

The Importance of Corporate Social Responsibility in Recruitment: Between Saying and Doing

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Abstract

This paper represents a study on the relation between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and recruitment. A survey was conducted among HRM staff investigating attitude and practices in recruitment for middle and higher management, in relation to CSR. Concomitantly, texts of job advertisements for middle and higher management positions were analyzed for mentions of CSR-related terms in the job description, job requirements and company self-description. The survey results show that HRM staff considers CSR important in all aspects of job recruitment. However, the analysis of job advertisements shows very little attention for CSR, except in the company self-description related to equal opportunities and diversity. The HRM staff survey shows that HRM staff finds CSR more relevant for higher than for middle management positions. However, in the job advertisements, there was little difference between middle and higher management in this respect.

Keywords

Corporate Responsibility, Human Resource, Management, Human Resource Management, Corporate Social Responsibility, Recruitment & Selection, Performance Appraisal System, Stakeholders

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsible management (CSR) is defined by the UN Global Compact as corporate measures that “align strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption, and take actions that advance societal goals” (United Nations, n.d.-a). These societal goals are summarized in the 17 UN Social Development Goals (SDGs), covering a wide range of topics varying from hunger to responsible production (United

Nations, n.d.-b). The European Commission (2001) defines CSR as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis”.

Though CSR and its precursor concepts have been discussed in academics, business, and society since at least the 60s of the last century (e.g. Friedman, 1970) the phenomenon of investing based on the CSR policy of company increased strongly only in the second half of the second decennium of this century. For instance, from 2016 to 2020, the assets managed by US Exchange-Traded Funds (ETFs) specifically focusing on companies with a strong CSR policy (ESG ETFs) increased by a factor of over 15 (Wagner & Ballentine, 2020).

Critics of the idea of CSR point out that any allocation of corporate resources towards goals that are not directly related to supporting or increasing the company's profitability will lead to a reduction of the company's competitiveness, as famously stated by Milton Friedman (Friedman, 1970, 2009). However, there is no general trend from the literature that shows that companies applying stricter CSR standards are functioning worse in economic terms (such as profitability) than companies with a lower level of CSR effort. On the contrary, evidence shows that CSR involvement tends to be positive for company performance (Brooks & Oikonomou, 2018; Friede et al., 2015; Gerard, 2019). The mechanisms proposed for this seemingly paradoxical result are complex. Vishwanathan et al. (2020) list four mechanisms: 1) enhancing firm reputation, 2) increasing stakeholder reciprocity, 3) mitigating firm risk, and 4) strengthening innovation capacity.

Potential beneficial effects of CSR on company performance can occur via several functions of human resource management (HRM). Various studies confirm the positive effect of CSR on job satisfaction (Ahmad et al., 2020; Bao, 2020), employee loyalty (Ahmad et al., 2020; Stojanovic et al., 2020), employees' trust in the organization (Thu et al., 2020), employees' commitment (George et al., 2020; Uçkun et al., 2020) and staff retention (Kim et al., 2020). CSR is an important factor in employer branding¹ (Özcan & Elçi, 2020).

Owen (2020) concludes that both HRM professionals and CSR professionals are unaware of the potential synergies between the two fields. He also states that the intersection of HRM and CSR offers significant untapped opportunities for advancing CSR, driving profitability, and boosting organizational resilience.

One key requirement to take fuller advantage of the positive effect of CSR in HRM is to communicate the company's CSR efforts effectively. Benitez et al. (2020) confirm the positive effect of CSR on the employer brand but stress the importance of efficient communication of the CSR efforts through, for instance, social media and communication of CSR efforts makes companies more attractive to millennial job seekers (Waples & Brachle, 2020).

The background for the present investigation is testing the notion that the

¹Employer branding is the process of managing and influencing a company's reputation as an employer among job seekers, employees and key stakeholders. It encompasses everything a company does to position itself as an employer of choice. The employer brand is the company's reputation as an employer.

positive effect of CSR on company performance can, in part, be explained by the observed synergy between CSR and HRM. For CSR to have a positive effect on HRM, HRM staff needs to be aware of CSR and its importance, and companies need to communicate their CSR efforts to employees and potential employees. In this paper, we specifically investigate the importance companies attach to CSR related to the HRM function of recruitment.

The research comprised two parts. In a survey, we investigated the attitude of HRM staff towards CSR, specifically for the recruitment function. Second, we investigated recent job advertisements for the mention of company CSR and for requirements of applicants for qualification in or experience with CSR.

Hypothesis development

The main hypothesis of this research is that companies are aware of the potential benefit of CSR for their employer brand and will try to capitalize on their CSR efforts in order to boost their chances of attracting more and highly qualified applicants for job openings. Second, we expect CSR is more important for higher management positions than for middle management positions, because introduction of CSR in companies will be a top-down process from the higher management towards the rest of the organization.

We investigated the awareness of companies using the survey among HRM staff, while the effort to capitalize on company CSR efforts was investigated using textual analysis of recent job advertisements.

The specific hypotheses generated for the survey were:

Hypothesis 1: HRM staff is aware of the potential benefit of CSR to attract more and highly qualified applicants.

Hypothesis 2: HRM staff will show that CSR qualifications and/or experience are important elements of job requirements for middle and higher management.

The specific hypotheses generated for the textual analysis of job advertisements were:

Hypothesis 3: Companies will mention their CSR efforts in their self-description of job advertisements.

Hypothesis 4: Companies will include CSR qualifications or experience with CSR in the candidate requirements.

Hypotheses on the difference between higher and middle management positions:

Hypothesis 5: Companies will consider CSR to be more important for higher management positions than for middle management positions.

Hypothesis 5a HRM staff will report that, in the recruiting process, CSR is more important for higher management than for middle management.

Hypothesis 5b Job advertisements for higher management will mention CSR and related terms more than job advertisements for middle management.

2. Method & Data Collection

2.1. Sampling Methods

The sample of companies for the survey

Questionnaires were distributed, and answers collected via Google forms. No personal data of respondents were requested or included in the data collection process. Questionnaires were sent out related either to recruitment for higher management for middle management positions. In total, 250 questionnaires were distributed and 124 answers were received, 64 for the category “middle management” and 60 for the category “higher management”. The overall response rate was 49.6%.

Job advertisements were sampled on the LinkedIn website (<https://www.linkedin.com/>) using the following selection criteria:

- Jobs were classified as either for middle or higher management (classification by the LinkedIn website).
- Jobs advertisements were in English language.
- The job advertisements were posted in 2021.
- Job positions were for commercial companies. Jobs for governmental organizations and non-profit organizations were excluded.
- Companies posting the job advertisements were in the European Economic Area or the USA.

The sample size for the job advertisement sample was 500 job advertisements for the category “middle management” and 500 job advertisements for the category “higher management”. Job advertisements were randomly sampled from job advertisements on the LinkedIn website that fulfilled the criteria mentioned above.

2.2. Survey Method

An online survey was conducted targeting higher and middle management HRM officers from 250 randomly selected medium- and large-sized companies in the European Economic Area and the USA. The survey contained questions on the actual importance of CSR in the recruitment strategy of the companies and questions on the view of the HRM staff related to the importance of CSR in recruitment processes. Two different questionnaires were sent out to the two different segments. The questions were identical, but for the target of the recruitment process. One set referred to recruitment for middle management positions, while the other set referred to recruitment for higher management positions. The questions used in the survey were:

Question 1: In your last recruitment (job ad) for middle (higher) management, did you ask for qualification in or experience with CSR?

Answer options: yes, no, I don't know.

Question 2: In your last recruitment (job ad) for middle (higher) management, did you refer to CSR activities or the CSR philosophy of your company?

Answer options: yes, no, I don't know.

Question 3: Do you think that asking for qualification in or experience with CSR would attract more or better qualified candidates for middle (higher) management positions in your company?

Answer option: 5-point Likert scale.

Question 4: Do you think that presenting your company as actively involved in CSR would attract more or better qualified candidates for middle (higher) management vacancies in your company?

Answer option: 5-point Likert scale.

Question 5: Would qualification in or experience with CSR improve the chances of a candidate for a middle (higher) management position in your company?

Answer option: 5-point Likert scale.

Question 6: How important do you think CSR is presently in the recruitment policies of your company for middle (higher) management positions?

Answer option: 5-point Likert scale.

Question 7: How important do you think CSR should be in the recruitment policies of your company for middle (higher) management positions?

Answer option: 5-point Likert scale.

Question 8: If you would like to share any thoughts or remarks on the survey and/or its topic, please do so here.

Answer option: free text.

2.3. Textual Analysis of Job Advertisements

Texts from advertisements on LinkedIn were collected and subdivided into 3 sections: job description, requirements for candidates, and company self-description. The sections were analyzed separately for the presence or absence of terms related to the fields: Environmental impact (E), Social impact (S) and corporate Governance (G). This subdivision is used in the most common ranking systems for the CSR effort of companies: ESG ranking (e.g. Mooij, 2017).

2.4. Data Processing

Data from the survey were analyzed for the effect of the factor “job level” (higher or middle management), using the Chi-square test for question 1 - 2 (answering options: “yes”, “no”, and “I don’t know”). ANOVA was used to analyze the effect of “job level” for question 3 - 8 (Likert scale data).

Data from the textual analysis of the job advertisements were analyzed for the effect of the factor “job level” (higher or middle management) on the presence or absence of mentions for the categories “Environmental”, “Social” and “Governance” in the different sections of the advertisements, using Fisher’s exact test.

Statistical analysis was performed with XLStat statistical software for Microsoft Excel (<https://www.xlstat.com>).

3. Data Analysis & Results

The results of question 1: “*In your last recruitment (job ad) for middle/higher management, did you ask for qualification in or experience with CSR?*” are

represented in **Figure 1**. The answers show that a significantly higher proportion of job advertisements for higher management had requirements for qualification in or experience with CSR (78% for “higher management” vs. 42% for “middle management”).

The results of question 2: “*In your last recruitment (job ad) for middle/higher management, did you refer to CSR activities or the CSR philosophy of your company?*” are represented in **Figure 2**. The answers show that a significantly higher proportion of job advertisements for higher management mentioned company CSR (68% for “higher management” vs. 47% for “middle management”).

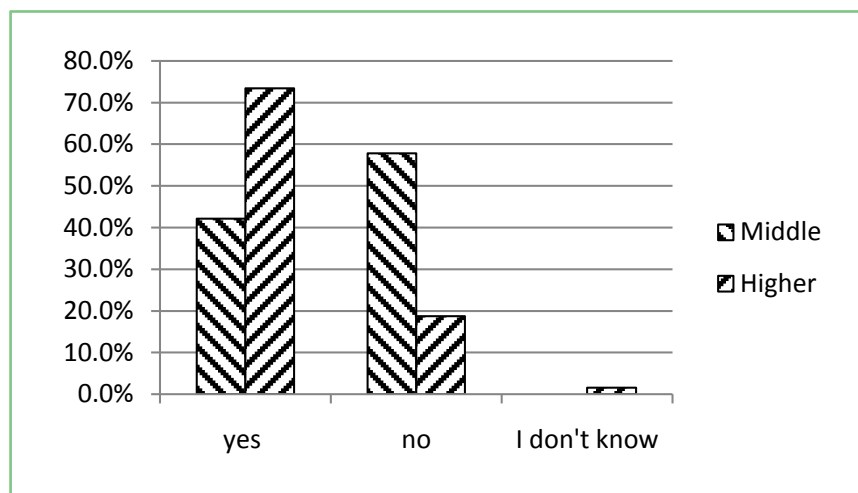


Figure 1. Response to question 1: “In your last recruitment (job ad) for middle/higher management, did you ask for qualification in or experience with CSR?” for the job levels middle and higher management. The effect of job level is significant (Chi-square test, $p < 0.0001$).

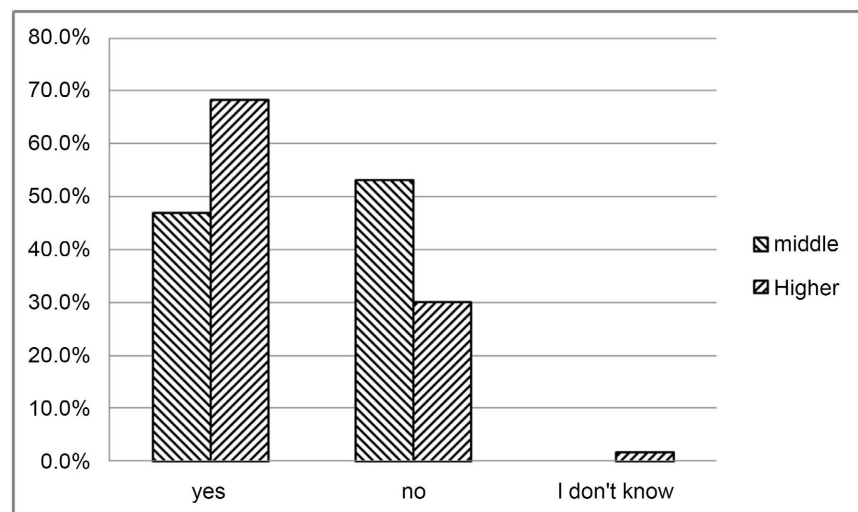


Figure 2. Response to question 2: In your last recruitment (job ad) for middle/higher management, did you make reference to CSR activities or the CSR philosophy of your company? The effect of job level is significant (Chi-square test, $p = 0.014$).

The results of question 3: “Do you think that asking for qualification in or experience with CSR would attract more or better qualified candidates for middle/higher management positions in your company?” is represented in **Figure 3**. The answers show that the surveyed HRM staff thinks that asking for CSR qualifications is effective in recruitment for both middle and higher management positions, but more so in recruitment for higher management positions.

The results of question 4: “Do you think that presenting your company as actively involved in CSR would attract more or better qualified candidates for middle/higher management vacancies in your company?” is represented in **Figure 4**. The answers show that the surveyed HRM staff thinks that presenting a company as actively involved in CSR would attract more or better qualified candidates without difference for middle and higher management positions.

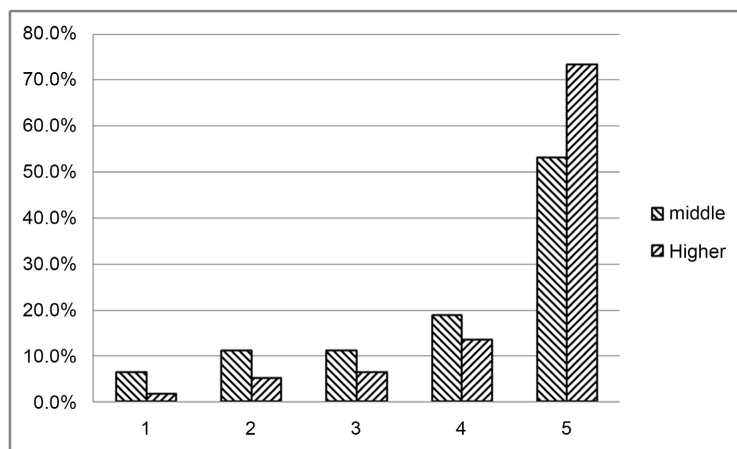


Figure 3. Response to question 3: “Do you think that asking for qualification in or experience with CSR would attract more or better qualified candidates for middle/higher management positions in your company?”. The differences between the answers for “middle management” and “higher management” are significant (ANOVA: $p = 0.016$). Likert scale: 1 = “certainly no” – 5 = “certainly yes”.

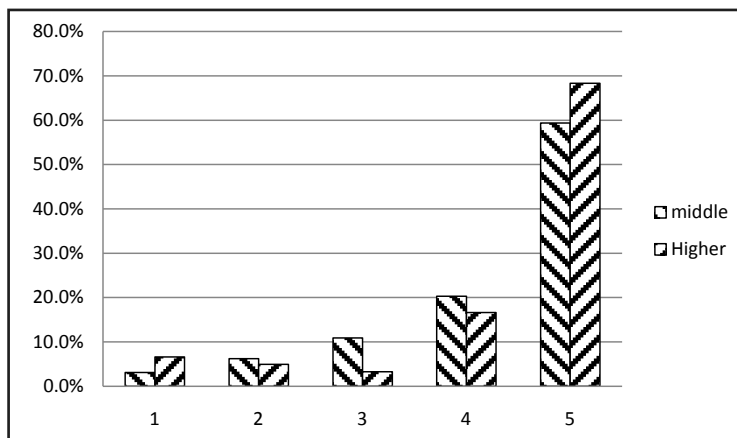


Figure 4. Response to question 4: “Do you think that presenting your company as actively involved in CSR would attract more or better qualified candidates for middle/higher management vacancies in your company?”. The differences between the answers to “middle management” and “higher management” are not significant (ANOVA: $p = 0.68$).

The response to question 5: “Would qualification in or experience with CSR improve the chances of a candidate for a middle/higher management position in your company?” is represented in **Figure 5**. The answers show that the surveyed HRM staff thinks that qualification in or experience with CSR would increase the chances of hiring for job candidates, without a difference for middle and higher management positions.

The response to question 6: “How important do you think CSR is presently in the recruitment policies of your company for middle/higher management positions?” is represented in **Figure 6**. The answers show that the most of the surveyed HRM staff think CSR presently is important, without difference between middle and higher management positions.

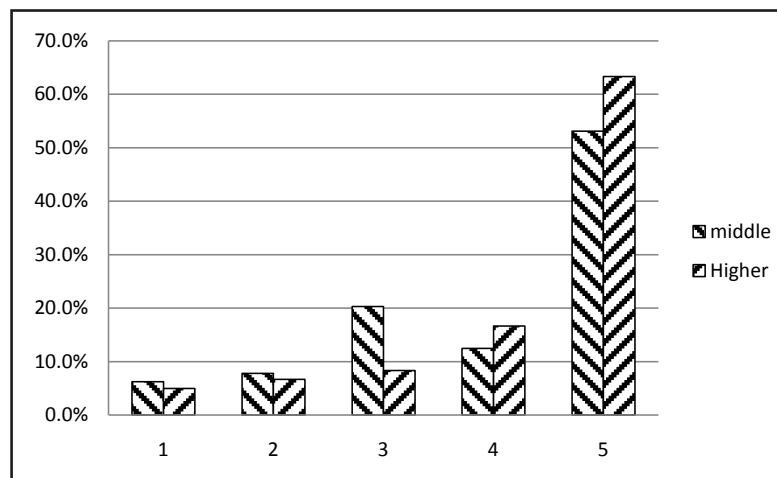


Figure 5. Response to question 5: “Would qualification in or experience with CSR improve the chances of a candidate for a middle/higher management position in your company?” The differences between the answers for “middle management” and “higher management” are not significant (ANOVA: $p = 0.20$).

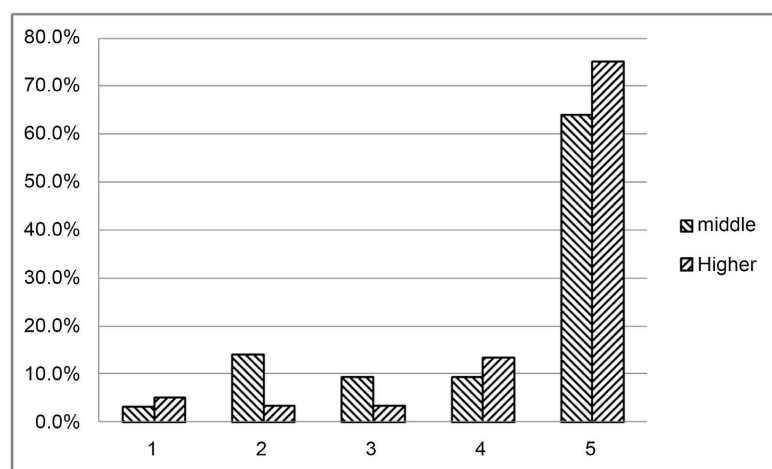


Figure 6. Response to question 6: “How important do you think CSR is presently in the recruitment policies of your company for middle/higher management positions?” The differences between the answers for “middle management” and “higher management” are not significant (ANOVA: $p = 0.12$).

The response to question 7: “How important do you think CSR should be in the recruitment policies of your company for middle/higher management positions?” is represented in **Figure 7**. The answers show that the most of the surveyed HRM staff thinks CSR should be important, without difference between middle and higher management positions. Comparison with the results for question 6 shows that the present importance of CSR in company recruitment is close to the way the surveyed HRM staff thinks it should be, with only a relatively small shift between the present situation and the desired situation for the category “middle management”.

The answers to question 8: “If you would like to share any thoughts or remarks on the survey and/or its topic, please do so here.” were mostly absent. The following answers were recorded:

“We are a sustainability consulting firm and therefore put a lot of emphasis on experience and qualifications related to sustainability.” (Respondent middle management category).

“A good company must present itself as CSR active.” (Respondent middle management category).

“When a company presents itself as an active company that involved in CSR, It will surely attract better candidates to be hired for higher management.” (Respondent higher management category).

“CSR is very crucial, the company must integrate the social and environmental concern in their business. It is very important”. (Respondent higher management category).

Textual Analysis of Job Advertisements

The total number of CSR-related mentions is much higher in the company self-description section of job advertisements than in the two other sections (see **Table 1**). The fundamental difference between the various sections of the job advertisements is caused by the large number of mentions of Governance in the section of company self-description, which were mostly related to equal employment and company diversity policies (see **Table 4**).

The number of job advertisements mentioning E, S or G in the sections “job description” and “job requirements” was low, and there were no differences between advertisements for middle and higher management positions (see **Table 2** and **Table 3**).

Table 1. Number of job advertisements (out of 1000 sampled advertisements) that mention CSR-related terms in sections of the job advertisement: job description, job requirements and company self-description. Numbers labeled with different letters are significantly different ($p < 0.05$, Fisher’s exact test).

Section of advertisement	CSR mentions
Job description	23a
Job requirements	7a
Company self-description	493b

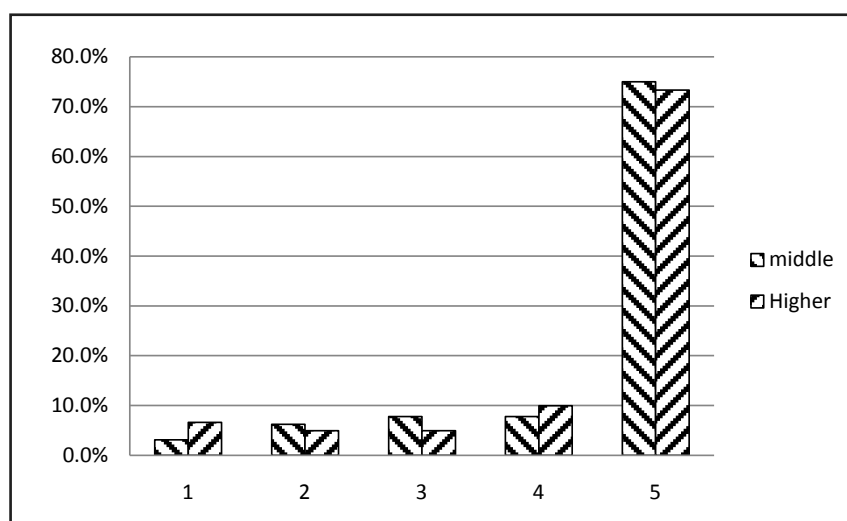


Figure 7. Response to question 7: “How important do you think CSR should be in the recruitment policies of your company for middle/higher management positions?” The differences between the answers for “middle management” and “higher management” are not significant (ANOVA: $p = 0.74$).

Table 2. Job advertisements on LinkedIn mentioning terms related to environment (E), social impact (S) and company governance (G) in the job description section of the advertisement. 500 job advertisements were sampled in the category “middle management” and 500 job advertisements were sampled in the category “higher management”. There was no significant difference in mentions between the middle and higher management categories.

	E	S	G
Middle management	3	1	8
Higher management	4	4	3

Table 3. Job advertisements on LinkedIn mentioning terms related to environment (E), social impact (S) and company governance (G) in the job requirements section of the advertisement. 500 job advertisements were sampled in the category “middle management” and 500 job advertisements were sampled in the category “higher management”. There was no significant difference in mentions between the middle and higher management categories.

	E	S	G
Middle management	2	1	4
Higher management	0	0	0

The numbers of E, S and G mentions in the section “company self-description” were higher than in the job-related sections of the job advertisements. The highest number of mentions was found for G, which were mostly related to equal employment and company diversity policies. The difference between advertisements for middle and higher management for G was significantly different, but not for the number of E and S mentions (see **Table 4**).

Table 4. Job advertisements on LinkedIn mentioning terms related to environment (E), social impact (S) and company governance (G) in the company self-description section of the advertisement. 500 job advertisements were sampled in the category “middle management” and 500 job advertisements were sampled in the category “higher management”. Numbers labeled with different letters are significantly different ($p < 0.05$, Fisher’s exact test).

	E	S	G
Middle management	22	19	190a
Higher management	15	13	234a

4. Discussions

The results show that the surveyed HRM staff is mostly aware of the importance of CSR in the recruitment process and HRM staff also shows that CSR qualifications and/or experience are important elements of job requirements for middle and higher management. Our results therefore support hypothesis 1 and 2. Hypothesis 3, stating that companies will mention their CSR efforts in their self-description of job advertisements, is partly supported by the results. While CSR mentions are most frequent in the company self-description section of the job advertisements studied, these mentions concern mostly the equal opportunity and diversity policy of the company, and mentions related to E and S are much rarer. Hypothesis 4, stating that companies will include CSR qualifications or experience with CSR in the job requirements, is clearly falsified by the analysis of the job advertisements. However, the HRM staff surveyed answered that CSR qualifications and/or experience were present in the job requirements in many recent job ads. This clearly contradicts the results of the job advertisement analysis. HRM staff reported that, sometimes, CSR is more important in the recruitment process for higher management than for middle management, for instance, in mentioning CSR in the job requirements and in the company’s self-description. This supports hypothesis 5a. However, the difference between the middle and higher management categories for CSR mentions in the job advertisements is small. Only the mention of corporate governance in the self-description section of the job advertisement studied showed a difference between the middle and higher management categories. This result falsifies hypothesis 5b.

The survey results show that awareness of the importance of CSR in the recruitment process is high among HRM staff, with indications that HRM staff thinks this importance is higher for higher management positions than for middle management positions. Overall, HRM staff finds it important to present the company’s CSR efforts and shows that candidates with CSR experience or qualification will have a better chance of being selected for a middle or higher management position. HRM staff finds that the present role of CSR in job recruitment is close to the situation as it should be. These results contradict the findings of Owen (2020) who concludes that both HRM professionals and CSR professionals are unaware of the potential synergies between the two fields. A po-

tential explanation of this contradiction could be that the present research concerned itself with a specific aspect of HRM, viz. recruitment, while Owen's research covered HRM as a whole. Therefore, the difference between Owen's and our results may come from other fields of HRM, such as staff training.

The textual analysis of job advertisements showed a different picture than the outcome of the survey. Overall, mention of CSR was infrequent, except in the company's self-description. For instance, in question 1 in the survey 42% and 73% of HRM staff showed that qualification in or experience with CSR was part of the job requirements in job advertisements for, respectively, middle and higher management. However, in the job advertisements analyzed, CSR-related requirements were found only in 1.4% and 0% of the job advertisements, for respectively middle and higher management positions. Similar discrepancies occurred between the answers to other survey questions and the results of the textual analysis of job advertisements. Only in the section "company self-description" resulted from the textual analysis closer to the answers of the surveyed HRM staff (see [Figure 2](#) and [Table 1](#)).

The textual analysis of the job advertisements shows CSR is not an important factor in the actual recruitment process, at least not at the level of advertising a job. The only frequent mention of CSR was in the company's self-description, mostly relating to equal opportunity and diversity policy.

The difference between the answers from HRM staff in the survey and the analysis of job advertisements is striking, even for the survey question that asked whether CSR qualifications were required in the last job advertisement for higher or middle management posted by the company. The conclusion is that the HRM staff in our research is over-representing the level of importance of CSR in the recruitment process. As seen from the analysis of many job advertisements, the importance of CSR in the recruitment process is low.

It would seem an obvious strategy for companies to strengthen their CSR effort and reap the benefits of a good CSR policy ([Vishwanathan et al., 2020](#)) by hiring managers that are qualified in or experienced with CSR. Although this study shows that HRM staff is aware of the potential of this strategy, in the practice of recruitment, we see little evidence of this. While it is possible to communicate a company's CSR efforts and philosophy via other channels such as social media ([Benitez et al., 2020](#)), job advertisements seem an obvious channel to communicate company CSR, which is presently under-used.

5. Conclusion

The survey results indicate that HRM staff considers CSR important in all aspects of job recruitment, including employer branding and attracting highly qualified candidates for middle and higher management positions. However, this opinion of HRM staff does not translate to job advertisements aimed at selecting CSR-aware candidates. Companies don't optimally use their CSR efforts or CSR policy as a tool for employer branding in job advertisements. The overall con-

clusion is that there is quite a gap between what HRM staff says about CSR and what companies do related to CSR in the recruitment process. This way, companies seem to miss out on a good way to strengthen their CSR, by putting emphasis on hiring CSR-competent and CSR-aware managers.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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