

# CEO letters in CSR reports: oil companies in focus

International Business Communication  
Master's thesis  
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## **Thesis: CEO letters in CSR reports: oil companies in focus**

**Key terms:** Corporate social responsibility, stakeholder perspective, CSR reporting, international business communication.

### **Abstract:**

**Objectives of the study:** A main challenge in planning CSR communication strategy is how to communicate positive motives of a corporation in its CSR activities and how to decrease stakeholder uncertainty. This study provides an analysis of the CEO letters issued by eight oil companies in their CSR reports. The thesis is an investigation of target stakeholder group and move-structure carried out to determine the communicative purpose of CEO letters in CSR reports of eight oil companies. There will be three research questions employed in this study in regards to CEO letters in CSR reports: (1) What is the target stakeholder group? (2) What is the move-structure? (3) What is the communicative purpose?

**Methodology and theoretical framework:** The data in this qualitative study consisted of eight CEO letters published in CSR reports of international oil companies, a focus group and two semi-structured interviews with experts in the field of CSR communication. Moreover, genre analysis was conducted to analyze the data, which was based on the Bhatia (2004) through which a clear seven step method to genre analysis was utilized. The theoretical framework of the study was based on the literature review, which focused on CSR communication including stakeholder perspective.

**Findings and conclusions:** The analysis reveals that CEO letters are a common feature in CSR reports internationally, which target all stakeholder groups instead of one particular group. The CEO letters included four distinct moves; (1) Title for the letter, (2) Defining CSR / Justifying CSR involvement with a view to changing, (3) Providing a narrative of salient facts (events, operations, figures), (4) Referring to outlook and priorities for the future. Furthermore, the key communicative purposes identified in the study were establishing importance of CSR-related topics, adding credibility to the report and portraying a positive image. Finally, some recommendations for including CEO letters in CSR reports were given.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of companies (are starting to) realize that they cannot disregard the moral expectations that society has placed on them. Thus, these companies cannot concentrate efforts towards profit alone but this profit must have increasing stakeholder value along with sustainable growth (Hond, Bakker & Neegard 2007; Roselle, 2005). Many of these companies are trying to deal with a variety of conflicting demands that are placed on them. With globalization and information technology today they understand that they do not exist in isolation and therefore need to attend to their stakeholders (Freeman, Harrison & Wicks, 2007, p.3). Moreover, companies struggle with how to define their role as good corporate citizens. In response to the demands of the society the companies endorse standards, adopt a code of conduct, or report on social/environmental performance according to the standards and guidelines, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (Hond, Bakker and Neergaard).

There is agreement that corporate ethics statements are often used as public relations tools in external corporate communication (Baker, 1993; Bowie, 1979; Seeger, 1997; Pollach, 2003). Argenti & Forman (2002, p. 35), argue the importance of ethics of corporate communication: "In the hands of people with questionable ethics, the strategies and techniques of corporate communication can serve evil ends. At worst, corporate communication is the practice of publicity stunts and spin, managed by modern-day 'snake-oil' salesmen interested in covering up the real activities and intentions of the companies they serve. By contrast, a corporate reputation that is built by honest, open corporate communications can be better than cash in the bank". This further stresses the importance of corporate social responsibility and the benefit or damage it can cause to a company's image. Therefore, a main challenge in planning a CSR communication strategy is how to communicate positive motives of a corporation in its CSR activities and how to decrease stakeholder uncertainty (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). However, there might be a "back lash effect" if stakeholders happen to get apprehensive and identify principally extrinsic reasoning in companies' social initiatives (Du, Bhattacharya and Sen). Consequently, CSR communication plays a pivotal role in managing relations with these stakeholders. Seeing the significance and value of the

topic, it is surprising that CSR communication in companies often remains absent in the practice of corporate responsibility (Dawkins, 2004).

Wolf, Mejri and Lamouchi (2012), claim that in order to attain a better understanding of CEOs role, as the voice of the whole organization, in the application of CSR, only a few researchers have analyzed how CEOs communicate about CSR (Ferns, Emelianova and Sethi, 2008; Mejri and De Wolf, 2010). As these authors utilized diverse methodologies and attained different results, this issue is therefore thus far not well documented and needs to be explored further. Therefore, it is interesting to look at CEO letters of oil companies in this research as this genre needs to be researched more, additionally, to also get insights in regards to CSR communication by influential members of oil companies as the act of extracting oil leads to oil companies being under scrutiny of the public .

The author of this study has seen this trend of corporate statements as public relations tools during the tenure of her studies that concentrated on CSR. The interest was first spiked during her bachelor's course where she saw how a certain oil company had devastated a region via its operations and yet having reported on its CSR activities it succeeded in communicating credibly. Moreover, as CEOs form the voice of the organization and since there has been limited research regarding CEO letters in CSR reports the decision to study CEO letters in CSR reports of oil companies was made. A brief recollection of the growing importance of CSR in the subsection below will aid in the understanding of the surfacing of CSR and the importance of this study.

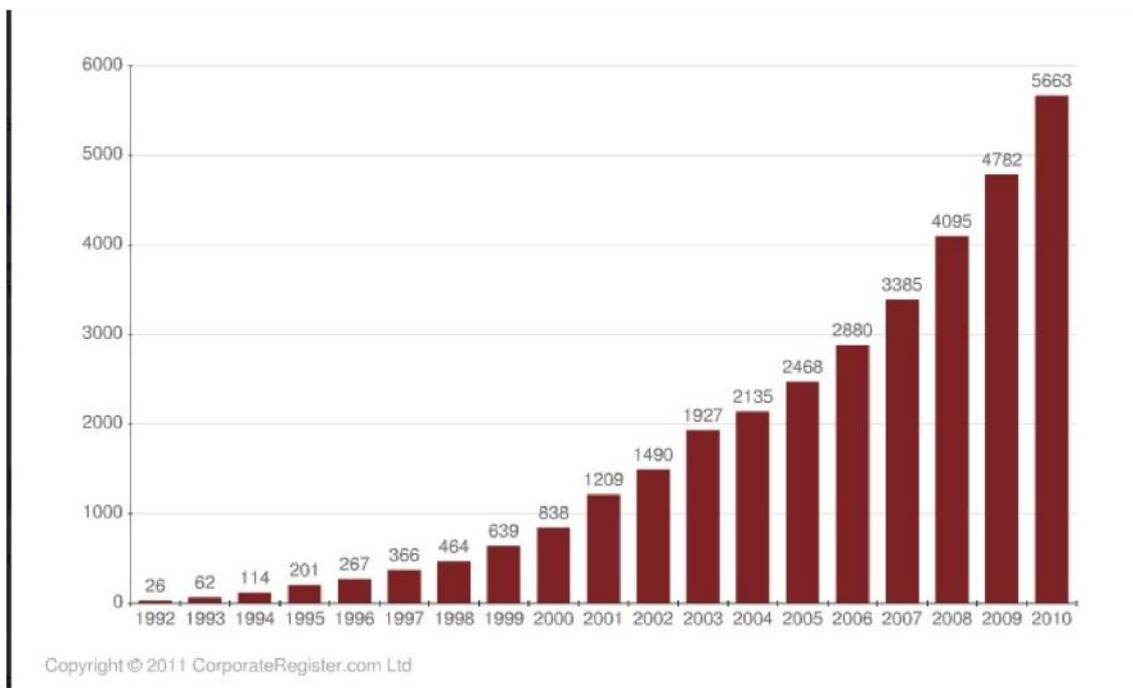
## **1.1 CSR Today**

Today CSR is seen as an important part of business, incorporated in strategy and corporate governance (Carroll, 2008, p. 20). Even though the concept of CSR has existed since there has been business, it has become core to business only during the last few decades (Carroll, 2008, p. 19). Furthermore, she argues that studies in regards to CSR have mainly been produced in the last 50 years. This could be a result of globalization as the district of business has become more international and has lead to

the demand of transparent information by stakeholders (Hopkins, 2003, p. 1), whether this concerns corporate governance, or child labor, environmental pollution, corruption, if corporations do not disclose such information then their brand reputation, shareholder/consumer confidence and product stability might be at risk (Blowfield, and Murray, 2008, p. 11). CSR has moved towards these wider areas of accountability, with a large range of stakeholders instead of simply being a concept that previously had its spotlight generally on environment related questions (Carroll, 2008, p. 20; Tammelin, 2009, p. 243).

Companies have, therefore, started to report in regards to their CSR activities and events due to the evolving emphasis on CSR. Initially, reports pertaining to environmental issues were published, while CSR reports pertaining to wider areas of accountability have emerged recently (Carroll, 2008).

This trend of reporting in regards to CSR can be seen in Figure 1, by CorporateRegister.com (2011). The figure represents the number of CSR reports annually produced. It can be seen that there is a steadfast increase in the number of CSR report from 1992 to 2010.



**Figure 1. Global CSR reports annually 1992–2010**  
([www.corporateregister.com](http://www.corporateregister.com)).

## **1.2 Research Questions**

As Wolf, Mejri and Lamouchi (2012) have claimed only a few authors have analyzed how CEOs communication in regards to CSR. Furthermore as emphasized by Breeze (2012, p. 7), since the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 where public view turned against the oil industry it is important to study messages issued by key corporations as it gives insight to the way that influential players pursue to influence public opinion. Therefore the objective of this study is to increase knowledge of CEO letters in CSR reports of oil companies consequently diminishing a gap in research within the field of international business communication.

The objective is met by understanding the communicative purpose, through understanding the target stakeholder group and move-structure of CEO letters in CSR reports. The primary data for the study consists of eight CEO letters in CSR reports, which were published by large oil companies from diverse geographical areas, thereby placing the study in an international context. In addition to the CSR reports, the findings are based on a focus group, as well as two semi-structured interviews with experts working with CSR communication and reporting. The research area will be analyzed through a qualitative approach using genre analysis in particular. The genre analysis will be carried out using Bhatia's (2004) 7-step model, where the aim is to interpret, describe and explain a genre and its communicative purpose.

The following research questions will be applied in order to reach findings that help accomplish the research objective, which is to attain a better understanding of CEO letter in CSR reports:

- (1) What is the target stakeholder group?**
- (2) What is the move-structure?**
- (3) What is the communicative purpose?**

Since CEO letters in CSR reports are quite a new phenomenon with limited research, the first research question aims to understand the stakeholder group being targeted. The second research question aims at finding out the structure of the CEO letters to see

whether there are similarities in the way they are constructed, which will directly link to answering the third research question. The third research question refers to the communicative purpose of the CEO letters in CSR reports, specifically why companies include these in their CSR reports.

### **1.3 Thesis Structure**

This study is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the surfacing of Corporate Social Responsibility, along with the research objectives and questions, and the thesis structure. In Chapter 2 previous literature relating to the thesis in regards to the field of CSR, CSR reporting, stakeholders perspective, CSR communication, CEO letters and genre analysis is included. The chapter also consists of the theoretical framework of this study.

Chapter 3 consists of the data and methods employed in the study along with the trustworthiness of the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, based on the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework. Lastly, Chapter 5 concludes the study, and consists of the summary, practical implications and limitations of the study while also providing suggestions for further research.

### **1.4 The Oil Industry**

The oil industry is a pivotal industry in the world, as many aspects, including the price of many products also depends on the price of oil. The amount of oil consumed every year in the world is as much as 30 billion barrels of which 25 percent is consumed by the United States of America. The non-OECD Asia, including China and India, is responsible for approximately 40 percent of the total oil use increase in the world. Moreover, since there are only few alternatives to petroleum, amid a variety of sectors, the transportation sector has led to a high pressure to the industry. In its report, Oil &

Gas Journal has shown that world oil reserves estimated at 1,293 billion barrels as of January 1, 2006 (Economy Watch, 2010). To meet the expected increase in the oil demand, the supply of petroleum has to reach 118 million barrels per day from 80 million barrels per day commencing the year 2003 (Economy Watch 2010).

Table 1 illustrates the largest oil companies of 2010 (Forbes, 2010). Table 1 will be adapted in the methodology section to collect data (from the companies included in it) for this study.

**Table 1. The Largest Oil Companies 2010 by Production taken from Forbes 2010**

	Company Name	Country	Production (Barrels Per Day million)
1	Saudi Aramco	Saudi Arabia	8.2
2	National Iranian Oil Company	Iran	3.8
3	Petroleos Mexicanos	Mexico	2.9
4	Iraq National Oil Company	Iraq	2.5
5	ExxonMobil	U.S.	2.5
6	BP	UK	2.5
7	CNPC (Petrochina)	China	2.3
8	ADNOC (Abu Dhabi National Oil Company)	U.A.E	2.3
9	Kuwait Oil Company (KOC)	Kuwait	2.3
10	Petroleos de Venezuela	Venezuela	2.2

The consumption and production of oil has for almost a century brought out the best and worst of the current society. Even though this industry has helped in the world's economic growth and higher standard of living, conversely the development of oil has left a deep negative impact on the environment worldwide. Oil companies, however, emphasize their socially responsible behavior on their corporate websites as the operations of oil companies almost always have a negative impact on the nature and the

society around it, especially when there are oil spills or accidents that lead to the destruction of the eco-system. A particular case in which a clear act of legitimizing actions was apparent in CSR communication was that of the oil industry following the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 (Breeze, 2012, p. 7). During the calamity, as the oil spread seemed to be uncontrollable, public view turned against the oil industry. Thus, it is not a surprise that the messages to stakeholders in annual reports of oil corporations refer to this incident and try to justify their companies and sector (Breeze). Therefore, it is important to study messages issued by key corporations as it gives insight to the way that influential players pursue to influence public opinion (Breeze). The following are examples of some of the aforementioned well-known IOCs' from corporate websites in regards to CSR:

***Chevron ([www.chevron.com](http://www.chevron.com))***

*“Our success is driven by our people and their unrelenting focus on delivering results the right way—by operating responsibly, performing with excellence, applying innovative technologies and capturing new opportunities for profitable growth.”*

***ExxonMobil ([www.exxonmobil.com](http://www.exxonmobil.com))***

*“Our commitment to high ethical standards, legal compliance, and integrity is reflected in our safety and environmental policies and practices worldwide.”*

***The Royal Dutch Shell ([www.shell.com](http://www.shell.com))***

*“The energy we supply helps to support economic growth and development. At our operations we aim to address social concerns and work to benefit local communities, protecting our reputation as we do business.”*

Now that the background of this study has been overviewed, this study will continue with surveying existing literature in the next section in regards to CSR, stakeholders, CSR communication, and CSR reports.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The section reviews literature that is relevant to this study and is used to build the background of this study, the objective of which is to understand the communicative purpose, via the help of participation framework and move-structure of CEO letters in CSR reports.

The literature review is divided into six subsections. Subsection 2.1 defines CSR and introduces the main terms that will establish a basic understanding of CSR while also briefly talking about CSR today. Subsection 2.2 introduces us to the stakeholder perspective, what different stakeholder groups there are and what interests each of these groups have in regards to CSR. Subsection 2.3 moves on to CSR communication which helps to understand how messages are tailored according to the communication needs of ones stakeholders. Then literature in regards to CSR reporting and guidelines is reviewed in subsection 2.4, particularly focusing on the Global Reporting Initiative, as the majority of CSR reports adhere to this initiative, to understand the number of guidelines that have been formed to structure annual reports by independent organizations to increase credibility, consistency and comparability of the reports. Based on this literature review, in Subsection 2.6 I will develop the theoretical framework for this study.

### **2.1 Defining CSR**

Today, CSR is commonly seen as a concept including three main components: social, environmental and economic responsibility, in particular, it is about being considerate of the three p's; people, profit and planet (Cornelissen, 2011). The academics have, however, not agreed on a single definition for the term CSR (Crane et al.,2008, p. 4). As Frederick (2006) argues, "The actual meaning of CSR has dogged the debate from the beginning." and, "The moral underpinnings of CSR are neither clear nor agreed upon.". Thus, we can establish that there are various definitions of CSR and in this section we can view a few of these definitions first and then CSR will be defined for the purpose of this study.

Table 2 displays a few popular definitions of CSR. They all state different meanings but nevertheless the main idea derived from these is the positive impact on the society. In this table, Carroll (2008) defines CSR as the social responsibility of business that entails the expectations a society has of organizations in regards to economic, ethical, discretionary and legal expectations. A similar outlook on CSR by European Commission describes CSR as a notion where business incorporates social and environmental concern in its functions and voluntary interaction with stakeholders. Frederick (1978), like Carroll and European Commission, also emphasizes that CSR is a company's continued dedication to act in an ethical manner whilst contributing to the economy's development at the same time as making the employees' and society's quality of life better, as also stated by The World Business Council for Sustainable Developments.

The definition of Hopkins (2004, p.1) is quite similar if not identical to that of Frederick's (1978), he also argues that CSR is concerned with the treatment of stakeholders in an ethical or responsible manner. By ethical or responsible he means that stakeholders should be treated in a way that is standard in a civilized society. Hopkins (2004), further states that stakeholders are both inside and outside the firm, the natural environment is also a stakeholder. According to him the big goal of social responsibility is to, along with maintaining corporations' profitability, have consistently higher standards of living for people both inside and outside the firm.

**Table 2. Popular definitions of CSR adapted from <http://mhcinternational.com>**

<b>Carroll ( 2008, p. 500)</b>	“The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that a society has of organizations at a given point in time.”
<b>EU</b>	“A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis.”
<b>Mallen Baker</b>	“CSR is about how companies manage the business processes to produce an overall positive impact on society.”

<b>The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)</b>	“Corporate Social Responsibility is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large.”
<b>Frederick (1978)</b>	“the firms’ commitment to work towards the improvement of society is the main principle of CSR”
<b>Hopkins (2004, p.1)</b>	“CSR is concerned with treating the stakeholders of the firm ethically or in a responsible manner”

It is also interesting to see how different establishments define CSR. This will be briefly done using Table 3. to see how six differing establishments from different backgrounds define CSR.

**Table 3. Definition of CSR according to different establishments, taken from Blowfield and Murray 2008**

<b>Starbucks, CSR Report, 2004</b>	A responsible company is one that listens to its stakeholders and responds with honesty to their concerns.
<b>Chiquita, www.chiquita.com, accessed 24 March 2004</b>	CSR commits us to operate in a socially responsible way everywhere we do business, fairly balancing the needs and concerns of our various stakeholders – all those who impact, are impacted by, or have a legitimate interest in the Company’s actions and performance.
<b>PricewaterhouseCoopers, www.pwcglobal.com accessed 24 March 2004</b>	CSR [is] the proposition that companies are responsible not only for maximizing profits, but also for recognizing the needs of such stakeholders as employees, customers, demographic groups and even the regions they serve.
<b>Confederation of British Industry, 2001</b>	CSR requires companies to acknowledge that they should be publicly accountable not only for their financial performance but also for their social and environmental record.
<b>European Commission, Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs</b>	[CSR is] a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interactions with

	their stakeholders on a voluntary basis
<b>Draft of ISO 26000, International Guidance Standard on Social Responsibility, 4 September 2009</b>	[Corporate responsibility is the] responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, through transparent and ethical behavior that (a) contributes to sustainable development, health and the welfare of society; (b) takes into account the expectations of stakeholders; (c) is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behavior; and (d) is integrated through the organization and practiced in its relationships.

Each of the institutions above are from a diverse background, however, they each define CSR in much the same way; referring to the impact on stakeholders. Furthermore, each of the institutions mentions responsibility of an organization for its operations.

Other than a few minor differences in expression and words all the definitions viewed so far, CSR is understood by the author to be related to the ethical treatment of stakeholders while being responsible to the environment and society besides contributing to the development of the economy. This shall now be used to define CSR for the purpose of this study as it offers to combine the definitions viewed earlier in a concise yet clear description of what corporate social responsibility means. This is the author's interpretation of CSR and is subjective..

## **2.2 Stakeholder perspective**

In this section we will begin by learning briefly about stakeholder perspective and then move on to gain understanding on how to define one's stakeholders by using different strategies.

Freeman(1984, p. 91) define stakeholders as any group or individual who is affected by an organization or who can affect an organization. Different individuals' and groups' stakes might be different from one another, thus putting pressure on an organization to balance different stakeholder interests. Freeman defines three types of stakes: equity stakes, economic or market stakes and influencer stakes. Equity stakes are held by those who have a direct ownership of the organization, such as; directors and shareholders. Economic or market stakes are held by those who have an economic interest but not an equity interest, such as; employees, customers, suppliers and competitors. Lastly, influencer stakes are held by those who have interests as advocates for consumers, environmental groups, trade organizations and government agencies (Cornelissen, 2008).

According to Johansen and Nielsen (2010, p. 211) the characteristic of form and script of stakeholder discourse is conditioned on the nature of the interests different stakeholder groups have. Table 4. shows how different stakeholders have different interests and require a different dialogue form and script accordingly (Johansen & Nielsen 2010).

This framework is particularly important in exploring and understanding different corporate-stakeholders (Johansen & Nielsen). Consumers, first in Table 4., are noted as one group of stakeholders and are, according to the framework, interested in quality and consumption. Keeping this in mind the company should use networking in order to communicate quality and distinctiveness of their products or services in order to ensure consumption. Dialogue script is then the way the message is conveyed, in this example, by utilizing experience in order to achieve communicative distinctiveness. Investors, on the other hand, seek to increase the value of their investment, decrease risk and want

responsible investment, which can be carried out by briefing such as; in a face-to-face meeting or conference, where both the organization and investors get to communicate with each other. The script in this case would be used to assure the investors of the soundness of their investment and balance between finance and ethics.

**Table 4. Stakeholder stake framework, taken from Johansen & Nielsen (2010, p. 211)**

<b>Stakeholders</b>	<b>Stake/Interest</b>	<b>Dialogue form</b>	<b>Dialogue script</b>
Consumers	Seek quality, license to consume engagement	Networking	Experience and distinctiveness
Investors	Seek pay-off, risk minimization and responsible investment	Mutual briefing	Ensuring and balancing (finance and ethics)
Employees	Seek identification, safety and job satisfaction	Involvement	Sense making and cultural enactment
NGOs	Seek influence, control, awareness	Negotiation	Compromising and legitimacy partnering
Suppliers	Seek commitment, long-lasting relationships and inclusion	Exchange	Knowledge sharing and (mutual learning)

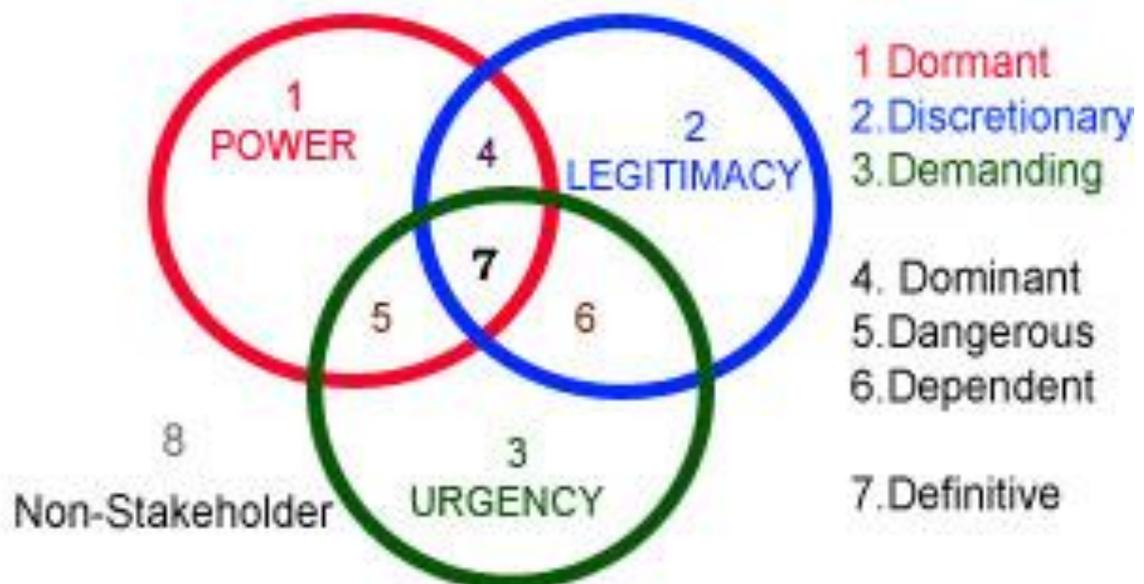
Stakeholder analysis is a process of gathering and analyzing qualitative information systematically about the different stakeholder groups (Cornelissen, 2008). It is carried out when developing or implementing a policy so as to determine whose interests should be taken into account. There are two mapping models that can be used to

identify and position stakeholders either by their influence on an organization's operations or by their stand on a particular issue related to the organization: Stakeholder Salience Model and Power-Interest Matrix (Cornelissen).

In the Stakeholder Salience model, shown in Figure 2, stakeholders are identified and classified according to their salience to the organization. This is done according to three major attributes and, based on these; priority is assigned to the stakeholder (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997-99):

- **Power** to impact the deliverables, which may be coercive, financial or material, brand or image, of the project or organization;
- **Legitimacy** of the association and actions in regards to appeal, appropriateness or suitability;
- **Urgency** of the requirements in terms of seriousness and significance of time for the stakeholder.

### Salience Model: Stakeholder Classification



**Figure 2. Stakeholder Salience Model, taken from Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997-99)**

After power, legitimacy and urgency have been established the stakeholder group can be placed in seven places. Place 7 is the most important stakeholder group as it holds all three elements; power, legitimacy and urgency, which give it the highest priority. Once the stakeholders of the organization have been classified according to their salience, the organization will have an overview of the stakeholder groups which need to be communicated with and given attention (Cornelissen, 2008).

A second mapping model is the power-interest matrix by Mendelow (1991), which is similar to the stakeholder salience model as once again the idea is that “communication practitioners can formulate appropriate communication strategies on the basis of identifying and categorizing stakeholders.” (Cornelissen 2008, p. 53)

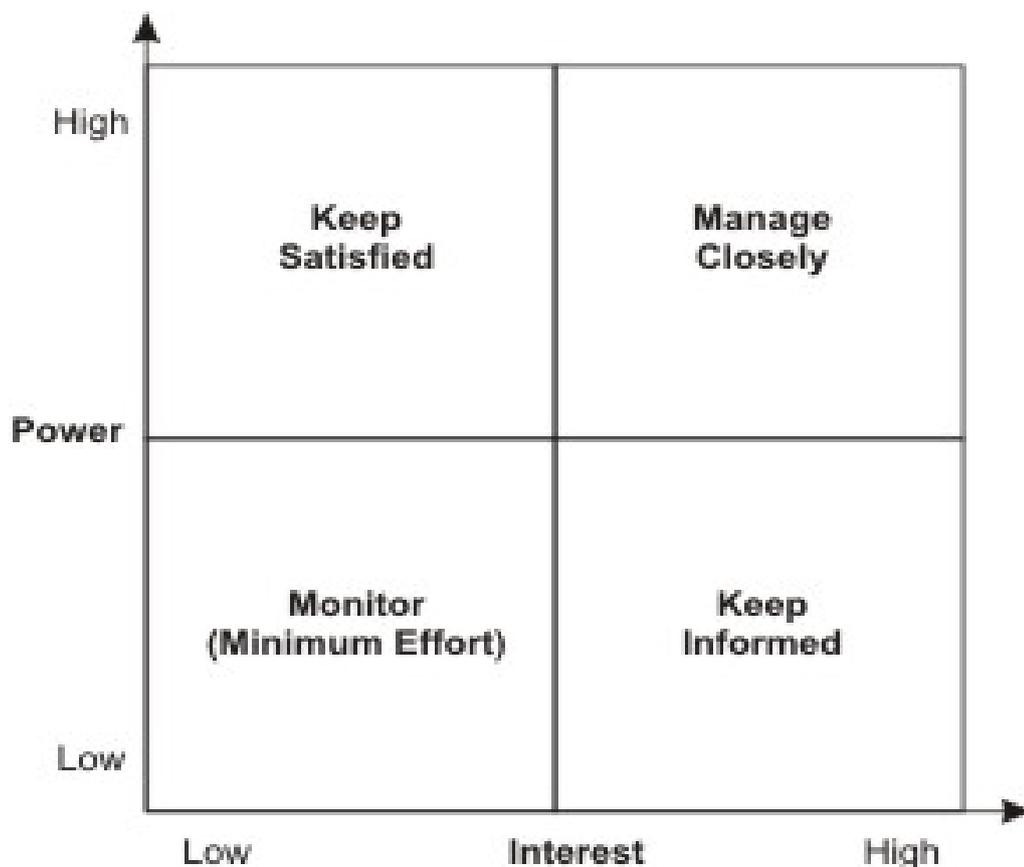


Figure 3. Power-Interest Matrix, taken from Thompson (2013)

Now that the importance of different stakeholders according to differing interests has been presented, this information will be used in the findings and discussion chapter to define who the CEO letters' perceived stakeholder group is and what stakes they have. In turn this will aid to answer what the participation-framework of these CEO letters is.

## **2.3 CSR Communication**

The previous section has equipped the reader with knowledge to understand different interests of stakeholders that need to be addressed. This has formed the basis for communication to stakeholders in the current section, which will then help to determine the stakeholder group(s) targeted by the CEO letters to help understand the communicative purpose.

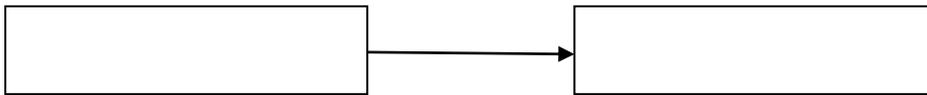
According to Carroll(1999) activities concerning corporate social responsibility can influence opinion leaders' behaviors concerning a target organization and so today, it is becoming more and more essential for companies to communicate their corporate social responsibility. Moreover, as also stated in Du and Sen (2010), the communication of corporate social responsibility related activities need to be conducted accurately to counter the mounting skepticism concerning corporate communication, which arises by some companies' perceived exaggeration of social behaviors. In order to gain competitive advantage and achieve strategic goals organizations tailor their CSR communication practices to their stakeholders. Including stakeholders in making CSR decisions can help organizations discover which issues are considered to currently be the most important and enable them to be met and also influence the stakeholders' expectations (Morsing &Schultz , 2006)

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that stakeholder engagement is a crucial factor as stakeholders, employees in particular, have a significant impact on other groups in their social environment (Morsing &Schultz , 2006). This implies that organization should engage stakeholders in their decision making concerning CSR issues as well as submit surveys or conduct meetings on a regular basis in order to stay in tune with the changing stakeholder expectations. Below are three models of organization-stakeholder communication by Mendelow 1991.

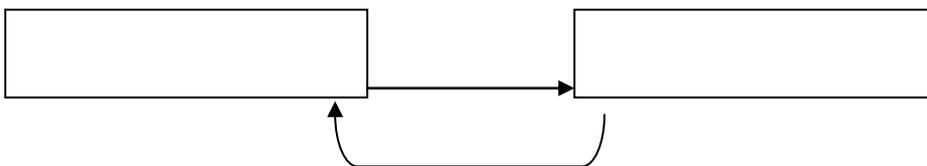
**Organization**

**Stakeholder**

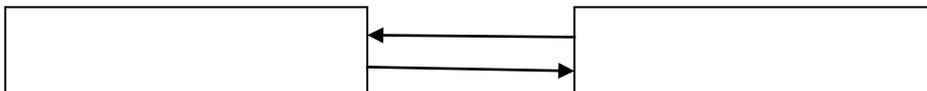
1. Informational strategy: one-way symmetrical model of communication



2. Persuasive strategy: two-way asymmetrical model of communication



3. Dialogue strategy: two-way symmetrical model of communication



**Figure 4. Organization-Stakeholder communication, taken from Cornelissen (2008)**

Informational strategy is where stakeholders request more information on CSR efforts of the corporation (Morsing and Schultz, 2006). The stakeholder roles or influence in this model is limited to either support or oppose. The focus of CSR identification is decided by the top management (Morsing and Schultz).

The persuasive strategy is described as where stakeholders need to be reassured that the company is socially responsible and ethical (Morsing and Schultz, 2006). The

stakeholder role here is to respond to the actions of the corporation. Once again the CSR focus identification is decided by the top management, through feedback investigation through dialogues, networks, opinion polls and partnerships (Morsing and Schultz).

The dialogue strategy is where stakeholders co-construct corporate CSR efforts (Morsing and Schultz). The stakeholder role is involved, where stakeholders participate and suggest corporate actions. The CSR focus identification is negotiated through stakeholder interaction (Morsing and Schultz).

**Table 5. CSR communication strategies, taken from Morsing and Schultz 2006 p. 326**

	<b>The stakeholder information strategy</b>	<b>The stakeholder response strategy</b>	<b>The stakeholder involvement strategy</b>
Communication ideal: (Gruning & Hunt 1984)	Public information, one-way communication	Two-way asymmetric communication	Two-way symmetric communication
Communication ideal: sensemaking and sensegiving:	Sensegiving	Sensemaking ↓ Sensegiving	Sensemaking ↕ Sensegiving – in iterative progressive processes
Stakeholders:	Request more information on corporate CSR efforts	Must be reassured that the company is ethical and socially responsible	Co-construct corporate CSR efforts
Stakeholder role:	Stakeholder influence: support or oppose	Stakeholder respond to corporate actions	Stakeholder are involved, participate and suggest corporate actions

Identification of CSR focus:	Decided by top management	Decided by top management, Investigated in feedback via opinion pots, dialogue, networks and partnerships	Negotiated concurrently in interaction with stakeholders
Strategic communication task:	Inform stakeholders about favorable corporate CSR decisions and actions	Demonstrate to stakeholder show the company integrates their concerns	Invite and establish frequent, systematic and pro-active dialogue with stakeholders, i.e. opinion makers, corporate critics, the media etc.
Corporate communication department's task	Design appealing concept message	Identify relevant stakeholders	Build relationships
Third-party endorsement of CSR initiatives:	Unnecessary	Integrated element of survey, rankings and opinion polls	Stakeholders are themselves involved in corporate CSR messages

This information will now help to define the communication strategy that has been employed via the CEO letter and will be discussed in the findings and discussion section of this study further. This is relevant to this study so as to understand the communicative purpose and participation framework, which are two of the three essential elements in this research.

## 2.4 CSR Standards and Reporting

In response to the demands of the society the companies endorse standards, take on a code of conduct, or report on their social/environmental performance. A commonly used standard for this is the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (Hond, Bakker and Neergaard,). Today companies communicate their CSR activities to their stakeholders in an increasingly active manner. This is mostly due to the changes in technology and communication during the last ten years along with the chance to influence stakeholders and opinion leaders so as to improve the image of the company and legitimize its actions (Birth, Illia, Lurati and Zamparini 2006, p. 3). Moreover, companies struggle with how to define their role as good corporate citizens, which may have led them to adhere to standards that can help provide guidance.

According to Blowfield and Murray (2008, p. 166) standards, guidelines and codes of conduct are mostly synonymous terms for a significant corporate responsibility management instrument. Broad business codes can provide a context for managing corporate responsibility. For the most part, however, modern corporate responsibility has more narrowly defined concerns. Cragg and McKague (2003) identify seven main issues covered by corporate responsibility standards:

- 1) The natural environment
- 2) Labor
- 3) Corporate governance
- 4) Money laundering
- 5) Bribery and corruption
- 6) Human rights
- 7) Corporate responsibility reporting principles

In Table 6. below, taken from Blowfield and Murray (2008, p. 169), we can see some examples of corporate responsibility reporting principles according to the different issues covered in the relation to the standards.

When concerns are environmental, there are three standards that cover this aspect; CERES principles, ISO14000 environmental management series and Kyoto Protocol. Issues related to labor are covered by three different standards; Fair Labor Association workplace code of conduct, ETI base code, and International Confederation of Free Trade Unions basic code of labor conduct. Corporate governance related issues are dealt with in OECD principles of corporate governance, Principles for corporate governance in the Commonwealth and Toronto Stock Exchange guidelines for improved corporate governance. Wolfsberg anti-money laundering principles and Basel Committee on banking supervision are two examples of standards which cover the issue of money laundering whilst bribery and corruption issues are covered by OECD convention combating bribery of foreign public officials in international business transactions, International Chamber of Commerce rules of conduct to combat extortion and bribery and Extraction Industry Transparency Initiative. Issues that deal with human rights have three standards that cover these; Amnesty International human rights principles for companies, UN draft norms on the responsibilities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises with regard to human rights and Voluntary principles on security and human rights. For more comprehensive issues standards such as UN Global Compact principles, OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises and ISO 26000 corporate responsibility standard are there.

As shown in Table 6. when the issue is regarding corporate reporting there are two standards that cover this, one is the AA1000 series and the second is the Global Reporting Initiative guidelines on social, economic and environmental reporting (GRI). In this section we will be discussing GRI in detail as this is the most popular initiative companies adhere to in general and in particular the eight companies we will be looking at later in this study also follow this reporting initiative.

**Table 6. Examples of Corporate Responsibility Standards, taken from Blowfield and Murray 2008, p. 169**

<b>Issue covered</b>	<b>Examples of standards</b>
Environmental	CERES principles ISO14000 environmental management series Kyoto Protocol
Labour	Fair Labor Association workplace code of conduct ETI base code International Confederation of Free Trade Unions basic code of labour conduct
Corporate governance	OECD principles of corporate governance Principles for corporate governance in the Commonwealth Toronto Stock Exchange guidelines for improved corporate governance
Money laundering	Wolfsberg anti-money laundering principles
Bribery and corruption	OECD convention combating bribery of foreign public officials in international business transactions International Chamber of Commerce rules of conduct to combat extortion and bribery Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative
Human rights	Amnesty International human rights principles for companies UN draft norms on the responsibilities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises with regards to human rights Voluntary principles on security and human rights
Corporate reporting	AA1000 series Global Reporting Initiative guidelines on social, economic and environmental reporting
Comprehensive	UN Global Compact principles OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises ISO26000 corporate responsibility standard

As stated by Carroll (1999, p. 268) unlike the notion of corporate social responsibility, which has a long and varied past, the writing on social responsibility, is officially the result of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in particular the past 50 years. Moreover, she states that even though we can track CSR thought globally, in developed countries mainly, the majority of official writings are apparent in the United States, where a considerable body of literature has built up.

Since 1993 there has been a steady growth in the number of reports issued by numerous corporations worldwide (Owen & O'Dwyer; 2005, p.2). Trillions of dollars are invested by companies to fulfill some social criteria, reflecting the importance of issuing CSR reports by corporations. The reporting is, however, voluntary and so can take a variety of forms as there is no specified regulation (Reynolds & Yuthas; 2008, p.48). Thus this makes it difficult and confusing for external parties to compare CSR reports of different companies. Due to this a number of guidelines have been formed to structure annual reports by independent organizations in order to increase credibility, consistency and comparability of the reports (Reynolds and Yuthas 2008, p.50). The leading frameworks include, for example EMAS, ISO, SA, AA, Copenhagen Charter and the GRI guidelines.

Dawkins and Ngunjiri (2008) state three reasons why companies might report their CSR activities:

1. To uphold and develop their authenticity perceptions
2. To manage key stakeholder perceptions
3. To reflect their corporate values

According to the European Commission (2011) when companies report on their corporate social responsibility more companies are pressured to take on these practices as well. Moreover, the reason companies report CSR is that it boosts their reputation, even though this can also increase the costs that the company might incur. European Commission states that the difficulty that companies face is the decision for instance on what the company reports consist of should, how should it arrange the content and how to convey the quality in a proper manner.

The research carried out by European Commission discloses that readers of CSR reporting look for an authentic effort by companies to truthfully and rationally represent their CSR activities, by means that assist readers to assess the sustainability of the company's activities. In addition the study discovers that the needs of readers are best met when:

- “- reporting is regulated
- CSR reporting is integrated with financial reporting
- stakeholders are more involved in reporting.”

**GRI reporting**

GRI is known to have the most detailed and standardized guidelines for CSR reports’ structure and is also the most widely used framework, known to have the best approaches to stakeholder engagement. Du and Sen (2010, p.15) also point out that it is essential for organizations to “adhere to leading reporting standards [in order] to increase credibility of its CSR reports”.

Report Application Level		C	C+	B	B+	A	A+
Standard Disclosures	Profile Disclosures OUTPUT	Report on: 1.1 2.1 - 2.10 3.1 - 3.8, 3.10 - 3.12 4.1 - 4.4, 4.14 - 4.15		Report on all criteria listed for Level C plus: 1.2 3.9, 3.13 4.5 - 4.13, 4.16 - 4.17		Same as requirement for Level B	
	Disclosures on Management Approach OUTPUT	Not Required	Report Externally Assured	Management Approach Disclosures for each Indicator Category	Report Externally Assured	Management Approach disclosed for each Indicator Category	Report Externally Assured
	Performance Indicators & Sector Supplement Performance Indicators OUTPUT	Report fully on a minimum of any 10 Performance Indicators, including at least one from each of: social, economic, and environment.**	Report Externally Assured	Report fully on a minimum of any 20 Performance Indicators, at least one from each of: economic, environment, human rights, labor, society, product responsibility.***	Report Externally Assured	Respond on each core and Sector Supplement* indicator with due regard to the materiality Principle by either: a) reporting on the indicator or b) explaining the reason for its omission.	Report Externally Assured

\* Sector supplement in final version  
 \*\* Performance Indicators may be selected from any finalized Sector Supplement, but 7 of the 10 must be from the original GRI Guidelines  
 \*\*\* Performance Indicators may be selected from any finalized Sector Supplement, but 14 of the 20 must be from the original GRI Guidelines

**Figure 5. GRI application levels (The Global Reporting Initiative, 2011)**

Report makers need to announce the level through the ‘Applications system’ to which they have applied the GRI reporting Framework, in order to specify that a report is based on the GRI. There are three levels in this GRI system, in order to meet the needs of beginners and advance reporters along with those who lie somewhere in between those two levels. Thus, the levels are titled C, B and A. Each level has reporting criteria that reflects the extent of the GRI Reporting Framework’s application. The plus sign included in front of the letter at each level is available when external guarantee for the report was used.

The differing levels in this application aim to provide readers of a report with an estimate of the degree to which the elements of GRI Guidelines and other Reporting Framework have been applied in the reports preparation. Furthermore, these levels also provide makers of the report a way for step by step increasing the GRI Reporting Framework applications in due course.

The maker of the report, based on his/her own review of the report against the criteria in the GRI Application Levels, decides on a Level for the report. Along with this process of self-declaration the organizations reporting are able to choose one or both of the options below:

- “• Have a third party offer an opinion on the self-declaration
- Request that the GRI check the self-declaration.”

This section has aided in the understanding of the CSR reports that have been employed in this study and the standard that they are adhering to. In the next section the theoretical framework of this study will be reviewed.

## 2.5 CEO letters

According to Madlock (2008), of the many competences, a successful CEO must have is the ability to display communicator competence. He argues that it is the enactment of communication that defines the behavior of leadership. The process of globalization and the increase in technologies that allow eased information sharing practices amongst both firms and consumers has brought about a series of challenges for corporate communication executives when addressing their internal and external stakeholders, given the consequential exposure of business activities and the heightened awareness of, and demand for, transparency and sustainability from firms. Madlock further states that this has further driven interest in research investigating variability in styles of writing in corporate communication genres in documents issued by firms with the intention to communicate sustainability performance or company values, such as annual reports or CEO letters (Hyland, 1998).

As cited in De Wolf et al (2012), Bournois and Point (2006) point out, annual reports, CEO statements and CEO letters to shareholders have developed into significant tools for organizations' public relations communicating corporate activities and developments to external audiences. Previous research has analyzed CEO letters and has identified how CEOs promote their firms' corporate image (Bowman, 1984) and use rhetorical tool to create positive perceptions of the organization and themselves (Hyland, 1998). When addressing internal audiences, CEOs presumably lead the way and devise the policies of the organization in regards to the future. Consequently, CEOs not only need to implement companywide strategies and values, but they need to communicate them effectively, so as to persuade the organization's workforce to follow the directions the CEO wishes the organization to take.

Argenti and Forman (2004, p. 110) state, "the CEO who stands at the helm of an organization can project through his or her person alone a company's commitment to goals, a commitment that would be less credible if voiced by anyone else". Despite the fact that CEOs and their actions are under constant scrutiny and may at times draw criticism their words remain interesting examples of leadership communication.

The CEO letter, for example, is considered an important part of the annual report (Jameson, 2000). Various studies assert the importance of investigating the way in which CEO letters address certain audiences, communicate values and ethics, and illustrate the company's performance along with other issues (Garzone 2004; Hyland 1999; De Groot 2005). As CEOs are the most credible voice of an organization they rightly so are entitled to communicate the firm's stance on matters related to ethics. This may conceivably be done with the firm's reputation in mind (Argenti 2003). Indeed, the CEO letter presents an ideal opportunity for the CEO to address issues concerning the firm, the industry and wider society, and in doing so highlight the firm in a positive light to a wider range of audiences than would be otherwise possible (Pelsmaekers, 2011).

Within the CSR report, the CEO's letter is widely seen as a promotional genre, designed to construct and convey a corporate image to stockholders, brokers, regulatory agencies, finance media, and the investing public (Anderson & Imperia, 1992, p.114). Managers seem for the most part optimistic in their text (Hildebrandt & Snyder, 1981), in pursuit of generating a positive view of themselves and their companies (Hyland, 1998). According to Jameson (2000) what is omitted is as noteworthy as what is included in a narrative. Moreover, these letters are an example of genre bending or subordinate genre, as these are found in both Annual and CSR reports, and pave the way to the proper report setting the tone for the rest of the text, therefore, giving the reader an interpretative framework (Bhatia, 2004).

## **2.6 Genres and Genre Analysis**

In order to discover the communicative purpose it was important to conduct a genre analysis, this is because genres form an important part of human activities and particularly in the use of language. Furthermore, it is according to genres that we perceive, interpret, and organize our lives. This progressively more mediatized and textualized society entails its members to have many useful genre skills, along with a more in depth awareness of language and genre (Heikkinen, Voutilainen, Lauerma,

Tiililä & Lounela, 2012). Research has recently foregrounded the essential standing of genres in all human proceedings where meaning is produced, conveyed, and interpreted. Genres, which have to do together with thinking and acting, individuals and groups, identities and ideologies, can be evaluated as; linguistic, textual, rhetoric, cognitive, and social phenomena and as diverse mixture of these features (Heikkinen et al, 2012).

The definition of genre according to Swales (1990, p. 33), *“is a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs. Most often it is highly structured and conventionalized with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form and functional value. These constraints, however, are often exploited by the expert members of the discourse community to achieve private intentions within the framework of socially recognized purposes.”*

As stated in the quote by Swales (1990), each discourse community uses certain ways of communication which give rise to a variety of genres. Therefore, genre is a way of attaining a communicative goal, which has changed due to certain rhetorical needs; consequently changing in response to the changes of those needs (Dudley- Evans, 1994). Therefore, genre analysis offers a practical framework for analyzing the use of language for various linguistic and teaching purposes (Bhatia, 2006). From move and strategies (Bhatia, 1999) to rhetorical features (2005), a broad array of focuses can be covered by genre analysis of research articles.

Catenaccio (2009) states that CSR reports as a genre have only lately accomplished a certain level of stability, which is also partly due to the publication of guidelines issued by the Global Reporting Initiative. From a genre-perspective, CSR reports are a form of genre bending as these are derived from Annual Reports through means of adaptation of an existing genre.

Bhatia (2008) argues that in regards to intertextuality and interdiscursivity all new instances of genre have some association with others. Furthermore, CEO letters are a clear example of genre bending, because these can be found in Annual and CSR reports. The letters are in the beginning on the reports and set the tone for the rest of the

document by providing the reader an interpretative framework. Moreover, CEO letters in the CSR report share a number of moves with those in Annual Reports, but the communicative purpose is a little different.

In the letter from the CEO of Annual Reports, we can find three obligatory moves as highlighted by Garzone (2004) who claims that CEOs' letters are characteristically a hybrid discourse genre that fulfils differing communicative purposes, the pivotal ones of which are:

- to provide a brief description of an explanation in regards to the activities and performance of the company;
- to show that the endorsed policies are indeed the most promising given the current state of affairs;
- to get investors to believe that the management of the company deserves their confidence;
- to portray a corporate image that is both positive and attractive.

On the other hand, Catenaccio (2010) claims the move structure of CEO letters in CSR reports present the following genre structure.

- 1) Defining CSR / Justifying CSR involvement with a view to changing existing conceptions of the role of business in society
- 2) Reporting on Company's performance, trends and results in the relevant year
- 3) Providing a narrative of salient facts (events, operations, figures)
- 4) Illustrating outlook and priorities for the future
- 5) Soliciting response

Studies of CEO letters, prior to the current study, which have also employed genre analysis to explore the genre and understand the set of communicative purposes, are:

- Garzone (2004) study of CEOs' letters
- Hyland (1988) study exploring the CEO's letter

- Nickerson & De Groot (2005), studying the business letter genre in the annual general report
- Raab (2008), conducting a genre analysis of CEO statements

Genre analysis entails three main schools: English for Special Purposes (ESP), Australian educational linguistics and New Rhetoric (Anne). For the purpose of this study the ESP school of genre will be used as the framework of Bhatia belongs to this school. Bhatia (2004, p. 164) offers a clear approach to carry out a genre analysis with his seven steps that must be taken into consideration in an in-depth analysis of an unfamiliar genre. Subsequently, each of the seven steps was included in the analysis as it is deemed necessary. The seven steps of Bhatia (2004, p.164) are:

1. Placing the text in a situational context

The first step in conducting a genre analysis is to position the text in a situational context according to one's intuition; this can be done using the writer's background knowledge of the genre and prior experience.

2. Surveying existing literature

It is emphasized that the literature should comprise, along with linguistic analyses of the genre in question, practitioner guidance, guide books, manuals and so forth, significant to the discourse community, along with literature on the social construction, connections, history etc. of the professional community.

3. Refining the situational/contextual analysis

Step three suggests that the analysis should be refined by defining the writer and audience of the text, their relationship, and their goals.

4. Selecting corpus

Selecting the corpus forms the fourth step. Here it is important for the writer to define the genre in question as well as necessary to tell it apart from closely associated genres.

5. Studying the institutional context

Step five proposes the analyst to study the institutional background, as well as the structure, in which the genre is used. This step happens to be pivotal especially if the data collected is from a certain organization that has its own organizational restrictions for genre construction.

6. Level of linguistic analysis

In genre analysis, linguistic features are divided into three sub-levels: lexicogrammatical features, textualization or text-patterning and structural interpretation.

7. Specialist information in genre analysis

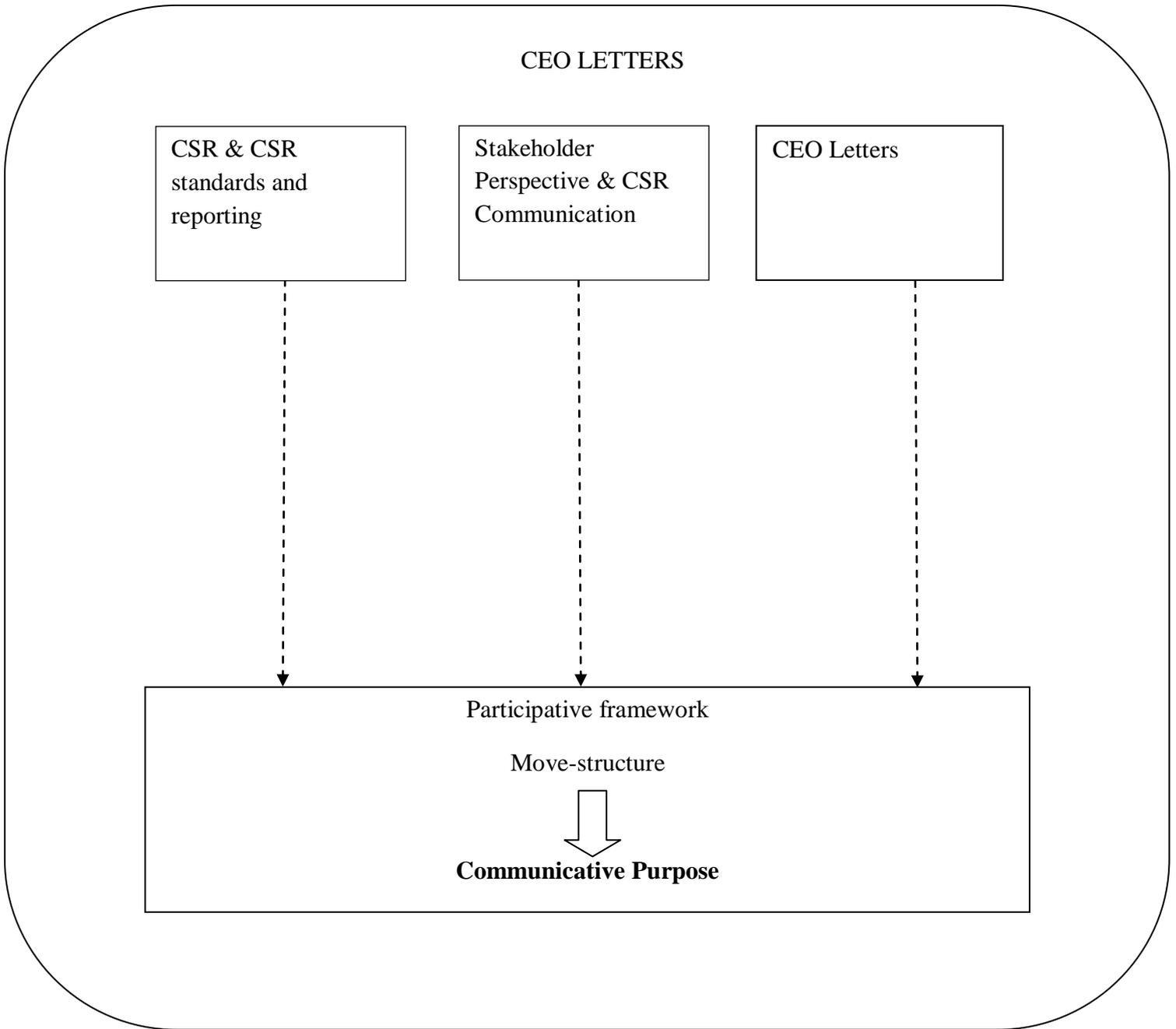
The seventh step suggests that the analyst consults a specialist; usually a member of the discourse community, who verifies, discards, validates or corrects the findings of the analyst and supplies additional information.

## **2.7 Theoretical framework**

For this study will the theoretical framework is built upon the literature presented in the earlier subchapters of this literature review, i.e. the concept of CSR, Stakeholder perspective, CSR Communication, Reporting and CEO letters.

The theoretical framework provides a basis for the empirical study which will be presented in the upcoming chapters. Figure 6 visualizes the theoretical framework, which helps to see the connection between the literature reviewed, analysis employed and findings in regards to the different objectives.

**Figure 6. Theoretical Framework**



Literature Review, which has three constituents as stated earlier and visualized in Figure 6, has been undertaken in order to assist in conducting the research and reaching the findings:

- **CSR and CSR standards and reporting;** combined together as they both are used in order to provide a background for understanding the communicative purpose of CEO letters in CSR reports. Literature related to CSR and CSR standards and reporting describes the environment in which the CEO letters are operating.
- **Stakeholder Perspective and CSR Communication;** these have also been joined together as together they help to understand the participation framework of the CEO letters in the CSR reports.
- **CEO letters and Genre Analysis;** literature in regards to CEO letters helps to understand the reasoning behind the documents released by corporations and CEO letters in particular, so that during the analysis it is easier to understand what to spot in the move-structure. Literature in regards to genre analysis has been used in order to understand why a genre analysis is to be conducted and what it will provide for this study.

Genre Analysis of CEO letters in CSR reports is then used, along with two semi-structured interviews and a focus group, to reach the research objectives of this study by aiming to identify the communicative purpose of CEO letters in CSR reports. In the next section the methodology of the study will be described to understand the methods and data used.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents the data and methods used in this study. This qualitative study is conducted using genre analysis on eight CEO letters in CSR reports of oil companies. The study is supported by interviewing two experts on CSR reports and conducting a focus group. The data and chosen methodology will be discussed in the subsequent subsections.

Qualitative study has been chosen to conduct this research as the data does not require numerical statistics, as the importance is given to words and their meanings (McGivern).

#### **3.1 Data**

To investigate the communicative purpose of CEO letters in CSR reports of oil companies, eight CSR reports were chosen for analysis. These reports were chosen from the top oil companies, which are listed in Table 1 according to production of barrels per day. However, since not all the companies listed in Table 1 had CSR reports, only the companies that had CSR reports were chosen and two of the six Major International Oil Companies were added to the list. The term “The Major International Oil Companies (Major IOCs)” is applied to a number of companies active in the oil industry that have progressed to become key players. The following six companies are referred to as the Major IOCs: BP, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, Shell and Total (P&G report of Downstream Oil Industry). Chevron and Shell were selected from these oil companies to be added to the data based on the author’s prior knowledge of the company names.

The updated list of oil companies is in Table 7. Moreover, not all companies had CEO letters; one had Chairman’s letter and one had Director Generals’ letter which were, nonetheless included in the analysis. For ease of reference, these will from here on also be referred to as CEO letters. Table 7 shows the letters that each company had in its CSR report.

**Table 7. Oil companies chosen for data collection**

	<b>Companies</b>	<b>Production (in Barrels per day)</b>	<b>Type of letter</b>
1	Saudi Aramco	8.2	CEO's letter
2	Royal Dutch Shell	3.9	CEO's letter
3	Chevron	2.7	CEO's letter
4	Exxon Mobil	2.5	CEO's letter
5	Beyond Petroleum (BP)	2.5	CEO's letter
6	China National Petroleum Company (CNPC)	2.3	Chairman's letter
7	Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC)	2.3	Director general's letter
8	Kuwait Oil Company (KOC)	2.3	CEO's letter

The latest CSR reports were selected for each company that is CSR reports that were published in 2012, referring to the activities and operations in year 2011, so as to have the most recent data to conduct this study. The CSR reports chosen were separate from the annual finance reports of the companies. This made it possible to include only information related to the CSR activities of the companies.

CEO letters issued by corporations have been chosen as interestingly various authors state that corporations release corporate documents in order to generate a positive image (Anderson & Imperia 1992, p. 114; Hildebrandt & Snyder, 1981; and Mitchell et al, 1999) and also because they are representative of their organizations voice. Private bodies, such as interest groups, institutions and corporations, participate more and more in this sort of activity which is self-justificatory, and which merges typical fundamentals of promotion, such as self-praise and positive connotations including some features of explanation and self-defense intended to prevent or calm criticism on existing issues (Malavasi, 2010). Such an activity could be; statements made in press releases, publications or brochures, all of which are not promotion specifically, but are used to create a positive public image (Malavasi).

## 3.2 Methods

This present study is a qualitative study using various data and methods to meet the aim of this research, which is to understand the participation framework, move-structure and altogether communicative purpose of CEO letters in CSR reports in the oil industry by conducting a genre analysis, two interviews and a focus group. Elements of quantitative study have also been employed as certain tables used quantified information.

To gain knowledge about CEO letters in CSR reports of eight oil companies this research will be based on qualitative research, as this type of research is appropriate in particular when there are not sufficient insights about a trend and so it suggests that qualitative research has a tendency to be descriptive, exploratory and flexible (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005, p. 202; Maykut & Morehouse 1994). This means that the aim is to discover what can be learned concerning the event of interest; in this study the phenomenon to be studied is CEO letters in CSR reports. In addition as stated in Bryman and Bell (2003, p 279) this research strategy most often has emphasis on words and not the quantity measures in the analysis and collection of data. Furthermore, the research is induced from theory and the social world is examined through the participant's interpretation. Qualitative research involves techniques like interviews, and this aspect of research will be utilized in order to understand what experts perceive the communicative purpose of these letters to be. The findings will be expressed in words or pictures but not in numbers (McGivern, 2009).

In the next chapters the genre analysis, analysis of interviews and analysis of the focus group will be presented.

### *Genre Analysis*

The genre analysis was conducted based on the seven-steps of Bhatia presented in subsection 2.6. Apparent differences were also underlined. The findings are based on the steps 6 and 7 respectively. Step 6 was concerned with level of linguistic analysis, referring to linguistic features, therefore the analysis of the CEO letters was conducted by going through each letter and underlining the similarities in regards to salutations, moves and themes that were being discussed. Move-structure was determined by using

Catenaccio's (2010) move-structure in CEO letters. Appendix 1 includes an example CEO letter and points out how the moves were recognized by the author and themes pertaining to the communicative purpose underlined.

Step 7, which was based on specialist view, was fulfilled by interviewing two experts in the field of CSR communication. The interview method will be discussed next.

### *Interviews*

After analyzing the CEO letters, a graduate of Aalto University School of Business, who majored in International Business Communication, was contacted due to their educational background alongside experience in a renowned communications agency involved in CSR communication in Finland. The graduate is a young female currently employed since four months as a communications officer at an IT-service agency, with past experience as an account manager and communications consultant at a communications company. She agreed to become an interviewee for this study and will be referred to as interviewee 2 here on. Furthermore, she recommended a contact to a former young female colleague employed as a sustainability communications expert for over two and a half years who agreed to the interview and from this point on will be referred to as interviewee 1. Both interviewees were contacted via e-mail and then a date for the interviews was decided. The interview framework followed has been included in Appendix 2. The two interviewees were contacted to express their view in regards to the CEO letters in CSR reports and perceived communicative purpose.

The interviews were conducted after the genre analysis and so findings from the interviews were included based on the similarity or differences in regards to the target stakeholder group, move structures and lastly communicative purpose(s) found by the author of this study. Both interviewees were explicitly asked to name the target stakeholder group, move structure and communicative purpose of CEO letters in general and then in regards to one of the CEO letters they chose to view from the three CEO letters presented to them. The three CEO letters offered to the interviewees were selected randomly.

The findings from each interview were compared to the author's findings and all differences and similarities were noted and included in the findings section of the study.

### *Focus group*

A focus group consisting of four communication students of Aalto University School of Business was also held. All students are studying in the field of International Business Communication and were included in the focus group to attain their perception of the genre and communicative purpose of CEO letters in CSR reports. Students were also selected due to their level of analysis, which was observed in courses taken together; Communication for Corporate Social Responsibility and Analytical Frameworks for Business and Corporate Communication.

The members of the focus group were given two CEO letters each, randomly, and all explicit references to either CSR reports or CEOs in the letters were removed in order to see whether the members recognized the texts to be CEO letters in CSR reports or not. Once the members recognized the text, it was revealed that the text was CEO letters in CSR reports. After which each member was asked to explicitly point out the target stakeholder group, move-structure and communicative purpose of the two CEO letters they had read. All similarities and differences pertaining to the three research questions were compared to the author's findings and included in the findings section.

### **3.3 Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.290) trustworthiness in a qualitative study aims to ensure that findings of the study are worth consideration. There are four matters in regards to trustworthiness in qualitative studies that need attention: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility evaluates the findings to see if they are a credible theoretical interpretation of the data that is driven from the original data of the participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.296). Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of the present study can be applied to other studies or projects. Dependability assesses the quality of the incorporated method of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation and lastly, confirmability measures the degree to which the collected data supports findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness of this study was ensured via credibility and transferability details of which are included below.

To address credibility two methods were employed. First, in the design of this study three learning initiatives were included, instead of one or two. This generated three levels of data from analysis and participants, therefore providing richer and more credible data. Furthermore, the data was selected based on specific set of criteria that has been accounted for in section 3.1. Second, observations and suggestions by communication experts in the field of CSR were utilized to update this qualitative research.

Transferability was addressed by including documents of data analysis in Appendix 3. This access gives other researches a chance to view, and/or transfer the conclusion of this study to other studies or to repeat the procedures that have been employed in this study.

## 4. Findings

In this chapter, the findings of the study will be presented, focusing on the target stakeholder group, move-structure, which are then utilized to determine communicative purpose, will include the results from genre analysis, interviews and focus group in order to provide a holistic observation.. This section is divided into three subsections, according to the three research questions of this study.

### 4.1 Target stakeholder group

This subsection focuses on the findings in regards to the first research question *what is the target stakeholder group?* This refers to the stakeholders that are being focused on in these CEO letters, which provides information that will help to understand the genre and determine the communicative purpose of the CEO letters in CSR reports. As seen in the literature review different stakeholders have different interests. Therefore the targeted stakeholders of the CEO letters were analyzed based on Table 4 by Johansen & Nielsen (2010, p. 211), according to the varying stakes of different stakeholder groups. Table 8 has been adapted from Table 4, by including an additional column to the right that shows information included in the CEO letters relating to the stakeholders' varied interests.

**Table 8. Information included in regards to different stakes, adapted from Table 4.**

<b>Stakeholders</b>	<b>Stake/Interest</b>	<b>Information included</b>
Consumers	Seek quality, license to consume engagement	Company information, and economic prosperity
Investors	Seek pay-off, risk minimization and responsible investment	Company information, economic prosperity, and safety of employees

Employees	Seek identification, safety and job satisfaction	Company information, safety of employees, and economic prosperity
NGOs	Seek influence, control, awareness	Company information. Environment and communities
Suppliers	Seek commitment, long-lasting relationships and inclusion	economic prosperity

As shown in Table 8, it can be determined that by including information in regards to safety of employees, the stakeholder groups being targeted were employees and investors. This was determined to be so as employees are concerned with their well being and investors seek to minimize risks of their investments. Including information in regards to the environment it was determined that the main stakeholder group being targeted was NGOs, as they are mainly concerned with environmental issues, especially in regards to the oil companies, as their operations greatly impact the environment, as stated in section 1. Information related to economic prosperity was deemed to target the stakeholder groups; suppliers, investors and employees. Suppliers seek long-lasting relationships and so information increasing demand for oil should ensure that the operations of the company will continue and the demand for suppliers will not diminish. As investors seek pay-off on their investments and minimize risk, they were also determined to be the target stakeholder group for information relating to economic prosperity. Employees require job safety and therefore by knowing that there is increasing demand for their company's products they are ensured that they will have jobs in the future. Information regarding communities was determined to target NGOs as well, as extraction of oil impacts not only impacts the environment but the communities established in areas close to its proximity. As customers seek quality, it was determined that information in regards to the company; its good performance and quality products and services offered to meet the growing demand, was aimed at customers along with investors, employees, NGOs and suppliers.

Table 9 gives an overview of all the CEO letters' target stakeholder group and salutations. After all letters were analyzed it was apparent that all CEO letters were written to target all stakeholders. Furthermore, none of the CEO letters, except for KOC, had greeting salutations, thus, implying that the CEO letters aim at all stakeholders of the companies and not one particular group. KOC's CEO letter was the only one that had a salutation, but that too was 'Distinguished Stakeholders'.

**Table 9. Participation-framework and Salutations**

	Companies	Participation-framework	Salutation (greeting)
1.	Saudi Aramco	All stakeholders	None
2.	Shell	All stakeholders	None
3.	Chevron	All stakeholders	None
4.	Exxon Mobil	All stakeholders	None
5.	BP	All stakeholders	None
6.	CNPC	All stakeholders	None
7.	ADNOC	All stakeholders	None
8.	KOC	All stakeholders	Distinguished Stakeholders

As CEO letters are a part of the CSR reports, it is therefore concluded that all stakeholder groups are targeted in these CEO letter as also voiced by Interviewee 1. Interviewee 2 also echoed this point by stating that CEO letters “give an overview without targeting a particular stakeholder group”. Moreover, both interviewees pointed out that the CEO letters are targeted to all stakeholders as it is also in the guidelines of GRI.

On the other hand, according to the members of the focus group three different stakeholder groups were recognized by the members when asked to identify the target stakeholder of the CEO letters. Two of the four members stated that the stakeholder group being targeted is shareholders, while one member stated it was employees and the other stated it was all stakeholders.

## 4.2 Move structure

The purpose of this section is to answer the second research question *what is the move-structure?* Therefore the move structures distinguished in the CEO letters will be presented. The moves were identified based on the five moves that were recognized by Catenaccio (2010) as discussed in Section 2.5. Upon conducting the genre analysis, interviews and focus group it was clear that all five moves of genre structure were not recognized in the CEO letters and the moves that were prevalent were modified.

The four moves found in the eight CEO letters are represented in Table 10. The first move identified was the title in the CEO letters which informed the reader that this was the letter from the most senior person of the company. After the title the letter defined CSR as what it meant to the company or tried to justify their involvement in CSR, which formed Move 2, for example in the CEO letter of Shell the second, after the welcoming note, sentence was:

“It was a year of continued economic turbulence that once again showed how placing sustainable development at the core of our business decisions is the right approach.”

Shell, CEO letter

This shows that Shell justified its sustainable development by referring to past year's economic instability. Having defined CSR the next move followed was providing accounting the key events or operations that were directly or indirectly related to CSR. Lastly, the CEO letters referred to outlook and/or certain priorities for the future.

**Table 10. Move recognized by Author**

	<b>Moves</b>
Move 1	Title for the letter
Move 2	Defining CSR / Justifying CSR involvement with a view to changing
Move 3	Providing a narrative of salient facts (events, operations, figures)
Move 4	Referring to outlook and priorities for the future

Table 11 represents the moves that were prevalent in each CEO letter. It can be seen that all letters included Moves 1, 2, 3 and 4. Representative excerpts in regards to each move have been included in Table 12 to illustrate the moves.

**Table 11. Moves in letters**

	Companies	Move 1	Move 2	Move 3	Move 4
1.	Saudi Aramco	X	X	X	X
2.	Shell	X	X	X	X
3.	Chevron	X	X	X	X
4.	Exxon Mobil	X	X	X	X
5.	BP	X	X	X	X
6.	CNPC	X	X	X	X
7.	ADNOC	X	X	X	X
8.	KOC	X	X	X	X

Careful reading and analysis helped to reach the decision that certain excerpts, such as the excerpts in Table 12, were representatives of the Moves. For instance, for Move 1, the titles introducing the letter were easy to determine as they used words such as ‘letter’ and ‘message’ to introduce the CEO letters and also stated that they were ‘from’ the ‘CEO’ on the top of the page. In regards to Move 2, this was straightforwardly

identified as the companies first referred to sustainability/CSR and then elaborated on it. As illustrated in Table 12, Saudi Aramco refers to the corporate citizenship in the first sentence and in the subsequent sentence refers to community and environmental initiatives in regards to sustainability, therefore elaborating on the corporate citizenship that was referred to previously. Move 3 was also established by identifying references to company activities, as shown in Table 12, Shell refers to the website launched in Nigeria, which enables persons to track oil spills, therefore qualifying as an activity undertaken by the company in regards to CSR. Move 4 was spotted as the CEOs alluded to the prospective operations, demand and/or risks, for instance; BP stated that the search for resources will not get easier and many challenges lay ahead therefore referring to the search and challenges that were to be faced in the future.

**Table 12. Excerpts representing moves**

Moves	Representative excerpts
Move 1	<p>Chevron: A Message From Our CEO</p> <p>ADNOC: MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL</p> <p>Koc: Message from CEO</p>
Move 2	<p>Saudi Aramco: At Saudi Aramco, we are undergoing a remarkable upscaling in how we practice corporate citizenship. In addition to our traditional community and outreach initiatives, our decision making increasingly incorporates awareness that the broad sustainability and indeed the vibrancy of the communities in which we operate, the health of the national environment, and our own performance as a company go hand-in-hand.</p>
Move 3	<p>Shell: We believe transparency in our operations helps build trust. In Nigeria, for example, the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) launched a website in 2011 that enable people to track details of oil spills at its facilities, whether from operations or due to sabotage or theft, and how it deals with them.</p>
Move 4	<p>BP: The search for energy resources will not get easier. Deepwater drilling; unconventional gas; oil sands; giant fields-there are tough technical, environmental and social challenges ahead in every area. Technology has a particularly helpful role to play in the safe and sustainable development of energy resources. It is also essential to acknowledge that our work will always involve some risk, and that we must keep focused on managing the risks inherent in our business.</p>

In regards to move structure interviewee 1 stated four moves that should be included in a CEO letter according to prior experience and having viewed the Shell CEO letter, which she was familiar with. The four moves pointed out were similar to the ones recognized by Catennacio, CEO, and these have been illustrated in Table 10 alongside

moves recognized by interviewee 2. Interviewee 1 stated that the CEO letters should begin with referring to sustainability/CSR, which would signify the topics that are on the management’s agenda, which correlates to Move 2 in Table 10. The reference should be followed by certain economic or strategic trends that are prevalent. The third move was to mention all the successes the company has faced in the past year, however, she also pointed out that in order to avoid ‘green washing’ the company should also refer to the negative aspects of business, especially if these were experienced on a large scale i.e. the Deepwater Horizon. Move 2 and Move 3 of interviewee 1 correlate to Move 3 in Table 10. The last move entails two aspects; one to refer to the future, stating the long-term vision of the company and second thanking employees for their efforts in making the past year a successful one. The first aspect of Move 4 is comparable to Move 4 in Table 10.

Moves recognized by interviewee 2 were similar to those of interviewee 1, but expressed differently. Move 1, which correlated to Move 2 of interviewee 1, was recognized to be in regards to global trends, which combine trends that are both strategic and economic. The second move was related to company performance in regards to CSR, which correlated to Move 3 of interviewee 1. Move 3 recognized by interviewee 2 were company goals and the next step to take for the company, which refers to the future and so correlates to Move 4 of interviewee 1. The last move, Move 4, recognized by interviewee 2 was thanking employees, which is the second aspect of interviewee 1’s Move 4.

**Table 13. Moves according to Interviewee 1**

	<b>Moves Interviewee 1</b>	<b>Moves Interviewee 2</b>
Move 1	Referring to sustainability	Global trends
Move 2	Strategic/Economic trends	Performance in regards to CSR
Move 3	Mention successes along with failures	Goals and next step
Move 4	Long-term vision and thanking employees	Thanking employees

Upon careful reading of the two CEO letters by each member, the members were asked to underline the moves common in both CEO letters. The moves recognized by all the members of the focus group are illustrated in Table 14. The focus group members, although had differences in wording the moves, described the structure of the letters in unison. The first move was the title of the letter, most of them titled in the form ‘Letter from our CEO’. After the title the move was to refer to sustainability or CSR, meanings of which were defined by the companies according to their view. Having mentioned CSR, the third move in the letters was identified as referring or discussing key topics for the company related to CSR. The last move, recognized by the members, was referring to the future of the companies’ operations and/or activities.

**Table 14. Moves according to Focus group**

	<b>Moves</b>
Move 1	Heading
Move 2	CSR/Sustainability
Move 3	Key CSR topics
Move 4	Referring to the future

To conclude this section, the moves recognized in Table 10 have been determined to be the four moves that signify the genre of CEO letters in CSR reports. These moves have been established to be representative of this genre, regardless of the differences in company sizes, culture or location, and can be applied internationally.

### **4.3 Communicative Purpose**

The purpose of this section is to provide an answer for the third research question of the present thesis; *what is the communicative purpose?* On the basis of the analysis the key communicative purposes of the CEO letters in the CSR reports are; establishing importance of CSR-related topics, adding credibility to the report and portraying a positive image.

#### **4.3.1 Establishing importance of CSR issues:**

One of the communicative purposes recognized for the inclusion of CEO letters in the CSR reports is to establish the importance of CSR issues that the company is partaking in. As also mentioned by Garzone (2004) as discussed in Section 2.5, one communicative purpose is to show that the endorsed policies, in regards to CSR, are indeed the most promising given the current state of affairs. This is, therefore as stated by Interviewee 1, a way of showing that the CSR issue(s) mentioned by the CEOs in the letters is “on the managements’ agenda”. It was also brought to attention by the interviewees that referring to key issues in regards to sustainability is one of the cornerstones in the GRI guidelines for CEO letters and therefore ascertains this to be one of the communicative purposes of these letters.

Moreover, all members of the focus group also voiced that the CEO letters seem to highlight CSR issues that are important to the company. Two excerpts below are included to represent how this was voiced by the members of the focus group:

Member 1: “Highlight specific issues”

Member 2: “Highlight important issues”

#### **4.3.2 Adding credibility to the CSR report:**

The second communicative purpose of the CEO letter discovered was to add credibility to the report so as to make the company seem more reliable. This was voiced by each of

the four focus group members when referring to the communicative purpose of the letters:

Member 1: “to seem reliable”

Member 2: “validate the CSR report”

Member 3: “validate and add credibility to the CSR Report”

Member 4: “credibility”

Furthermore, interviewee 1, explained credibility by recalling her experience with an investor she once interviewed who voiced that if a CEO is not comfortable enough to talk about CSR then how is it that it will be on a strategic level in the company or be deemed as credible. Interviewee 2 explained credibility by stating that the letters should include both positive and negative events to create a credible image. A way the companies have tried to achieve this is through referring to the Deepwater Horizon disaster. Therefore, CEOs letters aid the integrity of the CSR reports. Garzone (2004) has also referred to credibility while referring to one of the communicative purposes to be to get investors to believe that the management of the company deserves their confidence.

### **4.3.3 Portray a positive image:**

As stated by interviewee 2, a positive image can be derived from the perceived credibility of a company. Therefore as interviewees and members of the focus group have also stated that the CEO letters are adding credibility to the report it can be affirmed that this leads to a positive image being projected and thus forms the final communicative purpose.

This positive image is projected in regards to three areas; safety, operations and stakeholders. All letters communicate the importance of safety and/or, the growing demand of oil, and the positive impact on communities as a result of their operations and/or cooperation, therefore communicating a positive image for the company. In order to elaborate what is being communicated in regards to the three core areas-safety and

environment, verifying operations, and communities- excerpts that are representative of the CEO letters in each category will be included. Positive employer and investee image will be particularly pointed out as according to the positive image being communicated in regards to the different subjects, the target group here is analyzed to be employees and investors in particular.

*a) Safety and environment*

Each of the CEO letters mentioned operations and actions with regards to safety and its importance. All phrases and words related to safety formed the basis of this category; thus, either the word ‘safety’ was explicitly stated or it was implicit. It is also pivotal to note here that safety is not only in relation to the operations of the business but also in terms of the environment. Since six letters had environment and safety mentioned side by side, for that reason safety and environment form one category here and Table 15 depicts all the companies and the ‘X’ signifies that they mentioned safety and/or environment explicitly in their CEO letter in the CSR report.

**Table 15. Safety and Environment**

	Companies	Safety	Environment
1.	Saudi Aramco’s: CEO letter		X
2.	Shell’s: CEO letter	X	X
3.	Chevron’s: CEO letter	X	X
4.	Exxon Mobil’s: CEO letter	X	X
5.	BP’s: CEO’s letter	X	X
6.	CNPC’s:		

	CEO letter		X
7.	ADNOC's: CEO letter	X	X
8.	KOC's: CEO letter	X	X

As Table 15 illustrates, all companies, with the exception of Saudi Aramco and CNPC, mention both safety and environment in their CEO letters. Saudi Aramco's CEO letter gives the feeling that they see themselves as a higher power serving a higher purpose than just energy. The excerpt below communicates the responsibility of Saudi Aramco to humanity and the environment:

“But this renaissance must be characterized by more than growing profits. It should be an era in which we, as an industry, fulfill our commitments to humanity by helping raise and sustain quality of life across the globe while meeting our obligations to the natural environment.” Saudi Aramco, CEO letter

Furthermore, the CEO emphasizes that “the health of the natural environment, and our performance as a company go hand-in-hand”, conveying the importance of the environment in the industry. However, safety is not mentioned in the letter either explicitly or implicitly.

Shell's CEO letter offers a good representation from the sample, which mentions safety and environment already in the first paragraph:

“It was a year of continued economic turbulence that once again showed how placing sustainable development at the core of business decisions is the right approach. This means putting consideration for safety, environment and communities at the center of the steps we take to design, build and operate major energy projects.” Shell, CEO letter

The excerpt above stresses the importance of safety and environment in the designing and building of the operations of Shell. In the letter there is a section dedicated to

safety, titled 'Safety and principles'. Under this subheading CEO talks more about safety and refers to the BP Deepwater Horizon tragedy in 2010 and the priority of Shell to put safety first.

Chevron's CEO mentions safety all along the length of the letter and it forms the main message; even though the word safety may not be used each time the message is clearly in regards to safety. This can noticeably be established by reading the second paragraph of the CEO letter:

"Many of our business operations involve risk, which we work tirelessly to mitigate. We use processes and tools guided by our Chevron Way values and designed with one goal in mind: zero incidents." Chevron, CEO letter

After reading the excerpt above it seems quite obvious that the message is in regards to safety, also by the use of words such as 'mitigate' in relation to operational risk, and the words 'zero incidents' the underlining message in regards to safety is quite apparent. Furthermore, the CEO letter of Chevron uses safety not only in regards to operations but also in relation to the environment, as can be seen from the statement below:

"Environmental stewardship – our means of reducing our impact on our operating environments;" Chevron, CEO letter

ExxonMobil follows the same trend as the other two letters mentions safety and environmental performance in its quote introducing the CEO letter:

"Our greatest strength is developing the technology and techniques that maximize value while increasing safety, efficiency, and environmental performance." ExxonMobil, CEO letter

Upon reading the report the importance of communicating safety in operations and environment becomes more evident and the mention of the managing 'risk' adds further to this factor of safety.

BP's letter begins with mentioning the Deepwater Horizon accident and oil spill and in the paragraph following this refers to the company's commitment to safety:

“The employees of BP are working with great determination to make BP a stronger, safer company” BP, CEO letter

Furthermore, in its top three priorities, BP, states that “safety must be enhanced” further stressing the importance of this factor. Other than referring to safety the CEO of BP also refers to the environment and clearly proving how BP is contributing towards its safety:

“As part of our commitment to environmental restoration, BP is providing up to \$1 billion for early restoration projects designed to accelerate efforts to restore natural resources that were injured as a result of the accident” BP, CEO letter

Accident, in the above excerpt, is referring to the Deepwater Horizon disaster, as this disaster caused a lot of environmental damage and caused companies in the oil industry to review their safety measures. Consequently, in short, the reference by all companies to their dedication to safety in operations and environment defines the image of the company as an employer that is concerned and working towards the safety of its employees. Additionally, conveying a favorable image as an investee that is mitigating risks by acknowledging the operations and environmental risk prevalent in the industry of operation, so as to ensure the longevity of the company.

#### *b) Verifying Operations*

All letters refer to the importance of their operations due to economic progress worldwide, therefore, portraying a positive image as an employer and investee. A few excerpts will portray the way each CEO letter verifies their business. The CEO letter of Saudi Aramco describes the current status of the oil industry as a renaissance with continuous growth in demand, with reliance on petroleum, which is being met by the oil industry:

“The petroleum industry is experiencing a renaissance- demand continues to grow, and the applications of our products are continually broadening. People around the world will continue to rely on petroleum for decades to come. Rather than supply scarcity that

many predicted, the planet has adequate oil and gas supplies, due in large part to our industry's ingenuity in continuously unlocking new resources.”

Saudi Aramco, CEO letter

In this CEO letter it is also stated how this meeting of demand for oil by the oil industry and Saudi Aramco, is giving the world time to develop renewable resources and to surmount obstacles that are economic, environmental, technical and in regards to consumer acceptance.

The CEO letters of Shell, ExxonMobil and BP quantify this growing demand by including approximate amount of growth in the demand of oil in the near future, either by including numbers that show the growth in population or percentage growth in demand for oil. Table 16 contains the excerpts that use data to verify operations.

**Table 16. Excerpts including numerical data to back up operations**

	<b>Companies</b>	<b>Excerpts</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Shell</b>	There are now 7 billion people in the world, and we are on our way to 9 billion by 2050. In the decades to come, major economies will continue to consume energy to grow.....In short the world will need more energy.
<b>2.</b>	<b>ExxonMobil</b>	At ExxonMobil, we are proud of the role we play in supplying the energy to meet the world’s needs. These needs are expected to grow by about 30 percent by 2040, as economies expand and the world’s population approaches 9 billion people.
<b>3.</b>	<b>BP</b>	We expect the continuation of strong growth in the world’s most dynamic economies to drive even greater demand for energy. The BP Energy Outlook 2030 projects the global energy demand could grow by as much as 40% by 2030.

This section can be concluded by KOC’s CEO letter, which is representative of what the sample companies communicate under this topic in their CEO letters. The KOC CEO letter says that a main concern is “how to provide a fast growing world population with the life standards they deserve without compromising future generations’ social, economic and physical life conditions”, hence, conveying the longevity and growth of the company that is a positive factor for employees and investors alike.

c) *Communities*

All CEO letters, with the exception of ADNOC’s CEO letter, refer to communities and their concern for them and partnership with them, once again projecting a favorable image for the companies (and industry) and their operations. Some CEO letters

elaborate more about their active participation with certain stakeholder groups and others refer to them briefly. A list of excerpts representative of this sample of letters has been compiled in Table 17.

As can be seen from Table 17, Shell refers to contributing to society while working closely with communities to insure safety and also support human rights. ExxonMobil also refers to establishing relationships with communities and engaging stakeholders for open communication. BP echo's the same in regards to relationships with communities as Shell and ExxonMobil. KOC takes a step further and states the number of events it has participated in to show the involvement with various stakeholder groups.

**Table 17. Excerpts from companies referring to communities**

	<b>Companies</b>	<b>Excerpts</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Shell</b>	<p>We have to make sure Shell remains able to tackle future challenges so that we, in turn, can continue to make a positive contribution to society.</p> <p>We have worked closely with communities, coastguards and regulatory authorities to put the necessary safeguards in place. This collaborative effort has been invaluable.</p> <p>Shell was a founding member of the UN Global Compact and we support its principles in human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption</p>
<b>2.</b>	<b>ExxonMobil</b>	<p>Finally, our commitment to corporate citizenship is fundamental to our business, government and community relationships.</p> <p>We believe in addressing this dual challenge requires constructive and respectful engagement with our stakeholders.</p> <p>In communities where we are producing shale natural gas, we are working with city councils, neighbors, homeowners and regulators to open line of communication and share facts and information.</p>
<b>3.</b>	<b>BP</b>	<p>BP has been working closely with local communities and government agencies on the restoration of the Gulf Coast.</p>
<b>4.</b>	<b>KOC</b>	<p>Last year was a year when Group Companies again gave their full-fledged support to community activities: 248 charitable sponsorships and other projects were supported 89,140 saplings were planted. A total of 22,499 Group employees volunteered in these activities.</p>

In short, the positive image is being communicated in regards to communities in all CEO letters, by referring to close cooperation with communities and a sense of responsibility towards them. This has the impact of enhancing the image of the companies and depicting a positive image of them as responsible and admirable employers and investees.

The findings section can be concluded by stating that CEO letters are a common occurrence in the beginning of CSR reports. These letters are targeted at all stakeholder groups and they share similar characteristics that attempt to achieve the same communicative purposes. The communicative purposes recognized in all the letters are, establishing the importance of CSR that in turn helps to contribute to the credibility of the company, which consequently helps to enhance the positive image of the company.

## 5. Discussion

This section will provide a brief discussion of the findings presented above. The discussion will begin with participation framework; move on to the move-structure and then lastly the communicative purpose.

### *Target stakeholder group*

The findings of this study in regards to the target stakeholder group have been supported by previous research, such as that of KPMG (2008), where it is stated that given the differing interests of stakeholders, companies need to formulate a strategic decision in regards to the key stakeholder audience. The characteristic anticipated audience of sustainability reports include: customers, employees, suppliers, media, policymakers, NGOs, asset managers, investment analysts, rating agencies, government representatives, relevant industry bodies and associations and the general community. In short all stakeholders, as also pointed out by both interviewees, are targeted in CEO letters in CSR reports. However, the members of the focus group did not see the letters targeting all stakeholders but found the target stakeholder group to be investors, as in their opinion the CEO letters were referring to the operations of the company and thus alluding to the longevity and profitability, factors that are of particular interest to investors.

However, as also pointed out by Carroll (2008, p. 20) and Tammelin (2009, p. 243), CSR has indeed moved towards these wider areas of accountability, with a large range of stakeholders instead of simply being a concept that previously had its spotlight generally on environment related questions and having read the CEO letters in detail it was quite apparent to the author that the not one particular stakeholder group was being targeted.

As the findings have also shown, most CEO letters do not start with addressing a particular stakeholder group but skip the greeting address altogether, with the exception of KOC, where the greeting salutation was 'Dear stakeholders' which further emphasizes that the participation framework is all stakeholders in general. However, Interviewee 1 stated that one of the key stakeholders of CSR reports tend to be graduate

students. She stated that the reason for this is that graduates today value the ethics of a company and would like those to be in line with their own. As companies are recognizing this and seeing that graduates are becoming a main stakeholder group, CSR reports are a way that companies communicate their moral code. However, it is interesting to note that the communication students in the focus group and the author of this study, who are close to graduation, did not feel that they would read CSR reports to understand the company values or moral code and thus were not determined to be a target stakeholder group of CEO letters in CSR reports.

### *Move-structure*

The move-structure of this study was supported by Garzone (2004), as the observed moves in CEO letters recognized by him were analyzed to be prevalent in the CEO letters in this study. This supports Bhatia's (2004) statement that CEO letters are a case of genre bending. The CEO letters in Annual reports have moves similar to those of CEO letters in CSR reports as pointed out by Garzone (2004):

Move 1-Reporting on Company's performance, trends and results in the relevant year

Move 2-Providing a narrative of salient facts (events, operations, figures)

Move 3- Illustrating outlook and priorities for the future.

The similarities between the letters is not surprising as the purpose may be the same but in regards to different variables, for Annual reports the variable is presumed to be profits while for CSR reports it is evidently CSR.

It is interesting to note that the interviewees stated the last move in CEO letters to be thanking stakeholders, or employees in particular, but upon analyzing the eight letter it was found that only KOC and Shell entailed this move; thanking all stakeholders and thanking the review committee. The reason for this was thought to be cultural differences as the companies are international. As stated by interviewee 2, it is quite standard in Nordic companies' CEO letters to thank employees in the end and so it was

quite surprising that this was not the case in all the CEO letters studied. Furthermore, it was surprising that only four of the companies invited the reader to the CSR report/ give feedback on the CSR report, and therefore the Move 5 of Catennacio (2010) was removed from the findings.

Moreover, upon hearing from interviewee 1 and 2 that GRI has a guideline for CEO letters the guideline was reviewed and has been presented in Table and the moves recognized by Catennacio (2010) have been placed in the Table as well to show the similarities between the guidelines and moves. It can be clearly seen how the guidelines correspond with moves of the CEO letters, for instance, the first component of the GRI disclosure refers to the strategic priorities and key topics regarding sustainability and move 1 refers to defining or justifying CSR in regards to the role of business. The fourth component of the guideline, where it states key events during the reporting period this can directly link to move 3, providing a narrative of salient facts. The fifth, sixth and seventh components referring to achievements, failures and views in regards to performance can be linked to move 2, reporting on the performance, trends and results. Therefore, this guideline could have also been used as a basis for evaluation the move-structure of the letters had the author known about the guideline prior to the interviews conducted.

**Table 18. Statement from the most senior decision-maker of the organization in comparison to moves recognized by Catennacio (2010)**

	<b>Components of the disclosure</b>	<b>Moves recognized by Catennacio</b>
	Strategic priorities and key topics for the short and medium-term with regard to sustainability.	Move 1 Defining CSR / Justifying CSR involvement with a view to changing existing conceptions of the role of business in society
	Including respect for internationally agreed standards and how they relate to long-term organizational strategy and success.	

	Broader trends affecting the organization and influencing sustainability priorities.	Move 1 Defining CSR / Justifying CSR involvement with a view to changing existing conceptions of the role of business in society
	Key events during the reporting period.	Move 3 Providing a narrative of salient facts (events, operations, figures)
	Achievements during the reporting period.	Move 2 Reporting on Company's performance, trends and results in the relevant year
	Failures during the reporting period.	Move 2 Reporting on Company's performance, trends and results in the relevant year
	Views on performance with respect to targets	Move 2 Reporting on Company's performance, trends and results in the relevant year
	Outlook on the organization's main challenges and targets for the next year and goals for the coming 3-5 years.	Move 4 Illustrating outlook and priorities for the future
	Other items pertaining to the organization's strategic approach.	

### Communicative purpose

Therefore, as seen in the findings of this study and in previous research, it is pivotal in CSR communication, as in the CEO letters, to communicate positive motives of a corporation in its CSR activities and seem credible so as to decrease stakeholder uncertainty (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen , 2010). However, as recognized by Du et al, and the focus group members there might be a possibility of stakeholders getting apprehensive and identify principally extrinsic reasoning in companies' social initiatives.

As also discussed previously in Section 2.5, CEOs are expected to take part in an essential role in CSR execution, so as to be entirely dedicated to it and to make decisions accordingly (Agle et al, 1999). In fact, a number of scholars affirmed that the company's positive image is mostly derived from that of the CEOs (Gaines-Ross, 1999). The study verified this statement as indeed it is seen that via the CEO letters the CEOs have been succeeding in communicating a positive image by seeming credible. In addition to that social performance very much relies on and is determined by the level of involvement and engagement into CSR by CEOs (Waldman, Siegel, and Javidan, 2006; Falconi, 2004; Hansen & Reichwald, 2008).

As seen in this study and in a study by Meiri and DeWolf (2010), since the rank and integrity of the speaker are essential to build public trust; the CEO is frequently the first speaker in the social report. This issue of status and credibility was also raised by interviewee 1 when referring to the communicative purpose of CEO letters. Furthermore, as also found by Ferns, Emelianov and Sethi (2008), the aim of the letters was to give the report credibility with stakeholders along with the opportunity for the CEO to convey and confirm his dedication to good corporate citizenship and socially responsible behavior which could considerably add to the company image .

This section can thus be concluded by stating that the study agrees with previous research that CEOs are the most credible voice of an organization therefore they are in a position to communicate the firm's stance on matters related to ethics, which may be done with the firm's reputation in mind (Argenti 2003). Furthermore it is rightly argued by Pelsmaekers (2011) and as the findings of this study show that the CEO letter is a perfect opportunity for the CEO to attend to issues concerning the firm, the industry and

wider society. This, in turn, has been seen, in both previous research and this study, to result in the firm trying to exude a positive image to a wider range of audiences than would be otherwise possible (Hildebrandt & Snyder, 1981; Hyland, 1998). Moreover, as stated in previous research (Bhatia, 2004), these letters are indeed a case of genre bending, as these are found in both Annual and CSR reports, and pave the way to the proper report setting the tone for the rest of the text, therefore, giving the reader an interpretative framework.

## **6. Conclusions**

This section concludes the research process and the main findings of the study. The practical implications and limitations of the study along with suggestions for further research will also be included in this section.

### **6.1 Research summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate participation framework, move-structure in order to understand the communicative purpose of CEO letters in CSR reports of oil companies. The motivation behind the study was the limited research in the area and the increasing emphasis on CSR and CSR communication. The study focused on three research questions in order to determine the communicative purpose of CEO letters in CSR reports of oil companies:

- 1 What is the participation framework?
- 2 What is the move-structure?
- 3 What is the communicative purpose?

A qualitative approach was taken to answer the research questions, along with genre analysis that utilized the seven-step model of Bhatia to analyze genres. The data for the study consisted of eight CEO letters from international oil companies. The selected CEO letters from CSR reports were chosen based on their production and industry, adherence to GRI and publication of their CSR reports in 2012 reporting on the year 2011. The data was combined with two interviews with experts in CSR communication and a focus group of four communication students who have studied CSR. The literature review consisted of literature relating to CSR, stakeholder perspective, CSR communication and CSR reporting. This literature was utilized to form the theoretical framework of this study.

The findings indicate that all stakeholders are targeted in the CEO letters and not just one stakeholder group. There were four moves recognized in the CEO letters; (1) Title for the letter, (2) Defining CSR / Justifying CSR involvement with a view to changing, (3) Providing a narrative of salient facts (events, operations, figures), (4) Referring to outlook and priorities for the future. Furthermore, the three key communicative purposes discovered were establishing importance of CSR-related topics, adding credibility to the report and portraying a positive image.

## **6.2 Practical implications**

There are two practical implications in this study one refers to the credibility of reports and second to the importance of global trends. It is understood by the findings of this study that companies should include CEO letters in their CSR reports to not only show that the discussed CSR topics are on the companies' agenda but also to add credibility to their report and thus portray a positive image to the readers. Although this study has focused on CEO letters in CSR reports, it can be supposed that including a message from the most senior person in the company can be applied to other projects pertaining to CSR communication as this will add credibility and eventually create a positive image. As suggested by the interviewees, companies should provide a balanced view of the company's CSR activities to seem credible and so contribute to the positive image. In order to seem credible it was emphasized by the interviewees that both positive and negative activities should be referred to so as to avoid green washing.

Furthermore, as stated by the interviewees, companies should use different analyzing tools, such as, SWOT analysis to understand the important global trends, needs of stakeholders, and the companies own communicative needs when planning a communication strategy and apply these to the letter. Companies should do more than just refer to global trends, but state how they have made a change to their operations in regards to those to further add to the credibility of the letter.

### **6.3 Limitations of the study**

There are two main limitations to this study; one in regards to the sample of data chosen for analysis and the other in regards to the genre analysis conducted. In regards to the data sample, since there were only eight CEO letters chosen for analysis the scope of this study was narrowed. Furthermore, there were two interviews with communication experts in the field of CSR and one focus group consisting of four students. Therefore, the finding from this study cannot be generalized; however, this was not the scope or intent of the study. Furthermore, the companies chosen for analysis were from different countries and there were bound to have cultural differences in their letters, however, Bhatia (1993) claims that cultural differences are not likely to impact the fundamental communication purpose and move-structure of a genre.

The aim was to explore that communicative purpose of CEO letters in CSR reports of oil companies to offer an understanding of this phenomenon that has limited research. As stated previously due the exploratory nature of this study, this qualitative research was deemed sufficient. Therefore, when genre analysis was conducted to discover the communicative purpose, the linguistic aspect pertaining to lexico- grammatical features, textualization or text-patterning was not utilized in the analysis, which forms the second main aspect of limitation in this research. In the next part suggestions for further research will be made keeping the limitations in mind.

### **6.4 Suggestions for further research**

Due to the limitations in research and since there has been limited research in regards to CEO letters there are several suggestions for research. The different possibilities for further research suggested in this subsection are: study of CEO letters in CSR reports utilizing lexico- grammatical features, textualization or text-patterning, study of CEO letters from different industries utilizing a bigger sample of letters, studying cultural differences in CEO letters in CSR reports, and lastly doing a comparative study of CEO letters in Annual reports with CEO letters in CSR reports.

The first suggestion is to utilize lexico- grammatical features, textualization or text-patterning in the study of CEO letters in CSR reports provide more detail. As Bhatia (1993, p. 40) also states, analyzing lexico-grammatical features is significant, as these provide pivotal information pertaining to the structure and guide the reader. Secondly, since the sample was small, the same research can be carried out using a larger sample of CEO letters and perhaps with companies from different industries to understand the communicative purpose of CEO letters in general. A third suggestion is to acknowledge the cross-cultural differences in the CEO letters as the companies that produced these are based in different countries and as recognized by Hofstede (2005), it is vital to understand intercultural knowledge. Lastly, an extremely interesting study would be that of comparing the CEO letters in Annual reports to those in CSR reports, this would help to further differentiate between the genres and understand the communicative purpose and target stakeholder group specific to each.

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## 8. List of Appendices

### Appendix 1: Move-structure in Shell CEO Letter

**Move 1:** Introduction from the CEO



“WITH TOUGH ECONOMIC CONDITIONS PREVAILING, AND MOMENTOUS SOCIAL CHANGE TAKING PLACE IN SOME COUNTRIES, THE WORLD MUST NOT LOSE SIGHT OF LONGER-TERM CHALLENGES.”

Welcome to the Shell Sustainability Report for 2011.

**Move 2:** It was a year of continued economic turbulence that once again showed how placing sustainable development at the core of our business decisions is the right approach. This means putting consideration for safety, the environment and communities at the centre of the steps we take to design, build and operate major energy projects. The energy we provide must be produced and delivered in the right way.

Sustainability depends on our ability to build resilience into our plans and operations. We have to make sure Shell remains able to tackle future challenges so that we, in turn, can continue to make a positive contribution to society. We know that doing business responsibly helps us achieve this through greater productivity and by creating benefits for all. We can deliver our projects more effectively, increase production faster, supply our customers with products more efficiently, and create supply chains and jobs for local businesses. It is a situation where everyone wins.

**Move 3: Global challenges**

With tough economic conditions prevailing, and momentous social change taking place in some countries, the world must not lose sight of longer-term challenges.

There are now 7 billion people in the world, and we are on our way to 9 billion by 2050. In the decades to come, major economies will continue to consume energy to grow. In developing countries many people will become wealthier, buying their first television, refrigerator or car. In short, the world will need more energy.

Fossil fuels will still provide the bulk of this energy with, we believe, a greater role to play for cleaner-burning natural gas. Renewable energy, including low-carbon biofuels for transport, will also increase steadily. But Shell believes we cannot view energy supply and demand in isolation. As the world becomes more crowded, the stresses between the essentials of life – water, food and energy – will become more critical. Energy production needs water, and providing enough water and food to sustain people needs energy. Climate change is likely to intensify the stresses.

These are huge, integrated challenges and there is no time to waste if the world is to tackle them effectively. Yet the relationship between government, business and civil society is struggling to work. To build a sustainable energy system, we need a new level of collaboration and leadership to develop workable policies and solutions. We need vision and action. Major companies like ours can help encourage the global co-operation needed across public and private sectors, and across industries.

At Shell we believe that responsibly delivering cleaner, more reliable and affordable energy is the best contribution we can make today to a more stable world where economies can thrive. To do this we work with others including communities, other companies, governments, consumers and non-governmental organisations. But we know there is much work to do to meet the challenges of building a sustainable energy future.

### **Safety and principles**

After the *BP Deepwater Horizon* tragedy in 2010, the energy industry rightly came under intense scrutiny. For Shell, safety remains our top priority. Our standards are rigorous. If things do not go as planned we respond swiftly and decisively, and we investigate all incidents to learn and improve our performance.

**Move 4:** We prepare thoroughly to prevent incidents. In 2012, we intend to start exploration drilling in waters off Alaska. We have worked closely with communities, coastguards and regulatory authorities to put the necessary safeguards in place. This collaborative effort has been invaluable.

We believe transparency in our operations helps build trust. In Nigeria, for example, the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) launched a website in 2011 that enables people to track details of oil spills at its facilities, whether from operations or due to sabotage or theft, and how it deals with them. Nigeria faces many challenges. The best way to address them is a multi-party approach by government, communities, industry and others. [SPDC](#) is ready to play a key role in such an approach.

Shell was a founding member of the UN Global Compact and we support its principles in human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. We are also a signatory to the Global Compact LEAD, which reinforces the commitment of business to these principles. In this report you can read about our progress in these areas.

Once again I would like to thank the members of the External Review Committee for their valued contributions in producing the Sustainability Report 2011.

I also invite you to send your comments on the report to:

[sustainabilityreport@shell.com](mailto:sustainabilityreport@shell.com)

**Peter Voser**

*Chief Executive Officer*

## **Appendix 2: Interview Framework**

Focus on 'professionals' perceptions on the CEO letters' in CSR reports

### Themes to be discussed

Could you tell me generally about the role you play in your company?

Tell me about what the term CSR communication means to you?

So how does the process go in preparing a CSR report?

Who writes the text for the CEO?

Please do tell me a bit about CSR reports and why, in your opinion, companies produce them?

What is your view about CEO letters in CSR reports? And what about CEO letters in CSR reports of oil companies?

What would be the top three subjects to be included in a CEO letter in your opinion?

What are the main building blocks of CEO letters (structurally)?

Show a CEO letter (Shell CEO letter shown as Interviewee 1 was familiar with it):

Is there is something unusual/exceptional in the CEO letters?

Who do you think the CEO letters' target audience is?

Now, what would be the top three subjects covered here?

What are the main building blocks utilized in these letters?

### **Appendix 3: Link to all CEO letters**

ADNOC, CEO letter (2011):

[http://www.adnoc.ae/publications%5Chse\\_reports%5CADNOC\\_Sustainability\\_Report%202011\\_English.pdf](http://www.adnoc.ae/publications%5Chse_reports%5CADNOC_Sustainability_Report%202011_English.pdf)

BP, CEO letter (2011):

[http://www.bp.com/assets/bp\\_internet/globalbp/STAGING/global\\_assets/e\\_s\\_assets/e\\_s\\_assets\\_2010/downloads\\_pdfs/bp\\_sustainability\\_review\\_2011.pdf](http://www.bp.com/assets/bp_internet/globalbp/STAGING/global_assets/e_s_assets/e_s_assets_2010/downloads_pdfs/bp_sustainability_review_2011.pdf)

Chevron, CEO letter (2011):

[http://www.chevron.com/documents/pdf/corporateresponsibility/Chevron\\_CR\\_Report\\_2011.pdf](http://www.chevron.com/documents/pdf/corporateresponsibility/Chevron_CR_Report_2011.pdf)

CNPC, CEO letter (2011):

<http://www.cnpc.com.cn/resource/english/images1/pdf/11%20CSR%20Report/3-Chairman's%20Message.pdf>

ExxonMobil, CEO letter (2011):

[http://www.exxonmobil.com/Corporate/Files/news\\_pub\\_ccr2011.pdf](http://www.exxonmobil.com/Corporate/Files/news_pub_ccr2011.pdf)

KOC, CEO letter (2011):

[www.koc.com.tr/en-us/Corporate/.../CEOsMessage.aspx](http://www.koc.com.tr/en-us/Corporate/.../CEOsMessage.aspx)

Saudi Aramco, CEO letter (2011):

<http://www.saudiaramco.com/content/dam/Publications/Corporate%20Citizenship%20Report/CCR2011/CCR2011En.pdf>

Shell, CEO letter (2011):

[http://reports.shell.com/sustainability-report/2011/servicepages/downloads/files/11\\_review\\_english.pdf](http://reports.shell.com/sustainability-report/2011/servicepages/downloads/files/11_review_english.pdf)