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Exploring the CSR Leadership Competencies that contribute to successful sustainable development in South Africa

A research article submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration

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[31, March 2024]

DECLARATION

I, Chanell Oliphant declare that this research article is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the Graduate School of Business Administration, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.



Signed at Centurion, Gauteng

On the 31 March 2024

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

B-BBEE	Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment
CSI	Corporate Social Investment
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ESG	Environmental Social and Governance
NDP	National Development Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved from ad-hoc giving towards strategic sustainable focus projects, with many organisations creating departments or CSR-focused positions. However, critiques abound regarding the sustainability of CSR projects aimed at social change and uplifting, and industry thought leaders acknowledge a skills shortage or deficit in South Africa. For sustainable CSR, it is necessary to understand the competencies required by CSR professionals and how the competencies contribute towards sustainable CSR. Thus, the study explored what functional, social, and cognitive, competencies CSR professionals need to manage and execute CSR initiatives for practical, sustainable development through CSR, applying the holistic managerial competency model. Data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews, with 18 CSR professionals. The study found that, in practice, CSR professionals employ various competencies integratively. Social competency elements that understand the context to navigate social dynamics and positively impact collaboration and cognitive competencies elements that support a development mindset in CSR are needed. Functional competency elements enable managing projects, which supports the successful execution of projects and identifying value-creation opportunities for greater impact. Meta-competencies, like motivation, reflection, and perseverance, facilitate the application of these competency elements. The study found that collaboration competency was a common thread across competencies. The findings of this study have implications for organisations with CSR functions and CSR professionals. It provides a repository for CSR professionals of the competencies they already have and need to develop. In addition, organisations can use the identified competencies when hiring and developing CSR professionals. The study recommends that if sustainability is the focus of organisations, organisations in South Africa must draw their attention to intensifying collaboration efforts with a strategic development mindset for sustainable CSR.

Key words: CSR, competencies, CSR professionals, CSR competencies, sustainable development, integrative framework

1. Introduction

Organisations in South Africa increasingly recognise the importance of sustainability and are contributing to it by incorporating it into their corporate strategy and expenditures (McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017; Trialogue, 2022a). This growth in expenditure was highlighted in a recent study by Trialogue (2022a), a corporate responsibility consultancy organisation in South Africa, indicating that 44% of organisations participating in the survey Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) spending has increased, 29% stayed the same, and 27% decreased. Literature on CSR highlights an increasing interest in improving CSR performance contribution to society and the environment and increasing competitiveness (Barbosa & de Oliveira, 2021; Osagie et al., 2016).

Moreover, large organisations are shifting from traditional philanthropy and ad-hoc giving to strategic integration, empowerment, and long-term sustainable development, which aligns with global discussions on sustainable development (Mueller-Hirth, 2016). In light of this, there is a call for South African organisations to invest in long-term strategic corporate social responsibility that moves away from the feel-good stories and instead focuses on the impact of corporate social responsibility activities (Anwana, 2020; Flores-Araoz, 2011).

The increased interest in improving CSR performance and contributing to society and the environment has meant that the market for CSR professionals has grown and become institutionalised in organisations (Brès et al., 2019). Organisations employ CSR leaders, usually labelled as CSR or sustainability managers, who are responsible for creating, implementing, and managing CSR policies and programs (Brès et al., 2019). Du Preez and Van Zyl (2015) write that successful CSR requires collaboration, specific skills, and knowledge sets.

This research was intended to explore the CSR leadership competencies that contribute to successful sustainable development. The study was intended to expand the body of knowledge regarding CSR competencies within South Africa, which could inform organisations on the competencies that CSR leaders would require to support sustainable initiatives.

1.1 CSR vs CSI and sustainability

Initially considered a grey area in terms of definition (e.g. Anwana, 2020), the change in CSR focus has brought on many meanings, depending on the context, the stakeholders and the environment (Samuel & Mqomboti, 2017). This study defined CSR, drawn from the definition by Mcwilliams & Siegel (2001), as actions and strategies organisations implement to promote society's benefit while maintaining their interests and legal requirements. Moreover, the terms CSR and Corporate Social Investment (CSI) are often used interchangeably, with the latter forming part of CSR but focusing more on organisations financial and non-cash contributions towards social upliftment and development (Trialogue,2022b)

Similarly, sustainable development is a grey area used interchangeably with sustainability, corporate governance and social responsibility (Eizaguirre et al., 2019; Sheehy & Farneti,2021). However, a standard definition of sustainable development puts forth that it is meeting current needs without jeopardising future generations' abilities to meet their needs and aspirations (Eizaguirre et al., 2019; Sheehy & Farneti, 2021). Sheehy and Farneti (2021) distinguish between CSR and sustainable development, where sustainable development refers to a globally driven public policy initiative, and CSR is at the organisational level. Although they make this distinction, the authors of Trialogue (2022a) note that CSR activities within South Africa play a role in bringing South Africa closer to global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) Frameworks and aligning with the National Development Plan (NDP).

1.2 Previous CSR competencies studies

Thus far, studies investigating CSR individual competencies have been conducted in the sustainable development sphere concerning sustainability and education (de Haan, 2006; Wiek et al., 2011). For example, de Haan (2006) proposed eight sub-competencies, within the framework of *Gestaltungskompetenz,* as having a specific capacity to solve problems along the lines of sustainable development through active participation in society. In a study specifically focusing on CSR individual

competencies, Osagie et al. (2016) synthesised 8 CSR competencies. Their study employed reviewing existing literature and interviewing CSR professionals to gauge an understanding of the key competencies needed. Their contribution informed Jayakumar and Joshi's (2017) study on management education for CSR professionals in India.

Two recent studies on CSR individual competencies in South Africa looked at it from a perspective of proposing a curriculum for CSR practitioners (McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017); and a focus on a leadership behaviour inventory to build a leadership competency model for future usage (du Preez & van Zyl, 2015). The study by du Preez and van Zyl (2015) specifically investigated the intersection between CSR and leadership. It highlighted the importance of the leadership behaviour of the CSR professional in implementing successful CSR initiatives. On the other hand, the study by McCreanor and Bitzer (2017) highlights explicitly that there appears to be no clearly defined role or job description for CSR practitioners in South Africa. This raises the question of competency utilisation and the impact on successfully implementing sustainable CSR initiatives.

In addition, as complexities characterise the CSR environment, the studies thus far have highlighted the dynamic nature of competencies at different stages of CSR implementation (Du Preez & Van Zyl, 2015; McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017; Osagie et al., 2016).

1.3 Problem Statement

As highlighted in the preceding sections, CSR is a growing feature in current business practices, with many organisations in South Africa creating CSR-focused positions (Du Preez & Van Zyl, 2015), which is consistent with data obtained through a survey by Trialogue (2022a) indicating that 48% of respondents stated there was a dedicated department within the organisation for CSR, an increase from 43% in 2021. Despite this growing feature, industry thought leaders acknowledge a skills shortage or deficit of CSR practitioners in South Africa (McCreanor & Bitzer,

2017), corroborated in the survey results by Trialogue (2022a) that more than a fifth (21%) of Non-Profit Organisation (NPOs) and nearly a third of businesses (32%) lack any internal or external resources devoted to handling Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). It could be argued that the results confirm the arguments by Patel and Mushonga (2015) and McCreanor and Bitzer (2017) and indicate a need for more education and training of CSR practitioners to manage and implement CSR.

Increasingly, the world is affected by sustainability, and the question has moved from the justifying the need for CSR to how it should be implemented (Jayakumar & Joshi, 2017). However, critiques abound regarding the sustainability of CSR projects aimed at social change and uplifting (McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017).

Arguments have been put forth for micro-oriented CSR research focusing on the individual (Giacalone & Thompson, 2006; Jones et al.,2017). Despite this, Brès et al. (2019) argue that knowledge of CSR professionals is still limited, with existing literature on CSR in South Africa still mainly organisation-focused (Patel & Mushonga, 2015; Samuel & Mqomboti, 2017).

As the nexus of sustainability in organisations, the burgeoning CSR profession provides research opportunities for the impact of CSR competencies on sustainability (Brès et al., 2019). Although Du Preez (2015) and McCreanor and Bitzer's study (2017) form part of the first steps toward focusing on the CSR profession in South Africa, it indicates the need for more research on the CSR leadership competencies that contribute to sustainable development in South Africa. Considering this, for sustainable CSR it is necessary to understand the competencies required by CSR professionals and how the competencies contribute towards sustainable CSR.

In addition, the studies that have been done thus far highlight the need to move the focus towards the individual lens (Giacalone & Thompson, 2006; Jones et al., 2017), with a focus on the CSR professional as one of the nexus in successful CSR implementation and sustainability (Jayakumar & Joshi, 2017; McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017; Osagie et al., 2016; Wesselink & Osagie, 2019).

1.4 Research Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the CSR leadership competencies that contribute to successful sustainable development in South Africa. As such, the study focused on identifying and describing various cognitive, social, functional and meta-competencies from the perspective of current CSR professionals,

1.5 Research objectives

The research objectives were as follows:

Objective 1

To establish the cognitive competencies that contribute to successful CSR planning and execution.

Objective 2

To examine the social competencies needed by CSR leadership to navigate social dynamics in executing CSR initiatives.

Objective 3

To investigate the functional competencies that are essential for CSR leadership to execute successful CSR initiatives.

Objective 4

To develop a meta competency framework that will facilitate applying the core competencies (cognitive, social and functional) to achieve effective, sustainable development.

1.6 Research questions

The resultant research questions to the objectives were as follows:

RQ1 What are some of the cognitive competencies that enable successful CSR planning and execution?

RQ2 What are some of the social competencies that support CSR leadership to navigate social dynamics in executing CSR initiatives?

RQ3 What are some of the functional competencies that influence CSR leadership to execute successful CSR initiatives?
RQ4 What framework can be provided to assist CSR professionals in achieving effective, sustainable development?

1.7 Delimitations

Although the researcher acknowledges that organisational culture and CSR maturity impact CSR implementation and resultant sustainability, the study objectives did not cover organisational culture.

1.8 Structure of the report

The study was divided into the following sections:

Chapter 1:

The first section provides insight into prior research on CSR competencies, leading to the problem statement, objectives, and research questions.

Chapter 2:

The chapter comprises a literature review, which provides insights into competencies from a definitional perspective and previous studies. It also discusses the theoretical integrative holistic competency framework underpinning the research.

Chapter 3:

This chapter outlines the research methodology sampling, data collection method, and analysis through the qualitative analysis tool Atlas Ti, as well as the ethical considerations limitations of the study.

Chapter 4:

The fourth chapter presents the findings through thematic analysis, followed by a discussion of the findings in according with the literature reviewed in Chapter 5.

Finally, the conclusions per research objective and recommendations are provided in Chapter 6.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The preceding section highlighted the importance of focusing on the competencies of CSR leaders and professionals as key to sustainable CSR initiatives. The literature review provides some insight into competencies from a definitional perspective. The key takeaway from the definition provided is a holistic, integrative view. This view guided the exploration of each construct, cognitive, social, functional, and meta-competencies, as an initial guide to exploring how these have been viewed and studied thus far. Finally, the theoretical framework of Cheetham and Chivers (1996) provides an integrative holistic competency model to explore the four constructs.

2.2 Definition of competencies

Before exploring the proposed constructs of competencies, this section elaborates on the definitions of competencies and how the concept was applied in the study.

Baartman et al. (2007) put forth that within the educational literature, competencies refer to having specific sets of knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to a particular role. Similarly, Brophy and Kiely (2002, p. 167) define competencies as possessing the necessary know-how, abilities, behavioural conduct, and attitudes to carry out a task successfully. Within the field of sustainability, Wiek et al. (2011, p. 204) refer to competencies as enabling one to successfully perform tasks related to issues,

opportunities and challenges within the sustainability landscape. Some further definitions put forth of competencies is that effectively performing a role creates an organisational competitive edge (Jauhari, 2006, p. 123), which enables an organisation to reach its strategic goals (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005).

Recent interpretations of competencies suggest a situated and holistic integrated nature combining various knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a particular context for the desired outcome (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005; Mulder, 2014; Wiek et al., 2011). Due to the nature of the environment that CSR professionals work in and the multifaceted issues they must address, the definition of the integration of the competencies as proposed by McCreanor and Bitzer (2017), Mulder (2014) and Wiek et al. (2011) was utilised in the study.

2.3 Defining the Constructs

Although a holistic competency approach was employed in the study, elaborating on each proposed competency construct provided a typology to guide the study in engaging with the research participants. The competencies highlighted by the authors were explored within the cognitive, social, functional, and meta-competencies categories by matching the competencies according to each construct definition.

2.3.1 Cognitive competencies and their effect on CSR execution

Cheetham and Chivers (1996, p.24) define cognitive competence as having the necessary knowledge relevant to the work and being able to use the knowledge effectively. Osagie et al. (2016) similarly echo this definition and further situate it within the CSR environment as having the ability to foresee the development of CSR and see the interdependencies between systems and related regulations.

Table 1: Cognitive competencies for CSR execution.

Cognitive competencies				
Osagie et al. (2016)	**De Haan (2006)**	**Wiek et al. (2011)**	**McCreaner and Bitzer (2017)**	**Kakabadse et al. (2009)**
Anticipatory competency	Competence in foresight thinking	Systems thinking	BBBEE/CSR regulations and industry knowledge	Awareness of CSR
Systems and interdependence thinking	Interdisciplinary learning	Anticipatory competence	Systems thinking to dig for deeper understanding	Ability to discern CSR goals
Understand CSR drivers, standards and regulations.		Normative competence		

Table 1 indicates synergies between Osagie et al. (2016), de Haan (2006), Wiek et al. (2011), and McCreanor and Bitzer (2017) on the two cognitive competencies (1) anticipating the future and (2) systems thinking. The argument is that having the ability to anticipate future developments allows the CSR professional to make a sustainable decision in CSR execution with long-term future orientation and impact by anticipating and preventing unintended consequences (Gibson, 2006). Furthermore, Wiek et al. (2011) argue that systems thinking is essential as it allows for building transition strategies to sustainability by understanding the interconnected dynamic nature of socio-ecological systems. It further provides for anticipating future development. De Haan (2006) argues that these two competencies are essential as they highlight the ability to deal with the complexity and uncertainty of the present to make decisions for the future. Kakabadse et al. (2009) further highlight the importance of utilising the awareness and knowledge of CSR to lead CSR actively, which becomes crucial in transition strategies towards sustainability. Similarly, McCreanor and Bitzer (2017) highlight that a future thinking system is needed to deal with the complexity and create innovative future strategies in South Africa.

Both Osagie et al. (2016) and McCreanor and Bitzer (2017) stress the importance of knowledge and understanding CSR drivers as an essential cognitive competency. For example, one of the critical drivers of CSR in South Africa is

Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) (Mueller-Hirth, 2016). Therefore, CSR professionals in South Africa need an integrative knowledge and understanding of these drivers to successfully navigate necessary regulations for sustainable decision-making in CSR initiatives (McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017).

The literature reviewed on cognitive competencies highlights the importance of navigating CSR drivers, systems thinking, and having an anticipatory approach to making sustainable CSR decisions. Although McCreanor and Bitzer (2017) highlighted future systems thinking as one of the competencies, it was not highlighted in the explicit sense as a critical competency for South African CSR professionals for sustainability. This presented an opportunity to explore it further as one of the essential competencies needed by CSR professionals in South Africa.

2.3.2 Functional competency and their effect on CSR leadership to execute successful CSR initiatives.

The preceding section referred to cognitive competencies as having the knowledge and acting upon it to execute CSR initiatives. However, to act upon it, specific functional competencies are needed. Thus, functional competency refers to the operational aspect of competency (Asumeng, 2014), essentially what one should be able to do in a position or role (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996); it is thus the "linking of knowledge to action" (Wiek et al., 2011, p. 210).

The table below indicates some functional competencies identified in the literature for sustainable CSR initiatives.

Table 2: Functional competencies for CSR execution

Functional competencies				
Osagie et al. (2016)	**de Haan (2006)**	**Wiek et al. (2011)**	**McCreanor and Bitzer (2017)**	**Kakabadse et al. (2009)**
Manage CSR projects and programs,	Planning and implementation skills	Strategic competence	Takes the initiative and	Able to present a business case of CSR

Functional competencies				
Osagie et al. (2016)	**de Haan (2006)**	**Wiek et al. (2011)**	**McCreanor and Bitzer (2017)**	**Kakabadse et al. (2009)**
including implementation			ability to work independent	
CSR leadership competencies	Ability to do interdisciplinary work	Communication skills	Strategic work capabilities	Consistently apply CSR
Identify and realise CSR-related business opportunities			Creativity in innovative solution-driven projects.	Measure CSR success
			Planning and monitoring competence	Follow through from concept to implementation
			Financial insight concerning CSR projects.	
			Clearly express views	
			Adaptability and collaboration	
			Change management application	
			Maintains high standards for CSR projects and ensures that they are of high quality.	

Functional competencies				
Osagie et al. (2016)	**de Haan (2006)**	**Wiek et al. (2011)**	**McCreanor and Bitzer (2017)**	**Kakabadse et al. (2009)**
			CSR projects are tested for effectiveness	

Table 2 indicates strong agreement concerning having the competency to manage and implement CSR projects (de Haan, 2006; Kakabadse et al., 2009; McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017; Osagie et al., 2016) and to monitor and assess CSR initiatives to assess its impact (Patel & Mushonga, 2015). Furthermore, in a study on CSR in the Middle East and North Africa region, the findings of Al-Reyaysa et al. (2019) reveal that project management competencies allow for strategic CSR development, which can contribute to sustainability. Although communication skills are listed as part of the functional competencies by Wiek et al. (2011), they do not consider it an essential competency to focus on in sustainability efforts. They (Wiek et al., 2011) consider strategic competence a vital functional competency for sustainable development. Parallel to de Haan's (2006) assertion that the planning competencies must be aligned with a changing environment, Grunwald (2007) argues that in the changing environment of sustainability, a competing course of action with alternative strategies requires the CSR professional to propose and motivate the uncertain nature of strategies strategically.

Interestingly, McCreanor and Bitzer (2017) highlight the competency to work independently and take the initiative as a competency needed; this could be qualified by their assertion that there appear to be no clearly defined roles or job descriptions for CSR practitioners in South Africa. Hence the need to work independently and take the initiative in sustainability projects. Whereas some of the research (McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017; Osagie et al., 2016) had leadership as part of the functional competencies needed for CSR, the study by Du Preez and Van Zyl (2015) looked at CRS competencies specifically from a leadership perspective and looked at the intersection between CSR and leadership. Their approach looked at

the CSR leadership competencies needed at different phases of CSR implementation. Their study highlights that the CSR leader will use different competencies at different stages and phases (du Preez & van Zyl, 2015).

Du Preez and Van Zyl's (2015) study drew on the neo-charismatic leadership paradigm to identify which competencies are necessary for a successful CSR leader. The advantage of a neo-charismatic leadership framework is that it motivates and drives buy-in. Concurrent with this, the literature suggests that the CSR professional should be competent to present sustainable CSR projects from a business case rather than just an emotional appeal (Kakabadse et al., 2009; McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017). However, at the same time, a too strong focus on the business case could create a negative perception among beneficiaries that a conflict of interest exists between the company's economic and CSR strategies (Patel & Mushonga, 2015). In addition to the business case language, CSR professionals need financial acumen concerning their CSR projects to determine financial sustainability (McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017). The study provided an opportunity to further explore what functional competencies CSR professionals in South Africa need concerning their role and how the competencies contribute to sustainable development and sustainability.

2.3.3 Social competencies to navigate social dynamics in executing CSR initiatives.

The preceding sections highlighted the importance of knowledge and action in solving sustainability challenges and problems. In addition to that, sustainability challenges are caused by, and affect, various dynamic stakeholders (Wiek et al., 2011). For this, interpersonal and social competencies are essential. Here, social competencies are defined as working with people and knowing and managing emotions in others (Louw et al., 2012) and as personal competency: knowing how to behave as a form of social awareness and relationship management with various stakeholders both internally and externally (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996).

In their study on proposing an integrative CSR approach for South Africa, Samuel and Mqomboti (2017) state that considering local cultures and values is essential when initiating and implementing CSR projects. As tensions and misunderstandings may arise, cross-cultural understanding of diverse communities and cultures with more inclusive approaches is vital to navigating dynamics in planning and executing sustainable CSR initiatives (Kearins & Springett, 2003).

Table 3: Social competencies to navigate social dynamics

Social Competencies				
Osagie et al. (2016)	**de Haan (2006)**	**Wiek et al. (2011)**	**McCreanor and Bitzer (2017)**	**Kakabadse et al. (2009)**
Interpersonal Competence	Cosmopolitan transcultural understanding and perception	Interpersonal Competence	Networking with stakeholder competence	Persuasive ability
	Self-motivation and ability to motivate others		Interpersonal Competencies	

Table 3 indicates some social competencies identified as essential to navigating social dynamics in executing CSR initiatives. The authors highlight across-board interpersonal competencies. De Haan (2006) frames social competency as a curiosity and interest in people's experiences with the desire to learn. Here, we see a synergy between the functional competency to probe and question to solve a problem proposed by McCreanor and Bitzer (2017). Even more so, curiosity, as presented by de Haan (2006), places social competency as a definition of having collaborative competencies that facilitate participation and cooperation in working on CSR challenges and sustainable development (de Haan, 2006).

Furthermore, having the competency to create buy-in from internal stakeholders is essential for the sustainability of projects, argues Kakabadse et al. (2009), which

requires CSR professionals to demonstrate competency in understanding, listening and evaluating differing viewpoints (Wiek et al., 2011). Moreover, as highlighted by Cheruiyot-Koech and Reddy (2022), there is an institutional influence on CSR through community development, one of the B-BBEE tenets of the B-BBEE policy, indicating an embedded stakeholder influence with the state at a macro-institutional level as a critical stakeholder. Stakeholder competence at this level becomes crucial in creating legitimacy (Cheruiyot-Koech & Reddy, 2022).

In summary, social competencies draw on the behavioural model of competency, which emphasises behaviour as the predominant factor for success and competence (Asumeng, 2014). The critique of the behaviour model is that it overemphasises behaviour while ignoring other factors such as skills, abilities and attitudes (Asumeng, 2014). Thus, a nexus is proposed concerning CSR between knowledge and action in enacting social competencies for sustainable CSR initiatives.

2.3.4 Meta competencies that facilitate the application of the core competencies (cognitive, social, and functional).

Meta-competencies are concerned with communication, self-development, creativity, and analytic and problem-solving skills that aid in developing the other competency domains (Asumeng, 2014). Cheetham and Chivers (1996) stated that meta-competency could be considered the competency that overarches the other competencies. In this way, meta-competency can include creativity and mental agility (Asumeng, 2014). In addition, a recent definition of it includes ethical views and reflective practices (Osagie et al., 2016), extending the definition to the seminal concept of Schoen, the reflective practitioner (Schoen, 1983) cited in Cheetham & Chivers (1996) who questioned the logic of experts solving problems solely through technical and specialist knowledge, arguing that professionals should reflect and think about their actions while doing it. (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996).

Table 4: Meta-competencies facilitating core competencies.

Meta - competency				
Osagie et al. (2016)	**de Haan (2006)**	**McCreanor and Bitzer (2017)**	**Wiek et al. (2011)**	**Kakabadse (2009)**
Personal attributes and attitudes	Self-motivation	Self-awareness to drive personal development	Values thinking	Self-reflexivity
Personal values	Empathetic and compassionate	High moral and ethical standards		Handle contradictions and competing priorities
Active participation and CSR related behaviour	Self-motivating	Self-regulation in emotional intelligence		Stay from conception to implementing
Self-reflection on experiences and CSR	Self-reflection on culture models and self			Take action

McCreanor and Bitzer (2017) put forth the importance of having self-awareness competency, which aids in identifying development opportunities for competencies. Here, we see how the meta-competency of self-awareness facilitates and aids the development of competencies.

Research by Kakabadse et al. (2009) indicates that getting to the commitment stage in CSR requires a CSR leader to have the will to act and lasting power despite adversity. The competencies, self-motivation, will to act and follow through as meta-competencies proposed by Osagie et al. (2016), McCreanor and Bitzer (2017) and de Haan (2006) draw parallels to psychological drivers as proposed by Lockett et al. (2006). In a study on what drives sustainability managers to devote their time to address social, environmental and ethical issues, Lockett et al. (2006) identified

four types of sustainability managers with underlying values that drive their efforts. These are the (1) facilitators, (2) activists, (3) experts and (4) catalysts. Their study highlights the importance of aligning one's values with one's role to drive commitment through knowledge and action. A recent study by Licaro, Sánchez, and Huapaya-Huertas (2023) highlights CSR management motivations regarding corporate social responsibility as also driven by ethical considerations, such as moral obligations or personal convictions.

The literature on meta-competency as an overarching competency highlights the importance of reflexivity, self-awareness for development opportunities and awareness of personal values as key in the meta-competency framework. In addition, previous functional competencies were proposed as an additional construct of meta-competency in influencing the application of cognitive, functional and social competency in sustainability decision making (Hahn et al., 2014).

In exploring competencies, this study aimed to build on the previous competency studies to develop a framework to assist CSR professionals in achieving effective, sustainable development.

2.4 Theoretical framework

2.4.1 A holistic model of competency

The preceding sections highlighted that competencies need to be explored integratively. Thus, the holistic model of managerial competency proposed by Cheetham and Chivers (1996) offered a theoretical framework for exploring CSR leadership competencies that contribute to successful sustainable development in South Africa and developing a framework of competencies needed.

The model integrated the key dimensions emphasised by the behavioural, functional and job competency models and was proposed by Cheetham and Chivers (1996) to integrate the critical dimensions highlighted by each competency school. The model illustrated below in Figure 1 consists of the core components:

- Cognitive competence,
- Functional competence,
- Personal or behavioural competence, for the study it was social competence,
- Values/ethical competence,

In addition, it indicates the overarching meta-competencies. The dotted lines between the core components indicate that they are interlinked and, to some extent, dependent on one another (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996).

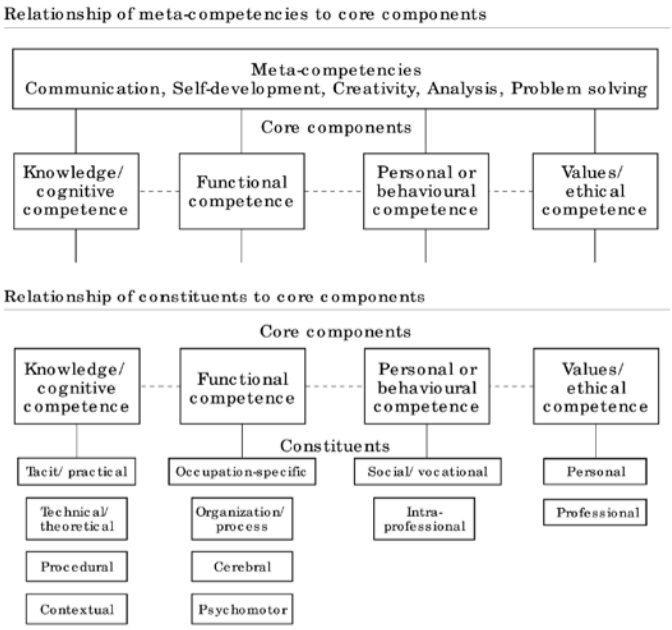

Figure 1 Holistic competence model proposed by Cheetham and Chivers (1996, p.25)

2.4.2 Roles played by CSR and linked occupational competence mix.

The model proposed by Cheetham and Chivers (1996) allows for a different mix of core competencies. The linked occupational mix is diagrammatically indicated by the size of the segments illustrated in figure 2 at each stage.

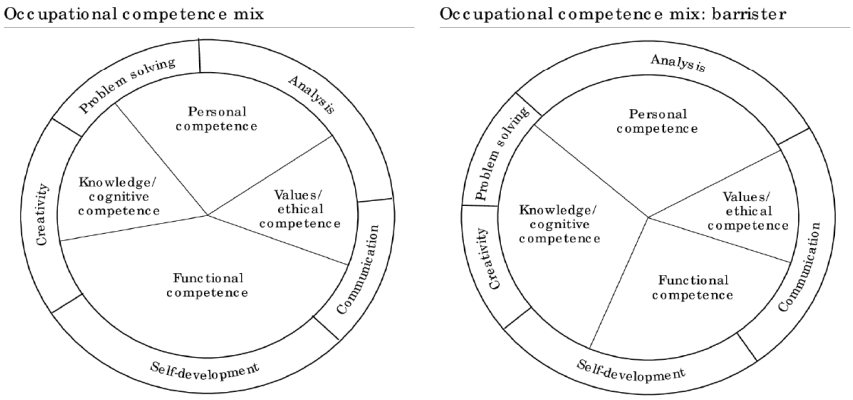

Figure 2**:** Occupation linked competency mix (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996, p.28)

Although participants shared what their role entails, the study did not examine in depth the various roles the participants play and the resultant competencies. However, the occupation-linked competency mix provides a framework for a dynamic exploration and representation of the various roles played by CSR professionals and the resultant degree of competencies needed for successful, sustainable CSR implementation. In the study, it represents the degree of application of competencies in an integrative dynamic manner.

The literature review provided insight into the CSR-related competencies identified thus far as a departure point for exploring the competencies as a helpful starting point for empirically exploring competencies within a South African sustainability context. This research aimed to explore these competencies and explore whether other CSR-related competencies are seen as crucial as well.

The holistic model allowed this study to consider the integrative nature of the various competencies constructs and the role the various meta-competencies play in facilitating the application of the competencies by CSR professionals in executing CSR initiatives.

2.5 Conceptual framework proposed.

Drawing on the literature review and the theoretical framework, the conceptual framework below guided the study. The proposed conceptual framework places cognitive, functional, and social competency as needed equally by the CSR leader/professional to execute sustainable CSR initiatives, illustrated in Figure three below. The dotted lines between the competencies indicate that they are interlinked and overarched by a meta-competency.

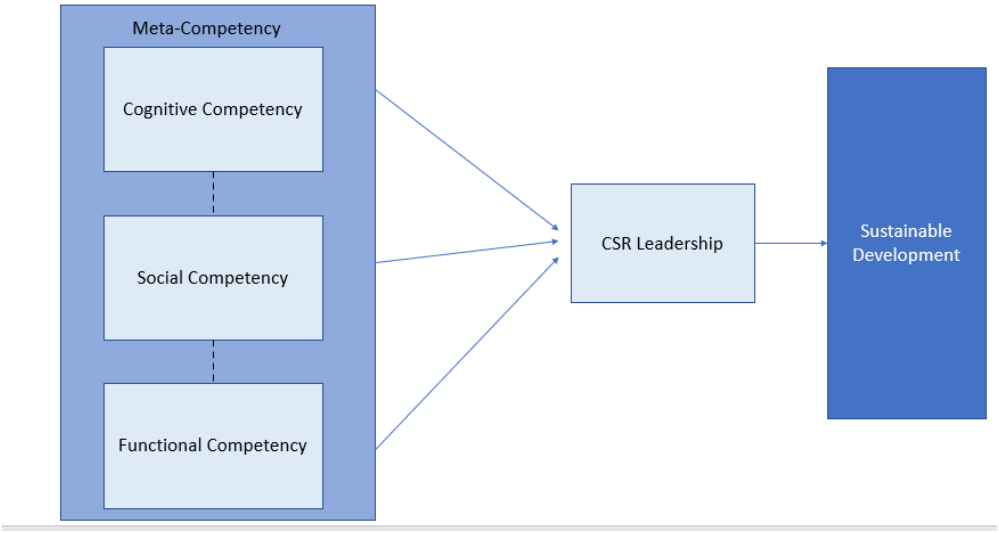

Figure 3: Proposed CSR competency conceptual model

In summary, the conceptual framework for this research provided a framework to explore meta-competencies as an overarching competency that influences cognitive, functional and social competencies.

2.6 Research Propositions

Based on the literature review and conceptual framework the below research propositions are put forth with the associated research question and objectives as outlined in chapter one:

Research objective	Research question	Propositions
Objective 1: To establish the cognitive competencies that contribute to successful CSR planning and execution.	**Research question 1:** What are some of the cognitive competencies that enable successful CSR planning and execution?	**Proposition 1:** The development of sustainability and sustainable development should be the goal of CSR. **Proposition 2:** Understanding CSR, regulations, and CSR drivers requires a developmental mindset that ensures compliance and alignment and enables CSR professionals to be purposefully led in sustainability and sustainable development efforts.
Objective 2: To examine the social competencies needed by CSR leadership to navigate social dynamics in executing CSR initiatives	**Research question 2:** What are some of the social competencies that support CSR leadership to navigate social dynamics in executing CSR initiatives?	**Proposition 3**: Networking and building relationships with stakeholders requires interpersonal skills that understand the context to navigate social dynamics and positively impact collaboration

Research objective	Research question	Propositions
Objective 3: To investigate the functional competencies that are essential for CSR leadership to execute successful CSR initiatives.	**Research question 3:** What are some of the functional competencies that influence CSR leadership to execute successful CSR initiatives	**Proposition 4:** Actively managing projects through a consultative approach supports the successful execution of projects **Proposition 5:** Employing financial and business acumen skills supports identifying value creation opportunities for a more significant impact
Objective 4: To develop a meta competency framework that will facilitate applying the core competencies (cognitive, social and functional) to achieve effective, sustainable development.	**Research question 4:** What framework can be provided to assist CSR professionals in achieving effective, sustainable development	**Proposition 6:** The meta-competency perseverance through actively managing projects and stakeholders supports follow through and the outcome of CSR initiatives. **Proposition 7**: Meta-competency emotional intelligence positively supports communicating and decision-making, engaging teams and stakeholders, and planning

Research objective	Research question	Propositions
		and executing CSR initiatives. **Proposition 8**: The meta-competency motivation supports the CSR professional's awareness of the need for CSR and positively impacts driving buy-in and solution orientation. **Proposition 9:** Balancing personal and business values without losing sight of personal values supports purpose-led CSR initiatives. **Proposition 10**: The meta-competency reflection supports developing sustainable CSR practice through learning and changing.

3. Research methodology

This section provides insights into the methodological approach and design. Aspects considered include the research design, data collection method, population and sample, interview guide design, data analysis approach, and strategies employed to maintain the quality of the data.

3.1 Research design

A qualitative approach was conducted through semi-structured interviews. One of the fundamental assumptions of qualitative research is the process of inductive inquiry, where the researcher recognises multiple realities from different perspectives (Walters, 2001). This approach suited the study as it aimed to explore and describe the interpretations of the competencies of CSR professionals based on their experience and views to develop a grounded theory based on the exploration (Creswell et al., 2019, p. 67).

3.2 Research population

The research population consisted of CSR practitioners, professionals, and leaders responsible for CSR initiatives in South Africa. The field of CSR was interpreted as a department or individual responsible for CSR activities. The research was not delimited to a particular industry as the CSR professional field is often limited in terms of the number of CSR professionals in an organisation, which could impact the sample size and access to participants. Further, the initiatives of CSR professionals speak towards society and sustainability within society and not the industry. However, participants were requested to share their industry if they were comfortable, as this could provide insight into future research.

The initial proposed minimum years of experience of participants was three years. This tenure proposal was based on a Trialogue survey, which observed that the average tenure of CSR staff is 6.5 years, with no company participating in the survey reporting fewer than two years (Trialogue, 2020). The reason for including

experience in delineating the research population was to ensure that the participants had sufficient experience relevant to the study's focus on exploring the competencies needed from a frame of reference and would be well acquainted with CSR and sustainable development.

3.3 Sample and sampling method

After obtaining ethics review approval via the Ethics Committee of the University of Witwatersrand, potential participants were approached. The study adopted "purposive sampling" (Creswell et al., 2019, p. 220) to select participants that the researcher believed could supply needed information. Participants were selected by drawing on the researcher's network recommendations that fit the criteria, using Google searches and the professional social media site Linkedin Premium.

A combined snowball and "purposive sampling" was applied (Creswell et al., 2019, p. 220) which included reaching out to individuals in the group who fall within the sample to refer other professionals within the group. Attached in Appendix B is the consent form that details the study to potential participants.

The study focus informed the sample size, that is, depth of understanding where no statistically significant discriminating variables were required Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 83). A minimum sample size of 15 participants is accepted in this case (Creswell et al., 2019). Although the current population size of CSR practitioners in South Africa is unknown, the sample size was derived from a small population size of 68 large corporate companies participating in a Trialogue survey, with the most CSI expenditures reported in Gauteng and Western Cape. The participating corporate companies were from various industries. The financial sector had the highest representation, followed by the consumer goods industry. The basic materials industry, which included mining, had the third highest representation. Based on this, the sample size equalled 18 participants, with the majority of participants being from the Western Cape and Gauteng, followed by participants from other provinces.

3.4 Research instrument

Semi-structured interviews were used in the study to enable, in-depth discussion of the research topic, while facilitating discussion points that will be relevant to the study. Participants were encouraged to recall incidents where the competencies came through following the critical incident method (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The advantage of this approach is that it guided discussions in a structured way, with questions framed to elicit probing and elaborations, which helped participants and the researcher to feel at ease.

At the same time, the disadvantage is that it will be easy to get sidetracked by aspects unrelated to the study (Creswell et al., 2019). In addition, semi-structured interviews allow less probing into the competencies-related experiences than an unstructured interview (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). To mitigate these disadvantages, the researcher guided participants back to the focus of the interview and requested participants to elaborate on their answers. Additionally, scheduling and participant availability made conducting interviews time-consuming, as many participants' initial responses highlighted time constraints. To mitigate the availability challenge, the researcher provided different timeslots from which the participants could choose the most suitable timeslot.

In Appendix B, the draft interview guide, which consists of five sections, covers the demographics of the target population and the three competencies' constructs. The interview guide supported guiding the interview by covering basic background information to ease into the interview and questions for each objective categorised using the guidelines proposed by Bryman and Bell (2011) and Ritchie and Lewis (2003). The questions proposed guided the discussion in a structured way, with questions framed to elicit probing and elaborations.

3.5 Data collection procedure

For the study, the participants chose a setting and time that was convenient for them. As the environment is increasingly technological with an increase in remote working, the researcher provided online platforms as an option for participants to

participate. Most interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams; two participants requested WhatsApp calls due to technology constraints, and with one participant, a physical interview was conducted per the participant's request. Participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded for transcribing purposes, to which they consented. The consent form attached in Appendix A details confidentiality, recording and the use of the data.

To build rapport with the participants, transparency was practised by sharing the research background, ethical considerations, and the researcher’s keen interest in social responsibility. Some participants, in turn, started engagement by posing questions to the researcher to build familiarity.

3.6 Data analysis approach

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using Otter AI software. The qualitative data analysis software Atlas Ti was utilised for coding, searching through the transcripts, and manually refining the analysis. The data was analysed by breaking down, evaluating, and categorising findings into categories like competencies drawn from grounded theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The data analysis and coding were both deductive and inductive, where codes and themes were developed based on the research questions. In the process of reviewing, further codes emanated, which also called for an inductive approach.

First, the interviews were all read to familiarise the researcher with the content. The second reading consisted of coding significant passages from the participants' answers to the questions. Subsequently, the codes were re-looked at and categorised using the listed competencies and constructs defined in the literature review. Additional codes were created to present further descriptions or competencies not expressly listed in the literature review and their experiences in practice. A total of 215 codes were created from the interviews. The codes were analysed using thematic analysis to compare the findings further in relation to the literature review.

3.8 Limitations of data collection method

- **Potential ambiguities:** Atieno (2009) writes that as qualitative research relies on human interaction, the phrases used can give room for ambiguities. Ambiguous phrases used in the interviews could potentially impact the accuracy and analysis of the results. To circumvent this, the researcher relied on asking clarifying questions.
- **Method used to collect the data**: Using only one method of data collection impacted the robustness of the information. Accordingly, in the research process, the researcher had to probe and be attentive to identify emerging trends and lines of inquiry which could impact the richness of the information for the study (Creswell et al., 2019). In addition, where possible, the researcher utilised the 2022 results of the Trialogue survey to provide some quantitative information on broader patterns and trends.
- **Representativeness:** Although participants were from different industries the study primarily focused on practitioners from Gauteng and Western Cape with minor representation from three other provinces. Since CSR practitioners operate across nine provinces in South Africa each with varied socio-economic contexts and environments the sample may not be representative of the entire CSR practitioner population.

3.9 Strategies employed to maintain the quality of the data.

According to Golafshani (2003) and Noble and Smith (2015), qualitative research focuses on concepts like trustworthiness, rigour, and quality instead of validation and reliability, as the position of enquiry is not one truth resultantly in maintaining the quality of the data, this study applied the four concepts of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell et al., 2019).

Confirmability centres on taking steps to reduce the effect of biases (Bryman & Bell, 2011) to ensure confirmability; draft versions allowed the researcher to reflect on her position and interpretation, and the research supervisor checked recorded

interviews. To ensure dependability, the researchers saved thought processes, versions of codes and document versions.

To ensure credibility, meaning that the findings reflect reality (Creswell et al., 2019), the researcher asked clarifying questions to remove ambiguities and set aside the researcher's interpretations to verify the accurate capture of views. During the sessions, the participants clarified and elaborated on their points. Where participants had already answered a question in a previous section, the researcher continued asking the set questions to remove ambiguities and set aside the researcher's interpretations. To ensure transferability, descriptions of the participants by way of role and responsibility, describing the methodology and responses are provided.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Specific ethical considerations were considered as the study involved human participants within industries. Drawing on the ethical considerations highlighted by Fleming and Zegwaard (2018), the study's ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, informing participants that participation is voluntary, that participation can be withdrawn at any point and maintaining confidentiality. The Ethics Clearance Certificate for this research is shown in Appendix C.

Confidentiality is essential in research to protect participants, the researcher, and organisations from potential harm, including resource loss, reputation, or emotional impact (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). As the research involved participants from professional organisations and the participants' responses could potentially be linked to their respective organisations, steps were taken to protect anonymity. Confidentiality was especially crucial as some participants, before sharing their thoughts on a particular question, would preface it by stating *"the fact that you say this is confidential"*.

The participants' identities and the organisations they work for, although known to the researcher, are de-identified in the paper. Furthermore, as the research sample

was small, participants' demographics were not linked to their industries in the findings section to maintain this confidentiality.

4. Presentation of findings

This chapter presents the results from the interviews based on the research questions and reports on the participants' demographic statistics. As indicated in Chapter 3, the researcher analysed the codes and grouped the themes to answer the research questions with the themes and propositions presented in this section.

4.1 Participants Demographics (n=18)

The participants were from the Western Cape, Gauteng and other provinces. The largest group of participants were from the Western Cape (50%), followed by 33% from Gauteng and 17% from what was grouped as other provinces.

The participants represented a wide range of industries, with the largest group (17%) representing the Financial Services Industry. The following industries were represented equally at 11%: Foundation, NPC, Property, Wine and Alcohol, and Agriculture. This was followed by the following industries: Steel Manufacturing, Automotive, Mining and Water and Sanitation, represented equally at 5.6%.

Table 5: Industry representation in study

Industries	Number of participants
Fishing extractive industry	1
NPC Foundation	2
Financial Services	3
Steel Manufacturing Industry	1
Automotive	1
Mining	1
NPC	2
Property	2

Industries	Number of participants
Water and Sanitation	1
Wine/Alcohol Industry	2
Agriculture	2

The participants had diverse academic qualifications. Most participants,78%, indicated they have a postgraduate degree, 16% held an undergraduate degree, and 6% respectively held a Matric and Higher Diploma.

Table 6: Level of education

Level of education	Number of participants
Postgraduate	14
Undergraduate	2
Matric	1
Higher diploma	1

Participants' work experience within the field of CSR was, on average, 11.58 years. Table 7 below indicates the participants' position titles.

Table 7: Position titles

Position title	Position title
CSI and Stakeholder Engagement Officer	CSI officer
Operations Manager	Head of Corporate Social Investments
Head of CSI	CSI Manager
Manager Foundation Centre	Junior project manager
Programs Manager	Junior Manager and Community Development Specialist
CSR and Plant Marketing Specialist	CSR specialist
CSI Coordinator	Program manager
Executive Director and Owner	Chief Operations Officer
Human Resources Officer	Regional Corporate Affairs Manager

4.2 Findings pertaining to proposition 1

Proposition 1: Sustainability and sustainable development should be at the core of CSR initiatives.

When asked what sustainability and sustainable projects mean, most participants highlighted the importance of creating impactful, self-sustaining projects with longevity. Participants framed longevity as programmes or projects existing beyond corporate involvement, with self-sustaining projects framed as CSR projects that need minimal corporate interventions after implementation and can sustain themselves. Here, buy-in and ownership of projects by the community or implementing partner were highlighted.

> *"we do not seek to own the concepts, the concepts must be owned by the NGO, because we are not in the business, for example of running career guidance. If that concept is the career guidance concept, that NGO partner is in the business of running career guidance, we co create the concept with a view of handing it over to the NGO, so that the NGO can approach other funders, NGO can grant a lot of other investments. And the initiative can live outside of us beyond us that is sustainable" (Participant 11,male, Gauteng).*

Participants viewed sustainability and sustainable development as part of CSR goals by creating initiatives aligned with organisational strategy and sustainable goals. Programmes, products, or services are initiated with the mindset of how they impact sustainability and positively impact society and communities by meeting current needs without compromising the future. One participant shared that sustainability and CSR are at their organisation's core and thus influence their initiatives. However, another participant highlighted that random acts of kindness should not be forgotten in the quest for sustainability and sustainable development as the greater socio-economic conditions sometimes call for initiatives that contributes towards immediate needs, a balance should be struck between strategic initiatives and short-term initiatives.

4.3 Findings pertaining to proposition 2

Proposition 2: Understanding CSR, regulations and CSR drivers requires a developmental mindset that ensures compliance, alignment and enables CSR professionals to be purposefully led in sustainability and sustainable development efforts.

This research aimed to understand the cognitive competencies that enable successful CSR planning and execution. The table below highlights the cognitive competencies explored with participants, enabling successful CSR planning and execution.

Table 8: Cognitive competencies highlighted by participants

CSR awareness of business role in society and appreciation for development.
Knowledge of regulations and CSR drivers
Ability to discern CSR goals.
Competence in foresight thinking.
Interdependence thinking.
Anticipatory competency.

- **Knowledge of Regulations and CSR drivers**

Participants acknowledged the importance of understanding relevant regulations and CSR drivers in planning and executing CSR, including BBBEE regulation, tax exemption and SDGs, with one participant sharing that they rely on their implementation partners' knowledge. Understanding regulations is crucial for regulatory compliance, planning, and execution and aligning with relevant regulatory stakeholders. It protects the CSR professional, beneficiaries and other stakeholders, prevents organisations from engaging in unsustainable CSR activities and informs the organisation's CSR direction. Beyond understanding regulation for compliance reasons, interestingly, one participant shared that regulation allows or provides an environment for CSR to exist, as seen in the excerpt below:

“So without regulation, I don't think we'd be able to operate, how we operate, and being able to care for people that way. Because it would be just a matter of me making money.” (Participant 3, female, Gauteng)

Regarding CSR drivers, participants shared that understanding CSR drivers allows organisations to plan and execute CSR projects that speak towards global, local, and national sustainable goals. One participant stated that when planning and executing, they ensure that they consult relevant regulations and local municipalities to ascertain that their projects are aligned, speak to regulatory requirements, and are accredited and recognised.

At the same time, the CSR professional needs to be cognizant of the kind of organisation they are in, as seen in the excerpt below:

“Another thing that influences is the kind of organization that you are. So I'm gonna give an example. Food security, food nutrition, it is an agenda, it's a global agenda. But if you're a financial institution, that might not be the agenda” (Participant 5, female, Gauteng).

- **Foresight thinking skills on CSR development in implementation and future CSR development.**

Foresight thinking skills are crucial for CSR professionals. Participants framed it as anticipatory and future-oriented perspectives. The anticipatory view involves identifying opportunities, challenges, stakeholders, and interdependent factors, allowing proactive management in planning and implementation.

On the other hand, the future-oriented perspective emphasises the need to map how CSR-related factors will develop and the future relevancy of current CSR activities. Participants shared that they always need to keep in touch and informed on what is happening within South Africa, other countries, and external projects to identify opportunities, as seen in the excerpt below:

“And foresight, just to build on the investment pieces that CSR has. It's no longer just a check exercise. We have strategy, at the foundation, we've got like a five-

year strategy we think about who are we and what we want to achieve. Thinking about your strategy, you have to understand, you know, where we find ourselves economically as a country. And that will inform where we're going. So, you must be very clued up, not just on what's happening within the development space, but also what's happening to the other sectors within the country so that you're able to make well informed decisions on where we should be going." (Participant 5, female, Gauteng).

In addition, some participants shared that through experience, they developed anticipatory, foresight, and interdependence thinking skills, enabling better decision-making, planning, and response time. One participant with experience in both the NPO and corporate environment framed the benefits of experience in terms of how having experiences in both spaces supports better decision-making and interdependence thinking skills.

- **The ability to establish and discern CSR goals leads to purpose-led CSR.**

When asked what the impact would be if goals were not established, participants' answers varied, as seen below:

"you are turning CSR which is supposed to be aimed at transforming lives into a PR exercise" (Participant 15, female, Gauteng).

"You will have ten different people trying to achieve what they think, is the right thing, and what might not actually be the right thing" (Participant 17, female, Western Cape).

Further impacts noted were negative impacts on the organisation's reputation, beneficiaries, employees, project success, and wastage of time and resources. Thus, participants emphasised the importance of establishing CSR goals as it allows for alignment amongst stakeholders and decision-making regarding project selection, planning, and execution. Being able to establish goals allows the CSR professional to measure for impact and reflect on their "why", as one participant stated. Moreover, in aligning CSR goals to CSR drivers, the CSR leader should be

cognizant of what their organisation does and that the goals speak towards it with one participant highlighting that CSR goals or projects do not exist outside of an organisation's business model and thus should not be constructed in isolation. For example, one participant shared:

> *"Also, the work we do, because our core business as a company is about risk mitigation. We are in short term insurance. So our CSI strategy talks do that. And our projects that we implement also talks to that." (Participant 7, female, Western Cape)*

Here, participants noted the importance of understanding the business, CSR drivers and regulations when planning and executing CSR goals, so that it speaks to the organisation's strategy and business, creating authenticity and buy-in. This was highlighted by a participant in the water and sanitation industry who shared that they would receive more participation from internal stakeholders such as engineers when projects related to their speciality.

The findings thus indicate that, discerning and setting CSR goals enables CSR professionals to pinpoint initiatives and be purposefully led in sustainability and sustainable development efforts.

- **CSR awareness of business role in society and appreciation for development**

Understanding CSR is framed as a developmental mindset that understands the role of business in society and the need for collaboration to address initiatives holistically for a more significant impact, with one participant sharing that CSR should be about collaboration and not competition. As mentioned in the preceding section, knowledge of CSR regulations is essential, but some participants cautioned against applying this knowledge mainly as a compliance tick-box exercise. Instead, they suggest a development appreciation mindset, framed as critical thinking, in implementing and planning CSR that speaks towards a holistic view of addressing impact.

The below response illustrates the development mindset:

> *“now we moved into a space where we are saying, hey, hang on maybe it's not just enough just to, you know, do your welfare, kind of CSI, maybe let's do developmental we ensure that we develop people, we develop communities, so that they are sustained” (Participant 16, female, Gauteng)*

Some participants shared the importance of training and educating oneself in CSR as it supports functional and cognitive competencies. One participant passionately emphasised the importance of appropriately qualified CSR practitioners with a development mindset. On the other hand, other participants shared that they developed an understanding of CSR through their years of CSR experience.

A developmental mindset of CSR understands that CSR is long-term. and enables the CSR professional to balance short short-term challenges and projects and persevere when planning and executing projects.

- **The ability to deal with context- dependent complexities.**

When asked what role the ability to deal with complexities plays, participants shared that one should be able to deal with complexities in CSR due to the dynamic environment and interdependent factors. Responses included being agile and flexible in decluttering information/processes and using a system thinking approach to dig for a more profound understanding, with one participant stating that one could experience difficulties adapting as a structured person. Another participant stated that one can strategize for five years, but things can change with another participant stating that when goals are not achieved; one needs to be able to view what happened, redirect, and create alternative solutions.

In addition, participants viewed the ability to deal with complexities by having a comprehensive view of the interdependent factors that impact project success. One participant from the NPO industry made an example that implementing education programmes does not only mean appointing a teacher or creating a school, other factors impact success, such as nutrition and accessibility, that need to be kept in

mind to understand social development as a complex matter and not a straightforward one. Here, participants highlighted that complexity means working together and collaborating. Another participant highlighted the impact of broader socio-economic problems, asserting that understanding socio-economic challenges requires the CSR leader to create strategies and projects around deeper investments rather than surface-level initiatives. At the same time, the assertion made earlier by another participant that the socio-economic challenges in South Africa require both strategic and philanthropic efforts need to be noted as well.

Moreover, participants stated that understanding the external and internal factors of projects or initiatives, having a risk register in place, and finding mitigation actions to address risks are essential. Here, an integration of functional competencies to be discussed in the subsequent proposition discussed is present.

In summary, dealing with complexities in planning and executing CSR projects means that the CSR professional understands the impact of interdependent factors on project success and how everything fits together to navigate challenges.

4.3 Findings pertaining to proposition 3

Proposition 3: Networking and building relationships with stakeholders requires interpersonal skills that understands context to navigate social dynamics and positively impact collaboration.

One focus of the research was to determine the social competencies that support CSR leadership in navigating social dynamics in executing CSR initiatives. Table 9 below indicates the social competencies participants identified as essential to navigating social dynamics or challenges in executing CSR initiatives and contributing to sustainability and sustainable development.

Table 9: Social competencies highlighted by participants

Interpersonal Competence
Networking Competence
Persuasive/negotiating abilities
Stakeholder Management competence
Socio-economic context understanding and perception

- **Interpersonal Competence**

Participants expressed that interpersonal skills support engaging and collaborating with stakeholders at various levels and navigating dynamics. Competing interests, timelines, different mindsets, expectations and understanding levels are some of the challenges experienced when implementing projects. Some cases described included navigating interactions with union or community members where differing views or understandings can arise and navigating power dynamics is at play. Listening to different perspectives combined with patience is essential to come to an alignment. Failing to understand different perspectives could impact the approval and implementation of projects. Concerning navigating dynamics, knowing how to communicate with vulnerable communities was framed as exhibiting humility, empathy, being caring and patient, having diplomacy, and practising self-awareness and awareness of others regarding one's beliefs, their impact on others and relating to others. Illustrated in the excerpt below:

> *"Because you work with stakeholders or communities that you would need to engage with in their vulnerable or marginalized status. So, you need to have that kind of interpersonal skill, how to communicate with them without having to infringe on their human rights" (Participant 14, female, Mpumalanga).*

- **Networking Competence**

Participants emphasised that CSR endeavours can only be attained with the input of stakeholders to achieve greater success. Networking competence equips the CSR professional with access to opportunities, serves as a resource connector, and supports collaboration and the creation of a more significant impact. A CSR leader's failure to network could limit the impact of the organisation's CSR work, impact buy-

in from stakeholders, limit the CSR leaders' capabilities, and lead to inefficiencies such as working outside of one's mandate. Examples of networking shared by participants included accessing funds that were needed and linking organisations and beneficiaries, as illustrated in the excerpts below:

> *"our ability or my ability as a team to network means accessing funding, we just recently accessed significant amount of funds for development to develop small businesses around the country, you know." (Participant 1, male, Western Cape)."*

> *"a skill of mine is that I'm able to connect resources and people or people with people. And I think that is a great quality to have within this field. Because often, sometimes you're not able to necessarily help a project or a situation or individual, but you can connect them to something." (Participant 12, female, Western Cape)*

- **Persuasive and negotiation abilities**

> *"you have to negotiate, most of the time we receive a budget but if you have like, an environment like working in an industry or at a, manufacturing plant, where there's also you need buy in from trade union, you need to be able to balance their demands, and what the business objectives are. (Participant 6, female, Eastern Cape)"*

> *"the challenge, is getting funding, funding approved for the projects, that's number one. Because if you don't get that funding, you're not going to be able to implement anything, right? And the challenge is convincing or persuading your board, right? (Participant 5, female, Gauteng)"*

The two excerpts above indicate that CSR professionals encounter buy-in challenges when implementing projects, such as community pushback, participation, and internal stakeholders' reluctance or people working in silos. Participants shared that navigating buy-in challenges required building trust, negotiating, raising awareness, finding alignment and consulting. In addition, depending on the internal stakeholders, this could include presenting a project

business case to persuade internal decision-makers. One participant shared that his reputation as an achiever motivates him to drive projects and motivate others to join, indicating the role of motivation in navigating buy-in challenges.

- **Socio-economic context understanding and perception.**

The participants stated that understanding the South African context and social contexts is required to determine the appropriate engagement for successful CSR implementation. The CSR professional must understand that people have different problems and concerns, understand the community's needs, and listen intently to understand and discern the actual needs. Participants working close on the ground shared that when engaging, one needs to understand the community dynamics and the specific ways to interact. One participant shared that where one is unfamiliar, the CSR professional should research the communities to inform engagement.

> *"you need to understand community dynamics you will need to understand you know, the social challenges that are impacting a particular community, you need to understand the demographics within that community." (Participant 16, female, Gauteng)*

In addition awareness of self and others in navigating dynamics is required.

> *"Understanding that there are inevitably power dynamics between you, as a, corporate, and communities…., the people see the institution that you're involved in, they see money. And therefore, it does impact on the power dynamics that you have, and how they relate and respond." (Participant 11, male, Gauteng)*

- **Stakeholder Management Competency**

Participants highlighted the importance of stakeholder relationship management and networking for project success, buy-in and navigating challenges in CSR implementation. Based on the responses from the participants, stakeholder management competency is framed as managing and building relationships with stakeholders to navigate challenges and enhance collaboration. Challenges

included buy-in, resistance, and local municipalities' working methods, with one participant even sharing that sometimes there could be illegal mafia-like elements. Participants shared that navigating these challenges requires involving relevant stakeholders and engaging from a space of understanding that each stakeholder is different. For example, one participant shared that by including community leaders and local ward councillors, they could navigate the challenges they experienced with mafia-like groups when executing projects in the community. Involving stakeholders such as the communities also means understanding the community's needs for the project to be sustainable.

In addition to networking, participants shared that building relationships with stakeholders results in collaborations, connecting dots, finding synergies, creating engagement, identifying potential projects, and creating impact that cannot be achieved alone. Building relationships with stakeholders creates trust, reciprocity, and longevity of programs. In managing these relationships, the CSR professional needs to draw together stakeholders such as internal stakeholders, local municipalities, communities, and implementing partners to drive the message of CSR and decision-making.

4.4 Findings pertaining to proposition 4 and 5

Proposition 4: Actively managing projects through a consultative approach support successful execution of projects and proposition 5: Employing financial and business acumen supports identifying value creation opportunities for greater impact.

The two propositions are discussed below.

One of the research questions included exploring the functional competencies that influence CSR leadership to execute successful CSR initiatives. The table below highlights the functional competencies that influence CSR leadership to execute successful CSR initiatives and identify value-creation opportunities.

Table 10: Functional competencies highlighted by participants

Project Management
Administrative and Computer Competency
Leadership competencies
Monitoring and Evaluation Competency
Team/People Management
Financial and Business Acumen
Opportunity Identification
Communication

- **Managing projects in planning and execution**

Participants shared that the CSR professional must know how to manage projects. If not managed correctly, it could impact the organisation's reputation or brand, goals not met and negatively impact the beneficiaries, which could impact future projects. The ability to manage projects also includes the CSR professional being able to develop partnerships and collaborations internally as well as externally to ensure successful execution. Moreover, some participants shared that managing the projects should not be done as a tick-box exercise but should be managed holistically and followed through from ideation to implementation. The elements of managing for successful execution confirmed by participants include:

- ***Ability to consult to identify needs:***

Participants emphasised the importance of practising discernment in identifying needs through consultation with communities and other relevant stakeholders where projects are to be executed in communities or within the mandate of governmental or local municipal departments. Establishing the community needs will ensure buy-in and utilisation as projects and initiatives will speak to the actual needs and challenges.

> *"you can't run away from consultation, because the stakeholders that I was talking about, you need to consult and you need to engage otherwise, you will think you're solving a problem. But you might find that they don't even need whatever you were selling them" (Participant 13, female, Gauteng).*

- ***Project management skills***

Participants shared that project management is crucial for successful CSR initiatives because it supports strategic planning, understanding the project lifecycle, identifying relevant stakeholders for collaboration or partnership, evaluating feasibility and effectiveness, , tracking and monitoring different projects, risk management, creating risk mitigation strategies and systemic interventions and ensuring stakeholder accountability Moreover, participants shared that experience helps, in strategic thinking and decision making prioritizing implementation and the feasibility and viability of decisions.

> *"If you don't have project management ability, nothing gets out of the starting. Here in CSR, I manage so many different pieces. There is a program in entrepreneurship there is a program at university there's a program in schools. And I've got to have the ability to understand what that project and that space aims to achieve." (Participant 11, male, Gauteng)*

- ***Monitoring and evaluation Competency***

The ability to monitor and evaluate when executing projects allows participants to evaluate impact and sustainability, continuously manage projects to assess progress and evaluate and respond to project blockers. This requires continuous feedback and checks during planning, execution, and post-implementation and enables reflection on practices.

- ***Change Management skills***

Where projects are implemented in communities or handed over to implementing partners, participants highlighted the importance of employing change management skills to create ownership of projects by beneficiaries, which requires the involvement of beneficiaries and stakeholders in managing and creating projects.

- **Administrative and computer literacy**

As project management has an administrative component, participants shared the importance of administrative competencies, including computer literacy, report writing, project planning, and providing detailed reports when executing projects.

- **Leadership Competencies**
- Elements of leadership competency confirmed by participants included being assertive, expressing one's views and values in decision-making, self-organisation, time management, decision making skills and driving the message of CSR. These elements support navigating challenges like silo working through emphasising collaboration. Inspiring and motivating others to take action and persevere were also elements identified. Moreover, as highlighted by a participant in a management position, facilitating team members is essential in executing successful projects, corroborated by another participant who shared the need for mentorship in CSR.

- **Team/ People Management for effective execution**

Due to the complexities highlighted by participants in the preceding sections, participants shared that CSR requires teamwork and working with people across the board. If a CSR leader cannot manage teams or people, it could negatively impact projects.

Participants highlighted the significance of managing implementing partners, internal teams, and stakeholders in CSR execution. Furthermore, one of the management participants highlighted the significance of managing teams, focusing on developing an effective team for CSR activities, allowing management to drive strategic aspects. Participants also highlighted the role of emotional intelligence in managing teams, guiding communication and how one responds to team members to get all on board, as seen in the excerpt below:

> "*So yeah, I think if you're emotionally intelligent, that helps you to manage yourself and your team a whole lot better, leading to like better implementation, because you*

can't I mean, be snapping at your team members, because you are in an internal contradiction. And then suddenly, next thing, you know, your entire project team is falling apart. And the next thing, you know, project is crashing." (Participant 1, male, Western Cape).

- **Communication Competency**

CSR professionals will need communication competencies to manage expectations and facilitate discussions at the understanding level of each stakeholder in driving the CSR message. Communication competency is seen as a verbal and nonverbal communication skill, whereby nonverbal communication skills refer to writing reports and presentations to share strategies and report back on impact. Interestingly, one participant shared that the language used is also essential to ensure the communities' or beneficiaries' understanding, as this could impact the success of a project.

"So if you take a community that is predominantly Afrikaans, you can't send somebody into the community that doesn't speak Afrikaans who would not be able to adapt to the lingo of that specific Afrikaans…and so there might come some conflicts in terms of understanding or the misinterpretation of what the intent might be." (Participant17, female, Western Cape)

- **Financial and Business acumen regarding CSR related projects**

All participants emphasised the importance of business and financial acumen in executing sustainable CSR projects, highlighting the ability to monitor and manage funds, spend wisely, know how to allocate resources, calculate return on investment. Failure to do so could result in overspending, continuous funding projects, resources misallocated, and unmet objectives.

Some participants elaborated that one does not need to be a finance specialist; however, they should have financial insight into CSR spend. One participant notably stated that financial acumen should not be a CSR prerequisite. However, it must be noted that a participant who is an operations manager at a foundation shared that, in her experience, the ability to read the financial statements of implementing

partners is required. Working within an organisation, they can draw on the expertise of their financial teams regarding evaluation and decision-making from a financial point of view. This further emphasises the previous points made by participants that CSR requires a multidisciplinary team.

> *"I'm a development practitioner, I'm not a financial manager. So having a high-level understanding of the numbers but knowing that I need to delegate or I need to rope in my financial manager to interpret the numbers for me, because they're experts in that field (Participant 5, female, Gauteng)."*

Some participants noted that as CSR deals with topics that draw on the heart, business and financial acumen allows one to balance heart-informed decisions with business-informed decisions, thus allowing the CSR professional to measure social impacts against financial input, strategy and values.

> *"Business acumen means you are thinking from the business perspective you can't just go with how you feel about a project, you need to think about how it impacts the business as well, not spending on projects that are not align with your business policies and values. (Participant 10, female, Western Cape)"*

Moreover, participants noted that business acumen is essential for achieving maximum impact with limited resources and enables forging collaboration and partnerships. These can also be internal, leveraging employees' expertise to volunteer their skills. Moreover, it allows the CSR professional to assess their implementing partners' capabilities and capacity and strategically disburse funds sustainably.

- **Identifying value creation opportunities**

Participants noted the importance of CSR professionals identifying value-creation opportunities for future collaboration, innovation, self-sustaining maximising solutions.

To identify opportunities, the CSR professional must be entrepreneurial, aware of their organisational goals and strategically identify opportunities that align with the

organisation’s values and CSR goals and the business imperative and value chain. This will contribute to sustainable development and further the organisation’s sustainability efforts. Here, one participant shared a farming project their organisation embarked on when they saw an opportunity for a product in their value chain to be needed in the market. By identifying this opportunity, the CSR project spoke to the business’s value chain and addressed the community’s livelihoods through the sustainable initiative. Some participants also shared that despite receiving funding, it is imperative to identify opportunities for sustainability of their initiatives and to achieve greater reach.

Participants highlighted that opportunities can be identified through consultation with local communities and keeping abreast of the CSR landscape and trends. In addition, the ability to identify opportunities supports navigating challenges regarding access to resources and funds and accessibility of the implementation location's physical and social locality.

4.6 Findings pertaining to meta-competencies propositions:

One main purpose of this research was to provide a competency framework that examines the overarching role of meta-competencies. The section below describes the meta-competencies that facilitate the application of the core competencies.

4.6.1 Proposition 6 pertaining to perseverance

The meta-competency perseverance through actively managing projects and stakeholders supports follow through and the outcome of CSR initiatives.

- Functional and socially orientated role of perseverance to build resilience in CSR.

When implementing CSR, the CSR professional is faced with resistance, conflicting situations, roadblocks, direction changes, project delays, the availability of funds, and dealing with various stakeholders. Considering these scenarios, when asked about the role of perseverance, participants shared that perseverance alongside

patience is essential in building resilience, as the ability to persevere is connected to the implementation or outcome. This is especially essential as CSR initiatives geared towards sustainability and sustainable development are long-term focused, which requires perseverance.

The competency was identified as functionally and socially orientated, which requires actively managing projects and stakeholders to determine whether to persevere further or discontinue.

4.6.2 Proposition 7 pertaining to emotional intelligence

Meta-competency emotional intelligence positively supports communication and decision-making while engaging with team members and stakeholders and planning and executing CSR initiatives.

- Functionally and socially orientated role of emotional intelligence in CSR

Participants identified emotional intelligence and its elements, such as empathy and awareness, as crucial in implementing CSR. CSR consists of various stakeholders with differing personalities, backgrounds, and contexts where there would be differing views with which one might disagree. It would require one to understand people and be sensitive to the needs of beneficiaries to find common ground. In management positions, participants highlighted the ability to sense how the team is doing as an essential emotional intelligence component in implementing CSR. Emotional intelligence and empathy were identified as functionally and socially orientated, guiding, managing, and engaging with teams and stakeholders.

4.6.3 Proposition 8 pertaining to values

Balancing personal and business values without losing sight of personal values supports purpose-led CSR initiatives.

- Cognitive and functional orientated role of Personal values

Participants mentioned personal values such as integrity, ethical framework, and trust as crucial to assessing situations, decision-making, driving the development agenda, and understanding the need for CSR. For example, some participants shared that having access to funds could make them susceptible to corruption, but their integrity guides them in driving the CSR agenda. Participants mentioned that aligning one's values to the organisation's values is crucial. If it is not congruent, it should be addressed as it impacts motivation, commitment, resilience, and success in implementation. Moreover, participants noted that as CSR is often viewed as a heart discipline, the CSR professional should be able to balance personal and organisational values without losing sight of his or her values in implementing and managing CSR. From this, one can argue that knowing one's values in decision-making has a cognitive orientation, and balancing between personal and organisational values has a functional orientation.

4.6.4 Proposition 9 pertaining to motivation

The meta-competency motivation supports the CSR professional's awareness of the need for CSR and positively impacts driving buy-in and solution orientation.

- Cognitive, functional, and socially orientated role of motivation

When asked what motivates the CSR professional, participants shared intrinsic motivations like passion, wanting to make a difference, purpose, personal achievement, awareness of South African disparities, personal experiences, and seeing the results or impact of CSR. Participants also noted the corporate citizenry aspect of motivation.

Motivation is instrumental in how CSR professionals implement CSR. It helps them persevere despite challenges and resistance, not exploit beneficiaries' vulnerabilities, be creative and solution-oriented, and go the extra mile. Moreover, it supports innovation and has a sustainable long-term impact on CSR.

In this instance, motivation has a cognitive, functional, and social orientation. It creates awareness of the need for CSR and supports driving buy-in and employs functional and social competencies in implementation.

4.6.5 Proposition 10 pertaining to reflection

The meta-competency reflection supports developing sustainable CSR practice through learning and changing.

- Cognitive, functional, and social orientation role of reflection

Reflection in action and about actions is crucial for personal and professional growth, allowing CSR professionals to evaluate initiatives, assumptions, and beliefs. It helps in strategic decision-making, achieving maximum outputs, and identifying areas for improvement. Reflection also helps in team and project reflection, the position of CSR in the organisation, and ensuring that CSR initiatives are still on track from an organisational and impact perspective.

In this instance, reflection has a cognitive, functional, and social orientation in CSR.

5. Discussion of the findings

This section discusses the findings from the interviews conducted with the 18 research participants to answer the research objectives, questions and resultant propositions. The findings are discussed against the literature review conducted to determine points of congruence and differences noted. An integrative view of competencies, as proposed by Mulder (2014) and Wiek et al. (2011), was evident in the findings.

5.1 Discussion pertaining to research question 1.

The first research question focused on exploring the cognitive competencies that enable successful CSR planning and execution, with the associated objective 1 establishing the cognitive competencies that contribute to successful CSR planning and execution. The following section discusses the associated literature alongside

the findings associated with research question 1, objective and the resultant two propositions, proposition 1 and 2.

As a point of departure, consistent with the literature by Eizaguirre et al. (2019) and Sheehy and Farneti (2021), participants viewed CSR contribution to sustainable development as long-lasting future orientated initiatives that benefits current beneficiaries and future generations. Moreover, these initiatives should be sustainable and self-sustaining and aligned with the environment, community needs and the NDP. The study also highlighted the impact of greater socio-economic challenges on the sustainability of CSR initiatives and the need for purpose-led deeper investments. Here, we see consistency with the assertion made by the authors of Trialogue (2022a) that CSR activities play a role in bringing South Africa closer to the SDGs and aligning with the NDP. However, of note is the assertion made by one participant that the principle of philanthropic giving should not be lost in the pursuit of strategic sustainability initiatives. This view can be framed in view of the impact of greater socio-economic challenges and needs in South Africa which requires immediate short-term initiatives.

Participants noted all the cognitive competencies highlighted in the literature review. In addition, participants' answers revealed that cognitive competencies for sustainable CSR include a purpose-led CSR leader who is aware of businesses' role in society and has an appreciation for development. These themes came up, for example, in discussions surrounding understanding and knowing CSR regulations and drivers, whereby participants emphasised the importance of a development mindset in navigating regulations for sustainable decision-making in CSR initiatives. This is consistent with that of Kakabadse et al. (2009), who argued that CSR awareness is crucial to lead CSR actively and successfully. In addition, regarding understanding CSR drivers and regulations participants shared that understanding CSR drivers allows organisations to plan and execute CSR projects that speak towards global, local, and national sustainable goals. At the same time, the CSR professional needs to be cognizant of the kind of organisation they are in. Here, an integrative application of competencies, as proposed by Mulder (2014) and Wiek et al. (2011), was found between the functional competencies of

identifying opportunities through understanding CSR drivers, regulation and organisational knowledge.

The ability to deal with complexities requires an integrative application of systems and future thinking (De Haan,2006 & McCreanor & Bitzer,2017) and interdisciplinary skills was set out in the literature under functional and cognitive competencies. In addition participants highlighted that understanding the complexities in CSR requires of the CSR to understand that sustainable development requires collaboration. Moreover, one of the objectives put forth in the literature review under the cognitive competency construct was to further explore future thinking as one of the essential competencies needed in CSR in South Africa as per previous studies (McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017; Osagie et al.,2016 & Wiek et al.,2011). All participants shared the view that future thinking and anticipatory thinking are crucial, as anticipatory view allows for identifying opportunities and risk management, and future thinking allows for understanding future CSR development.

5.3 Discussion pertaining to research question 2.

The second research question focused on exploring the social competencies that support CSR leadership to navigate social dynamics in executing CSR initiatives, with the associated objective 2 examining the social competencies needed by CSR leadership to navigate social dynamics in executing CSR initiatives.

Consistent with the literature, the social competencies identified and explored by the participants highlighted interpersonal competence (Osagie et al.,2016; Wiek et al.,2011; McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017), stakeholder management competence (McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017), and socio-economic context understanding and perception (de Haan, 2006; Samuel & Mqomboti, 2017). Participants shared that these competencies support collaboration, navigating challenges, and driving the CSR message across various stakeholders to create and implement CSR initiatives successfully. Collective impact was identified by Trialogue (2022a) as essential to solving some of the systemic challenges faced in South Africa. Similarly,

participants highlighted the importance of collaboration competencies in creating engagement, finding synergies, and creating impact to address some of the systemic challenges faced in South Africa.

Moreover, as highlighted through the research by Cheruiyot-Koech and Reddy (2022), the state has an embedded stakeholder influence as a key stakeholder. Similarly in the study five participants specifically shared the importance of governmental and local municipality stakeholder management competencies in navigating these engagement dynamics. Of the five participants, two were from the mining and alcohol industries. These participants highlighted that their industries, respectively, could be seen as negatively impacting society and the environment and are thus highly regulated. The participants shared that the importance of local government and municipality engagement provides legitimacy and buy-in for their initiatives and creates sustainability.

Although not explicitly stating it as cross-cultural competencies as defined by Kearins and Springett (2003) and cosmopolitan transcultural understanding and perception as defined by de Haan (2006), the research participants indicated the importance of understanding local community needs, dynamics and the particular South African socio-economic context, to determine the appropriate engagement, for sustainable CSR as highlighted by Samuel & Mqomboti's (2017) proposition that consideration of local culture and values are essential for CSR in South Africa. In these instances participants shared that failing to understand different perspectives, local community needs and dynamics could impact the approval and implementation of projects.

5.4 Discussion pertaining to research question 3.

The third research question focused on investigating the functional competencies essential for CSR leadership to execute successful CSR initiatives. The associated objective 3 examined the social competencies needed by CSR leadership to navigate social dynamics in executing CSR initiatives.

The literature review on functional competencies indicated a strong agreement concerning having the competency to manage and implement CSR projects (de Haan, 2006; Kakabadse et al., 2009; McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017; Osagie et al., 2016) and to monitor and assess CSR initiatives to assess its impact (Patel & Mushonga, 2015). Similarly, participants highlighted that functional competencies influence CSR execution through various elements, including the ability to manage projects. Most strikingly, most participants highlighted project management competencies as essential for strategic CSR. This competency is viewed as providing an environment that allows for other essential competencies to be employed, allowing strategic CSR for sustainability, as in the findings of Al-Reyaysa et al. (2019). Although McCreanor and Bitzer (2017) highlighted the competency to work independently, participants highlighted the importance of teamwork and collaboration in CSR, as the complexities of CSR requires input from various stakeholders and disciplines.

The participant's demographic data indicated that they were qualified in different fields and had various levels of education, of note was one of the participants' assertions regarding the need for appropriately qualified CSR professionals and leaders within the field of CSR and developmental work. The participant's assertion highlighted the findings by McCreanor and Bitzer (2017) and propositions by de Haan (2006) regarding the need for CSR and sustainability-related education, training and skills.

Language competency was not highlighted in the literature reviewed, however one of the participants made an interesting observation about the importance of understanding communities' languages when engaging with them and for the successful execution of CSR initiatives.

The ability to identify opportunities and employ financial insight was highlighted by Kakabadse et al. (2009), McCreanor and Bitzer (2017) and Osagie et al. (2016) in the literature review. Similarly, participants highlighted the importance of employing financial and business acumen to identify value-creation opportunities for more significant impact and sustainability. Of note here is the assertions and clarity

provided by two research participants that CSR professionals are not financial experts and thus require the input and support of finance specialists in their organisation. At the same time, another participant who is the operational manager at a foundation highlighted the competency to read financial statements. These assertions highlight the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, supporting de Haan's (2006) argument that a single specialised field cannot fully address sustainability. Additionally, it highlights the differing roles CSR leaders occupy and highlights the occupation-linked competency mix proposed by Cheetham and Chivers (1996).

5.5 Discussion pertaining to research question 4

One of the primary objectives was to provide a framework for CSR professionals that will facilitate applying the core competencies through investigating the role of various meta-competencies. The fourth research question thus focused on proposing a framework that can assist CSR professionals in achieving effective, sustainable development. The holistic model of competencies proposed by Cheetham and Chivers (1996) provided a framework for understanding the interconnected nature of competencies and the overarching role of meta-competencies. Similarly the findings highlighted the interconnected application of competencies by participants. The meta-competencies perseverance, emotional intelligence, reflection and motivation were highlighted in the literature review as overarching competencies that aid in developing the other competencies (Asumeng, 2014) whereas the meta-competency motivation and aligning personal values were highlighted in the literature as supporting perseverance and the will to act (Osagie et al.,2016; McCreanor & Bitzer, 2017 & de Haan, 2006; Locket et al., 2006).

Similarly, participants highlighted the importance of meta-competencies in planning and executing thus the participants' responses supported the literature review regarding the overarching role of meta-competencies in planning and executing, These were highlighted in the resultant propositions associated with the literature

on meta- competencies and participants response on the role it plays. Thus, the findings of the study corroborated the associated propositions as listed below:

- Proposition 6 that perseverance supports follow through.
- Proposition 7 that emotional intelligence positively supports communicating and decision making, engaging teams and stakeholders.
- Proposition 8 that motivation supports the CSR professional's awareness of the need for CSR and positively impacts driving buy-in and solution orientation.
- Proposition 9 that balancing personal and business values without losing sight of personal values supports purpose-led CSR initiatives.
- Proposition 10That reflection supports developing sustainable CSR practice through learning and changing.

The holistic model of competencies proposed by Cheetham and Chivers (1996) further provided a framework for understanding the interconnected nature of competencies as participants answers often indicated the interdependent nature of different competencies constructs in execution and planning. For example, an integrative application of competencies was found between the functional competencies of identifying opportunities and the cognitive competencies of understanding CSR drivers, regulation, and organisational knowledge. Similarly, participants' responses indicated a nexus concerning knowledge and action in enacting social competencies for sustainable CSR initiatives.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This section provides the study's conclusions per research objective, a summary of the findings, implications for research, implications for practice, limitations, and finally, recommendations for future research.

6.1. Conclusion pertaining to research objective 1.

To establish the cognitive competencies that contribute to successful CSR planning and execution.

The research question posited was to determine the cognitive competencies that enable successful CSR planning and execution. As highlighted in the literature review, some competencies included CSR awareness, knowledge of regulations and CSR drivers, ability to discern CSR goals, competence and foresight thinking and anticipatory thinking skills. The responses from the participants highlighted similar competencies. The importance of understanding the need for collaboration to address initiatives holistically for more significant impact was a common thread. The researcher then, through proposition two and based on the participants'' responses, determined that understanding CSR, regulations, and CSR drivers requires a developmental mindset that ensures compliance and alignment and enables CSR professionals to be purposefully led in sustainability and sustainable development efforts.

6.2 Conclusion pertaining to research objective 2.

To establish the social competencies needed by CSR leadership to navigate social dynamics in executing CSR initiatives.

The research question posited under research objective 2 was to understand the social competencies that support CSR leadership in navigating social dynamics in executing CSR initiatives. The literature review highlighted social competencies such as interpersonal competence, networking and stakeholder competence and cosmopolitan transcultural understanding and perception. The responses from the participants highlighted similar competencies. Through proposition three and based on participants' responses, the researcher determined that networking and building relationships with stakeholders require interpersonal skills that understand the context to navigate social dynamics and positively impact collaboration. Some participants highlighted the importance of government and local municipality stakeholder competence in collaborative efforts. Similarly, the importance of collaboration was highlighted by participants as it pertains to social competencies.

6.3 Conclusion pertaining to research objective 3.

To investigate the functional competencies that are essential for CSR leadership to execute successful CSR initiatives.

The research question posited under research objective 3 was: what functional competencies influence CSR leadership to execute successful CSR initiatives? The literature review highlighted the importance of actively managing and implementing CSR projects, CSR leadership competencies, identifying opportunities, and possessing financial and business acumen. The responses from the participants highlighted similar competencies. Moreover, project management was particularly highlighted as a competence to strategically manage CSR initiatives. Through propositions four and five and based on participants' responses, the researcher then determined that actively managing projects through a consultative approach supports the successful execution of projects and employing financial and business acumen supports identifying value creation opportunities for greater impact. Similarly, the importance of collaboration was highlighted by participants, with particular reference made to drawing on the strengths of other fields capabilities.

6.4 Conclusion pertaining to research objective 4.

To develop a meta competency framework that will facilitate applying the core competencies (cognitive, social and functional) to achieve effective, sustainable development.

One of the main purposes of the study was to provide a framework to assist CSR professionals in achieving effective, sustainable development. The holistic model of competencies proposed by Cheetham and Chivers (1996) provided a framework for understanding the interconnected nature of competencies and the overarching role of meta-competencies that aid the development and application of other competencies. The responses from the participants highlighted that meta-competencies such as motivation and personal values over-arch the application of other competencies and meta-competencies such as reflection and emotional

intelligence facilitate the application and development of other competencies. Sustainable outcomes can therefore be achieved.

6.5 Summary of findings

In summary, this study aimed to explore the CSR leadership competencies that contribute towards sustainability and sustainable CSR projects in South Africa and suggest a framework for applying the various competencies. The findings indicate that in practice, CSR professionals employ social, cognitive and functional competencies in an integrative manner with the different meta-competency elements facilitating the application of the competencies in practice for sustainable outcomes (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996). CSR is a dynamic environment with greater socio-economic challenges in South Africa that CSR leaders must navigate. Moreover, in their conclusion remarks, participants highlighted the importance of collaboration, a common thread in the study. Thus, the findings highlighted that if sustainability and sustainable development are the aims, then organisations in South Africa will need to draw their attention to intensifying collaboration efforts and developing these competencies through CSR.

6.6 Implications for research

The study adds to the existent CSR literature, with a specific focus on understanding the CSR leadership competencies for sustainable CSR outcomes in South Africa.

6.7 Implications for practice

The findings provide CSR professionals and organisations with criteria to reflect on the competencies that they are already applying and further need to develop for effective, sustainable CSR. In addition, the identified competencies provide organisations with a repository when hiring and developing CSR professionals and the need to intensify collaboration efforts in CSR.

6.8 Limitations

This study's limitation was the sample size's representativeness and the varied industry representation. It is recommended that future research be undertaken with a concentrated sample representation which will provide more detailed concentrated exploration and dynamics.

6.9 Recommendations for future research

Although the findings provided some insights into collaboration and networking supporting a more significant impact, future research can intensify the scope by focusing specifically on purpose-led collaboration between private entities to address sustainability and sustainable development. Additionally, it is recommended that other factors that were not included in this study, such as interdisciplinary experience, CSR professional experience and the impact of education qualification on CSR performance, be considered for further study.

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Appendix A Participant Information sheet and consent

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

Dear Participant,

RE: Participant information sheet informed consent - Exploring the CSR Leadership Competencies that contributes to successful sustainable development in South Africa

My name is Chanell Oliphant, and I am a student at the University of Witwatersrand Business School. In partial fulfillment of an MBA degree. I am conducting a research study and collecting the data through interviews with CSR professionals/leaders.

My research title is: "Exploring the CSR Leadership Competencies that contributes to successful sustainable development in South Africa". The study aims to explore the competencies employed by CSR professionals and Leaders that aids the implementation and execution of successful sustainable development. Your participation in the study will collaboratively contribute towards creating a knowledge competency base for CSR professionals in South Africa.

Participation in the study will entail being interviewed through face-to-face semi-structured interviews or digital online interviews. The interviews will take approximately 60 minutes. Follow-ups may be required for clarification questions at a time and place or digital platform that is convenient for you. The interviews will be structured to gauge and explore the competencies needed by CSR professionals in South Africa based on your experience and knowledge base.

The interviews will be recorded for transcribing reasons to ensure accuracy. Your responses will be treated confidential and the results communicated in my final research report. No information that could identify you will be included in the report unless otherwise expressly stated.

Please note that you can withdraw your permission to participate at any time during the study. There are no known risks in participating in this study and no monetary benefits to participating in the study. All research data will be preserved for research reuse by myself in future.

Please let me know if you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,

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Verbal recorded Informed Consent

Before we proceed further, I will need your verbal consent to the following. You can answer yes or no.

Do you agree that your participation will remain anonymous.

Do you agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in the report.

Do you agree to this interview being audio recorded.

Do you agree that the information you provide may be used anonymously in the report.

Appendix B Interview Guide

Research Title: Exploring the CSR Leadership Competencies that contributes to successful sustainable development in South Africa

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
    - Matric
    - Undergraduate/Higher diploma
    - Postgraduate
3. What was your field of study.
4. Please describe your work experience to date
5. For how many years have you been in the current company?
6. How many years of experience do you have in CSR?
7. Can you share what industry your organisation is in? (only if participant is comfortable)
8. What is your position title and your current level within the organisation.
9. Describe your current position and what it entails.

Social Competencies needed in CSR Leadership

1. What skills do you believe one needs as a CSR leader when working with people.
2. What does it mean to you to have networking skills and the ability to build relationships as CSR leader?
3. What role does not having the ability to build network and build relationships play as a CSR leader
4. Describe a situation where your ability to network and build relationships played a role in fulfilling your CSR position.
5. What challenges does a CSR leader face in making their projects a success while working with people?
    - What role does experience play in this? (sub-question)

Cognitive Competencies

1. What does it mean to you to have foresight thinking skills as a CSR leader?
2. What role does the ability to deal with complexities play in your work as a CSR leader?
3. What is the impact if CSR Goals are not established.
4. How does knowledge of regulations, national or international and other CSR drivers influence establishing sustainable projects?
5. What role does experience play in the knowledge that you have as a CSR leader and how you apply it?

Functional Competencies

1. What operational skills do CSR leaders need?
2. What is the importance of being able to manage CSR projects as a CSR leader?
3. What is the importance of identifying opportunities as a CSR leader?

Research Title: Exploring the CSR Leadership Competencies that contributes to successful sustainable development in South Africa

4. Without financial or business acumen competencies what impact would you foresee on CSR projects.
5. How would you measure CSR success?

Metacompetencies

1. What role does reflection play in being a CSR leader both from a personal and professional aspect?
2. What motivates you to do what you do as a CSR leader?
3. How has this helped you in implementing and managing CSR projects as a CSR leader?
4. What role does knowing one's personal values play in decision making as a CSR leader?
    - How do you navigate between the two when they are contradicting with differing priorities?
    - How does this impact the management and implementation of sustainable CSR projects?

Emotional intelligence and perseverance

1. How does a CSR leader's emotional intelligence impact managing and implementing sustainable projects?
2. How does a CSR leader's perseverance impact managing and implementing sustainable projects?

Sustainability and CSR leadership

1. What does sustainability and sustainable projects mean to you as a CSR leader?

Closing question

1. Is there anything else that you can think of that could contribute towards the research?

Appendix C Ethics Clearance

Graduate School of Business Administration
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Wits Business School Ethics Committee
Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Ethics Clearance Certificate

Ethics protocol number: WBS/BA1946112/986
This certificate is only valid with a legitimate ethics protocol number and signed by the Researcher (below).

Project title	Exploring the corporate social responsibility leadership competencies that contribute to successful sustainable development in South Africa
Investigator / Researcher	Ms Chanell Oliphant
Nature of Project	MBA (Research Article)
Decision of the Committee	Approved, provided stakeholders and participants are guaranteed confidentialty.
Issue Date of Certificate	2022-01-14
Expiry date	Date of submission of the project report
Chairperson	Prof Anthony Stacey ☎ +27 11 717 3587 +27 82 880 4531 anthony.stacey@wits.ac.za

Declaration by Researcher

One copy must be signed by the Researcher and returned to the Chairperson of the Wits Business School Ethics Committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature _____ Date: _____