg, 2011). It accentuates the importance of including all stakeholders in the decision-making process concerning the future of the organisation.

Therefore, this study used this theory to evaluate and understand how PR practitioners use by South African organisations to incorporate stakeholder engagement in their CSR planning and implementation from a PR practitioners' point

of view. The theory serves as a foundation to understand the relationship between CSR and stakeholder engagement the importance of incorporating stakeholders into CSR planning and implementation.

3.4 Triple Bottom Line

The TBL is a framework formulated by John Elkington (1994) to gauge sustainability during the mid-1990s by incorporating another structure to quantify execution in corporate America. The TBL went past the customary benefits, return on investment, and shareholder value to incorporate environmental and social dimensions. By concentrating on detailed investment results concerning execution and the interrelated components of profits, people and the planet. The TBL approach can now be utilised as an essential tool to support sustainability goals (Slaper & Hall, 2011).

According to Schmitz (2012), the TBL approach can now be a form of CSR prescribing that organisations present bottom-line results on economic terms and company effects in the social realm and the environment. The TBL approach suggests that instead of one bottom line, there should be three: profit, people, and the planet (Investopedia, 2019). The TBL emphasises non-economic and intangible aspects of business that would lead to stakeholders' satisfaction and brand value improvement.

According to Elkington (1998), the broadest perspective on TBL is for organisations to capture the full scope of values, issues, and processes to boost the positive effects of their tasks and make extra financial, social, and environmental value. Slaper & Hall (2011) posit that the TBL approach captures the quintessence of sustainability determining the effect of an association's activities on the world, including the two its profitability and investor esteem and its social, human and ecological capital.

Jackson et al. (2011) believe organisations must be held to high standards of principles formulated by internal and external forces. One of the ways organisations can ensure this is by adopting TBL reporting. It requires organisations to focus on

determining the impact of their operations on host communities. It should be a systematic process devoid of assumptions or ambiguities. TBL provides organisations and stakeholders with the opportunity to practice transparency at its highest level. However, it is not enough to declare financial data and claim transparency. Organisations must go beyond that. There should be a link between an organisations' financial activities and their everyday interactions with members of the communities where they operate. Beyond financial reporting, organisations should be clear about what they did or are doing in communities and why.

This theory is deemed appropriate to support this study as it suggests that multiple stakeholders other than the financial stakeholders should benefit from an organisation's operations. It aids the researcher in understanding the importance of stakeholder inclusivity and how that comes to life in South African organisations. This theory assists the researcher in uncovering how PR practitioners engage with their stakeholders in the purposes of CSR and what plans and techniques are being put in place to ensure transparency during the planning and implementation of stakeholder engagement.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter looked into the conceptual framework that supports this study. The stakeholder theory and CSR can be seen as different models but with some similarities. The critical similarity between the two notions is that both stakeholder theory and CSR stresses the significance of consolidating societal interests into organizational operations. (Freeman & Dmytriyev, 2017). Therefore, organisations must exercise stakeholder engagement when undertaking CSR activities to yield a competitive advantage that amounts to harmonized relationships. The reflective paradigm, as discussed above, ensure that a poly-contextual worldview considers stakeholder relations, symmetrical communication, and reporting on the TBL (people, planet, profit), which supplement or replace conventional legislation.

According to Freeman & Dmytriyev (2017), CSR focuses on one facet of the business, its direction toward the society at large, for example, its social direction over the other business obligations. Stakeholder theory sets that the quintessence of

business predominantly lies in building relationships and adding value to all its stakeholders. The correlation between these theories is that they all stress the importance of organisational responsibility towards communities and society. Failure to use the reflective paradigm, stakeholder theory, and TBL approach may pose challenges in ensuring that stakeholder engagement and inclusivity remain at the organisation's forefront.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a plan of action for answering the research questions of this study. It further discusses the chosen research philosophy and the research design. The research methodology detailed below will assist in answering the following research questions: What do PR practitioners understand as strategic CSR? Do PR practitioners consider stakeholder engagement to be a significant part of CSR? What do PR practitioners perceive to be the specific role of stakeholders in CSR planning? What do PR practitioners suggest to be the best practice for organisations to incorporate stakeholder engagement in their CSR planning and implementation? By answering these questions, the researcher will address the main research question on *how PR practitioners in South Africa conceptualise the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR*.

Burns and Grove (2001) define research methodology as the steps taken by a researcher to identify a problem and gather data to analyse and solve the identified problem. According to Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2009), the theoretical scope of the study and the researcher's natural or social standing influence the choice of research methodology adopted.

4.2 Research paradigms

According to Wahyuni (2012), research paradigms address the philosophical components of social science known as the ontological, epistemological, axiological and hypothetical contemplations. Burrell & Morgan (1979) posit that two essential philosophical suppositions mould social science researchers' perspectives: ontology and epistemology.

4.2.1 Ontological assumptions

Ontology is a philosophical belief system that studies the nature and form of reality, all that is or exists, and the different entities and categories within reality (Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). According to Bhattacharjee (2012), ontology refers to our assumptions about how we see the world. For example, do we view the world as it consists primarily of social order or constant change? Bhattacharjee (2012) further argues that ontology involves theories such as ontological monism, pluralism, idealism, materialism and dualism. Ontological assumptions impact research topic selection, the formulation of research questions, and the research strategies.

4.2.2 Epistemological assumptions

Epistemology is the philosophical field revolving around the study of knowledge and how to reach it. According to Bhattacharjee (2012), epistemology is our most ideal approach to analysing the world, for example, should we utilize an objective or subjective way to examine social reality. Nieuwenhuis (2007a) states that epistemology is the body of philosophy that includes information and accepts how the connection between the researcher and research subjects is comprehended.

The field of epistemology includes theories such as realism, relativism, rationalism and irrationalism. It explains views of knowledge and how to get knowledge about the world (O'Leary, 2004).

Bhattacharjee (2012) compared the two assumptions to categorize social science research. He posits that if a researcher's view of the world mainly consists of social order (ontology), their study would most likely view ordered events and behaviours. He further argues that, it is best to consider such a world utilizing a goal approach (epistemology). First, it is autonomous of the individual directing the perception, for example, using normalized information assortment tools like surveys; then they embrace a functionalism approach.

Assume a researcher trusts that the ideal approach to examine social order is through the abstract translation of participants included. In that case, this is done by interviewing different participants and highlighting differences among their responses

using their subjective perspectives. That particular researcher has adopted an interpretivism paradigm approach (Bhattacharjee, 2012)

The epistemological and ontological approach guiding this study is within interpretivism and social constructionism. According to Orlikowski & Baroudi (1991), the interpretive approach captures a complex and dynamic nature within its context. The aim is to understand how social worlds such as organisation fields, groups, institutions etc., enact their particular realities through their interactions. It also seeks to understand how they ascribe meaning to them and show how these meanings influence their actions. Social constructionism refers to the view that all knowledge and all significant reality are reliant upon human practices, being constructed in and out of the interaction between people and their world, developed and communicated within a social context (Crotty, 1998; Berger & Luckman, 1966).

4.3 Methodology

This study followed a qualitative research approach to fulfil its objectives. According to Dawson (2000), a qualitative research methodology explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences through interviews, focus groups discussion, etc. Ritchie et al. (2013) describe qualitative research as a research methodology that is interpretative and naturalistic. It involves studying a social phenomenon by taking the viewpoints and records of participants as a starting point.

Du Plooy (2009) states that qualitative research is first about humans. He argues that the qualitative methodology does not exist outside human interactions. This methodology has allowed the researcher to gather an extensive understanding of PR practitioners' conceptualization of the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR planning and implementation within South African organisations.

The qualitative research approach is exploratory and allows for observing new situations (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). A qualitative research approach is oriented towards understanding how the social world is constructed (McLeod, 2011). This view resonates with Silverman (2009), who states that researchers can collect

descriptive or substantial data by studying participants' attitudes and practices in their everyday settings.

According to Wagner and Maree (2000), qualitative research methods permit the research a degree of adaptability in the conduct of a specific study. Wagner and Maree (2000) further contend that, in contrast to quantitative analysis, qualitative research favours a moderately open and unstructured exploration procedure rather than one decided in advance, which directs what should be researched and how it should be explored.

4.4 Research design

A research design has been defined as the overall plan or strategy selected to integrate different study components coherently and logically, thereby ensuring the effective address of the research problem. The study utilised an exploratory study approach to recognize the limitations of the environment where the issues, openings, or circumstances of interest will dwell and distinguish the observable components or factors relevant to the research. Mills, Durepos & Wiebe (2010) defined exploratory research as research investigating a distinct phenomenon and providing extensive knowledge about the particular subject.

This study has employed an exploratory research approach as this is a new area of research and sought to produce new insights into the research topic. Exploratory research is described by Burns and Grove (2001) as an examination that led to acquiring new insights, finding novel thoughts, and incrementing information on a phenomenon. Using this design, the researcher explored South African CSR practices and approaches from PR practitioners' viewpoints. For this information to be valid, the researcher selected PR practitioners who are currently performing the CSR officer/manager role and are involved in CSR planning and implementation in South Africa.

4.5 Sampling and Sampling Procedure

The population for this research consisted of six PR practitioners from South African organisations. This study employed a non-probability sampling technique focusing

on purposive sampling to select participants from the relevant organisations. Sampling refers to the process of selecting a portion of the population that matches a designated set of specifications to be studied. On the other hand, the sample is a subset of a population selected to participate in the study (Polit & Beck 2004; Uys & Basson 1991). Burns & Grove (2003) argues that sampling is also known as the 'target population'. According to Welman *et al.* (2005), sampling can be classified into two major classes, probability and non-probability sampling; with probability sampling, each unit of the population has a chance of being included as a unit of the sample frame. Henry (1990) defined probability sampling as having the "distinguishing characteristic that each unit in the population has a known, nonzero chance of being included in the sample". Thus, with probability sampling, all the participants have an equal probability of being selected from the population.

With non-probability sampling, the units to be included are not specified. Etikan (2016) states that non-probability sampling is an examining strategy where the samples are accumulated in a cycle that doesn't give every one of the participants or units in the population equivalent odds at being incorporated.

4.5.1 Purposive sampling technique

The purposive sampling technique refers to purposefully choosing the research subjects based on their expertise and suitability (Denscombe, 2010). According to (Etikan 2016), purposive sampling is also referred to as judgment sampling because the choice of the research participant (s) is deliberate due to the participant's abilities. Etikan (2016) further argues that purposive sampling is a non-irregular sampling procedure that doesn't need hidden hypotheses or a set number of members. Instead, with purposive examining, the researcher chooses what should be known and sets to discover willing, knowledgeable and well-informed people with a spectacle of interest on the subject (Bernard, 2002).

According to Etikan (2016), convenience sampling techniques can be used in qualitative and quantitative studies. However, it is frequently used in quantitative studies. Purposive sampling is relatively utilised in qualitative studies. The

researcher chooses to use either one of these techniques depending on the type and nature of the study.

The sample for this study consisted of six PR practitioners involved in CSR within their organisations as they would have extensive knowledge of their organisations' CSR planning and implementation. The selected practitioners are corporate organisations that have been/were recognized for CSR practices over the past five years; this does not include any NGOs. The selection criteria of the organisations were based on the past and present CSR projects which have and are still contributing to a communities' social growth.

4.6 Data collection

According to Burns and Grove (2001), data collection is a definite, methodical gathering of data relevant to the study utilizing various procedures. For this investigation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to understand the PR practitioners' conceptualization of the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR planning and implementation.

4.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 3) defined semi-structured interviews as "interviews to obtain descriptions of the interviewee's world to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena". According to Dawson (2000), semi-structured interviewing is the most frequently used type of interview in qualitative social research. Dawson (2002) posit that with semi-structured interviewing, the researcher wants to know specific information which can be compared and contrasted with knowledge gained in other interviews. It is done by asking the same set of questions in each interview. Thus, this interviewing remains flexible yet still formal in terms of the questions posed.

Miles & Gilbert (2005) referred to a semi-structured interview as a simple conversation. The researcher knows what they want to find out and have a set of questions to ask and an idea of the areas they will cover during the interview. The semi-structured interviews were based on well-crafted questions to gather an in-

depth understanding of the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR for South African organisations and took between 15-20 minutes each. Interviews provide a two-way conversation between a researcher and the interviewee; they allow the interviewee to be confident and comfortable with the information they give when they are in their comfort zone. The researcher is aware of the disadvantages of the interviews, such as availability, time, and environment, as Dawson (2000) highlighted.

The interview selection was based on the researcher's responses after sending emails asking for permission to conduct these interviews with the relevant PR practitioners. The researcher also asked for permission to record interviews using a voice recorder. The intent was to avoid capturing photographs of the candidates. Recordings have allowed the researcher to prevent misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the collected data.

4.6.2 Document analysis

Document analysis has been utilised to validate and support the findings of the semi-structured interviews. It has been described as a systematic review of documents used in everyday life (Robson, 2002). According to Strauss & Corbin (1990), document analysis allows data to be analyzed and deciphered to gain importance, acquire understanding, and foster exact information as evidence.

Bowen (2009) states that document analysis, like any other analytical research method, necessitates that information be analyzed and deciphered to invigorate importance, acquire understanding, and foster empirical comprehension. He further argues that documents used for research evaluation take various forms, such as newsletters, magazines, journals, minutes of meetings, letters, memorandums etc. Denzin (1970) & Bowen (2009) posit that document analysis often used in combination with other qualitative research methods. This process is known as triangulation. Eisner (1999) argues that by triangulating data, the researcher endeavours to deliver a convergence of proof that breeds integrity.

According to (Bowen, 2009) documents provide multiple purposes as part of the research process, these include:

- Documents provide in-depth background information and historical insights, which can assist a researcher in understanding the historical roots of specific issues that impact the phenomena currently being investigated.
- Documents can also suggest some questions that need to be asked and situations that need to be observed as part of the research.
- Information and insights extracted from documents can be a valuable addition to a knowledge base.
- Documents can be analysed as part of verifying finding or validating information from other sources.

For this study, the researcher obtained documents such as annual reports, magazines and bulletins to validate the information provided by each organisation's PR practitioner. The researcher requested permission to access these documents before the interview phase commenced. This method is appropriate in this study as it has assisted in explaining documented insights for each organisation's CSR practices.

4.7 Data analysis

According to Creswell (2013), data analysis includes coordinating and positioning printed data acquired into themes through coding and shortening the codes and expressing the data in figures, tables, or discussions

For this study, a thematic analysis has been used to analyse the data collected. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as unbundling data to identify, analyse, and report patterns within exploratory studies. As a data analysis method, the thematic analysis identifies themes, i.e. patterns in the important or interesting data. It uses these themes to address the research or say something about an issue (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Braun & Clarke (2006) divide the themes into two levels, the semantic and latent. Semantic themes centre around the data's precise or surface implications. The investigator is not searching for anything past what a participant has said or what has been composed. The latent level looks past the information exchanged and distinguish or analyze the hidden thoughts,

presumptions, conceptualisations and belief systems that are conjectured as moulding or illuminating the semantic substance regarding the data.

The researcher has identified themes at the latent level for this study as the research was based on conceptualizations/perceptions rather than universal facts. Therefore the researcher needed to verify and support the perceptions addressed by each practitioner. The researcher has followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6-step framework to triangulate the findings and maintain a logical analysis of the importance of stakeholder engagement in CSR planning, as will be discussed in the content. The steps of the framework are as follows:

Step 1: Becoming familiar with the data.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

Step 3: Searching for themes

Step 4: Reviewing themes

Step 5: Defining themes

Step 6: Write-up.

4.8 Ethical considerations

Diener and Crandall (1978) outlined four ethical principles that researchers need to consider when conducting research. These include harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception. Strydom (2005) states that researchers are obliged to research in an ethically acceptable manner. For this study, the researcher first completed a CPUT Research Ethical Clearance Compliance Form, which serves as a declaration for researchers to conduct research ethically. Secondly, the researcher sent a consent form to the selected practitioners/ those who agree to participate in the study.

The research ethics that have governed this study include protecting an individual's right to privacy, freedom of expression and confidentiality; the researcher did not employ deception or expose any participant to harm. All research material, including notes and recording, have been used after participants and organisations granted consent.

The researcher supplied the participants with non-disclosure agreement forms outlining what and where the information would be published, kept and used. The form also requested the participants' permission to record the interviews and assure them that their names and organisations will be kept confidential unless they wish to be disclosed (Makwambeni, 2018). The findings were presented in a way that does not reveal the identity of the participants; therefore, the researcher has used the term "PR Practitioner" for all those who took part in the research. The consent form clearly stated the purpose of the study and that it would be used for academic purposes, and no information would be shared with a third party.

4.9 Validity in qualitative research

According to Brink (1993) validity and reliability are key aspects of all research, they are particularly vital in qualitative research, where the researcher's subjectivity can so readily cloud the interpretation of the data. Validity represents the connection between the material gathered and the phenomenon being scrutinized. Validity in research is concerned with the accuracy and truthfulness of the findings (Le Compe & Goetz 1982). A validity review ought to show what really exists and a legitimate instrument or measure ought to really gauge what it should measure. Svenningsson (2003) states that validity can be categorized into external (theoretical validity) and internal (logical validity).

According to Patino & Ferreira (2018) internal validity is defined as the extent to which the collected data represent the truth. Internal validity of a study can be threatened by many factors, including errors in measurement or in the selection of participants in the study. The authors mentioned above have highlighted that it is vital for the group of participants to be as diverse as possible. For this study, a few of the selected participants became unavailable while some were dealing with complexities that came with covid-19 pandemic. To avoid a lack of validity, those participants were replaced with alternative participants (see Makwambeni, 2013). Uys & Basson (1991) posits that in qualitative studies when a researcher deals with a smaller number of participants, they run the greater risk of sampling error and this means that the study may lack its representativeness. Due to time restrictions and accessibility, this study has not had the chance to interview a greater amount of participants while maintaining a similar intelligent and subjective norm.

This study was mainly guided by a theoretical framework consisting of Stakeholder theory, Triple Bottom Line approach and the Reflective paradigm of PR. Since the main objective of the research was to understand how PR practitioners in South Africa conceptualise the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR, stakeholder theory and TBL theories were the most significant framework to approach the problem. Similar to the stakeholder theory, CSR also intends to consider the community as a key stakeholder in its business. TBL theory further expands CSR as the theory is about the concern towards people, planet and profit. Both theories focus on the tangible as well as intangible benefits of organisational goal. Therefore, the theories selected clearly support CSR activities and making CSR the center of an organisation to accomplish brand worth and loyalty. Subsequently the both theories are valid externally. Due to the study being exploratory and involving perceptions and attitudes of the participants, a qualitative method was selected for pragmatic of the theory. It is almost impossible to measure and quantify perceptions thus, in this study, the theories and methods used are valid and relevant. Both external and internal validity are ensured in this study through the careful selection of theoretical framework and methodology.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter described the research methodology, including the population, sample, data collection instruments, and strategies used to ensure the study's ethical standards, reliability, and validity. The researcher used a qualitative, exploratory research design. The researcher personally administered the research questionnaires to collect the data from the participants. The questionnaires had open-ended questions. The researcher obtained data from the participants and also sought consent from the participants. The researcher was very cautious in ensuring anonymity and confidentiality during the administration of questionnaires, interpretation of data and report writing.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses and discusses the findings of the research undertaken. The main focus of the study was to understand how PR practitioners in South Africa conceptualize the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR. In addition, the study sought to understand how PR practitioners built and maintained relationships with stakeholders during CSR activities. To achieve this objective, the researcher studied the role played by PR practitioners in the context of CSR and how they incorporate CSR and stakeholders in their overall corporate strategy. In addition, it also sought to understand the nature of engagement between PR practitioners and their stakeholders.

This study employed a thematic analysis to derive the insights from the semi-structured interviews, as well as document analysis to understand and analyse the research findings. The literature also guided the analysis on the relationship of CSR and Public Relations undertaken in Chapter 2. The study was further guided by the reflective paradigm, stakeholder approach to CSR and the TBL approach. Furthermore, the interpretation of the findings has been approached from a narrative point of view using quotations when needed as obtained from diverse sources. This chapter consists of two sections; the first section presents the findings of this research, while the second section discusses and interprets the findings.

5.2 Presentation and analysis of the research findings

As mentioned in chapter 4, this study used thematic analysis and document analysis to understand and interpret the data. The research findings have been presented according to the themes which emerged. The themes identified are stakeholder inclusivity and engagement, stakeholder perception, and organizational approaches to socially responsible. The reflective paradigm guides the analysis of these themes. The researcher also employed a stakeholder approach to CSR and the TBL approach to ensure that these are presented academically and ethically.

5.2.1 Stakeholder inclusivity and engagement

The findings of this study revealed that stakeholder inclusivity and engagement varies for each organization. The most common goal set out in many organization's corporate strategies is to equally engage and put all their stakeholders at the forefront of the business. Still, the phase in which they include their stakeholders depends on the project at hand and depends on what is being communicated. Mabusela (2017) states that stakeholders are included because of the adherence to policy, not because they are valuable. Therefore, PR practitioners and organisations' representatives first evaluate the message to be communicated to each stakeholder. Although the goal is to ensure that they communicate the right message to the right stakeholder, they still make all the important information available to all the stakeholders, information such as financial performance and company growth which does not necessarily need to be communicated to all the stakeholders simultaneously.

The process mentioned above is also undertaken during CSR planning; some PR/CSR practitioners only engage/include their stakeholders once all the planning has been completed. For example, one of the PR practitioners who were interviewed in this study shared her opinion on the importance of engaging with stakeholders during CSR planning and implementation; she mentioned that:

"I do not deem this a priority at all. Only staff/internal stakeholders need to be involved at the planning stage, considering that things change and do not always go according to plan. Furthermore, it is much easier to remedy a situation if the planning and implementation team is smaller".

Based on the above statement, it can be said that when PR practitioners do not include some stakeholders during the planning phase. It's not that they exclude them in the activities but rather to ensure that the work is carried out in smaller teams. Therefore, it is easier to manage before being carried out to the rest of the stakeholders to ensure that the company delivers before making promises.

The findings also revealed that some PR/CSR practitioners do not share the same view regarding stakeholder inclusivity. The semi-structured interviews also showed

that all stakeholders are an essential part of the CSR planning phase; however, identifying the stakeholders that need to be part of the planning phase is also necessary. As a result, one of the PR professionals stated that:

“The community is the primary stakeholder group, but other stakeholders with specialized capacities and responsibilities are essential. The identification of relevant stakeholders should be made during the early stages of the Programming Phase. Stakeholder involvement is significant when interest groups are expected to play an active role in the implementation, operation, and maintenance processes.

Stakeholder participation requires commitment, transparency in the process, acknowledgement of alternative views, ideas, time and human resources. Properly handled, participation contributes to consensus and acceptance of proposals and will facilitate implementation”.

PR practitioners were asked if they perceive stakeholder engagement to be an essential part of CSR. The responses from the interviews show collective understanding that stakeholder engagement should be a necessary part of CSR as it should for all other organizational activities because an organization that engages with its stakeholders is a progressive organization. In support of this argument (O'Dwyer & Unerman, 2016; Unerman & Zappettini, 2014), an organisation that demonstrates responsiveness and accountability to stakeholders regarding CSR issues could potentially have a flourishing corporate reputation, and the organization's market performance would benefit. Two of the practitioners stated responded as per below to CRS being an essential part of CSR:

“CSR is very beneficial for organisational image and reputation. Therefore, I would engage stakeholders on CSR activities as it demonstrates the organization “giving back”.

“Yes, it is essential that the organisation engages with the relevant external stakeholders to understand better the needs of the communities in which we operate. In addition, it allows the organisation to assess where and how they can assist, measure ROI and if this CSR project aligns to business objectives/ strategy”.

A document analysis conducted from documents of a hotel and casino chain shows that stakeholder engagement is an integral part of the organization's sustainable strategy. For the organization engaging with its stakeholders ensures that the

communities and the business continue to thrive. The CSR professional for this organization elaborated on this by saying:

“For our group, stakeholder engagement is essential in building and maintaining transparent relationships in the communities we operate in. Some of our stakeholders include communities and traditional leaders, provincial and national government, NGOs, NPOs, PBOs, foundations, and labour organisations. The SED and stakeholder engagement specialist and the SED professionals at the various units are responsible for engaging with these stakeholders. This engagement ensures that our relationships with these stakeholders offer shared value and sustainable SED”.

The organization’s community engagement approach guarantees that all its commitment and interventions align with the group's sustainability techniques and, all the more extensively, the provincial and national growth and advancement plans. In 2019, they initiated a stakeholder engagement pilot project with its 'Big 5' units, all of which have devoted Socio-Economic Development (SED) officials. Once carried out to all units, this new methodology will smooth out community engagement and assist the group with focusing on its intercessions to address every local area's aggregate need.

Below is a diagram outlining the organization’s stakeholder engagement approach:



Figure 4 [Source for the above diagram: organization x socio-economic development strategy presentation on stakeholder engagement]

In summary, PR practitioners and organisations regard stakeholder engagement to be an indispensable part of CSR. They are aware of the benefits of effectively engaging with stakeholders during CSR activities and engaging with stakeholders at

all times. Luu (2019) posit that co-creation activities also contribute to stakeholder engagement. These help stakeholders feel good about the organisation, become less susceptible to negative information, and develop feelings of loyalty. It ensures a long-term relationship between the organization and its stakeholder while ensuring progressive success for the business.

5.2.2 Conceptualization of stakeholder engagement by PR practitioners in South Africa

A couple of studies on PR and stakeholder engagement show that stakeholder engagement is becoming an essential concept with a huge potential to reshape and reconceptualize public relations and CSR (Kang, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014). PR practitioners who were part of this study also attest to this by stating that:

“Building culture and fostering stakeholder engagement into our PR&CSR planning and activities has become one of our central tasks as a public relations team. Our conceptualization and execution of stakeholder engagement have been further enhanced by the rise of digital media, especially social media, which provide unlimited opportunities for stakeholders to become engaged with organisations and vice-versa.”

“Having stakeholder engagement as part of our business strategies to enhance our CSR planning and implementation has allowed us to relook our stakeholder groups and prioritise our stakeholders according to their contribution to the business. For example, through social media monitoring on stakeholder engagement, we were able to identify stakeholders who do not have a positive contribution to the organization and plan on how we will change their negative opinions about the business”.

Two participants also highlighted how they engage with their stakeholders daily to ensure that their relationship remains solid. Finally, they were asked how do they effectively engage with their stakeholders during CSR planning. Below are a few of their responses to this:

“Engagement is via meetings, visits to NGO’s/projects, engagement with beneficiaries to see the success stories /projects and their impact”.

The other participant highlighted how they use technology to engage with their stakeholders:

“Social media has made engagement a lot easier for many organisations. We engage stakeholders via social media campaigns (incl T— teaser campaigns, appealing graphic designs, online quizzes, special announcements, etc”.

One of the central functions of stakeholder engagement highlighted in the literature review was to state that a stakeholder engagement process ought to be a reiterative interaction permitting commitment to profit with persevering arranging, intensive revealing and the use of learning because of proper assessment and observing (Grayson & Hodges, 2004). Furthermore, it emphasises the importance of ensuring that organisations formulate and use the planned stakeholder engagement process. This study revealed that having a stakeholder engagement plan as part of an organization business strategy also assists PR practitioners in building relationships with external stakeholders and internal stakeholders. One of the practitioners explained that:

“Having a stakeholder engagement plan in place has also assisted me and my team develop internal CSR activities, which predominantly focus on employees, including those in managerial levels”.

As internal CSR centres around workers, it constructs a solid bond between an organisation and its employees. According to (El-Garaihy et al., 2014), internal CSR practices like employee development, wellbeing and security strategies, establishing a motivating environment in organisations, lessen the organisation’s operating expenses and improve its efficiency (El- Garaihy et al., 2014). The document analysis for one of the organisations also revealed that:

“We’ve recently had a relook at our stakeholder engagement strategy, and now the key objective of our sustainability strategy is to embed a sustainability culture throughout the group, and our employees remain the key drivers in effectively implementing this culture through sustainability initiatives within our units. A sustainability culture programme is being developed to strengthen this process, which informs a tiered approach to achieving behavioural change within our business. Our stakeholder approach to effective CSR practice will start within the organization to ensure that our employees are part of the implementation process before carrying out the strategy to our external stakeholders”.

The advantages of adopting CSR into business strategies have been well-acknowledged in the academic literature and corporate governance reports such as the King reports. However, there's very little highlighted about the internal CSR. Low (2016) supports the above findings on the implementation of internal CSR by stating that the advancement and improvement of CSR also illuminate enterprises not to disregard the pivotal human resource, the employees, while practising their CSR activities. CSR can be coordinated into the working environment and leave considerable effects on the employees' perspectives and conduct that encourage the organisation's performance.

5.2.3 Stakeholder perceptions of PR practitioners

The study's findings revealed that stakeholders play a pivotal role in an organization's success and CSR initiatives. The relationship between the organisation and its surrounding communities is based on its commitment to the partnership and the shared belief that the organisation and the host communities should be good neighbours.

According to the PR practitioners, an organization that has a good relationship with all its stakeholders stands a better chance at succeeding because stakeholders are the ones that drive the organization forward. They are the foundation and existence of an organization. During the semi-structured interviews, PR practitioners were asked how central are stakeholders to their organisations and their overall corporate strategy? And in what way are stakeholders beneficial to them.

These were their responses:

An organisation comprises stakeholders, be it, staff, partners, customers, communities, investors, suppliers, etc. Without stakeholders, it is near impossible for an organisation to function successfully and to its total capacity”.

“External stakeholders are critical to our business as they are consumers, purchase our product, support our initiatives etc.; without external stakeholders such as consumers purchasing our products, we would not exist”.

One of the practitioners highlighted the role of stakeholders in CSR/CSI planning, and implementation and the role played by communication in that process:

“The stakeholders of an organisation play a vital role in the process of CSI planning and execution. Therefore, there is a need to communicate CSI activities to stakeholders and monitor the flow and role of communication within the CSI context. Challenges in communicating corporate social responsibility do exist – for example, communication channels used in CSI, scepticism towards company messages and potentially hostile reactions from the media, complex community engagement processes, diversity of the audience, misunderstanding with special interest groups employees and government regulations. The diverse information requirements of different stakeholder groups also present special communication challenges”.

In short, as much as stakeholders are an essential part of CSR and the organisation, it is also imperative to communicate with them effectively for the message to get across and take part in initiatives and support your business. According to Ansu-Mensah *et.al.*, (2021), mechanisms need to be employed to take social responsibilities seriously. The mechanisms must allow stakeholders’ views to feed into the organisations’ decision-making process, ensuring that organisations are held accountable to stakeholders’ expectations. Prioritizing stakeholders and their needs also means perfecting communication and using the proper communication channels to ensure that the message doesn’t get distorted or misinterpreted.

5.2.4 Organizational approaches to corporate social responsibility

Most organisations have different approaches, and each approach has its purpose. These organisations identify what they stand for and seek to align their values with their host communities to be regarded as socially responsible. The participants were asked to reflect on their work experience as PR/CSR practitioners and advise on how organisations can be socially responsible to all their stakeholders. These are the highlights of their feedback:

“Organisations must identify community needs in their regions and ensure their business and regional objectives align with the overall business strategy. Organisations are socially responsible to their stakeholders and need to report on this in their annual report from an investment. Organisations need to showcase how they have

given back, empowered others and uplifted the community through initiatives”.

“Organisations are responsible to the general public to be good corporate citizens. Corporates must help protect the environment and engage in corporate philanthropy, including contributing cash, donating goods and services, and supporting employees' volunteer efforts. As a result, companies are increasingly working with stakeholders to understand their views and concerns on various environmental, social, corporate governance and economic issues. Issues often referred to as corporate social responsibility (“CSR”) issues) and to incorporate and address those views and concerns in the company’s strategic decision-making processes. Our group’s CSR vision is to deliver sustainable social-economic development projects that positively change the trajectory of the lives of people in the communities we work in whilst positively affecting our business, thus Creating Shared Value.”

Based on the above, PR practitioners in South Africa share the same belief in becoming socially responsible. Their feedback highlighted how organisations should take their stakeholders and take them into account to become socially responsible organisations.

PR professionals in South Africa understand the role that CSR plays in the success of an organization, and they agree that CSR should be an integral part of an organization’s corporate strategy.

They highlighted that:

“an organization needs to give back to the communities, mainly where you operate. Therefore, it’s essential to align CSR activities to the business objectives. CSR must be aligned to business strategy and objectives. Therefore, a percentage should be spent annually on CSR linked to your Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization (EBITDA)”.

One of the PR practitioners shared how her organization has been active in including CSR in its organizational strategy; below are a few pointers that the practitioner highlighted. These are referenced as part of the document analysis of this research:

“Though our organization has contributed towards the upliftment of communities we do business in, since 2015, a strategic focus that aligns our community investments to our core business has been and continues to be entrenched in our methodology through

embracing some of the concepts of Creation of Shared Value (CSV)”.

She added that:

“Our investments in socio-economic development (SED) help us create shared value, fulfil our licence conditions, and promote B-BBEE and corporate governance processes. It also empowers and uplifts the communities we operate in, creates cohesion and ensures we are sustainable. Our focus remains in Education, Sports, Arts and Culture as these areas are core to the business.”

Below is are the primary focus areas that the organization look into to ensure that CSR remains an integral part of the organization’s corporate strategy. This shows how the organization prioritizes corporate social investment and how it benefits the organization and all its stakeholders.

Focus area	Objective	Outcome
Socio-Economic Development (SED) & Corporate Social Investment (CSI) initiatives.	To Implement high impact and measurable projects with shared value for stakeholders involved/affected.	Maximised community socio-economic benefit = upholding Social License to Operate. Compliance with BBBEE Act
Community & Stakeholder Engagement (C&SE)	To foster and cultivate lasting mutually beneficial relations through managing high expectations	Positive Relations = Mutual understanding amongst stakeholders = Trust building & Cohesion = Social stability
Internal Stakeholder Engagement & staff involvement	To improve on internal stakeholder engagements	Social Risk & Impact Management.

Figure 5 [Source for the above table: organization x socio-economic development strategy presentation on stakeholder engagement]

5.2.5 PR practitioners’ understanding of the reflective paradigm and strategic CSR

The reflective paradigm conceptualized by Holmstrom (1996) defines an analytical phenomenon such as the TBL (People, Planet, and Profit), multi-stakeholder dialogue, symmetrical communication, and ethical accounts and poly-values orientation. In addition, it views organisations to impact beyond their financial bottom line and affect other organisations, individuals, and stakeholders in society. PR practitioners who took part in this research were also asked about the role that the reflective paradigm of PR play in their CSR activities and what influence does it have

on their stakeholder approach to CSR. Two of the participants stated the below in their responses:

“The reflective paradigm should play an important role in CSR activities. CSR should be holistic, and that is not essentially about the organisation or its financial bottom line. CSR activities can greatly influence stakeholders’ opinions of an organisation. The more “selfless (on the organisation’s part)” CSR activities appear to be, the more ethical, considerate and relational an organisation is perceived.”

“The Triple Bottom line is still very valid when it comes to CSR activities. All three elements are considered when our organization evaluates activities to get involved in, support NGOs, etc.”

PR practitioners were also asked how their understanding of the reflective paradigm and TBL has shaped their strategic approach to CSR. One of the participants responded by highlighting the stakeholder engagement policy that they have in place, which guides into ensuring that their CSR activities are in line with their business strategy:

“As a group, we have an obligation to our stakeholders to ensure that Community and Stakeholder Engagement (C&SE) forms an integral part of our business strategy. Our C&SE strategy ensures that the environment in which we operate is conducive to business and allows for our business to thrive together with our communities and stakeholders at large. The group aims to achieve its C&SE objectives and create shared value by ensuring that we are:

- transparently and inclusively engage with the communities and stakeholders with whom we interact and deal ;
- determine and where feasible address the most significant issues affecting our stakeholders;
- timeously respond to stakeholder issues and queries;
- continue to build and nurture relationships with surrounding communities through our mutually beneficial and sustainable partnerships.”

It is very gratifying to see that the TBL is being applied/taken into consideration by organisations when they conduct their CSR planning and implementation. It is also good to see that South African PR practitioners drive the approach and ensure that it is actively used in CSR activities.

South African PR practitioners who are involved in the day-to-day operations of CSR activities still perform a portion of the traditional PR role as they have to disseminate CSR information mostly aligned to the social, environmental and governance matters

as a strategy of creating an understanding of how South African organisations engage with their prominent stakeholders. The PR practitioners who were part of this research stated that CSR activities in South Africa are also used as a criterion by investor stakeholders to identify organisations who are “*agents of social change*” as these stakeholders want to be associated with organisations who believe in doing good and engaging with all its contributing stakeholders such as the communities in which they operate.

The PR practitioners provided above understand the importance of stakeholder engagement in CSR planning and implementation. They were then asked to advise on best practices that they could suggest for other organisations to be able to also incorporate stakeholder engagement into their CSR planning and implementation. Their responses were:

It needs to be a way of doing business, links it to your business objectives, has measure KPIs, set budget and timeframes”.

“Stakeholder engagement ensures all stakeholder expectations conform with what managers are ready to offer in terms of CSR initiatives and policies. Highlighted below are a few best practices in my opinion:

- Create CSI capacity within the organisation
- Have a clear focus strategy and focus
- Communicate well
- Define stakeholders broadly and strategically
- Build CSR partnerships- Ability to leverage expertise, skills and resources”.

Not every organization will have the same strategy towards stakeholder engagement, but the few pointers highlighted above can guide and be a starting point for organisations in the early stages of engaging with their stakeholder or early stages of being active in CSR initiatives. The above has proven to have worked for the organisations of the PR practitioners who were involved in this research, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they will work for every organization. It is, however, essential to have a plan in place of how you as an organization will equally engage with stakeholders and how you go about including them in CSR planning and implementation.

5.3 Discussion of findings

The previous section presented the findings from the semi-structured interviews and document analysis conducted with the PR practitioners, which revealed a collective understanding of the importance of stakeholder engagement in CSR planning and implementation. Therefore, the following section will discuss the research findings on PR practitioners conceptualization and approach to stakeholder engagement during CSR planning and execution relevant literature studies in chapter 2 will support this. In addition, relevant literature studies in chapter two will support this. However, the main aim of the discussion of the findings is to answer the main research question.

5.3.1 PR practitioners' conceptualization and approach to stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement has consistently been vital for public relations but has gotten more consideration because of the presentation of real-time media and new hybrid forms of marketing, advertising, public relations, and CSR (Luoma-aho, 2015). The findings of this study revealed that stakeholder engagement had gained more relevance within the context of CSR compared to the past. PR practitioners performing the CSR role or undertaking CSR activities for their organization now consider stakeholder engagement an essential part of CSR and a considerable part of their business strategy. The findings also show that PR practitioners are more inclined to transparency and effective communication with their stakeholders.

Jeffery (2014)'s stakeholder engagement model suggests a proactive two-way communication process between an organisation and its stakeholders. With this process, communication, opinions, and suggestions flow in both directions, ensuring a successful and effective stakeholder engagement process. With the development of technology and digital media, the findings reveal that PR practitioners continuously improve their CSR strategies by ensuring that their stakeholder engagement approach aligns with their overall business strategy. In practice, they provide that their stakeholder engagement plan enforces transparency and two-way communication.

The findings also revealed that organisations/PR practitioners are now considering all their stakeholders to be a critical part of CSR. Practitioners who were part of this study highlighted that their consideration and consultation of the reflective paradigm and TBL approach had assisted them in developing internal CSR plans which were not part of their stakeholder engagement plans. In the past, their main concern was the communities in which they operate and the environment. Still, with the TBL approach emphasising people, planet and profit, they had to relook their strategy to ensure that all three components are at the forefront of their stakeholder approach to CSR.

5.3.2 Importance of engaging with stakeholders during CSR planning and implementation

Stakeholder engagement can be viewed as an organisation's techniques to include invested individuals in business operations positively. Partners' basic system to CSR implies that their commitment can be incorporated into planning significant CSR programs and helping rebuild and reinforcing exercises (Amoako, 2017). Engaging with stakeholders during the planning and implementation of CSR activities could result in the organization being actively involved in initiatives that positively impact the community. Stakeholder engagement helps identify what your stakeholders need and not what you as an organization want for them.

The findings revealed that as much as it is essential to be transparent to your stakeholders, it is also important for the organization to identify the initiatives that involve certain stakeholders. Including all your stakeholders in all activities often doesn't work as some stakeholders may not necessarily be interested in everything being communicated. Still, when an organization identifies what to communicate to which stakeholder, then it is easier for the message to get across to the right stakeholders and to use the right medium that that particular stakeholder understands.

On the other hand, the findings show that communicating with all the stakeholders could assist in carrying out the activities as some stakeholders have specialized capabilities that could assist in carrying out the work. They may not necessarily be involved in CSR activities. Still, their expertise could assist in ensuring that the

organization contributes to its host communities positively. The findings are similar to those of Adongo, Kim, & Elliot (2019), which states that the participation of stakeholders in CSR planning ought to be seen as a customarily useful and community-oriented plan appearing as a 'moral partnership of equals'.

The main objective of stakeholder engagement in CSR is to establish relationships with stakeholders by properly appreciating their opinions and concerns on relevant issues and contributing their perspectives on issues that the organization does not recognize.

5.3.3 Stakeholder engagement as an integral part of CSR

According to Greenwood (2007), stakeholder engagement gives the impression of CSR. It can be understood as practices that the organization assumes to involve positively include stakeholders in organisational activities. The findings revealed that engaging with stakeholders during CSR activities demonstrate the organization as doing good and positively giving back to its host communities. This allows the organization to understand better the needs of the communities in which they operate. Stakeholder engagement also allows the organization to assess where and how they can assist its stakeholders; it can also assist the organization in identifying whether or not its CSR activities are aligned to the business objectives and corporate strategy.

Greenwood (2017) supports these findings by stating that stakeholder involvement acts responsibly towards these stakeholders if an organisation shows commitment through policy and practice. Furthermore, the more an organisation engages with its stakeholders, the more accountable and responsible it is to these stakeholders. Thus, stakeholder engagement plays a crucial role in CSR initiatives. When it is correctly implemented, it assists organisations in understanding their stakeholder needs and the stakeholders to understand the organization's objectives and corporate strategy.

The findings also revealed that it requires a guarantee to effectively engage with stakeholders, pay attention to them, build a relationship with them, and react to their

interests in a commonly helpful manner. Two-way communication plays a big role in ensuring a successful stakeholder engagement between an organization and its stakeholders. For an organization to be regarded as socially responsible, it needs to meet with its stakeholders on equal terms and discuss and develop mutually beneficial outcomes regardless of the stakeholder's background or level of business knowledge. Chen & Zhang (2009) supported these findings when they highlighted that when an organization implements a two-way communication strategy as part of its CRS planning and implementation, it has a great chance of having successful CSR initiatives and a good relationship with its stakeholders.

5.3.4 Approaches to effectively engage with stakeholders during CSR planning

According to Greyson & Hodges (2004), stakeholder engagement is as equally important as all the other business functions. Greyson & Hodges (2004) further states that "Stakeholder engagement should be managed as one would manage any other business function". The engagement with stakeholders ought to be seen as some other business planning process, with adequate investigation, arrangement, execution, reporting, assessment and follow up. The best stakeholder engagement process ought to be iterative, permitting commitment to profit with constant planning, definite detailing, and learning because of proper evaluation and monitoring (Jeffery, 2009).

Jeffery (2009) further states that as more organisations have set up specific divisions to deal with their CSR activities, stakeholder language has gotten all-inclusive all through organisational marketing and public relations materials, attendant with the developing conviction that stakeholders can be fundamental to business performance. The finding revealed that with the growth of CSR in organisations, it has also become imperative for organisations to formulate a stakeholder plan that ensures their CSR activities and success.

The findings have also shown that being a socially responsible organization makes it necessary to have an engagement plan as part of your communication strategy. Stakeholder engagement requires planned two-way communication, which aligns the

organization's objectives and the needs of its stakeholder, particularly its host communities.

The research findings also revealed that a few organisations have stakeholder engagement plans in place. Even though they differ from organization to organization, an organization must have an engagement plan that aligns with its CSR objectives. From the findings, some organisations have specialized departments that focus mainly on stakeholder engagement to ensure that they enforce their stakeholder engagement plan. Due to the importance of stakeholder engagement, new roles have emerged, such as “*stakeholder engagement specialist*” for a large organization. This role is often carried out by PR practitioners who specialise in formulating stakeholder engagement plans and are responsible for disseminating information to the investor stakeholders.

Jeffery (2009) simplified the stakeholder engagement process by adapting Sequeira *et al.* (2007) stakeholder engagement key components to identify the stakeholder process for PR professionals to reference when formulating a stakeholder engagement plan. He states that the engagement isn't straight but instead it is an iterative process where an organisation learns and advances on its capacity to perform significant stakeholder commitment while creating mutual relationships with its stakeholders. The research findings suggest when a stakeholder engagement approach is in place, it ensures that engagement and interventions align with the organization's CSR strategy.

5.3.5 Socially responsible organisations

As many of us understand that for organisations to survive and prosper, they need to make a profit, but that's not all; over the years, organisations have come to realize that they need to do much more to survive and gain the respect of their stakeholders especially the communities in which they operate. They need to be perceived as good neighbours and good corporate citizens and not just businesses, which is why many organisations introduce the CSR function to ensure that they do good for their stakeholders and their host communities. In South Africa, the King Report on corporate governance guide organization to become ethical and responsible citizens.

The research findings highlighted organizational efforts to becoming socially responsible. Most organisations have different approaches, and each approach has its purpose. These organisations identify what they stand for and seek to align their values with their host communities to be regarded as socially responsible. The findings also revealed that PR practitioners understand the role of CSR for an organisation, and the responsibility lies within them to ensure that the organization is engaging with all its stakeholders and is doing well for its surrounding communities.

The research findings also uncovered that for an organization to be socially responsible, it needs to ensure that it has a stakeholder engagement plan in place, which will assist in identifying the stakeholder needs and providing that those align with the objectives and overall business strategy. Being a good corporate citizen takes more than just donating money, food, clothes etc., under the assumption that the host communities need those. Stephenson (2016) states that strong moral and ethical standards guide an excellent corporate citizen in everyday interactions with clients, investors, and employees. That includes cautiously balancing investors' necessities with those of the community and continually thinking about the ecological effect of the business tasks.

The findings also revealed that being socially responsible means knowing and understanding all stakeholders and giving great consideration to the planet. It was also discovered that many South African corporations are progressively working with stakeholders to comprehend their perspectives and concerns on various ecological, social, corporate governance and financial issues to join and address those perspectives and concerns in the organisational strategic decision-making processes. The research finding also highlighted that PR practitioners use the reflective paradigm of PR in their CSR planning and implementation to ensure that their CSR strategies align with the TBL approach.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the data analysis and the findings obtained from the applied data collection methods. The results show that stakeholder engagement is a crucial

part of CSR and should form part of an organization's corporate strategy as per all the other business activities. It should be aligned with the organization's objectives and properly planned out and executed as carefully as possible.

The research shows that in South Africa, organisations are slowly implementing stakeholder engagement strategies for CSR concerning the TBL approach by John Elkington (1994) and the stakeholder engagement process by Jeffery (2009). Importantly, investor stakeholders use stakeholder engagement strategies and CSR activities as a criterion to invest in organisations. Consequently, it has become vastly important for PR practitioners to work with or perform the role of Socio-Economic Development (SED) specialists to ensure that stakeholder engagement plans are put in place and that all stakeholders are included in CSR activities.

This demonstrates that the theoretical frame of the study as derived from the Reflective paradigm of PR (Susan Holmstrom, 1996), Stakeholder Approach to CSR (Freeman, 1984), and the TBL approach (John Elkington, 1994) have positive implications on PR practitioners' efforts of engaging with stakeholders for CSR from a South African standpoint. It is also clear that the two-way communication process plays a fundamental role in the stakeholder engagement process, even though most of that communication is controlled by the organization as they are the ones who establish the CSR initiatives for their host communities. Some of these organisations recognise the feedback and contribution of the communities to their organizational success.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the key findings to the research questions and discusses the theoretical implications of the study. Finally, this section draws this exploration to an end, presenting the critical bits of knowledge gathered from the investigation.

The study's main objective was to understand how PR practitioners in South Africa conceptualize the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR. The study further evaluated whether or not PR practitioners' view stakeholder engagement as an integral part of CSR. Finally, the study also assessed the extent to which two-way communication contributes to stakeholder engagement strategies.

This chapter concludes this study by returning to the research questions set out in chapter one to establish if the study provided answers to the research questions posed and fulfilled the primary research objective. Furthermore, this chapter reflects on the study's limitations and identifies areas for further research that could offer extended views to the role played by stakeholder engagement in CSR. The research questions highlighted in chapter one of the study were:

- a) What are PR practitioners understanding of strategic CSR?
- b) Do PR practitioners consider stakeholder engagement to be a significant part of CSR?
- c) What do PR practitioners perceive to be the specific role of stakeholders in CSR planning?
- d) What do PR practitioners suggest to be the best practice for organisations to incorporate stakeholder engagement in their CSR planning & implementation?

6.2 Summary of the findings

In an effort of uncovering the importance of stakeholder engagement in CSR within a South African context, the researcher interviewed PR practitioners who are actively involved in the day-to-day activities of CSR to understand how they conceptualize the role of stakeholder engagement in CSR. As a result, the interviews, stakeholder

engagement processes discussed in chapter five emerged and assisted in answering the research questions.

6.2.1 PR practitioners' understanding of strategic CSR

The findings revealed that PR practitioners share a common understanding of the strategic role of CSR. It was mentioned that CSR has is now used as a strategic tool to attract investors, and when its well-executed, the higher the chances for an organization to be viewed as socially responsible. Being a good corporate citizen is no longer a “nice to have.” To remain a responsible, competitive, and profitable company, it's a “must-have” and CSR's strategic role.

The research finding revealed that CSR is a significant business activity that organisations should ensure they include in their overall corporate strategy. Porter & Kramer (2002) state that “*Most companies feel compelled to give to charity. Few have figured out how to do it well*”. Strategic CSR is not about handouts. It's about engaging with stakeholders to understand their needs better and ensuring that those are in line with the organization's objectives.

Many organisations have become more “socially responsible”; however, they all have their different approaches and end-goal. Some organisations are socially responsible for organizational benefits such as brand image, financial performance and public relations. While some do it for ethical reasons (because it's the right thing to do), they understand that giving back is not just about giving money. It's about ensuring that the money makes a positive difference. As previously mentioned in chapter 5, some organisations are being socially responsible for their financial gain. They are aware investor stakeholders will most likely invest in a company that is perceived as a good corporate citizen.

Werther and Chandler (2006) state that “Strategic CSR is the incorporation of a holistic CSR perspective within a firm's strategic planning and core operations so that the firm is managed in the interest of a broad set of stakeholders to achieve maximum economic and social value over the medium to long term”. The findings also revealed that when CSR is an integral part of an organization's corporate

strategy, it is also a way of maintaining the legitimacy of its host communities' actions by bringing stakeholders' concerns to the foreground.

6.2.2 Stakeholder engagement as a significant part of CSR

Stakeholder engagement can be understood as practices that the organisation assumes to involve stakeholders positively in organisational activities such as CSR, PR, Marketing etc. This research reveals that stakeholder engagement is an organisational process that should be included in CSR planning and implementation and overall business activities. As part of CSR, stakeholder engagement can contribute to the business in both a negative and positive manner. The stakeholder engagement process is built on two-way communication aspects. When the stakeholder engagement plan is not well-executed, the engagement may have negative outcomes as the messages being communicated get distorted or misinterpreted.

For stakeholder engagement to be successful in CSR, it needs to be well-executed and aligned with the organization's objectives. Heath (2006) states CSR requires proactive preparation and administration to work well and adequately and satisfies and surpasses expectancies for stakeholders and investors. The findings reveal that in South Africa, stakeholder engagement has become a vital force for encouraging CSR.

Inside CSR, stakeholder engagement plays a crucial role in ensuring that its stakeholders have long-lasting mutual relationships. Stakeholder engagement also actively assists when organisations plan CSR activities. The research findings showed that engaging with stakeholders during CSR planning is a good business practice. An organization needs to identify the planning phase to engage with stakeholders and identify which stakeholders to engage with for a particular project (Jeffery, 2009). Hamid, Haron & Amran (2017) argue that organisations are likely to confront a circumstance where a disparity of needs between authoritative choices and stakeholder anticipations will happen without drawing in stakeholders or taking their interest in CSR evaluations.

6.2.3 Specific roles of stakeholders in CSR planning

The research findings highlighted stakeholder inclusivity, which is another important aspect when discussing CSR planning. The results of this research revealed that PR practitioners recognize the role of stakeholders in CSR planning; they highlighted that it is essential that they include their stakeholders during the planning and implementation of CSR to ensure that they address the real stakeholder needs. It was also mentioned that stakeholders also play a role in contributing knowledge that drives the organization's success.

Stakeholders are the ones that make CSR possible for most organisations, starting from internal employees who research, plan and execute CSR initiatives to communities who receive these initiatives and support the organization's objective. Stakeholders play a crucial role in ensuring that the CSR plan is well executed and that communication about CSR initiatives is communicated to all the other stakeholders.

6.2.4 Best practices for organisations to incorporate stakeholder engagement in their CSR planning & implementation

From the findings of this research, it was revealed that some organisations recognise CSR as humanitarian exercises while others see it as an essential segment in a cutthroat world. Lindgreen (2007) states that organisations have started to focus more on socially responsible practices as of late as stakeholders are becoming progressively mindful about organisational entities' ethical strategies.

The research findings revealed that not every organization would have the same strategy in integrating stakeholder engagement into their CSR planning and implementation. However, the PR practitioners who were part of this study highlighted a few pointers which can be used as a starting point to incorporating stakeholders:

- Align stakeholder engagement strategy to the organization's objectives.
- Identify a team within the organization to specialize in all CSR activities.
- Formulate a clear strategy.
- Open internal and external communication channels.
- Define stakeholders broadly and strategically

- Build CSR partnerships

6.3 Recommendations

PR professionals involved in this study didn't quite tap into whether stakeholders are using two-way communications as a communication stream for stakeholder engagement. It remains unclear whether or not stakeholders are engaging with organisations regarding their CSR activities or needs. The study recommends that PR/CSR practitioners open communication platforms that stakeholders can use to address their needs and suggest CSR initiatives. PR practitioners should ensure that both parties (organization and stakeholders) effectively use the two-way communication stream to ensure that CSR activities succeed. The current research doesn't reveal how stakeholders communicate with the organisations. It indicates that communication during CSR planning and implementation is one-way even though the stakeholder engagement process suggests that two-way communication be applied.

The two-way symmetrical communication enables regular interaction between an organization and its stakeholders. Therefore, PR practitioners need to open lines of communication for stakeholders to address their needs. They also need to communicate with stakeholders not only when they want to conduct CSR activities but check in on their stakeholders regularly to build long term mutual relationships.

6.4 Recommendations from PR practitioners

The PR practitioners involved in this study were asked to share their recommendations on how other PR practitioners could effectively engage with their stakeholders during CSR planning & implementation. These are some of their recommendations:

“When dealing with CSR, it is essential for one to understand the codes of conducts set out in the King Reports on corporate governance. These provide standard principles that organisations in South Africa should conform to. In addition, understanding the King reports makes it easier to understand the importance of effectively engaging with all stakeholders as the guidelines provide the basis for one to plan out their CSR activities”.

“Effectively engaging with stakeholders not only means providing a two-way communication platform but rather strategizing on what to communicate and who to communicate to, stakeholders feel appreciated when they are given a chance to provide their opinions towards a certain hence it is important to consult with them before making final decisions on issues that impact them”.

One of the PR practitioners highlighted that “there is a huge gap or misinterpretation of the role of the triple bottom when it comes to CSR. It is only understood in the planning of CSR activities; however, it is not 100% carried out in practice. So researchers should provide a bit of context as to how important this theory is in local CSR practises”.

6.5 Areas for further research

The findings provided stakeholder engagement approaches for CSR. There is a need for further research on the impact of two-way symmetrical communication in implementing stakeholder engagement during CSR planning. The research findings revealed that for stakeholder engagement to play out in CSR fully, there is a need for clear communication to address stakeholder needs and the organization's corporate strategy and objectives.

The researcher also acknowledges the need to conduct this study using a larger sample of PR practitioners to expand the findings of this research. An increase in the sample group could provide adequate validity of the results. In addition, it will assist in gaining further insights on the conceptualization of stakeholder engagement in CSR in a South African context.

In conclusion, there is also an opportunity to examine how organisations engage with their stakeholders during uncertain times, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. This research could be expanded to investigate how organisations use social media platforms to communicate their corporate strategies and use social media to build and maintain relationships with their stakeholders.

6.6 Limitations of the study

In academic studies, limitations have always been a norm, and this research is no exception as it faced its fair share of limitations. For this study, the most significant limitation ascended during the data collection phase, particularly the access to the participants of this study proved to be a challenge. PR practitioners, especially those working on both CSR and PR concurrently, generally work with tight deadlines and rarely have time for personal meetings or responding to the thousands of emails they get from media and other stakeholders. It proved to be the biggest challenge for this study; ten PR practitioners were approached, with six as CSR professionals and four as traditional PR practitioners; only four responded with positive feedback and offered their time to participate in this study. Covid-19 also contributed to the lack of response from the participants as many people worldwide had a hard time adjusting to the pandemic. Many of them had to adapt to the new normal, which meant new ways of working and dealing with anxiety affected by the pandemic.

The study had to take a shift and use a triangulation method to ensure sufficient validity of the research and provide comprehensive findings. Then a study was then conducted using a smaller sample of PR practitioners, which makes it uneasy for the researcher to neither claim the validity nor generalise the findings of other touch-points. However, the researcher ensured that the study's conclusions are linked to the study's existing literature and theoretical framework.

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