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**Corporate Approaches to Human Sustainability:
Workforce Wellbeing in Large Japanese Companies**

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Abstract

Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) have become widely researched fields. In recent years, there has been a growing social concern about issues affecting workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. However, little is known about how companies resolve these issues. In particular, there is a dearth of empirical research in these fields examining how companies address workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues under increasing social pressures. To fill this knowledge gap, this exploratory study examines how large Japanese companies address these issues. It is positioned within a social constructionism/interpretivism paradigm and employs qualitative research methodology, drawing upon interviews with managers from 31 companies, as well as their stakeholders and informants.

The study begins by examining workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives promoted by large Japanese companies. It identifies four interconnected areas addressed as integral parts of CSR practices: gender equality, flexibility at work, regulating overwork, and productivity improvement. However, while companies promote initiatives under increasing social pressures, they find it difficult to incorporate the initiatives into CSR strategy due to emerging dilemmas.

Next, the study explores the business-society interface in which companies face these dilemmas. It identifies nine factors which constrain the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. The evidence indicates that these factors constitute the underlying system of responsibilities that characterises the existing workstyle, leading to externalised overwork and gendered roles in Japanese society.

Finally, the study examines how some companies implement human sustainability initiatives as part of their business strategies, even within these constraints. The evidence shows that these companies seek to proactively align core business practices with human sustainability initiatives, in order to enhance business performance over the long run. The findings also suggest that companies seek to proactively engage with key stakeholders to work through existing stakeholders' expectations.

Overall, the outcomes of this thesis elucidate a conceptual framework of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability, incorporating the roles of key stakeholders. This may assist scholars and practitioners to address issues affecting workforce wellbeing and human sustainability more effectively within a given social context. Hence, the contributions of this study are both theoretical and empirical.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This study explores workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies. Over the past few decades, Japanese companies have witnessed a growing social concern about issues affecting workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. Such issues include persistent long working hours, lack of work-life balance, and gender inequality in the workplace. These issues have been incorporated into the agenda of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and corporate sustainability. However, while large Japanese companies have implemented various workplace initiatives, many have found it difficult to resolve the underlying issues and make significant progress. This exploratory study investigates how companies seek to resolve these issues, drawing from interviews with managers with CSR responsibilities, their stakeholders and informants. By adopting the ethical, social, and economic perspectives of CSR, this study aims to expand understanding of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability.

This chapter introduces the research topic and its objectives and provides a summary of its contribution. First, the background of the study is provided. The following sections present the motivation and justification of the study including the research gaps in the literature. The research objectives and questions are outlined in the next section, followed by an overview of the research philosophy and methodology underlying the study. Then significance of the study and definitions of key terms are presented. The last part of the chapter describes the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background of the Study

The idea of sustainability has been defined and discussed as social development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Gladwin, Kennelly, & Krause, 1995; WCED, 1987, p. 43). This idea requires companies to meet the present and future needs of their stakeholders over the long term in environmental, social, and economic dimensions (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Van Marrewijk & Werre, 2003). This concept of corporate sustainability is often translated into, and considered equivalent to, CSR (corporate social responsibility) (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007; Van Marrewijk, 2013). Both concepts stand for corporate commitment to operate their businesses responsibly in an environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable manner (Elkington, 1998; Klettner, Clarke, & Boersma, 2014).

Social sustainability involves meeting basic human needs and achieving equitable and secure human development (Bansal, 2005; Gladwin et al., 1995; Kopnina & Blewitt, 2015). In sustainability and CSR literature, it has been discussed as enhancing human wellbeing and quality of life, along with environmental and economic sustainability (Anand & Sen, 2000; Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Gladwin et al., 1995; Qasim, 2017; Ross, 2009). In line with these perspectives, Benn, Dunphy, and Griffiths (2014) have discussed the development and meeting of human needs as ‘human sustainability,’ which evolves in parallel with economic and ecological sustainability.

In the workplace, such human needs are considered to include broad workforce wellbeing topics, such as better health, work-life balance, equality, diversity, learning, and development of the workforce (Benn et al., 2014; European Commission, 2001; International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2010; Painter-Morland, Demuijnck,

& Ornati, 2017). Workforce wellbeing broadly indicates that the workforce is in a positive state, physically, mentally and socially (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Pressman, Kraft, & Bowlin, 2013; World Health Organization, 2018). This view is in line with the perspective that meeting human needs helps people flourish (Costanza et al., 2007; Sen, 1999) and that sustainability is a process of equitable and secure human development (Gladwin et al., 1995). Thus, workforce wellbeing is considered an integral component of CSR and corporate sustainability (Benn et al., 2014; Welford, 2004).

In management literature, there is a rich body of research on work and wellbeing, such as in organisational psychology (Anderson, Jané-Llopis, & Cooper, 2011; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Salanova, Del Líbano, Llorens, & Schaufeli, 2014; Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2009) and in human resource management (Ehnert, 2009; Ehnert, Harry, & Zink, 2013; Guest, 2017). The increasing research evidence indicates that high levels of wellbeing at work are good for the employee, the organisation, and society (Anderson et al., 2011; Robertson & Cooper, 2018). In line with the increasing awareness, both at the organisational and societal level, there has been a growing concern about emerging issues affecting workforce wellbeing. These issues include persistent long working hours (Golden, 2009; Kang, Matusik, & Barclay, 2017; Muhlbauer & Tziner, 2017), lack of work-life balance (Bardoel & De Cieri, 2014; Fleetwood, 2007; Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010), and gender inequality in the workplace (Grosser, McCarthy, & Kilgour, 2016; Klettner, Clarke, & Boersma, 2016; Terjesen, Aguilera, & Lorenz, 2015).

In sustainability and CSR research, however, while these work and wellbeing issues are increasingly linked to sustainability and CSR practices (European Commission, 2001; International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2010; Welford, 2004), how to resolve

the issues and improve workforce wellbeing and human sustainability remain less examined both theoretically and empirically in comparison to environmental and economic sustainability (Kossek, Valcour, & Lirio, 2014; Pfeffer, 2010; Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012; Van Engen, Vinkenburgh, & Dijkers, 2012). According to Pfeffer (2010), this lack of research can be attributed to several reasons: impact on human wellbeing is often less visible than environmental impacts and harder to define and measure objectively; and an understanding and focus on human wellbeing is different from society to society, requiring an in-depth analysis within a given social context.

These workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues merit particular attention in the empirical domain of this study, Japan, where the workforce is undergoing an unprecedented change. While the country enjoys one of the highest life expectancies worldwide, birth rates are among the lowest in the world, indicating an ageing and declining workforce (Faruquee & Mühleisen, 2003; OECD, 2016). As a result, the Japanese population is projected to shrink by 25% between 2015 and 2050 (OECD, 2018b). Meanwhile, the elderly-dependency ratio, which is the elderly population as a share of the working-age population, was the highest in the OECD (44%) in 2015, and is projected to reach 73% in 2050, putting a strain on the country's fiscal sustainability (Faruquee & Mühleisen, 2003; OECD, 2018b). To support the economy, its ageing workforce needs to work efficiently while addressing the twin pressures of childcare and eldercare (OECD, 2011, 2018b). While this pressure is particularly acute in Japan, the same concern looms for other ageing societies, such as in Europe (Dey, 2006; MacInnes, 2006; Poelmans, Chinchilla, & Cardona, 2003).

This demographic change requires Japan to reconsider its traditional workstyle characterised by long working hours. According to the Better Life Index (OECD, 2011),

Japan is ranked 34th out of 36 OECD countries for overall “Work-Life Balance (WLB)”, with particular concern over its long work hours. Excessive work hours have long been associated with negative health impacts (Bannai & Tamakoshi, 2014; Dembe, 2009) and in some cases *karoshi* (death by overwork) (Kanai, 2009). In a 2005 survey of the labour unions in large Japanese companies, 80% identified ‘reducing working hours’ as one of their high priority CSR issues (Goto, 2007). However, long working hours remains a persistent issue. In 2016, the Japanese Government’s first white paper on *karoshi* reported that the average annual working hours for full-time employees have hovered around 2000 hours for the last 20 years in Japanese companies. Almost a quarter of companies surveyed had full-time employees working over 60 hours a week, and only about half of paid annual leave was taken by employees (Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare [Japan], 2016). Furthermore, young Japanese workers have worked themselves to death due to long working hours, causing social concerns both in Japan and around the world (Johanson, 2017; Lane, 2017; Yamauchi et al., 2017).

Long working hours also constrain gender equality by perpetuating the gender division of labour between work and home (Cha, 2013; Gascoigne, Parry, & Buchanan, 2015; Nemoto, 2013a). In Japan, the gendered division of labour has become common, as women continue to retain more family-care and home responsibilities than men (Gambles, Lewis, & Rapoport, 2006; Nemoto, 2013a; North, 2011). As long work hours have become increasingly taken for granted, less than 5% of male employees in the private sector take parental leave, while half of women quit their jobs after their first child is born (Gender Equality Bureau [Japan], 2018). This is despite the fact that both males and females are entitled to take parental leave under Japanese laws (Karu & Tremblay, 2018).

Correspondingly, the average proportion of female managers in Japanese companies remains at 12%, in comparison to the OECD average of 31% (OECD, 2017).

Furthermore, the practice of long working hours affects economic wellbeing, through stagnant labour productivity. It is pertinent to note here that productivity has not been explicitly discussed as an aspect of human sustainability (Benn et al., 2014; Kossek et al., 2014; Pfeffer, 2010; Spreitzer et al., 2012). Nonetheless, productivity has been recognised as an integral part of economic wellbeing (Kopnina & Blewitt, 2015; Robertson & Cooper, 2018). From the economic perspective, labour productivity is defined as GDP per hour worked and represents the volume of output produced per unit of labour input (OECD, 2018c). Labour productivity in Japan remains 26% below the top half of OECD countries (OECD, 2018b), and the lowest among G7 countries, lagging behind its international competitors, such as Germany, the United States, and the UK (Office for National Statistics [UK], 2018). Thus, cutting long working hours and increasing labour productivity is considered necessary for the economic wellbeing of Japan (Kopp, 2017; OECD, 2018b; Ono, 2018).

For businesses, long working hours and related health issues affect their economic bottom line. The potential costs are increasing, including the compensation cost due to poorer physical and mental health, inability to attract and retain talent, as well as damage to the health of their workforce (Goh, Pfeffer, & Zenios, 2016; Kuroda & Yamamoto, 2016; Pfeffer, 2010, 2018). For society, long working hours may also discourage young people from starting a family, thus leading to a low fertility rate and, in the long run, worsen the labour shortage (Ikeda, 2010; OECD, 2011). Thus, the government and business are increasingly concerned with the impact of working long hours on the economy and society

(Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017; Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; Gambles et al., 2006).

The Japanese government has attempted to rectify the situation. It declared 2008 to be the 'inaugural year' of Work-Life Balance (WLB), and a cabinet-level office was established to promote new policies. The Work-Life Balance Charter was created as a cornerstone of Japan's efforts, with the aim of persuading businesses that they have a moral obligation to change their ways to serve the broader national interest (North, 2010). In line with these efforts, the Japanese government has also adopted the Action Plan for the Realization of Work Style Reform (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017, p. 2), which states the following:

The greatest challenge toward the revitalization of Japan's economy is work style reform... We have not been able to embark on a full-scale reform, although many people were aware that conducting work style reform[s] would positively contribute to a better work-life balance or improved productivity. That is why we need enough energy to change our society to accomplish this reform.

This statement underscores the government's determination to improve work-life balance and the productivity of their workforce simultaneously. However, the government-backed campaign launched in 2017 to encourage workers to leave the office earlier and boost spending, 'Premium Friday', has failed to gain momentum (Tsunoda, 2018).

Moreover, in order to redress the gender gap, the Japanese government has set a target for women to hold over 30% of leadership positions in all social sectors by 2020 (Dalton, 2017). Positive action was implemented both at the national and corporate level; however,

progress has been slow due to persistent gender roles and practices (North, 2009, 2011). Consequently, this target was revised down in 2015, indicating that the government realised that it was an impossible goal (Dalton, 2017).

1.2 Motivation for this Study

The motivation for this study comes from the desire to address long working hours and related issues in Japanese businesses. The roots of this desire can be traced back to the 1980s, in the midst of the rapid economic growth, when I became aware of the incidences of *karoshi* (death by overwork) of Japanese ‘salarymen’ and the plight of their families. In the late 1990s, I joined the workforce and experienced long working hours, a lack of work-life balance, and related gender gap issues first hand, both as an employee and as a business manager. I realised that this ‘workstyle’ was neither equitable nor sustainable. This realisation formed the desire and motivation to conduct this study. The emergence and significance of sustainability and corporate social responsibility discourse provided the backbone for this research. As the business-human sustainability interface has not been well explored both in theory and practice, this study aims to explore the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability in the context of Japanese business and society.

1.3 Justification of the Study

Following the above discussion, it can be argued that there is a need for research into how companies address workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues. This argument is

founded on the calls for further study from academia, business, and the government. There are five reasons for this, which are outlined below.

First, workforce wellbeing and human sustainability need to be appropriately incorporated into the discourse of CSR and corporate sustainability. Some arguments have emerged for the need to incorporate human wellbeing into the organisational sustainability research. For instance, Pfeffer (2010) states that “there is a growing public and business interest in building sustainable organisations and increasing research and educational interest in the topic of organizational sustainability” (p. 34). He points out that, in comparison to environmental sustainability, human sustainability has been neglected. This gap is a serious concern because “being a socially responsible business ought to encompass the effect of management practices on employee physical and psychological well-being” (p. 36).

Spreitzer et al. (2012) also argue for the importance of human sustainability from the perspective of the triple bottom line of sustainability. They state that “in comparison to the environmental and economic dimensions of sustainability, substantially less attention has been focused on sustainability’s human dimension” (p. 155). They argue that this gap needs to be filled because “sustainable organizations have the capacity to endure and simultaneously satisfy a triple bottom line of economic, environmental and human performance” (p. 155).

Similarly, Van Engen et al. (2012) argue that human sustainability is increasingly important for management, particularly within the “current demographic developments common to industrialized nations, such as growing numbers of dual earners and ageing populations” (p. 646). Kossek et al. (2014) also state that sustainability requires businesses to foster a

“sustainable workforce” (p. 295). Based on the review of the literature, Kossek et al. (2014) point out that “work-life balance, wellbeing, and sustainability are not well linked in research and practice, despite the fact they are growing in importance in the scholarly and managerial literatures” (p. 296). They further argue that this disconnect is “a critical problem” because it affects the long-term workforce effectiveness as well as the health of society (p. 296).

Research shows that a failure to incorporate human sustainability into management practice is costly to society. According to Goh et al. (2016), in the US alone, more than 120,000 deaths annually are associated with such harmful management practices as long working hours, work-family conflict, economic insecurity, an absence of job control, and lack of health insurance. In economic terms, they estimate that approximately 5-8% of annual healthcare costs are associated with these practices. Considering the human and social costs, Pfeffer (2018) argues that business should measure workforce health and that the government should focus on the workplace to address the healthcare cost crisis. Based on the above arguments, there is an increasing need for research into human sustainability in the CSR and corporate sustainability literature.

Second, more research is needed to develop effective corporate initiatives to resolve workforce wellbeing issues. One such research area is work-life initiatives in the workplace. Kossek, Lewis, and Hammer (2010) note that, despite the growing need to support work-life balance, corporate initiatives are often ineffective and changes are slow and uneven, because they are marginalised in management practices. Similarly, according to S. Lewis and Beauregard (2018), while there has been a considerable growth of ‘work-life balance (WLB)’ practices, the effects of WLB policies remain limited and need further

examination based on more critical and long-term considerations of broader societal and economic issues.

Another area of research needed to develop effective corporate initiatives is gender equality in the workplace. Grosser, McCarthy, and Kilgour (2016) point out that “gender equality is recognized internationally as a human right, and identified as key to economic, social, and democratic development in the 21st century...” (p. 3). They go on to argue that the gender equality issue remains marginalised in management research and practice, partly due to persistent gender roles and practices. In a similar vein, Thompson (2008) calls for further attention to gender equality initiatives, since business has “the duty to adopt gender equity as a corporate citizenship and social responsibility priority” (p. 87). Thus, these researchers call for further research into more effective corporate initiatives to enhance work-life balance and gender equality.

A third reason for further research into human sustainability is that management literature still lacks empirical studies on how companies can overcome the competing demands inherent in the pursuit of corporate sustainability. There is an increasing call for research into the trade-offs, dilemmas, and conflicts of CSR and sustainability initiatives. For instance, Hahn, Figge, Pinkse, and Preuss (2010, p. 218) state that trade-offs and conflicts between economic, environmental and social aspects represent the rule rather than the exception, yet have received little attention in the management literature. They go on to argue that “future research should thus provide managers with guidance on how to deal with trade-offs in corporate sustainability” (p. 226).

In a similar vein, Epstein, Buhovac, and Yuthas (2015) argue that, while the study and practice of sustainability have been maturing, empirical evidence is lacking as to how managers can simultaneously manage the competing demands. Thus, these researchers call for further research into the practical challenges of incorporating sustainability into management practices.

Fourth, CSR and corporate sustainability research need to incorporate societal factors. Researchers point out that societal factors have been relatively overlooked in CSR research, while most studies tended to focus on instrumental and business case arguments. For example, Brammer, Jackson, and Matten (2012) note that much literature on CSR has treated the societal aspects as “a black box as a set of external requirements” (p. 4). Brammer et al. (2012) go on to argue that, without an effective societal and institutional context, “companies have opportunities to externalize the costs of CSR (Aguilera, Filatotchev, Gospel, & Jackson, 2008)” and that “a compelling business case for corporate irresponsibility will remain (Lynch-Wood, Williamson, & Jenkins, 2009)” (p. 18).

In a similar vein, Arena, Azzone, and Mapelli (2018) stress the importance of understanding societal factors when incorporating CSR into strategy. They state that companies need to disentangle the contextual factors that shape their social obligations in order to develop more effective CSR strategies. Bondy, Moon, and Matten (2012) also argued for the need to identify the institutional context for current and future CSR practices, given that “it is a relatively new idea for business and that its specifics are contested by the wide range of stakeholder interests” (p. 282). Thus, these researchers call for further research into incorporating societal factors into CSR and corporate sustainability research.

Fifth, workforce wellbeing and human sustainability have become an urgent challenge for Japan. S. Lewis, Gambles, and Rapoport (2007) state that human sustainability has become an issue particularly for countries with falling birth rates and ageing populations, notably in Japan and Europe. Furthermore, Eweje and Sakaki (2015) argue that Japanese business and government initiatives are falling short of what is expected from the society. They state that longstanding issues such as gender diversity and inclusion, work-life balance, and reduction of long working hours have become pressing issues of CSR, which call for a fundamental solution, going on to point out that “interestingly, most of the initiatives listed up by companies are somewhat similar” and that they are “proving more difficult than expected”, despite the companies’ determination (p. 683).

The prime minister of Japan shares this determination. On September 2016, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe appealed for his commitment to advance workstyle reform for better work-life balance and improved productivity and called for nation-wide efforts (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2017).

Thus, there is an increasing call from academia, business and the government to address workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues in Japan. However, it remains unclear as to what companies can do, especially when a range of initiatives are marginalised (Kossek et al., 2010), methods to overcome the conflicts remain unknown (Hahn et al., 2010), and the specifics of what should be done are contested by the wide range of stakeholder interests (Bondy et al., 2012). Yet, companies are expected to address these challenges effectively, urgently, and under demographic pressures.

A conclusion can be derived from the above arguments that the need for research into how companies address workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues is timely and well justified.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

As discussed, the research objective of this study is to expand understanding of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability, using the Japanese business context as an empirical domain. In order to achieve this objective, a number of research goals for this study have been set.

The first goal is to scrutinise the current state of sustainability and CSR research in the literature and identify the knowledge gaps with regard to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability, from which to determine a research methodology (goal 2). The third goal is to identify human sustainability initiatives within the companies and examine how they are incorporated into their CSR strategies. The fourth goal of this study is to explore the institutional factors that influence the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. The fifth goal is to examine how human sustainability initiatives are integrated into the core business practices of companies. The final goal is to develop a conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability.

A summary of these goals and corresponding chapters in which they are addressed in the thesis is presented below in Table 1.1.

Table 1. 1 *Research goals of the study*

Goals	Chapters
To identify the knowledge gaps within sustainability and CSR literature with regard to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability	Chapter 2: Literature Review
To establish the research methodology for the study	Chapter 3: Methodology
To examine human sustainability initiatives and how they are incorporated into CSR strategies	Chapter 4: Human Sustainability Initiatives and CSR Strategies
To explore the institutional factors that affect the implementation of human sustainability initiatives	Chapter 5: Factors Influencing Human Sustainability Initiatives
To examine how human sustainability initiatives are integrated into core business practices	Chapter 6: Human Sustainability, Business Strategy, and Core Business Practices
To develop a conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability	Chapter 7: Discussion

Based on consideration of these research goals and the review of literature in Chapter 2, the following research questions were developed.

1. How do human sustainability initiatives become part of CSR strategies in large Japanese companies?
2. What factors influence the implementation of human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies?
3. How do large Japanese companies integrate human sustainability initiatives into their core business practices?

1.5 Research Philosophy and Methods

As explained in detail in Chapter 3, this study was conducted from the standpoint of social constructionism/interpretivism. From this perspective, social reality is subjective and constructed from the perceptions of social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Interactions among participants and observers continuously create the social phenomena and their meanings; this means that there are multiple interpretations and all are potentially meaningful (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001). As such, the truth is a matter of the best-informed and most sophisticated construction on which there is a consensus at a given time (Schwandt, 1994).

Social constructionism/interpretivism fits this research for two reasons. First, this study aims to develop a conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability better. The corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability involve continuous human actions and perceptions. It is the managers and stakeholders who act and, based on their subjective experiences, form their perceptions and interpretations, which then form a 'social reality'. Second, the researcher's subjectivity cannot be entirely separated from the inquiry (Schwandt, 1994). This is because the researcher and participants are part of the social construction processes of reality and knowledge. Therefore, the researcher aims to present a specific construction of social reality and knowledge based on the conversation with participants. Hence, positioning this research in the social constructionism/interpretivist philosophy serves the aims and nature of this inquiry.

This research inquiry is exploratory in nature. Even though sustainability and CSR literature is extensive, corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human

sustainability remain relatively unexplored both conceptually and empirically in these fields, particularly in relation to large Japanese businesses. In line with this exploratory nature, the study adopts a qualitative and abductive approach. Qualitative research is suited to explore the unknown problem (P. Lewis, Thornhill, & Saunders, 2007), to examine the perception of people and to develop themes from them (Creswell, 2012). To understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability, it is necessary to explore the perceptions of managers in charge of relevant policies and initiatives.

This study uses the reasoning process of abduction. It has a logical form different from induction and deduction; it starts with consequences then constructs reasons. In this reasoning, the researcher works through interpreting the phenomenon within a contextual framework and aims to understand something in a new way from the new perspective. This approach was adopted to gain a perspective from which to understand less known phenomena with guidance from well-researched sustainability and CSR literature.

This study employs qualitative interviewing as a research method to examine the perceptions of managers and stakeholders. Participants were purposively selected, according to the research objective of this study to extend understanding of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability in Japan. The initial criteria for the selection of companies included high CSR and sustainability evaluations and ranking in major indices, including participation in workforce wellbeing initiatives, more than 5,000 employees, with their headquarters located in Japan. The index and rankings were reviewed based on these criteria.

The study involved conducting interviews with participants from 31 large Japanese companies, 6 stakeholders including representatives from business associations and labour unions, and 4 informants from academia. They were asked to discuss their experiences, perceptions and interpretations regarding corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. Broad topics were used to focus the conversation on philosophies, policies, specific practices and logics and conflicts, as well as how each of these is addressed. Thematic data analysis was conducted using the NVivo 11 programme.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The need to understand the business-human sustainability interface has recently been emphasised in the literature (Anderson et al., 2011; Goh et al., 2016; Kossek et al., 2014; S. Lewis et al., 2007; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Pfeffer, 2010; Salanova et al., 2014; Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2009; Spreitzer et al., 2012). However, having reviewed the literature on CSR and sustainability, it appeared that this literature lacked empirical evidence and conceptual frameworks on workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives. This study aims to fill this gap by broadening the scholarly understanding of the business-human sustainability interface and providing an in-depth empirical interpretation of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. The significance of this study will be explained in the following ways.

First, this study attempts to contribute to the CSR literature by linking workforce wellbeing and human sustainability to CSR strategy. It is argued that CSR practices should be properly integrated into business strategy in order to be effective (Chandler, 2016; Gao & Bansal, 2013; Lenssen, Perrini, Tencati, & Lacy, 2007). However, how such integration

should proceed remains under-researched (Gao & Bansal, 2013; Hahn, Pinkse, Preuss, & Figge, 2015; Yuan, Bao, & Verbeke, 2011). By employing an integrated theoretical framework, this study suggests that companies can integrate workforce wellbeing and human sustainability into CSR strategy in a way that enhances business performance over the long term. However, to do so, companies need to align core business practices with emerging stakeholders' pressures and work through existing stakeholder expectations at the same time.

Second, this study extends the knowledge of CSR by linking workforce wellbeing and human sustainability to the institutional environment. It is argued that the institutional environment shapes the form of CSR (Campbell, 2007; Kim & Moon, 2015; Matten & Moon, 2008). However, what factors influence workforce wellbeing aspects of CSR has been under-researched, especially within a non-Western context (Kim & Moon, 2015; Matten & Moon, 2008). This empirical study, by exploring institutional factors, suggests that particular expectations of the customers, government, and the workforce itself shape the 'institutionalised workstyle', including core employment practices, and that this system of responsibilities then enables *and* constrains the form of workforce wellbeing in large Japanese companies.

Third, this study seeks to contribute to sustainability literature by linking workforce wellbeing and human sustainability discourse. There has been a growing concern for workforce wellbeing in such areas as long working hours, work-life balance and gender equality. However, its application to human sustainability discourse has been limited (Angus-Leppan, Benn, & Young, 2010; Benn, Dunphy, & Griffiths, 2006; Pfeffer, 2010). This study, by examining the views of managers with CSR responsibilities and their

stakeholders, indicates that addressing workforce wellbeing issues by internalising ‘human costs’ could support and enhance human sustainability both at the organisational and societal level.

Furthermore, based on the findings, this study proposes a conceptual framework to better understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. It is believed that this will provide a renewed perspective on the dynamic interface between business and human sustainability in a more generalised manner. This framework can also help practitioners to develop approaches to better integrate human sustainability initiatives into CSR practice and business strategy, in a way that enhances social and business performance over the long term. Thus, it is hoped that this research contributes significantly to the practical as well as theoretical improvement of workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives in Japan and potentially in other similar social contexts.

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

This section provides the definitions of core concepts used in this study.

Workforce Wellbeing

Wellbeing as a term refers to what it means to function as a healthy person, encompassing various types of satisfaction enjoyed by individuals, including the physical, mental, and social aspects (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Pressman et al., 2013; World Health Organization, 2018). In this study, this concept is applied to the workforce, which refers to people engaged in or available for work within a specific context. Accordingly, in this study, the term ‘workforce wellbeing’ is defined as ‘the positive state of the workforce both

physically, mentally, and socially’ (Costanza et al., 2007; Danna & Griffin, 1999; World Health Organization, 2018).

Human Sustainability

To date, there has been no widely agreed definition of human sustainability. In this study, based on the literature (Dunphy, Griffiths, & Benn, 2007; Gladwin et al., 1995; Pfeffer, 2010), human sustainability is first broadly conceptualised as ‘a renewed focus on human wellbeing within a broad umbrella of sustainability’. Following the empirical investigation, this study proposes a definition of human sustainability as ‘a level-spanning concept in sustainability discourse and practice that links individual, organisational, and societal level activities and outcomes of meeting interconnected human needs and enhances human wellbeing in line with sustainable development’.

1.8 Thesis Structure

This thesis proceeds in the following manner. Chapter 2 presents the initial review of the literature on sustainability and CSR and identifies its relevance to the ensuing research in a Japanese business context. It also identifies and critically examines the relevant theories in the field. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology for this study. It explains the social constructionism/interpretivist philosophy employed in the research. Following the research philosophy, the research approach is explained. The research method is then outlined for data collection, interviews, sampling, transcription, and data analysis. The issues of research quality and ethics are also discussed. It also presents the integrated theoretical framework to guide further examination.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present findings from the analysis of data, using the integrated theoretical framework. Chapter 4 identifies human sustainability initiatives and how they are incorporated into CSR strategies. Chapter 5 reports institutional factors which affect the implementation of human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies. Chapter 6 reports how some companies, even within the constraints, seek to integrate human sustainability initiatives into core business practices through further internal and external changes.

Chapter 7 integrates the findings, research questions, and literature and provides an overall discussion in line with the objective of this study. In particular, key findings are synthesised to develop the conceptual framework. This is then compared with the theoretical framework to generate theoretical implications. The conclusion is presented in Chapter 8, with empirical findings and the contributions of this study to theory and practice. It also discusses the limitations of this research and recommendations for future study.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces two bodies of literature: sustainability and CSR. Sustainability and CSR are both well-established and widely researched fields. While sustainability and CSR are closely related, each research field has a distinct origin and research focus. This chapter begins with an overview of the sustainability literature, with a focus on human sustainability. The second section reviews CSR literature, with a focus on workforce wellbeing. The third section introduces the empirical domain of CSR in Japan, where human sustainability and workforce wellbeing have become an urgent business agenda. The last section presents the conclusion of this chapter. Thus, the objectives of this chapter are to:

- Examine the literature on human sustainability, CSR and workforce wellbeing,
- Introduce the empirical domain of CSR in Japan, and
- Identify critical knowledge gaps in the literature.

2.1 Literature Search and Review Method

An initial exploratory search of the literature was conducted in March 2015 to define the scope of the literature. The sources used included electronic databases (Scopus, Business Source Complete, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Google Books) and Massey University library. The following keywords were used in the literature search:

1. Sustainability, social sustainability, human sustainability
2. Corporate social responsibility, CSR
3. Workforce, employee, employment
4. Wellbeing
5. Japan, large Japanese companies

These keywords were applied separately and in combinations to search the literature in electronic databases and identify references in which keywords were used in any of the data fields, including title, abstract, and keywords. All references were included in the review, including those in peer-reviewed sources and grey literature, irrespective of publication date. The main language used was English. In addition, non-English publications were included when no accessible translation existed. The abstract of each reference was read to establish its relevance to the study.

In the initial search and review, references were found in multiple bodies of literature, including organisational and social psychology, human resource management, CSR and sustainability, and others. In light of the vast range of literature, it was necessary to consider inclusion and exclusion criteria to establish a clear scope for this study.

As discussed in Section 1.6 (Significance of the Study), this study aims to fill the gap in the literature on CSR and sustainability, by broadening the understanding of the interface between business and human sustainability based on empirical data. Accordingly, criteria were set to include mainly the references in CSR and sustainability literature, particularly at the interface between business and human sustainability. Consequently, the references in organisational and social psychology, human resource management, and other areas were

considered peripheral to this inquiry. However, the references were included when there was a clear link with the empirical data, in order to draw from the vast body of literature in areas outside of CSR and sustainability. These references supported the argument made in the findings and discussion chapters.

After the initial search and criteria setting, further searches and reviews of the literature were conducted throughout the course of this study. The search was facilitated by electronic alerting, peer discussions, and conference proceedings, as well as database searching. Those included based on the above criteria were read in full in order to write this chapter. Thus, the process described above helped establish the scope and focus of this study.

2.3 Sustainability

This section introduces the literature on sustainability, in particular, human sustainability. While it is hard to pinpoint the origin, the concept of sustainability came into world prominence during the 1980s (Lélé, 1991). It is derived from the concept of ‘sustainable development’ (WCED, 1987), which emerged as a new paradigm of development in response to emerging global environmental and social issues (Gladwin et al., 1995; Lélé, 1991). Since then, sustainable development has evolved into a multi-dimensional agenda for a more equitable and sustainable world (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005).

Sustainability requires the simultaneous pursuit of three dimensions of development over the long term: namely, economic, social and environmental (Daly, 1996; Elkington, 1998; International Labour Office, 2007b; WCED, 1987). In particular, Barbier (1987, p. 103) articulated the dimensions by stating that sustainable development aims to “maximize simultaneously the biological system goals (genetic diversity, resilience, biological

productivity), economic system goals (satisfaction of basic needs, enhancement of equity, increasing useful goods and services), and social system goals (cultural diversity, institutional sustainability, social justice, participation)”. Thus, sustainable development upholds an integrated perspective on development, which is based on multiple value systems (Gladwin et al., 1995; Manderson, 2006).

Along with emphasis on the environmental dimension, sustainability focuses on the pursuit of the human wellbeing (Anand & Sen, 2000; Gladwin et al., 1995; Painter-Morland et al., 2017). Drawing from numerous definitions, Gladwin et al. (1995) summarised the essence of sustainable development as “a process of achieving human development in an inclusive, connected, equitable, prudent and secure manner” (p. 876). In particular, inclusiveness implies human development over time and space; connectivity means an embrace of ecological, social, and economic interdependence; equity entails inter-generational, intra-generational, and interspecies fairness; prudence suggests duties of care and prevention; security connotes safety from chronic threats and protection from harmful disruption (Gladwin et al., 1995). This summary of sustainable development suggests that the human wellbeing is an integral part of sustainability.

2.3.1 Dimensions of Sustainability

As stated, sustainability has been commonly conceptualised in three dimensions: environmental, economic, and social. This section briefly discusses each dimension and expands on the social dimension. First, environmental sustainability describes the protection and renewal of the biosphere for present and future generations (Daly, 1996; Kramar, 2009). At the business level, this principle requires companies to recognise the

limits of natural resources and manage their operations in an environmentally responsible manner (Bansal, 2005).

Second, economic sustainability concerns the sustainable pattern of economic development. In particular, it means ensuring that future generations can live well or better by managing limited resources and equitable human development (Anand & Sen, 2000; International Labour Office, 2007b). It is associated with wellbeing in relation to financial indicators (Kopnina & Blewitt, 2015). At the business level, it means building a strong financial base and improving short- and long-term values for shareholders (Steurer, Langer, Konrad, & Martinuzzi, 2005). This perspective on economic sustainability also forms the foundation for companies to fulfil other forms of responsibilities, including legal, ethical, and philanthropic ones (Carroll, 1999, 2016).

Third, social sustainability relates to equality, wellbeing, and quality of life (Ross, 2009). It means ensuring economic values are shared equitably to meet basic human needs (Bansal, 2005). It also requires meeting various human needs, such as cultural, emotional, physical and social needs, and recognising and managing the impact on people, communities, and societies (Kopnina & Blewitt, 2015).

Enhancing social sustainability involves developing two types of capital: social capital and human capital (Adler & Seok-Woo, 2002; Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002). Social capital is a sociological concept which refers to “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (R. D. Putnam, 1995, p. 67). It generally relates to broader community or societal issues such as poverty, justice, human rights, corruption, community development, security, family-

related problems, education, public health, youth and democracy (Adler & Seok-Woo, 2002; Habisch & Moon, 2006; R. D. Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1994). Human capital, on the other hand, is an economic concept that focuses on individuals and human development, related to skills development, motivations and people's networks (Adler & Seok-Woo, 2002; Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002). Thus, social sustainability discourse broadly covers these two concepts that originate from different disciplines.

As business is part of the society, socially sustainable companies are expected to “add value to the communities within which they operate by increasing the human capital of individual partners as well as furthering the societal capital of these communities” (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002, p. 134). In other words, companies need to create a positive work environment in which employees can refine their social skills, as well as to invest in human capital for individuals and organisational competitiveness (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Habisch & Moon, 2006).

In addition, human interactions in social sustainability are the common threads running across social, economic, and environmental sustainability; however, social sustainability and human interactions remain vague and left behind in sustainability discourse (Adler & Seok-Woo, 2002; Pfeffer, 2010; Ross, 2009). Accordingly, further research is needed on social sustainability in order to enhance capacity to generate economic and environmental sustainability.

2.3.2 Human Sustainability

This section examines the conceptual development of human sustainability. As the three dimensions of sustainability have become more familiar over time, another concept has

been posited: human sustainability. As one of the early attempts, Goodland (2002) conceptualised human sustainability as maintaining human capital to realise individual potential. In particular, he differentiated human sustainability from social sustainability, in that the former means enhancing human capital, and the latter denotes enhancing social capital. Human capital concerns aspects such as human health, knowledge, and skills, and access to basic services, while social capital concerns broader services that create the basic framework for society. Exploring human sustainability as part of sustainability discourse is meaningful because humans are different from social institutions. As Goodland (2002, p. 489) put it, the “human lifespan is relatively short and finite (unlike institutions)”, and “human sustainability needs continual maintenance by investments throughout one's lifetime”.

However, human sustainability as a concept has remained mostly in the background in management research (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010; Ehnert et al., 2013; Kossek et al., 2014; Pfeffer, 2010; Spreitzer et al., 2012; Van Engen et al., 2012). To date, there has been no widely agreed definition of human sustainability. As Pfeffer (2010, p. 34) put it, there has been “relative neglect of the human factor in sustainability research” (p. 34). He points out that most research and public pressure concerning sustainability is focused on business impacts on the physical environment. However, companies and their management practices profoundly affect the human and social environment as well. Following this argument, this thesis aims to explore the concept of human sustainability, as it provides a renewed focus on human wellbeing within a broad umbrella of sustainability. Furthermore, this thesis empirically applies human sustainability to workforce wellbeing issues as part of CSR and corporate sustainability discourse.

A few management scholars have attempted to apply the concept to the corporate level. For instance, Dunphy et al. (2007) explored human sustainability as the critical component of organisational sustainability. They first defined human sustainability as “the development and fulfilment of human needs” toward corporate sustainability (Dunphy et al., 2007, p. 05). They then presented an integrated phase model of organisational change for corporate sustainability. In this model, human sustainability and ecological sustainability (the protection and renewal of the biosphere) evolve in a parallel manner along different phases (Dunphy et al., 2007). Human and ecological sustainability evolve together, as ecological sustainability depends on human capabilities and social capital (Adler & Seok-Woo, 2002). The phases of human sustainability evolve from the most basic to the advanced: compliance (e.g., occupational health and safety, human rights, equal employment opportunities); efficiency (e.g., competency development, skills development, employee empowerment); strategic proactivity (e.g., work-life balance, diversity, flexible workplace); and the sustaining corporation (e.g., intellectual capital, ethical concerns, participative decision-making). Thus, in their model, human sustainability is an overarching concept that covers basic and advanced human needs concerning workforce wellbeing over time.

Similarly, at the corporate level, Pfeffer (2010) conceptualised human sustainability as upholding human health and wellbeing in the pursuit of organisational sustainability. According to Pfeffer (2010, p. 34), human sustainability is increasingly important as the “human factor” (p. 34) in building sustainable organisations, because it has profound implications for human health, happiness, and organisational effectiveness. In particular, such human factors include various aspects, such as lack of health insurance, the effect of layoffs, long working hours and work-family conflicts, work stress, issues with job design,

and inequality (Anderson et al., 2011; Pfeffer, 2010; Salanova et al., 2014; Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2009). Furthermore, when companies excessively stress workforces, externalities are imposed on society in the form of social and human costs, such as increasing healthcare costs to treat physical and mental health issues (Goh et al., 2016; S. B. Harvey et al., 2017; Kuroda & Yamamoto, 2016). Therefore, human sustainability practices have profound implications not just for companies but also for society (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Ehnert et al., 2013; Pfeffer, 2010).

From the broader societal perspective, scholars such as Gambles et al. (2006) have explored human sustainability issues. They argue that the market economy allows for thriving business activities, but the significant problem of market economies arises when the market takes no measure of externalities (Benn et al., 2006, p. 79; Gambles et al., 2006; Kumra & Manfredi, 2012). In economic terms, externalities indicate costs or benefits of activities which ‘spill over’ onto third parties (Matten & Moon, 2008; Pigou, 2013). When the costs ‘spill over’ to others, it is called negative externality (Pigou, 2013). According to Gambles et al. (2006), markets drive down cost by externalising the environmental cost of commercial activities and having society pay for them (e.g., polluting a river). In the same way, Gambles et al. (2006) argued, when the markets externalise the human costs, workforce wellbeing is depleted so that society pays for it (Bunting, 2011, p. xxi; Gambles et al., 2006). They further point out that the ‘human costs’ may appear in the form of severe health problems (e.g., exhaustion, depression, and death from overwork) and lack of time for personal and community lives as well as a care deficit (e.g., child and elderly care).

At this juncture, it is pertinent to consider the difficulties involved in the research on human sustainability. The first difficulty concerns the objective measurement of human wellbeing

(Costanza et al., 2007). Pfeffer (2010) pointed out that business-related consequences on human wellbeing are often less visible and hard to measure in comparison to environmental impacts:

You can see the iceberg melting, polar bears stranded, forests cut down, and mountaintops reshaped by mining, and experience first-hand the dirty air and water that can come from company economic activities that impose externalities. Reduced life expectancy and poorer physical and mental health status are more hidden from the view (p. 41).

The second difficulty is that there is an assumption of choices (S. Lewis et al., 2007; Pfeffer, 2010). According to Pfeffer (2010), people implicitly assume that they must act for the environment because animals and plants cannot act on their own behalf when they are degraded. Similarly, people assume that if employees cannot tolerate their current working conditions, they can decide to work elsewhere, exercising choice in a labour market. However, studies have shown that people's choices are socially constrained (Blount, 2000; Fleetwood, 2007; Gascoigne et al., 2015; S. Lewis et al., 2007). The third difficulty concerns the local and cultural differences in what wellbeing means in the society (S. Lewis et al., 2007; Ross, 2009). Despite the fact that values and cultures are different between societies, many concepts used in social sustainability, or social interaction between people, are "heavily value-laden and culturally specific" (Ross, 2009, p. 2247).

Due to these difficulties, human sustainability may have remained in the background of sustainability discourse, despite its profound implications on organisational and social sustainability. Accordingly, this study aims to bring these difficulties into consideration as

they apply to the concept of human sustainability in the empirical domain of large Japanese companies. By doing so, this study aims to bring human sustainability to the forefront as an under-explored, critical component of sustainability discourse.

2.4 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

This study applies the concept of human sustainability to the issues affecting workforce wellbeing in large Japanese companies. The practical workforce wellbeing issues investigated are recognised as essential components of CSR (European Commission, 2001; Global Reporting Initiative, 2018; International Labour Office, 2007b; International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2010; Welford, 2004). For instance, the discourse on internal aspects of CSR has incorporated employee practices affecting workforce wellbeing, such as health and safety, work-life balance, and diversity (European Commission, 2001). Therefore, it is critical to discuss CSR literature in addition to human sustainability.

CSR is essentially an old concept (Andrew Crane, Matten, McWilliams, Moon, & Siegel, 2008). According to Andrew Crane et al. (2008), the fundamental question of CSR is arguably as old as business itself. The question is ‘what is business for and what contribution does it make to society?’ (Andrew Crane et al., 2008; Handy, 2002). As a field of academic inquiry, however, CSR has been debated at least since the 1950s. The beginning of the systematic discussion of CSR could be traced back to the publication of *Social responsibilities of the businessman* in 1953 (Carroll, 2016). In this seminal book, American businessman Howard Bowen asked a question that continues to resonate today:

“what responsibilities to society may [the] businessman reasonably be expected to assume?” (Bowen, 1953, p. xi). He then offered one of the first definitions of social responsibility: “the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and value of our society” (Bowen, 1953, p. 6). This definition shed light on individual managers' responsibilities toward society and paved the way for further conceptual development.

In the subsequent years, scholars have developed the concept as a business-society interface evolved. With the increasing power of corporations, the discussion of social responsibility was soon extended to corporations (Frederick, 1960; McGuire, 1963). Sethi (1975) proposed one of the early theoretical models of CSR and attempted to place corporate performance within the context of business and society. In his model, ‘corporate social performance (CSP)’ is shaped by the dimension of social obligation (response to market forces or legal constraints), social responsibility, and social responsiveness (adaptation to social needs). In presenting this model, he posited that “social responsibility implies bringing corporate behaviour up to a level where it is congruent with the prevailing social norms, values, and expectations of performance” (Sethi, 1975, p. 62).

Building on Sethi’s model, Carroll (1979) proposed the four-part model of CSR. This model distinguished four responsibilities of corporations, with CSR defined as “the social responsibility of business [to encompass] the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time” (Carroll, 1979, p. 500). Importantly, in this model, economic responsibility sits at the bottom of the pyramid of responsibilities and provides a foundation on which all others rest.

Then, the Brundtland report publicised the concept of sustainable development, or sustainability, as an alternative paradigm of development (Lélé, 1991; WCED, 1987). Since then, several attempts have been made in the public and business community to develop CSR concepts further in line with sustainability. Elkington's (1998) 'triple bottom line' (TBL) model of sustainability requires companies to pursue three dimensions of performance simultaneously: namely, profit (economic prosperity), planet (environmental quality), and people (social equity). Following the wide acceptance of the TBL concept, the European Commission (2001) supported the application of CSR in business, which aims to focus on economic viability, to develop social initiatives including community development and the wellbeing of employees, and to promote environmental initiatives including managing resource use and emissions.

Along with the developments of sustainability and CSR concepts, the concept of corporate sustainability emerged (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2013; Van Marrewijk, 2003; Van Marrewijk & Werre, 2003). For instance, Dyllick and Hockerts (2002, p. 131) defined corporate sustainability as "meeting the needs of a firm's direct and indirect stakeholders (such as shareholders, employees, clients, pressure groups, communities, etc.), without compromising its abilities to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well". Moreover, in line with the three dimensions of sustainability, corporate sustainability is pursued at the intersection of economic development, environmental protection and social responsibility (Bansal, 2005). In other words, corporate sustainability is conceptualised as the ability to ensure that "economic development is accompanied by progress towards social inclusion, and does not take place at the expense of the natural environment" (Benn & Dunphy, 2009, p. 276). In this study, corporate sustainability and CSR are often used interchangeably

based on the understanding that both represent corporate commitment to operating in an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable manner (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Klettner et al., 2014; Van Marrewijk, 2003). In discussing corporate sustainability, however, it is important to note that individual companies cannot become sustainable by themselves; instead, they merely contribute to the broader social system in which sustainability may or may not be achieved (Brammer et al., 2012; Hahn & Figge, 2011; Hahn et al., 2015; Jennings & Zandbergen, 1995). Therefore, corporate sustainability is a level-spanning concept that links corporate and societal level activities and outcomes (Hahn, Figge, Pinkse, & Preuss, 2018).

During conceptual development, several commonly used definitions of CSR emerged. The basic proposition is that companies are not socially responsible if they merely comply with the minimum legal requirements; in other words, CSR starts where the law ends (Eweje, 2001). As Carroll (1999, p. 290) put it, CSR implies that “corporations have an obligation to constituent groups in society other than shareholders and beyond that prescribed by law and union contract”. Furthermore, CSR indicates that companies internalise and manage externalities in their business operations (Husted & Allen, 2006; Matten & Moon, 2008). Similarly, Warhurst and Mitchell (2000, p. 92) defined CSR as “internalisation by the company of the social and environmental effects of its operations through pro-active pollution prevention and social impact assessment so that harm is anticipated and avoided and benefits are optimised.” This idea of internalising larger social and environmental concerns beyond legal compliance has become a common baseline of CSR. For instance, the European Commission (2001) defined CSR as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with

their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (p. 6). Similarly, the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD) defined CSR as “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 the local community and society at large” (Dahlsrud, 2008, p. 7).

2.4.1 Multiple Perspectives of CSR

Following the conceptual development, this section examines multiple perspectives of CSR to identify different approaches to workforce wellbeing issues. The field of CSR has grown to accommodate various, sometimes competing perspectives (Carroll, 2015; Andrew Crane et al., 2008; Garriga & Melé, 2004). For instance, drawing on a literature review, Lockett, Moon, and Visser (2006, p. 133) observed that CSR knowledge is in a continuing state of emergence, without a dominant theoretical approach, assumptions, or method, calling it “a field without a paradigm”. Similarly, Moon, Crane, and Matten (2005) argued that CSR remains essentially contested, with relatively open rules of application. Consequently, as this observation indicates, CSR can be understood not as a concept, construct, or theory but as a field of scholarship (Lockett et al., 2006), located at an intersection of multiple contributing disciplines (Andrew Crane et al., 2008). As Brammer et al. (2012) articulated:

CSR is still highly contested terrain – how much corporations (‘C’) should set the agenda, what standards for social (S’) responsibility are acceptable and to whom the company is ultimately responsible (‘R’).

As indicated in the introduction, the purpose of this study is to extend understanding of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. For that purpose, it

is essential to understand how human sustainability can be linked to multiple and sometimes competing perspectives within the CSR literature. The three main perspectives examined in this study are the ethical, social, and economic perspectives of CSR, which will be elaborated on in the following sections.

2.4.1.1 Ethical perspective

One of the main streams of CSR research is the ethical perspective. This perspective sees CSR as businesses fulfilling ethical requirements in society. Scholars in this school have investigated different ethical foundations for CSR. The main arguments concern the corporation's fundamental responsibilities to stakeholders. In his landmark book *Strategic Management: a Stakeholder Approach*, Freeman (1984) contended that managers bear a fiduciary relationship to stakeholders. This statement contrasts with the widely held notion at the time that business has fiduciary duties exclusively to shareholders (Friedman, 1970).

Based on the ethical perspective, Donaldson and Preston (1995) further argued the legitimacy of stakeholders' interests as follows. First, stakeholders are people or groups with legitimate interests in procedural and substantive aspects of corporate activity. Their interests are legitimate whether or not corporations have any interest in the stakeholders. Second, the interest of stakeholders is of intrinsic value. Each interest merits consideration for its own sake, regardless of the ability to further the interests of other groups, such as the shareholders.

With regard to the workforce, the ethical arguments of CSR are founded upon fundamental human rights and labour rights (Welford, 2004; Wettstein, 2012). The incorporation of

human rights into business can be traced to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 (G. Brown, 2016; Andrew Crane & Matten, 2010). Over the years, the International Labour Office (ILO) translated the various articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into conventions directly relevant to business. Many countries adopted ILO conventions on non-discrimination, equal opportunities, freedom of association, collective bargaining, and working hours (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2010; Ruggie, 2007; Welford, 2004). Furthermore, human rights and labour rights were embedded in the UN Global Compact (2000) and The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011), which are widely accepted in the business world.

Workforce wellbeing initiatives investigated in this study are fundamentally supported by these ethical perspectives based on human rights and labour rights. For instance, gender equality initiatives are supported by ‘equal opportunities’, which emanate from the ‘rights to freedom from discrimination’ (Andrew Crane & Matten, 2010). Similarly, work-life balance initiatives are supported by the ‘rights to healthy and safe working conditions’ (Andrew Crane & Matten, 2010).

Based on these ethical perspectives, a critical question for human sustainability is formed as follows: “what are the ethical foundations for supporting human sustainability?” At the same time, considering that the progress in resolving issues is limited, it is pertinent to understand what normative pressures could constrain human sustainability initiatives. For instance, persistent gender inequality in Japanese companies is partly attributable to persistent gender division of labour between work and family in the society (Nemoto, 2013b; North, 2009). However, it is not clear what normative pressures perpetuate the

gender division of labour, despite the increasing ethical pressure to pursue gender equality. In a similar vein, the issue of long working hours has been persistent, even though companies have long been upholding labour rights for healthy and safe working conditions, as required by law (Kanai, 2009; North, 2011). Therefore, it is important to examine what normative assumptions, if any, constrain overwork reduction initiatives. Thus, this study aims to examine workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues based on the ethical perspective of CSR.

2.4.1.2 Social perspective

Another stream of CSR research is the social integration perspective, which sees CSR as a process of businesses integrating social demands and issues. The central idea is that corporations depend on society for their existence and that society gives legitimacy to corporations depending on their responsiveness in the face of social issues (Sethi, 1975). Thus, companies integrate social demands in their pursuit of legitimacy; however, legitimacy is essentially socially constructed within the society (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006; Suchman, 1995). As Suchman (1995, p. 574) put it, legitimacy is “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions”.

This idea is in line with the notion that the company has always been a social and political creation because the government granted the benefit of limited liability in order to pursue the public interest (Brammer et al., 2012; Scherer, Palazzo, & Matten, 2014). From this notion comes the fundamental question of “what responsibilities society places on the corporation itself in exchange for the legal privilege of limited liability” (Brammer et al.,

2012, p. 6). Consequently, the content of corporate responsibility is shaped and defined by the social demands of the time (Preston & Post, 1981). However, the precise direction of responsibility rests at company discretion, which distinguishes CSR from government responsibilities (Andrew Crane et al., 2008; Matten & Moon, 2008). Thus, CSR consists of policies and practices of companies that reflect business responsibility for broader social good at the time, defined in relation to government responsibility.

Scholars in this school of thought have investigated different ways for companies to respond to social demands. One way is through the process of “institutionalisation” under social pressures (Bondy et al., 2012; Campbell, 2007; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Matten & Moon, 2008). In this process, company practices, once considered legitimate, form “institutions”, which are “stable, valued, recurring patterns of behaviour” (Huntington, 1969, p. 12). Consequently, companies may not respond to social demands, when they encounter weak or unclear pressures from society (Campbell, 2007; Matten & Moon, 2008). In particular, companies may hesitate to respond when government policy is not yet established or is in transition, or there is an area called a “zone of discretion” (neither regulated, nor illegal, nor sanctioned) (Ackerman, 1973, p. 92).

Another way to respond to social demands is to identify the key stakeholders and manage their often competing demands (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997; W. K. Smith & Tracey, 2016; S. A. Waddock, Bodwell, & Graves, 2002). Accordingly, a key question concerning human sustainability asks “what are the social demands from the key stakeholders and how are companies responding to them?” In the context of this study, as discussed in the introduction, Japanese companies are increasingly under strain from social pressures to address long working hours and gender inequality. The government is putting pressure on

companies through ‘workstyle reform’ to address these issues (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017). Considering that progress has been slow, however, it is important to examine what social pressures, if any, constrain the relevant initiatives. Thus, this study aims to examine human sustainability initiatives based on the social perspective of CSR.

2.4.1.3 Economics perspective

Another stream of CSR research is the economics perspective, which sees CSR as a strategic tool to achieve economic objectives. To this school, CSR is ultimately a question of enlightened self-interest: it is an instrument for profit (Keim, 1978). Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman argued that corporations as economic institutions should anchor their operations in the economic sphere. To Friedman (1970), in a capitalist economy, the only responsibility of business towards society is the maximisation of profits to the shareholders within the legal framework and the ethical customs of the country.

The economic objective can be pursued by investing in strategic social activities to create a competitive advantage (Hockerts, 2015; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Porter & Kramer, 2002, 2006, 2011). The central idea is that CSR can improve competitiveness when companies focus on appropriate initiatives and areas of expertise to add value. This pursuit of competitiveness drives the discussion of the strategic application of CSR. Lenssen et al. (2007) regarded strategy as a link between the company and the entire market and non-market environment (i.e., social, environmental, political, and cultural), where the company dynamically interacts with diverse stakeholders. In line with these views, companies can pursue ‘strategic CSR’ in an attempt to gain a competitive advantage while addressing

stakeholder interests (M. P. Lee, 2008). Similarly, Chandler (2016) defined ‘strategic CSR’ as “the incorporation of a holistic CSR perspective within a firm’s strategic planning and core operations so that the firm is managed in the interests of a broad set of stakeholders to optimize value over the medium to long-term” (p. 248). As discussed, human sustainability is concerned with maintaining human capital (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Goodland, 2002). It is also concerned with internalising the human and social costs (Gambles et al., 2006; Pfeffer, 2010).

Consequently, to this school, an essential question for human sustainability is “how does investment in human sustainability enhance business performance over the long term?” At the same time, considering that progress is limited, it is important to ask “what economic pressures constrain the relevant initiatives?” Thus, this study aims to examine human sustainability initiatives based on the economic perspective of CSR.

2.4.2 Global Diffusion of CSR

In addition to the multiple perspectives discussed in Section 2.4.1, this section briefly discusses global diffusion of CSR, with a focus on workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues. As the field of CSR expanded, CSR diffused globally beyond national boundaries as a set of management practices (Bendell, Miller, & Wortmann, 2011; Brammer et al., 2012; Vogel, 2010). This global diffusion, particularly over the last three decades, has been observed during rapid economic globalisation and expansion of global business activities (Fransen & Burgoon, 2013; Vigneau, Humphreys, & Moon, 2015). As large global companies expand corporate power and its impact on society, they have been under increasing scrutiny, particularly against the background of a reduction in government

spending and increasing stakeholder pressure (Dobele, Westberg, Steel, & Flowers, 2014; Hart, 2000).

Within this shifting balance of power between companies, governments, and civil society, a new set of global voluntary CSR regulations emerged to govern global companies and their supply chain networks (Bendell et al., 2011; Vogel, 2010). These regulations do not replace legally enforceable government standards, but they operate around legally-binding ‘hard law’ as ‘soft law’ (Ruggie, 2004; Vogel, 2010). As Vogel put it, “voluntary business regulation has emerged as a response to the failures or shortcoming of existing legal mechanisms of regulatory governance in the global economy” (p. 83).

These voluntary regulations, such as the UN Global Compact, ISO standards, and Global Reporting Initiatives, helped companies to understand, manage and report their CSR activities (S. Waddock, 2008), and gave legitimacy to their business operations (Vigneau et al., 2015). Consequently, an increasing number of large companies accepted these voluntary regulations (Vogel, 2010), diffusing CSR practices across industries and countries (Matten & Moon, 2008). The following sections briefly introduce key voluntary regulations that affect workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies.

2.4.2.1 UN Global Compact

Launched in 2000, the UN Global Compact has become one of the most accepted voluntary CSR standards in the world (Rasche, Waddock, & McIntosh, 2012). As of 2018, nearly 10000 companies across 164 countries have accepted the framework, which stipulates ten

universal principles in the areas of human rights, labour rights, the environment, and anticorruption (United Nations, 2018b). The principles of human and labour rights include the elimination of discrimination, forced labour, and child labour, as well as the right to collective bargaining (United Nations, 2018b). As a principle-based initiative, this standard reflects broadly defined norms and does not enforce its compliance, although it requires participating companies to report annually on implementation progress (Bernstein & Cashore, 2007; Rasche et al., 2012). Backed by the moral and political legitimacy of the UN system with 193 member states, this standard has contributed to the legitimisation and widespread adoption of CSR practices internationally, including in Japanese companies (Rasche et al., 2012; United Nations, 2018a).

2.4.2.2 ILO conventions

ILO conventions are another set of globally accepted labour standards, which have both voluntary and legally binding aspects. The ILO promotes fundamental human and labour rights across countries as a specialised agency of the United Nations. As discussed in Section 2.4.1, the ILO has translated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into conventions relevant to business (Welford, 2004). These conventions, once drawn up and adopted by the representatives of trade unions, governments, and companies, are submitted to each member country for their consideration; however, it becomes legally binding only after it is ratified (International Labour Office, 2018b).

Welford (2004) identified the ILO conventions relevant to internal aspects of CSR: non-discrimination (Convention 100), equal opportunities (Conventions 100, 110 and 111), freedom of association and collective bargaining (Convention 98) and working hours

(Conventions 1, 20 and 47). It is pertinent to note here that the Japanese government ratified Convention 98 (Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949) in 1953 and 100 (Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951) in 1967 (International Labour Office, 2018c). However, Japan, along with the US, UK, and Germany, has not ratified Convention 1, the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, which limits the number of work hours in industrial undertakings to eight in a day and forty-eight in a week (International Labour Office, 2018a, 2018c; Shimada, 2004). Accordingly, Japanese companies are obliged to follow working hour regulations under the Labour Standards Law of Japan: this law stipulates a 40 hours standard work week but allows employees to resort to longer working hours if they can reach an agreement with the company union (Japan External Trade Organization, 2018; Shimada, 2004).

2.4.2.3 ISO26000

Another set of influential voluntary CSR standards are ISO standards. With regard to the environmental aspects of CSR, ISO 14001 has become widely accepted as the international standard for environmental management systems (EMS) (Rasche, de Bakker, & Moon, 2013; Schembera, 2016). In 2010, ISO26000 was launched to provide guidance on social responsibility, outlining management processes to integrate socially responsible behaviour into companies and improve social performance (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2010; Rasche et al., 2012). It offers companies a means to complement ‘hard laws’ to adequately address social issues (Schembera, 2016). It is understood as a process-based standard, as it defines procedures to improve their management systems but does not enforce compliance (Rasche et al., 2012). One of the

seven core subjects is labour practice, which covers issues including employment, conditions of work and social protection, social dialogue, health and safety at work, and human development and training in the workplace; another core subject is human rights, which covers issues including discrimination and fundamental rights at work (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2010). It has been observed that an increasing number of companies across 80 countries have adopted ISO26000, including Japanese companies (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2018).

2.4.2.4 Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)

Another important voluntary CSR standard is the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). Launched in 1997 as a multiple-stakeholder initiative, it has become a widely accepted standard of sustainability reporting among companies (Vigneau et al., 2015). As a reporting initiative, it defines the comprehensive list of indicators and guidelines to promote the disclosure of CSR performance (Global Reporting Initiative, 2018; Rasche et al., 2012). GRI social standards cover a range of aspects such as employment, labour/management relations, occupational health and safety, training and education, diversity and equal opportunity, non-discrimination, freedom of association and collective bargaining, child labour, human rights and more (Global Reporting Initiative, 2018). It is observed that GRI provides standardised CSR reporting guidelines and thus provides companies with the legitimacy needed to justify their CSR practices (H. S. Brown, de Jong, & Lessidrenska, 2009; Vigneau et al., 2015).

In addition to the above list of CSR standards, financial indices are also considered as a form of voluntary CSR regulation (Slager, Gond, & Moon, 2012; Vigneau et al., 2015).

These financial indices, such as the FTSE4Good and Dow Jones Sustainability Index, require companies to complete an extensive questionnaire on their CSR practices, including labour practices (Vigneau et al., 2015).

As discussed above, these CSR standards have become common instruments with which companies across industries and countries can adopt CSR practices. These standards provide large Japanese companies with the broad context and social pressures to address issues affecting workforce wellbeing, such as long working hours and gender inequality. Following this argument, the next section examines the aspect of workforce wellbeing as an emerging CSR and business agenda.

2.4.3 Workforce Wellbeing

This section briefly introduces workforce wellbeing, which has emerged as an integral component of the CSR and business agenda. In particular, it provides an overview of the topics which have been discussed in the CSR and management literature.

The wellbeing of the workforce has become a common topic in the mainstream media and management research (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Guest, 2017; Schulte et al., 2015). However, because of the vast domain covering physical, mental, and social aspects, the general conceptualisation of wellbeing remains vague (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Ivković, Ham, & Mijoč, 2014). In this study, in order to broadly explore the issues affecting the workforce, workforce wellbeing is broadly defined as the positive state of the workforce both physically, mentally, and socially (Costanza et al., 2007; World Health Organization, 2018).

It indicates that individuals in the workforce enjoy life and work satisfaction (Danna & Griffin, 1999). It is also considered to be linked to the fulfilment of various human needs, in line with the concept of sustainability (Costanza et al., 2007; Sen, 1999).

CSR discourse has incorporated various issues affecting the workforce. According to the European Commission (2001), internal CSR involves employee practices and relates to issues such as investing in human capital, health and safety. In particular, the internal CSR aspects include a range of employee practices: life-long learning; employee empowerment, better work-family balance, workforce diversity, equal pay, career prospects for women, profit sharing, job security, the reconciliation of work and family obligations through work organisation (e.g., flexible jobs, flexible working hours), and service provision for families (e.g., assistance with childcare and elderly care). Later, Welford (2004) categorised these internal CSR aspects into six themes, based on a further review of important international standards (e.g., the UN declaration of human rights, ILO conventions, UN Global Compact). These themes are non-discrimination, equal opportunities, fair wage (including working hours and overtime), vocational education (including staff development), freedom of association, and human rights. Accordingly, a broad range of employment issues is considered relevant to the wellbeing of the workforce and internal CSR in the literature.

Among a range of issues, several issues emerged as particularly relevant in the context of this study. As discussed in Section 2.4.1, large Japanese companies are increasingly under strain from social pressures to address issues such as long working hours, lack of work-life balance, and gender inequality. The government is putting pressure on companies through ‘workstyle reform’ to address these issues (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017). During the empirical interviews conducted, these themes were

repeatedly mentioned as particularly critical issues for the sample of large Japanese companies. Accordingly, the following sections present a brief overview of the literature relevant to long working hours, work-life balance, and gender equality.

2.4.3.1 Long working hours

Concerns over long working hours are not new. The discussion on the regulation of working hours started with the onset of the industrial revolution (Golden, 2009; Hopkins, 1982), which gave rise to factory work with harsh working conditions and long working hours (Dembe, 2009). Over time, out of concerns for the health and wellbeing of workers, the labour movement began in Europe, which eventually led to protective legislation regulating work hours across industrial countries (Dembe, 2009; Golden, 2009). Following the development of labour movements, the ILO issued its first ILO Convention to establish the limits on daily (8 hours) and weekly (48 hours) working hours: the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1).

Since then, as the economies grew, working patterns and hours have greatly diversified across countries and industries. This diversification is partly because the economy shifted from manufacturing to the service sector, with corresponding women's participation in the workforce (Dembe, 2009). While there is a variation between sectors and professions, in the US, the overall working hours started to rise in the 1970s, especially among white-collar workers (Golden, 2009). The trend was somewhat different for some of the European countries, which experienced an overall reduction in working hours during the 1970s and 1980s, partly due to stronger labour legislation (Golden, 2009).

More recently, the trend of technological advances has contributed to the creation of a ‘24-hour society’, in which the boundary between work and non-work time is increasingly blurred (Gambles et al., 2006; Golden, 2012; Nam, 2014). While there remains a variation across professions and countries, the trend of long working hours has become a common concern globally (OECD, 2018a). It was estimated in 2007 that 22% of the global workforce, which is roughly 600 million workers, work over 48 hours per week (S. Lee, McCann, & Messenger, 2007). In OECD countries, it is estimated that 1 in every 8 employees works over 50 hours per week, which is common in Japan and South Korea, and to a lesser extent, in the US, New Zealand, and the UK (Angrave & Charlwood, 2015; OECD, 2018a).

Long working hours or overwork, which is defined as 50 hours a week or more, have received the attention of researchers and practitioners, particularly for their adverse impacts on the health and wellbeing of the workforce (Angrave & Charlwood, 2015; Kossek, Kalliath, & Kalliath, 2012; Kuroda & Yamamoto, 2016; Muhlbauer & Tziner, 2017; Salanova et al., 2014; Shimazu, Demerouti, Bakker, Shimada, & Kawakami, 2011). In the field of CSR, working hours have been recognised as an essential aspect of internal CSR, particularly in Asia where long working hours have become more prevalent than in the West (J. H. Kang, Matusik, & Barclay, 2017; Welford, 2004). Moreover, from the ethical perspective, Dembe (2009) argued that society has an ethical obligation to protect workers from the harmful effects of long working hours.

It is pertinent to note here that historically the governments, not companies, have been primarily responsible for regulating working hours through working time policies and statutory regulations (Berg, Bosch, & Charest, 2014; Gornick & Heron, 2006; S. Lee et al.,

2007). In other words, the primary responsibilities of the companies were to comply with the statutory regulation on work hours; therefore, it has not been explicitly included in the CSR practices in some countries, which by definition go beyond legal responsibilities. However, as discussed in Section 2.4.2, in line with the global diffusion of CSR, global voluntary CSR regulations emerged to govern global companies and their supply chain networks, which include regulating working hours (Bendell et al., 2011; Vogel, 2010).

As discussed above, long working hours and overwork have long been the concern of scholars and practitioners. However, long working hours seem to have only recently emerged as an important CSR and business agenda, in particular in developed economies, against the background of the shifting technological, economic and social environment, as well as their increasingly visible health impacts.

2.4.3.2 Work-life balance

The concern for work-life balance is also not new. The issues of balancing work and other parts of life, especially family, have been debated among management scholars at least since the 1960s in the West (S. Lewis et al., 2007; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1965). Research in this area reflected shifting needs of the workforce and their responses to changing social and economic environments (S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; S. Lewis et al., 2007). For instance, as women's participation in the workforce grew in the 1960s in the West, many researchers started to examine the issues surrounding working mothers and dual-earner families; later in the 1980s and 1990s, more researchers further examined the interface between work and family (work-family conflict) (S. Lewis et al., 2007). Later, as working patterns continued to diversify among the workforce, some scholars broadened the 'life'

domain, by defining work-life balance (WLB) as to how well multiple life roles are balanced (Haar, Russo, Suñe, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014; S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). During this time, ‘work-life balance’ and ‘work-life initiatives’ emerged as an important topic among researchers and practitioners, alongside an increasing need to support women in the workplace (Kossek et al., 2010), as well as concerns over the long working hours (OECD, 2011, 2018a) and increasingly blurry boundary between work and non-work time due to technological advancements (Gambles et al., 2006; Golden, 2012; Nam, 2014).

Following the popularisation of the term, the topics concerning work-family and work-life balance were incorporated into CSR frameworks. For instance, according to the European Commission (2001), the following topics were included in internal CSR: better work-family balance, the reconciliation of work and family obligations through work organisation (e.g., flexible jobs, flexible working hours), and service provision for families (e.g., assistance with childcare and elderly care). Similarly, topics such as work-life balance, flexible workplace and work-family conflicts were incorporated into the broad discourse of human sustainability, as they are considered human needs (Costanza et al., 2007; Dunphy et al., 2007; Kossek et al., 2014; S. Lewis et al., 2007; Pfeffer, 2010).

Work-life initiatives generally refer to organisational practices introduced to facilitate the integration of employees’ work and non-work demands (Bardoel, 2016; A. McCarthy, Darcy, & Grady, 2010). They typically include flexible working conditions, leave options, child care and dependent care (Bardoel, 2016; Smeaton, Ray, & Knight, 2014). A review of the literature suggests the increasing use of work-life initiatives (Bardoel, 2016; Beauregard, 2011; Brough & O’Driscoll, 2010; L. Putnam, Myers, & Gailliard, 2014).

However, there continues to be a contested debate on the definition of WLB and the effects of WLB or work-life initiatives. For instance, scholars such as S. Lewis and Beauregard (2018) argue that the term work-life balance implies a false dichotomy of ‘work or life’ choice; work is part of life rather than a separate element to be balanced with life (Fleetwood, 2007; Gambles et al., 2006). Furthermore, the concept is primarily a social construct originating in the industrial West, and its discourse tends to neglect the culturally-sensitive nature of the construct; accordingly, the concept needs to be interpreted differently in different social contexts, such as in the East (S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; S. Lewis et al., 2007). Moreover, the term tends to position WLB as a matter of individual choice, when the choices are in practice constrained by the organisational and social structures and cultures (S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). Thus, without more fundamental changes, so-called WLB initiatives can lead to adverse outcomes, such as equality concerns among non-users, reduced prospects for career advancement, and more intensive work and more extended work hours (Beauregard, 2011; Kossek et al., 2010; S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; S. Lewis et al., 2007).

As discussed above, WLB or work-life initiatives have been a concern for scholars and practitioners. However, they have not been fully integrated into CSR discourse, within the contested debate on the definitions and the effect of WLB and work-life initiatives. In light of this, this study examines work-life initiatives as integral to CSR, workforce wellbeing, and human sustainability.

2.4.3.3 Gender equality

The concern for gender equality is also not new. Gender equality has been debated among management scholars at least since the 1970s (Acker, 1990; Acker & Van Houten, 1974; Kanter, 1977; Paoloni & Demartini, 2016). Scholars such as Acker (1990, p. 327) argued that, despite the increased participation of women, large organisations continue to be dominated by men, partly because of the deeply embedded assumptions and structures about gender within organisations and within societies. Acker (1990) called for further examination of the ‘gendered’ nature of organisational practices because gender inequality continues to be created through organisational practices (Grosser et al., 2016; L. Putnam et al., 2014).

Later, gender equality emerged as a global economic and political agenda in 1995, when the United Nations held the World Conference on Women in Beijing (Pavlic, Ruprecht, & Sam-Vargas, 2000; Thompson, 2008). Thompson (2008) notes that this Conference framed its ambitious goal of gender equality and equity based on the ethical claims of human rights. As part of the call, the Conference adopted the term ‘gender mainstreaming’, as ‘the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action including legislation, policies and programmes, in any area and at all levels’ to place human beings and relationships at the centre of global economic development (Pavlic et al., 2000; Thompson, 2008). According to Grosser and Moon (2005, p. 327), gender mainstreaming is understood as a fundamentally transforming process beyond the equal opportunity policies:

Gender mainstreaming has been defined as a transforming process, which includes, but moves beyond, individual rights for equal treatment, and positive actions to address group disadvantage, and involves ‘identifying how organisational systems

and structures cause indirect discrimination and altering or redesigning them as appropriate' (Rees, 2002).

This approach was adopted and developed as an official government policy in the European Union and the UK (Grosser & Moon, 2005; Rees, 2002; Sümer, 2009), which eventually led to policies such as gender board quota legislation (Terjesen, Aguilera, & Lorenz, 2015).

Following the political call, the topics concerning gender equality were incorporated into CSR frameworks (e.g., equal pay, career prospects for women, equal opportunity) (European Commission, 2001; International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2010; Welford, 2004), as well as human sustainability discourse (e.g., equal employment opportunities, diversity, inequality) (Dunphy et al., 2007; Pfeffer, 2010). As such, CSR researchers agree on the importance of promoting gender equality as integral to CSR from the ethical perspective of human rights as well as a key to economic and social development (Grosser et al., 2016; Kumra & Manfredi, 2012; Thompson, 2008). However, although companies broadly incorporated the agenda of gender equality, there has been a “lack of focus on the structural, systemic gender bias in the prevailing modes of business” (Thompson, 2008, p. 87). Moreover, there is only limited empirical research examining how CSR contributes to gender equality (Grosser & Moon, 2005, 2008; Karam & Jamali, 2013). Grosser and Moon (2017) point out that the limitation is partly attributable to persistent gender roles within organisations and marginalisation of gender equality in management research in general.

In order to examine gender equality further, considering the vast literature on the topic, it is pertinent to clarify its definition in the context of workforce wellbeing and human

sustainability. According to the International Labour Office (2007a) and Thompson (2008), ‘gender’ refers to the socially constructed differences and relations between men and women, which vary widely among societies and change over time. Accordingly, gender roles are learned behaviours in a given society, which condition the activities and responsibilities perceived as appropriate to men and women respectively. Following these definitions, this study adopts the definition of gender equality as “the enjoyment of equal rights, opportunities and treatment by men and women” and is further described in detail as follows (International Labour Office, 2007a, p. 91):

It asserts that people’s rights, responsibilities, social status and access to resources do not depend on whether they are born male or female. It does not mean, however, that men and women are the same or must become the same... Gender equality implies that all men and women are free to develop their personal abilities and make life choices without the limitations set by stereotypes or prejudices about gender roles or the characteristics of men and women.

This study adopts the above definitions to examine gender equality initiatives as integral to CSR, workforce wellbeing, and human sustainability.

In this manner, the field of CSR has expanded to accommodate multiple perspectives and workforce issues, which provide a rich foundation to examine workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives.

2.4.3.4 Relationship between Workforce Wellbeing and Human Sustainability

Given the extensive use of the terms ‘workforce wellbeing’ and ‘human sustainability’ in this study, it is useful to clarify the relationship between the two concepts at this point. The two concepts are similar in that both centre on the concept of wellbeing. The difference is that they originate from different concepts, which have different levels of analysis (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Gladwin et al., 1995) (Table 1.2). In addition, the concept of sustainability emphasises a long timeframe, while workforce wellbeing does not necessarily do so (Gladwin et al., 1995). Despite these differences, however, these concepts overlap particularly at the level of organisation, as the discourse expands to empirically investigate the relevant issues.

Table 1.2 *Similarities and differences between workforce wellbeing and human sustainability*

Concepts		Workforce Wellbeing	Human Sustainability
Similarity	Central focus	Wellbeing	Wellbeing
Difference	Conceptual origin	Health	Sustainability
	Levels of analysis	Individual, organisation (micro)	Society, organisation (macro)
	Literature	Dana & Griffin, 1999 Costanza et al., 2007 World Health Organization, 2018	Gladwin et al., 1995 Dunphy, et al., 2007 Pfeffer, 2010

2.5 CSR in Japan

While CSR has diffused globally, it has taken on a different meaning in different social contexts. Therefore, it is critical to understand the context of CSR in Japan, in relation to workforce wellbeing issues. This section is composed of three parts: first, CSR in Japan is located within the CSR discourse using the comparative perspective; second, CSR practices in Japan are discussed; and the last part examines the traditional employment practices under scrutiny and emerging CSR initiatives to address the issues.

2.5.1 Comparative Perspective

This section introduces CSR in its Japanese context in comparison to its Western counterpart. As discussed in Section 2.4.2, CSR has diffused globally as a set of management practices originating from the West. However, CSR has taken on different meanings in different institutional settings and at different times, because of the different political systems and historical contexts (Brammer et al., 2012; Campbell, 2007).

Consequently, it is important to understand what meaning CSR has taken in a Japanese historical institutional framework in comparison to the West.

Matten and Moon (2008) argued that the social responsibilities of corporations reflect the historical institutions of their national business systems. In particular, the behaviour of large companies tends to depend on the national institutional arrangements (Hall & Soskice, 2001). Thus, CSR of large Japanese companies needs to be examined within the broader responsibility systems in which business, government, legal, and social actors operate, as suggested by Matten and Moon (2008). In particular, Whitley (1999) described four critical features of a historically grown institutional framework: political, financial, education and

labour, and the cultural system. These systems affect the nature of the firm (e.g., ownership), the organisation of market processes (e.g., business associations), and the coordination and control system (e.g., employee discretion, representation, and participation). These factors then affect national agreements on the responsibilities for pay, working conditions, and education and training (N. Kang & Moon, 2012). For instance, according to N. Kang and Moon (2012), in coordinated market economies such as Germany and Japan, the labour market is developed within the companies, which enable the managers to balance employee interests through discretion.

Furthermore, Matten and Moon (2008) presented two distinct forms of CSR, based on the difference in the national institutional framework. For instance, companies in the United States tend to take what they call ‘explicit CSR’, a voluntary, deliberate, and often strategic discretion rather than reflecting government authority. In contrast, European companies tend to take ‘implicit CSR’, which indicates a reaction to given institutional environments, norms, and rules. Accordingly, even if European companies do not claim specific initiatives as CSR, they may be nonetheless acting responsibly within society, as indicated by Carroll (1979).

Matten and Moon (2008) further argued that the increasing adoption of ‘explicit CSR’ in Europe could be seen as a response to changing institutional frameworks and national business systems. One of the changes lies in political systems, particularly regarding the capacity of the welfare state under mass unemployment and financial stress in the 1970s to 1990s. Another change lies in labour systems, which included the deregulation of labour markets and weakening trade unions. Within this changing environment, some European

companies responded by taking greater responsibilities for expectations of skills development and employment (Preuss, Haunschild, & Matten, 2009).

Traditionally, from the perspective of the institutional environment, Japan is considered relatively similar to European ones, in terms of high bank and public ownership, patriarchal and long-term employment, and coordination and control systems based on long-term partnerships rather than markets (Matten & Moon, 2008; Tanimoto, 2009; Whitley, 1999). However, national business systems in Japan have been changing due to the increased exposure to global capital markets, US business approaches and education models, as well as the challenges to the capacity of the state (Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Tanimoto, 2009). Since many of the institutional forces are common phenomena globally, a rise of explicit CSR is also expected in Japan (Matten & Moon, 2008).

Furthermore, from a comparative perspective, in comparison to CSR in Western countries, the ethical norms seem to provide a stronger institutional basis for CSR in Asia (Kim & Moon, 2015). In particular, Japan's traditional ethical system emphasises duties to those with whom one has a close relationship (Fukukawa & Moon, 2004; Kim & Moon, 2015). In line with this view, Campbell (2007, p. 959) explained that the essential normative status of employees in large Japanese companies is deeply embedded in business culture:

Japan, for example, long has been known for the fact that its corporations typically hire employees for life and, if economic circumstances dictate, will shed labor by reassigning employees to jobs in other closely held firms (Dore, 1983, 2000; Westney, 2001). The implicit commitment to employee security has been under

strain recently owing to the Japanese recession, but many firms are still reluctant to engage in mass layoffs for fear of public criticism.

With regard to commonalities between East and West, Gond, Kang, and Moon (2011) observed the same kind of industrial paternalism in 20th century East Asian businesses and 19th century Western European ones. They argued that this industrial paternalism preceded welfare states and reflected the importance of workers as human capital and the need to maintain harmony in ‘catch-up’ development. Consequently, CSR in this industrial paternalism included the provision of social and economic support for workers and their families, such as housing, education and medical facilities. In comparison to Europe, CSR in Japan and South Korea went further to cover social protection measures for core workers, such as long-term employment and the priority of wage claims over creditors in case of bankruptcy. Thus, large Japanese and Korean companies shared welfare responsibilities that would be regarded as belonging to the government in other countries.

With regard to the balancing of responsibilities, there is an on-going discussion concerning the effective forms of regulation and responsibility of the government. One form is statutory regulation, which is implemented as the responsibility of government. Another form is self-regulation, which is defined as “the situation of a group of persons or bodies, acting together, performing a regulatory function in respect of themselves and others who accept their authority” (Black, 1996, p. 27). This form could be in industry standards and codes of conduct (as discussed in Section 2.4.2), the implementation of which is monitored by the group itself. Self-regulatory initiatives have become an essential approach to corporate governance in different countries (Aguilera & Cuervo-Cazurra, 2004). Brammer et al. (2012) stated that many of the interesting developments in CSR play out in the form

of self-regulation. There is also co-regulation, which combines both elements. In this approach, the government could first provide the legal basis for the business to form specific rules and functioning (Rahim, 2013).

Institutional theory tends to “portray organization[s] as passive pawns, adapting willingly to institutionalized expectations in organizational fields or to dominant business systems’ characteristics” (Tempel & Walgenbach, 2007, p. 10). However, Matten and Moon (2008) pointed out, within these institutional forces and national business systems, companies have played an active role in shaping institutional frameworks, as in the case of various business coalitions and the UN Global Compact.

Thus, Matten and Moon (2008, p. 420) expect “changing balances” of companies and their institutions, as well as their implicit and explicit responsibilities. They call for further research in this area as follows:

It remains, of course, open to future research whether different social issues are more effectively and efficiently addressed by explicit than by implicit CSR; how the social outcomes reflect fairness, social inclusion, and equality of opportunities; and how these values are balanced with other norms of innovation, diversity, and choice.

Following this call, this study examines the changing balances of companies and institutions in Japan, with regard to the implicit and explicit responsibilities for workforce wellbeing and human sustainability.

2.5.2 CSR Practices in Japan

This section briefly outlines how Japanese companies have adopted the concept and practices of CSR. It has been observed that CSR has become a near daily discussion in the contemporary Japanese business community (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Tanimoto, 2013). The year 2003 is often called the year when the Japanese corporate world formally adopted CSR, referred to as “*CSR gannen*” (the first year of CSR) (Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009). While this adoption seems to be somewhat lagging behind the West, CSR is not new in Japanese business discourse (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; Tanimoto, 2009). It has been well documented that Japan has a tradition of thought on the social responsibility of business (Davis, 2014). According to Mizuo (2013), the present discussion of CSR in Japan could be traced to the post-war recovery. In 1949, Yamashiro discussed the idea of social responsibility in his *Keiei no shakaiteki sekininron* (social responsibility of management). In 1956, the *Keizai Doyukai* (Japanese Association of Corporate Executives) made a public statement emphasising that a corporation was a public institution, and corporate executives were responsible not just for shareholders but society. It stated that “corporate executives were no longer stewards of shareholders”, but that “they were stewards of the society in which their companies operated” (p. 10).

As the economic growth caught on, Japan experienced the first boom of CSR in the 1970s, as a response to environmental pollution and corporate scandals (Tanimoto, 2009). In 1973, the *Keizai Doyukai* published a paper “For Establishing Mutual Trust between Business and Society”, reiterating “top management needs to make decisions not only for profit-seeking but also to seek a balance between social goals and corporate merit”. In 1991, the *Keidanren* (Japan Business Federation), in response to a series of scandals in the banking

and securities industries, announced the “Charter of Corporate Behaviour”. Furthermore, the *Keidanren* announced their position paper on promoting CSR in 2004, which highlighted the importance of various stakeholders and CSR issues (Mizuo, 2013).

According to Fukukawa and Moon (2004), a review of CSR communications from the top 50 companies by annual revenue found that 96% of the companies claimed to have individual units dealing with CSR (comparable with that of the UK and more than twice that of most other Asian countries). Many large companies have established CSR units and promote CSR initiatives on a daily basis (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Tanimoto, 2013). Moreover, Suzuki and Tanimoto (2005) found that Japan is by far the leader in Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) reporting, a protocol that is among the premier CSR reporting standards.

As discussed above, the ‘late adoption’ of Western CSR does not indicate the absence of social responsibility discourse. Instead, Japan is one of the developed economies with an understanding of social responsibility different from that of the West (Dore, 1993; Tange, 2001; Wokutch & Shepard, 1999). Scholars have explored the characteristics of the Japanese understanding of CSR, in comparison to those held by Western societies. For instance, Dore (1993) examined different national views of business firms in capitalist societies and argued that Japanese corporate and social relations are more solidarity oriented (“employee community view”) and more akin to a German model than to the Anglo-American model (“property view”). Similarly, Tange (2001) argued that in Japan an individual belongs to the community called a company. In contrast, in the Anglo-American model, both individual and company belong to a community, which is part of society.

Moreover, Wokutch and Shepard (1999) observed that the Japanese approach to CSR is the “micro moral unity paradigm”; CSR principles reflect the societal and cultural background of Japanese society. In particular, they argue that there are three distinct differences between the Japanese and Western approaches to CSR. The differences are group membership (within-group/out-of-group distinction), the Confucian sense of duty to those who have a relationship (e.g., family or employees), and a strong emphasis on the value of loyalty.

According to Wokutch and Shepard (1999), regarding group membership, there are differences in the treatment for within-group members and out-of-group members, as evident in different occupational health and safety (OHS) policies for full-time employees (within-group) and part-time or temporary employees as well as subcontractors (out-of-group). Concerning the Confucian sense of duty for those who have relationships, people tend to help those whom they have strong relationships with, such as family and employees. This relationship is sometimes more important than duties to outside stakeholders. As for loyalty, the importance of employees' loyalty to employers often outweighs the importance of law and regulations.

Therefore, the Japanese approach to CSR is characterised by a strong orientation to close members of their “community”, underpinned by the Confucian sense of duty. In comparison, Western CSR originated from Anglo-American and European ethical principles, including Kantian ethical principles, theories of justice, and theories of freedom, rights, and consent (Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Garriga & Melé, 2004).

Since these characteristics of the Japanese understanding of CSR were observed in the 1990s, several structural pressures have emerged and shaped the further development of CSR in Japan (Tanimoto, 2009). The first pressure is the growing economic pressure, which changed the relationship between corporations and employees. After the collapse of the bubble economy in the 1990s, the old corporate structure that characterised Japanese management also collapsed, including the assumption of long-term employment (Fukukawa & Moon, 2004; Tanimoto, 2009). Consequently, many companies can no longer maintain the same level of commitment and care even to close members of their community.

The second pressure is growing public scrutiny. In the face of a series of corporate scandals, public confidence in corporations continued eroding through the late 1990s (Tanimoto, 2009). The implication was that it had become necessary for companies to demonstrate their level of responsibility to gain public confidence. The third is the growing pressure from foreign investors. According to Tanimoto (2009), the 1990s was marked by a structural change in stockholding: in Japan, from late 1980s to early 2000s, the ratio of shareholding of foreign investors increased, while the rate of cross-holding and stable shareholders decreased. In addition, there was a significant shift to the overseas market for large corporations' growth strategies, as companies faced dwindling domestic markets from the rapidly aging population (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; Tanimoto, 2009). The implication was that companies increasingly faced the need to adapt to global standards for corporate conduct, including the UN Global Compact, SRI ratings, and Global Reporting Initiatives (GRI), as well as harsh criticisms and inspections from NGOs (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; Suzuki & Tanimoto, 2005).

Therefore, it was under these societal pressures that the Japanese corporate world adopted the Western conception of CSR. Fukukawa and Teramoto (2009) explain how Western CSR continues to be interpreted in Japan as follows:

The ‘glocalization’ of CSR in Japan could be understood as the forces of an external, generally Western-led definition of CSR going through a process of interpenetrating and co-shaping with the thoughts and practices of social responsibility amongst Japanese corporate business. (p. 144)

2.5.3 Employment Practices in Japan

It has been documented that long working hours, lack of work-life balance, and gender inequality have been persistent features of the Japanese employment system (Ono, 2018; Todeschini, 2011; Tsutsui, 2015). Accordingly, this section briefly describes the traditional employment system in Japan.

2.5.3.1 Traditional employment practices

Sociologists and management scholars have documented the “recurring patterns of behaviour” (Huntington, 1969, p. 12) within the Japanese employment system (Aoki, 1990; Kato & Kodama, 2017; Ono, 2018; Ouchi, 1981; Tanimoto, 2009; Tsutsui, 2015).

According to Ono (2018, p. 38), the Japanese employment system is best described as “a cluster (or bundling) of complementary institutions whereby its essential parts, such as lifetime employment, seniority wages, job rotation and internal promotion, are bundled together”. This system is maintained through their complementary and reinforcing

relationship (Aoki, 1990). For instance, Tanimoto (2009, p. 53) summarised the common patterns of Japanese employment practices as follows:

A tacit long-term employment understanding, although not stipulated, has existed in Japan between corporations and employees, where they are mutually committed (either positively and/or passively) with each other. Since the end of WW2, in the business sector, what is called “internal labour market” has been formed, whereby companies educate, redeploy and evaluate employees within the organization, adopting a medium to long-term perspective (Kamii & Nomura, 2004; Koike, 1996). Personnel was evaluated over the long term according to their merit and by the traditional seniority system. Employees held certain tacit expectations as to how they will be treated appropriately in the long run if they work hard, show loyalty to the organization and commit to it voluntarily (Tanimoto, 2002). Mid-term recruitment was not typical, with the labour market underdeveloped.

Along with these complementary practices, the company was expected to provide what is called the ‘Three Sacred Treasures’: lifetime employment, promotion by seniority, and a company union (Todeschini, 2011; Yakabe, 1974). The company was expected to be “a protector of the employee as if the company itself were a clannish family” (Todeschini, 2011, p. 49). Kato and Kodama (2017, p. 106) point out that, for companies operating under this system, “perhaps the most relevant and powerful stakeholders are the employees/unions”. They argued that these companies believe that their fundamental source of competitiveness lies in the creativity, resourcefulness and discretionary effort of their employees.

This approach to being responsible for employees' loyalty was seen as functional at the time in enhancing employees' skills and incentives, as well as the company's competitiveness in the global market (Aoki, 1990; Aoki & Dore, 1994; Hamaaki, Hori, Maeda, & Murata, 2012; Ouchi, 1981).

In order to tap into the fundamental source of competitiveness, companies have adopted an interrelated set of management practices to support employees as 'family members'. The first 'sacred treasure' of 'lifetime employment' has become one of those practices (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Ono, 2010, 2018; Ono & Moriguchi, 2006). According to Kato and Kodama (2017, p. 8), this practice could be interpreted as an "implicit long-term employment guarantee", in which employees who enjoy job security under this tacit agreement are "asked to take advantage of opportunities to exert discretionary effort, produce useful local knowledge and share it with their co-workers and higher-level engineers and managers". These discretionary efforts are shown in the collective efforts such as quality circles and *Kaizen*, a distinct feature of the Japanese management style (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Macpherson, Lockhart, Kavan, & Iaquinto, 2015).

Another 'sacred treasure' of the Japanese employment system is the seniority-wage system. According to Kato and Kodama (2017, p. 8), it is the reward system associated with lifetime employment, in which "wages are detached from specific jobs and seniority plays a significant role in wage determination". In other words, wages rise automatically in accordance with years of service (Ono, 2018). Ono (2018, p. 39) further points out that this system "rewards input in the form of commitment and loyalty to the company" rather than output and performance. Kato and Kodama (2017) further note that this system aligns financial wellbeing to group performance rather than individual performance. It should be

noted here that, particularly among large companies, there has been a recent shift from a seniority-based pay system to a merit-based or performance-based pay system (Ono, 2018). Most companies have adopted a hybrid of the seniority-based and merit-based pay system, and wage systems based on seniority alone are becoming a minority (Ono, 2018; Takahashi, 2018). However, full introduction of a merit-based system has slowed down because of reasons such as loss of a long-term view, difficulty of evaluation, and a deterioration in teamwork (Ono, 2018; Watanabe, 2018).

These sets of management practices were also supported by another ‘sacred treasure’ of the Japanese employment system: the company union. A cooperative relationship between labour and management characterises the Japanese employment system (Watanabe, 2018). Joint labour-management committees are the Japanese version of work councils, in which the management and labour representatives facilitate the alignment of their common interests as a ‘family’ (Kato & Kodama, 2017). This cooperative relationship encourages extensive company-specific training for employees, which enables their wellbeing and long-term contribution to the company (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Mun & Jung, 2018; Watanabe, 2018).

In this sense, the traditional Japanese employment system represents a management paradigm (employee stakeholder model) different from the Anglo-American shareholder model (Fukukawa & Moon, 2004; Kato & Kodama, 2017). In this model, employees and the company are more bound by implicit long-term contracts, an employee’s stake in the company is higher with company-specific training and activities, and management and labour are more cooperative and jointly support company interests. These practices around employees as ‘family members’ seem consistent with the Japanese word for business *keiei*.

Keiei is a compound of the words *kei*, meaning “governing the world in harmony while bringing about the well-being of the people”, and *ei*, meaning “making ceaseless efforts to achieve” (Fukukawa & Moon, 2004, p. 46; Taka, 1997).

However, being a ‘family member’ has its disadvantages. This disadvantage stems from full-time employees’ (historically disproportionately males) acceptance of the company’s discretion over three ways of work: their job content, place of work, and working hours (Tsutsui, 2015). If employees do not accept the company’s decision, they are seen as being ‘disloyal’ to the company, and their career as a core employee is substantially restricted (Asai, 2007; Tsutsui, 2015). This imperative may have resulted in long working hours, which as previously noted restricts the career prospects of female employees who often bear more family responsibilities (Brinton, 1993; Nemoto, 2013a; North, 2010).

While these ways of work may have functioned in the past, times have changed. Due to intense global competition and slow economic growth in Japan since the 1990s, the assumption of long-term employment can no longer be taken for granted (Fukukawa & Moon, 2004; Tanimoto, 2009). Nonetheless, the practice remains a standard management approach, although to a lesser extent (Tsutsui, 2015). Furthermore, Kato and Kodama (2017) pointed out that only standard employees, who are called *seishain*, are regarded as insider stakeholders, while non-standard employees (part-timers and contract workers) are only marginally considered stakeholders.

2.5.3.2 Emerging CSR initiatives

Accordingly, as part of social responsibility and sustainability, Japanese corporations have re-evaluated internal CSR aspects such as gender inequality, discrepancies in employee conditions, and issues over human rights (Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009). In particular, in response to the pressures for CSR and addressing workforce wellbeing issues, companies have introduced numerous policies such as overtime work restrictions, enhancement of employee discretion over the pace and schedule of work, and the introduction of various work-life balance measures (North, 2010). However, implementing initiatives to reduce long working hours, promote work-life balance and diversity has proven to be harder than they expected (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015).

However, literature on the intersection between human sustainability, workforce wellbeing, and CSR remains scarce in Japan, except for a few studies. As one of the early empirical studies, Fukukawa and Teramoto (2009) conducted interviews to investigate how Japanese multinational companies understand and manage CSR. They found that Japanese multinational company managers have come to re-evaluate business aspects needing rectification, including gender inequality, discrepancies in employee conditions, and issues over human rights and supply chains. Further, managers' responses showed a complex picture of global and local interaction, in which there is evident scepticism in uncritically adopting the frame of CSR as a Western-led concept.

A more recent study conducted by Eweje and Sakaki (2015) interviewed CSR managers in Japanese global companies to investigate contemporary CSR and sustainability strategies and practices in Japan. They found that companies are eager to demonstrate that CSR is integral to their business strategy and have various initiatives to support their commitment.

However, implementing new initiatives such as the reduction of long working hours, work-life balance, diversity and inclusion are proving harder than expected, despite the companies' determination to make them work for their organisations. They further identified some of the issues fundamental to Japanese companies engaging in CSR initiatives, including work-life balance, diversity and inclusion, and human rights and labour protection.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature in two research areas of sustainability and CSR. Key features in sustainability and CSR literature were reviewed, including the conceptual development and empirical domain of this study.

This literature review identified critical research gaps. First, although both sustainability and CSR literature are extensive, there are few conceptual and empirical studies which have applied human sustainability to workforce wellbeing issues in the corporate context.

Second, studies suggest that large Japanese companies are attempting to address workforce wellbeing issues as a CSR agenda, yet many found it difficult to deliver significant progress. However, little agreement has been reached concerning “what is happening” (Robson, 2002, p. 59): in particular, how the companies integrate human sustainability initiatives into their CSR strategies, what factors make the implementation harder than expected, and how companies can resolve the underlying issues and make significant progress remain virtually unexplored.

There are several possible reasons for this lack of research. First, the business consequences of neglecting employee wellbeing, such as fatigue and illness, could be harder to identify

than environmental sustainability issues. In addition, workforce wellbeing is constructed differently in each society; thus, its investigation requires an understanding of the local context, including ethical and regulatory factors. Furthermore, multiple stakeholders and actors are involved in human sustainability, which may make it difficult to comprehend the whole picture.

These gaps will be addressed in an attempt to make a conceptual and empirical contribution in this area. This study aims to examine employee wellbeing and human sustainability as a relatively under-investigated area of CSR and sustainability, in the empirical domain of large Japanese companies. Given the mounting pressures and risks involved for large Japanese companies, it is timely to investigate how actors and stakeholders think, react and feel, and how their social reality is constructed. Therefore, this study aims to leverage this opportunity and present a rich description of the subjective perspectives on human sustainability held by corporate managers and their stakeholders. This chapter has examined the literature and identified the research gap; the next chapter will explain the methodology used in the study.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology for this study. As discussed, the research objective of this study is to expand our understanding of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. To achieve this, the study examines how companies integrate workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives into their CSR strategies. As discussed in the previous chapters, the severity of workforce wellbeing issues such as long working hours, lack of work-life balance, and gender inequality has been recognised for decades in Japanese businesses. These issues are considered to affect the sustainability of the workforce and corporate performance in the long run. While large Japanese companies have implemented various workplace initiatives, many have found it difficult to resolve the underlying issues and make significant progress. This exploratory study investigates how companies seek to resolve these issues.

This study aims to develop an understanding of corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability in a new light. This study uses a qualitative approach and abductive reasoning, positioned within a social constructionism/interpretivism paradigm. The focus is on the corporate approaches, viewed through the corporate managers and key stakeholders relevant to the research question.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 3.2 introduces the research philosophy. Section 3.3 then explains the choice of research approach. It is followed by Section 3.4, the research methods, which explains the details of the processes used in the study. Section 3.5 describes the theoretical framework. The last section, 3.6, discusses the research quality and ethical considerations, followed by the conclusion of the chapter.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy concerns the assumptions on which the researcher bases their perception and interpretation of social reality (P. Lewis et al., 2007). There are different philosophies about the nature of social reality and how it should be examined, which correspond to different research methods. Thus it is necessary to clarify the philosophical assumptions of ontology and epistemology underlying the inquiry of this study (Creswell, 2012).

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality. The question is whether social reality is objective and external to social actors, or subjective and constructed from the perception of social actors (Bryman, 2016). The objective view is referred to as objectivism, in which the truth of objects resides in the object itself, independent of human consciousness (Cavana et al., 2001). On the other hand, the latter view is referred to as social constructionism, in which what is real is constructed in the minds of individuals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this view, social phenomena and their meanings are continuously created by interactions among participants and observers; therefore, there are multiple interpretations and all are potentially meaningful (Cavana et al., 2001; Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 1994). As such, the

truth is a matter of the best-informed and the most sophisticated construction on which there is a consensus at a given time (Schwandt, 1994, p. 128).

Epistemology is about how knowledge can be constructed. An objective ontology is consistent with a positivist epistemology, whereas a social constructionism ontology is consistent with an interpretivist epistemology. Positivism is based on the premise that social reality is objective, based on independent facts free from values (P. Lewis et al., 2007). Consequently, it aims to ensure objectivity during data collection and analysis, and replicability and verification of results (N. Lee & Lings, 2008). In contrast, interpretivism is founded on the view that human beings are different from the objects of natural science (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Denzin, 2001). Whereas positivism would seek an explanation of human behaviour, interpretivism is concerned with the understanding of human behaviour, as the social reality is experienced, interpreted, and constructed through human beings. As there can be multiple possible accounts of an aspect of social reality, interpretivist research aims to ensure acceptability to others and credibility through different procedures.

This research fits within social constructionist/interpretivist philosophy. The research objective of this study is to develop a conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. At the centre of this process lie continuous human actions and perceptions: it is the managers and stakeholders who act and, based on their subjective experiences, they form their perceptions and interpretations, which then construct 'social reality'. Constructionism challenges the notion that social actors only respond to pre-given, external realities. Moreover, the researcher interacts with participants and tries to construct meaning from the conversations. In taking this approach, the researcher's subjectivity cannot be separated from the inquiry (Schwandt, 1994); the

researcher and participants are part of the social construction process of reality and knowledge. Therefore, the researcher aims to present a specific version of social reality and knowledge based on participants' interpretations which are continually being created, rather than one that can be regarded as independent from human experience (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Accordingly, the nature of this study fits well within social constructionist/interpretivist philosophy, which then directs the selection of the research approach in the following section.

3.3 Research Approach

3.3.1 Exploratory and Qualitative

A research approach is a way of conscious reasoning, and research processes explain the steps necessary to follow the path of the specific research approach (Kovács & Spens, 2005). According to Robson and McCartan (2016), an exploratory study is a valuable means through which the researcher aims to find out what is happening, seek new insights, ask questions and assess phenomena in a new light. This is in line with the intention of this study, to develop a conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability.

Qualitative research is a broad methodological approach used to analyse text and other qualitative data obtained from the natural setting. It is suited to exploring unknown problems and interpreting the experiences and interpretations of relevant actors (P. Lewis et al., 2007). It is particularly helpful when the researcher seeks to understand a complex issue in detail by examining the perceptions of people, hearing their voices and developing

themes from them (Creswell, 2012). Moreover, the qualitative approach also allows for the openness required to understand perspectives from different organisations within the focus of the research (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). It also allows for flexibility in the study to be polished by the natural evolution of the research process (Royer & Zarlowski, 2001).

This research investigates the views of corporate managers across industries and key stakeholders, listening to their voices to develop themes and concepts. By developing the themes and concepts based on an exploratory-qualitative approach, the study seeks to offer a renewed understanding of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability.

3.3.2 Abductive Reasoning

This study uses the reasoning process of abduction. Abduction is developed as a synthetic inferential process involved in the production of a hypothesis (Fann, 1970; Peirce, 1974). It has a logical form different from induction and deduction. The deductive process starts with a rule and proceeds through a case to reach a result, whereas induction begins with a collection of examples and develops an inference for universal rules. Abduction starts with consequences and then constructs reasons, as follows:

“The surprising fact that C is observed.

But if A were true, C would be a matter of course.

Hence, there is a reason to suspect that A is true” (Peirce, 1974, p. 117).

According to Kovács and Spens (2005, p. 138), abduction “works through interpreting or re-contextualising individual phenomena within a contextual framework, and aims to understand something in a new way from the perspective of a new conceptual framework”.

While induction traditionally aims at generalising findings from empirical data to reach theory, abduction seeks to develop new combinations of established theoretical models and new concepts derived from the encounter with the new reality (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 559).

Since this study seeks to gain a perspective on a relatively unexplored phenomenon, the abduction approach seems appropriate. Following the abductive reasoning process, this research starts with the consequence: that is, various corporate initiatives undertaken to improve workforce wellbeing are proving harder than expected. To guide the process of investigation, a theoretical framework is constructed from existing literature. The research then proceeds through the collection, analysis, and interpretation of new empirical data to extend the model or develop a new conceptual framework.

3.4 Research Methods

3.4.1 Data Collection

Research methods are the procedures or techniques used to gather and analyse data for specific research questions (Crotty, 1998). Qualitative research frequently combines different methods in line with the research philosophy and approach; the methods used include ethnography/participant observation, qualitative interviewing, focus groups and language-based approaches such as discourse analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Qualitative interviewing is a broad term that describes a wide range of interviewing styles and is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). According to Bryman (2016, p. 466), “it is the flexibility of the interview that makes it so

attractive”. For instance, qualitative researchers employing ethnography/participant observation typically use a substantial amount of qualitative interviewing (Bryman, 2016).

This study employs qualitative interviewing as a research method, especially for the data gathering phase. Interviewing is especially useful when collecting in-depth data on individual experiences. It is effective when accessing individual experience, including personal feelings and opinions (Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2012) that cannot be obtained via observation or a formal questionnaire (Silverman, 2006). Consequently, it is widely used in interpretivist research with the purpose of collecting in-depth data, especially on how individuals understand and give meaning to their experience (Fontana & Frey, 2000). To explore the interface between business and human sustainability, the study aims to collect in-depth data about the participants’ experience across organisations. The use of interviewing seems to be an appropriate choice to facilitate the systematic acquisition of this in-depth data to be analysed for conceptual development.

3.4.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

This research used semi-structured interviews which allow for both standardisation and flexibility (Gilham, 2000). In the semi-structured interview, the researcher has a list of questions or specific themes, referred to as an interview guide. However, flexibility and variations are allowed from interview to interview, according to individual discussions and the flow of conversation (N. Lee & Lings, 2008; P. Lewis et al., 2007).

3.4.1.2 Development of the interview guide

Based on the review of the literature, three major topics of discussion were identified for exploring the processes used by businesses when integrating human sustainability (see Section 3.5.2 for further explanation):

1. Pressures,
2. Initiatives, and
3. Conflicts or consistency/fit.

The researcher developed questions under these three themes. In a semi-structured interview, variations are allowed for each topic and the order of questions/discussions, determined by a participant's interest and knowledge. Probes and questions generated from the discussion were used to gain detailed information on the topic.

Considering that the interface between business and problems of human sustainability is an underdeveloped area, pilot interviews were conducted to ensure interview effectiveness (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher conducted three pilot interviews with managers and key stakeholders, with the objective to verify clarity, content and the flow of questions and the researcher's involvement. Constructive feedback was provided by these interviewees, which helped adjust the interview guide (see Appendix 1 for the final interview guide). In this process, several interview questions were reworded, modified, and regrouped to improve the clarity and flow of questions.

3.4.2 Sampling

Qualitative research requires a systematic and well-defined sampling plan, in which the researcher can justify each participant selected (N. Lee & Lings, 2008). The objective of this study was to expand the understanding of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. Accordingly, sample selection was based on purposive sampling, not probability or random sampling. Participants were purposively selected according to the research objectives (P. Lewis et al., 2007).

In purposive sampling, the researcher needs to clarify the criteria for inclusion and exclusion, so that samples are selected systematically and are relevant to the research question (Bryman, 2016). The initial criteria for the sample selection were set as follows:

1. High CSR and sustainability evaluation and ranking according to several major indices (e.g., The Dow Jones Sustainability Japan 40, Nikkei NICES ranking, Tokyo Keizai CSR ranking);
2. Inclusion and participation in wellbeing-related initiatives (e.g., METI Diversity Management 100, METI & Tokyo Stock Exchange “Health and Productivity Management Selection 2016”, Nikkei BP “Health and Productivity Management Forum”); and
3. More than 5,000 employees, with their company headquarters in Japan (categorised as ‘large firms’ by Japanese government statistics).

Selecting large Japanese firms ranked highly in CSR and sustainability practices ensured that companies were likely to have embraced social responsibility concepts and have relatively sophisticated CSR strategies, and that participants were knowledgeable in the practice of CSR (Bondy et al., 2012).

Some of the indices are explained below.

Dow Jones Sustainability Japan 40

The Dow Jones Sustainability Japan 40 Index tracks the performance of the largest companies in Japan that are included in the Dow Jones Sustainability Asia Pacific Index.

Nikkei NICES

Nikkei uses its questionnaire survey results and disclosed financial data to evaluate “good companies” from five perspectives, four perspectives of stakeholders (investor, consumers and business partners, employees, and society) and the point of view of “future potential”.

Toyo Keizai CSR Ranking

The Toyo Keizai Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Survey 2015 sent a questionnaire to all listed Japanese companies and major unlisted companies and evaluated the results according to four themes: human resource management, environment, corporate governance and society.

These databases and rankings were reviewed with the above criteria to compile an initial list of Japanese companies. The companies with less than 5,000 employees were removed from the list. This resulted in an initial pool of 120 companies, which were then contacted via email by the researcher.

In addition to the companies, based on the review of the literature and non-technical literature such as corporate websites and media, the researcher identified 20 potential stakeholders and informants, who were also contacted by email.

3.4.2.1 Gaining access

Relevant contact information of the sample companies was gathered from their websites and an email or phone call was made, requesting to interview the managers responsible for CSR and human sustainability initiatives. Following the ethics procedure (as described in

Section 3.8), a formal email was then sent with an official invitation and information sheet to these companies. Communication continued until managers accepted or declined the invitation.

This process resulted in an initially confirmed list of 21 companies. A snowballing technique was also used, where the researcher asked participants to introduce other organisations they might recommend given the objectives and questions of this study. This resulted in another ten companies, totalling 31 companies. Among them, 29 companies agreed to participate in face-to-face interviews, while two companies agreed to participate in the study through email exchanges. The same process also resulted in 6 stakeholders and 4 informants (see Appendix 1 for the list of all participants).

The researcher considered interviewing individual employees, with the aim to reflect the perspectives of internal stakeholders (A. Crane & Glozer, 2016). However, given the employee-community view of Japanese companies, it is difficult to gain permission to interview individual employees for perspectives different from their managers (Dore, 1993; Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009). Considering the difficulty and time constraints, the researcher accessed and interviewed external stakeholders, including the representatives of a national trade union, industry labour union, and civil organisation, who are considered to represent employees' voices at the societal level (Kato & Kodama, 2017).

3.4.2.2 Interview procedure

Face-to-face interviews were preferred because they allow the researcher to interact with interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and obtain non-verbal clues such as body language

and facial expressions (Seidman, 2013). Most of the companies in the study have head offices in Tokyo or other major cities in Japan. However, considering the feasibility of time and costs, when face-to-face interviews were difficult, Skype or phone interviews were a secondary choice.

The participants were provided with an information sheet and introduced to the nature of the research and interview schedule via emails. The participants were advised that each interview lasts approximately one hour, and they were advised that other managers within the company were also invited if they thought they were relevant to the topics being discussed. This could include executives in charge of CSR or managers responsible for equal opportunity, diversity management and other ‘workstyle’ initiatives. Their questions and doubts were cleared up during the initial email exchange.

Before the interview, all publicly available documents related to their corporate, sustainability, or CSR strategies and activities were read, including company reports, websites, codes of conduct and other relevant policies. The consent sheet provided details of their rights as a participant and were returned with the signatures of the participants. During the interviews, the researcher asked questions following the interview guide (Appendix 4). Upon hearing the first responses from interviewees, the researcher used prompts to steer the conversation. During the conversation, the researcher often asked ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, particularly when the interviewees discussed the dilemmas and difficulties they face in promoting initiatives. These questions lead to deeper conversations about underlying issues, which were reported in detail in Chapters 4 and 5. For instance, when one manager explained their decades-old equal opportunity initiatives, the researcher questioned why there have only been limited results, which led to the section on the issue

of lack of progress in equal opportunity outcomes (Section 4.3.1.3). In this way, the researcher tried to construct meaning from the conversation, as part of the ‘construction’ process of social reality together with participants (Schwandt, 1994). At the end of the interview, participants were invited to provide names of other appropriate participants and key stakeholders and informants outside their companies who might be interested in this study.

3.4.3 Transcription

According to Gibson and Brown (2009), transcription represents and guides the data, as well as giving it an analytic focus. In an interview study, data must be recorded and transcribed fully and accurately to enable accurate recall and analysis (Dey, 1993).

Accordingly, all interviews were digitally recorded with prior permission from participants, and notes were taken during the interview.

The researcher used ‘Express Scribe’ software, audio player software for the PC to assist with transcribing. It helped to manage audio playback with keyboard shortcuts as well as control the speed while transcribing. When requested by participants, the transcripts were then sent back to participants for verification, as agreed at the time of interview. The transcripts were then processed for systematic data analysis, as discussed in the following section.

In the data collection phase, to collect rich data, participants’ native language was used to interview them. This has resulted in data in Japanese, except for one interview with a stakeholder whose first language was not Japanese. In this case, English was used. As a

result, once the transcription was completed, the transcripts were translated into English for further analysis and writing.

In the process of translation, it was necessary to make sure that the Japanese words were translated into the English words with the nearest meaning. In order to minimise the possibility of any discrepancy, two professional Japanese-English translators familiar with the field (native English speakers living in Japan) were employed to translate the interview guide and transcription. The researcher provided the terms list relevant to this study both in English and Japanese, which was compiled during the process of literature search and review. The translators were asked to strictly follow the terms list in order to ensure consistency.

3.4.4 Data Analysis

According to Gibson and Brown (2009), qualitative data analysis is about examining the relationship between the data and the research problem. Similarly, Marshall and Rossman (2016) describe qualitative data analysis as “a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes” (p. 154). It deals with “breaking data down into bits and then beating the bits together” (Dey, 1993, p. 31) and identifying meaning, features, and relationships by systematic procedures (Wolcott, 1994).

In qualitative data analysis, different formal approaches can be employed depending on the data gathering techniques. Thematic analysis was used as it is regarded as a foundation method in qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), particularly for interview research (Meier, Boivin, & Meier, 2008). It involves three steps of “identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

The main strength of thematic analysis is that it enables the use of a broad range of information in a systematic manner, which then increases accuracy in understanding and interpreting observations about situations (Boyatzis, 1998). This strength fits well with the approach of this study to analyse wide-ranging information to develop themes over various companies and stakeholders. The thematic analysis allows for flexibility to identify, analyse, and compare multiple perspectives on the relatively unknown interface between business and human sustainability. Furthermore, the thematic analysis provides flexibility for the researcher in communicating interpretations to others (Boyatzis, 1998). Thus, using interview methods and thematic analysis, the researcher examined interview conversations across organisations line by line from the transcripts to form a series of themes (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008).

To assist the thematic analysis, this study adopted some of the systematic processes known as grounded analysis. This type of analysis is an approach to data analysis based on new empirical data, consisting of such processes as iterative rounds of coding, recording memos and diagrams, and constant comparison (Bryman, 2016; Pozzebon, Petrini, de Mello, & Garreau, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). These processes allow the researcher to be sensitive to emerging relationships in the data analysis process; it requires the researcher to revisit and re-evaluate the data, break the habit of perceptions, and see it in light of as many cases and relationships as possible (Pozzebon et al., 2011; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). The following sections elaborate each process of analysis in detail.

3.4.4.1 Coding

Coding is the central part of thematic analysis. According to Saldana (2016), coding is not just reducing or labelling data; it is about generating meaningful topics out of raw data.

Familiar concepts used in coding are code, category, and theme. ‘Code’ is a word or short phrase that symbolically allocates a summative and salient attribute to a portion of data.

‘Category’ is a list of codes that are related. ‘Theme’ is a device to represent commonalities in data which represent similar codes and categories (Gibson & Brown, 2009; Saldana, 2016).

This coding process can be systematised using grounded analysis. The coding process can be divided into three steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Open coding is a stage of breaking data apart and delineating concepts and categories to stand for blocks of raw data while qualifying the characteristics and variations regarding the concepts. Axial coding then crosscuts or relates concepts and categories to each other, followed by selective coding, in which central phenomena among categories are developed as a coherent framework. Accordingly, the researcher followed these three steps in the coding processes. In the first step of open coding, the researcher read the transcripts carefully line by line, identifying the main ideas in the text. This resulted in over 300 codes (e.g. childcare leave, elderly care leave, remote work). In the second stage of axial coding, the researcher reviewed all the codes in relation to the research questions, identifying their commonalities and relationships. During this process, similar codes were merged and renamed into 103 categories (e.g., childcare, elderly care, flexible working). In the third step of selective coding, the researcher reviewed all the categories again in relation to the research questions, identifying the relationships and structures among them. This process

resulted in 9 major themes (e.g., human sustainability initiatives and CSR) and 24 sub-themes (e.g., flexibility at work, work and life) with various categories and codes.

These themes and sub-themes were then defined and elaborated in the findings and discussion chapters. For instance, the first major theme (in Chapter 4), ‘needs of the workforce’, has two sub-themes, which evolved from various categories and codes.

Similarly, the second major theme, ‘human sustainability initiatives and CSR’, has four sub-themes, which also evolved from various categories and codes. The remaining major themes and sub-themes are displayed in the node trees in each findings chapter.

Furthermore, these themes were further integrated into the conceptual framework presented in the discussion chapter.

3.4.4.2 Memos and diagrams

An important activity during coding is memoing (Pandit, 1996). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), a researcher cannot keep track of all the generative thoughts and questions that evolve from the analytical process without a written record of analysis: a system of memoing. Accordingly, during the process of coding described above, the researcher generated a large volume of memos regarding the texts, codes, categories, and themes, as well as their relationships to the research questions and theoretical framework. These memos were stored using annotation functions of the NVivo software, linked to the original texts (Appendix 5). Some examples of memos include: “This comment indicates a sense of unfairness among male and female employees”; “Does this practice reinforce gender/family role?” These memos were reviewed many times to generate further ideas and comments to be used in the analysis. For instance, the researcher generated 100 comments regarding the

category of ‘diversity’ and 364 comments regarding the category of ‘norms’, which were then reviewed and used in the writing of the findings and discussion chapters.

Diagramming, a visual device that depicts the relationship between analytic concepts, is also another tool to be utilised in this analysis process. Accordingly, the researcher drew diagrams extensively during the process of coding. For instance, the researcher drew 10 different diagrams to represent the relationships of themes and sub-themes in relation to the first research question. These figures were reviewed, revised, and merged many times during the different steps of coding. In the writing phase, these diagrams were integrated into figures described in the findings and discussion chapters.

3.4.4.3 Constant comparison

Furthermore, the coding steps proceeded through constant comparison, where the data were re-examined continuously and re-coded (Pozzebon et al., 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this process, throughout the series of coding steps, the data were constantly compared with the codes, categories, and themes that had been flagged for similarities and differences. To do so, questions needed to be constantly asked, such as what, where, how, when, how much, etc. with regard to the data (Pandit, 1996). Asking such questions allowed the researcher to retain the curiosity and capacity to contextualise the answers that emerge (Pozzebon et al., 2011). This process of iteratively comparing the data and codes, through a series of coding steps, resulted in constantly re-naming the codes and categories, which led to the final themes and sub-themes presented in the findings and discussion chapters.

Another tool used in the process of analysis is what Strauss and Corbin (1998) called a paradigm. It is a tool to help the researcher identify contextual factors and link them to processes. The paradigm, consisting of conditions, interactions and consequences, allows the researcher to determine the sets of conditions that give rise to circumstances to which individuals respond to by interactions, with specific consequences. For instance, during the coding process, the researcher always asked questions such as: what are the problems or situations as defined by participants?; what are the structural conditions that gave rise to these situations?; how are the companies or participants responding to these situations?; what is the consequence of one set of interactions, which plays into the next sequence of interactions? Asking these questions prompted the researcher to consider the conditions, initiatives, and consequences described in the findings and discussion chapters.

These iterative processes of coding, recording memos and diagrams, and constant comparison allowed the researcher to systematically reach and explain a conceptual framework grounded in data. According to Dubois and Gadde (2002), in studies based on abductive reasoning, the original framework is successively modified, as a result of empirical findings and new insights gained during the research process. This approach can be thought of as a fruitful cross-fertilisation where new combinations are developed through a mixture of old models and new concepts derived from encounters with the new reality.

3.4.4.4 NVivo programme

There is increasing use of programs known as computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) in qualitative analysis. This study used CAQDAS for analysing data.

There are fundamental advantages in using CAQDAS for data management: managing a large volume of data, fast and flexible coding, storage, retrieval, data linking, memoing, data analysis and theory building (Silverman, 2006). However, there are also limitations. It is understood that these programmes cannot analyse data by themselves (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A researcher could rely on “auto coding” tools without knowing the data and its patterns (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). With premature use of CAQDAS, the qualitative analysis could be diverted to “quick and dirty” analysis with a premature theoretical conclusion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 8).

Furthermore, Bazeley and Jackson (2013) criticise the potential disconnection between the researcher and the data which may arise from a reliance on automated analysis. The disconnection may limit the process of learning about the research (Fielding & Lee, 1991). One example is the case where repetitive use of such tools makes coding a standardised process and leaves less opportunity for the emergence of new codes. The researcher needs to be aware of these limitations and to be responsible for understanding data, applying codes and categories, and linking and analysing them (Silverman, 2006). An appropriate program needs to be selected based on the analysis of the research needs, approach, and nature of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The researcher considered these factors in the following manner. First, the research involved textual data from 31 interviews as well as 10 interviews with major stakeholders and informants, and these data needed to be managed for flexible, speedy and efficient coding and retrieval. Second, in addition to basic coding and retrieval, effective memoing and annotation was required for vigorous data analysis. Third, the exploratory-abductive

nature of the study required the researcher to link the literature with the empirical data (Silverman, 1985).

Considering these factors, NVivo 11 was selected as the preferred choice for this research. NVivo allows flexibility in adjusting, merging, moving and changing codes and sub-codes (Gibbs, 2002). It also reduces analysis time and allows flexibility, revision, easy retrieval and storage for the future (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). NVivo also allows memos and annotations, which is crucial in qualitative analysis. With the help of these tools, the data can be analysed critically and linked to developing a conceptual framework from raw codes.

With these considerations, the researcher extensively used the NVivo programme for storing and analysing data. The researcher conducted the initial open coding and generated memos, without using ‘auto coding’ functions. Once the open coding was completed, ‘auto coding’ was used only to organise the data, such as according to interview questions (e.g., “what initiatives does your company have to respond to the expectations?”) or common words (e.g., regulations). This process helped the researcher to avoid ‘quick and dirty’ analysis.

3.5 Theoretical Framework

This section presents the theoretical framework used to guide this study. The theoretical perspective in a study reflects the researcher’s theoretical orientation and plays a crucial role as the filter for choosing and interpreting the data (Kilbourn, 2006). First, this study explores the business-human sustainability interface by applying institutional theory to the ‘workstyle’. Second, this study employs stakeholder theory to explore how companies

manage stakeholder demands. Finally, this study uses organisational strategy theory to explore how companies integrate initiatives into their business strategy. The following sections elaborate on each theory in detail.

3.5.1 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory has a strong foundation in politics (goal attainment) and sociology (social integration) (Garriga & Melé, 2004). Institutional theory allows the exploration of forces, including those of managers, shareholders, and other key stakeholders, that govern the institution within their local context (Matten & Moon, 2008). It can then offer explanations as to why certain practices are chosen without an obvious economic benefit (Glover, Champion, Daniels, & Dainty, 2014).

According to institutional theory, institutions mean not only the formal but also informal rules, norms, and incentives. Huntington (1969, p. 12) described institutions as “stable, valued, recurring patterns of behaviour”, defined by their adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence. Thus, “institutions enable predictable and patterned interactions that are stable, constrain individual behaviour, and are associated with shared values and meanings” (Matten & Moon, 2008, p. 406). In the context of this study, the primary concern is how human sustainability initiatives might become legitimate, and therefore be perceived as “institutions” within the Japanese business context.

The process of practices becoming legitimate within a social context is called institutionalisation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Tolbert & Zucker, 1999). Three types of social pressures have been identified as contributing to institutionalisation: coercive, mimetic, and normative (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Coercive pressures are authoritative

influences, coming from entities upon which the organisations are dependent. Weaker or stronger labour regulations and compliance requirements could be considered as an example of changing coercive pressures. Strong pressure from primary business clients can also be interpreted as coercive.

Mimetic pressures can be considered demands to imitate other organisations that are deemed legitimate. Mimetic behaviour makes sense for organisations since it requires little expense, especially in the face of uncertainty. Companies may feel pressured to imitate human sustainability initiatives of other firms when successful or unsuccessful practices are frequently reported in the media. Normative pressures come from educational and professional entities through which norms and behaviours are accepted as legitimate and transferred to individuals. For instance, universities, business schools, or ISO (International Organization for Standardization) standards might exert changing normative pressures.

An alternative classification of institutional forces is regulative, cognitive, and normative forces (Scott, 2014). Regulative forces are the formal rules and regulations, cognitive forces are the collective beliefs about the social world, and normative forces are the collective norms on appropriate behaviour, including informal societal expectations of how things should be done. It is suggested that these forces coexist and tend to reinforce each other (Boxenbaum, 2006; Dacin, 1997).

During the institutionalisation, a set of shared meanings is established at the core of the organisation or organisational field (Friedland & Alford, 1991). An organisational field refers to the primary social environment for a company such as an industry, collection of

companies, or a nation. Within this field, participants share a common system of meaning and interact more frequently with each other than with actors outside the field (Scott, 2014).

Such common meaning systems are also called institutional logic, manifesting a shared understanding of the goals to be pursued and how they should be pursued (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Thornton and Ocasio (2008, p. 804) defined institutional logic as:

[...] the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individual[s] produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality.

Such institutional logics may develop at different levels, such as organisations, industries, inter-organisational networks and other communities (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008).

Institutional logic offers “a template for organizing” within a given institutional context (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009, p. 68), and affects organisational decision making by focusing attention (Thornton, 2004). Thus, once established, institutions can shape the identity of social actors for a long time (Jackson, 2010).

Friedland and Alford (1991) proposed that the core institutions of modern society are markets, states (national government), families, democracies and religions, each of which has its distinguished institutional logic that enables and constrains individual and organisational behaviour. Following this perspective, Thornton (2004) later conducted a review of empirical studies and identified six major institutions: markets, states, families, religions, professions and corporations.

It is important to note that, although persistent once established, these institutional logics or institutions themselves are not pre-determined; over time, they are subject to change. One

source of change is the change of institutional forces as they interplay with each other (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Another source of change is the existence of actors who challenge the institution (Battilana et al., 2009). These actors are often called institutional entrepreneurs, who leverage resources to transform existing institutions or create new ones. In this process of institutional change, while incumbents seek to maintain the logics and structures, challengers work to realign them (e.g., Beckert, 1999; Knight, 1992; D. L. Levy, 2008). Consequently, it is possible to conceptualise constant change in the dynamic processes of dis-institutionalisation and re-institutionalisation (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Thus, comparing institutional logics of different organisational fields can illustrate differences and changes in the shared meanings underpinning relevant practices.

Scholars have called for an application of institutional theory to an organisational context. For instance, DiMaggio and Powell (1991, p. 188) stated that:

Our contribution to the study of organisations will be greatly enriched if we are able to discern the sources of institutional patterns, their subsequent elaboration and potency... and the kinds of setting where they operate with the greatest resonance.

In particular, Bondy et al. (2012) call for empirical research linking CSR and institutional theory to explore the forms of institutionalisation within particular organisational contexts. Institutional theory has been extensively employed to explore environmental management in organisations (e.g., Bansal, 2005; Christmann, 2004; Hoffman, 1999). In the Japanese business context, there are mounting pressures for businesses to reform their workstyle as their social responsibility, while there are also resilient social patterns supporting the

traditional workstyle. In summary, institutional theory was employed in this study because it allowed an examination of changing pressures and logics, as well as how agents and actors are maintaining and creating institutions.

3.5.2 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory has a strong foundation in ethics (Garriga & Melé, 2004) and has been well researched and practised in the field of management. In his seminal work *Strategic Management: a Stakeholder Approach*, Freeman (1984) contended that managers bear a fiduciary relationship to stakeholders. A stakeholder is defined as “any group or individual who can affect or be affected by the achievement of a corporation’s purpose” (Freeman, Harrison, & Wicks, 2007). They identified two types of stakeholders. Primary stakeholders typically include shareholders/financiers, customers, employees, suppliers and the local community. The secondary stakeholders include the government, media, competitors, NGOs/consumer advocacy groups and special interest groups.

To establish the legitimacy of other stakeholders' interests, Donaldson and Preston (1995) further argued as follows:

- (1) Stakeholders are people or groups with legitimate interests in procedural and substantive aspects of corporate activity (whether or not the corporation has any interest in the stakeholders); and
- (2) The interest of stakeholders is of intrinsic value (each merits consideration for its own sake, regardless of the ability to further the interests of other groups, such as the shareholders).

A growing acceptance of stakeholder theory gave rise to the practice of stakeholder management (Andriof & Waddock, 2002; Mainardes, Alves, & Raposo, 2011), in which organisations recognise, analyse and examine the characteristics of their stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Rowley, 1997). Stakeholder management involves 1) identification of stakeholders, 2) interpreting their needs and interests, and 3) constructing relationships structured around organisations' objectives (Mainardes et al., 2011).

According to Donaldson and Preston (1995), stakeholder management is shaped by three different approaches: normative, instrumental, and descriptive. The present study primarily follows a descriptive approach, which views a company as “a constellation of co-operative and competitive interests possessing intrinsic value” (p. 66). This is also consistent with the managerial approach, which is more pragmatic than the normative approach and focuses on the practical relations between the company and its stakeholders (Fassin, 2009).

However, the descriptive approach does not exclude ethical or instrumental views. The literature suggests that there are competing reasons for promoting human sustainability initiatives, which are ethical (e.g., both Western and Japanese work ethics and orientations toward responsibilities) and instrumental (e.g., benefits of holding onto/making changes to long work hours). Therefore, both normative and instrumental views will be referred to during the analysis. It is this rich interplay of normative and instrumental views that scholars emphasised in their calling for further research to develop stakeholder theory (Berman & Johnson-Cramer; Weaver & Trevino, 1994). This is also in line with the understanding that descriptive, instrumental, and normative views are mutually supportive, as indicated by Donaldson and Preston (1995).

In summary, descriptive/managerial stakeholder theory, in conjunction with a normative and instrumental perspective, was employed in this study to investigate the character of the stakeholders, their demands, and the on-going relations between companies and stakeholders. This was followed by an analysis of different challenges for stakeholder management.

3.5.3 Organisational Strategy Theory

Organisational strategy theory has a strong foundation in economics (adaptation to the environment) (Garriga & Melé, 2004). The concept of ‘fit’ has been a central theme in strategy literature (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1986; Miller, 1996; Venkatraman & Camillus, 1984). The idea is that the degree of fit with external environments and with internal processes will ultimately determine the effectiveness of the strategy and practices (Yuan et al., 2011).

In organisation theory, an organisation is seen as a system of interconnected practices. From this perspective, integration is defined as “the process of achieving unity of effort among the various subsystems in the accomplishment of the organization’s task” (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, p. 4). In line with this view, some scholars categorise practices as either ‘core’ or ‘peripheral’ (Hannan, Burton, & Baron, 1996; Hannan & Freeman, 1984; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994; Siggelkow, 2002). Conceptually, core practices are central to the organisation’s survival and are considered to include elements such as stated goals, forms of authority, core technologies and marketing strategy (Hannan & Freeman, 1984).

Core practices shape the organisational identity and have a significant influence on resource allocation and other non-core practices. Core practices are susceptible to inertial forces and

thus are more resistant to change. Changes in core practices are often slow and incremental, except in the case of a crisis with extreme external and internal pressures (e.g., a consumer boycott or financial crisis). These characteristics are contrasted with peripheral practices, which are arrangements undertaken to align with core practices or the environment. Being non-core, they are easier to change (Yuan et al., 2011). In line with these views, N. C. Smith and Lenssen (2009) observed that many companies have dealt with CSR as a ‘peripheral’ issue.

According to ‘fit’ and ‘core-periphery’ models, interactions among core and peripheral practices may lead to internal and external fit or their opposite, enhancing or reducing business performance (Siggelkow, 2001). While some practices reinforce each other leading to high coherence and internal consistency, others are incoherent and inconsistent, resulting in a decline of organisational performance in the long run (Yuan et al., 2011).

Globally, there has been a sharp increase in both societal stakeholder demands for CSR initiatives and managerial requirements that such initiatives should improve business performance (Porter & Kramer, 2006; Yuan et al., 2011). Accordingly, there has been an extensive discussion on strategic CSR or the business case for CSR (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Porter & Kramer, 2002, 2006, 2011). However, it is commonly held that there is no one-size-fits-all business case since the effectiveness and returns of CSR initiatives are contingent upon various factors (Rowley & Berman, 2000; Ullmann, 1985). Furthermore, Hahn et al. (2018) warn of the potential opportunism of business case logic, which conceptualises corporate sustainability at the organisational level (not at the societal level).

Porter and Kramer (2006) observed fragmentation in CSR initiatives and disconnection between CSR and core business strategy. They argue that firms should fully integrate CSR initiatives into regular business routines to enhance business performance; however, there has been limited research on how such integration should proceed (Yuan et al., 2011).

Scholars have attempted to fill this gap by applying the concept of ‘consistency’ (Basu & Palazzo, 2008) and ‘fit’ between core and peripheral practices (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Yuan et al., 2011). Yuan et al. (2011) observed that some CSR routines currently practised by firms are peripheral elements intentionally separated from core business routines. They point out that, due to their mismatch internally and externally, some new CSR initiatives may look good on the surface but may not be effective in substance. In the context of this study, this lack of fit could be examined as one barrier that makes the progress of human sustainability initiatives harder than expected and small in scale (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; North, 2010).

In summary, this study employed the ‘core-periphery’ perspective to investigate how companies improve ‘consistency/fit’ internally and externally, solving mismatch strategically, and responding to market pressure to demonstrate the ‘business case’ for CSR. Here, applying this perspective, companies need to develop human sustainability initiatives as stable patterns of initiative with consistency/fit. Specifically, to contribute to business and social performance (Jamali, Zanhour, & Keshishian, 2009; Yuan et al., 2011), companies need to improve the initiatives’ consistency/fit with external pressures, CSR strategies, and core business practices.

3.5.4 Integrated Theoretical Framework

As discussed, in this study, three theories were employed in parallel to investigate the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. This combination was intended to produce three potential benefits regarding contribution to theory.

First, this combination brings together the strengths of stakeholder theory and institutional theory. A frequently noted shortcoming of stakeholder theory is that it treats the environment as static. In reality, the company and its stakeholder groups exist in dynamic processes (Campbell, 2007); however, there is no provision for understanding how to manage this dynamism and change (Key, 1999). Accordingly, dynamism needs to be introduced into the model of the external environment (Mainardes et al., 2011). In this study, institutional theory can help us identify the institutional dynamics, supplementing our description of stakeholder relationships.

Second, this combination brings together the strengths of stakeholder theory and organisational strategy theory. Balancing conflicting stakeholder interests and demands poses a challenge in reality; how to reach a balance and reconcile the trade-off is not clear (Jensen, 2001; Lépineux, 2005; Sternberg, 1997). In response to this challenge, organisational strategy theory is used to examine the mismatch that might arise internally and externally in a dynamic environment. This will also help complement stakeholder theory in understanding how to manage dynamism and change.

Third, this combination brings the strengths of institutional theory and organisational strategy theory. Institutional theory can also help complement organisational strategy theory. This is because, as Dacin (1997) pointed out, the traditional boundary for the

economic argument does not take into account the changing institutional environment, such as historical, cultural and normative forces (Granovetter, 1985).

Thus, employing this integrated theoretical perspective, this study attempts to describe the dynamic relationship between the business and stakeholders/actors, and explore how companies develop human sustainability initiatives to ultimately contribute to economic and social performance. This is in line with the view that sustainability is not just about a responsibility to society but also a source of value creation for both the company and for society (Baumgartner, 2014; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001).

This perspective is also in line with the argument that scholars should not neglect how prevailing institutions support ‘corporate irresponsibility’ (Brammer et al., 2012; Campbell, 2007). This is because a lack of human sustainability indicates that companies have opportunities to externalise ‘human costs’ in their decision making, and thus a compelling business case remains for ‘not’ promoting human sustainability. This argument is also in line with the view that companies need to work with governments, NGOs, and other social actors to incentivise efforts when the market fails to provide adequate solutions, as in dealing with emissions and wastes (Chandler, 2016).

To explore how companies integrate human sustainability into their CSR strategies, three themes involving integration are proposed below to provide a focus to this inquiry.

Although they have different foci, the three perspectives help us identify and examine three common themes: ‘pressures’, ‘initiatives’ and ‘conflicts or consistency/fit’ (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 *Comparing and integrating three perspectives*

	Institutional theory	Stakeholder theory	Organisational strategy theory
Main concept	Institution	Stakeholder	Fit
Pressures	Pressures	Demands	Business Case
Initiatives	Action	Stakeholder management	Strategy/implementation
Conflicts or consistency/fit	Competing logics	Trade-off	Consistency/fit

3.5.4.1 Pressures

As shown in Table 3.1, in the row labelled ‘pressures’, institutional theory in column 1 offers the viewpoints of who the actors are (e.g., incumbents and challengers) and what pressures they exert (e.g., coercive, mimetic, and normative) (Matten & Moon, 2008). Stakeholder theory prompts us to identify and describe the stakeholders (e.g., different categories of the workforce, unions, industry associations, shareholders) and their demands (i.e., all kinds of requests) (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). In the case of organisational strategy theory in column 3, the primary concerns are pressures from the market (e.g., product, financial, labour market) for a ‘business case’ (e.g., marketing/sales, finance, talent attraction and retention) (Porter & Kramer, 2006). These factors have different foci, but can be analysed as part of ‘pressures’ for integration.

3.5.4.2 Initiatives

In the row labelled ‘initiatives’, institutional theory prompts us to identify agents (e.g., corporate managers, business association representatives, union leaders, or regulators) and their initiatives (e.g., to create, maintain and disrupt institutions) (Battilana et al., 2009). In stakeholder theory, management (e.g., the company) takes initiatives (e.g., policy formation, programmes, engagement) with stakeholders (e.g., certain groups of the workforce, unions, industry groups) (Mainardes et al., 2011). In organisational strategy,

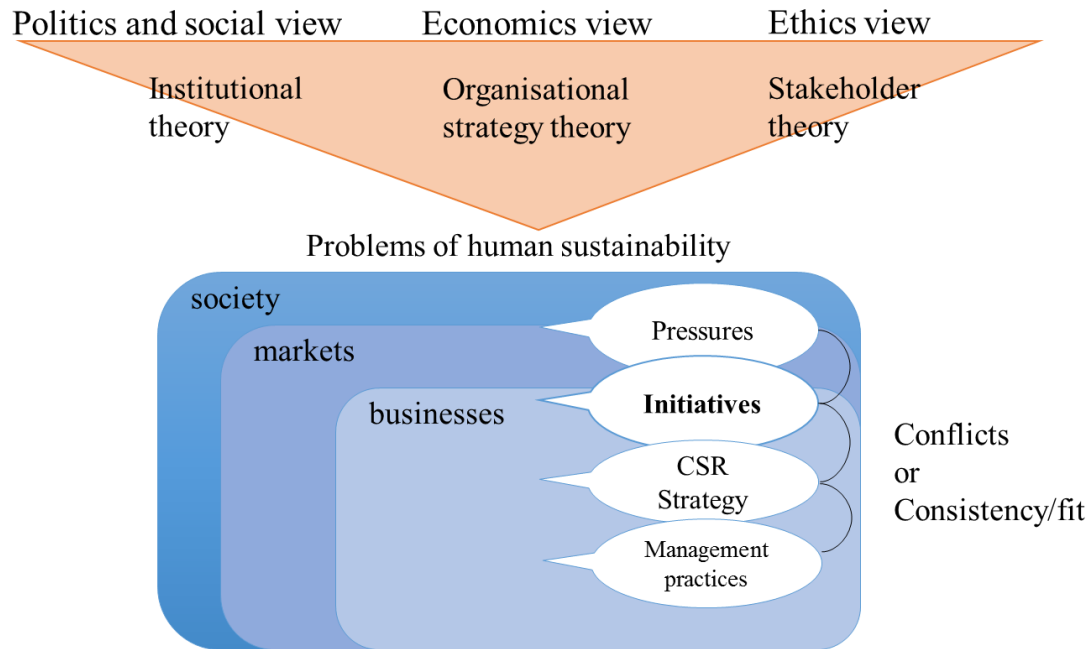
management (e.g., the company) develops strategy and carries out implementation (e.g., values, CSR strategy, KPI) (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010). These factors, although with different foci, can be analysed as part of ‘initiatives’ for integration.

3.5.4.3 Conflicts or consistency/fit

In the row labelled ‘conflicts or consistency/fit’, institutional theory emphasises how resilience/competing logics can constrain institutional change (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Stakeholder theory offers to balance demands as a solution but without a practical process to reconcile conflicting demands and trade-offs (Berman & Johnson-Cramer, 2016). Organisational strategy theory prompts us to assess the inconsistency/mismatch and align them to enhance effectiveness (Yuan et al., 2011). Again, although with different foci, these factors can be analysed as part of ‘conflicts or consistency/fit’ for integration. From the discussion above, each theme for integration is considered to contribute to the better understanding of the interface between business and human sustainability.

3.5.4.4 Synthesis of themes

As discussed, human sustainability has been relatively underexplored, and the existing theoretical framework is limited. Notably in Japan, while there are mounting pressures, there is only limited empirical research on how companies address and resolve the human sustainability issues in their CSR strategies. This study draws on institutional theory, stakeholder theory, and organisational strategy theory as the core theoretical orientations to fill this gap. Accordingly, a theoretical framework has been developed, as shown in Figure 3.1.



(Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Bondy, Moon, & Matten, 2012; Garriga & Melé, 2004; Freeman, 1984; Yuan et al., 2011)

Figure 3.1 Theoretical framework

Figure 3.1 illustrates the proposed interface between the business and human sustainability. According to institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), a business does not exist in a vacuum. It is embedded in society, as well as in the market in the market economy.

Businesses are under constant pressures from markets, societal actors, and stakeholders. At the same time, the markets themselves are embedded in human societies (Brammer et al., 2012). This generates the first theme of ‘pressures’ within society and the market.

In response to these external pressures, businesses may respond with initiatives. This gives rise to the second theme of ‘initiatives’ within the field of business. At the corporate level, there are various organisational initiatives under management topics such as reducing long work hours, work-life balance, equal opportunity and career advancement, respect for the individual, diversity management, and health and productivity management (Eweje &

Sakaki, 2015). However, progress is reported to be limited (with some exceptions) in comparison to companies in other OECD countries, potentially due to factors such as market competition, inadequate regulations, and workforce norms and customs (Ono, 2018). This study examines how corporate initiatives align with the pressures as well as existing management practices. Externally, these initiatives may align with specific pressures, but not with others, especially when pressures are not consistent. Internally, these initiatives may align with some aspects of (but not with other items of) CSR strategy as well as conventional core business practices. This gives rise to the third theme of ‘conflicts or consistency/fit’.

Based on the empirical data and conceptual framework, this model will be extended, or a new model will be developed in the discussion chapter. In the following sub-sections, each component is discussed in detail in its respective theory. This study uses this analytical framework in seeking to contribute to the literature on human sustainability and CSR by examining the interface between businesses and societal human sustainability issues.

The theoretical framework is used as a lens for subsequent analysis to answer the three research questions in this study. The following section discusses and outlines the three perspectives employed to explore the interface between business and human sustainability.

3.6 Research Quality

In the qualitative research process, it is necessary to specify terms and ways of establishing and assessing the research quality that provides an alternative to reliability and validity

(Bryman, 2016). Reliability refers to consistency in the processes of research: in other words, they can be repeated with the same results (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). In qualitative studies, however, consistency in the sense of replicability or generalisability is questionable due to the contextual and interpersonal nature of the research inquiry (Creswell, 2012). This study follows the alternative proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as trustworthiness, which is made up of four criteria: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*.

In a quantitative study, validity refers to an accurate representation of data, as well as generalisability and transferability of results to another context (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that, in a qualitative study, validity should be considered regarding 1) credibility and 2) transferability. Credibility refers to internal validity, which translates into enhancing acceptability to others. Several procedures were used in this study to do this. First, this study gathered information from three sources: corporate managers, key stakeholders, and informants. Interviews were conducted with corporate managers, while at the same time, through literature review and snowball sampling, key stakeholders and informants were identified and interviewed. The interview questions were the same but simplified with some adjustments to reflect the different viewpoints. The data were then checked for consistency and discrepancy, along with secondary data such as corporate as well as government reports and websites. This is called data triangulation (Patton, 2002).

The second criterion of trustworthiness is transferability, which concerns whether the findings can be applied to other contexts or in the same context at a different time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In developing a conceptual framework, the researcher discussed the extent to which the new conceptual framework can be applied in other contexts. Furthermore, this

study achieved what Geertz (1973) called ‘thick description’, in which rich accounts of details provide readers with a base for making judgements about the possible transferability to another context.

The third criterion is 3) dependability, which parallels reliability: the idea is to keep complete records throughout the research process in an accessible manner. This was done in a systematic recording of all the writing during the literature review, data collection, memoing, diagrams, and drafts for the final thesis. This criterion is discussed with 4) confirmability, which parallels the objectivity of the research.

In this study, dependability and confirmability are enhanced by appropriate sampling, an effective interview environment, and sufficient interpretation and display (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Concerning sampling, the research employed purposive sampling, in which interviewees who can best discuss which research problems were selected. The interview setting was organised in consultation with participants. The display was managed using NVivo, where the researcher attached raw data to the given codes and themes.

In the interview process, care was taken to enhance dependability and confirmability through pre-testing the interview, training the interviewer, more fixed-choice questions, effective digital recording of the interview, accurate transcribing and the presentation of long extracts of raw data (Silverman, 2006). In this study, the researcher prepared the interview guide with three themes and their corresponding questions. The interview schedule was first checked for ambiguity, relevance, and comprehensibility with another PhD student who is familiar with this topic, then the wording of questions was edited accordingly. For instance, the original questions using the theoretical concepts, such as

‘trade-offs’ and ‘fit with strategy’, were edited using more general words used in the business context, such as ‘difficulties’ and ‘consistency’. All the interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed using Express Scribe software. When requested by participants, transcripts were sent to participants for verification and modified accordingly.

3.7 Ethics

Ethical issues are critical for social research. Ethics must be considered before data collection, as required by the university. The ethical status of this research was discussed with supervisors to review risk factors based on the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluation Involving Human Participants.

This study was evaluated by peer review as low risk. Ethical issues related to this study are discussed below. Regarding informed consent, participants were informed about the nature and aims of the research beforehand. Participants’ rights were clearly mentioned on the consent sheet, such as freedom to withdraw from the research, the right to ask questions or express doubts, the right to allow or disallow use of a digital recorder and the right to be informed about publication details. A detailed information sheet and consent sheet were provided to the participants if they expressed willingness at the time of the initial contact. They then had sufficient time to consider and ask questions before their interview.

During the interviews, some participants expressed personal opinions different from corporate statements, on the condition that their comments need to be “off the record”. These comments were not included in the report to protect the sources. As for protection of confidentiality, the identity of participants and organisations sampled in the study were securely stored so that only the researcher had access to the relevant file. All transcripts,

tapes, field notes and analysed data were stored under fictitious names to ensure the anonymity of participants and their organisations and will be destroyed five years after data collection.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter laid out the philosophical-methodological stance of the study. The objective of this study is to expand our understanding of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. This chapter outlined philosophical approaches and established that the research fits within social constructionism/interpretivism paradigm. The chapter discussed research approaches and justified the adoption of a qualitative and abductive reasoning approach. The research methods were explained in detail, justifying the use of interviewing, purposive sampling in data collection, and thematic analysis assisted by heuristic tools in grounded analysis. The process was facilitated by NVivo software for data analysis. An initial theoretical perspective was then proposed to guide the abductive reasoning process, followed by the discussion on research quality and ethical issues.

Chapter 4. Human Sustainability Initiatives and CSR Strategy

4.1 Overview

This chapter reports the answer to the first research question: ‘*How do human sustainability initiatives become part of CSR strategies in large Japanese companies?*’ It marks the first of the three chapters presenting the findings from this empirical study. As discussed in previous chapters, the issues affecting workforce wellbeing have been incorporated into the discourse of CSR and human sustainability (Benn et al., 2014; European Commission, 2001; Pfeffer, 2010). These issues are considered to affect the sustainability of the workforce and corporate performance in the long run (Kossek et al., 2010; Kossek et al., 2014; OECD, 2018b).

Accordingly, many Japanese companies have promoted initiatives to address workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; Mun & Jung, 2018; North, 2010). From an economic perspective, companies need to incorporate these initiatives into their business strategies in order to enhance business and social performance in the long term (Chandler, 2016; Freeman, 1984; Porter & Kramer, 2006). However, there is limited understanding of how workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives can be incorporated into CSR strategies. This chapter, therefore, seeks to identify workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives within large Japanese companies and examine how they have become part of their CSR strategies.

The main theme and sub-themes that emerged from the data (using NVivo) are illustrated in a node tree (Figure 4.1). This node tree describes the processes in which companies

perceive emerging needs of the workforce, promote workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives as CSR practice, and seek to integrate the initiatives into business strategy. In the remainder of this chapter, the node tree structure is followed and expanded to present the findings.

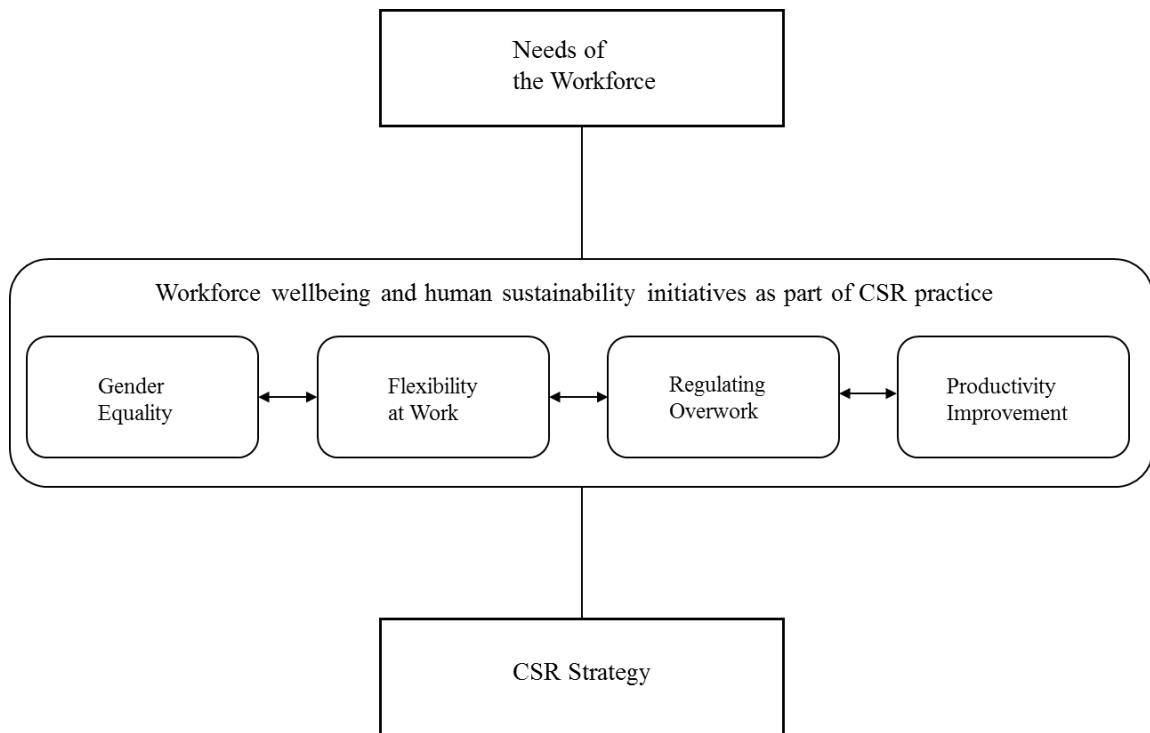


Figure 4. 1 Overview of human sustainability initiatives and CSR strategy in large Japanese companies

This chapter is organised as follows. Section 4.2 describes the emerging needs of the workforce. Section 4.3 then elaborates on workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives as part of CSR practice. It is then followed by Section 4.4, which reports how companies integrate these initiatives into business strategy. Section 4.5 provides the synthesis of the findings, followed by the conclusion of the chapter.

4.2 Needs of the Workforce

As discussed in previous chapters, workforce wellbeing and human sustainability require the company to properly meet the needs of the workforce (Benn et al., 2014; Costanza et al., 2007; World Health Organization, 2018). The needs of the workforce are considered to shift in response to changing social environments (S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; S. Lewis et al., 2007; Matten & Moon, 2008). Following these perspectives, this section examines the emerging needs of the workforce within the changing social context in Japan, as reported by the participants. Two themes that emerged from the data were *family-care* and *diverse workstyles*. The following sections elaborate on each theme in detail.

4.2.1 Family-care

This section elaborates on the first theme of *family-care*. As discussed, the issue of balancing work and other parts of life, especially family, has been an emerging social concern along with women's growing participation in the workforce. Over time, topics such as work-family conflicts, flexible workplace, and service provisions for families have been incorporated into the broad discourse of human sustainability and CSR (European Commission, 2001; Pfeffer, 2010). The issue of work and family merits particular attention in Japan, where the workforce is ageing and shrinking at an unprecedented pace (OECD, 2011, 2018b).

In line with these perspectives, all the participants of this study referred to *family-care* as one of the emerging needs of their workforce. Around half (15 out of 31) mentioned it in the interviews while the rest referred to it in their corporate reports. For instance, L-

Manager stated that, in parallel with a declining and aging population, their workforce is increasingly constrained by childcare, nursing care or their own health conditions:

In the past, most of the workforce in our sector [was] Japanese men with very light responsibilities at home, and most of these people were in good physical condition.

Our assumption now is that things will be entirely different from here on.

The manager went on to explain that, with changing demographic and economic pressure, women must also take part in the labour force; senior employees will also need to work while somehow making up for physical shortcomings with support from the company. This comment highlights the needs of the workforce to work and care for their families at the same time. AB-Manager summarised the needs succinctly: “everyone really wants to work, but they also have to take care of their families”. This perspective is consistent with the view that the Japanese workforce, aging and shrinking in size, is experiencing double pressures for childcare and eldercare (Faruqee & Mühleisen, 2003; S. Lewis et al., 2007; OECD, 2011, 2016). It is also in line with the view that, within the ageing population in developed countries, effective childcare and elderly care are increasingly critical to the development of future generations of the workforce (Kossek et al., 2010; Kossek et al., 2014).

4.2.2 Diverse Workstyles

In addition, all the participants mentioned *diverse workstyles* as among the emerging needs of their workforce. Over half of the participants (17 out of 31) mentioned it in their interviews. For instance, J-Executive Officer argued that workstyle is diversifying:

In the old days, male employees worked anytime, anywhere... Their employment conditions were regulated uniformly by The Labour Standards Act, which was thought to be good in terms of productivity as well. Now, however, things are quite different... Work conditions are classified and managed in great detail, according to varying conditions.

In other words, the workstyle had been characterised by uniformity in the past; however, this characteristic no longer holds due to changing demography. Similarly, E-Senior Manager noted that it is the companies which need to adjust to the diverse workstyles:

The labour market is changing...we cannot continue the past practice of choosing people based on particular conditions. Instead, we now believe in accepting a wide variety of individuals, whatever their conditions are, as long as they share our company philosophies and principles. In addition, having them on board for a long time is vital to our business sustainability.

For this participant, adapting to the diversifying workstyle is not merely an option, but a business imperative. In particular, they cannot retain their workforce effectively, unless the company changes its human resources approach. These comments are consistent with the view that working patterns and hours have greatly diversified over the past decades, as the economy shifts from the manufacturing to the service sector, and an increasing number of women participate in the workforce (Dembe, 2009; Golden, 2009; S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). These comments also confirm the view that companies seek to adapt to these changing contexts, by properly supporting diversity of needs in terms of work and family role integration (Ehnert et al., 2013; Kossek et al., 2010; Kossek et al., 2014). Accordingly,

these companies reported various initiatives to meet these emerging needs of the workforce, which will be elaborated on in the following sections.

4.3 Human Sustainability Initiatives and CSR

This section reports various initiatives the participants reported to promote workforce wellbeing and human sustainability within large Japanese companies. Four themes emerged from the analysis: *gender equality*, *flexibility at work*, *regulating overwork*, and *productivity improvement*. These themes were mentioned by the managers from all companies which participated in this study. Following the theoretical perspective adopted for this study, the sections elaborate on each theme, describing the relevant pressures, initiatives, and consequences. In addition, the sections also report the emerging relationships between the themes.

4.3.1 Gender Equality

This section reports the corporate approach to gender equality as reported by the participants. In this study, gender equality is defined as “the enjoyment of equal rights, opportunities and treatment by men and women” (International Labour Office, 2007a, p. 91; Thompson, 2008). The topics concerning gender equality have been incorporated into CSR frameworks and human sustainability discourse (Benn et al., 2014; Grosser & Moon, 2005, 2008; Thompson, 2008). Accordingly, all 31 companies reported *gender equality* as an integral part of workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. Three sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis were *stakeholders’ pressures*, *increasing the number of women in management*, and *issues with gender equality initiatives*. The following sub-sections elaborate on each theme in detail.

4.3.1.1 Stakeholders' pressures

As companies are embedded in society, CSR practices need to be examined from the broader responsibility system in which business, government, and other social actors operate (Matten & Moon, 2008). Accordingly, this section elaborates on the increasing pressures from stakeholders for the companies to promote gender equality as part of CSR. When asked to identify the pressures, all the participants indicated increasing pressure from the government. Around half (14 out of 31) directly mentioned it in interviews. For instance, K-Senior Manager states that: “There is certainly pressure coming from the government for gender equality initiatives, such as to issue numerical targets for female managers”. The participant referred to a law enacted in 2016 which mandates companies to disclose their target in terms of the percentage or number of women in management (Kato & Kodama, 2017). This government pressure is in line with the view that supporting working women is critical to resolving the declining workforce issues in Japan (Dalton, 2017; Steinberg & Nakane, 2012).

Apart from the government, the majority of participants (23 out of 31) also mentioned increasing pressures from shareholders. For instance, N-Manager stated that: “Pressure is increasing in the last few years... Investors and fund managers explicitly ask us to disclose relevant indicators on gender equality”. The comment highlights the trend that shareholders are increasingly concerned about gender diversity and exerting pressure on companies to complete an extensive questionnaire on their labour practices (Vigneau et al., 2015). This concern is consistent with the view that gender equality and diversity are associated with the company's long-term social and financial performance (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Yasser, Al Mamun, & Ahmed, 2017). The above comment also supports the view that companies

seek to adapt to increasing stakeholders' pressures and promote gender equality initiatives (Grosser & Moon, 2005, 2008; Mun & Jung, 2018).

4.3.1.2 Increasing the number of women in management

This section reports the corporate initiatives taken to respond to the stakeholders' pressures. Global CSR standards and increasing stakeholder pressures prompt companies to promote gender equality (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Mun & Jung, 2018). This perspective was supported by all the companies, which reported that they promote gender equality initiatives as part of CSR practice. For instance, M-Manager described their CSR initiative in detail:

[As part of CSR management] Our company has several KPIs in place for women's empowerment...we have set a target ratio of female recruits and cleared it every year. Together with the target at entry, we will also thereafter raise the ratio of women groomed for managerial positions over a certain level. With that as a target, we are moving forward with some success toward keeping that goal.

In a similar vein, Q-Manager asserted that gender equality is integral to their CSR and that: "To promote women into managerial positions, we are working hard to set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the next three years and create a pool of women employees [for advancement]". These companies reported that they are developing targets and taking necessary measures to achieve them. These comments are in line with the view that companies are increasing the number of women in management, in response to

stakeholder pressures (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Mun & Jung, 2018). Table 4.1 displays the examples of companies' KPIs and targets, with aggregated percentages.

Table 4.1 *Target ratio of women in management*

Company (Industry)	Ratio of women employees	Ratio of women among management	Target ratio of women among management
Q (Electronics)	20% (2016)	3% (2016)	8% (2020)
M (Chemical)	14% (2013)	7% (2015)	20% (2025)
O (Telecommunications)	20% (2015)	2.5% (2013)	5% (2018)
R (Electronics)	17% (2015)	6.5% (2015)	*1
AD (Chemical)	14% (2016)	4% (2015)	*2
K (Convenience Store)	16% (2016)	7% (2015)	30% (2020)

*1. A proportion of newly appointed managers equal to a ratio of women employees this year (17%)

*2. Ensuring women's promotion rate is at least 80% that of men for the five-year period

These comments support the view that gender equality is incorporated into the CSR practices of large Japanese companies (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; Kato & Kodama, 2017; Mun & Jung, 2018). Furthermore, the data indicates that these companies seek to develop KPIs, targets and implementation mechanisms to promote gender equality, in line with CSR management practices (Asif, Searcy, Zutshi, & Fisscher, 2013; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010).

4.3.1.3 Issues with gender equality initiatives

However, despite the incorporation of gender equality into CSR practice, there has been limited progress in terms of outcome (Grosser et al., 2016; Grosser & Moon, 2017; Thompson, 2008). In line with this perspective, most of the participants (25 out of 31) reported emerging issues with gender equality initiatives. Two sub-themes that emerged

from the data were *conflicts in equal opportunity policies* and *lack of progress in equal opportunity outcomes*. The following sections elaborate on each theme in detail.

Conflicts in equal opportunity policies

The first sub-theme which emerged is conflicts in equal opportunity policies. Over half of the participants (17 out of 31) indicated that they face conflicts concerning equal opportunity policies, particularly in fairness of evaluation. For instance, O-Manager explained that they have set their target to double the proportion of female managers to 5% in 2018 (2.5% in 2013). However, the manager acknowledged “the dilemma in ensuring fairness in personnel evaluation”.

This dilemma is elaborated by R-Manager, who noted the consequence of gender equality initiatives promoted over the past 15 years at her company. Since the company formed a dedicated unit for women’s empowerment in 2001, the number of female managers has grown tenfold at the section manager level. While the manager saw this as a measure of success to a certain extent, she also acknowledged an emerging conflict:

Women’s promotions have become murky... and the fact is, there is some kind of negative reaction, with remarks like ‘not another initiative for women’, or ‘not more inflated evaluations’, although we do not inflate anything.

The above comment shows that, because of initiatives, a sense of unfairness emerged from another type of stakeholder: male employees. The manager emphasised that, in practice, the company did not ‘inflate’ evaluation based on gender. Nonetheless, concerning perception, a sense of unfairness seemed to persist on the part of the male employees.

Another manager elaborated on the dilemma. AD-Manager explained the conflicts in equal opportunity policies: “I understand the point of view that the inequality in society will not change unless a target is set. It is clear that we must guide our efforts toward them”. At the same time, he explained that: “It is hard to convince employees in the workplace that, between a man and a woman with the same abilities, the woman receives preferential treatment – this could be seen as reverse discrimination”. He then articulated his company’s equal opportunity policy to avoid these conflicts:

We should remove any conditions that hinder the participation of women. However, I do not think we should control the outcome, should we? In our company, we do not base our decisions on [target] numbers. We firmly believe that results will naturally follow.

For this manager, the company should ensure equal opportunities yet should not control the outcome.

These comments highlight the development of a dilemma once companies implement gender equality initiatives. From the stakeholder view, this dilemma can be interpreted as competing demands based on equal opportunity from two categories of stakeholders: female and male employees, as suggested by L. McCarthy and Muthuri (2018). While women naturally demand that they are promoted on equal terms to men, men also demand that they are promoted on equal terms to women (Kumra & Manfredi, 2012; Manfredi, 2017).

From the theoretical perspective of this study, this dilemma can be interpreted as two competing logics. According to social responsibility logic, we need to correct past

inequality by prioritising an under-represented category (Thompson, 2008). However, the other logic suggests that we must secure fair evaluations irrespective of category and avoid ‘reverse discrimination’ (Manfredi, 2017). These two logics seem contradictory on the surface at least in the short term (Manfredi, 2017).

Lack of progress in equal opportunity outcomes

Although mentioned less frequently (9 out of 31 companies), a second sub-theme emerged in relation to conflicts: *lack of progress in equal opportunity outcomes*. For instance, AD-Manager went on to argue that they had promoted women into managerial positions since the 1950s. They also voluntarily introduced childcare support for their employees in 1981, ten years before it was legally required. These actions suggest that the company has been exercising gender equality initiatives voluntarily above the requirements of the law (Eweje, 2001; Thompson, 2008). However, in discussing progress, the manager acknowledged the limitations in terms of outcome:

To be honest, women’s promotions to managerial positions have not gone very far yet at 4.4%. Compared with the ratio of women, 14% in the company as a whole, it is still apparently small. There are not many constraints for women to work in the workplace, so I think that number will change in the future.

When asked why progress is limited despite the decades of equality initiatives, the manager stated:

The reason why we are not making much headway, even though we were early adopters, is something we may not have analysed correctly. My direct boss is also a

woman, and we often wonder, “Why is our company not progressing [in our projected outcomes]?”

The above comment indicates that the outcome did not follow at a pace expected by his supervisor, despite efforts to remove the constraints for women. This discrepancy suggests that the temporal dimension is not controlled well, even if the company has a clear policy to advance women’s careers by ensuring equal opportunities (Grosser et al., 2016; Grosser & Moon, 2017). This concern for the temporal dimension emerged in an interview with another company. According to C-Senior Manager, in 2017 the company set a target of almost doubling female managers by 2020. When asked if he foresaw any difficulty, he shared his concern for the slow progress:

I wonder how long it will take. Some women joined our company on the assistive staff track, and there are still many of them left. In the past, jobs were divided between the main career track and assistive staff tracks. I wonder if the attitudes of those in the assistant track will change [to pursue careers as managers].

The above manager is concerned with the consequence of the past career practices, which resulted in gender division of career patterns (Acker, 1990; Kossek et al., 2010; Mun & Jung, 2018). Likewise, W-Manager explained their gendered job practice in the past:

Our company used a recruitment system in which the career-track positions were taken mainly by men. They relocate across the country, work on the front lines such as in sales, and move up in their careers to become department heads or directors... while women took on the supporting roles.

The manager further explained the consequence of this practice in terms of career drive:

Because of this, the women were characteristically less motivated to move up in their careers than the men were. In other words, the current situation is based on this historical context, where women were not given these roles in the first place.

In other words, the employees in the assistive staff track responded to the past career practices by forming hesitant attitudes toward career advancement (Mun & Jung, 2018). This comment highlights the on-going dilemma in which managers face competing logics regarding fairness and target setting. From one perspective, fair evaluation needs to be secured irrespective of the category (Kumra & Manfredi, 2012; Manfredi, 2017). However, this leads to a consequence where target setting is not done properly (Mun & Jung, 2018). This outcome points to the necessity of setting a clear goal and target for women's promotions within a clear timeframe (Grosser & Moon, 2008). However, once again, this conflicts with the need for fair evaluation irrespective of gender (Manfredi, 2017). Furthermore, the employees in the assistive staff track face competing demands over time. Previously they formed their life and career plans according to a more 'constrained' view of their career, but now they are pressured to adapt their attitudes to a more 'committed' career track (Mun & Jung, 2018). These issues with gender equality initiatives are summarised in Table 4.2. These competing logics confirm the view that progress has been limited due to persistent gender roles and practices within the companies (Acker, 1990; Grosser & Moon, 2017; Thompson, 2008). They also substantiate the view that conflicts emerge once companies implement sustainability initiatives (Hahn et al., 2010; Hahn et al., 2015).

Table 4.2 *Issues with gender equality initiatives*

Theme	CSR requirement	Issue
Fairness concerns	Women must be promoted on equal terms to men	Men must be promoted on equal terms to women
	Prioritise an under-represented gender	Need fair evaluation irrespective of gender
Long timespan	Fair evaluation irrespective of gender	Timespan is not managed
	Set a clear target for female promotion	Need fair evaluation irrespective of gender

Here, it is pertinent to note the industrial differences which have emerged from data analysis. According to institutional scholars (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Scott, 2014), within society, there are different organisational fields, such as industries or collections of companies, indicating the existence of industry differences in terms of social environments. In line with this perspective, while managers across industries expressed the above dilemmas, the majority of managers (23 out of 31) emphasised that they face different pressures compared to other industries. For instance, K-Senior Manager suggested that they are facing a rapidly changing customer base: “Before, the majority of our store customers were males in their 20s and 30s. Now, female customers have increased dramatically”. To respond to the change, the company set numerical targets in 2005 for women managers comprising 30% by 2020. The manager described how promoting women has become their business imperative:

To make the stores women-friendly, there should be more women actively working in the company as well... As customers diversify, management at the time had a sense of urgency that the employees needed to be gender-diverse, because they make our goods and services.

The above comment indicates that the management perceived pressure from the market. Therefore, in response to the pressure, the company promoted gender equality initiatives as their business case, as suggested by McWilliams and Siegel (2001). In other words, their business can only be financially sustainable if they advance women's careers. The finding here implies that the sense of urgency may be weaker in industries with less market pressure, indicating the limitation of a business case approach (Manfredi, 2017).

In addition to this variation in market pressure, some managers reported that the workforce varies among industries. For instance, L-Manager explained that vehicle manufacturers compete for a limited female candidate base:

To begin with, women graduates with science and technology degrees are extremely scarce in Japan. Moreover, most of them do not choose a car manufacturer... for the limited pool we have to compete with the other vehicle manufacturers.

The manager went on to state that they face an arduous task to advance women's careers:

Under those circumstances, we will have to secure many more women from now on. Moreover, to be able to put women in management positions, we will have to develop these women as human resources who can manage people, operations, and the business.

These comments highlight industry variations: in particular, science and technology-oriented industries have a smaller female candidate base compared to other industries. This difference reflects the situation that each industry is gendered differently. This perspective is consistent with the view that conditions and pressures for companies differ in each organisational field (Beschorner & Hajduk, 2017; Dabic, Colovic, Lamotte, Painter-

Morland, & Brozovic, 2016; Matten & Moon, 2008). These findings indicate that the nature of customers and the workforce affect the conditions in which companies advance gender equality initiatives. The implications of industry variation are further examined in the discussion chapter 7.

Conditions for gender equality

During the interviews, participants identified the necessary conditions for advancing gender equality. In particular, all the participants suggested that flexibility at work is a necessary condition for successful gender equality initiatives. For instance, A-Senior Manager maintained that:

The ratio of female managers in our company will inevitably rise, if we create a workplace where a talented woman can somehow continue to work without having to leave due to marriage or because they cannot balance work and childcare after giving birth.

The above comment suggests that, for women to work equally, women need to manage work time flexibility during different life stages (S. Lewis et al., 2007). Q-Manager supports this view: “women have different career plans from men, including marriage and child rearing...I think that companies have to think much harder about how women can get through the life stages”.

Furthermore, most participants (30 out of 31) identified regulating overwork as a necessary condition. This perspective is in line with the view that overwork perpetuates gender inequality in the workplace (Cha, 2013; Gascoigne et al., 2015). For instance, K-Senior

Manager stated that, while they make efforts to “speed up women’s promotion much faster than before”, they also need to change the working environment simultaneously:

For women to take on the managerial positions involving the sales line, which comprises the majority of the business, working conditions have to improve... we need to provide work that ends at a reasonable time.

The above comment highlights that working hours present a hurdle for women. This hurdle may reflect a social condition in Japan where home and family-care responsibilities are unevenly shared between women and men (Gambles et al., 2006; S. Lewis et al., 2007; OECD, 2011). Under this social condition, overwork practices constrain gender equality in the workplace (Cha, 2013; Nemoto, 2013a; North, 2009). T-Manager shares this view:

To promote women’s empowerment, men must have better working conditions... Even if women’s empowerment alone is promoted, women see how hard and long the man next to her is working... then they will think: “I can’t do that. It’s impossible to take care of my child if I’m that busy”.

The above comments highlight the link between advancing women’s careers and the working conditions of both men and women (Kosseck et al., 2010; Thompson, 2008). In other words, men and women fulfilling gendered responsibilities perpetuate the practice of overwork. This concurrent relationship may explain why this manager argued that gender equality and overwork reduction initiatives need to be promoted irrespective of the gender category. He asserted that women need to feel that “I can also be a manager if male managers are working the same way I do”.

All of these comments indicate that addressing gender inequality involves enhancing flexibility at work and regulating overwork, as suggested by Nemoto (2013b) and North (2009). In other words, gender equality, flexibility at work and regulating overwork need to develop in parallel as CSR practices. The following sections examine these themes of flexibility at work and regulating overwork in detail.

4.3.2 Flexibility at Work

This section reports the corporate approach to flexibility at work. In this study, flexibility at work indicates working practices that allow employees to flexibly adjust the where, when, and how of work and integrate work and non-work demands (Bardoel, 2016; L. Putnam et al., 2014). The topics concerning flexibility at work, such as work-life balance, flexible workplace, flexible work hours, and flexible working conditions, have been incorporated into CSR frameworks and human sustainability discourse (Dunphy et al., 2007; European Commission, 2001; Pfeffer, 2010). Accordingly, all 31 companies reported flexibility at work as an integral part of workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. Three sub-themes emerged from the data analysis: *stakeholders' pressures*, *promoting flexible working conditions*, and *issues with flexible work initiatives*. The following sub-sections elaborate on each theme in detail.

4.3.2.1 Stakeholders' pressures

This section elaborates on the increasing pressure from stakeholders for the companies to promote flexibility at work as part of CSR. When asked to identify where pressures were

originating, companies reported pressures from stakeholders similar to those for *gender equality*: namely, the government and shareholders. This similarity is because all the companies include flexible work initiatives as part of their gender equality initiatives, as indicated in the literature (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; Kato & Kodama, 2017; Kawaguchi, 2013). In other words, these companies consider *flexibility at work* as an integral part of gender equality initiatives.

In addition to the pressures described for gender equality, all the participants referred to emerging needs of the workforce for family-care irrespective of gender, as reported in Section 4.2. For instance, according to W-Manager, their company has so far worked mainly on women's empowerment to "create a workplace in which 'active women' is the standard rather than the exception". However, the manager went on to state that:

Our challenge moving forward lies in the fact that all of our employees, both men and women, will have to change... The issue of childcare and nursing care is not just the women's problem. With dual-income parents increasing, more employees, male and female alike, will have some double-care responsibilities.

The above comment confirms that the workforce, irrespective of gender, faces increasing family-care responsibilities in addition to work responsibilities, as suggested by Kossek et al. (2010). AC-Senior Manager shared this concern for increasing family-care responsibilities. The manager explained that mid-career employees, at the core of the company and with significant work responsibilities, are now reaching the age when they need to provide nursing care for their parents. For this manager, addressing this issue is not a choice but a business imperative:

Our company needs to foster a working environment where these people [with increasing elderly-care responsibilities] can continue working, feeling truly secure. A person cannot handle work while not knowing if their parents are well or not. As a company, it is imperative to properly take care of this issue of elderly care, in addition to childcare.

These managers' concerns for increasing elderly-care responsibilities are confirmed by Stakeholder A, Senior Manager of a national business association and labour specialist. Stakeholder A maintained that this is “one of the biggest problems in human resources management” in Japan today: “people are leaving their work to take care of family members... An estimated 100,000 people are quitting jobs due to elderly care each year”. He emphasised that this trend can only accelerate, as dual-income and one-child families increase. For instance, when two children from single child families marry, the working couple will have to support four parents. To make the trend more alarming, he pointed out that monitoring the actual situation is difficult:

The statistics may be only the tip of the iceberg... The real number may be much more. Therefore, companies have to face the issue of how to monitor the actual number of employees who provide nursing care, or those who may likely do so in the future.

The above comments suggest that demographic changes, in particular the ageing population and increasing elderly-dependency ratio, are putting the workforce and companies into vulnerable positions (Kossek et al., 2010; OECD, 2011, 2018b). This indicates that, even if the employees are willing to work, they are put in a position where they have to choose

either work or family-care. As such, the companies mentioned above are developing various initiatives such as flexible work and family-leave for men and women alike, so that their employees can work through demands at work and maintain other areas of their life flexibly. They are in line with the view that socially responsible companies provide support for their employees who seek to fulfil their work and home responsibilities (European Commission, 2001; Stropnik, 2010). The above comments suggest that companies seek to adapt to increasing stakeholder pressure and promote flexible work initiatives.

4.3.2.2 Promoting flexible working conditions

This section reports the corporate initiatives taken to respond to the above-mentioned pressure from stakeholders. Global CSR standards and increasing stakeholder pressures prompt companies to promote flexible working conditions (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Stropnik, 2010). This perspective was supported by all companies in this study, which reported that they promote *flexible working conditions* as part of CSR practice. Under this theme, two sub-themes emerged: the promotion of *flexible working options* and *family-leave options*. Each sub-theme is explained in detail below.

Flexible working options

The first sub-theme which emerged is *flexible working options*. It has been observed that flexible working conditions typically include multiple flexible working options, leave options, and child and dependent care options (Bardoel, 2016; Smeaton et al., 2014). In line with this perspective, all the participants reported that they promote multiple flexible working options. For instance, W-Manager described their approach, which they call ‘shift

work’, which allows employees to flexibly choose starting times between 7am and 1pm.

The manager explained how ‘shift work’ works:

Our company has established a policy that allows individuals to pursue work flexibility and freely choose work hours on a daily basis. As long as it is okay for their workplace, anyone can decide to work the next day at a different time for personal reasons.

The manager reported that, with this policy in place, their workforce works flexibly through shifting demands in work and life. This flexible work approach was commonly observed across companies that participated in this study. For instance, O-Manager described their approach called ‘slide work’, which is increasingly used by working mothers in the company. In this programme, workers can slide work hours among multiple patterns (e.g., from 9am to 5:30pm, from 9:30am to 6pm, or from 10:30am to 7pm). The company report that, with these choices, working parents can attend to family needs, such as picking up children from nursery and taking them home.

Another type of approach companies reported was ‘work from home’. All companies interviewed have been promoting some kind of work-from-home options, although with varying degrees of application. For instance, T-Manager stated that: “Employees in the corporate division already work from home once a week. Now, we are testing it on a trial basis for customer service units”. Similarly, Y-Senior Manager reported that about 70% of their employees across divisions now work from home at times. The above comments indicate that companies promote *flexible working options* through such programmes as shift

work, slide work, and work from home. These initiatives and relevant KPIs are summarised in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 *Flexible working options*

Company	Initiative (programme)	KPI
W (Insurance)	Shift work	# of employees using the programme
O (Telecommunications)	Slide work	
T (IT)	Work from home	
Y (Food and beverage)		

Family-leave options

The second sub-theme which emerged was *family-leave options*. In addition to these flexible working options, all companies reported that they are promoting various types of family-leave options, such as childcare and elderly care options. For instance, Company W reported that more and more employees are taking childcare leave, and consequently, the average number of days taken off work for childcare leave is increasing. Furthermore, they hold childcare forums to help their employees and supervisors. In addition to childcare, they also allow employees to take nursing care leave to look after their parents.

Similarly, Company O reported an even more extensive list of family-leave options. For instance, in addition to childcare leave, the company offers variations of shorter leave, such as a paid ‘childcare break’: a female employee with a baby under one year old can take a 45 minute break twice a day to provide necessary care for the child. Shorter work hours are another variation: employees can choose options from 4-hour, 5-hour, or 6-hour workdays, when they have a child below the third grade level at elementary school. Similarly, for nursing care, in addition to leave, the company offers a ‘nursing care vacation’: an

employee can take up to five days of non-paid leave per year to provide care for a family member.

Where there were different levels of options available to employees, all companies reported these types of family-leave options and their uptake in their reports. The following comment by H-Manager highlights the aim: support for leave is offered so that the workforce can continue to work.

We want to ensure that employees do not need to quit for child rearing, and they can return to work after taking family-leave. We are working to properly establish a system that will allow people to continue to work, even if they have to care for someone.

The above comment emphasises the emerging needs of the workforce to work and care for the family at the same time, as reported in Section 4.2. This comment reflects a concern that their employees cannot continue working effectively unless family-care leave options are effectively in place. This perspective is also in line with the view that work-life initiatives could enhance organisational performance by reducing turnover and improving productivity, particularly when they are provided with proper managerial support (Beauregard & Henry, 2009).

These companies reported that they are taking necessary measures to achieve them, although the targets are not disclosed. Table 4.4 displays the examples of companies' initiatives and KPIs.

Table 4.4 *Promoting family-leave options*

Company	Initiative (programme)	KPI (male/female/total)
W (Insurance)	Childcare leave	# of employees using the programme # of days taken off work
	Family care leave	# of employees
O (Telecommunications)	Shorter work hours	# of employees
	Nursing care vacation	# of employees

The examples mentioned above demonstrate that companies promote a variety of flexible work initiatives to help their employees integrate work and non-work demands (Bardoel, 2016; Beauregard, 2011; Smeaton et al., 2014; Stropnik, 2010). These comments also indicate that, supported by the emerging needs of the workforce (as reported in Section 4.2), flexibility at work has been incorporated into the CSR practices of large Japanese companies (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; Kato & Kodama, 2017). Furthermore, the data indicates that these companies seek to develop KPIs, targets and implementation mechanisms to promote flexibility at work, in line with CSR management practices (Asif et al., 2013; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010).

4.3.2.3 Issues with flexible work initiatives

It has been argued, however, that work-life initiatives could lead to adverse outcomes without a fundamental change within the organisations (Beauregard, 2011; Kossek et al., 2010; Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; Lewis et al., 2007). In line with this perspective, all the participants reported emerging issues with flexible work initiatives. Three sub-themes that emerged from the data were *gap in parental leave*, *fear of consequences to career*, and *workload concern*. The following sections elaborate on each theme in detail.

Gender gap in parental leave

The first sub-theme that emerged is *gap in parental leave*. Most of the participants (28 out of 31) indicated that, although they see an increasing uptake of flexible working conditions, they also see a persistent gender gap. For instance, AA-Manager explained how parental leave reflects gendered responsibilities of work and home:

We have childcare leave, of course, and shorter work hours, babysitter assistance and welfare benefits. In the evaluation system, using any of these does not affect the assessment...but many of those who take childcare leave are women, while the rate of men taking the leave remains low. We do have to address these issues moving forward.

This concern about the gender gap is shared by R-Manager, who asserted that the number of men taking childcare leave is “overwhelmingly low”; fewer than ten out of the whole male workforce take short-term breaks each year. V-Senior Manager shares this view: “We have set up a system for men’s childcare leave, but no one takes it. I don’t know why... but in any case, they don’t”.

The above comments highlight an emerging gender gap in taking family leave: more women are taking leave, while the majority of men, with a few exceptions, are not taking leave (Beauregard, 2011; S. Lewis et al., 2007). The managers above described the pattern with a sense of puzzlement, using such words as ‘overwhelmingly low’ and ‘I don’t know why’. This puzzlement suggests that companies expected more use of the childcare leave irrespective of gender. All these comments highlighted the unexpected emergence of a dilemma once companies implement flexible work initiatives. According to the logic of

CSR, childcare leave is promoted irrespective of gender, because it is both men and women who need to fulfil increasing family-care responsibilities (European Commission, 2001; OECD, 2011, 2017). However, in reality, childcare leave is often taken by women and much less by men (Beauregard, 2011; S. Lewis et al., 2007). This gender gap implies that the dominant logic within organisations is that it is women, not men, who take childcare leave (S. Lewis et al., 2007). Thus, the data indicates that, while companies promote family-leave options, they find it difficult to reconcile the conflicting logics regarding gendered responsibilities between work and family.

Fear of consequences to career

The second sub-theme that emerged from the data was related to concerns for their careers. It has been argued that work-life initiatives could reduce the prospects for career advancement (Beauregard, 2011; Kossek et al., 2010; S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; S. Lewis et al., 2007). In line with this perspective, most of the participants (28 out of 31) indicated that they face dilemmas concerning career consequences. For instance, AD-Manager explained that, compared to other companies in Japan, they were quite early in formulating a childcare leave policy. Consequently, the use of childcare leave had progressed to the point that it is normal for women to continue working after giving birth. However, the manager stated that this practice has a disadvantage from the career perspective:

Childcare leave is from a year and a half to two years. On top of that, shorter work hours for childcare are also taken until the child finishes third grade. Consequently, an increasing number of women have not worked full-time for a long time, up to ten

years, for example. In terms of women's empowerment, this has turned into a big problem: they are not promoted as initially planned.

The above comment describes an unexpected consequence of promoting family-leave options: careers become stalled. Similarly, I-Senior Manager argued that career gaps have increased because the leave policy is in place:

The extended leave policy has led to employment stability. However, in terms of becoming successful in their careers, it has frankly become a barrier and parts of it have the opposite effect of hobbling their career. This is an issue that we really have to work on, so that they do not get gaps in their careers while making use of the system, continuing to work, and keeping their motivation high at work.

The above comments highlight the dilemma that managers face when more women take childcare leave: leave creates a gap in their careers, which hinders women from continuing an active career (Beauregard, 2011; S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). Two competing logics are observed here. According to one logic, family-leave options are necessary for both men and women in the workforce, in order for them to continue working through all life stages (S. Lewis et al., 2007). However, in reality, taking a family-leave option hinders career development (Beauregard, 2011).

In relation to this dilemma, AC-Senior Manager shared his concern that flexible work initiatives are disconnected from, and therefore not consistent with, core business practices:

Our company has various work-life balance measures for women, with a policy of balancing work and childcare. However, it seems that it ends there. In fact, after using it, they need to be aware that, similar to regular male employees, they are

expected to manage and operate the company... Otherwise we cannot incorporate women's attitudes into the management in the real sense.

For this manager, promoting flexible work initiatives had not lead to women's involvement in management, as indicated by Kossek et al. (2010). The above comments highlight the difficulty of reconciling the competing logics regarding family-care and career. This perspective is consistent with the view that work-life initiatives help raise women's participation in the workforce but hinder career advancement by encouraging longer leave and career interruption (Datta Gupta, Smith, & Verner, 2008; Leslie, Manchester, Park, & Mehng, 2012).

Workload concerns

The third sub-theme which emerged from the data was related to the management of workload when flexible working options are taken. It has been argued that work-life initiatives could lead to more intensive work and more extended work hours (Beauregard, 2011; Kossek et al., 2010; S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; S. Lewis et al., 2007). In line with this perspective, around half (14 out of 31) indicated that they face dilemmas concerning workload. For instance, X-Manager reported that promoting flexible work and various forms of family-leave create a situation where workloads are simply passed onto other colleagues:

Several flexible work and leave patterns have come out, and these have shorter work hours in general. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the company increased the number of people in the workplace; in reality, the workload goes to other people.

In our department, for example, we have individuals who have almost no overtime and people whose overtime work goes over 100 hours a month.

The above comment highlights workload spillover, creating difficulties for colleagues. He expressed his concern: “And so, the reality is that it’s not so easy to find support from your colleagues to take leave”. Similarly, AA-Manager shared the concern:

Childcare leave has become fairly common and there is no problem on the surface. But as long as you don’t change the workstyle and the long work hours, the truth is, the burden on individuals who are not doing childcare and who can’t even take days off from work is actually increasing. The problem is that the burden has just turned into a personal one.

The above comment suggests that the flexible work initiatives just shift the burden inside the company, without fundamental adjustments of how work is carried out (Beauregard, 2011; Kossek et al., 2010; Ono, 2018). Furthermore, AA-Manager pointed out that this workload overflow could become hidden:

Last year, we conducted a company-wide survey on elderly-care and the work situation. When we asked “Have you told anyone in your workplace that you are now providing elderly care?” half responded with “I haven’t told anyone”. One respondent said: “departments with people providing elderly care or childcare from the start are so busy and pressured with work that I can’t come out with my own situation”.

The above comment indicates that employees hesitate to report their family-care responsibilities in the first place. The manager went on to argue that, to resolve this situation, they must address fundamental management of the workload.

The above comments indicate that there are competing logics concerning the workload. According to one logic, it is necessary to take family-leave and flexible working options to manage work and home responsibilities (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; European Commission, 2001). However, the other logic suggests that doing so will create workload spillover that forces colleagues to work longer hours (Beauregard, 2011; Kossek et al., 2010; Ono, 2018). In other words, while these companies promote flexibility at work, many have not fundamentally changed how work is carried out as an organisation, leading to fundamental issues. Issues with flexible work initiatives are summarised in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 *Issues with promoting flexibility at work*

Theme	CSR requirement	Issue
Leave gap	Childcare leave must be taken by both gender	Childcare leave is taken by women, much less by men
Career concerns	More women should take childcare leave	Career is put on hold
Workload concerns	Flexible working options must allow an employee to manage work and home responsibilities	Workloads overflow and colleagues end up working longer

Conditions for flexibility at work

During the interviews, participants identified the necessary conditions for advancing flexibility at work. In particular, all the participants suggested that overwork reduction is a necessary condition for successful flexible work initiatives. For instance, G-Manager stated that, without a reduction in working hours, the workload just shifts within the organisation:

There are cases in which the managers think that they should take up the work that the staff could not do, which, conversely, leads to increasing overtime for the managerial staff. The company is also acutely aware of this problem, and discussions are on-going in dealing with such negative aspects as well, together with discussions on [gender] diversity and workstyle reform.

This company is concerned with the harmful consequences of promoting flexible work initiatives, without fundamentally addressing overwork. W-Manager expressed the same concern: “We were able to implement childcare leave and shorter work hours with cooperation at the workplace, and it is now the norm to take care of kids while continuing to work”. However, the manager asserted that overwork must be addressed for those taking childcare leave to come back to the workplace:

Listening to what our female employees are really saying, I hear them say things like “I can’t help but worry about overtime” when thinking of returning to full-time work, or “If only there was no overtime, I’d go back to full-time”. As this is not an issue unique to that person alone, I think our future task lies in reducing overtime in the workplace as a whole. I feel that it is an issue for Japan as a whole too.

In other words, these employees are feeling trapped within the extreme choices (L. Putnam et al., 2014). The manager also emphasised that “the same issue is evident in the workplace across Japan”, in which overwork and gender division of labour have been taken for granted (OECD, 2011; Ono, 2018). Under these conditions, overwork may reinforce gender inequality and career gaps for family-leave takers, as suggested by Cha (2013).

These comments indicate that *flexibility at work* needs to be accompanied by *regulating overwork*. In other words, flexible working and overwork reduction initiatives need to be developed in parallel as CSR practices. The next section examines the theme of *overwork* in detail.

4.3.3 Regulating Overwork

This section reports the corporate approach to regulating overwork, as reported by participants. In this study, overwork or long working hours is defined as working 50 hours a week or more (Angrave & Charlwood, 2015; OECD, 2018a). The topics concerning long working hours have been incorporated into CSR frameworks and human sustainability discourse (Benn et al., 2014; Pfeffer, 2010; Welford, 2004). Accordingly, all 31 companies reported *regulating overwork* as an integral part of workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. Three sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis were *stakeholders' pressures*, *regulating work hours*, and *issues with regulating work hours*. The following sub-sections elaborate on each theme in detail.

4.3.3.1 Stakeholders' pressures

This section elaborates on the increasing stakeholder pressures for the companies to regulate overwork as part of CSR. When asked to identify pressures, the majority of participants (24 out of 31) identified increasing pressure from the government to regulate overwork. For instance, R-Manager stated that the pressure from the government's labour administration to correct the long work hours had grown as never before:

The Labour Standards Inspection Office has issued instructions that are quite strict compared to the previous year: whether each office has been exceeding the overtime work hours set in their overtime agreement.

The above comment refers to the legal framework of the Labour Standard Act. The law mandates companies to set overtime limits with the company union and comply with the agreement (Japan External Trade Organization, 2018; Shimada, 2004). The above comment suggests that companies are under increasing pressure to comply with the agreed-upon hours.

This government pressure is consistent with increasing pressure to disclose the overtime agreement. Stakeholder B, an occupational health physician, and advocate for health and productivity management, compared legal frameworks of EU countries and Japan. He explained that, whereas overtime beyond 8 hours a day is prohibited in the EU directive, with an exception for managers in the UK, overtime is regulated differently in Japan:

In the case of Japan, there is Article 36 of the Labour Standards Act, and labour-management agreements based on Article 36 allow 100 hours a month of overtime work for six months in the worst places. Such companies are now under pressure from various stakeholders for disclosure. They have also been sued in courts to disclose the overtime agreement. From those pressures, it has now become clear that many companies have labour-management agreements with overtime work of 80 hours or even 100 hours a month.

The above comment highlights the increasing concerns from various stakeholders about companies' overtime practices. Furthermore, Z-Senior Manager described the increasing pressures coming from the labour market:

I do think workforce wellbeing and work-life balance are vital for recruiting people and in making the best use of human resources. Recently in Japan, these companies with severe conditions in such areas are being labelled and criticised as “abusive companies”, so I think this also puts enormous pressure [on these companies].

The above comment highlights the increasing pressure from the workforce itself, who are concerned with companies failing to resolve persistent overwork.

Another type of pressure the companies mentioned is increasing pressure from customers. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4.2), global voluntary CSR regulations emerged to govern global companies and their supply chain networks (Bendell et al., 2011; Vogel, 2010). AC-Senior Manager reported that their customer, a global food brand, independently audits their working practices in line with these standards:

An auditing firm commissioned by our customer visits our factory to audit. They closely scrutinise our labour practices, in addition to environmental practices. Each person's attendance sheet for 12 months will be printed out, 100 people's sheets from January to December. That is without notice. After looking at it, each individual is called one by one in a private room to be asked to confirm that the attendance sheet is correct... For a global brand, long working hours in the factory is something that is unacceptable.

Similarly, Q-Manager shared the view that regulating overwork is a market demand for the manufacturing industry. “In short, the current climate now requires evidence that you care for people properly when you manufacture. This demand leads right to the survival risk of the business”. The above comments underscore the increasing pressures these companies perceive from their markets. This perspective endorses the view that the market exerts pressures to promote CSR initiatives (Matten & Moon, 2008; Porter & Kramer, 2006). These comments suggest that companies seek to adapt to increasing stakeholders’ pressures and promote overwork reduction initiatives.

It is pertinent to note the industry differences with regard to the levels of pressure. For instance, only a few participants (3 out of 31) identified the above-mentioned market pressure. This small number is because of differences in customer base, which suggests industry variation in terms of customer pressures. This perspective is consistent with the view that conditions of and pressures on companies differ in each organisational field (Beschorner & Hajduk, 2017; Dabic et al., 2016). Furthermore, it is important to note that companies with only Japanese customers have not mentioned this pressure explicitly. This lack of pressure is because businesses in Japan operate in a different institutional setting than companies in the global market, as suggested by Matten and Moon (2008). This aspect is discussed further in Chapter 7.

4.3.3.2 Regulating work hours

This section reports how the corporate initiatives respond to the above-mentioned stakeholders’ pressures. In Chapter 2, it was argued that historically, overwork reduction

initiatives have not been explicitly incorporated into the CSR practices in Japan. However, all the companies reported that they are regulating working hours as part of CSR practice.

For instance, P-Manager stated that the company understands the need for a diverse workstyle and tries to monitor work hours to regulate overwork:

To enable the workforce in different work conditions to be successful, it is critical to eliminate long work hours. Therefore, our company takes measures such as encouraging work in the morning, prohibiting late-night work in principle, making working hours and labour management measurable and visible.

Similarly, J-Executive Officer described their initiatives:

Of course, we set a goal every year to reduce working hours, and always report this to the president. For operations that have too many overtime hours, we provide individual consultation and monitor their progress.

This company had attempted to regulate working hours by setting targets and monitoring progress. R-Manager reported similar management efforts:

Last year, of the 60,000 employees in total, there were about 350 people per month with over 80 hours of monthly overtime last year. Aiming to reduce this to zero, since 2015 we have been working on eradicating overwork.

This company set a target to eradicate excessive overwork and has been working on it already. These comments underscore the companies' attempts to proactively regulate work hours.

In addition to monitoring overtime, all the participants reported that they encourage their employees to take more paid holidays. For instance, X-Manager explained that the company had set targets regarding the uptake of paid holidays:

Last year, the number of paid holidays taken is now about six days per year.

However, we are working towards raising this to 10 days in 2020. At the beginning of the year, employees are asked to enter their leave plan into the attendance system and to review their plan each time leave is not taken.

These companies have set up a policy, are monitoring the progress, and are working on changing their practices. Table 4.6 displays examples of primary initiatives with KPIs reported in their corporate reports.

Table 4.6 *Regulating work hours*

Company (Industry)	Initiative (programme)	KPI
P (Transportation)	Encourage employees to come to and leave work earlier Establish twice-weekly ‘go-home-early’ days Track late-night and weekend work	-
J (Heavy industry)	Overtime ban day once a week Encourage use of annual paid vacation	Total annual work hours Annual overtime hours Paid vacation use rate
R (Electronics)	Reduce ‘over 80 hours of monthly overtime’	# of person
X (Housing construction)	Encourage use of paid leave	# of days/person/year Paid leave use rate

The examples mentioned above demonstrate that companies promote overwork reduction initiatives in their effort to respond to increasing stakeholder pressures and the emerging needs of the workforce (as reported in Section 4.2). Accordingly, the data indicates that overwork reduction has been incorporated into the CSR practices of large Japanese companies (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; North, 2010), which seek to develop KPIs, targets and implementation mechanisms to regulate overwork, in line with CSR management practices (Asif et al., 2013; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010).

4.3.3.3 Issues with regulating work hours

However, again, it has been pointed out that work-life initiatives could lead to adverse outcomes, without a fundamental change within the organisations (Beauregard, 2011; Kossek et al., 2010; Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; Lewis et al., 2007). In line with this perspective, the majority of participants (21 out of 31) indicated that they face dilemmas in regulating overwork. Two sub-themes that emerged were *financial concerns* and *workload concerns*, which will be elaborated in the following sub-sections.

Financial concerns

The first sub-theme that emerged from the data is *financial concerns*, which over half of the participants (16 out of 31) reported. In Chapter 1, cutting long working hours and increasing labour productivity is considered necessary for the economic growth of Japan (Kopp, 2017; OECD, 2018b; Ono, 2018). Paradoxically, however, the participants argued that regulating work hours would constrain the economic growth of their companies. For instance, Z-Senior Manager acknowledged that they are concerned about the economic and financial implications of regulating work hours:

If you shorten working hours, then, of course, the output will be reduced by just as much. We understand the overwork issue, but if we reduce hours, sales or orders will probably decrease. So, what do you do when that happens? Well, people say “raise productivity”, but there is still no clear understanding of how we can do that. That part is quite tough, I think.

The manager is uncertain about how they can regulate overwork while sustaining economic and financial performance. X-Manager also expressed this sense of uncertainty:

At the business front, we obviously have to maintain our sales performance as well... One reason why policies cutting long work hours are not moving forward may be that people on top are worried all along about what to do if the business performance drops. Of course, I know that European companies work many fewer hours and sometimes perform much better than Japanese companies perform [so it should not be impossible].

This comment indicates that the company management is uncertain about how to sustain sales and financial performance if they curtail long work hours. Here, two competing logics are observed concerning overwork. According to one logic, overwork must be regulated for better work-life balance, better health and wellbeing, and long-term economic performance (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017; Kossek et al., 2014; Welford, 2004). However, in reality, overwork reduction initiatives are constrained by economic and financial concerns. Thus, the data indicate that, while these companies try to regulate work hours, they find it difficult to reconcile the conflicting logics.

Workload concerns

The second sub-theme that emerged from the data in relation to financial concerns was workload concerns. Again, it has been argued that work-life initiatives could lead to more intensive work and more extended work hours (Beauregard, 2011; Kossek et al., 2010; S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; S. Lewis et al., 2007). In line with this perspective, around half (13 out of 31) indicated that, despite some progress in the past, their initiatives lead to a dilemma concerning more intensive work. For instance, S-Manager explained her conversation with a colleague to illustrate the point:

I was talking with a person from the R&D department the other day, and I said, “You don’t look good. What’s the matter?” He answered, “Before, I was so busy that it was stressful and gruelling to work overtime all the time. Now, I’m being told to keep overtime within 10 hours a month, and I think that I’ll go mad with the pressure of doing the same amount of work with that limit”.

The manager went on to point out the changing nature of difficulty. The employees used to think, “It’s tough to have to work overtime”; now, they are thinking, “I’m having a nervous breakdown with the pressure of not being able to work overtime”. In other words, the company’s effort to reduce work hours is creating a different pressure for the workforce: not being able to do overwork. The manager expressed a sense of puzzlement: “What does this mean? I am beginning to think that something is fundamentally wrong”.

Z-Senior Manager also expressed the same puzzlement and concern for the unchanged workload. He admitted that certain work could not be completed without overtime work:

Yes, the work-life balance would be nice to have. However, right now, there is just so much work. We talk about how we cannot just get on with our own lives and

leave the office when there is work to do... Even if the company say, “go home early”, we are left thinking, “Who is going to do this work?”

In other words, the company’s call for ‘work-life balance’ is creating a sense of puzzlement among employees. The employee hesitates to prioritise ‘life’ over ‘work’ because “somebody needs to do the job”. Two competing logics are observed concerning the overwork here. According to one logic, balancing ‘life’ and ‘work’ is encouraged because it would increase productivity and organisational performance (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). However, in reality, the employees are prioritising ‘work’ over ‘life’ to finish the work.

In relation to this dilemma, L-Manager pointed out that work priority is not adequately managed at an organisational level. She asserted that it is quite difficult for individuals to determine the optimal workload:

The work just keeps piling up. People say “choose” or “prioritise”, but for the people on top [the senior management of the company], all the work is important in some way... So to some extent, I think the key is in how well the company or organisation prioritises, sorting out which work goes first and which can wait until later. However, the thing is, we are not really doing that. Perhaps, as a result, it is extremely difficult for any company to address the issue of long work hours.

The above comment indicates that the manager is *aware* of the necessity to manage the workload as an organisation, yet it is hard somehow for the management to prioritise work.

Furthermore, several companies pointed out that regulating work hours without actually managing the workload leads to a negative consequence. For instance, U-Senior Manager

asserted that if the employees receive “too much pressure to stop working long hours and take a break”, they will think of ways to circumvent the pressure:

We monitor working hours... If computers have been logged on after business hours, and there is unpaid overtime, there will be severe consequences if the government finds out. Therefore, [to avoid that] some people will [voluntarily] disconnect from the Internet and continue to work. Alternatively, some people will adjust their work time record, such as by noting ‘I was smoking at this time’ or ‘I took a break from 5 to 8’.

The above comment indicates that having too much pressure to regulate work hours may create another layer of the problem: the employee thinks of ways to report false work hours while trying to be responsible for work. In other words, the workforce is put in a position to choose to incur the human costs personally, as indicated by Gambles et al. (2006). This leads the companies to record false work hours, which are reported to the government labour administration. The above manager warned that: “this lying game would be perilous”. The comment indicates that the current approaches to regulating overwork lead to a situation where the overwork just becomes externalised, as the human costs ‘spill over’ to individuals and societies (Matten & Moon, 2008; Pfeffer, 2010; Pigou, 2013). The above issues with regulating this dilemma are summarised in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 *Issues with regulating work hours*

Theme	CSR requirement	Issue
Sales concerns	Reduce overwork to balance work and life	Sales may drop by reducing work hours
Workload concerns		Workforce continues to overwork to finish the same workload. Overwork becomes unmonitored and false hours are reported.

Conditions for regulating overwork

During the interviews, participants identified the necessary conditions for advancing overwork reduction. In particular, most of the participants (30 out of 31) suggested that companies must improve productivity in the workplace. For instance, W-Manager asserted that they needed to accept shorter work hours and improve productivity simultaneously:

In our company, childcare leave and shorter work hours have become commonplace, and working hours have just decreased naturally. It is not that it is bad, but I think that in doing so, we also have to figure out how to raise productivity per hour so that we can sustain output. That is our next task. Specifically, how do we convert our focus from long work hours to productivity? We have to work further on this question.

The above manager emphasises the necessity of shifting their focus to productivity, yet also admits their uncertainty about how they can do it. In relation to this necessity and uncertainty, L-Manager asserted that the company must seriously consider labour productivity as part of business strategy, including methodologies on how to improve performance and achieve results within a shorter time. She elaborated on this challenge:

Labour productivity is not about government demand, but an imperative for company survival... What is certain is that unless the issue of long work hours is resolved, it will be very tough to carry out any corporate activity. However, we still have not had a shot at it yet.

This manager is concerned with the lack of strategies to achieve results within the shorter amount of time. Z-Senior Manager shared this concern and asserted that overwork and

productivity are now a critical management agenda: they need to plan how to boost productivity in all of their business operations. The manager explained this challenge:

There is so much construction going on. If you brush it off, the long work hours for extended periods will eventually come out anyway, so it really is an important management issue. Therefore, we have to increase productivity. When I say productivity, that includes productivity when actually constructing the building at the site of course, but it also applies to other work such as design and processes done at the field office, such as making a construction plan.

For these managers, productivity improvement is an imperative if they are to curtail long working hours. In other words, regulating overwork needs to be accompanied by improved productivity for the company to be sustainable, as suggested by Beauregard and Henry (2009). This perspective is in line with the view that corporate sustainability requires the simultaneous pursuit of sustainable economic, social, and environmental practices over the long run (Bansal, 2005; Elkington, 1998). The following section examines the themes of productivity improvement in detail.

4.3.4 Productivity Improvement

This section reports the corporate approach to productivity improvement, as reported by the participants. In this study, productivity indicates the volume of output produced per unit of labour input (Golden, 2012; OECD, 2018c). A review of literature suggests that the topics concerning productivity have not been explicitly incorporated into CSR frameworks and

human sustainability. However, all 31 companies reported *productivity improvement* as an integral part of workforce wellbeing and human sustainability, particularly in relation to overwork. Three sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis were *stakeholders' pressures*, *promoting workstyle reform*, and *issues with workstyle reform*. The following sub-sections elaborate on each theme in detail.

4.3.4.1 Stakeholders' pressures

This section elaborates on the increasing stakeholder pressures to improve productivity as part of CSR. When asked to identify pressures, the companies reported similar pressures for regulating overwork. This similarity is because all the companies referred to *productivity improvement* as a necessary part of regulating overwork. In particular, the majority of the participants (24 out of 31) identified increasing pressure from the government. For instance, A-Senior Manager stated that:

The current administration is pushing forward 'Workstyle reform', which aims to enhance productivity by reforming the workstyle... the society-wide change is ongoing regarding workstyle. Things will not change naturally. As such, in a way, companies count on the government to exert pressure for change.

This manager emphasised that 'workstyle reform' aims to address overwork and low productivity at the same time. This view is consistent with the government's recent action plan (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017).

It is pertinent to note that managers did not mention other stakeholder pressures, such as the shareholders or customers referred to under the other themes. This omission is because

higher productivity and organisational performance are already part of the demands of shareholders and clients as part of business performance (Porter & Kramer, 2006). In other words, productivity improvement may have been implicitly embedded in the business and society. This aspect will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

4.3.4.2 Promoting workstyle reform

When asked how they respond to these pressures, all the companies reported that they are promoting workstyle reform. For instance, I-Senior Manager stated that they are reforming their workstyle:

We are considering reducing overwork together with business reform. Perhaps we can resolve the dilemma by accurately delineating the work that is redundant or superfluous, and clearly divide the work by implementing something like the job descriptions in Europe or the US.

This comment highlights the need to assess how work is conducted within the organisation. In other words, the company is reforming their workstyle both at the individual and organisational level. E-Senior Manager also emphasises this need for reassessment:

We are in the middle of promoting a workstyle reform, from working long hours to figuring out how to produce results in a shorter time... We have to change the current business processes throughout the company, including the decision-making process. This challenge is the real crux of the matter.

This company is reassessing and changing the business processes in reforming their workstyle. The manager further explained the need for such reform in his company: “After

all, it will be impossible for store managers to stay in the company unless they can have reasonable work hours as well as paid holidays”. This comment underlines the company’s attempt to change core business practices to secure its workforce based on a long-term perspective (Porter & Kramer, 2006; Yuan et al., 2011). The workstyle reform initiatives require the companies to reassess and change core business practices. In other words, through a workstyle reform, the social responsibility imperative and core business practices intersect. This link will be further discussed in Chapter 6. Table 4.8 displays examples of primary initiatives reported in their corporate reports.

Table 4.8 *Promoting workstyle reform*

Company	Initiative (programme)	Items
I (Airline)	Project for changing workstyle	Delineating redundancy IT investment Testing various work rules
E (Apparel)	Workstyle reform	Changing decision-making process IT investment

4.3.4.3 Issues with workstyle reform

Most participants (28 out of 31), however, reported issues with workstyle reform. Sub-themes emerged from the data: *evaluating productivity at the office* and *evaluating business impact*. The following sections elaborate on each theme in detail.

Evaluating productivity at the office

The first sub-theme which emerged from the data (25 out of 31 participants) concerns evaluation of productivity at the office. In Chapter 2 (Section 2.4.3), it was argued that traditional employment practices in Japan are characterised by their distinctive evaluation practices based on long-term employment (Tanimoto, 2009). In line with this perspective,

Stakeholder C, a European CEO of the Japan-based operation of a multinational company, presented the contrast between the factory and office regarding productivity with a sense of puzzlement:

In the factory, Japanese are super-efficient. Factory workers work precisely the time they need and have maximum output. Productivity per employee in a factory is super high, and factories in Japan are the best factories in the world regarding production output, quality, and service... Their culture is *Kaizen*, cost reduction, efficiency... However, in the office, nobody ever spoke about *Kaizen*, cost reduction, efficiencies. In fact, if you talk to the people in the factories, they consider people working in the offices as practically having parties. Offices are very inefficient.

For the above participant, productivity and workstyle in a factory and office are puzzlingly different. This comment described a paradoxical situation between the factory and office: while productivity in factories is one of the highest in the world, productivity in offices is one of the lowest in OECD countries (OECD, 2018b, 2018c; Ono, 2018). The CEO went on to suggest that, since not all Japanese workforces are working inefficiently, there should be much room for Japanese office workers to improve.

The interviewer asked company managers how they see this paradox. Some companies agreed and expressed their puzzlement over the contrast. For instance, L- Manager stated that work in an office is not as efficient as in factories:

Concerning improving productivity at the office, we, including myself, still haven't acquired the skill, first of all, to efficiently work for a shorter period and produce

results. In a way, the sense of value, which considers that as “good workstyle”, is still not well developed in the company. We are inexperienced in how to do it, and the value system has not matured sufficiently yet.

The above comment indicates that while the company is aware of the need, they are yet to develop a “good workstyle” in office work. This sense of uncertainty in productivity at the office is in contrast with a high level of precision and certainty commonly observed in Japanese factories, a distinct feature of Japanese management style (Macpherson et al., 2015).

This puzzlement and uncertainty lead to the difficulty of evaluating productivity in the office, which most participants (27 out of 31) reported. For instance, AC-Senior Manager explained how they perceive the difficulty of evaluation:

[In office work] Time is not directly correlated to output. Shorter work hours do not mean lower output, and more extended work hours do not mean higher output. To be honest, we do not have a formula for a relationship between the amount of time spent and the output or the outcome.

This manager is seeking to understand the relationship between time, output, and outcome to evaluate productivity in the office. However, the relationship is not clear, and therefore it is hard to evaluate productivity. L-Manager further elaborates on this difficulty, stating that a primary challenge in enhancing productivity is that there is still no common way to measure performance of office work. The manager acknowledged that there are formulas of labour productivity in theory, as indicated by the OECD (2018c). However, the manager expressed her uncertainty about how much they can be applied in practice:

I really doubt whether these formulas can evaluate how we work, including our creativity...No agreed-upon scale can measure the results achieved by office workers or how well we work. In the factory, time is one clear quantitative scale by which we can measure how to enhance productivity; we look at scales such as 3 seconds, 1 second, or even to the scale of 0.1 seconds. The tricky part is that there is no such thing for office work.

This manager further emphasised the need to account for creativity as a component in the formula when evaluating productivity. Z-Senior Manager shared the same concern in the construction industry. He maintained that regulating time rigidly would hamper creative work and the pursuit of quality:

What I especially feel uncomfortable about is that when designers or creators are thinking about what to do with onsite processes for the best outcome, it is absolutely impossible for them to just suddenly go “Hey, it's 7. We're done here” (laugh). Our company is particular about pursuing higher quality.

This manager is concerned about constraining productivity regarding quality, by trying to regulate the time, as done in factory work. All the comments mentioned above suggest that the companies try to reform workstyle to improve productivity. However, they face difficulty in evaluating productivity in non-factory work: in particular, how to account for time, workstyle, and the pursuit of quality. This difficulty leads to the second theme concerning evaluation of business impact.

Evaluating business impacts

The second sub-theme which emerged from the data is *evaluation of business impact*.

According to Beauregard and Henry (2009), work-life initiatives do not always lead to better organisational performance. In line with this perspective, 23 out of 31 participants reported the need for and difficulty of evaluating the impact of their initiatives on current and future business. For instance, T-Manager acknowledged his concerns bluntly: “Well honestly, what is really difficult is to measure how initiatives for less overtime or more paid holidays are connected to business profits”. The manager is concerned about the lack of formulas to account for business impacts. M-Manager elaborated on this lack of formulas:

It is easy to fall into doing a bit of this initiative and a bit of that initiative... but it is hard to get the essence and to understand the connection... [As there is no formula,] we just need to “try and fail’ or “try and succeed”... As a business entity, ultimately, we want the effects to be reflected in our performance. However, it is hard, and it just takes time to show direct cause and effect. Trying to explain it all would invite further scrutiny and disagreement.

This manager is seeking to understand the connection between initiatives and business performance. However, direct causes and effects are not clear, and therefore it is difficult to evaluate the business impact, especially within a short period, as indicated by Beauregard and Henry (2009). This missing connection is a matter of concern for V-Senior Manager. He maintained that while the company is curtailing overtime work due to compliance pressure, they are uncertain of a formula to connect initiatives and business profit.

I do not know though whether we are enhancing our human capital by doing such things. Of course, the management can support individuals so that they can continue

to work for a long time span. However, the management team has yet to understand such a formula. For instance, who can work in what ways to attain what outcomes, leading to how much profit? Management needs to clarify that these initiatives are worthwhile, based on the formula.

This manager is concerned about the effectiveness and continuity of the initiatives, unless the management understands the strategic formula. The above difficulties are summarised in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9 *Issues with productivity improvement initiatives*

Theme	CSR requirement	Issue
Evaluating productivity	Reform ways of working to reduce overwork, improve work-life balance, and improve productivity	Difficult to evaluate productivity in non-factory work
Evaluating business impact		Difficult to account for time, ways of working, and the pursuit of quality Difficult to evaluate how initiatives are connected to business profit

Thus, the data indicates that these companies attempt to reform workstyle and face difficulties in evaluating productivity and business impacts. Consequently, many are yet to find the strategic formula with which to connect initiatives and business performance and profit over the long run.

4.4 Human Sustainability Initiatives and CSR Strategy

This section reports how companies seek to incorporate human sustainability initiatives into CSR strategy. As discussed in Section 4.1, from the economic perspective, companies need to incorporate these initiatives into their business strategy in order to enhance business and

social performance in the long term (Chandler, 2016; Freeman, 1984; Porter & Kramer, 2006). When participants were asked to describe the connection between their initiatives and CSR strategy, the majority of participants (21 out of 31) indicated that these initiatives are necessary but not connected to business strategy and their core business practices yet. For instance, AC-Senior Manager stated:

Work-life balance is not written down explicitly or positioned and integrated into the business in our current business plan. In principle, I think that this should be included in a medium-term plan as a CSR dimension, but this workforce wellbeing aspect is still in the works.

This manager is concerned with the lack of connection between the work-life balance aspect of their CSR agenda and their business plan. Q-Manager shared this concern about the connection:

I have been in CSR for quite a while. However, if the business and CSR are far apart, the initiatives just will not progress. How do you go about achieving work-life balance? What does it have to do with the business? If there is no link between work-life balance and the business, then these initiatives just will not gain ground.

For this manager, as a company, there is a limit to what extent CSR initiatives can be promoted if they are disconnected from the business. In other words, the initiative may look pleasing on the surface, but under the surface, they are in conflict, are trade-offs, or contrary to core business practices (Hahn et al., 2010; Kossek et al., 2010).

For AA-Manager, this disconnection is evident for other initiatives in relation to human sustainability. The manager referred to the limitations of their initiatives such as women's empowerment, workstyle reform, and work-life balance:

Everybody is in favour of them on the surface, but will not agree in practice. Now no CEO would say, "CSR is unnecessary". As long as the company exists in society, it clearly has the social responsibility and [most CEOs of] the company tries to do what it can do. However, our company's management firmly believes that, as a business in a market, we need to somehow turn some profit out of the efforts. However, we cannot make a profit out of them yet. I feel that it will reach an impasse unless we can do that.

This manager is concerned with the limitation stemming from human sustainability initiatives disconnected from the profit-seeking mission of the business. This lack of integration between human sustainability themes and business strategy means that efforts may be in vain. X-Manager shared his sense of puzzlement regarding this lack of integration:

CSR is not idealistic theory, is it? I think that it is meaningless unless it is tied to business strategies. If you just say, "Let's increase childcare leave for men because it's our social responsibility", I don't think anybody will go "Okay, let's do that". And it probably won't work unless people understand that we are promoting, for instance, childcare leave for men for such and such reasons, and that we are doing this to deal with such and such issues, and that this is also good for the company, as well as for the company's business performance.

This manager is uncertain about the connection between flexibility at work and business strategy: the management and workforce need to understand how initiatives can reinforce business strategy, to make further progress (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). The comments above demonstrate that, while the companies are aware of the need for these initiatives, they find it difficult to integrate them into CSR strategy.

4.5 Synthesis

This section provides the synthesis of the findings presented in this chapter. The following figure synthesises the findings, by elucidating the relationship among human sustainability issues, initiatives, and consequences in the sample of large Japanese companies (Figure 4.2). The figure is described in the text that follows.

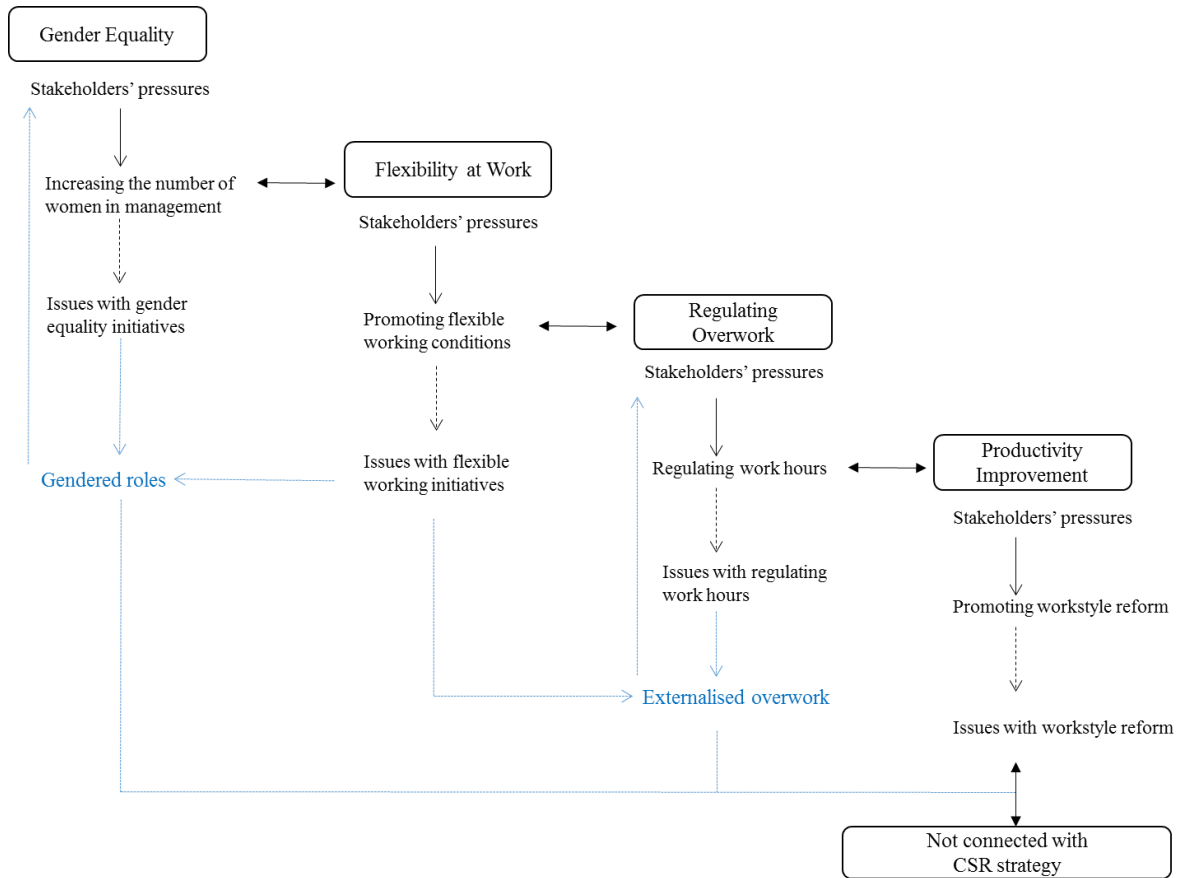


Figure 4. 2 Human sustainability issues, initiatives, and consequences in large Japanese companies

Under increasing pressures from stakeholders, companies promote initiatives such as increasing the number of women in management, flexible working conditions, regulating work hours, and workstyle reform. However, as a consequence of these initiatives, issues emerge concerning gendered roles and externalised overwork. Furthermore, in addition to these issues, difficulties remain in evaluating productivity at the office and the impact on business of these initiatives. As a result, the majority of these companies were unable to connect human sustainability initiatives to their CSR strategy.

Importantly, this figure shows that these initiatives are interrelated, in a way that each set of initiatives needs to sustain the other if they are promoted in parallel. For instance, the initiatives for addressing gender inequality are sustained by enhancing flexibility at work. At the same time, initiatives for enhancing flexibility at work are supported by regulating overwork. Simultaneously, initiatives for regulating overwork are sustained by productivity improvement. This means that, ultimately, unless companies effectively improve productivity in the workplace, it is difficult for them to address persistent overwork, lack of flexibility at work, and gender inequality.

Furthermore, this figure shows the relationships between these issues, initiatives, and dilemmas, and ultimately, the difficulty of integrating initiatives into business strategy. The dotted line indicates potential consequences of the initiatives. As shown, promoting gender equality and flexible work initiatives lead to dilemmas. All of these dilemmas are consistent with the pattern of gendered roles in Japanese society, and may further reinforce the pattern (Nemoto, 2013a; North, 2009). For instance, conflicts in gender equality policies could result in a backlash from men toward women, and vice versa. Also, the gender gap in parental leave and the issue with stalled careers could simply lead to even more gendered career patterns.

Similarly, promoting flexibility at work and regulating overwork leads to workload spillover both to colleagues and non-work time (Kossek et al., 2010; L. Putnam et al., 2014). These dilemmas could potentially lead to patterns of externalised overwork: in other words, overwork is there but not internalised in the management, and ultimately ‘spillover’ costs the individual and society (Gambles et al., 2006; Matten & Moon, 2008; Pfeffer, 2010). Over time, these consequences, namely the gendered roles and externalised

overwork, could make it even more difficult to integrate human sustainability initiatives into CSR strategy.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored the first research question: ‘*How do human sustainability initiatives become part of CSR strategies in large Japanese companies?*’ To answer this question, the chapter drew upon the evidence based on the interviews with managers from 31 large Japanese companies which proactively promote workforce wellbeing and CSR strategy.

First, this chapter examined the dynamics of human sustainability issues, initiatives, and consequences in large Japanese companies. With regard to common dynamics, it reported the themes of perceiving emerging needs of the workforce, promoting workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives as CSR practice, and seeking to integrate the initiatives into business strategy. In terms of the initiatives, four major issues were identified: *gender equality, flexibility at work, regulating overwork, and productivity improvement*. Thus, this chapter described how companies respond to emerging needs of the workforce by promoting workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives as their social responsibility and business imperative.

Second, the chapter has reported the perceptions of managers on the pressures, actions, and dilemmas for each theme of human sustainability initiatives. It reported that companies perceive and respond to increasing stakeholder pressures mainly from the government, shareholders, and the workforce itself, underlined by the emerging needs of the workforce. The companies then promote initiatives such as increasing the number of women in management, flexible working options, regulating work hours, and reforming the

workstyle. However, as a consequence of these initiatives, dilemmas arise. Furthermore, difficulties remain in evaluating productivity at the office and the business impact of these initiatives.

Third, this chapter has examined how human sustainability initiatives have become part of CSR strategies within large Japanese companies. It reported that these initiatives are becoming part of CSR practices but are yet not integrated into their business strategy in the majority of companies in the sample. In other words, while their human sustainability initiatives may be consistent with CSR practices, they are not necessarily consistent with their business strategies and core business practices. Consequently, it remains difficult to integrate human sustainability initiatives into CSR strategy and ultimately enhance business performance.

Overall, this finding shows the dynamics of ‘interrelated economic and social concerns’ (Hahn et al., 2010, 2018; Hahn et al., 2015) in relation to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability in the context of large Japanese companies. The dynamics of issues, initiatives, and consequences point to the difficulty of integrating human sustainability initiatives into their business strategies. Most companies have integrated human sustainability initiatives into CSR practices, but have not been able to resolve the existing patterns of gender inequality, lack of workplace flexibility, overwork, and low productivity in the workplace due to emerging conflicts. This finding substantiates the view that Japanese companies find it harder to resolve gender inequality and long working hours than they expected despite their determination (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015), even with CSR management practices (Asif et al., 2013; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010).

The next chapter goes on to explore the business-society interface in which these large Japanese companies face these dilemmas. It will look at external as well as internal factors which affect and constrain the implementation of human sustainability initiatives.

Chapter 5. Factors Influencing Human Sustainability Initiatives

5.1 Overview

This chapter reports the answer to the research question: ‘*What factors influence the implementation of human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies?*’ It marks the second of the three chapters presenting the findings from this empirical study. The preceding chapter reported that companies perceive increasing pressures from stakeholders and promote workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives as CSR practice. However, most found it difficult to integrate the initiatives into CSR strategy due to emerging dilemmas. This chapter explores the business-society interface in which large Japanese companies face these dilemmas.

As discussed in previous chapters, CSR and sustainability practices are influenced by broader social factors (Campbell, 2007; Mainardes et al., 2011; Matten & Moon, 2008) and organisational processes (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Yuan et al., 2011). With regard to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability, it has been observed that initiatives such as gender equality and WLB initiatives have often been ineffective due to underlying conflicts (Kosseck et al., 2010; L. Putnam et al., 2014). However, there is a limited understanding of the factors leading to the underlying conflicts in different social and cultural contexts (Kim & Moon, 2015; S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; S. Lewis et al., 2007). This chapter examines these factors in the empirical domain of large Japanese companies.

During the interviews, participants were asked to elaborate on the dilemmas and conflicts they perceive when implementing human sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, they were

asked to describe their perspectives regarding which stakeholders share the responsibility for the limited progress in Japanese society. Through data analysis, nine factors emerged as the underlying conflicts, thereby influencing (and mostly constraining) the implementation of human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies. Based on the theoretical framework of this study, these factors are categorised into three main themes: external factors, internal factors, and cognitive factors, as illustrated in a node tree (Figure 5.1). In the remainder of this chapter, this node tree structure is followed and expanded to present the findings.

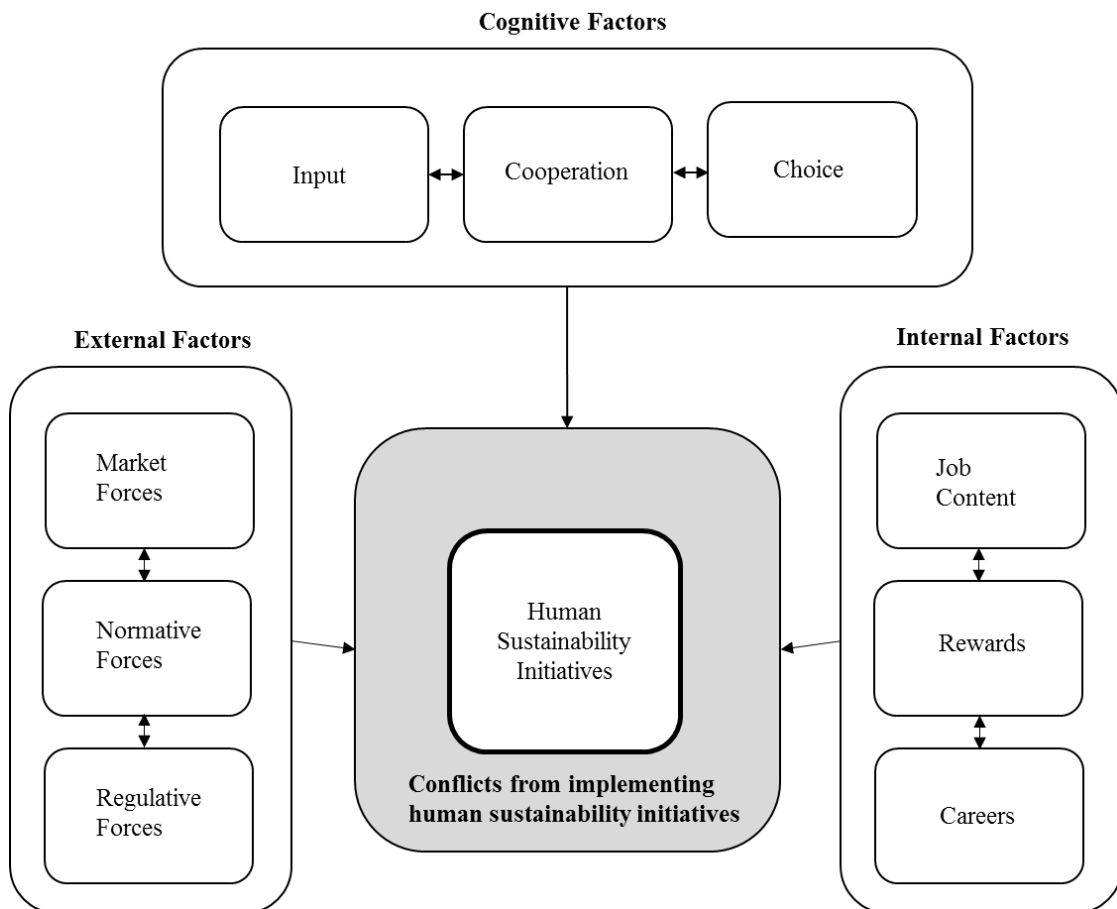


Figure 5.1 Factors that influence the implementation of human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 5.2 describes three factors categorised as external factors. Section 5.3 then elaborates on three factors categorised as internal factors. It is followed by Section 5.4, which explains three factors categorised as cognitive factors. Section 5.5 presents the synthesis of the findings, followed by the conclusion of this chapter.

5.2 External Factors

As discussed, CSR practices are influenced by the external environments (Campbell, 2007; Mainardes et al., 2011; Matten & Moon, 2008). Accordingly, this section examines the external factors that affect the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. In this study, in line with the distinction between external and internal CSR (European Commission, 2001; Welford, 2004), ‘external factors’ indicate influential factors outside the organisation, related mainly to external stakeholders (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Mitchell et al., 1997). All 31 companies which participated in this study reported such external factors. As sub-themes, three different forces emerged from the data: *market forces*, *normative forces*, and *regulative forces*. These main and relevant sub-themes are illustrated in a node tree (Figure 5.2). The following sections elaborate on each theme in detail.

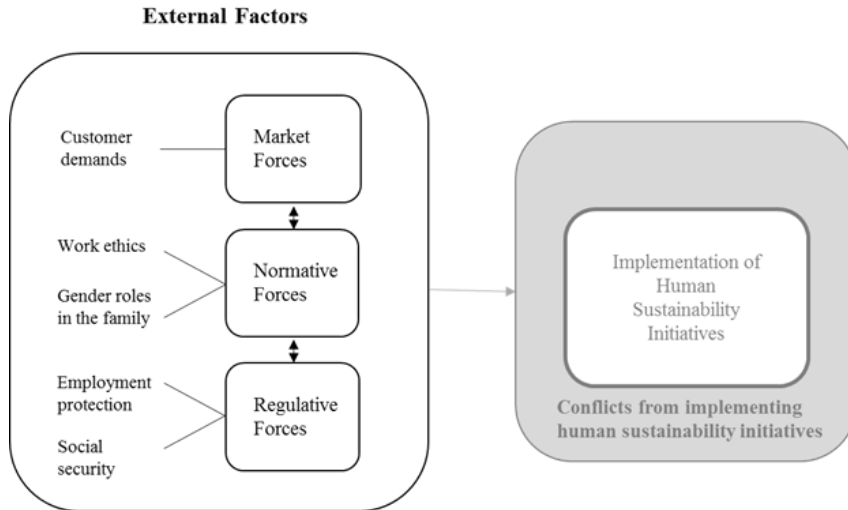


Figure 5. 2 External factors that influence the implementation of human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies

5.2.1 Market Forces

As discussed, one of the core institutions of modern society are the markets (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton, 2004). Markets exert pressures on companies and affect CSR practices (Campbell, 2007; Matten & Moon, 2008; Porter & Kramer, 2006). Following these perspectives, the majority of companies reported that *market forces*, in particular, *customer demands*, influence human sustainability initiatives.

5.2.1.1 Customer demands

A majority (19 out of 31) of the participants referred to *customer demands* as one factor that leads to persistent overwork. For instance, R-Manager stated that their overwork practice is a consequence of “the demands of customers”. The manager explained that long working hours are persistent, particularly in their electronics business unit competing in the highly-competitive market:

Overwork does not spring from each employee's decisions to work longer. Instead, it comes from customer demands to meet short delivery deadlines and achieve the highest quality required. Unless we meet this need, we will be told that they will merely replace us with our competitors.

This manager perceives the customer demands for quality and delivery time as very high in this business. In their perception, the cost of not meeting the demand is potential substitution in the market. The manager went on to assert that: "Because this market pressure is huge, the company cannot casually say that we are going to reduce the hours we work".

Z-Senior Manager makes a similar point concerning delivery time in their construction business:

There is such thing as a construction period... but there are obviously weather conditions and costs that are not included in the calculations. We can't say to our customers, things such as "There's been a typhoon and it's been raining for two weeks, so the construction period will be delayed". Customers will counter with "ah, but, we need it to be done on time".

This manager also perceives customer demands as particularly high in the competitive construction industry; consequently, their efforts to meet such demands result in overwork.

F-Manager also emphasised the need to respond to customer demands in the chemical industry:

It seems like customer demands present a never-ending dilemma...we have to accommodate customers if they insist. Realistically, we cannot meet the impossible demands. However, there is definitely pressure to force unreasonable production.

The above comment highlights a link between the highly competitive market and persistent overwork. Because such pressures seem never-ending, “it comes down to how the company will accommodate the customer”.

Furthermore, this limitless demand of customers could lead to out-of-hours service. C-Senior Manager elaborates on the competitive pressure for out-of-hours service in the house-building industry:

Customers at times request meetings at the weekend or at night. After all, I think that unless we conduct business when desired by our customers, we shall lose out to our competitors. I think, therefore, that companies inevitably end up giving instructions to go and attend these meetings.

Again, this comment indicates that the cost of not meeting the request is potential substitution in the market. The same competitive pressure was a concern for U-Senior Manager in the same industry, who stated that his company “operates in the belief that the real relationship with its customers begins after the provision of their main products” [houses]. This belief, he felt, matches the high customer demands in his industry:

In order to cater to customer requests, there are even people who have written on their business cards to call 24 hours a day anytime. Sales representatives receive calls at night and on days off as the customers rely on them more.

The sales representatives aim to respond to such customers by working beyond normal hours. This competitive pressure pushes the representatives “in the opposite direction of creating a comfortable working environment”.

For the participants mentioned above, overwork is persistent because of constant market forces, in particular, customer demands in the competitive market. The data indicates that when this competitive pressure is exceptionally high, companies perceive the need to respond to the customer demands not just for quality and delivery deadlines, but also for out-of-hours services. These perspectives endorse the view that overly intense competition can cause companies to behave irresponsibly towards their workforce, particularly by putting them in a position to overwork (Campbell, 2007; Pfeffer, 2010; Shimazu, 2009).

In addition to the managers, one informant offered a comparative perspective regarding customer demands. According to Informant A, a sociologist, such intensive competition and the trend of extended working hours can be observed in other developed economies; yet there is a variation within the economies and overwork is more common in Japan than in the West (Angrave & Charlwood, 2015; OECD, 2018a). He argued that working hours practices are markedly different in Japan from those in other developed economies. One of the differences, he stated, is the “unusually high demand” from customers in Japan. He explained that:

The European customers, for instance, exert less pressure for out-of-hours services. Perhaps in European societies, there is a consensus that in order to get a reasonable level of service, matching monetary compensation is necessary. Nobody complains even if the store is closed on Saturday and Sunday.

In contrast, in Japan, he explained that there is “an immense gap between those who provide services and those who receive them”:

In Japan, consumers demand high-quality service regardless of whether they are in convenience stores or fast foods. I do not know how this situation came about, but I think that since working hours can be set without limits [based on current labour regulations], we unwittingly accepted workstyles that respond excessively to consumers.

The comment highlights the taken-for-granted norm of overwork and high customer demands in Japan, which is partly reinforced by particular labour regulations. He then argued that this social norm needs to change for companies to reduce overwork: “If there is no room for customers to accept little inconveniences such as these, it seems to me that companies are not likely to change easily”. This comment indicates the existence of interplay between market, normative, and regulative forces, as suggested by institutional scholars (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). This potential interplay is further examined in the remainder of this chapter.

5.2.2 Normative Forces

According to institutional scholars, CSR practices are affected by the normative forces within society (Campbell, 2007; Kim & Moon, 2015; Matten & Moon, 2008). Normative forces are transferred to individuals in the form of virtues, beliefs, and culture (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Overwork culture seems to be more prevalent in Japan than in the West

(Kanai, 2009; North, 2011; Welford, 2004). Following these perspectives, all 31 companies reported that *normative forces* influence the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. This section reports two forms of normative forces that emerged from the data: *work ethics* and *gender roles in the family*.

5.2.2.1 Work ethics

One theme which emerged from data analysis was *work ethics*. It was argued that the long working hours culture in Japan is underlined by particular work norms, ethics, and virtues (Nemoto, 2013a; North, 2011; Ono, 2018). In line with this perspective, 23 out of 31 companies indicated that their *work ethics* allow for persistent overwork. For instance, U-Senior Manager reported that they are working hard to “break down Japanese-style work ethics and corporate norms that treat long working hours as a virtue”. AA-Manager also acknowledged that similar work ethics are seen as “admirable” implicitly, although “no one specifically states it at our company”. S-Manager elaborated that behind this work ethic is “a virtue to be thoughtful about what is expected implicitly”. The manager went on to state that: “Considered from a work perspective, this virtue leads to extra work... This virtue is often equated with a part of Japanese ‘hospitality (*omotenashi*)’, which really takes a long time”. Stakeholder D, director of a national trade union, summarised the normative dimension of this virtue: “Japanese emphasises ‘doing one’s utmost’ given a task. This virtue may easily lead to the taken-for-granted expectation for working overtime”.

For J-Executive Officer, within this norm of ‘doing one’s utmost’ is a mentality to respond to the unlimited expectations at the workplace:

It is difficult to discern when enough has been done to finish a given task. There is a sense or feeling of wanting to show one's boss that one has done his or her utmost.

It would be good if the boss could clarify what is enough, but this is quite difficult.

The comment highlights the distinct nature of this norm, which involves an expectation not just for oneself but also for others to do the same. In other words, this expectation is collective: everyone is expected to do their utmost equally. This expectation is taken for granted, he felt, to the extent that “even if the boss actually says so [what is enough], this will not be taken at face value by employees”. This collective expectation within the workplace seems to be in line with the ‘micro moral unity paradigm’ and a strong emphasis on the value of loyalty, observed by Wokutch and Shepard (1999).

Furthermore, this norm does not derive from the workplace. Institutional scholars suggest that the education system and schools affect the normative forces (Matten & Moon, 2008; Whitley, 1999). In line with this perspective, AE-Manager pointed out that this expectation of ‘doing one's utmost’ is carried over from education at school, where “school club activities mostly consisted of using sheer determination alone”. Through participation in these activities, he argued, Japanese acquire “the mentality that the more you do your utmost, the closer you get to some self-actualisation”. Similarly, X-Manager pointed out that: “our school education has always instilled the mentality that we will be in trouble unless we continue to work”. He compared this mentality to the fable of the ant and the grasshopper, with its ethical favouring of work over rest and pleasure: “Our perspective on labour is quite like the ant... there is even a sense of fear around taking time off”.

Furthermore, this mentality is historically rooted, according to Informant B, a business ethics researcher. She asserted that this collective expectation for everyone to do their utmost has been observed since the pre-industrial *Edo* period (1603-1867). In the practice of the five-person group system (*Gonin Gumi*), if one person fails, all five people take responsibility. “Because one lives within the community, it is necessary to try one’s hardest and harmonise with the whole... to the extent of negating one’s individual interests”. In other words, the Japanese virtue of working long hours reflects a collective understanding of responsibility to close members of the community, as suggested by Fukukawa and Teramoto (2009).

Similar to the unlimited market pressure reported earlier, this mentality of ‘doing one’s utmost’ was also strongly contrasted with other developed economies. According to Informant B, “In Anglo-Saxon societies, everyone thinks more about the individual and one is a separate entity from the company. However, the Japanese have thought differently for a long time”. The comment indicates that the expectation for everyone to do their utmost is rooted in the Japanese community, having been ‘taken for granted’ even before the industrial age. These comments are consistent with the view that Japanese companies operate within the culturally and historically rooted understanding of responsibility based on unity in the community (Dore, 1993; Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Tange, 2001; Wokutch & Shepard, 1999).

Furthermore, this collective expectation has a strong implication for how equality is conceived. I-Senior Manager pointed out that equality can be seen as an outcome of an effort to do one’s utmost:

Labour productivity, of course, differs from person to person. However, in Japan, if someone with less ability tries hard and works three times as long to produce the same level of output as a more talented person, then they will receive equal treatment. Elementary school education underscores that ‘everybody is equal’ in this sense.

With this view of equality, the amount of time used and productivity per unit of time are of secondary consideration. This practice is contrasted with other developed countries in the West. The manager went on to state that, in the UK and Germany, where he once lived, to a degree, student life courses are decided at the elementary school stage based on their respective abilities. However, in Japan, “this sort of thing is deemed discriminatory... The idea is that pupils of all abilities study together throughout the school years”. This idea has implications for working hours: “I think this sort of norm and practice is related to working overtime in Japan”. A-Senior Manager also testifies that this understanding of equality is linked to persistent overwork: “Our generation, who lived in the old era, tends to think that if I don’t have the same ability, I am expected to increase output through working longer hours”.

For the participants mentioned above, Japanese work ethics allow for persistent overwork. In particular, the norm of “everyone does their utmost” represents the unlimited expectations within the workplace as a ‘community’. This implicit norm is perceived to be practised historically in Japanese society at least since pre-industrialisation, and it is being instilled in the workforce through the education system. This normative force with emphasis on equality based on “everyone doing their utmost” is different from the one in

the developed economies of the West, where ethical principles emphasise individual freedom, justice, and rights (Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Garriga & Melé, 2004).

5.2.2.2 Gender roles in the family

Another theme which emerged was *gender roles in the family*. According to institutional scholars, one of the core institutions of modern society is the family (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton, 2004). It is also argued that progress in gender equality has been limited due to persistent gender roles in Japan (Nemoto, 2013a; North, 2009, 2011; Ono, 2018). In line with this perspective, 28 out of 31 companies indicated that *gender roles in the family* lead to persistent gendered roles in the workplace. For instance, I-Senior Manager pointed out that husbands and wives have traditionally taken on roles differently: “there is an idea that men work because they must protect the family, even if this means doing overtime”. This comment highlights the persistent gendered roles within the family. She argued this pattern of role sharing continues to be taken for granted in the Japanese society:

People are still very much constrained by fixed attitudes on roles in the family...

There is a sense in society that this way of working – how people have lived up until now – cannot be so easily let go of... But it is only possible if their wives stay at home... I think this is a problem for Japanese society as a whole.

This role sharing is highly implicit, as explained by V-Senior Manager:

In Japan, no formal document explicitly stipulates role sharing in the family, for example as written down in the Imperial Rescript on Education in the past. It is not

formally written that men should be like this and women should be like that. Yet in some way, this is how everybody behaves.

These comments indicate the persistence of gender role sharing in the family, as the norm has been practised historically and continues to affect behaviour (Nemoto, 2013b; North, 2009; Ono, 2018). As P-Manager explains, the assumption that these traditional values, represented by the idea that mothers should be full-time homemakers, has been “imprinted as the norm” as her generation grew up. This norm persists, despite efforts to change their employees’ mentality: “A few can question the assumption [of gender roles in the family] and think about what needs to be done together to overcome this social situation [of overwork and gender inequality]. But many others still cannot change their ways of thinking”.

AA-Manager also testified to the persistence of traditional roles:

As a woman, the moment I say to my colleagues that, although I have a child and husband, I live and work away from family, they all have an instant look of astonishment. Everyone starts asking about how my husband feels or how my child is doing. Then I feel that maybe I shouldn’t be pursuing my career.

The above participant feels conflicted between the family role and pursuing her career at the workplace. This norm, she felt, is reinforced by family and the public education system:

I don’t want to blame them [my colleagues] for saying this. It is not an individual thing. It is a social norm... Our ideas [in Japanese companies] lag behind because of norms in family life, culture and the education of Japanese society as a whole.

Unless there is a change in these norms, the progress will probably continue to be limited.

Furthermore, this normative force affects the expectation for how elderly care is provided. According to K-Senior Manager, the traditional role-sharing norm attributes the main responsibility for elderly care to a female family member:

Nursing care for my mother-in-law has become an issue in my family too, and there is talk that I, the wife, should be the one to look after her. It is especially difficult to change the mentality of the aged regarding role sharing in the family.

This participant feels conflicted between the role of family-care and her career at work. The norm tells her that it is the wife who should look after a family. The implication is that the husband is relatively less expected to do so, but instead, is expected to be working hard in the workplace for the family (Nemoto, 2013a; North, 2009). This conflict between family-care and work reflects the emerging needs of the workforce to work and care for the family at the same time, as discussed in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2.1).

Furthermore, these conflicts between family and career are intensified when both wife and husband work, as indicated by North (2009). According to Stakeholder C, a European CEO of the Japan-based operation of a global company, a family does not function if both wife and husband work:

The problem for women comes when her husband also works for a Japanese company. If both of them need to stay in the office until 11 pm, even the family does not function well. The female has limited support from men, so she thinks what she can do in the workplace is quite limited.

In other words, the functioning of family and career hinges on both the husband and wife.

As explained by A-Senior Manager,

If one couple works in the same company, we can request both to role-share efficiently. However, if our female employee has a partner working in the other company, it is quite difficult because such instructions cannot be given.

The comment highlights the cooperation needed beyond each family, or even the company that the husband and wife work for. He illustrated the case of one company. Once praised for the advanced preferential support system for women, the company announced that they could no longer support the system. “Their lesson was that it will be difficult for one company to act on its own, unless men become more aware and properly fulfil their roles in the family as a social consensus”. The comment highlights that there is a limit to what can be tackled by each company, a point also made by I-Senior Manager who stated that a “wide net must be cast over the whole society”.

Z-Senior Manager pointed out that changes are necessary not just at the workplace, but also at the family and school level:

When it is normal for both mom and dad to do the child rearing together in the family, and fathers are told to “Go home early. Why do you need to do so much work?”, then productivity goes up. That is the power of the wife... Also, there has to be a class in high school to teach students how to work productively, acquiring the necessary skills and to go home early to do childcare. If students who are educated that way enter society, their companies will also have to change.

The comment highlights the expectation that companies would behave differently if normative forces change, as suggested by Matten and Moon (2008).

For the participants mentioned above, Japanese *gender roles in the family* lead to persistent gendered roles *and* overwork in the workplace. In particular, the norm of ‘husband working hard at work and wife looking after the family at home’ represents the unworkable expectations within the families. This implicit norm is perceived to be practised historically in Japanese society during the industrial age, and it continues to be instilled in family life and the public education system. Again, this normative force with emphasis on gender roles in the family seems to be different from the one in developed economies in the West, where the emphasis has moved from ‘male bread-winner model’ to ‘adult worker model’ (North, 2009).

Here, it is pertinent to note that *work ethics* and *gender roles in the family* are consistent with each other within traditional Japanese society. In particular, they can reinforce each other if husband and wife can ‘do their utmost’ at work and home separately, fulfilling their gender roles in the family (Nemoto, 2013a; Ono, 2018). Thus, these themes together shape a particular form of normative force which affects human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies. However, this pattern is seen as becoming dysfunctional, with the emerging needs of the workforce, both husband and wife, to work and care for the family at the same time, as discussed in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2.1).

5.2.3 Regulative Forces

As discussed, one of the core institutions of modern society is the state (national government and state agencies) (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton, 2004). CSR practices are affected by regulative forces exerted by the government, which is founded on the political and labour system in the country (Campbell, 2007; Matten & Moon, 2008; Whitley, 1999). In particular, employment practices are regulated by labour regulations (Berg et al., 2014; Terjesen et al., 2015). However, labour regulations and employment practices in Japan are different from those in the West (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Nemoto, 2013a; Shimada, 2004). Following these perspectives, 19 out of 31 companies reported that *regulative forces* influence the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. This section reports two forms of regulative force that emerged from the data: *employment protection* and *social security*.

5.2.3.1 Employment protection

One theme which emerged from data analysis was *employment protection*. It has been argued that labour laws and practices in Japan reflect industrial paternalism, covering labour protection measures for core workers and their families through long-term employment (Campbell, 2007; Gond et al., 2011). However, 17 out of 31 companies reported that the traditional form of *employment protection* constrains the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. Two sub-themes emerged from the data analysis: *regulation of overtime* and *regulation of dismissals*. The following sections elaborate on each sub-theme in detail.

Regulation of overtime

One sub-theme which emerged from data analysis was *regulation of overtime*: 13 out of 31 companies reported this theme. For instance, Q-Manager maintained that working overtime in Japan is “tolerated and even protected” by labour regulations:

It is not that companies want to make their employees work unconditionally for as many long hours as possible. On the contrary, working overtime is actually tolerated and even protected by labour regulations. This is because the extent to which employees can work overtime is agreed between management and the company union.

This manager referred to article 36 of Japan’s Labour Standards Act (enacted in 1947 and amended in 1995) to govern working conditions in Japan (Japan External Trade Organization, 2018). While the law allows standard working hours of 40 hours a week, the special provision of article 36 provides the regulatory basis for overtime work thorough the ‘36 Agreement’ (Iwasaki, Takahashi, & Nakata, 2006; Shimada, 2004). It stipulates that “in the event that the employer has entered [into] a written agreement” with a company union, the company can “extend the working hours” beyond 40 hours per week (The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, 2016). In other words, legally, overtime is, to an extent, at the discretion of the company and core workers.

According to Informant C, a labour economist, this discretion allows for persistent overwork. She argues that a company can make its employees work long hours legally, as long as “a balance has been attained based on an agreement by properly concluding the ‘36 Agreement’ in advance”. As overtime hours are tied to overtime payment for employees,

“the long working hours cannot simply be said to be the responsibility of the company alone. In the end, this overwork is a system”.

In this system, as Informant D, a labour law researcher, argued, “There is in practice no ceiling on overtime hours”. When asked to describe why this ‘escape clause’ has persisted despite increasing stakeholder pressure to reduce overwork, he explained that in essence, companies and the government have seen working overtime as “extremely positive”:

In a way, the government acknowledged long working hours by enacting the Labour Standards Act. The fact that long working hours are regarded as okay shows that both Japanese companies and the government implicitly acknowledge working longer to be an extremely positive practice. Therefore, [with the ‘escape clause’] there is a sense of ignoring explicit rules that are not in line with this implicit agreement.

The comment highlights the ‘implicit’ nature of the view of overwork as positive. It also highlights the norm of overwork partly reinforced by a particular labour regulation.

For the participants mentioned above, this form of overtime regulation allows for persistent overwork. In particular, the acceptance of this regulation represents excessive expectations for work within the business community, acknowledged by the government, companies and unions. This regulative force, which allows for discretion between the company and core workers, is different from the common approach in the West, which limits the number of work hours in industrial activities to eight hours per day and forty-eight in a week (International Labour Office, 2018a; Shimada, 2004).

Regulation of dismissals

Another sub-theme which emerged was *regulation of dismissals*: 9 out of 31 companies reported this theme. For instance, L-Manager described their struggle under current regulation of dismissals:

Our company follows the labour laws properly, but there are too many parts concerning labour that is controlled by regulation... Under these regulations, we have to organise and enhance all the careers of full-time employees we hired indefinitely without dismissal.

The comment highlights the non-dismissal responsibility placed on companies by labour regulations in line with lifetime employment. The manager went on to argue that this responsibility for “everything regarding employees” has become difficult to maintain for many companies. This comment is consistent with the perspective that, due to intense global competition and slow economic growth, the assumption of long-term employment can no longer be taken for granted (Fukukawa & Moon, 2004; Tanimoto, 2009).

According to Informant C, a labour economist, dismissal is more strictly regulated in Japan than other developed economies:

In the field of labour regulation, there is the customary phrase of the ‘four requirements for dismissals’. These are pretty strict requirements. Consequently, once a company hires an employee it is difficult to dismiss them.

This comment refers to the customary requirements established by judicial precedents of Japanese courts (Hamada, Otsuka, Ranis, & Togo, 2011; Sugeno & Yamakoshi, 2014). In one of the leading precedents, it is stated that “even when an employer exercises its right of

dismissal, it will be void as an abuse of rights if it is not based on objectively reasonable grounds that are socially acceptable” (Hamada et al., 2011, p. 79).

According to Hamada et al. (2011), ‘socially acceptable grounds’ include proving the following criteria. First, the company has a compelling need for dismissal such as serious economic depression; second, the company has endeavoured to avoid dismissals by resorting to other measures such as transfers; third, it has gone through a proper selection of people based on objective criteria; and fourth, it has implemented a proper procedure of explaining to the workers the need for dismissal and the conditions, and consulting with them in good faith.

According to Informant C, these criteria are written ambiguously, using general terms such as ‘socially acceptable’, ‘proper’, and ‘good faith’. As the term ‘socially acceptable’ indicates, these criteria reflect the normative forces in Japanese society. However, without specific standards, it is difficult to prove companies have met these normative criteria. Consequently, she explained that, while some argue that the custom of lifetime employment has broken down, fundamentally it is very difficult for companies to dismiss full-time employees in comparison to other countries. These perspectives are in line with the view that large Japanese companies operate under relatively stringent employment protection regulations, particularly for regular workers (Belot, Boone, & Van ours, 2007; OECD, 2007).

It is pertinent to note here a different perspective regarding dismissal regulations. For instance, Sugeno and Yamakoshi (2014) state that it is an exaggeration to say that Japanese

employment laws make it almost impossible to fire regular workers. They examine the use of the labour tribunal and argue that the procedures are not excessive (p. 92):

The substantive rules of dismissal are not so strict as to make employers abandon the idea of dismissing employees who have committed serious misconduct, who exhibit exceptionally poor job performance or when the firm runs into serious economic difficulties. Basically, Japanese dismissal law is premised upon the employer's freedom of dismissal, and protects the interest of employees by restraining its abusive exercise.

They went on to conclude that Japanese dismissal law is “neither too strict nor too loose for the employer” and that “it does not impose excessive rigidity on the employer for establishing discipline and efficiency in the workplace or carrying out necessary adjustments of the workforce” (p. 92).

Regardless of the level of strictness, Informant C argues that the strict dismissal rule has an implication for overwork, because “companies try to maintain as few full-time employees as possible”. She explained that:

Even if the economy improves temporarily, companies do not take on full-time employees, which they keep at a bare minimum. Doing this leads to a situation where full-time employees are forced to work long hours, especially when it is the busy season or when the economy recovers.

This comment indicates that, for full-time employees and companies, overwork functions as a buffer in economic cycles, when the strict dismissal rule is in place. Furthermore, G-

Manager elaborated on the further implication of strict dismissal rules for part-time employees:

There is no freedom for [full-time] employees to quit or for companies to dismiss [full-time] employees. With this lack of freedom, companies have to use non-regular employees, in the end, to cope with economic risk systematically.

In other words, for full-time employees and companies, part-time employees function as another buffer in economic cycles, when the strict dismissal rule is in place. These comments suggest that, under the strict *regulation of dismissals*, companies are incentivised to keep full-time employees to a bare minimum and use overtime and part-time employment as a buffer during economic cycles. This view is in line with the perspective that the form of employment protection legislation influences the companies' hiring practices (Barbieri & Cutuli, 2015; Hijzen, Kambayashi, Teruyama, & Genda, 2015). It is also in line with the view that Japanese companies tend to balance employee interests through discretion during economic cycles (Campbell, 2007; N. Kang & Moon, 2012).

For the participants mentioned above, this form of dismissal regulation allows for persistent overwork as a buffer, while protecting the employment of core workers. This perspective is also consistent with the view that full-time employees (historically disproportionately males) accepted the company's discretion over three aspects of work: their job content, place of work, and working hours (Tsutsui, 2015).

In addition, one informant offered a perspective regarding the interplay between market, normative, and regulative forces, as suggested by institutional scholars (Basu & Palazzo,

2008; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Informant C, a labour economist, pointed out that Japanese society is unique in that society perceives dismissals so negatively:

For instance, the US or China are societies in which companies can say to workers that they do not need to come next month for multiple reasons, such as changes to the contents of operations... The employment contracts are often renewed annually... In comparison, Japan is a society that is very paternalistic in protecting employees from dismissals.

This comment highlights the taken-for-granted norm of lifetime employment in Japan, which is partly reinforced by particular labour regulations. This view is in line with the perspective that, even when long-term employment can no longer be taken for granted, the practice remains a standard management approach, although to a lesser extent (Tsutsui, 2015).

Thus, *regulation of overtime* and *regulation of dismissals* emerged as factors that allow for persistent overwork. These themes together shape a particular form of regulative force, which affects human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies. As in the relationship between *work ethics* and *gender roles in the family*, these themes are consistent with each other. In particular, they can reinforce each other if the government and companies can protect employment by strict *regulation of dismissals* while allowing discretion for unlimited overtime.

5.2.3.2 Social security

As stated, companies that participated in this study reported that *regulative forces* influence the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. In addition to the regulative force of *employment protection*, 13 out of 31 companies reported that the form of *social security* constrains the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. Two sub-themes emerged from the data analysis: *job security* and *security of family-care provision*. The following sections elaborate on each sub-theme in detail.

Job security

One sub-theme which emerged from data analysis was *job security*: 10 out of 31 companies reported this theme. In particular, they indicated that it is difficult to provide job security by themselves. For instance, according to Informant C, in the past, lifetime employment practices provided a form of *job security* to the workforce:

With the past model of only the husband in the family working, if the husband lost his job, then the whole family would be at a loss. Consequently, because it is necessary to secure the income of the husband as the mainstay of the family, this sort of guaranteed employment came to be linked with the stability of the family and society.

The comment highlights the indirect form of *job security* borne by the companies.

Furthermore, the stability of family and society was seen as supported by the practice. In other words, strict *regulation of dismissals* functioned as an indirect form of *social security*, within the established model of employment (Campbell, 2007; Kato & Kodama, 2017; Tanimoto, 2009). Within this model, strict *regulation of dismissals* and *job security* can reinforce each other if the companies and employees are able to shoulder the responsibility.

In turn, it was natural for employees to expect social security offered by companies. This expectation is consistent with the view that a tacit long-term employment understanding defined the Japanese employment system (Ouchi, 1981; Todeschini, 2011; Tsutsui, 2015).

With an increasingly unclear economic outlook compared to the past, however, this model is seen as difficult to retain. G-Manager, following on her statement that “there is no freedom for employees to quit or for companies to dismiss employees”, pointed out that “both the company and the employee could end up being unhappy” with this model:

After all, these employees [considered as redundant during the economic downturn] have some kind of expertise but are not able to make use of this in practice [within the company]. Even if it is actually more functional to move to another company, these people cling to our company because they think it is beneficial not to quit. There is a limit [for government and society] to just tell the companies to maintain employment.

This comment highlights the connection between company-shouldered *job security* and the employees’ incentive to stay on in the company. This comment is in line with the perspective that employees have an incentive to stay on in the company when the labour market is underdeveloped and mid-term recruitment is not typical (Tanimoto, 2009).

Expressing a sense of frustration, the manager pointed out a need to improve employee mobility in the society, if they are to improve productivity and reduce working hours.

Similarly, N-Manager argued that job security and labour productivity cannot be maintained by a company alone:

Simply stated, if we are allowed to dismiss the lowest performing 10% or 20% of employees, that would likely raise labour productivity. However, for companies to do this, some sort of job security system must be there at the society level. Yes, lifetime employment may be an extreme form, but [if companies start to dismiss employees] who will support employment?

These comments by managers emphasised the need to consider both job security and productivity improvement at the societal level.

In a different manner, the national union leaders stressed the importance of job security at the societal level. For instance, Stakeholder D, Director of the national union centre, stated that they had taken the position that “revisions of the rules to loosen worker protections are absolutely unacceptable”. Similarly, Stakeholder E, Director of an industry labour union, advocated the need for employment stability in the society:

After all, we think that stable long-term employment is the most important. Some say that wages will rise in exchange for making the labour market more flexible. However, although labour mobility sounds good on the surface, this essentially means making it easier to dismiss employees. If this is the kind of society that is to be created, we cannot acquiesce. We shouldn't create a labour market that promotes dismissals.

Importantly, while the comment emphasises the need for employment stability and security, it also acknowledges the links between employee mobility, labour productivity, and work hours.

For the participants mentioned above, company-shouldered job security affects the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. While company managers and unions take different views on dismissals, both stakeholders agree that the traditional form of *job security* is linked to overwork and low labour productivity. This view is in line with the perspective that the form of employment protection legislation affects productivity of the economy (Heyes & Lewis, 2014).

Security of family-care provision

Another sub-theme which emerged was the *security of family-care provision*: 11 out of 31 companies mentioned this theme. In particular, they indicated that it is difficult to provide the security of family-care provision by themselves. For instance, N-Manager stated that:

There is an increasing need to provide nurseries and the system to properly look after children... The government says, “Companies should come up with a solution by themselves”, but it is in the end extremely difficult.

This manager is concerned about the responsibility placed upon companies regarding family-care provision. S-Manager elaborates on this perception of burden:

Now, we are trying to mitigate the hardships of employees who are struggling with childcare and elderly care. But our support only relieves just a bit of the hardship. Presently, this support still cannot be entrusted to the government and the local community.

The comment reflects the perception that the *security of family-care provision* is limited beyond what companies can provide. The limitation indicates a lack of family-care

provisions shared by the government and the company. These comments are in line with the view of *family-care* as one of the emerging needs of their workforce (Section 4.2.1). These comments are also consistent with the perspective that particular challenges occur in the ‘zone of discretion’, an area neither regulated, nor illegal, nor sanctioned (Ackerman, 1973; Andrew Crane et al., 2008).

This lack was expressed particularly strongly regarding elderly care. L-Manager describes the impact of elderly care on employees:

In most cases, elderly care becomes something long term... taking elderly-care leave is simply not enough... I strongly believe the premise that employees will take time off from their company to care for someone could end up making it very depressing and arduous for them.

The comment describes the situation where the employees struggle to continue working even with elderly-care support from the company. L-Manager acknowledged that elderly care leave regulations now provide for a generous total of 93 days of leave (Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare [Japan], 2010). She explains that her company goes further and allows employees to take one year off; nonetheless there is a limitation to this approach:

There is an issue regarding the current infrastructure of society... people have no choice but to take time off work wholly for the sake of elderly care. As long as this issue is not resolved, corporate support for elderly care remains very difficult. It also remains difficult for employees to continue working while caring for family... the support by care facilities must be advanced as a society.

The comment highlights the absence of responsibility despite government regulations and corporate initiatives. In the current family-care system, even if the government and corporations support employees to take leave temporarily, the employees cannot come back to work full-time. This is because family care needs to be provided for the long term, and employees are faced with a choice between full-time work or family-care provision. The comments describe the way in which the Japanese workforce is experiencing double pressures for childcare and eldercare (Faruqee & Mühleisen, 2003; S. Lewis et al., 2007; OECD, 2011, 2016).

Furthermore, according to Informant C, this situation makes it “a rational choice for the companies to discriminate against women”:

Statistically, the turnover rate is significantly higher for women than men.

Therefore, for companies, there is less incentive to assign women to workplaces based on their future career prospects or to carry out in-house vocational training if they are likely to quit in any case.

This ‘rational discrimination’ against women, she argued, is therefore not the responsibility of companies alone but also the responsibility of the government. Consequently, she argued that the government should offer more support to women so they can remain in the workplace and do not need to quit their jobs to provide care for their families. The comment highlights the need for the *security of family-care provision* in order for women to take on responsibilities in the workplace, as indicated by North (2009). In other words, the current form of *social security* placed on the shoulders of companies is seen as leading to externalised overwork and gendered roles in the Japanese workplace.

As reported, *employment protection* and *social security* together shape a particular form of regulative force in Japan, which affects human sustainability initiatives. These themes are not only consistent but also mutually reinforcing: they function together if the government enforces strict employment protection and companies offer stable employment and social security, underpinned by the outlook for economic growth.

In summary, this section elaborated on the *external factors* that affect and mostly constrain the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. The evidence suggests that these factors constitute the system of unreasonable expectations shared by key stakeholders, leading to externalised overwork and gendered roles in Japanese society. The next section turns to the *internal factors* that the participants reported in conjunction with these *external factors*.

5.3 Internal Factors

This section examines the internal factors that affect the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. As discussed, CSR practices are influenced by internal factors (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Yuan et al., 2011). In this study, ‘internal factors’ indicate influential factors within the organisations, and are related mainly to internal stakeholders (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Mitchell et al., 1997; Welford, 2004). Most participants (27 out of 31) reported such internal factors. As sub-themes, three patterns of practices emerged from the data analysis: *job content*, *rewards*, and *careers*. These main themes and relevant sub-themes are illustrated in a node tree (Figure 5.3), and are elaborated in detail in the following sections.

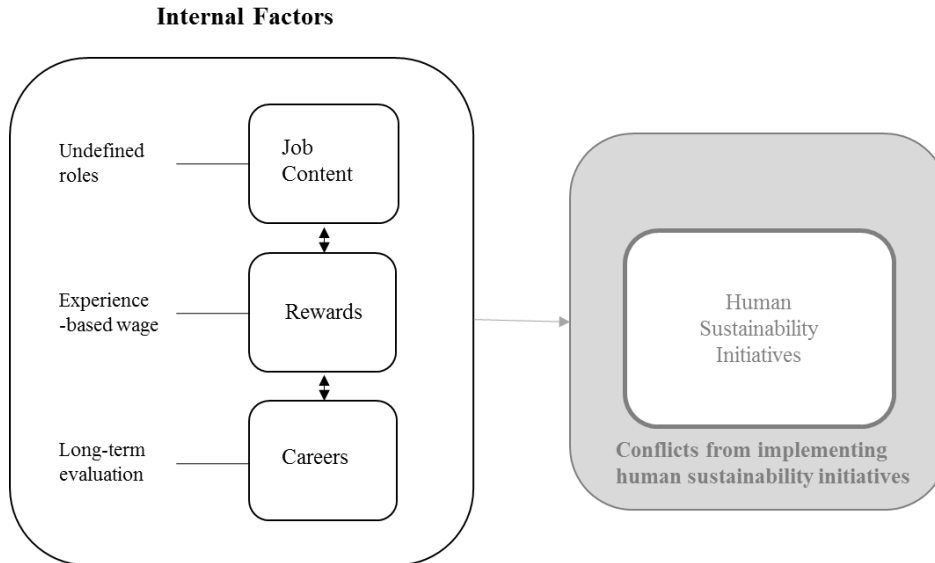


Figure 5.3 Internal factors that influence human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies

5.3.1 Job Content

This section reports the first theme: *job content*. As discussed, company practices form stable patterns of behaviour and practices within the organisation once they are accepted as legitimate (Matten & Moon, 2008; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). In Japan, one of the core employment practices is the company’s discretion over the job content (Asai, 2007; Ono, 2018; Tsutsui, 2015). Following these perspectives, 17 out of 31 companies reported that *job content* influences the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. For instance, G-Manager expressed her concern for the patterns of ambiguous job content in her company, which allows for persistent overwork:

The definition of job role is not clear for all employees. Because of this, everyone willingly takes up jobs from the space between the assigned tasks, but working time increases proportionately as a result.

For this participant, this space between boundaries of tasks leads employees to overwork. This comment is consistent with the view that an ambiguous job description is a cause of long working hours (Ono, 2018). I-Senior Manager elaborated on this lack of assigned tasks, contrasting with how jobs are defined in companies in the UK:

Before my current position, I worked in London for four years. I was often in and out of the office for a UK company, but employees there rarely worked overtime.

There is a clear division of tasks, and people are told explicitly what to do.

The above comment suggests that job content is defined and divided explicitly in UK companies. This comment is consistent with the view that the job description is more clearly defined in Europe, where employment relationships are governed by more explicit contracts (Ono, 2018; Yamamoto & Kuroda, 2014). This division of tasks, I-Senior Manager argued, reflects a clear division of management responsibilities:

They are also told that their authority only goes up to a point. Things that escalate above one's responsibility are all decided in detail. Therefore, every boundary is defined both horizontally and vertically, and if there is any gap, it means that the basic design of the organisation is flawed. In that case, it is the upper management that will pick up these tasks.

The above comment highlights a clear boundary of tasks and responsibilities in the UK company. In other words, job content is bounded more explicitly than in Japan, which makes it difficult to assign the employees to unspecified tasks (Ono, 2018; Yamamoto & Kuroda, 2014). In clear contrast to this company, the manager asserted that Japanese companies “don’t have anything like this”:

There are people in charge [of specific tasks], but in reality, one may be told to do something he or she is not actually in charge of. Said positively, everyone collaborates together. But put in more negative terms, there is overlap.

In other words, job content, roles and responsibilities are not restricted in practice, even when there are stated responsibilities. This comment is in line with the view that employment relationships in Japan are governed by implicit contracts (Yamamoto & Kuroda, 2014). This implicit practice, the manager argued, reflects unlimited expectations for management responsibilities in Japanese companies:

Regarding authority as well... even if it is clearly stated in the role descriptions... in terms of everyday decision making, the people in charge end up going up each level to explain to the board of directors.

This comment highlights the gap between the public statement and actual practice, which is covered by the discretionary efforts and commitments of employees, which are rewarded by career advancement in the long run (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Tanimoto, 2009).

According to S-Manager, this practice of undefined roles makes it difficult to control workload and improve work-life balance in Japan, as suggested by Ono (2018):

Work-Life Balance is far better overseas, because their roles at work are defined in the job description, and they are able to control their workloads more easily... It is only in Japan [in our global operations] where this problem gets complicated.

P-Manager asserted that these undefined roles allow an employee to advance his or her career by experiencing various roles. “They are called ‘generalists’, similar to a jack of all trades”. P-Manager pointed out that, with this pattern of career development, when there

comes a period when an employee does not work, there is an equivalent loss of experience. This perception of ‘loss of experience’, the manager argued, allows for persistent overwork:

I feel that there is a problem with the perception of employees here. In this system, [when employees take leave] they tend to think that they could have been assigned to some roles and been able to brush up on their skill-based experience.

The comment highlights the feeling of conflict inside the minds of employees: taking leave means losing the experience of various roles, thus hindering career advancement opportunities. This comment is consistent with concerns for career advancement when employees hesitate to take WLB initiatives (Beauregard, 2011; Kossek et al., 2010). Furthermore, this feeling employees have is consistent with the view that their career as a core employee is substantially restricted in Japan if they do not accept the company’s discretion over the job content (Asai, 2007; Tsutsui, 2015). In contrast to this view, however, L-Manager stated that such feelings of conflict are not evident in her company:

It’s hard to imagine “stalling” one’s career just because one is not around a month or three months... Our company doesn’t have a system that promotes and gives raises based on number of years... It’s a bit difficult to imagine that the childcare leave will directly affect their careers.

The comment indicates that the level of such conflict differs from company to company, depending on the system of evaluations and career advancement. This difference will be further examined in Chapter 6. Nonetheless, overall, the above comments show that this pattern of *undefined roles* put the workforce in a quandary. These comments suggest that,

for the participants, the particular patterns of job content in Japan allow for persistent overwork.

5.3.2 Rewards

In combination with job content, the pattern of rewards emerged as another factor which allows for persistent overwork. In Japan, one of the core employment practices is the rewards system based on seniority (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Ono, 2018). In line with this perspective, 13 out of 31 companies reported this theme. For instance, Stakeholder E, Director of an industry labour union, explained that the rewards are traditionally based on employees' experience, which is considered a rough equivalent to 'employee competency'. This rewards system, commonly referred to as 'competency-based wages', he argued, allows for persistent overwork:

In Japan, the traditional workstyle has been based on evaluations of 'employee competency'. This means that if a person works hard, they could become more important and receive a higher income. That is why everyone tries their hardest. They also industriously work overtime. As far as possible, they don't take annual paid leave. They only took time off for weddings and funerals. I think it can be said that up until now Japan had been this sort of society... a society where everyone tries hard.

This comment highlights the link between the pattern of overwork, rewards, and career advancement. The link can be elaborated on as follows: the longer and harder they work, the more 'experience' they gain; more 'experience' leads to more 'employee competency'; this 'experience' and 'competency' then leads to higher wages and 'generalist' career

advancement over the course of one's lifetime employment. This perspective is in line with the view that, within lifetime employment, employees were evaluated over the long term according to their merit and by the traditional seniority system (Ono, 2018; Tanimoto, 2009). This comment further underscores the practice of 'everyone tries their hardest', which is consistent with the norm of 'everyone does their utmost' discussed in Section 5.2.2.

According to stakeholder E, within these shared expectations between company and employees, companies "moved employees around, made them acquire multiple skills, and promoted employees internally". This promotion practice reflects the pattern of seniority wages and internal career advancement within the traditional Japanese employment system (Ouchi, 1981; Tanimoto, 2009; Todeschini, 2011; Tsutsui, 2015). It is also consistent with the interpretation of 'lifetime employment' as an 'implicit long-term employment guarantee' and 'the associated reward system', in which wages are detached from specific jobs and seniority plays a significant role in wage determination (Kato & Kodama, 2017). This rewards practice has an implication for working hours, because the employees who enjoy job security under this implicit agreement "are asked to take advantage of opportunities to exert discretionary effort" (Kato & Kodama, 2017). Furthermore, Ono (2018, p. 39) further points out that the seniority-based rewards system "rewards input in the form of commitment and loyalty to the company" rather than output and performance. This pattern of an 'experience-based' wage system contrasts with wage systems in other developed economies. For instance, according to Stakeholder E, in the 'job-based' wage system, "wages are paid according to defined job content regardless of personal circumstances; the workers are supposed to stay on the same job task and are not to be

moved around from one job to another, as in the Japanese promotion system”. In this system, he explained, “employees are told to work at the company from 9am to 5pm, and consequently, overtime is not a routine expectation but an exception”. While acknowledging the benefits, he emphasised that the ‘generalist’ career advancement pattern will be lost if this wage system is introduced in Japan: “If Japanese companies change to a job-based wage system, those who have worked their way up within the company [in the ‘experience-based’ wage system] will no longer be able to reach the top executive level”. In other words, for this informant, experience-based wages allow for generalist career and promotion patterns that are not possible in ‘job-based’ wage systems. This comment is in line with the view that the experience-based wage system complements the ‘generalist’ career advancement pattern (Ono, 2018; Tanimoto, 2009).

In a similar manner, Informant A, a sociologist, pointed out that the ‘job-based’ wage system could lead to a loss of career advancement opportunities. He explained the process, citing the comments of a Japanese researcher in the USA, who “values work-life balance highly, but is absolutely opposed” to promoting a job-based wage system in Japan:

He says people should come to America to see for themselves. There are people who have worked for the same wage for 30 years without a promotion. He asks whether this sort of society is really good. In other words, for the people who have had their means for career advancement taken away, the nature of job-based pay may become a nightmarish world.

This informant acknowledged that there are a variety of reward systems; not all developed economies use a purely job-based wage system, as shown by Nishimura (2017). He argued,

nonetheless, that the job-based wage system based on defined job content could take away the opportunity for career advancement in certain situations.

These comments reflect scepticism towards a ‘job-based’ wage system even if it may resolve overwork. This scepticism is consistent with the trend of limited introduction of a Western-style, performance-based wage system in Japan (Ono, 2018; Watanabe, 2018).

Thus, for these participants, the rewards system based on an experience-based wage system allows for persistent overwork.

5.3.3 Careers

In combination with job content and rewards, the pattern of careers emerged as another factor which allows for persistent overwork. In Japan, one of the core employment practices was a career system based on internal promotions in the internal labour market (N. Kang & Moon, 2012; Ono, 2018; Tanimoto, 2009). In line with this perspective, 23 out of 31 companies reported this theme. For instance, Stakeholder F, a leader of a civil organisation advocating work-life balance, pointed out that the practice of promotions is “more or less similar” among Japanese companies, since “the corporate side of schemes are bounded by the regulation of the Labour Standard Act” and because they are based on a shared assumption of long-term employment and corresponding career prospects:

Although there is, of course, a performance evaluation, this is treated as somewhat secondary. Even if these performance targets are met, this does not mean that the person responsible will suddenly be made a division manager the next day... an appointment to division manager is something that is only decided after ten years or more.

This long-term evaluation and promotion practice, he argued, is based not on the individual's short-term productivity but on "fully being in the company system":

Within a preconceived configuration, employees stand on their format while salaries, bonuses, and promotions are being decided. It is set up so that employees are evaluated for fully being in the system.

The comment highlights the lack of focus on short-term productivity. Similarly, S-Manager explained that their rewards and careers do not depend on short-term productivity in her company:

At our company, in terms of individual performance, the lower 20% of people within the organisation are not told that their rewards will be substantially reduced because of low productivity. They are treated in the sense that they too are trying hard and have perhaps been able to secure their place in the company.

The comment indicates that individuals' short-term productivity is only a secondary consideration in terms of evaluation. These comments suggest that, within the Japanese 'competency-based wage' system, 'competency' is not based on an individual's short-term productivity; instead, it is based on 'trying hard' and 'fully being in the system' for the long term, as indicated by Ono (2018). The focus on 'fully being in the system', in turn, allows employees to hold implicit expectations that they will be treated appropriately in the long run if they work hard and show loyalty to the company (Tanimoto, 2009).

Furthermore, this practice is supported by a particular sense of 'equal treatment' in Japanese companies. S-Manager went on to explain that:

The middle 60% of people are treated in a way that they only need to do a reasonably good job. Consequently, 80% of employees [the lower and middle combined] probably work in a comfortable working environment. However, the top 20% may be dissatisfied, who then could leave the company.

The comment indicates the dissatisfaction of higher performers with this pattern of evaluations. This dissatisfaction is because lower performers in the company, who are ‘trying hard’ in the system, are more or less treated as equal to higher performers.

In a similar vein, G-Manager explained that this pattern of evaluations leads to a particular pattern of job concentration within the company:

Jobs concentrate on the top 20% of employees, while the lower 80% do more miscellaneous tasks. I think this pattern is still extremely common in Japanese companies... As a result, though all employees have the same formal roles and rewards, what they are actually doing and the respective difficulty of these tasks are completely different. However, you end up with a situation where evaluations and careers are not much different.

In other words, an individual’s job-based productivity is considered secondary within this pattern of evaluations. This indicates that individual employees are not necessarily incentivised to enhance job-based productivity, at least in the short term. Instead, they are incentivised to show that they are ‘trying hard’ to be in the system, underpinned by a particular sense of equal treatment. Consequently, this system could allow for persistent overwork for all employees.

This pattern has an implication for gender equality. I-Senior Manager stated that they analysed the correlation between working hours, evaluations and careers in order to understand the obstacles to women's advancement:

As would be expected, employees who work overtime tend to be rated more highly, even though there is no such formal evaluation criteria. A clear correlation [between working hours and career advancement] was discernible...I feel that this results in a somewhat negative spiral as employees are more prone to work more extended hours if working overtime leads to better evaluations and careers. So we are working on decoupling the correlation.

This comment highlights an implicit link between evaluations and working hours, which restricts the career prospects of female employees (Brinton, 1993; Nemoto, 2013a; North, 2010).

In summary, this section elaborated on the *internal factors* that affect and mostly constrain the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. In particular, the comments indicate that the pattern of undefined roles, experience-based wages, and long-term evaluations supports persistent overwork, which then constrains gender equality in the Japanese workplace. These internal factors reflect the core employment practices in Japan (Tanimoto, 2009; Tsutsui, 2015), which have been recurring patterns of behaviour in Japanese society. The evidence suggests that these factors constitute a system of unlimited expectations shared by key stakeholders, leading to externalised overwork and gendered roles in Japanese society. The next section turns to the *cognitive factors* that the participants reported in conjunction with these *external and internal factors*.

5.4 Cognitive factors

This section examines the cognitive factors that affect the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. As discussed, CSR practices are influenced by institutional forces. According to Scott (2014), in addition to regulative and normative forces, there are institutional forces such as cognitive forces, which represent the collective beliefs about the social world. It is argued that workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives tend to fail due to outdated assumptions about ideal workers and the way that work should be carried out (Acker, 1990; Kossek et al., 2010; S. Lewis et al., 2007; Pfeffer, 2010). Accordingly, in this study, ‘cognitive factors’ indicate collective beliefs and assumptions held by stakeholders within the organisation and society (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Mitchell et al., 1997; Welford, 2004). Over half of the participants (18 out of 31) reported such cognitive factors. Three themes that emerged from the data analysis are *input*, *cooperation* and *choice*, which are elaborated on in detail in the following sections.

5.4.1 Input

This section reports the first theme: *input*. As discussed, one of the assumptions that constrain WLB and gender equality initiatives is the belief that the ideal worker always places work ahead of all other activities and contributes to economic output (Kossek et al., 2010; S. Lewis et al., 2007; North, 2009). In addition, the core tenet of the Japanese employment system is that the system rewards input in the form of commitment and loyalty to the company (Ono, 2018; Tanimoto, 2009; Wokutch & Shepard, 1999). Following these perspectives, 19 out of 31 companies reported that the assumption that ‘input leads to

output’ constrains human sustainability initiatives. Input is defined as a collective belief that the more input there is, the better.

For instance, Q-Manager argues that Japanese workers are often “trapped in the established view of labour that ‘input leads to output’”:

When it comes to labour in factories, we can expect [more output from more input and] high productivity from a high degree of uniformity in our workstyle.

Consistency and hard work as a team is something that is absolutely required, and it is well suited to the Japanese workstyle. I think this [match] is illustrated by the success [of the Japanese economy] in the past.

The comment highlights the match between ‘Japanese workstyle’ and the assumption of ‘input leads to output’ based on a uniform workstyle. However, he explained that economies are changing from manufacturing to a knowledge economy, supported by an evolution of information technology.

As soon as we moved out of factories and began intellectual knowledge production, this match was no longer the case. People are connected via a network, and somebody is thinking about a variety of things 24 hours a day. It is no longer necessary to work together uniformly, face to face, for long hours.

In other words, more input no longer necessarily results in high productivity and output. Q-Manager went on to state that:

Regarding this change, I feel that the old view of labour held by Japanese people has become a stumbling block. Because workers are protected partly by regulation,

companies have to work within this framework. Inevitably, this can be crippling. Managers and employees suffer unless State regulation and company rules are relaxed. The many good things that were created in the past have now become harmful.

The comment highlights the persistence of the established view of labour as ‘input leads to output’, which is protected partly by labour regulations. Consequently, Q-Manager concludes that this “taken-for-granted” view of labour creates the illusion of performance:

In the end, white-collar workers are working within this system. I think there are many people even now who are under the illusion that the longer one works, the higher the output and performance becomes.

U-Senior Manager also emphasises this illusion. He explained that the “old view of labour” is assumed in the Labour Standard Act of 1947:

The Labour Standards Act is a regulation that focuses on working time. In the period when primary and secondary industries flourished, the hours worked were roughly equivalent to the output produced. This law is based on the idea that because more work leads to higher output, companies should pay wages accordingly.

The comment highlights the match between the hours worked and the outputs produced in the established view of labour. This match was underpinned by corresponding job content, wages and a career system that rewards working more extended hours, as discussed in the previous sections. However, he explained that this match does not apply well to his industry:

In tertiary or order-based industries like ours, an output is not proportional to working hours. For instance, incompetent sales staff may work overtime until late, leading to a contradictory situation of people who work inefficiently receiving larger rewards.

The comment highlights the dysfunctions that arise from the “old view of labour” based on input, which is assumed in the Labour Standard Act. It describes the view of the people falling into “contradictory situations” that leads to inefficiency.

According to AA-Manager, this view of labour persists for their company, despite their workstyle reform initiatives:

Producing an output in a short time is indeed admirable. However, if one works a really long time, then the output will be 50% or 100% more – it is even more admirable... We somehow have to break down this norm.

The comment is in line with the view that working long hours in Japan is a symbol of their ‘input-oriented society’ (Ono, 2018). Ono (2018) stated that:

If “output = input x productivity”, input is represented by some unit of labour, such as the number of workers and working hours. Output may be raised by increasing input, productivity, or both. Until now, output has been raised by increasing working hours, i.e., by increasing input. By now, however, it is becoming difficult to increase working hours longer than they currently are, and if anything there is pressure to decrease working hours.

This assumption, that more input is always better, is further illustrated by R-Manager:

Whenever employees are informed about the company's efforts to reduce long working hours, they inevitably take it to mean a reduction of personnel costs. The instant it is conveyed in this sense, no matter how effective the contents of the proposal, I think there is difficulty in progressing any further.

This comment highlights the negative response from employees operating under the influence of the view of labour. The assumption is that more labour leads to higher outputs, more wages, and higher economic growth. It further indicates that surface-level changes do not work when this established view of labour is persistent. This comment is consistent with the view that WLB practices are in conflict with outdated assumptions about ideal workers and the way that work should be carried out (S. Lewis et al., 2007).

One stakeholder offered a comparative perspective regarding the assumption of input. According to Stakeholder C, a European CEO of the Japan-based operation of a multinational company, this view of labour is sharply contrasted with the one in Europe. He illustrates the contrasts by seeing the view as a “cultural paradigm”:

If I go to Europe now, everybody from the Union and the workers' families puts pressure on us by saying, “I want to do my job properly, but more efficiently – how much can I cut waste to have a life as I work”, and “How can you allow me to do it and how can technology enable that”.

The comment highlights the efficiency and output focus in Europe regarding cutting waste time at the workplace. He went on to describe the view in Japan with a different focus:

In Japan, not even the unions push us for that. There is never a request in any union meetings for “please allow our people to work less.” It is always, “we are loyal to

the company, we want to stay more, staying more is good, and overtime is good”.

Overtime is not good. Overtime is a waste. And, waste for you is a waste for us. It is a waste for everybody.

The comment highlights the contrasting views regarding the working hours between two views, or “cultural paradigms”. In these views, unions conceptualise overtime differently. In one paradigm, overtime is a waste; in the other paradigm, overtime is good, as it shows loyalty to the company (Ono, 2018; Tanimoto, 2009; Wokutch & Shepard, 1999). It is also noted that, in the latter paradigm, the direction is always ‘more overtime’ toward the ‘all’ end of the dichotomy, as expressed in the phrases ‘we want to stay longer’ and ‘staying longer is good’.

Stakeholder C acknowledges that “there are good reasons why it happened”, yet argues that “there should be a way more functional to Japan’s wellbeing than the traditional way”. One way to do it, he proposed, is to shift away from the established view of labour:

Japan’s cultural values are not based on staying longer in the office. I notice that they are based on other things which are social respect, like cooperation between individuals, high levels of personal integrity and care... So we need to break this paradigm, which is “I am more Japanese if I stay longer in the office”. You are not. We need to say, “You can be a great Japanese person even if you don’t stay longer in the office”.

This comment highlights the perceived connection between *normative forces* and the assumption of *input* in Japanese society. It indicates the possibility that *normative forces* are attached to the Japanese workstyle in a particular way in this established view of labour, as

suggested by Ono (2018). Consequently, in the alternative view of labour, influenced by changing economies, an alternative *normative force* needs to be attached to the workstyle, as suggested by Kossek et al. (2010).

All these comments illustrate the influence of the assumption of *input*. This assumption emerges at the intersection of *market, normative and regulative forces*, and corresponding historical patterns of *management practices* reported in the previous sections. The established view of labour as ‘input leads to output’ is illustrated by uniformity associated with manufacturing, and the view that the longer you work, the higher the output and economic value becomes. This leads to another assumption of *cooperation*, which will be discussed below.

5.4.2 Cooperation

This section reports on the second theme: *cooperation*. As discussed, the core tenet of the Japanese employment system is that the system rewards input in the form of commitment and loyalty to the company (Ono, 2018; Tanimoto, 2009; Wokutch & Shepard, 1999). In addition, it was observed that Japanese companies and employees share the perspective that an individual belongs to the community called a company (Dore, 1993; Tange, 2001).

Following these perspectives, 12 out of 31 participants reported that the assumption that ‘cooperation leads to output’ constrains human sustainability initiatives. The assumption of cooperation is defined as a collective belief that the more cooperation there is, the better.

Stakeholder D, director of the national union centre, elaborated on this belief. He shared his concerns about changing from *experience-based wages* to *job-based wages*: “Changing to job-based wages will perhaps lead to a situation where people just do as they are told.

There is no need for any extra work...but which is better?" He went on to answer this question himself, stressing the need for cooperation in Japanese companies:

For the company, it is perhaps best for all of its employees to work as hard as they can, to go the extra mile, and to provide better products and services by cooperating with each other. Therefore, although there is no right or wrong way, we at the union feel that in the end, it is better for employees to find their job rewarding and to work in a creative manner while drawing on the know-how of each other, and as a result of this, to receive better wages and treatment.

The comment underscores the necessity of *cooperation*, which matches well with external and internal factors described in the previous sections. In particular, the belief in the ideal for 'all of its employees to work as hard as they can' reflects the *normative force* of 'everyone does their utmost'. This normative force is linked with the *market force* to 'provide better products and services' (i.e., customer demands). These expectations are realised through the practice of *cooperation*, expressed as 'to go the extra mile', 'cooperating together', and 'drawing on the know-how of each other'. As a consequence, this process leads to better *wages* and treatment for everyone who worked as hard as they can. The statement "a better world" indicates the strong normative overtones regarding this view of the world. This description of the world is consistent with the description by Kato and Kodama (2017, p. 8) that within the implicit long-term employment guarantee, employees are "asked to take advantage of opportunities to exert discretionary effort, produce useful local knowledge and share it with their co-workers".

This assumption of *cooperation* is also expressed by N-Manager, in relation to his concern about changing to *job-based wages*:

I think that overwork will be reduced if the work of employees is defined and limited, like in America and Europe... However, I also think that we should respect the practice of teamwork in contemporary Japan that covers for any insufficiencies [in pursuit of quality]. We cannot just dismiss this practice of cooperation as low productivity.

The comment highlights the importance of extra cooperation as a team in Japanese companies. This view is consistent with the perspective of the “micro moral unity paradigm”, which regards individuals as part of the community called the company (Tange, 2001; Wokutch & Shepard, 1999). This manager also expressed his concern over such cooperation being seen as hampering productivity.

This importance of cooperation is not limited to teams. Stakeholder A, Senior Manager of a national business association, highlights the practice of *cooperation* between management and worker: “during times of recession, methods like Western-style dismissals are not taken in Japan as far as possible”. He raised two reasons for this extra *cooperation*:

One reason is that it is simply extremely difficult to dismiss employees due to the regulations. More fundamentally, managers strongly hold on to the idea of protecting the jobs of employees... While there are increasing stories of “abusive” companies in the media, I believe that the vast majority of companies do try to really take care of employees.

The comment indicates that both *normative* and *regulative forces* support the extra *cooperation*. He illustrated the *cooperation* between management and worker through long-term economic cycles:

At such times as the bursting of the IT bubble in 2002 and the Lehman shock of 2008, companies think flexibly about conditions of employment, and how to protect the jobs of employees and union members. Because of this, workers and management consult together on lowering the conditions of employment or raising them back again eventually.

The comment highlights the extra *cooperation* of both parties beyond their formal boundaries of responsibilities, to cope with economic hardships without resorting to *dismissal*. He emphasised that “being able to do this is a strength of Japanese corporations”. This perspective is consistent with the view that the cooperative relationship between labour and management characterises the Japanese employment system (Watanabe, 2018).

This extra *cooperation* in times of hardships, according to AD-Manager, is critically important for his company. He maintained that the company had been able to overcome the Lehman shock “without compromising the principle of avoiding dismissals”. This principle, the manager indicated, is underpinned by expected benefits:

Regarding the lack of worry, motivation, and loyalty to the company of employees, as well as the planned management of operations, dismissal is something that should only be discussed when all other alternatives have been exhausted. Perhaps, many employees say they like the company partly because of this principle.

The comment highlights the link between the normative principle and the expected benefit of higher loyalty. This expected benefit of higher loyalty is also emphasised by Stakeholder A, Senior Manager of a national business association:

For the employees, there is the loyalty factor that results from being able to work at a company free from the worry of dismissal. I think the benefits that companies accrue from this loyalty factor cannot be ignored.

These comments underscore the focus on extra cooperation between management and worker, underpinned by expectations for the benefits of higher loyalty (Aoki, 1990; Aoki & Dore, 1994; Hamaaki et al., 2012).

However, Informant A also acknowledged that this focus has its negative sides. While emphasising strength, he also stated that: “However, because mental health issues due to long working hours have newly arisen, I really feel that the companies need to take appropriate care”. This comment indicates that the negative sides are also part of this assumption that the more cooperation there is, the better.

All these comments illustrate the assumption of *cooperation*. This finding endorses the perspective that cooperative labour-management relations continue to play a significant role in the Japanese management system (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Todeschini, 2011). The findings further show that this perspective emerges at the intersection of *market, normative and regulative forces*, and *management practices* reported in the previous sections. The assumption of *cooperation* is illustrated by positive normative and instrumental emphasis on higher loyalty; however, it also has a negative side leading to working long hours and mental health issues. This negative side may come out when there is a fine line between

extra *cooperation* and unlimited *cooperation*, driven by the shared expectation for all employees to “work as hard as they can”. This assumption of *cooperation* is connected to another assumption of *choice*, which will be discussed below.

5.4.3 Choice

This section reports on the third theme: *choice*. As discussed, one of the assumptions regarding workforce wellbeing and human sustainability is that employees can exercise choice in a labour market (Pfeffer, 2010). However, the core tenet of the Japanese employment system is that the system rewards input in the form of commitment and loyalty to the company (Ono, 2018; Tanimoto, 2009; Wokutch & Shepard, 1999). Following these perspectives, 11 out of 31 participants reported that the assumption that ‘choice is either all or nothing’ constrains human sustainability initiatives. The assumption of choice is defined as a collective belief that there is only a choice of ‘either all or nothing’ in terms of workstyle.

According to Informant C, when the assumptions of *input* and *cooperation* are taken for granted, many Japanese women are confronted with the *choice* of “all or nothing”:

Women want to do their best at jobs with more career prospects in the same way as men. However, in reality, if they are just forced to work as the ‘corporate warriors’ of the past, then they end up choosing to become full-time homemakers, or to work part-time for just above the minimum wage and do really boring jobs.

The comment illustrates the all-or-nothing choice for women in term of job content, rewards, and career prospects (Nemoto, 2013a). For this informant, it is this dichotomy of

overwork or no work, as well as career or no career, that characterises the choice for the female workforce in Japan: “At the moment the situation is such that there are not enough intermediate workstyles”.

According to P-Manager, the *choice* of all or nothing is not restricted to women. It is a “system for most Japanese companies”, applied to men and women alike, which leads to working “either full-time or not working at all”. Similarly to the above informant, the manager argued, lacking in this dichotomy are the intermediate *choices*, which is acutely felt for workers with family-care responsibilities.

It might be good if more relaxed forms of employment were approved. For instance, one can be partially on leave, only coming to the office occasionally due to time constraints. But the person can still work from home. Instead of either 100% or nothing, this may create an intermediate career style of 50% or 80%.

These comments highlight a dichotomy of choice in the current system. On the one hand, when this ‘overwork or nothing’ perspective is applied to men, men make a *choice* to overwork with full pay and career, or ‘nothing’ with limited pay and career (North, 2011). On the other hand, women are confronted with this *choice*, under the normative pressure of taking more home responsibilities (Nemoto, 2013a). In this system, individuals are denied intermediate *choices* and forced into the all-or-nothing *choice*. When this perspective of ‘overwork or nothing’ is taken for granted, the *choices* made in the workplace reflect the patterns of *externalised overwork* and *gendered roles* in the Japanese workplace.

Within this dichotomy of *choice*, L-Manager points out, “it is difficult to manage work and life”. In referring to the national effort for workstyle reform propounded by the

Government and the Japanese Business Federation (Keidanren), the manager shared her concern about the difficulty:

I feel there are difficulties with how to proceed with this workstyle reform. The notion that people of diverse backgrounds shall one by one shine brightly while working sounds very beautiful on the surface level. In practice, however, as each employee is absorbed in their jobs, they are not able to skilfully manage work and life individually, including working hours and paid holidays.

The phrase ‘absorbed in their jobs’ indicates a sense of uncontrollable force that pushes the individuals toward the ‘all’ end of the dichotomy. This phenomenon is, the manager argued, “common across potentially any Japanese company”.

Stakeholder F, the leader of a civil organisation advocating work-life balance, makes a similar point. He maintains that, in the current workplace, there is no sense in which employees can come up with their own workstyle:

There is almost nothing left to the discretion of individual employees... There is no concept of employees deciding for themselves how they will work in negotiation with the management.

Stakeholder C also emphasised this lack of *choices* and room for autonomy: “the way of working in Japan is designed in a way which doesn’t allow people freedom”. He illustrates the *choice* of overwork or nothing by sharing his account of a conversation with his employees:

I asked them “how is it possible that you never go home to eat with your family any night of the year?” They answered me, “Ah, if I go home, my wife would think that I am not working hard enough... that I am not a good worker”. You know, we need to separate these ideas of “I am working hard” and “I am very successful if I stay longer in the office”.

As A-Senior Manager explains, this dichotomy of choice is peculiar and persistent in Japanese society:

When looked at globally I strongly feel that people from around the world are wondering why Japanese work like this... You see, this [puzzlement] tells us how work has been positioned at both an individual and social level in Japan [differently than other countries]. I think it is pretty hard to reset the minds of people when work has been such a central part of their life.

The comment highlights the persistence of ‘the minds of people’, indicating a strong normative overtone regarding overwork (Nemoto, 2013b; Ono, 2018).

Informant C pointed out that, within this ‘all or nothing’ dichotomy, increasing numbers of part-time employees are unable to get out from the ‘nothing’ end. For this informant, from the perspective of fairness, it is necessary to increase employment mobility by “loosening the requirements for dismissals”:

In the present system, growth in part-time employees is sacrificed so as to protect the jobs of the limited full-time employees rigidly. As a result, this leads to unfair treatment of part-time workers.

The comment highlights her concern for the link between the working conditions of part-time and full-time workers within this ‘all or nothing’ *choice*. This comment is in line with the view that only standard employees, who are called *seishain*, are regarded as insider stakeholders, while non-standard employees (part-timers and contract workers) are only marginally considered as stakeholders (Kato & Kodama, 2017).

G-Manager shared this concern and stated that, without employment mobility, a burden is unfairly placed on young people without full-time jobs:

There are many young capable people, but with the ‘employment ice age’ [period when job seekers had a hard time finding full-time jobs] going on for 20 years, they can’t find regular employment. And so they despair. That’s a terrible loss for society.

All these comments illustrate the assumption of *choice*. This perspective emerges at the intersection of *market, normative and regulative forces*, and management practices reported in the previous sections. The *choice* of overwork or nothing is illustrated by the dichotomy in which intermediate *choices* regarding job content, rewards, and career prospects are restricted (Asai, 2007; Tsutsui, 2015). When this perspective of ‘overwork or nothing’ is taken for granted, the *choices* are consistent with the patterns of *overwork* and the *gendered roles* in Japanese society.

5.5 Synthesis

The following figure synthesises the findings. It describes the relationship between the markets, norms, regulations, management practices, collective beliefs and assumptions, and relevant stakeholders (Figure 5.4).

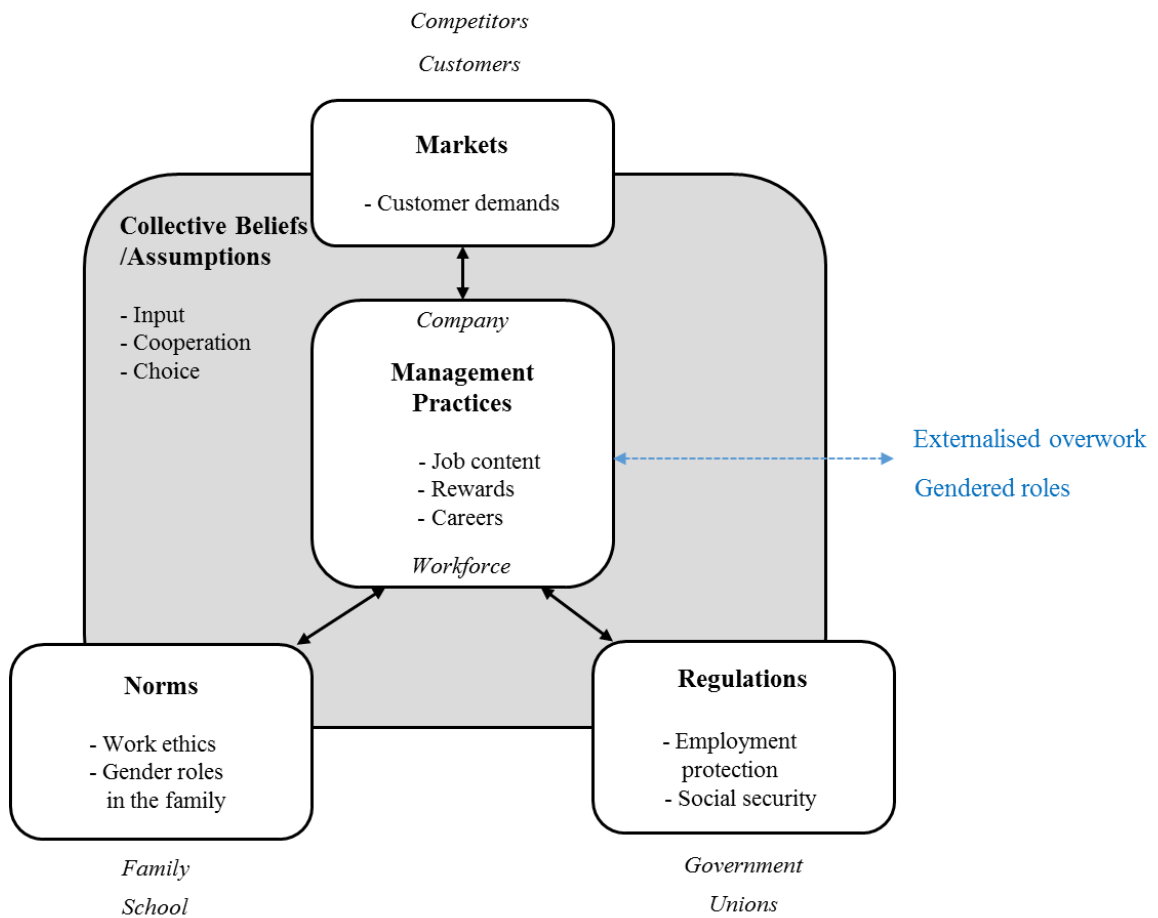


Figure 5.4 The inter-relationship of factors affecting human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies

Importantly, this figure describes how nine factors are interrelated, in the way each is consistent and sometimes reinforcing others to form a coherent institutional pressure, which

leads to externalised overwork and gendered roles. For instance, *work ethics* and *gender roles in the family* are consistent and can reinforce each other. Moreover, *employment protection* and *social security* are consistent and can reinforce each other. The *markets* are also considered to be affected by the norms and regulations stated above, since the customers themselves are part of Japanese society; their demands reflect what is taken for granted in the social context.

The figure further shows that the historical patterns of management practices are nested within a broader social context. In particular, the Japanese management practices of *undefined roles*, *'experience-based' wages*, and *long-term evaluations* are nested within the shared beliefs and assumptions regarding how work should be carried out (i.e., *input, cooperation and choice*). These assumptions are then nested within external factors (i.e., *market, normative and regulative forces*). This nested relationship indicates that changing management practices involves addressing these patterns as a whole.

Together, these factors constitute the underlying system of responsibilities that characterise the existing workstyle in large Japanese companies. This system could lead to patterns of externalised overwork and gendered roles, once it is taken for granted. The evidence suggests that it is this coherence of factors that characterises the persistence of this workstyle. However, now that the economic and social environment is fundamentally changing, such workstyles are considered contradictory to the emerging needs of the workforce and pressures from stakeholders. Consequently, they are perceived as being increasingly dysfunctional in comparison to the past, ethically, economically, and socially.

Overall, the figure shows that implementation of human sustainability initiatives is constrained by the existing systems of responsibilities. Importantly, it can be argued that this existing system of responsibilities also enables other forms of workforce wellbeing, such as employment protection and social security borne by companies. These findings again substantiate the view that Japanese companies find it harder to resolve gender inequality and long working hours than they expected (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015), even with CSR management practices (Asif et al., 2013; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010).

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored the second research question: *‘What factors influence the implementation of human sustainability initiatives in Japanese companies?’* To answer this question, this chapter drew upon the evidence from interviews with managers from 31 companies, their stakeholders, and informants. This chapter reported nine factors, consisting of external factors, internal factors, and cognitive factors.

The external factors consist of *market, normative, and regulative forces*. The markets were shaped by the prevailing expectations of high customer demands, not just for quality and delivery deadlines but also for out-of-hours services. The norms comprise *work ethics* and *gender roles in the family*, which can reinforce each other, if husband and wife can do their utmost at work and home separately. The regulations consist of expectations of *employment protection* and *social security*, which can reinforce each other, if the government enforces strict *employment protection* and companies offer stable employment and *social security*, underpinned by stable economic growth.

The internal factors consist of *job content*, *rewards*, and *careers*. The job content was shaped by undefined roles, which allows experiencing of various roles and thus a career of the so-called ‘generalist’. The rewards were shaped by the ‘competency-based’ wage system, based on employee experiences. This rewards practice allowed employees to experience various roles, acquire multiple skills and to move up the ‘generalist’ career within the company. With this practice of job content and rewards came the practice of long-term evaluations, in which the individual’s job-based productivity was a secondary consideration.

The cognitive factors consist of assumptions of *input*, *cooperation* and *choice*. The assumption of *input* was shaped by a consistency associated with manufacturing and an established view of labour that rewards working more extended hours. The assumption of *cooperation* was shaped by the emphasis on extra cooperation beyond the formal boundaries of responsibilities. The assumption of *choice* was shaped by a choice of either “all or nothing” and a lack of intermediate choices. When these perspectives are taken for granted, the choices at the workplace reflect patterns of externalised overwork and gendered roles in Japanese society.

Thus, this chapter has reported factors which affect and mostly constrain the implementation of human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies. However, even within these constraints, some companies seek to proactively implement human sustainability initiatives, as part of their business strategy. The next chapter goes on to examine how these companies address the constraints and further integrate human sustainability initiatives into core business practices.

Chapter 6. Human Sustainability, Business Strategy, and Core Business Practices

6.1 Overview

This chapter reports the answer to the research question: ‘*How do large Japanese companies integrate human sustainability initiatives into their core business practices?*’ It marks the last of the three chapters presenting the findings of this empirical study. The first findings chapter presented the human sustainability initiatives promoted as part of CSR practices by large Japanese companies. The second findings chapter then examined the underlying factors that affect and mostly constrain the initiatives, leading to persistent patterns of externalised overwork and gendered roles within Japanese society. This chapter examines how some companies, even within these constraints, implement human sustainability initiatives as part of their business strategies.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, there has been an increasing expectation for companies to promote CSR and sustainability in a way that contributes to business and social performance (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Porter & Kramer, 2006). In order to do so, companies need to integrate their CSR and sustainability initiatives into their business strategies (Chandler, 2016; Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & de Colle, 2010), in particular, into core business practices (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Yuan et al., 2011).

With regards to human sustainability, Japanese companies are increasingly under strain from social pressure to address long working hours, lack of flexibility at work, gender inequality, and low labour productivity (Chapter 4 and 5). It is argued that initiatives for better work-life balance and gender diversity could enhance organisational performance;

however, the effects depend on internal processes and external contexts (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Dwyer, Richard, & Chadwick, 2003; Hoobler, Masterson, Nkomo, & Michel, 2018; Kirton & Greene, 2016; Smeaton et al., 2014). Similarly, it is argued that there is no one-size-fits-all business case for CSR, since the effects are contingent upon various internal and external factors (Brammer et al., 2012; Matten & Moon, 2008; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Accordingly, large Japanese companies need to properly integrate human sustainability initiatives into their business strategies, which involves both internal and external processes. However, how to work through conflicts and proceed with integration remains relatively unknown (Engert, Rauter, & Baumgartner, 2016; Gao & Bansal, 2013; Hahn et al., 2015; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015; Yuan et al., 2011). This chapter examines how large Japanese companies seek to integrate human sustainability initiatives into their business strategies and core business practices within the context of Japanese society.

During the interviews, participants were asked to elaborate on how they implement human sustainability initiatives. In addition, they were asked to describe their perspectives on the relationship between these initiatives and business strategy and how they seek to integrate them better. Through data analysis, eight themes emerged as relevant to the integration process. Based on the theoretical framework of this study, these themes are categorised into three main themes: *the relationship between human sustainability and business strategy*, *internal processes*, and *external processes*, as illustrated in a node structure (Figure 6.1). In the remainder of this chapter, this node tree structure is followed and expanded to present the findings.

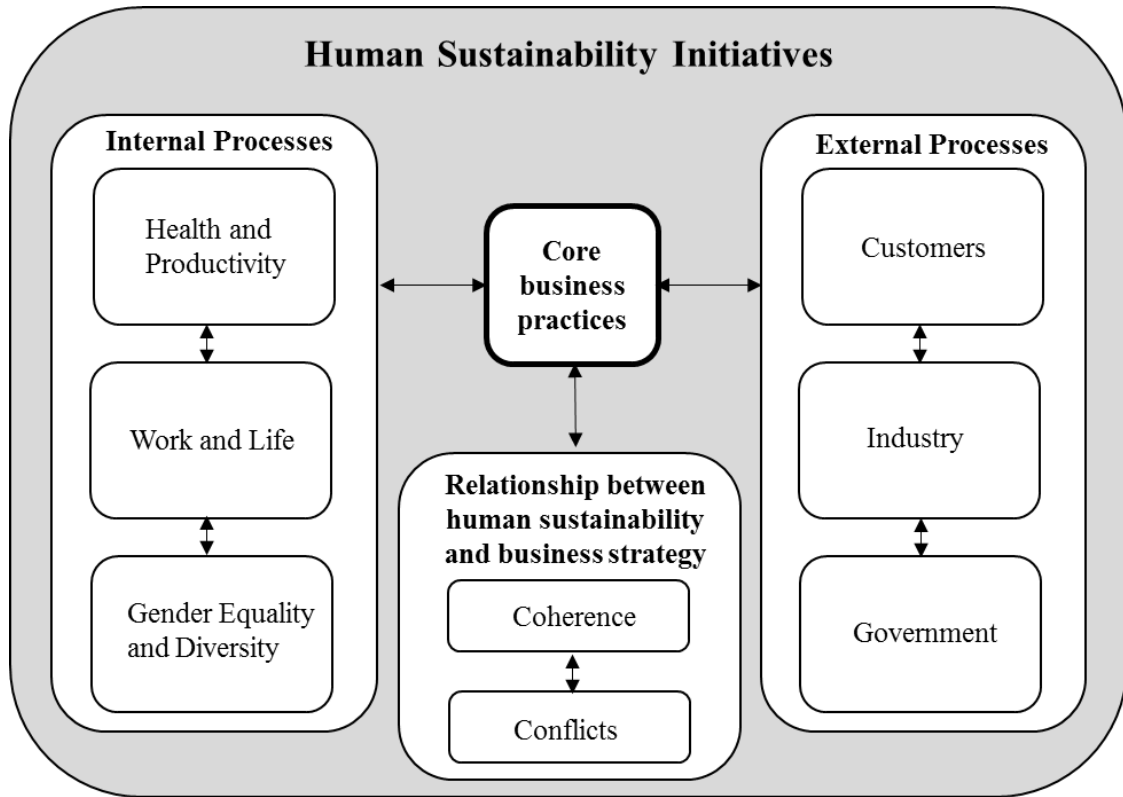


Figure 6. 1 Integration of human sustainability initiatives into business strategy and core business practices in large Japanese companies

The structure of this chapter is as follows. Section 6.2 reports the two perspectives on the relationship between human sustainability and business strategy described by the participants. Section 6.3 then elaborates on three themes categorised as internal processes. It is followed by Section 6.4, which elaborates on three themes categorised as external processes. Section 6.5 presents the conclusion of this chapter.

6.2 Relationship between Human Sustainability and Business Strategy

In this study, integration is defined as “the process of achieving unity of effort among the various subsystems in the accomplishment of the organization’s task” (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967, p. 4; Siggelkow, 2002; Yuan et al., 2011). As discussed in Chapter 3, CSR and sustainability initiatives are often separated from business strategy and core business practices (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Weaver, Trevino, & Cochran, 1999; Yuan et al., 2011), leading to conflicts between economic and broader social objectives (Hahn et al., 2010; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). In the context of Japan, large Japanese companies are eager to demonstrate that CSR is integral to their business strategy (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015). Accordingly, this section examines the relationship between human sustainability and business strategy, as reported by the participants: ‘*conflicts* or *coherence*’.

6.2.1 Conflicts

This section examines the first theme which emerged from the data analysis: *conflicts*. It was reported in Chapters 4 and 5 that human sustainability initiatives are not yet clearly connected to business strategy in the majority of the sample (21 out of 31 companies) due to emerging conflicts with existing management practices. In other words, for these participants, human sustainability conflicts with business strategy and core business practices. This view reflects the perspective that conflicts are ‘the rule rather than the exception’ in corporate sustainability (Hahn et al., 2010, p. 218).

Nonetheless, all these participants were aware of the need for integrating their initiatives and business strategy. For instance, as reported in Section 4.4, some managers were concerned with the lack of connection between work-life balance initiatives and their

business plan. Others were concerned with the limitations of their initiatives, such as women's empowerment, workstyle reform, and flexible work initiatives that are disconnected from the profit-seeking mission of the business. U-Senior Manager expressed the awareness succinctly:

For our company to be sustainable, our employees also have to be sustainable, that is, keep healthy, motivated, and happy from a fulfilled and balanced life with their families.

This perspective is in line with the view that businesses need to foster a 'sustainable workforce' for long-term workforce effectiveness as well as the health of society (Kossek et al., 2014).

The manager went on to state that doing so requires the integration of human sustainability and business strategy:

Such integration is difficult, and there is no clear answer... It is not just in our company, but elsewhere too. However, management is about integrating the inconsistencies, and senior managers and top management somehow need to do that.

The comment highlights the difficulty of integration and the responsibilities of the managers. This perspective is consistent with the view that managers are required to address conflicts and trade-offs between social and economic benefits of CSR and sustainability initiatives (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Hahn et al., 2018; Hahn et al., 2015).

6.2.2 Coherence

This section examines the second theme which emerged from the data analysis: *coherence*. In contrast to the above perspective of *conflicts*, 10 out of 31 companies reported that their initiatives are fully integrated with business strategy and core business practices. Some of them explicitly stated that there are not many conflicts. In other words, for these participants, human sustainability is consistent with business strategy and core business practices. For instance, T-Manager stated that their initiatives are connected to business strategy and daily management practices:

We make it clear in our strategy that the initiatives to improve productivity, create a pleasant and rewarding workplace, and manage health and wellness can strengthen our management foundation... These initiatives are clearly integrated into our management practices. This integration is not just plans on paper; we are actually working on this.

The comment highlights the coherence between human sustainability, business strategy, and daily management practices. Furthermore, this manager went on to state that these initiatives contribute to business performance:

The added value produced by every employee, who is fully engaged in their work, leads to company growth and good business performance and allows us to pass on profit returns to our stakeholders.

In a similar vein, AE-Manager maintained that their human sustainability initiatives are integrated with business strategy:

We think our CSR initiatives, including such human sustainability elements, are aligned with our business strategy... Our medium-term management plan explains our understanding that, because we can achieve our CSR goals, we are also able to realise the medium-term management plan.

The comment again highlights the coherence between human sustainability, CSR, and business strategy. Likewise, W-Manager stated that: “To us, ‘human sustainability’ means wellbeing of people, which serves as the primary foundation for management and corporate strategy”. In other words, for these managers, their human sustainability initiatives form a necessary foundation for their business strategy.

These comments reflect the perspective that, unlike the view of conflicts which leads to an either-or choice, integration of sustainability and business strategy can allow for long-term economic and social performance (Hahn et al., 2015; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015). This perspective is consistent with the definition of ‘strategic CSR’ as “the incorporation of a holistic CSR perspective within a firm’s strategic planning and core operations so that the firm is managed in the interests of a broad set of stakeholders to optimize value over the medium to long-term” (Chandler, 2016, p. 248).

This section reported the two different perspectives on the relationship between human sustainability and business strategy: *conflicts* and *coherence*. The following section goes on to examine how companies develop processes that lead to coherence, drawing mainly from the 10 companies which reported that human sustainability initiatives are fully integrated with their business strategy and core business practices.

6.3 Internal Processes

As discussed in Chapter 3, the effects of CSR and sustainability initiatives depend on internal processes (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Yuan et al., 2011). Accordingly, this section reports the internal processes that lead to coherence between human sustainability initiatives, business strategy and core business practices. As sub-themes, three internal processes emerged from the data analysis: proactive management of *health and productivity*, *work and life*, and *gender equality and diversity*. The following sections elaborate on each sub-theme in detail.

6.3.1 Health and Productivity

This section examines the first theme: proactive management of *health and productivity*. As discussed in Chapter 2, workforce wellbeing and human sustainability concerns better health of the workforce (European Commission, 2001; International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2010; Pfeffer, 2010). The health of the workforce is constrained by persistent overwork, which then constrains the economic wellbeing of the companies and society through reduced productivity and increasing health care costs (Bannai & Tamakoshi, 2014; Goh et al., 2016; Kuroda & Yamamoto, 2016). In line with these perspectives, all 31 companies reported that they had introduced initiatives to improve the *health and productivity* of the workforce. In particular, 10 companies which reported ‘coherence’ explicitly stated that they proactively manage *health and productivity*, in a way that contributes to business and social performance. The following sections elaborate on such approaches by three companies which claimed substantial progress in this regard.

Company T (IT)

Company T, a leading IT service provider, exhibited one such proactive approach to *health and productivity*. It is argued that commitment and leadership at the top levels of management is necessary for sustainability initiatives to be integrated into business strategy and core management practices (Engert et al., 2016; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010).

Accordingly, T-Manager explained that their workstyle reform had been led by top management since 2011 out of concern for *health and productivity* of the workforce:

Our workstyle reform started with our top management. Five years ago [when the company was formed by a merger], our new CEO saw the massive amount of overtime work and said: “This workstyle won’t do. How can we produce intellectual value in this working environment?” As head of the company, he was quite decisive and made it very clear both inside and outside the company that we will work on workstyle reform even if it results in a decline in sales and profits [in the short term].

The manager went on to explain that the management team committed to both employee health and company growth, by reducing working hours and generating higher added value. It is pertinent to note here that this commitment is characterised by both ethical (health) and economic (productivity) perspectives, which reflect both normative and instrumental views of CSR (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Hahn et al., 2018).

According to Epstein and Buhovac (2010), the commitment and leadership at the top levels of management need to be supported by effective implementation processes, including programmes and goals. Accordingly, T-Manager explained the implementation process. The

company introduced a programme called the ‘Smart Work Challenge’. This programme aimed to “ensure a more pleasant and rewarding workplace with more efficient work”, with the target for each employee to attain 20 paid vacation days and less than 20 hours of average monthly overtime. To attain this target, the company instituted various flexible work options, such as systematic granting of annual paid leave, hourly or half-day leave, and backup leave for unexpected situations after taking all paid leave. In addition, the company encouraged development of other initiatives to attain the goal. In particular, top management encouraged each department to strive for more effective operations. Then, each department considered and implemented specific initiatives.

In Chapter 5, it was reported that the traditional rewards systems tends to reward longer working hours rather than productivity and output (Sections 5.3.2 and 5.4.1). It is argued that companies need to align their rewards systems to counterbalance the existing incentivising pressures that encourage unsustainable practices (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010). Accordingly, T-Manager explained that the company introduced a different rewards system to address the issue:

Of course, it is not that we have completely resolved the dilemmas, in which longer work could lead to higher sales. There is always that economic pressure [to work longer]. However, we made it clear that we will work on workstyle reform throughout the company all at once and reflect the overwork reduction performance in the bonuses of all employees.

In other words, their new rewards system would not reward overwork; instead, productivity will be carefully evaluated. In particular, a special bonus is paid out when targets for

overtime reduction and paid vacation days are met as a company. This means that the overtime compensation saved would be returned to the employees. T-Manager explained that the introduction of this new rewards system affected the whole company immediately:

This means that, if our department increases overtime, while the other department is working hard to reduce theirs, then we will get in trouble with them. (laugh) In short, we have made overwork reduction a collective responsibility [of all employees]. Introducing the policy this way, the results were immediate.

In other words, this company evaluated and rewarded productivity as a collective responsibility. In addition, this collective evaluation of productivity was aligned with each employee's individual objectives:

We tell employees to include reduction of overwork and paid holidays taken as part of their performance objectives. If they do not achieve them, they and their immediate boss will be evaluated negatively. So, the incentives are distinctive.

These comments indicate that their evaluation practices are aligned with the overtime reduction initiatives both at the company as well as individual employee level. According to their corporate report, instituting this evaluation and rewards system “encouraged staff to pursue even more efficient working styles”. This comment indicates that the company aligned one of the core business practices of large Japanese companies, which is a rewards system, with human sustainability initiatives (Section 5.3.2).

The company report highlighted the overall effectiveness of this programme. It states:

By promoting both reduced overtime and the taking of paid vacation simultaneously, we have been able to make significant strides in reducing overtime work and ensuring employees take their annual paid vacation days.

More specifically, the report exhibited some evidence for their progress. In 2017, the average overtime hours (per month) was reduced to 18 hours, in comparison to 35 hours in 2009. In addition, the annual paid leave days taken increased to 19 days (in comparison to 13 days in 2009). This progress was attained while operating income expanded steadily over the period. The company explicitly stated that these initiatives contributed to higher business performance: “these efforts have enabled us to entrench new working styles throughout the Company, thereby realising shortened work hours and heightened productivity. The company continues to grow as a result”. This perspective is in stark contrast with the assumption that more labour leads to higher output, more wages and economic growth (Section 5.4.1). This perspective is also consistent with the view that progress in reducing overwork can be attained concurrently with business growth, as indicated by Beaugard and Henry (2009).

Company A (Food and beverage)

Another company which proactively managed *health and productivity* through workstyle reform was Company A, a leading food manufacturer. Similar to Company T, A-Senior Manager emphasised the role of top leadership to address the dilemma related to overwork:

Of course, when we pursue financial targets [in the competitive market], there are moments when work-life balance is hard to maintain. There is indeed a dilemma

there. Therefore, to resolve the dilemma requires a powerful will at the top management level.

Again, this emphasis is in line with the view that top leadership is critical to overcoming dilemmas in implementing sustainability initiatives (Engert et al., 2016; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010). Following this commitment, the company adopted workstyle innovation as a critical theme of management reform, according to their corporate report. The company then launched a programme called the “workstyle innovation project” with the aim to “practice zero-based workstyle innovation to support various ways of working regardless of individual time constraints”. In the project, the company first worked on productivity improvement through IT investment and remote work, and then “added diversity and wellbeing elements”. The project target was set to attain a seven-hour workday, which is less than 1750 annual work hours; the level the company considered as “the global standard” for companies with “thriving, diverse human resources”.

Similar to Company T, Company A promoted workstyle innovation as “necessary for the company’s sustainable growth”. This perspective is also in stark contrast with the assumption that more labour leads to higher output, more wages and economic growth (Section 5.4.1). Company A emphasised the link between their workstyle innovation and value creation. Their corporate report stated that “realising a healthy balance between work and personal life for each employee” is necessary for “diverse talents to fully perform their abilities towards creating new value”. In other words, a healthy workstyle provides the foundation for value creation. In the words of A-Senior Manager, “In our policy, work-life balance is not about just enriching personal lives. It is about enabling both personal and

corporate growth”. In line with these comments, the corporate report stipulates the aim of the reform leading to innovation:

[We are] advancing diversity and work-life balance to achieve the aims of improving individual engagement and growing the company sustainably... these efforts are aimed at fostering and harnessing the varied strengths of a diverse workforce towards continuous innovation.

This pursuit of growth and innovation is in line with the view that innovations are necessary for sustainability initiatives to be part of core business practices (Baumgartner, 2014; Epstein et al., 2015). To facilitate such a process, similar to Company T, Company A was in the process of updating its evaluation system, while instituting a variety of leave and flexible working options. A-Senior Manager again emphasised the role of top management in this process:

To an extent, resolving the dilemma of overwork involves a change in how people are evaluated. We cannot show management commitment to our employees, without a change at that level.

The comment indicates that the evaluation system is at the core of their business practices, which cannot be changed without high-level commitment. According to their report, performance evaluation targets for progress in productivity were set for each department, which was translated into individual targets. Similar to Company T, the approach also acknowledges different situations each department faces. Again, this approach is in line with the view that reward systems need to be aligned with sustainability initiatives to overcome conflicts and trade-offs (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010).

Furthermore, A-Senior Manager added that the company union fully cooperated with these efforts:

This year, labour-management negotiations on working conditions with the company union were not about increasing the salary base. It was about shortening work hours. For the next year, we discussed lowering the working hours per day down to seven hours, and promoting workstyle reform to that end... We are doing our best to increase productivity per unit time.

Interestingly, this comment shows that, in contrast to some companies reported in Chapter 5 (section 5.4.3), the company union is less concerned with cuts in overtime compensation. Instead, the company union seems to proactively take collective responsibility for regulating overwork and improving productivity. This approach based on cooperation is in line with the view that the union plays an important role in coordinated market economies such as in Japan (N. Kang & Moon, 2012) and labour-management cooperation is a critical component in the traditional Japanese management system (Kato & Kodama, 2017).

In line with these statements, the corporate report provided some evidence for their progress. In 2016, average annual work hours were reduced to 1890 (in comparison to 1996 hours in 2014) with minimum daily work hours of seven hours and 35 minutes. The paid leave use rate increased to 89.2% (in comparison to 80.5% in 2014). Importantly, this progress was attained while operating income grew over the period. Again, this evidence indicates that human sustainability initiatives are not necessarily in conflict with their economic interests.

Company Y (Food and beverage)

Another effective approach to managing *health and productivity* through workstyle reform was reported by Company Y, a leading beverage company. Y-Senior Manager also emphasised that the work reform initiatives were led by the CEO's leadership, which is driven by the founder's philosophy:

At its heart, our company has a spirit for taking on challenges passed on by our founder... To practise this philosophy, one must maintain physical and mental health... This perspective is at the foundation of all our initiatives, and our end goal is to maintain each individual's spirit and a cycle of taking on challenges and innovating.

The comment highlights the link between workforce wellbeing and innovation underlined by the founder's philosophy. This perspective is also in line with the view that commitment and leadership at the top levels of management is critical for sustainability initiatives (Engert et al., 2016; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010), and that sustainability initiatives need to be linked with innovation (Baumgartner, 2014; Epstein et al., 2015). Again, this management commitment is characterised by the joint application of the ethical (physical and mental health) and economic (innovation) perspectives of CSR and corporate sustainability (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Hahn et al., 2018).

According to the corporate report, the company declared "workstyle innovation" as a key management theme in 2016. It then set a target to reduce the total annual working hours per employee to 1,900 hours while increasing the number of paid holidays taken to 16 days a year. The company pushed forward 'workstyle innovation' initiatives, with the aim to

“generate high productivity, high-quality output, and new value creation as well as to allow diverse employees to work with enthusiasm”. The initiatives included utilising an IT and working methods handbook to increase operational efficiency, as well as promoting flexible work hours without core time, and teleworking, which can be done in 10 minute increments. Y-Senior Manager explained the intention of this approach: “Until now, applications [for teleworking] were on an hourly basis. Now you can apply in 10-minute units for 10, 60 and 90 minutes of work. This was very significant in promoting productivity awareness”.

In addition, according to Y-Senior Manager, the management team encouraged each department to develop their own initiatives, in line with the company spirit of a cycle of challenge and innovation. The manager explained that:

Of course, we set goals and KPIs for health and productivity, but we mainly make them as we go along... The situation with overwork and productivity is quite different for each department. As such, based on a broad policy that points to what we want to do, we start a cycle where each department chief makes their own policies and starts activities at the beginning of the year. Also, every six months, the progress of these activities is checked and evaluated, and the good initiatives are shared throughout the company.

This comment highlights the collective responsibility and close coordination within the company, based on autonomous initiatives. This perspective is consistent with the view that an appropriate response to CSR challenges may require close coordination across relevant functions to avoid internal conflicts (Yuan et al., 2011).

With regard to progress, Y-Senior Manager stated that: “we are managing work hours and work-life balance well...we are certainly making progress”. The corporate report provided some evidence for the progress as a result of these initiatives. In 2017, the company reduced overtime by roughly 10% and increased the paid holidays taken by 30%, in comparison to the year before. This progress did not come at the expense of economic performance, as its operating income has been steadily on the rise for the past few years.

Thus, these companies proactively managed and improved the *health and productivity* of their workforce, while reducing overwork. While the conflicts are “the rule rather than the exception” in corporate sustainability (Hahn et al., 2010, p. 218), for these companies, their human sustainability initiatives are not in conflict with their economic interests. Some companies even stated that their initiatives are necessary to attain corporate growth, which was supported by evidence of business performance. Their relatively successful initiatives were characterised by approaches such as high-level commitment (both ethical and economic perspectives), clear targets, investment, collective responsibility and close coordination, and choices and initiatives within the company. The comments indicate that these approaches support the companies to avoid internal conflicts and align the initiatives and core business practices.

6.3.2 Work and Life

This section examines the second theme: proactive management of *work and life*. As discussed in Chapter 2, workforce wellbeing and human sustainability involve better work-family balance, work-life balance, the reconciliation of work and family obligations and service provision for families (Dunphy et al., 2007; European Commission, 2001;

International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2010; Pfeffer, 2010). In particular, with the ageing demography of developed countries, effective childcare and elderly care are increasingly critical to the development of future generations of the workforce (Kossek et al., 2010; Kossek et al., 2014). Work-life initiatives facilitate the integration of employees' work and non-work demands (Bardoel, 2016; A. McCarthy et al., 2010) and enhance organisational performance through improved productivity and reduced turnover (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). In line with these perspectives, all participants reported that their company had introduced initiatives to improve the WLB (work-life balance) of the workforce. In particular, all 10 companies which reported 'coherence' proactively support their workforce to manage the interface between *work and life*, in a way that contributes to business and social performance. The approaches are categorised into two broad themes: managing *childcare* and *elderly care*, which will be elaborated on in the following sections.

6.3.2.1 Childcare

Chapter 4 reported increasing family-care responsibility as an emerging need of the Japanese workforce. However, Chapter 5 reported that there is a gap in family-care provisions between the government, company, and the individual in the workforce (Section 5.2.3). In response to this gap, all 10 companies which reported 'coherence' proactively supported their workforce to manage the interface between work and childcare. In the managing of *childcare*, two further sub-themes emerged: *childcare service provision* and *mandatory paternity leave*. Each sub-theme is explained in detail below.

Childcare service provision

One approach is to directly provide childcare services, by establishing an onsite childcare facility for employees (Beauregard, 2011; Beauregard & Henry, 2009). For instance, P-Manager stated that:

For our company, creating an onsite nursery was, in a way, a message from management to employees, telling them that we want men and women to work as equals, in an environment where they can keep on working through life stages.

The comment highlights the management intentions to allow all employees to manage work-life responsibilities effectively, without leaving the company.

The manager then stressed the aim of changing employee minds in the process: “to a certain extent, this childcare facility changes the employee mentality since they routinely see other men dropping off and picking up children at the nursery”. It is pertinent to note here that this change of mentality implies a divergence from the established norm of *gender roles in the family* (Section 5.2.2). This focus on the change of norms is consistent with the view that a change of thinking and attitude is required in implementing sustainability initiatives (Baumgartner, 2014; Engert et al., 2016; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010).

Likewise, Company K established an onsite childcare facility. K-Senior Manager articulated that “it was an investment in women”:

Our company policy allows for a generous childcare leave until the child is three years old. However, there are concerns about business skills and feeling distanced from the company after being away for three years. So we now recommend they

[women who took childcare leave] return to work as soon as possible. Employees who do not want to stall their careers too much are telling us that they are very grateful.

The comment indicates their shift in approach from a lengthy career break to a short one, from the perspective of career development. With an onsite childcare facility, female employees with childcare responsibilities can return to work earlier so that they can steadily build their careers.

Another approach is to provide financial assistance for childcare services (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Kossek et al., 2010). For instance, R-Manager explained that their past policies focused on giving exemptions to female employees from work responsibilities, in the form of shorter work hours or childcare leave for parenting. However, the manager stated that they changed focus in their approach:

Now, we believe that we need to widen our perspective and also give support to people who want to work fulltime, steadily building their careers, while raising their children. So, for people who intend to work fulltime without using such exemption policies, the company launched a policy paying for the expenses of external childcare services from last year.

The above policy indicates another indirect form of investing in women's careers, different from operating onsite childcare facilities. It is important to acknowledge that analysis is limited due to a lack of information regarding the costs of investment and its contribution to long-term business performance (Yuan et al., 2011). However, these approaches reflect the companies' perspectives that work-life management is not necessarily in conflict with

organisational performance (Beauregard & Henry, 2009), with proper investment (Engert et al., 2016).

Mandatory paternity leave

Another approach which companies reported was to promote *mandatory paternity leave*.

For instance, K-Senior Manager described their renewed, practical approach for paternity leave:

Three years ago, no male employee was taking paternity leave. Our policy allows even the men to take paternity leave for three years until the child is 3, but they have to go over a very high hurdle. As in other companies, they were concerned that their careers would be affected if they take paternity leave. So, as a more realistic target, the whole company along with the managers campaigned for a one-week break as a start.

The comment highlights a shift in their approach from extended leave to short leave, to address the employees' career concerns. It indicates that, if everyone takes the leave, then one does not need to fear the career consequence in comparison to others. Here, it is pertinent to note that this approach supports men to work, instead of taking a lengthy break.

He reported signs of progress:

Last year, 85% of applicable male employees took the weeklong paternity leave, and this number has increased further this fiscal year. It is gradually gaining acceptance as part of the corporate culture... Even taking the 1-week leave means something to us.

The comment highlights the effects of this initiative on the norm of employees: men taking paternity leave (although short) is being accepted as part of corporate culture. Again, it is pertinent to note here that this change of norm implies a divergence from the established norms of *gender roles in the family* (Section 5.2.2.2). This focus on the change of norms is consistent with the view that a change of thinking and attitude is required in implementing sustainability initiatives (Baumgartner, 2014; Engert et al., 2016; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010).

W-Manager further elaborated on the importance of changing corporate culture. The manager stated that, likewise, the target is for all applicable male employees to take short-term paternity leave:

Our primary goal is to create a culture of taking paternity leave. We just want them to do and experience it (laugh), regardless of the number of days... Taking paternity leave will make male employees realise how female colleagues are working, under time pressures and high stress as they have shorter work hours and parental leave.

The manager reported that 70% of applicable male employees had taken the leave in 2015 and the number is rapidly increasing.

In Chapter 5, it was reported that the pattern of job content based on undefined roles, as well as the assumption that ‘the more cooperation there is, the better’, allow for persistent overwork (Section 5.3.1 and 5.4.2). P-Manager stated that this increase of uptake affects job content and patterns of cooperation:

Paternity leave also allows colleagues around him in the workplace to think about how they can manage jobs when someone suddenly takes leave. This approach [in

allowing all to take leave] is different from just relegating parental leave to long-term leave for women.

The comment highlights a shift in their approach from an extended leave for women to a short leave for everyone. That is, for everyone to take leave, then job content needs to be defined and coordinated more explicitly and efficiently than it otherwise would have been. This then means less worry about workload spill-over that forces colleagues to work more extended hours (Beauregard, 2011; Kossek et al., 2010; Ono, 2018). P-Manager emphasised that “to do this is not easy,” but they intend to “allow our employees to think about how they can work differently, including job content and responsibilities”. This comment indicates that the company aligned one of the core business practices of large Japanese companies, which is job content, with human sustainability initiatives (Section 5.3.2).

These comments indicate that the above companies are proactively assisting their employees, both male and female, to manage the interface between work and childcare responsibilities. In some companies, male employees taking paternity leave is being accepted as company culture; in other words, it is taken for granted as a norm within the company. It is important to note here that this shift in the norms implies a divergence from the established norms of *gender roles in the family*, in which women are expected to take care of the family and men are expected to work at the company (Section 5.2.2). This emerging pattern, although limited in scale, is different from the system of responsibilities underlined by the persistent gender division of labour between work and family in Japanese society (Nemoto, 2013b; North, 2009).

6.3.2.2 Elderly care

Chapter 5 reported that this gap in family-care provisions between the government, companies, and the individual workforce was strongly expressed for elderly care (Section 5.2.3). In response to this absence, all 10 companies which reported ‘coherence’ proactively supported their workforce to manage the interface between work and elderly care.

It was reported that, despite the increased responsibilities for elderly care, only a limited number of employees use elderly-care leave in comparison to childcare leave (Section 4.3.2). Concerning this relative lack of uptake, some articulated the difference between elderly care and childcare. One difference was the certainty of schedule. For instance, Q-Manager pointed out that, whereas childcare can be scheduled, it is not so straightforward for elderly care:

For childcare, you can schedule in ‘until the child enters elementary school’ or ‘until college graduation’. Elderly-care leave ends only ‘after the need for caregiving is gone’. However, no one knows when the need for caregiving of a parent will end. So the bar may be higher for taking elderly-care leave.

W-Manager pointed out that this uncertainty adds to their career concerns:

Of course, our employees can take the extended leave of one year off work. However, unlike childcare, you often cannot see the future [of your career] in elderly care - because many cannot avoid dropping work after taking leave [because the need for caregiving continues].

These comments indicate that employees hesitate to take elderly-care leave because they are uncertain of how long caregiving will continue and how it will affect their career.

Another difference is the variation in individual conditions. For instance, Q-Manager pointed out that individual circumstances are very different because elderly-care depends on the degree of care required as well as how far apart employees and parents live. The uncertainty of schedule and variation of individual conditions indicate that employees need to develop their own approach in managing elderly-care responsibilities. These views are in line with the perspective that work conditions are increasingly diversifying and need to be managed in great detail (Section 4.2.2). These views also confirm the perspective that long-term care becomes increasingly important with the ageing demography of industrialised countries (Kossek et al., 2010).

Two approaches which emerged as companies' responses to these challenges were different from those to childcare. One approach was to lower the bar for employees to take the elderly-care leave. For instance, Q-Manager explained that they had changed the leave policy so that employees could take elderly-care leave multiple times, rather than for a limited time. This change was to take into consideration the difficulty of knowing when 'the need for caregiving is gone'. Alternatively, E-Senior Manager explained their policy "for people who had to quit work to provide elderly-care because they could not tell when their caregiving responsibilities ended". The policy is called the 'Hello Work' policy, which is based on their stance that "We would like you to come back whenever your circumstances get better". With these policies in place, they now know they can come back to work and continue their career. These policies are considered to offer viable choices, as suggested by L. Putnam et al. (2014), by lowering the bar for employees to take leave and deal with family-care responsibilities. However, it is important to note that employees who took leave may not come back as they continue to have elderly-care responsibility.

A higher level of integration was indicated by other companies, which assist their employees in managing work and elderly-care responsibilities without taking leave. One approach was by providing information assistance with elderly-care services (Beauregard, 2011; Beauregard & Henry, 2009). For instance, Company W reported that they aim to find a workstyle that will enable employees to manage both work and elderly care effectively through their educational initiative:

We hold elderly-care seminars as an opportunity to let employees think and work on their plans. Rather than assuming that “I am taking a leave of absence”, we are encouraging them to ask "What do I have to do to keep working while giving care?"

To illustrate his point, he went on to list the questions asked in the seminar:

We help our employees think through questions like: When will I need to provide elderly care; how can I support others in the family; what kind of plans do I need; when do I need to get professional support, and where can I outsource the elderly care?

The comment highlights the awareness of individual variations, as the question focuses on how each employee thinks through their own situations and plans. With regard to progress, the manager reported that seminar participants, both male and female employees, have increased at a steady pace since they started offering elderly-care seminars two years ago.

Another approach was providing financial assistance with elderly-care services (Beauregard, 2011; Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Company R stressed the importance of assisting employees in continuing work. R-Manager stated that:

We are holding more seminars on the topic of elderly care, to give our employees more comprehensive support related to elderly care. It is too late to think about elderly care after it has started.

He went on to explain that the comprehensive support includes partly shouldering the elderly-care costs:

Since April 2014, we set up a policy that, although it has an annual upper limit, shoulders half of the actual elderly-care costs. We were able to give employees who face these situations a choice to continue working.

The comment indicates management commitment to support its employees to manage work and elderly-care responsibilities based on individual choices. It also indicates that the company perceives the long-term benefit of their employees to continue working while providing family care. This is in line with the view that their initiatives to manage family care are not necessarily in conflict with their economic interests.

An even higher level of integration was indicated by Company T, which involves allowing more flexibility for employees in daily work. Similar to W-Manager, T-Manager described the educational initiative to assist employees to manage work and elderly care:

I think we are quite ahead of other companies with regard to elderly care. We have been conducting seminars for employees who will be providing elderly care in the future, and more than 1,000 employees have already participated.

In line with this comment, the company held elderly-care seminars 17 times in 2016, and about 1,600 employees participated, according to a corporate report.

Nonetheless, T-Manager acknowledged that only a few employees took elderly-care leave. Asked how they evaluate progress, the manager stated that the number of employees taking elderly-care leave is not necessarily the measure of their progress:

That is because, even if there is a policy for elderly-care leave, it would be better not to take the leave at all if possible. Although they can take it when they really have to, the better option would be for them to be able to provide elderly care as part of their everyday lives, since they can adjust their schedule by working at home and taking annual holidays.

The comment indicates that greater flexibility at the workplace supports employees to manage their elderly-care responsibilities. In other words, without workplace flexibility, elderly care is challenging to manage. This view supports the increasing importance of flexibility at work, particularly with the ageing demography of the industrialised countries (Kossek et al., 2010).

The manager went on to stress that their initiatives support their workforce to stay connected to both work and home, rather than to make an either-or choice (e.g., either work or home) (L. Putnam et al., 2014):

One principle behind promoting work from home is to give employees the time for caregiving or adequately taking care of needs at home whenever they need while continuing to work.

Similarly, W-Manager stressed the importance of staying connected to both work and home: “One of our challenges is how employees can provide elderly care while continuing

to work. To that end, we are setting up telecommuting and shift work”. The manager also emphasised the need for individual choices:

Rather than the company providing a (uniform) workplace that is easy to work in, we are pursuing a flexible, easy-to-work-in environment where individuals have choices.

A similar approach to integration was indicated by E-Senior Manager, which involves allowing more workplace flexibility for employees by adjusting their work conditions. He reported that the company adjusted the pattern of job roles and responsibilities from the perspective of family-care responsibilities:

Initially, store employees were basically employees who assume that they will be relocated nationwide. However, we have included a policy that allows employees who cannot move or relocate because of elderly care, childcare, etc. to work in a limited region by temporarily exempting them from nationwide relocation.

In addition to adjusting customary job roles and responsibilities, the company created a new job category called ‘local full-time employees’, who can stay within the limited location.

The manager stated that this policy has both short-term and long-term implications:

Currently, we have about 11,000 people working as local full-time employees...

Although they are designated as local full-time employees, they are treated the same way as regular employees including welfare benefits, so the impact on management is naturally large in terms of cost. However, this policy is not for our short-term performance. It is a long-term strategy to increase overall productivity, by having

them work in the company over a long period and improving the level of work skills in our company and providing better service [to the customers].

The above policy indicates another indirect form of investing in the career of both men and women, particularly with family-care responsibilities.

Thus, these companies proactively managed and improved the *work-life management* of their workforce, while enhancing flexibility at work. The company aligned one of the core business practices of large Japanese companies, which is the career pattern, with human sustainability initiatives (Section 5.3.2). These initiatives also aim to bring long-term benefits for both employer and employees from ‘investing’ in the careers of both men and women (Engert et al., 2016; Kossek et al., 2010). Again, it is important to acknowledge that the analysis is limited due to the lack of information regarding the costs of investment and its contribution to long-term business performance (Yuan et al., 2011). However, these approaches reflect the companies’ perspectives that work-life management is not necessarily in conflict with organisational performance (Beauregard & Henry, 2009), with proper investment (Engert et al., 2016; Margolis & Walsh, 2003).

6.3.3 Gender Equality and Diversity

This section examines the third theme: proactive management of *gender equality and diversity*. As discussed in Chapter 2, workforce wellbeing and human sustainability include a concern for *gender equality and diversity* of the workforce (European Commission, 2001; International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2010; Pfeffer, 2010). In this study, *gender equality and diversity* is defined as “the enjoyment of equal rights, opportunities, and treatment by men and women” (International Labour Office, 2007a, p. 91). In line with

these perspectives, all participants reported that their company had introduced initiatives to improve *gender equality and diversity* of the workforce. In particular, all 10 companies which reported ‘coherence’ proactively managed *gender equality and diversity* through career development in a way that contributes to business and social performance. The following sections elaborate on such approaches by three companies which claim substantial progress in this regard.

Company I (Airline)

Company I, a leading airline, exhibited one such proactive approach to *gender equality and diversity*. It is argued that commitment and leadership at the top levels of management is necessary for sustainability initiatives to be integrated into business strategy and core management practices (Engert et al., 2016; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010). Accordingly, the company had been promoting women’s career development as a top management commitment. In particular, with women accounting for roughly half of their employees, the company aims to expand women’s career paths, incorporate their viewpoints into management, and generate new corporate values. Again, this commitment is characterised by the joint application of ethical (equality) and economic (corporate values) perspectives of CSR and corporate sustainability (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Hahn et al., 2018).

According to Epstein and Buhovac (2010), the management commitment has to be supported by effective implementation processes, including programmes and goals.

Accordingly, the company set the target ratio of women in management at 20% by 2023. In their corporate report, the company emphasised that their approach is not just driven by

target attainment but “guided by our merit-based appointment policy”. In other words, the company seems to be aware of potential conflicts in equal opportunity policies, that is, between ‘fair representation of women’ and ‘fair evaluations irrespective of gender category’ (Section 4.3.1).

With regard to implementation, I-Senior Manager explained that their career development initiatives are supported by promoting better work environments and workplace culture. In particular, regarding better work environments, the manager explained a significant turning point in their approach:

We already had a programme to support women’s work-life balance, which exceeded regulative requirements, such as allowing for three-year childcare leave. However, we realised that this policy also perversely inhibited women from moving up in their career. A big turning point was a policy shift towards supporting women to work [instead of supporting career breaks].

The manager went on to explain that this shift in policy required further workstyle reform:

Going in that direction [to support women to work], we also had to move towards workstyle reform. So, we set up a new specialised group to conduct reform. While shoring up infrastructure development such as IT investment, we also put more effort into providing workstyles that are flexible and are not tied to a place.

This approach is consistent with the view that addressing gender inequality involves enhancing flexibility at work and regulating overwork (Section 4.3.1). It is also consistent with the approach to encourage the workforce to stay connected to both work and home, rather than to make an either-or choice (e.g., either work or home) (L. Putnam et al., 2014).

The manager went on to explain that, once these policy and workstyle reforms were firmly in place, it became common for working women to balance work and family responsibilities.

Based on this foundation, we have been focusing on career development such as expanding job categories, raising career awareness of women, and career vision building... And further to that, we are now focusing on the role of top management in effectively supporting the process of women's career development.

These comments of I-Senior Manager highlight the necessity of a better work environment to support women to continue work, which provides a foundation for supporting women's career development. This shift in approach is in line with the view that generous work-life balance practices can have both positive and negative effects: they can help raise women's participation in the workforce but hinder career advancement by encouraging more extended leave and career interruption (Datta Gupta et al., 2008).

In addition, the company supported women's career development by increasing training programmes for them. According to their corporate report, "we are seizing every opportunity from grade-based training to performance evaluator training, to raise awareness of the importance of diversity". Furthermore, the company has also set up meetings between managers with female subordinates and made sure that "women are being given challenging assignments that will help them grow". These approaches reflect their collective responsibility and close coordination within the company to support women's career development. The company reported progress as a consequence of these initiatives: the ratio of women in management has risen by 5% (to 16.3% in 2016) over the last 5

years. This progress was attained while operating income grew over the period. This evidence supports the view that progress in *gender equality and diversity* can be attained concurrently with business growth (Kirton & Greene, 2016).

Company W (Insurance)

Another company which proactively managed *gender equality and diversity* through career development was Company W, a leading insurance provider. Similar to Company I, Company W declared that diversity is an essential part of its management strategy by making it the highest priority in 2013. With their aim to translate diversity into a drive for growth, management set a goal of increasing the percentage of women in managerial positions to 30% by 2020 (from 5% in 2013). Again, this management commitment is underlined by not just an ethical (equality) but also an economic (values) perspective (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Hahn et al., 2018).

With regard to implementation, W-Manager described a similar turning point in their approach, as reported by the above I-Senior Manager:

Since 2010, we have been conducting various initiatives to advance women's careers. Initially, our focus was to make the workplace easy to work in, by allowing women to continue to work with better work-life balance. However, now, we focus also on enhancing women's career drive and motivation for work.

Their initiatives included instituting various training programmes to create a pipeline of positions from junior level to management level. W-Manager described what the company calls a “career management system for women”:

To lay down the pipeline [of female candidates], we firmly created the training and career development programme for each grade. It is not disclosed in our report, but we have our promotional plan for 2020 being implemented for each individual by name. That is, in order to achieve our 30% target by 2020, we are managing the careers of each candidate.

The comment highlights the company’s attempt to manage career development by catering for each individual. This approach could be considered as one response to the dilemmas between ‘setting a clear timeframe’ and ‘need for fair evaluation irrespective of gender category’ (Section 4.3.1). This is because the approach addresses conflicts in equal opportunity policies by setting clear targets and focusing on individualised training and promotions based on merit.

In addition to this training, the company also implemented a mentor programme for women’s career advancement. Similar to Company I, in this programme, a manager other than her own supervisor provides support as a mentor (advisor) to the employee. The aim was to create a work culture and environment that helps develop women’s careers and encourages them to raise their aspirations and take on new challenges. The company reported that some of the ‘graduates’ of these programmes have advanced to the position of director, executive officer, and general manager. As for this drive and advancement of career, W-Manager stressed that the female candidate could not do it alone:

To sustain the career drive and advancement, the female candidate, her male supervisor, and the top management need to be involved as key stakeholders. So, the management first set the goal, commit to it both inside and outside the company, and establish an organisational structure. Then, all the directors except for the CEO are involved as mentors. We also ask male supervisors to join with the female candidates in training or interview them before and after training. Also, we ask the supervisors to improve their workstyle and work-life balance themselves.

Again, this comment highlights the importance of collective responsibility and close coordination within the company to avoid internal conflicts (Yuan et al., 2011).

Similar to Company I, Company W also reported some progress after instituting these initiatives; in 2017, the percentage of women in managerial positions increased from about 14% to about 19% within four years, while their operating income is rising. This evidence supports the view that progress in *gender equality and diversity* can be attained concurrently with business growth (Kirton & Greene, 2016).

Company AE (Housing)

Another effective approach to managing *gender equality and diversity* through career development was reported by Company AE, a leading housing product maker. Their corporate report articulated the aims and aspirations for their gender diversity initiatives. Their aims were stated as follows:

...to expand choices available to its employees so that they can develop their abilities and maintain a good work-life balance while challenging themselves with active, demanding roles.

These initiatives are based on their aspiration for:

...creating a company where, based on its strength in diversity, diverse human resources gather and work comfortably irrespective of age, working time, location, and type of job, and have the motivation to take on new challenges.

Again, these aims and aspirations are underlined by the joint application of ethical (equality, work-life balance, diversity) and economic (abilities, active roles, motivation) perspectives of CSR and corporate sustainability (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Hahn et al., 2018).

Following these aims and aspirations, Company AE had set a target of increasing the percentage of women in management from 5.6% in 2014 (women comprise a quarter of all employees) to 10% by 2017. Similar to Company I and W, to this end, Company AE continued to recruit women into regular positions and developed specific training to support career and skills development. The training targeted female employees and their supervisors, with a focus on improving management skills and awareness. This was because the skills training and job role assignments with supervisors' involvement were necessary to support career development effectively. Again, this approach highlights the importance of collective responsibility and close coordination within the company to support CSR initiatives (Yuan et al., 2011).

As reported in Chapter 4, the majority of participants reported emerging dilemmas of promoting gender equality and flexibility at work (Section 4.3.1 and 4.3.2), which included career concerns. In contrast, AE-Manager reported that there is no significant dilemma regarding career:

We want women to work for a long time [through life stages], so there should not be a dilemma that they will be damaging their career if they take leave such as childcare and elderly-care leave... So, in our company, there is no link between taking leave and being evaluated negatively. There is no worry that it [taking leave] will affect their evaluation.

The comment highlights that their evaluation system ensures that taking leave does not constrain career development. This perspective is in stark contrast with the view that women are confronted with an *all or nothing choice* of career or family responsibility (Section 5.4.2). Furthermore, the manager's comment indicated one response to the dilemmas between 'setting a clear timeframe' and 'need for fair evaluation irrespective of gender category' (Section 4.3.1). AE-Manager acknowledges the potential dilemma, by stating that: "there may be some dissatisfaction deep down in male employees, with such thoughts as 'they got the managerial job just because they are women'". However, the manager went on to stress that "Still, I feel that if we do not take such measures [of setting a target number and supporting women's career advancement], it [gender equality] won't take root over time". The comment highlights the company's long-term commitment and perspective towards resolving gender inequality (Engert et al., 2016; Grosser & Moon, 2008).

The manager went on to state that these initiatives take time to permeate:

In a sense, this [pursuing gender equality] is a societal change. To respond to change, we need to give it time until it [gender equality] becomes normal... If we continue these measures, for those who will join the company 10 or 20 years later, it [gender equality] becomes normal. Here it is essential to give it proper time since doing too much too suddenly will bring much dissatisfaction.

The comment highlights that long-term societal change forces *gender equality and diversity*, which this company seeks to respond to by managing short-term conflicts (Hahn et al., 2015; Parker, 2002; S. A. Waddock et al., 2002). This perspective also reflects the shifting needs of the workforce and their responses to changing social and economic environments (S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; S. Lewis et al., 2007).

Company AE reported some progress after instituting these initiatives. In 2016, the percentage of women in management increased to 8.4% (about a 1.5% increase from 2015), while the proportion of women among all employees increased to roughly 32% (about a 6% increase from 2015). This progress has been attained while their operating income is on the rise. Again, this evidence supports the view that progress in *gender equality and diversity* can be attained concurrently with business growth (Kirton & Greene, 2016).

Thus, these companies reported their approaches to managing and improving *gender equality and diversity* through career development, in a way that leads to business and social performance. These companies aligned with one of the core business practices of large Japanese companies, which is career pattern, with human sustainability initiatives (Section 5.3.2). While the conflicts are “the rule rather than the exception” in corporate

sustainability (Hahn et al., 2010, p. 218), for these companies, their *gender equality and diversity* initiatives are not in conflict with their economic interests. In contrast, these companies explicitly stated their aims to attain higher corporate values and business growth, which were supported by evidence of business performance. This perspective is in line with the view that *gender equality and diversity* is demanded by shareholders (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Yasser et al., 2017).

In addition, similar to the initiatives to improve *health and productivity*, their relatively successful initiatives were characterised by approaches such as high-level commitment (both ethical and economic perspectives), clear targets, investment, collective responsibility and close coordination, and choices and initiatives within the company. The comments indicate that these approaches support the companies to avoid internal conflicts and align the initiatives and core business practices.

To summarise, this section reported the internal processes that lead to coherence between human sustainability initiatives, business strategy, and core business practices. It elaborated on three different processes that emerged from the data: management of *health and productivity*, *work and life*, and *gender equality and diversity*. The next section turns to the external processes.

6.4 External Processes

As discussed in Chapter 3, the effects of CSR and sustainability initiatives depend on external processes, which relate to external stakeholders (Brammer et al., 2012; Mainardes et al., 2011; Yuan et al., 2011). Without an effective societal and institutional context, companies have opportunities to externalise the costs of CSR, and thus there remains a

strong business case for not integrating CSR into business strategy (Arena et al., 2018; Brammer et al., 2012). Accordingly, this section reports the external processes that lead to coherence between human sustainability, business strategy, and core business practices. As sub-themes, three external processes emerged from data analysis: proactive engagement with *customers*, *industry*, and *government*. The following sections elaborate on each sub-theme in detail.

6.4.1 Customers

This section reports the first theme of *customers*. According to Gambles et al. (2006), markets drive down costs by externalising the human costs, which lead to severe health problems (e.g., exhaustion, depression, and death from overwork) and lack of time for personal and community lives as well as a care deficit (e.g., child and elderly care). In Chapter 5, it was reported that market forces, in particular, customer demands, lead to persistent overwork. Following these perspectives, 11 out of 31 participants referred to the need to engage with *customers* when promoting human sustainability initiatives.

For instance, Company T, which reports ‘coherence’, proactively engages with their *customers* to regulate overwork and improve productivity. T-Manager described their efforts in which they asked their *customers* for cooperation:

Two years ago, our company wrote a letter addressed to customers under the name of our president, saying that “our company encourages paid annual leave, and we have set annual office holidays on which everybody will be on holiday. We have also initiated shorter working hours. We hope for your kind understanding and cooperation on this matter”. We handed this letter directly to customers through

executive officers, bowing all the while and asking for their understanding and cooperation.

In other words, Company T sought to change their *customers'* expectations regarding work hours. According to T-Manager, most of their business involves their employees on-site working in customers' offices. In this work environment, the manager explained that it is often hard to say that 'we are leaving the office now' when colleagues are working. However, "since the executive officer had made a courtesy call beforehand, *customers* accepted it with an 'Oh, that thing is today'". As for the *customers'* responses, the manager stated that no customer was reluctant to cooperate:

If employees on-site asked for cooperation from the customers, the effect would certainly be limited. However, after an executive officer explains the letter from the president, you do not expect customers to get angry and suspend business transactions... they won't say they can't agree with us on this [proper work hours].

The comment underscores the importance of high-level commitment when asking for cooperation from their *customers*. This view is in line with the perspective that management commitment and leadership is necessary to overcome dilemmas that managers face in implementing sustainability initiatives (Engert et al., 2016; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010).

Furthermore, T-Manager went on to describe their proactive approach to their shareholders. The manager explained that their shareholders did not have "any problems at all" because their sales, profits, and dividends increased for five consecutive years:

The management team probably expected and was preparing for lower sales and profits [due to regulating overwork], which naturally meant lower dividends for shareholders. However, after everything is said and done, we've surprisingly kept on growing. We have dialogues with shareholders that go like this: "We've accomplished this much after implementing the workstyle reform. How would you assess that as a shareholder?"

The comment highlights the CEO's perspective that their human sustainability initiatives are not in conflict with their economic interests. This perspective is in stark contrast with the view that regulating work hours would constrain the economic growth of the companies (Section 4.3.3).

As shown above, T-Manager described their effort to influence the expectations of *customers*, and also shareholders, regarding workstyle reform. N-Manager in the same IT industry praised Company T's approach when stating that sending letters to *customers* asking for cooperation is "quite innovative". However, he went on to point out that: "at our company, many of our *customers* are government agencies, and we can't just say that we are giving priority to regulating overtime work". This comment indicates that *customers'* cooperation cannot be easily attained due to high pressures from *customers*.

AB-Manager also praised Company T's approach to the *customers* as "what it should be from now on":

Although there is a saying "the customer is king", what the customer says isn't always right. In fact, we should explain better [to the customer] and move with them together in the right direction.

The manager illustrated his point by citing an analogous situation in their CSR efforts. In what they called the Green Gift project, the company asked for the *customers'* cooperation in reading online contract agreements, instead of a thick, paper contract agreement, to reduce the environmental impact. If the *customers* are willing to cooperate, the costs the company saved by reducing paper use are then returned back to society in the form of volunteer environmental projects. “We try to conserve the use of paper resources with the customer’s cooperation. In other words, we save social ‘costs’ both for the company and society, and use the savings for good initiatives”. This analogy is similar to the analogy put forth by Gambles et al. (2006) that markets drive down cost by externalising the environmental cost of commercial activities and having society pay for them.

The manager asserted that this project and Company T’s approach have a commonality:

This is an example of the environmental aspect. However, we also show our customers a world that they have not seen yet; we should not just blindly follow their ways and whatever they demand. I believe that will be the way of the future. Progressive companies are showing how to create a better society together with their customers and presenting their approach to the larger society.

The comment highlights a corporate approach to their *customers*, from “blindly following” their demands to “creating a better society together with their *customers*”, by internalising the social costs. This approach supports the view that customers can play an important role in overcoming conflicts between economic and social benefits (Glover et al., 2014; Goodman, Korsunova, & Halme, 2017).

Furthermore, this approach is consistent with the notion of CSR as an internalisation and integration of externalities by companies through proactive management practices beyond the minimum legal requirements (European Commission, 2001; Husted & Allen, 2006; Matten & Moon, 2008; Warhurst & Mitchell, 2000). It is also in line with the view that human sustainability requires internalisation of the human and social costs (Gambles et al., 2006; Pfeffer, 2010).

All these comments illustrate the need to engage with *customers* when promoting human sustainability initiatives. This leads to another theme of *industry*, which will be discussed below.

6.4.2 Industry

This section reports the second theme of *industry*. As discussed in Chapter 2, there are two forms of regulations in terms of CSR: self-regulation within the industry and statutory regulation by the government. Following this perspective, 21 out of 31 participants referred to the critical role *industry* competitors play in regulating overwork.

For instance, T-Manager stated that workstyle needs to change not just in their company, but also in their *industry*:

IT companies are still seen as sweatshops with long and tough work, as well as an industry that is hard on women. In response, we want to change these perceptions, so that not just our company but the whole industry will attract excellent people and grow as an industry.

T-Manager went on to describe their collaborative initiative in the *industry*:

Workstyle reform is not just our company’s initiative; we open up and share our know-how so that we can all collaborate. To do so, we invited the top management of a dozen listed companies in the IT industry to come and talk about workstyle reform, as well as health and productivity management. We also have exchange meetings to share human resources know-how; directors of personnel departments of IT companies come, and we openly share our initiatives.

In other words, Company T regards their *industry* competitors as key stakeholders in their workstyle reform. The need to engage with *industry* is also expressed by C-Senior Manager in the house building industry, who stated that *industry* collaboration is crucial to regulating overwork:

We are aware of our high impact and attention as a leading company in the industry... Regarding labour issues, information from industry peers helps a lot as well. We exchange information with other companies in the industry... There is competition of course, but we need to collaborate as an industry in this area [to regulate overwork].

Informant A, a sociologist researcher, also emphasised the need for *industry* engagement. He pointed out that, within a competitive market, even if companies ask their *customers* for ‘cooperation’ concerning workstyles, their *customers* may just go to their competitors for “better service” produced with more extended working hours:

[If customers just leave for “better service”], then it seems like we will go right back to where we started [where everyone overworks]... To a certain extent, we need to have some consistent standard [on workstyle reform] in the industry. So I do think

that it would be good to create a framework somewhere for building consensus for each industry.

The comment highlights the need for self-regulation regarding work hours at the *industry* level. This view is in line with the need for *industry*-level self-regulation to support socially responsible initiatives (Brammer et al., 2012; Vogel, 2010).

All these comments illustrate the need to engage with *industry* when promoting human sustainability initiatives. However, a Senior Manager of Company Z, a leading construction company, pointed out that *industry*-level rules are fragile under competitive market pressure:

Even if the industry decides on the rules on its own initiative, customers will beg for changes. If the customers say “Why can’t you make some accommodations [to work longer]? Other companies have done it for us”, we can only respond with “Sure we will do it” (laugh). Control is really difficult at this level unless it’s enforced by the law.

The comment highlights the need for enforcement by the government under a competitive environment. This view is in line with the perspective that industrial-level self-regulation often fails due to economic pressure, without enough support from the government (Campbell, 2007; Vogel, 2010). This leads to another theme of *government*, which will be discussed below.

6.4.3 Government

This section reports the third theme of the *government*. In Chapter 5, it was reported that regulative forces, in particular, the form of *employment protection and social security*, allow for persistent overwork and gendered roles. Following this perspective, 15 out of 31 participants referred to the critical role the government can play in supporting their proactive human sustainability initiatives.

It is important to note here that, unlike *customers* and *industry* competitors, no company reported their actions to actually engage with or influence the government directly.

However, companies reported their various expectations of the roles the government can play in regulating overwork as well as promoting *gender equality and diversity*. Three sub-themes emerged from the responses: *working hours regulation*, *gender diversity regulation*, and *accounting standards*, which will be elaborated on in the following sections.

6.4.3.1 Working hours regulation

One sub-theme which emerged from data analysis was *working hours regulation*. Around half of the companies (14 out of 31) refer to the need for government initiatives to establish statutory working hours regulations. For instance, A-Senior Manager acknowledged that, when it comes to workstyle reform, “Things cannot be changed so easily if left to their own devices”. Thus, “we as companies expect the government to take the lead to some extent”.

Likewise, Stakeholder D, director of the national union centre, also expressed the need for compulsory change supported by the government: “I don’t think long working hours will ever be reformed unless there are compulsory regulations on minimum break intervals or upper limits of working hours”. In line with these views, Z-Senior Manager regarded such

regulations as necessary to a degree, because “without it, the health conditions of employees and recovery will be difficult... they can only recover and have a mental break from work if they are given proper rest”. Asked how such regulations may affect their business, Z-Senior Manager explained that their company should be able to cope with the regulations with improved productivity:

For instance, even if we cannot be on the site the next morning [due to the regulation], we can ask our colleagues to give instructions for staff. There are also IT tools we can use from home to give directions. Ultimately, there should be no one so indispensable that work will not go on without them on site. We should be prepared to cover for anybody if they are not there. Some people place importance on “being on the scene, with the actual product, at present” but the point is that it is enough to be there when the situation requires it. So there is room for growth in productivity, depending on how the management does it.

The comment highlights that there is room for improvement in productivity even when regulations on intervals between work shifts are imposed by the government. This view is in line with the government’s determination to improve work-life balance and the productivity of their workforce simultaneously through workstyle reform (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017).

Nonetheless, Z-Senior Manager also claimed that there must be room for the company’s self-regulation at the same time:

It is good to have a certain upper limit. However, there are naturally times when, for example, a project is really stuck, and work has to go on beyond regular hours.

During those times, we need to manage the situation. So it would be good if we say to the government, “we exceeded the limits because of this situation”, and if the reason is clear the government can respond with “That is okay, but make sure you cut the time by the corresponding amount next month”.

In a similar vein, F-Manager also emphasised the need for self-regulation. He pointed out the need to cope with fluctuating market pressure: “there will always be busy periods. We might lose our balance when the pressure is on, but we cannot be busy 365 days a year. So we can make allowances later for rest for the personnel”.

In a different manner, C-Senior Manager emphasised his preference for self-regulation over government regulation:

The discretionary labour system [i.e., self-regulation] is clearly better for the company. So it is absolutely necessary for companies to ensure proper breaks and holidays for their employees.

The comment underscores the responsibility of the companies to self-regulate proper working hours. In a similar vein, P-Manager expresses a sense of caution about government regulation:

The government needs to strengthen working hours regulations, but companies may fold trying to comply with unrealistic regulations. Imposing unrealistic regulations is similar to saying “die for your own health”. So some parts need to be strengthened, but other parts need to be left to the company’s discretion and self-regulation so that companies can be positive and creative in addressing the challenge.

In other words, this manager is concerned about the effectiveness of government regulation, disconnected from the realities of market competition. L-Manager's comments summarised the concern:

Currently, the government proposes the 'ideal' ways of working and employment conditions, while companies have no option but to conform to these along with the laws... Instead of being imposed, as a company and industry, our challenge is to propose and pursue our workstyle, and ultimately our own ways of creating value and wellbeing.

Thus, participants indicated the need for both regulation and self-regulation in the management of overwork, in order for their initiatives to be effective. This view is in line with the perspective that neither self-regulation nor government regulation is adequate alone; and that private regulation needs to be reinforced by effective government regulation (Abländer & Curbach, 2017; Campbell, 2006; Rahim, 2013; Vogel, 2010).

6.4.3.2 Gender diversity regulation

The second sub-theme which emerged was *gender diversity regulation*. Although limited in number, four out of 31 companies explicitly stated the need for statutory gender quota regulations. For instance, A-Senior Manager stated that compulsory change is necessary if significant progress is to be delivered in gender equality:

The reason Northern European countries have progressed with promoting gender diversity was because they have laws to mandate a certain percentage of women board members... Even in those countries, the position of women had not been so

high in the past. The situation would not have changed so quickly without such a statutory law. Why can't we also use the government power to effect such changes in the value system in Japan?

This view is in line with the perspective that gender quota legislation could significantly improve gender diversity at the board level (Terjesen et al., 2015).

To further illustrate his point, A-Senior Manager elaborated on the analogous situation in his company's environmental project. The manager explained that, given the negative environmental impact of palm oil use in their products, the company is working to shift to the use of certified palm oil. However, palm oil is used so commonly in the market that "even if a few companies take the initiative [to use certified palm oil], nothing will ever change if we compete by price alone". Accordingly, he argued that "now only Japan has been left behind in the use of certified palm oil, bringing criticism from the rest of the world, as well as the risk of losing exports". This analogy is similar to the analogy put forth by Gambles et al. (2006) that markets drive down cost by externalising the environmental cost of commercial activities and having society pay for them.

The manager explained that this situation has commonality with the gender equality situation in Japan:

In the case of palm oil, there will be no improvement unless the policy is shifted and the government imposes an import duty or such [on non-certified palm oil] ... The government has to act on this across the board, as it is impossible to leave it up to companies to regulate themselves.

The comment highlights the role of government regulations to trigger change in the situation.

Similarly, M-Manager also supported a government statutory gender diversity standard. The manager stated that a gender diversity quota for the ratio of female executives “has merits and demerits, but it forcibly breaks open the shell that could not otherwise be broken and raises the standard to a certain level”. In order to advance gender diversity, the manager argued that:

Japan can also make use of the same powerful medicine to some degree. I think it is better to not just talk about it but decide on the term and do things forcefully. Otherwise, we will never know what the problems [impeding women’s advancement] are.

The comment underscores the need for a breakthrough, which can only be triggered by the government's coercive pressure. However, the manager also acknowledged the limitation of such an approach: “But such a code is not something that should be in place forever. After reaching a certain point, policy or direction towards a higher level will have to come out”. This view is consistent with the perspective that the country’s institutional environment co-evolves with gender diversity initiatives of the companies (Terjesen et al., 2015).

However, similar to working hours regulations, AB-Manager expressed his sense of caution and argued in support of self-regulation:

Our company is still male-centred, as with many Japanese traditional companies. If a target [for the number of female managers] is set all of a sudden, then it will just be applied forcibly even if the relevant employee level has not been prepared to

some extent. At our company, we attach importance to implementing workstyle reform first, preparing the workforce [for the change].

The comment highlights the limitation of a forceful approach if there is no foundation, such as a work environment and the skills necessary to support women's career advancement (Terjesen et al., 2015). The manager went on to argue for both government regulation and companies' self-regulation:

The country as a whole should commonly share the final goal, and the ensuing implementation should be tailored to each company's current situation while monitoring their condition. If preparations have advanced and the company has enough of a pipeline of female candidates, then we can start figuring out definite percentage targets. However, it will be hard to promote this uniformly, since there are many different factors at play depending on the company, such as corporate culture and employee composition.

The comment highlights the effectiveness of self-regulation at the corporate level, in particular the institutional context (Klettner, Clarke, & Boersma, 2016; Terjesen et al., 2015).

As shown, while some participants expect the government to take the lead to break out of the situation, others also expect room for self-regulation. Overall, again, these views are in line with the perspective that neither self-regulation nor government regulation is adequate alone; private regulation needs to be reinforced by effective government regulation (Abländer & Curbach, 2017; Campbell, 2006; Rahim, 2013; Vogel, 2010).

6.4.3.3 Accounting standards

The third sub-theme which emerged was *accounting standards*. In Chapter 2, it was argued that competitive markets, if left alone, externalise the human costs as much as possible (Benn et al., 2006; Gambles et al., 2006; Pfeffer, 2010). Following this perspective, although limited in number, five out of 31 companies explicitly referred to the limitation of *accounting standards*. For instance, R-Manager expressed a concern that the workforce is often treated as just a “cost” and companies only try to minimise the human cost by “just looking for cheaper labour and discarding it later”. Q-Manager went further to point out that human costs are not fully accounted for in the current framework in Japan:

For many CEOs, a human is only a ‘cost’ [on the balance sheet]. It is based on the accounting perspective. So often they try to ‘reduce labour costs’ when business goes down, but this has negative impacts: for instance, when salaries are reduced below the living wage, it leads to mental illness and ultimately lower productivity. How can we make those non-financial, human components visible in financial statements? Only if human components are included in the company’s corporate value, can we have a renewed foundation [for human sustainability initiatives].

The comment highlights the difficulty of measuring business-related consequences on human wellbeing (Pfeffer, 2010). This view is also in line with the perspective that the current financial reporting system is not well designed to capture CSR performance (Bondy et al., 2012). The manager further emphasised the need for “an accounting framework that can help analyse investment in human components”. He explored such an accounting framework:

In what [accounting] category do you place human investments? Is it training or welfare? Once they become clear, perhaps, companies will do their best to invest”.

These questions need to be answered for innovation, not just at each business level but also the management of the business-society relations.

In a similar vein, Automobile H-Manager also pointed out the limitation of the existing accounting framework. He stated that, when it comes to human capital, it is difficult for the company to measure human investments:

For example, the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) asks for the return on the cost and hours of employee training. However, it is impossible to say these hours of training to this person led to these abilities and these sales. This can only be seen as part of long-term investment... We need to think of this not as a cost but an investment in human components.

The comment highlights the difficulty in measuring human costs and investments within the current accounting framework. This view is in line with the perspective that, in order for the companies to integrate CSR and sustainability initiatives into core business practices, they need to measure the costs of investments and their contribution to long-term business performance (Engert et al., 2016; Gray, 2001; Yuan et al., 2011). Furthermore, this view also supports the view that human sustainability is concerned with maintaining human capital (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Goodland, 2002) and internalisation of the human and social costs, that is, externalities (Gambles et al., 2006; Pfeffer, 2010).

Furthermore, some participants explicitly stated the limitations of the current accounting framework adopted in Japan. Japan remains one of the few non-adopters of the

International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) (De George, Li, & Shivakumar, 2016). Regarding this framework, E-Senior Manager stated that “if IFRS accounting standards are introduced in Japan, it will be easier to manage overwork as such dynamics are at work [to account for the leave balance]. After that, it is just a matter of how to match the business practices”. E-Senior Manager was referring to IFRS requirements to allocate the allowance for paid leave, which is not required in the current Japanese accounting framework. C-Senior Manager also referred to IFRS requirements for paid leave and stated that: “such pressure from outside would help us manage overwork”.

These comments, although only mentioned by a few participants, indicate that the accounting framework affects how companies integrate human costs and investment in their business decisions. This evidence supports the view that, in implementing corporate sustainability and CSR, companies need to integrate external costs into management decision-making (Atkinson, 2000; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Hahn et al., 2010). It also supports the view that government and business hold joint responsibility for internalising the social costs (Abländer & Curbach, 2017).

To summarise, this section reported the external processes that lead to coherence between human sustainability initiatives, business strategy, and core business practices. It elaborated on three different processes that emerged from the data analysis: engagement with *customers, industry, and government*. The next section turns to the synthesis of the findings.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored the research question: ‘*How do large Japanese companies integrate human sustainability initiatives into their core business practices?*’ To answer this question,

the chapter drew upon the evidence from interviews with managers from 31 large Japanese companies, their stakeholders, and informants. The study employed the ‘core-periphery’ perspective to investigate how companies improve ‘consistency/fit’ internally and externally, responding to market pressures and demonstrating the ‘business case’ for human sustainability.

First, this chapter reported two different perspectives on the relationship between human sustainability and business strategy: *conflicts* and *coherence*. For the majority of participants, human sustainability conflicts with business strategy and core business practices. Nonetheless, they were aware of the need for integrating their initiatives and business strategies. In contrast, for some participants, human sustainability is coherent with business strategy and core business practices. For these managers, their human sustainability initiatives form a necessary foundation for their business strategy.

Second, this chapter reported the internal processes that lead to coherence between human sustainability initiatives, business strategy and core business practices. All 10 companies which reported ‘coherence’ explicitly stated that they proactively manage *health and productivity*, *work and life*, and *gender equality and diversity*, in a way that contributes to business and social performance. Their relatively successful initiatives were characterised by approaches such as high-level commitment (both ethical and economic perspectives), clear targets, investment, collective responsibility and close coordination, and choices and initiatives within the company. In addition, these companies aligned the core business practices of large Japanese companies, such as the pattern of job content, rewards, and careers, in line with human sustainability initiatives. The comments indicate that these

approaches support the companies to avoid internal conflicts and align the initiatives and core business practices.

Third, this chapter reported the external processes that lead to coherence between human sustainability, business strategy, and core business practices. Three themes emerged from the data analysis: proactive engagement with *customers*, *industry*, and *government*. Some companies articulated the critical roles these stakeholders play to regulate overwork and promote gender diversity. The evidence suggests that a few companies, although substantially limited, have started to explore cooperation with *customers* and *industry* competitors. In addition, some participants also expect the government to institute effective *working hours regulations*, *gender diversity regulations*, and *accounting standards*, in a way that can align with their proactive human sustainability initiatives.

Overall, the findings show that, even with having more difficulty resolving gender inequality and long working hours than they expected (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015), some large Japanese companies seek to implement human sustainability initiatives as part of their business strategies for better business and social performance (Jamali et al., 2009; Yuan et al., 2011). These companies sought to align human sustainability initiatives, business strategy, and core business practices (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Yuan et al., 2011), and were able to deliver better business and social performance (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Porter & Kramer, 2006). This finding supports the view that the integration of sustainability and business strategy can allow for long-term economic and social performance, with effective internal and external processes (Hahn et al., 2015; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015).

Thus, this chapter presented how companies implement human sustainability initiatives as part of their business strategies, even within the existing constraints. The next chapter goes on to develop the conceptual framework, based on the key findings presented in the last three findings chapters.

Chapter 7. Discussion

7.1 Overview

This chapter discusses and integrates the findings from the previous three chapters. The objective of this study is to expand our understanding of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the empirical findings of this study, develop links with the theories adopted for this study, and present a conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability.

The remainder of the chapter is organised as follows. Section 7.2 provides an overview of the development of human sustainability initiatives as CSR practices. Section 7.3 describes factors affecting human sustainability initiatives, highlighting the institutionalised workstyle that constrains the initiatives. Section 7.4 discusses human sustainability initiatives, business strategy, and core business practices, with a focus on the coherence between them and the roles of key stakeholders. Section 7.5 brings together the discussions of the previous sections into the conceptual framework. Section 7.6 discusses the implications for the concept of human sustainability. The last section concludes this chapter.

7.2 Human Sustainability Initiatives and CSR

Human sustainability initiatives and how they are incorporated into CSR strategies were examined in Chapter 4. In line with the theoretical framework, the chapter reported that

companies first perceive increasing pressures from stakeholders, and then promote workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives as CSR practice. It then reported that most companies found it difficult to integrate the initiatives into CSR strategy due to emerging dilemmas. In this section, stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and organisational strategy theory are applied to empirical results to develop a theoretical understanding of CSR as integral to human sustainability.

7.2.1 Stakeholder Pressure for Human Sustainability Initiatives

Theories adopted in the theoretical framework suggest that companies perceive constant pressures from stakeholders in societies and markets (Brammer et al., 2012; Mainardes et al., 2011; Matten & Moon, 2008). This study applies this perspective and identifies the key stakeholders which exert pressure on companies to promote workforce and human sustainability initiatives as integral to CSR.

One of the key stakeholders the companies reported is the workforce within society and their organisations. In line with stakeholder and institutional theory, the findings show that companies perceive the changing needs of the workforce as their key stakeholder: namely, *family-care* and *diverse workstyles*. This finding was consistent with the view that workforce wellbeing and human sustainability require the company to properly meet the needs of the workforce (Benn et al., 2014; Costanza et al., 2007; World Health Organization, 2018). However, this institutionalised workstyle may become dysfunctional due to emerging stakeholder pressure. It is also in line with the view that the needs of the workforce shift in response to changing social environments, including the increasing participation of women in the workforce (S. Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; S. Lewis et al.,

2007). In the context of Japanese society and business, the workforce is ageing, shrinking, and increasingly diverse in their needs to facilitate work and family roles. Accordingly, participants reported effective family-care and diverse workstyles as the emerging needs of the workforce.

Another key stakeholder within society that companies reported is the government. In line with stakeholder and institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Donaldson & Preston, 1995), the government is seen as exerting increasing coercive pressures on companies to address human sustainability issues. In line with the literature, the evidence shows that the government exerts increasing coercive pressures through instituting laws and regulations on overwork (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017), work-life balance (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Kawaguchi, 2013), and gender equality (Dalton, 2017; Kato & Kodama, 2017).

The companies also reported increasing pressure from stakeholders in the markets (Campbell, 2007; Porter & Kramer, 2006). In line with the literature, the evidence shows, through an extensive questionnaire and information disclosure requests, that the shareholders exert increasing pressure on companies to promote gender equality and flexibility at work (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Mun & Jung, 2018; Vigneau et al., 2015).

Another pressure on companies to regulate overwork is exerted by customers, in particular, global companies, through extensive audits over supply chain networks (Bendell et al., 2011; Vogel, 2010).

While stakeholder pressure is common across industries, it is pertinent to note industry variation with regard to the degree of pressure. For instance, the pressure for gender

equality is perceived differently between a retail company with a growing female customer base and a heavy manufacturing company with a limited number of female customers. Likewise, pressures to regulate overwork were perceived differently between a printing company with a global customer base and a housing company catering to domestic customers. These variations support the view that the conditions and pressures for companies to pursue CSR differ in each organisational field (Beschoner & Hajduk, 2017; Dabic et al., 2016; Matten & Moon, 2008).

7.2.2 Human Sustainability Initiatives and CSR Practices

Theories adopted in the theoretical framework suggest that business promotes CSR initiatives in response to stakeholder pressure (Battilana et al., 2009; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Mainardes et al., 2011). This study applied this perspective and identified workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives developed as part of CSR. Four major human sustainability issues and initiatives are identified as promoted by business: *gender equality*, *flexibility at work*, *regulating overwork*, and *productivity improvement*. In line with the literature, the senior management of the companies participating in this study developed policies/programmes, set targets/KPIs, and implemented CSR management practices (Asif et al., 2013; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010).

These corporate initiatives are also in line with the emerging gender equality initiatives (Grosser & Moon, 2005, 2008; Kato & Kodama, 2017; Mun & Jung, 2018), WLB initiatives (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Stropnik, 2010), and overwork reduction initiatives (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; North, 2010) as an integral part of CSR initiatives. This finding

also confirms the view that workforce wellbeing is integral to CSR (European Commission, 2001; Welford, 2004) and human sustainability (Benn et al., 2014; Pfeffer, 2010).

From the perspective of stakeholder theory, these corporate initiatives can be considered as practices to manage stakeholder interests (Mainardes et al., 2011). In accordance with this perspective, the companies identify increasing pressures from stakeholders and attempt to meet their fundamental needs, interests, and expectations with regard to human sustainability. For instance, concerning gender equality, companies developed gender equality initiatives to meet the needs of women as key stakeholders (International Labour Office, 2007a; Thompson, 2008). Furthermore, concerning flexibility at work, companies developed various flexible working options and family-leave options, with the aim to retain both male and female employees through different life stages (Bardoel, 2016; Smeaton et al., 2014).

From the perspective of organisational strategy theory, these stakeholder management practices can be considered as having strategic importance (Freeman et al., 2007). This is because these initiatives are expected to improve not just social performance but also business performance (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Yuan et al., 2011) through improved retention and productivity (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Porter & Kramer, 2006). In line with these expectations, the companies promote workstyle reform to improve work-life balance and productivity at the same time (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017).

7.2.3 Human Sustainability Initiatives and CSR Strategy

Theories adopted in the theoretical framework suggest that companies promote strategic CSR in order to enhance business and social performance (Chandler, 2016; Freeman, 1984; Porter & Kramer, 2006). This study applied this perspective and found that it remains difficult to integrate human sustainability initiatives into CSR strategies and ultimately enhance business performance.

In particular, the findings provide an in-depth view of the emerging conflicts due to trade-offs (Berman & Johnson-Cramer, 2016; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). For instance, senior management is concerned with the conflicting logic of WLB and overwork reduction initiatives. For instance, according to one logic, family-leave options are necessary for both men and women in the workforce, in order for them to continue working through all life stages (S. Lewis et al., 2007). However, in reality, taking a family-leave option hinders career development (Beauregard, 2011). Similarly, according to one logic, overwork must be reduced for better work-life balance and productivity (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017; OECD, 2011; Welford, 2004). However, in reality, reducing overwork may cause loss of sales and financial performance (Beauregard, 2011). These competing interests/logics lead to the trade-off in implementing sustainability initiatives (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010; Hahn et al., 2018). In addition, forcing overwork reduction without a fundamental change in how work is carried out could lead to a situation where overwork becomes hidden. This difficulty echoes the concern that the market puts pressure on companies to externalise human costs so that individuals and society pay for the costs (Benn et al., 2006; Gambles et al., 2006; Pfeffer, 2010).

From the perspective of organisational strategy theory, the findings indicate that, because of the emerging dilemmas and conflicts, many of the human sustainability initiatives remained ‘peripheral’ elements separated from core business practices (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Porter & Kramer, 2006; Yuan et al., 2011). The findings also substantiate the view that conflicts arise when companies attempt to integrate sustainability initiatives into core business practices (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Gao & Bansal, 2013; Hahn et al., 2010). With regard to human sustainability initiatives, the conflicts were related to concerns over careers, workload, and sales. The findings indicated that these conflicts reflect and reinforce persistent patterns of externalised overwork and gendered roles within Japanese society.

Overall, this finding shows the dynamics of interrelated economic and social concerns (Hahn et al., 2010, 2018; Hahn et al., 2015) in relation to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability, in the context of large Japanese companies. Due to these interrelated concerns, most companies are not able to resolve the existing patterns of gender inequality, lack of workplace flexibility, overwork, and low productivity in the workplace, and as a result, cannot enhance business and social performance by promoting human sustainability initiatives (Chandler, 2016; Freeman, 1984; Porter & Kramer, 2006). Accordingly, there is only partial ‘consistency/fit’ between human sustainability initiatives and CSR strategies in the majority of participating companies (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Yuan et al., 2011). In particular, WLB and overwork reduction initiatives remain ‘peripheral’ elements separated from core business practices, as suggested by N. C. Smith (2010). From the perspective of institutional theory, this separation implies that these initiatives were only ‘partially-institutionalised’ within these large Japanese companies due to conflicting logic, despite increasing social pressures (Bondy et al., 2012).

7.3 Factors Affecting Human Sustainability Initiatives

The factors which affect the implementation of human sustainability initiatives were examined in Chapter 5. Theories adopted in the theoretical framework suggest that CSR and sustainability practices are influenced by broader social factors (Campbell, 2007; Mainardes et al., 2011; Matten & Moon, 2008) and organisational processes (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Yuan et al., 2011). In line with the theoretical framework, the chapter reported that external factors, internal factors, and cognitive factors constrain the implementation of human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies. In this section, stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and organisational strategy theory are applied to empirical results to develop a theoretical understanding of the factors affecting human sustainability initiatives.

7.3.1 External Factors

This section discusses the external factors that affect the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. In this study, in line with the distinction between external and internal CSR (European Commission, 2001; Welford, 2004), ‘external factors’ indicate influential factors outside the organisation, related mainly to external stakeholders (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Mitchell et al., 1997).

7.3.1.1 Work norms

According to institutional theory, CSR practices are affected by the normative forces within society (Campbell, 2007; Kim & Moon, 2015; Matten & Moon, 2008). Normative forces are transferred to individuals in the form of virtues, beliefs, and culture (DiMaggio &

Powell, 1983). This study applied this perspective and identified the work norms which constrain human sustainability initiatives.

Chapter 2 identified increasing normative pressures for promoting workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives (European Commission, 2001; Tanimoto, 2013; Welford, 2004). These pressures include global CSR and corporate sustainability standards (i.e., UN declaration of human rights, ILO conventions, UN Global compacts, SRI ratings, and Global Reporting Initiatives). These frameworks uphold the principles of non-discrimination, equal opportunities, fair wages (including working hours and overtime), vocational education (including staff development), freedom of association, and human rights (Welford, 2004), as well as better work-life balance, flexible working hours, and job security (European Commission, 2001). With regard to these normative forces, all companies that participated in this study reflected their relevant ethical responsibilities in their CSR policies. Accordingly, no participants argued against these normative principles in their interviews.

However, this study also identified work norms that constrain human sustainability initiatives. It was argued that the long working hours culture in Japan is underlined by particular work norms, ethics, and virtues (Nemoto, 2013a; North, 2011; Ono, 2018). In line with this view, the findings suggest that local and historical *work ethics*, which emphasise *'doing one's utmost'* encourage persistent overwork and gendered roles. This interpretation is consistent with the observation of a strong emphasis on group membership, the value of loyalty, and the 'company as an employee community' atmosphere in Japanese companies (Dore, 1993; Tange, 2001; Wokutch & Shepard, 1999). In addition, within this work ethic, equality can be seen as an outcome of an effort to do one's utmost. The view on

equality stands in stark contrast with Anglo-American and European ethical principles with their emphasis on equal opportunity based on individual freedom, justice, and rights (Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Garriga & Melé, 2004).

The norm of *gender roles in the family* is another factor that influences the decisions made by employees within the companies. For instance, in line with the literature, male employees often make decisions not to take paternity leave because of their gender's role in the family (to work hard for the family); in contrast, female employees often decide to take extended career leave and provide care for the family because of their gender's role in the family (Nemoto, 2013a; North, 2009, 2011; Ono, 2018). This finding is in line with the statistics that less than 3% of male employees take parental leave while half of the women quit their jobs after their first child (Gender Equality Bureau [Japan], 2018).

The findings also indicate that these 'work and family' norms reinforce each other if husband and wife can do their utmost at work and home separately, playing their family roles as 'good' husband and wife. The evidence indicates the collective sense of responsibility to the company and family, which support the persistence of overwork and gender inequality at the workplace. These findings are also in line with the literature that highlighted the strong influence of virtues in Japanese CSR (Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Kim & Moon, 2015).

It is important to note here that, from the perspective of institutional and stakeholder theory, these virtues of the workforce and their families cannot be dismissed as illegitimate.

According to Suchman (1995, p. 574), legitimacy is defined as a "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some

socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions”. This definition indicates that legitimacy hinges on local norms and beliefs. In addition, the interests of the stakeholders are of intrinsic value and merit consideration for their own sake (Donaldson & Preston, 1995), and workforce wellbeing is essentially locally and culturally specific (Ross, 2009). Thus, this study argues that large Japanese companies need to embrace and work through these conflicts between emerging as well as historical virtues and beliefs, as suggested by Fukukawa and Teramoto (2009) and Hahn et al. (2018).

7.3.1.2 Employment regulations

According to institutional theory, CSR practices are affected by regulative forces exerted by the government, which is founded on the political and labour system of the country (Campbell, 2007; Matten & Moon, 2008; Whitley, 1999). In particular, employment practices are controlled by employment regulations (Berg et al., 2014; Terjesen et al., 2015). This study applied this perspective and identified the employment regulations which constrain human sustainability initiatives.

Institutional theory suggests that companies experience constant coercive pressure in the form of laws and regulations (Matten & Moon, 2008). In line with this perspective, this study identified regulative forces that support workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives. They are increasing coercive pressure to promote gender equality (i.e., laws mandating companies to set a goal of the percentage or number of women in management), WLB (i.e., laws specifying the scope of family leave granted to employees), and overwork reduction (i.e., increasing compliance pressure for the overtime hours agreement set with the company union). These pressures seem to reflect the government’s

concerns that it is critical to support working women when the workforce is shrinking (Steinberg & Nakane, 2012), and that workstyle reform is the most significant challenge for revitalising Japan's economy (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017).

However, this study also identified employment regulations that constrain workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives. These factors are *employment protection* (composed of *overtime regulations* and *dismissal regulations*) and *social security* (composed of *job security* and *security of family-care provision*).

According to Whitley (1999), state power determines who assumes the responsibility for social services. Extant literature indicates that Japanese companies share welfare responsibilities that, in European countries, would be regarded as belonging to the government, including social protection measures and employee security provisions for core workers and their families (Campbell, 2007; Gond et al., 2011). In line with these views, the present study provides an in-depth view of the regulative forces that define the welfare responsibilities of companies and the government in Japanese society. The findings show that, when it comes to employment protection, large companies are held responsible for keeping the employees once hired (Hamada et al., 2011). However, the overtime hours are left to the discretion of the company (and company union) to an extent, as long as dismissal is avoided (Iwasaki et al., 2006; Shimada, 2004). These perspectives are in line with the view that large Japanese companies are under relatively stringent employment protection regulations, particularly for regular workers (Belot et al., 2007; OECD, 2007). From the perspective of employment protection, these large companies are held responsible

for providing social security, particularly concerning employment as well as family-care provisions.

These findings provide a potential explanation for the view that, even if the assumption of long-term employment can no longer be taken for granted, the practice remains a standard management approach, although to a lesser extent (Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Kato & Kodama, 2017; Tsutsui, 2015). This persistence is because ‘long-term employment’ continues to be protected by regulative forces, which support overwork as part of the employment protection and social security responsibility embedded in the ‘traditional’ Japanese management system (Ouchi, 1981; Tanimoto, 2009; Todeschini, 2011; Tsutsui, 2015). These findings are in line with the observation that companies were expected to be “a protector of the employee as if the company itself were a clannish family” (Todeschini, 2011, p. 49).

The findings also provide clear evidence that these regulative forces, directly and indirectly, constrain gender equality. While the family-care responsibilities of the workforce are increasing and diversifying, there is ‘a lack of responsibility’ or ‘zone of discretion’ (Ackerman, 1973; Andrew Crane et al., 2008) for family-care provisions. This situation allows for persistent justification of ‘rational discrimination’ against women, since they tend to quit in their effort to manage uneven family-care responsibilities (Gender Equality Bureau [Japan], 2018; OECD, 2011). Thus, these regulative forces constrain the implementation of human sustainability initiatives.

Again, it is pertinent to note that these themes of employment protection and social security cannot be dismissed merely as illegitimate interests leading to overwork and gendered

roles. This is because job security and service provision for families are recognised as essential workforce needs in the framework of CSR, within the established model of employment (Campbell, 2007; Kato & Kodama, 2017; Tanimoto, 2009). In other words, employment protection and social security are defining elements of the current form of workforce wellbeing in large Japanese companies.

Furthermore, in accordance with institutional theory, the findings also highlight a particular interplay between the market, normative, and regulative forces. Institutional theory suggests that institutional pressures coexist and influence each other (Boxenbaum, 2006; Dacin, 1997; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). The findings indicate that these factors reinforce each other to justify the logic of overwork and gendered roles. In particular, market forces (*customer demands*), normative forces (*work ethics, gender roles in the family*), and regulative forces (*employment protection and social security*) are consistent and coherent in promoting overwork, and consequently, gendered roles. These findings substantiate the view that institutional pressures tend to reinforce each other (Boxenbaum, 2006) and shape the identity of social actors over a long time (Jackson, 2010).

7.3.1.3 Competitive markets

According to institutional and organisational strategy theory, markets exert pressures on companies and affect CSR practices (Campbell, 2007; Matten & Moon, 2008; Porter & Kramer, 2006). As discussed in the previous section, this study identified emerging market pressures from shareholders (financial markets), the workforce (labour markets), and customers (product/service markets) to address human sustainability issues. In contrast, this study also identified existing pressures from competitive markets that constrain human

sustainability initiatives. The issue is customer demands, which, in particular, tend to lead to overwork, especially where market competition is intense. This finding substantiates the view that intense competition can cause companies to behave irresponsibly towards their stakeholders (Campbell, 2007). This finding also provides evidence of the perspective that the market externalises ‘human costs’ in its bid to drive down the costs (Gambles et al., 2006; Pfeffer, 2010).

7.3.2 Internal Factors

As discussed, CSR practices are influenced by internal factors (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Yuan et al., 2011). Organisational strategy theory suggests that ‘peripheral’ practices (such as CSR practices) could lack ‘fit’ with core business practices, which could then constrain long-term business performance (Siggelkow, 2002; Yuan et al., 2011). In addition, institutional theory suggests that organisational practices, once considered legitimate, are perceived as institutions; the institutions both enable recurring patterns of behaviours and constrain individual behaviour (Huntington, 1969; Matten & Moon, 2008). This study applied these perspectives and indicated that core business practices constrain human sustainability initiatives.

These core business practices are the pattern of job content based on undefined roles (Asai, 2007; Ono, 2018; Tsutsui, 2015), rewards based on seniority (Kato & Kodama, 2017; Ono, 2018; Tanimoto, 2009), and careers based on long-term evaluation in the internal labour market (N. Kang & Moon, 2012; Ono, 2018; Tanimoto, 2009). The evidence suggests that these factors constitute a system of unlimited expectations shared by key stakeholders, leading to externalised overwork and gendered roles in Japanese society.

These findings extend the literature on the core employment practices of the Japanese management system (Aoki, 2000; Aoki & Dore, 1994; Kato & Kodama, 2017; Tanimoto, 2009). With regard to core employment practices, Kato and Kodama (2017) argued that Japanese companies adopted an interrelated set of management practices to support employees as ‘family members’. These practices included an ‘implicit long-term employment guarantee’ and ‘the associated reward system’ (e.g., a seniority wage system in which wages are detached from specific jobs and seniority plays a significant role in wage determination) (p. 106). They further pointed out that the employees who benefit from job security were expected to exert discretionary effort with their co-workers, while their financial wellbeing was tied to group performance rather than individual performance. This ‘workstyle’ was accepted with the belief that the fundamental source of competitiveness of companies laid in the creativity, resourcefulness and discretionary efforts of its employees (Kato & Kodama, 2017). The findings of this study confirm and extend these perspectives by suggesting that core business practices of *job content*, *rewards*, and *careers* supported employees as ‘family members’ and as a ‘source of competitiveness’ (Aoki, 1990; Aoki & Dore, 1994; Hamaaki et al., 2012; Ouchi, 1981).

7.3.3 Cognitive Factors

Institutional theory suggests that, during institutionalisation, a set of shared meanings, or institutional logic, is formed at the core of the organisational field (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). In line with this view, the findings illustrate the institutionalised workstyle that constrains human sustainability initiatives.

Extant literature has identified the importance of working hard for long hours in the ‘traditional’ Japanese management system. For instance, personnel evaluation is tied to ‘working hard’ over the long run (Tanimoto, 2009), and career advancement is also provided to those who show loyalty to their company and commit to it voluntarily (Asai, 2007; Tsutsui, 2015). In line with these views, the findings provide evidence that the assumption about output (a collective belief that the more input there is, the better) leads to overwork when it becomes a taken-for-granted workstyle.

Similarly, extant literature has examined the importance of cooperation in the ‘traditional’ Japanese management system. For instance, Japan’s traditional ethical system emphasises duties to those with whom one has a relationship, such as family or employees (Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Wokutch & Shepard, 1999) within the ‘employee community view’ (Dore, 1993). A particular emphasis was made on the cooperative relationship between labour and management, which facilitates the alignment of their common interests as a ‘family’ (Kato & Kodama, 2017). Furthermore, payment practice was tied to group performance instead of individual performance (Kato & Kodama, 2017). In line with these views, the findings provide clear evidence that the assumption about cooperation could lead to overwork when it becomes a taken-for-granted workstyle.

The extant literature has also indicated the emphasis on (lack of) choice in the ‘traditional’ Japanese management system. For instance, Tsutsui (2015) pointed out that, in exchange for job security and treatment as a ‘family member’, employees accepted the company’s discretion over three aspects of work: their job content, place of work, and working hours. If employees do not accept the company’s decisions, their career as a core employee is substantially restricted (Asai, 2007). Moreover, an internal labour market is more

developed than an external labour market (Tanimoto, 2009), and the employee's stake in the company is higher with company-specific training and activities (Kato & Kodama, 2017). These observations indicate that employees feel their choice is restricted to either following the company's directives and 'undefined' career fully or else risk losing their career. This perception of (lack of) choice is also consistent with the regulative forces of social security. It is also in line with the argument that people's choice is constrained and socially influenced (Pfeffer, 2010). In line with these views, the findings provide evidence that the assumption about choice (i.e., overwork or nothing) leads to overwork when it becomes a taken-for-granted workstyle.

Overall, the findings suggest that the institutionalised workstyle constrains the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. Importantly, it can be argued that this existing system of responsibilities also supports other forms of workforce wellbeing, such as employment protection, social security, and a particular sense of equality, cooperation, hard work, and a lack of choice rooted in Japanese society. In other words, the traditional 'workstyle' offers "a template for organizing" (Battilana et al., 2009, p. 68) in terms of workforce wellbeing within the Japanese institutional context. In this institutionalised workstyle, particular management practices have contributed to workforce wellbeing and met multiple stakeholder expectations. These findings substantiate the view that the institutionalised workstyle remains persistent, even with emerging social pressure to change (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009; Tsutsui, 2015).

Importantly, these nine factors are in line with the core employment practices in large Japanese companies (Tanimoto, 2009; Tsutsui, 2015; Wokutch & Shepard, 1999), indicating that these factors have been part of the taken-for-granted practices in Japanese

society and business. The evidence further indicates that nine factors are interrelated, in that each is consistent and sometimes reinforcing others (Boxenbaum, 2006; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) to form coherent institutional pressure, which leads to externalised overwork and gendered roles (Nemoto, 2013a, 2013b; North, 2009; Ono, 2018). This indicates that these factors constitute the existing system of responsibilities (Brammer et al., 2012; Matten & Moon, 2008) which shapes the current form of workforce wellbeing in large Japanese companies. This form reflects industrial paternalism, covering labour protection measures for core workers and their families through long-term employment (Campbell, 2007; Gond et al., 2011). However, now that the economic and social environment is fundamentally changing, such workstyles are considered contradictory to the emerging needs of the workforce and pressures from stakeholders. Consequently, they are perceived as being increasingly dysfunctional in comparison to the past, ethically, economically, and socially.

7.4 Human Sustainability Initiatives, Business Strategy, and Core Business Practices

How human sustainability initiatives are integrated into business strategy and core business practices was examined in Chapter 6. Theories adopted in the theoretical framework suggest that companies need to integrate their CSR and sustainability initiatives into their business strategies (Chandler, 2016; Freeman et al., 2010; Gao & Bansal, 2013), in particular, into their core business practices (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Weaver et al., 1999; Yuan et al., 2011). In line with the theoretical framework, the chapter reported that some

companies implement human sustainability initiatives as part of their business strategies, even within these constraints. The findings indicate that, while the integration remained difficult for many, some companies worked through the conflicts and integrated human sustainability initiatives into business strategy and core business practices. In this section, stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and organisational strategy theory are applied to empirical results to develop a theoretical understanding of human sustainability as integral to business strategy and core business practices.

7.4.1 Human Sustainability Initiatives and Business Strategy

Theories adopted in the theoretical framework suggest that CSR and sustainability initiatives are often separated from business strategy and core business practices (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Weaver et al., 1999; Yuan et al., 2011), leading to conflicts between economic and broader social objectives (Hahn et al., 2010; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). This study applied this perspective and identified the relationship between human sustainability and business strategy: ‘*conflicts or coherence*’.

On the one hand, the majority of companies indicated that human sustainability initiatives were not integrated with business strategy and core business practices. These companies found it difficult to link their human sustainability initiatives with the profit-seeking mission of the business. This difficulty reflects the conflicts and trade-offs between social and economic benefits of CSR and sustainability initiatives (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Hahn et al., 2010, 2018; Hahn et al., 2015; Margolis & Walsh, 2003), particularly with regard to work-life balance (Kossek et al., 2010; S. Lewis et al., 2007; L. Putnam et al., 2014) and gender equality and diversity (Hoobler et al., 2018; Manfredi, 2017).

On the other hand, however, the empirical results also indicate that human sustainability initiatives are integrated with business strategy and core business practices in some companies. Their views reflect the perspective that, unlike the view of conflicts which leads to an either-or choice, integration of sustainability and business strategy can allow for long-term economic and social performance (Hahn et al., 2015; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015). For these companies, these initiatives form a necessary foundation for their business strategy. This perspective supports the view that companies can embrace and work through conflicts (Hahn et al., 2018) in a way that leads to added value for a broad set of stakeholders in the long run (Chandler, 2016; Epstein et al., 2015).

In particular, all 10 companies which reported ‘coherence’ explicitly stated that they proactively manage *health and productivity*, *work and life*, and *gender equality and diversity*, in a way that contributes to business and social performance. For instance, with regard to overwork and WLB, extant literature has shown that large Japanese companies introduced policies to address overwork, which included overtime work restrictions, various work-life balance measures, and enhancement of employee discretion regarding work (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; North, 2010). The findings confirm the view, and further indicate that companies seek to proactively manage *health and productivity* and *work and life* in order to address overwork. This finding provides a potential link between overwork reduction initiatives and business performance; proactive management of *health and productivity* and *work and life* can lead to higher business performance through improved retention and productivity improvement.

With regard to gender equality, the extant literature has indicated that work-life initiatives help raise women's participation in the workforce but hinder career advancement by

encouraging more extended leave and career interruption (Datta Gupta et al., 2008; Leslie et al., 2012). The findings confirmed that this process presents a particular challenge in Japan, where there is ‘a lack of responsibility’ (Ackerman, 1973; Andrew Crane et al., 2008) in terms of family-care provision. The findings further indicate that some large Japanese companies proactively manage *health and productivity*, *work and life*, and *gender equality and diversity*, with the aim to promote business and social performance. This finding may provide a potential linkage between gender equality initiatives and business performance: proactive management of *health and productivity*, *work and life*, and *gender equality and diversity* can lead to higher business performance.

In addition, it is pertinent to note here other potential explanations for the two contrasting perspectives regarding the relationship between human sustainability initiatives and business strategy. From the perspective of institutional theory and organisational strategy theory, differences and dynamism of the organisational fields may provide a potential explanation for contrasting perspectives of ‘*conflicts or coherence*’.

One potential explanation for the difference is the organisational fields of the companies. Institutional theory suggests that an organisational field is the primary social environment for a company, such as an industry, a collection of companies, or a nation (Scott, 2014). In accordance with this view, each industry is considered to have its unique organisational field, with industry differences in terms of social environments (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Matten & Moon, 2008). For instance, a company with knowledge workers (e.g., IT, insurance) may have much room for overwork reduction and productivity growth by enhancing work-life balance. In contrast, a company with many production workers (i.e., heavy-industry manufacturing, automotive industry) may have more limited room for

productivity growth through work-life balance measures, as working time is already well controlled and productivity in their factories is already at a very high level. Moreover, a company with many working mothers and fathers (e.g., retail, insurance) may have much room for productivity growth by promoting flexibility at work, in comparison to a company with many fewer working mothers and fathers. This comparison indicates that the link between human sustainability and business strategy may be easier to find in particular organisational fields than others. This perspective is consistent with the view that conditions and pressures for companies differ in each organisational field (Beschorner & Hajduk, 2017; Dabic et al., 2016; Matten & Moon, 2008).

Another potential explanation concerns the dynamism of the organisational fields.

Institutional theory indicates the existence of multiple potentially contrasting institutional logics within the organisational field (Thornton et al., 2012), particularly during an on-going process of institutional change (Greenwood et al., 2002; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008).

Organisational strategy theory indicates that the changing external environment puts pressure on companies to adapt their strategies to survive in market competition (Yuan et al., 2011). Furthermore, this dynamism requires companies to embrace and work through conflicting stakeholder interests in the changing environment (Freeman et al., 2007).

Following this argument, companies which reported ‘coherence’ between human sustainability and business strategy might have adapted their strategies in the dynamic environment effectively in comparison to other companies.

7.4.2 Human Sustainability Initiatives and Core Business Practices

Theories adopted in the theoretical framework suggest that companies need to align CSR and sustainability practices with core business practices in order to enhance business and social performance (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Yuan et al., 2011). This study applies this perspective and identifies the relationship between human sustainability initiatives and core business practices.

Following this perspective, those companies which reported ‘coherence’ aligned the core business practices of large Japanese companies (Aoki, 2000; Aoki & Dore, 1994; Kato & Kodama, 2017; Tanimoto, 2009), in particular, the patterns of *job content, rewards, and careers*, in line with the proactive management of *health and productivity, work and life, and gender equality and diversity*. The comments indicate that these approaches support the companies to work through internal conflicts and trade-offs between social and economic benefits of CSR and sustainability initiatives (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Hahn et al., 2010, 2018; Hahn et al., 2015; Margolis & Walsh, 2003).

In addition, their relatively successful initiatives were characterised by approaches such as high-level commitment (from both an ethical and economic perspective) (Engert et al., 2016; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010), clear targets (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010), investment (Engert et al., 2016; Margolis & Walsh, 2003; Yuan et al., 2011), and collective responsibility and close coordination (Yuan et al., 2011).

The findings further highlight the importance of a practical implementation mechanism which allows for individual choices and initiatives (L. Putnam et al., 2014). This factor is considered important because of the changing needs of the workforce, namely, *family-care*

and *diverse workstyles*. It is important to note that such choice was limited within the existing ‘workstyle’ in the traditional Japanese employment system (Section 5.4.3). In addition, choices and initiatives are considered important not just for the individuals, but also for each department, business unit, and company, because of the variety of situations they face. This factor may call for further development of a management control and measurement system (Engert et al., 2016; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010) in the case of promoting human sustainability in large Japanese companies.

7.4.3 Roles of Key Stakeholders

Theories adopted in the theoretical framework suggest that companies need to engage with external stakeholders in order to enhance business and social performance (Brammer et al., 2012; Mainardes et al., 2011; Yuan et al., 2011). This study applied this perspective and identified the roles of key stakeholders when companies promote human sustainability initiatives.

Following this perspective, companies reported the roles of stakeholders in exerting pressures for human sustainability initiatives. For instance, the findings of Chapter 4 provided evidence of the increasing pressures. The findings of Chapter 5 also provided evidence of the pressures that constrain the initiatives: namely, market, regulative, normative, and cognitive forces. The findings of Chapter 6 further provided evidence that, within these conflicting pressures, companies reported their expectations for the roles of key stakeholders: namely, customers, industry competitors, and the government.

The findings of this study support the critical role of customers when implementing human sustainability initiatives. Extant literature suggested that customers can play an important

role in overcoming conflicts between economic and social benefits (Glover et al., 2014; Goodman et al., 2017). It was also suggested that changes in core business practices are often slow except in crises such as consumer boycotts (Yuan et al., 2011). In line with these views, the findings highlight the importance of customers' cooperation when companies seek to regulate overwork. This is because high customer demands cause constant pressure for overwork in a competitive market (Campbell, 2007; Gambles et al., 2006; Pfeffer, 2010).

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of industry-level cooperation when companies seek to regulate overwork. Institutional theory suggests that the industry constitutes part of the organisational field of a company (Matten & Moon, 2008). Extant literature suggested the critical role of industry-level self-regulation in promoting CSR (Aguilera & Cuervo-Cazurra, 2004; Brammer et al., 2012; Vogel, 2010) as well as cooperation within the industry to enhance competitive advantage (M. Levy, Loebbecke, & Powell, 2003; Walley, 2007). In line with these views, the findings indicate the possibility that industry competitors play a critical role when companies regulate overwork. This is because market competition can constrain overwork reduction initiatives by incentivising customers to seek "better service" produced by competitors with more extended working hours. This perspective is in line with the view that the market puts pressure on companies to externalise the human costs of overwork (Benn et al., 2006; Gambles et al., 2006; Kumra & Manfredi, 2012). Nonetheless, the findings also indicate that industry-level cooperation is fragile and difficult to retain under increasing economic pressure. This finding is in line with the view that the effectiveness of industry cooperation is limited without effective government regulations (Campbell, 2007; Vogel, 2010).

In addition, the findings indicate the role of government regarding human sustainability. In line with the view that private self-regulation needs to be reinforced by effective government regulation (Abländer & Curbach, 2017; Campbell, 2006; Vogel, 2010), companies expect both effective government regulation and self-regulation in the management of overwork (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017) and gender equality (Klettner et al., 2016; Terjesen et al., 2015). The findings also indicate the possibility that some companies seek to develop institutional entrepreneurship approaches to change their institutional environments (Battilana et al., 2009), that may then affect the broader responsibility systems in which business, government, and social actors operate (Matten & Moon, 2008).

Moreover, the findings indicate that the government's role may include the development and adoption of accounting standards which support human sustainability initiatives. The accounting standard is considered necessary because of the current difficulty in measuring human costs and investments within the accounting framework (Bondy et al., 2012; Pfeffer, 2010). This finding is in line with the view that, in order for the companies to integrate CSR and sustainability initiatives into core business practices, they need to measure the costs of investment and its contribution to long-term business performance (Engert et al., 2016; Gray, 2001; Yuan et al., 2011). Furthermore, this view also supports the view that human sustainability is concerned with maintaining human capital (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Goodland, 2002) and internalisation of the human and social costs, that is, externalities (Gambles et al., 2006; Pfeffer, 2010). This evidence supports the view that, in implementing corporate sustainability and CSR, companies need to integrate external costs

into management decision-making (Atkinson, 2000; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Hahn et al., 2010).

From the perspective of stakeholder theory, the findings suggest that companies proactively engage with external stakeholders in relation to human sustainability initiatives. In particular, in line with the view that strategic CSR involves dynamic interactions with diverse stakeholders (Chandler, 2016; Lenssen et al., 2007), the findings indicate that companies seek to interact with customers, industry competitors, and potentially the government in integrating human sustainability initiatives into their business strategy and core business practices.

Overall, even within the existing constraints, these companies sought to align human sustainability initiatives, business strategy, and core business practices (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Yuan et al., 2011), and were able to deliver better business and social performance (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Porter & Kramer, 2006). This finding supports the view that integration of sustainability and business strategy can allow for long-term economic and social performance, with effective internal and external processes (Hahn et al., 2015; Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015).

7.5 Conceptual framework

As discussed in Chapter 3, the abductive approach starts with a theoretical framework, collects and analyses data, and concludes with a new theory or expands the existing theoretical framework. Based on the theoretical framework and empirical findings in the context of Japanese business and society, this chapter develops a conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability (Figure 7.1).

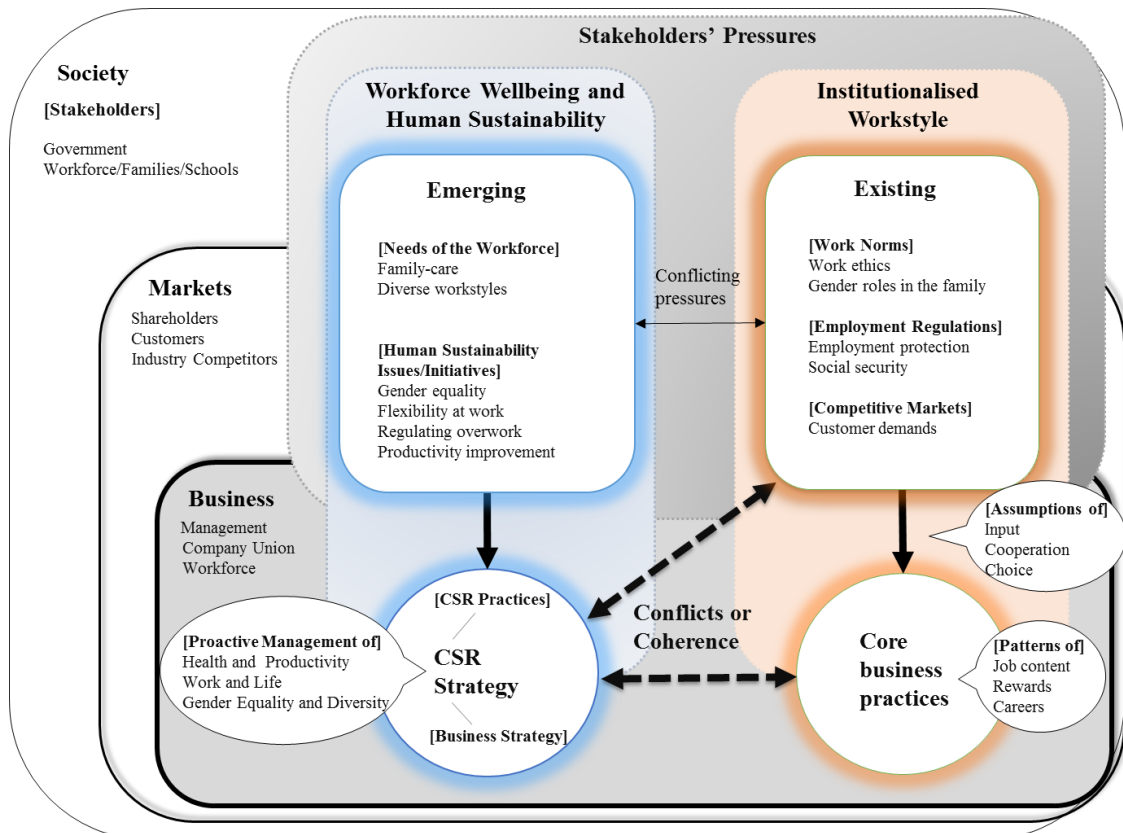


Figure 7.1 The conceptual framework of corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability

Building on the theoretical framework, this conceptual framework shows that, in response to stakeholder pressure, companies develop workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives and attempt to integrate them into their CSR strategies to enhance business and social performance. However, such human sustainability initiatives may conflict with the institutionalised workstyle, which consists of core business practices and existing stakeholder pressure. Within these constraints, some companies seek to proactively align their initiatives, business strategy, and core business practices, in line with emerging stakeholder pressures.

This conceptual framework extends the theoretical framework in three ways. First, it elaborates on the process in which conflicts arise. As discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.5.4), the theoretical framework indicated that conflicts might arise when human sustainability initiatives do not align with external pressures and demands. The proposed conceptual framework extends the view by distinguishing ‘emerging’ and ‘existing’ stakeholder pressure as follows:

Human sustainability initiatives may align with emerging stakeholder pressure, but may conflict with existing stakeholder pressure. This existing stakeholder pressure reflects the various stakeholders’ expectations in the norms, regulations, and markets. They include such themes as work ethics, gender roles in the family, employment protection, social security, and customer demands.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework indicated that conflicts might arise when human sustainability initiatives do not align with the CSR strategy as well as conventional core

business practices. The proposed conceptual framework extends the view by distinguishing and relating ‘CSR practices’, ‘business strategy,’ and ‘core business practices’ as follows:

Human sustainability initiatives may align with ‘CSR practices’, but may conflict with ‘business strategy’ as well as ‘core business practices’. Such ‘core business practices’ include the pattern of job content, rewards, and careers in the context of Japanese society and business. Some companies proactively manage health and productivity, work and life, and gender equality and diversity to enhance the coherence between human sustainability initiatives, business strategy, and core business practices.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework indicated the existence of a dynamic institutional environment regarding human sustainability, leading to conflicts or consistency/fit. The proposed conceptual framework elucidates the institutional dynamics as follows:

Existing stakeholder pressure and corresponding ‘core business practices’ constitute the institutionalised workstyle in the context of Japanese society and business, which could support a particular form of workforce wellbeing. However, this institutionalised workstyle may become dysfunctional due to emerging stakeholder pressure.

Second, this conceptual framework extends the view of the integration process when these conflicts emerge. The theoretical framework indicated that companies promote human sustainability initiatives under increasing stakeholder pressure and seek to integrate the initiatives into core business practices, in their effort to enhance internal and external

‘consistency/fit’. The proposed conceptual framework elucidates the integration process as follows:

Companies seek to enhance internal coherence between human sustainability initiatives and core business practices. In particular, they align core business practices such as job content, rewards, and careers, in line with the proactive management of health and productivity, work and life, gender equality and diversity of their workforce. These practices could enhance internal coherence, leading to higher social and business performance over time.

Simultaneously, companies perceive the conflicting sets of emerging and existing stakeholder pressure in a dynamic environment. Facing the conflicts, some companies seek to enhance external coherence with emerging stakeholder pressure and, at the same time, work through existing stakeholder expectations, in the areas of norms, regulations, and markets, by proactively engaging with the key stakeholders.

Thus, the proposed conceptual framework builds on the theoretical framework and elucidates how companies seek to address workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues in a dynamic institutional environment.

This conceptual framework provides a renewed explanation of the phenomenon this study examines. As discussed in Chapter 3, this study seeks to gain a perspective on a relatively unexplored phenomenon of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. The conceptual framework shows that companies are embedded in the existing system of responsibilities that characterises the form of workforce wellbeing.

However, this system is increasingly seen as dysfunctional due to increasing stakeholder pressures, underlined by emerging needs of the workforce, such as family-care and diverse workstyles, within the changing demography. This indicates that, to pursue workforce wellbeing and human sustainability, companies need to effectively work through the existing system and concurrently develop a more functional system of responsibilities in cooperation with their stakeholders in the markets and society.

In terms of the applicability of this framework, it is important to note that the stakeholder pressures, human sustainability initiatives, and core business practices are locally rooted. This conceptual framework is developed based on the empirical findings in the context of Japanese society and business. Moreover, the dynamics proposed in this framework may not be evident in other social contexts, especially when the existing system of responsibilities is functioning well, indicating that companies perceive much less conflict in promoting workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives. Therefore, in applying this framework to other social contexts, it is important to consider what, in each societal context, constitute human sustainability issues, which may be different from the ones identified in this study.

7.6 Implications for the Concept of Human Sustainability

As discussed in Chapter 1, this study aims to extend our understanding of human sustainability by proposing a definition following the empirical investigation. Based on the literature (Dunphy et al., 2007; Gladwin et al., 1995; Pfeffer, 2010), the term was first broadly conceptualised as ‘a renewed focus on human wellbeing within a broad umbrella of sustainability’. This term was used as an operational definition and applied to the

examination of workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies.

Table 7.1 exhibits the synthesis of descriptions and themes of human sustainability. The first row shows the categories of human sustainability themes: health, security, equality, care, choice, cooperation, productivity, and other general themes. Themes found in literature and this study are aligned with these categories. Two observations can be made. First, the themes that emerged from the empirical investigation in this study generally align with the themes described in the literature under these categories. Second, the themes that emerged from this study, such as ‘health and productivity’, ‘gender equality and diversity’, and ‘security of family-care provision’ demonstrate the interconnection between themes. For instance, productivity indicates economic wellbeing, while other themes reflect individual (e.g., health, security, choice) as well as social (e.g., equality, care, cooperation) aspects of wellbeing. These economic and social aspects, as well as individual and social aspects, are closely interconnected within a conception of human sustainability.

Following these observations and based on this study, the concept of human sustainability is defined as:

Human sustainability is a level-spanning concept in sustainability discourse and practice that links individual, organisational, and societal level activities and outcomes of meeting interconnected human needs and enhances human wellbeing in line with sustainable development.

These interconnected human needs, such as the need for health and productivity, security and care, equality, choice, and cooperation can serve as an underpinning of human

sustainability as a discourse and practice. Meeting these needs in diverse ways can enhance human wellbeing over space and time within a specific context. In the context of a competitive market economy, an approach to human sustainability involves properly internalising ‘human costs’ at the organisational and the societal level, within a constantly changing external environment.

It is important to note here that there are local and cultural differences in what wellbeing means in society (S. Lewis et al., 2007). Ways to meet these needs and in what combinations are socially constructed (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006; Suchman, 1995). Accordingly, various themes and initiatives (i.e., gender equality, flexibility at work, regulating overwork, and productivity improvement) reported in this study (i.e., workforce wellbeing in large Japanese companies) can be seen as exemplars of both workforce wellbeing and human sustainability in a specific context, as well as pointers for other social contexts.

Table 7.1

Literature	Level of analysis	Descriptions	Health	Security	Equality	Care	Choice	Cooperation	Productivity	General theme
Gladwin, et al., 1995	Society	Sustainable development as a process of achieving human development	Safety	Security	Equity	Prudence (duty of care)	People's choices			Connectivity (ecological, social, and economic), Inclusiveness (over time and space)
Goodland, 2002	Society	Maintaining human capital to realise individual potential	Health	Access to basic services					Human capital, Skills, Knowledge	
Gambles, et al., 2006	Individual, society	Markets externalise the human costs, eroding human sustainability	Exhaustion, Depression, Death from overwork			Care deficits (child and elderly care), Personal and community lives				
Dunphy, et al. 2007	Organisation	The development and meeting of human needs	Occupational health and safety		Equal employment opportunities, Diversity	Work-life balance	Flexible workplace	Employee empowerment, Participatory decision making	Competency, Skill, Intellectual capital	Basic human rights
Pfeffer, 2010	Individual, organisation, society	Upholding human health and wellbeing	Health, Long working hours, Work-stress	Health insurance, Layoffs	Inequality	Work-family conflicts		Job design		
This study	Organisation-society interface	A level-spanning concept in sustainability discourse and practice that links individual, organisational, and societal level activities and outcomes of meeting interconnected human needs and enhances human wellbeing in line with sustainable development.	Health and productivity, Regulating overwork	Social security, Job security, Security of family-care provision	Gender equality and diversity	Family-care, Work and life (childcare and elderly care)	Diverse workstyles, Flexibility at work, Choice, Work and life (childcare and elderly care)	Job content, Cooperation	Productivity improvement, Health and productivity, Gender equality and diversity, Rewards, Careers, Input	Over time and space

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter developed a conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. Following the overview, this chapter provided a discussion of the key findings concerning the research questions, literature, and theories adopted for this study. Then, building on the theoretical framework, this chapter presented a conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. In this framework, companies perceive stakeholder pressures, promote workforce wellbeing and human sustainability, and develop coherence between human sustainability initiatives, business strategy, and core business practices by working through an institutionalised workstyle. This conceptual framework was applied to the phenomenon this inquiry focussed on, and a potential explanation was provided. The next chapter summarises the discussion and concludes the thesis.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This study examined workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies. This final chapter draws together the findings of the research and its contribution to theory and practice. The chapter is organised as follows. Section 8.2 provides a brief overview of the thesis. Section 8.3 presents the key research findings. Then Section 8.4 describes the theoretical contributions, followed by the practical implications in Section 8.5. Section 8.6 describes the limitations of this inquiry. Section 8.7 concludes the chapter with suggestions for future research.

8.2 Overview of the Study

The objective of this study was to expand our understanding of the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. It was established early on that both sustainability and CSR have become widely researched fields. In recent years, there has been growing social concern regarding issues affecting workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. Such issues include persistent long working hours, lack of work-life balance, and gender inequality in the workplace. However, little is known about how companies resolve these issues. In particular, there is a dearth of empirical research examining how companies address workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues under increasing social pressures. To fill this knowledge gap, this exploratory study examined how large Japanese companies address these issues.

The study adopted an exploratory, abductive and qualitative approach to exploring the key research gaps. The data were mainly drawn from semi-structured interviews with managers responsible for CSR and workforce wellbeing. In addition, further interviews were conducted with external stakeholders and informants to explore broad perspectives within society. By adopting stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and organisational strategy theory, this study provided useful insight into how companies address human sustainability issues under increasing stakeholder pressure.

This study aimed to examine how large Japanese companies seek to integrate human sustainability initiatives into their CSR strategies. Accordingly, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do human sustainability initiatives become part of the CSR strategies in large Japanese companies?
2. What factors influence the implementation of human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies?
3. How do large Japanese companies integrate human sustainability initiatives into their core business practices?

These research questions were explored using qualitative interviews, given the lack of conceptual and empirical studies that applied human sustainability to workforce wellbeing issues, particularly in the Japanese business context. The participants were selected purposely according to the selection criteria developed, including high CSR and sustainability ranking in major indices. The data were drawn from interviews with managers responsible for CSR and workforce wellbeing from 31 large Japanese companies,

as well as their stakeholders and informants. The thematic data analysis was conducted using the NVivo 11 programme. The findings of the study were presented and synthesised to develop a conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability.

8.3 Research Findings

This study contributed new data on the workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives of large Japanese companies. It further proposed a conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. The following sections summarise the key research findings.

8.3.1 Human Sustainability and CSR Strategy

Chapter 4 reported the answers to the first research question: *‘How do human sustainability initiatives become part of the CSR strategies in large Japanese companies?’*. Using the integrated framework, the chapter reported that companies perceive increasing pressures from stakeholders and promote workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives as CSR practice. However, the evidence indicated that it remains difficult to integrate the initiatives into CSR strategy due to emerging dilemmas.

This chapter identified four interconnected human sustainability issues and initiatives addressed as integral parts of CSR practices: *gender equality, flexibility at work, regulating overwork, and productivity improvement*. For each of the issues and initiatives, companies perceived increasing pressure from stakeholders and developed KPIs, targets, and implementation mechanisms to promote workforce wellbeing and human sustainability as

part of their CSR practices. However, dilemmas arose as a consequence of these initiatives. Furthermore, difficulties remain for evaluating productivity in the office and the impact these initiatives have on business. Consequently, workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives are becoming part of CSR practices but are not yet being integrated into their business strategy in the majority of companies whose managers were interviewed. It remains difficult to integrate the initiatives into CSR strategy and ultimately enhance business performance.

8.3.2 Factors Affecting Human Sustainability Initiatives

Chapter 5 reported the answers to the research question: ‘*What factors influence the implementation of human sustainability initiatives in large Japanese companies?*’ It explored the business-society interface in which companies face the dilemmas and identified nine factors which constrain the implementation of human sustainability initiatives. These factors were categorised into external, internal, and cognitive factors.

The external factors consist of *market, normative, and regulative forces*. The market forces are shaped by the prevailing expectations of high *customer demands*. The normative forces comprise *work ethics* and *gender roles in the family*. The regulative forces consist of expectations of *employment protection* and *social security*.

The internal factors consist of *job content, rewards, and careers*. Job content is shaped by undefined roles, which allow workers to experience various roles and thus have a career of the so-called ‘generalist’; the rewards are shaped by the ‘competency-based’ wage system, based on employee experiences. This rewards-based practice allowed employees to experience various roles, acquire multiple skills and to move up in the ‘generalist’ career

role within the company. The pattern of careers is further shaped by long-term evaluations, in which the individual's job-based productivity was a secondary consideration.

The cognitive factors consist of assumptions of *input*, *cooperation*, and *choice*. The assumption of *input* is shaped by a consistency associated with manufacturing and an established view of labour that rewards working more extended hours. The assumption of *cooperation* is shaped by the emphasis on extra cooperation beyond the formal boundaries of responsibilities. The assumption of *choice* is shaped by a choice of “all or nothing” and a lack of intermediate choices.

8.3.3 Human Sustainability, Business Strategy, and Core Business Practices

Chapter 6 focused on the third question: ‘*How do large Japanese companies integrate human sustainability initiatives into their core business practices?*’ Using an integrated framework, it examined how some companies implement human sustainability initiatives as part of their business strategies, even within these constraints. The findings indicate that, while integration remained difficult for many, some companies were able to work through conflicts and integrate human sustainability initiatives into business strategy and core business practices.

First, this chapter reported two different perspectives on the relationship between human sustainability and business strategy: *conflicts* and *coherence*. For the majority of participants, human sustainability is in conflict with business strategy and core business practices; however, for some participants, human sustainability is coherent with business strategy and core business practices.

Second, this chapter reported the internal processes that lead to such coherence. All 10 companies which reported ‘coherence’ explicitly stated that they proactively manage *health and productivity*, *work and life*, and *gender equality and diversity*, in a way that contributes to business and social performance. Their relatively successful initiatives were characterised by approaches such as high-level commitment (from both an ethical and an economic perspective), clear targets, investment, collective responsibility and close coordination, and choices and initiatives within the company. In addition, these companies proactively aligned core business practices, such as the pattern of job content, rewards, and careers, in line with human sustainability initiatives.

Third, this chapter reported the external processes that lead to such coherence. Some companies articulated the critical roles that *customers*, *industry competitors*, and *the government* play in regulating overwork and promoting gender diversity. The evidence suggests that a few companies, although substantially limited, have started to explore cooperation with *customers* and *industry* competitors. In addition, some participants also expect the government to institute effective *working hours regulations*, *gender diversity regulations*, and *accounting standards*, in a way that can align with their proactive human sustainability initiatives.

8.4 Theoretical Contributions

Through a qualitative inquiry, the findings of this study add value to the limited body of research on the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. As an early empirical study, this research broadens the understanding of how companies address workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues under increasing social

pressures. This section discusses the contribution of the study to the field of human sustainability and CSR.

8.4.1 Contribution to CSR

This study extends CSR literature and practice in three ways. First, the findings add rich empirical data on the emerging CSR initiatives to address workforce wellbeing issues in Japan. At present, researchers have identified relevant CSR initiatives and lack of progress (e.g., regulating working hours, promoting women, etc.), yet most studies have not examined the emerging initiatives that have delivered progress (e.g., health and productivity, work and life, gender equality and diversity initiatives). In identifying and examining these emerging initiatives extensively, this study goes some way to answering the call for studies to investigate the practical solutions within the Japanese business context (Eweje & Sakaki, 2015; Fukukawa & Teramoto, 2009).

Second, this study offers researchers a new perspective from which to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. So far most studies on workforce wellbeing have focused on the individual and organisational-level factors and consequences (e.g., Danna & Griffin, 1999; Salanova et al., 2014), while human sustainability focused on macro-level discussion (e.g., Gambles et al., 2006; Goodland, 2002). CSR research has recognised the practical workforce wellbeing issues as essential components of CSR (e.g., European Commission, 2001; Grosser & Moon, 2005). In this study, the researcher proposed a new conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches, in particular, by shifting the focus to the business-society interface rather than on individual, organisational or societal levels separately. This broader framework can

assist researchers to examine the business-society interface in relation to local issues affecting workforce wellbeing and human sustainability in different social settings.

Third, the study offers researchers and practitioners a more in-depth understanding of the limitation and potential of CSR strategies, when the issues become embedded within an existing institution. At present, it is recognised that companies need to incorporate CSR initiatives into their business strategy in order to enhance business and social performance in the long term; however, how such integration should proceed remains under-researched (Gao & Bansal, 2013). This study articulates how CSR-strategy integration is difficult even with proactive CSR initiatives. Additionally, this study clearly shows that such integration is constrained by an institutionalised workstyle that continues to be supported by institutional factors and stakeholders, even when it becomes dysfunctional. The study further shows that this system consists of external factors (i.e., market forces from the customer/industry peers, normative forces from the workforce/family/school, and regulative forces from the government/unions) and internal factors (i.e., core management practices such as job content, rewards, and careers). In articulating how integration is constrained, this study goes some way to answering the call for research into the trade-offs, dilemmas and conflicts (Hahn et al., 2010) and relevant societal factors that constrain CSR-strategy integration (Arena et al., 2018; Bondy et al., 2012). Despite these constraints, the findings clearly show that companies can overcome the dilemma by developing coherence between CSR initiatives, business strategy, core business practices, and emerging stakeholder pressure while working through an institutionalised workstyle. Accordingly, this study contributes to meeting the need for research into how to overcome the dilemma and fully integrate CSR initiatives into management practices (Hahn et al., 2015; Yuan et al., 2011).

8.4.2 Contribution to Human Sustainability

This study also sought to contribute to the human sustainability literature. Scholars have advocated the importance of integrating human wellbeing into sustainability discourse (Gladwin et al., 1995; Goodland, 2002). A few management scholars have applied the concept of human sustainability to the organisational context (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010; Dunphy et al., 2007; Pfeffer, 2010). However, there has been a lack of empirical research into how companies seek to resolve workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues, particularly under increasing social pressure. The findings of this study contribute to this under-explored research area in two ways: first by linking workforce wellbeing and human sustainability, and second by conceptualising the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability.

First, this study has attempted to extend the current knowledge of human sustainability by linking workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. Scholars have attempted to conceptualise human components of sustainability at the societal level (Barbier, 1987; Goodland, 2002; Ross, 2009). There has been a growing focus on the impact of human components, such as health and wellbeing of the workforce, on organisational sustainability (Anderson et al., 2011; Dunphy et al., 2007; Gambles et al., 2006; S. B. Harvey et al., 2017; Pfeffer, 2010, 2018; Salanova et al., 2014; Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2009). However, human sustainability has been relatively neglected and practical application in the context of workforce wellbeing was limited (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010; Ehnert et al., 2013; Kossek et al., 2014; Pfeffer, 2010; Spreitzer et al., 2012; Van Engen et al., 2012). This empirical study proposed that workforce wellbeing at the corporate level constitutes an integral part of human sustainability at the societal level. Participants of this study identified the critical

issues and initiatives affecting workforce wellbeing and human sustainability: namely, gender equality, flexibility at work, regulating overwork, and productivity improvement. Their comments indicate that these issues and initiatives are interconnected, showing the dynamics of ‘interrelated economic and social concerns’ (Hahn et al., 2010, 2018; Hahn et al., 2015) in relation to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability, within the context of Japanese society and business.

Second, this study has attempted to extend the knowledge of human sustainability by presenting a renewed perspective on the business-human sustainability interface. Scholars have attempted to conceptualise the problem of human sustainability as part of a dynamic market process of externalising the ‘human costs’ (Bunting, 2011; Gambles et al., 2006; Pfeffer, 2010). They argue that there is a growing concern for the increasing health problems (e.g., exhaustion, depression, and overwork to death) and a lack of time in personal and community lives as well as a care deficit (i.e., childcare and elderly care). However, scholars have not fully explored how companies approach human sustainability issues (Pfeffer, 2010).

This empirical study applied institutional, stakeholder, and organisational strategy theory to this problem and proposed the conceptual framework to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. In this framework, companies perceive emerging stakeholder pressure from the markets and society and seek to develop workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives as an integral part of CSR strategies. Some companies seek to align core business practices, workforce wellbeing and human sustainability initiatives, and changing (‘emerging’ and ‘existing’) stakeholder pressure. Importantly, this framework indicates that, if companies and their stakeholders try

to be responsible only for existing stakeholder pressure, companies may find that workforce wellbeing and human sustainability are being depleted at the individual, organisational, and society level (Bunting, 2011, p. xxi; Gambles et al., 2006). This indicates that, in order for companies to resolve workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues, ‘human costs’ need to be properly internalised both at the organisational (Yuan et al., 2011) and the societal level (Bondy et al., 2012). In other words, addressing workforce wellbeing issues by internalising ‘human costs’ could support and enhance human sustainability both at the organisational and societal level.

The findings, thus, confirm and extend the knowledge of human sustainability by demonstrating that the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability are dynamic processes in which companies attempt to internalise ‘human costs’ at the organisational and the societal level (Gambles et al., 2006; Pfeffer, 2010). This would require companies to think beyond and work through the existing system of responsibilities, while developing a more functional system of responsibilities in line with stakeholder pressures underlined by their emerging needs within a changing demography (Kosseck et al., 2010; OECD, 2011, 2018b; Van Engen et al., 2012). This approach is in line with the view that sustainability is not just about responsibilities to society but also a source of value creation for both the company and for society (Baumgartner, 2014; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001).

In addition, the present study advocates the perspective that human sustainability is defined differently in each society (Pfeffer, 2010; Ross, 2009), in line with the view that human sustainability is essentially socially constructed within the society (S. Lewis et al., 2007; Palazzo & Scherer, 2006; Suchman, 1995). In particular, the findings demonstrate that

human sustainability initiatives are supported and constrained by historical, local systems of responsibilities, shaped by particular markets, norms, and regulations, as suggested by Matten and Moon (2008). Within the system, local stakeholders (i.e., the government, workforce/families/schools, shareholders, customers, industry competitors, management, the company union, and employees) shape these work norms, employment regulations, and competitive markets. This finding indicates that companies need to work through the locally-rooted existing stakeholder expectations to address emerging workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues.

This study also shows that the integration of human sustainability into CSR strategies is a dynamic process involving internal factors (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010; Yuan et al., 2011) and external processes (Brammer et al., 2012; Mainardes et al., 2011). Internally, companies need to enhance coherence between human sustainability initiatives with core business practices, such as the pattern of job content, rewards, and careers. Externally, companies need to enhance coherence between human sustainability initiatives and emerging stakeholder pressures while working through existing stakeholder expectations, which constitute the institutionalised workstyle within a given social context. In doing so, the companies need to develop a more functional system of responsibilities together with key stakeholders which could enable, not constrain, their human sustainability initiatives.

Thus, this study has extended the understanding of the dynamic interface between business and human sustainability, by applying institutional, stakeholder, and organisational strategy theory to the empirical context of Japanese society and business.

8.5 Practical Implications

The findings of this study are based mainly on the perspective of managers; therefore, the study is expected to have implications for practitioners. The findings offer several potential benefits for practitioners.

First, these findings offer a renewed focus for managers to address workforce wellbeing and human sustainability issues in large Japanese companies. In particular, companies can assess their organisational context from the perspective of stakeholder pressure identified in this study. For instance, managers can ask questions such as: what pressures do we perceive from the market, regulations, and norms?; how strong are these pressures?; are these pressures increasing or decreasing?; who are the relevant stakeholders and what are their changing needs? These questions help companies to identify the organisational context in which they can address human sustainability issues.

Second, companies can assess the dilemmas they face, in line with the patterns of dilemmas and conflicts identified in this study. In particular, using the proposed conceptual framework, managers can identify the dilemmas and conflicts between their practices and emerging stakeholder needs, existing stakeholders' expectations, and core business practices. Managers can then further assess and map out the conflicts in relation to the key stakeholders to understand and develop the broader system of responsibilities in which they are embedded.

Third, companies can assess their human sustainability initiatives, in line with the relatively successful human sustainability initiatives identified in this study. In particular, managers can identify effective practices of companies which integrate human sustainability

initiatives into business strategies and core business practices, in such areas as proactive management of health and productivity, work and life, and gender equality and diversity. Managers can then consider how these practices can be adjusted to form practical solutions, in a way that fits with their own internal and external context within the specific industry. Thus, managers can develop the relevant policies, programmes, and targets/KPIs in line with the effective approaches identified in this study.

Furthermore, the findings show that human sustainability issues reflect the existing system of responsibilities within a given social context. All the stakeholders and the pressures they exert that were mentioned in this study constitute a system of responsibilities, although with different degrees of influence. Therefore, companies should proactively work with stakeholders identified in this study to develop a more functioning system of responsibilities that responds to the emerging needs of the workforce.

Thus, the findings provide useful guidelines for managers to analyse the status of their practices and develop approaches to better integrate human sustainability initiatives into CSR strategies, in a way that leads to better social and business performance. Overall, the findings of this study send a strong signal to the field of CSR that the scope of CSR discourse and practice needs to be broadened to challenge the notion of what wellbeing means within the society. This broadening scope is contrasted with a narrowed focus on a single issue (e.g., long working hours, lack of work-life balance, gender inequality, low productivity) and on a single analytical level (e.g., individual, organisation, society). Furthermore, researchers and practitioners should not just focus on companies; they need also to focus on the role of customers, industry, family, school, government, unions and

others. These stakeholders play a significant role in forming an alternative system of responsibilities.

Accordingly, this broadened discourse challenges managers to go beyond promoting their own CSR initiatives based on ethical, economic, and social views. This is because the existing system is dysfunctional and not sustainable. They need to construct an alternative system, which involves challenging taken-for-granted expectations held by key stakeholders. At the same time, this perspective challenges the government to move beyond a partial reform (such as ‘Premium Friday’ or stronger compliance measures). They need to show leadership into ‘a full-scale-reform’ (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017) (Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform [Japan], 2017), which should involve reforming all the regulatory forces discussed in this study. Overall, this study offers pointers for companies, governments, and other stakeholders to build a system of responsibilities that enhances human wellbeing, so that *karoshi* does not happen.

8.6 Limitations of the Study

Given its exploratory nature, this study is subject to some limitations. It is important to acknowledge that the generalisability of the findings is limited due to the limited sample size. The study is mainly based on interviews with managers from 31 large Japanese companies. Therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalised to all large Japanese companies or to small-to-medium-sized enterprises (SME). In addition, the generalisability of the findings to other social contexts, such as other developed countries, is also limited due to the limited scope of this study.

Several procedures were conducted to ensure the credibility and transferability of the research results. In order to ensure credibility, this study used data triangulation and gathered information from different standpoints, including corporate managers, key stakeholders, and informants. The interview data gained was further checked for consistency with secondary data, including official reports and websites. Moreover, this study aimed to enhance the transferability of the findings by discussing how the new conceptual framework can be applied to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It also provided a rich account of details for the reader as a base for making a judgment about the possible transferability to other contexts.

Another limitation is related to data collection. The selection of samples was based on three criteria, which were developed in line with the intention of the study to understand the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability. These criteria were: high CSR and sustainability evaluations and ranking based on several major indices, inclusion and participation in wellbeing-related initiatives, having more than 5,000 employees, and having its headquarters in Japan. These criteria might provide a bias in the selection of samples, and the results of the study cannot be applied to those companies excluded from the criteria. For instance, companies excluded from these criteria may have different approaches toward workforce wellbeing and human sustainability than participating companies.

There is also a limitation due to interview bias. Data were collected from interviews with CSR managers and managers in charge of workforce wellbeing issues: individual employees were not involved in the research. CSR managers and managers with relevant responsibilities tend to put a higher priority on CSR, in particular workforce wellbeing

issues, than managers in other departments. Therefore, the comments of the interviewees are potentially biased toward CSR-conscious perspectives. Involvement of individual employees could have helped the verification of such potentially CSR-conscious perspectives and provided more individual-based perspectives. However, the focus of the study remained on perspectives representing the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability rather than the perceptions of individual employees.

In addition, with regard to stakeholders, government representatives were not involved in this research. Despite attempts to interview representatives of government agencies, the researcher was not able to identify participants who were able to provide views representing the government. The standard reply to the interview invitation was that they are not the best agency to provide the views. This response may have been related to the fact that workstyle reform had become a highly political topic during the time this research was conducted.

Furthermore, there were limitations concerning single researcher bias. All the interviews, transcriptions, and coding were done by the researcher alone. This process may raise a question about the possibility that potential bias was introduced in the interview and coding process. However, in designing the methodology, several preventive processes were introduced to minimise such a possibility, which were strictly followed throughout the research process. For instance, semi-structured interviews were used to avoid the unnecessary influence of the interviewer, while keeping a similar structure to some extent. All interviews were digitally recorded to gather appropriate data. The analysis and coding process was systematised using heuristic tools in grounded analysis. To keep the record accessible for verification, all written accounts during the literature review, data collection,

memoing, diagramming, and drafts for the final thesis were recorded systematically, all of which were supported by the extensive use of the NVivo programme.

8.7 Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of the research indicate several avenues for further exploration. First, the applicability of the conceptual framework needs to be verified by further research with a larger sample size, including companies and industries excluded from the sample selection criteria. The larger sample may include companies and industries which are not as committed to CSR and sustainability in comparison to the participants of this study, as well as small-to-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which are considered to have fewer financial resources than large companies that can address human sustainability issues. Expanded sample size would allow the researcher to verify the dynamics and examine other factors that influence the implementation of human sustainability initiatives.

The framework can also be tested by deliberately looking for negative cases or alternative explanations to account for the phenomenon, as suggested by Timmermans and Tavory (2012). For instance, while the framework suggests that companies develop human sustainability initiatives in response to emerging stakeholder needs/demands/pressures, individual companies may have developed effective human sustainability initiatives several decades ago, even before the emerging stakeholder needs/demands/pressures were identified in the framework. If this were the case, internal organisational factors such as corporate philosophy, management systems, and organisational culture play a more critical role than stakeholder pressures.

It would be useful to conduct research in another social context and examine the validity and applicability of this framework. The research suggested that ‘workstyle’ is socially constructed and institutionalised in each society. This is not just because each society has a different understanding of how work should be carried out, but also because there are particular norms, regulations, and markets supported by local stakeholders. In light of this, the researcher intends to review the framework concerning the different pressures and dynamics in another social setting mentioned in the interviews, such as the US, Germany, the UK, and Nordic countries. These societies face similar human sustainability issues (i.e., more extended working hours, gender equality, flexibility at work) but with different degrees of urgency (OECD, 2011) with different ethical, social and historical backgrounds (Matten & Moon, 2008). In particular, future studies can explore in detail the areas of human sustainability issues, emerging stakeholder needs/demands/pressures, relevant initiatives, the nature of conflicts with existing pressures and management practices, and corporate approaches to enhance internal and external consistency/fit.

A mixed research approach might be useful to do this. Quantitative data, along with qualitative data, may provide a broader perspective on the applicability of the conceptual framework. A quantitative survey could measure the different degrees of emerging pressures, the strategic importance of each human sustainability initiative, and the level of conflict with the existing stakeholder expectations and management practices.

Furthermore, a more in-depth analysis of internal factors can extend the conceptual framework presented. For instance, formal internal factors could be further examined, including organisational structure, formal management instruments, and control systems such as processes, measurements, and reward systems, to evaluate performance and

enhance accountability (Baumgartner, 2014; Epstein & Buhovac, 2010). Future studies can also examine informal internal factors such as leadership, mission, culture, and people to support the implementation (Epstein & Buhovac, 2010). These formal and informal factors can be further linked to integration efforts at normative, strategic, and operational levels (Baumgartner, 2014).

In-depth analysis of external factors can be useful to verify and extend the conceptual framework. For example, although this research has shed light on the role of the customers, industry competitors, and the government, how companies can effectively engage with these and other stakeholders to develop an alternative ‘workstyle’ remains to be examined. In particular, while the findings indicated the importance of external factors, it remains unclear how companies can help develop such work norms and regulations, as well as accounting standards to internalise ‘human costs’ within a constantly changing external environment. It may require certain companies to pursue a more proactive ‘economic’ role as well as becoming a ‘political’ actor in market societies, as suggested by Scherer et al. (2014), which calls for further research in the direction of industry collaboration as well as joint regulation with governmental agencies.

The findings also suggested there is industry variation from the perspective of the organisational field (Matten & Moon, 2008; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). However, there is limited research comparing the commonalities and differences of the organisational field in each industry. Future studies can examine different pressures and their influence on the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability.

While this study explored the corporate approaches to workforce wellbeing and human sustainability, the scope was limited to the aspects of workforce wellbeing relevant mainly to full-time employees within large companies. The concept of “workforce wellbeing” and “human sustainability”, on which this study draws, remain in the developmental stage. It remains for future research to further develop their definitions, scope, and dynamics, based on more refined conceptual and empirical investigations. The aspects could include the wellbeing of the workforce external to the organisation but within their value chain, including suppliers and communities. For instance, this study did not include issues such as supply chain labour standards, health and safety, child labour, the protection of indigenous populations, and fair trade (Bendell et al., 2011; Welford, 2004). Moreover, the aspects of increasing part-time employees were mentioned but not analysed extensively in this study. These aspects should not be ignored given that there is an increasing population of ‘precarious workers’ and a stronger role of trade unions (Harvey, Hodder, & Brammer, 2017) in the age of global competition and transformative technological development. Thus, future research could improve this framework by testing its applicability beyond the limited scope of this study.

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Appendix 1 – List of Participating Companies, Stakeholders, and Informants

No.	Company	Industry	Role/Responsibilities
1	A	Food and beverage	Senior Manager, CSR
2	B	Food and beverage	Manager, CSR
3	C	Housing construction	Senior Manager, CSR
4	D	Securities	Manager, CSR
5	E	Apparel	Senior Manager, Human Resource, Diversity and Inclusion
6	F	Chemical	Manager, CSR
7	G	Office Solutions	Manager, CSR
8	H	Automobile	Manager, Corporate Planning
9	I	Airline	Senior Manager, Corporate Citizenship, Diversity
10	J	Heavy industry	Executive Officer, CSR
11	K	Convenience Store	Senior Manager, Human Resource
12	L	Automobile	Manager, Human Resource
13	M	Chemical	Manager, Corporate Strategy
14	N	IT	Manager, Diversity, CSR and Social Contribution
15	O	Telecommunications	Manager, CSR
16	P	Transportation	Manager, CSR
17	Q	Electronics	Manager, Human Resource
18	R	Electronics	Manager, Human Resource, Diversity
19	S	Office Equipments	Manager, CSR
20	T	IT	Manager, CSR
21	U	Housing construction	Senior Manager, CSR
22	V	Banking	Senior Manager, CSR
23	W	Insurance	Manager, CSR, Human Capital
24	X	Housing construction	Manager, Workstyle Reform
25	Y	Food and beverage	Senior Manager, CSR
26	Z	Construction	Senior Manager, CSR
27	AA	Chemical	Manager, Workstyle Reform, Diversity
28	AB	Insurance	Manager, CSR
29	AC	Printing and Electronics	Senior Manager, CSR
30	AD	Chemical	Manager, CSR
31	AE	Housing	Manager, ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance)

Stakeholder	Background
A	Senior Manager of a national business association and labour specialist
B	Occupational health physician/advocate for health and productivity management
C	European CEO of the Japan-based operation of a multinational company
D	Director of a national union centre
E	Director of an industry labour union
F	Leader of a civil organization advocating work-life balance

Informant	Role/Responsibilities
A	Sociologist
B	Business ethics researcher
C	Labour economist
D	Labour law researcher

Appendix 2 – Information Sheet



Doctoral Research Project

Corporate Approaches to Human Sustainability: Workforce Wellbeing in Japanese Companies

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher Introduction

I, Kazunori Kobayashi, am the lead/student researcher of this study which is carried out as a part of my PhD (Management) research at Massey University.

Project Description

The aim of this project is to investigate how companies address increasing concerns for ‘ways of working’ in the context of social responsibility and strategy. The related initiatives are reported under such topics as work-life balance, equality and diversity, flexible working, etc. However, the progress is reported to be slow. With your involvement, this study aims to explore how companies make relevant initiatives more coherent with CSR strategy, core business practices, and social sustainability.

An Invitation

You are invited to share your views and experiences on pressures, actions, and conflicts regarding this issue. I’m hoping to talk to approximately 30-40 CSR managers and 10-15 key stakeholders across the sectors to gain a broad understanding.

Project Procedures

I would like to interview you in person, over the phone or online (for example, Skype) for about 60 minutes. The interviews will be recorded, then transcribed verbatim and returned to you for checking and editing if you choose. When you are happy with the transcript I will analyse the data and include it in summary form in my thesis. Some direct quotations from your interview may appear, but without names (company and yourself). The only information included is industry and the number of employees in your organization. Some data and quotations may also be used in academic and professional articles arising from the project. Electronic data collected will be kept secure on password protected devices for two years. After 2 years, data collected in interviews will be deleted.

Information about you will remain confidential to the study and any identifying details about you or the organisation for which you work will be removed from the transcript and from the report I write. I'll use a pseudonym or numbering system instead of your name.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study (up until one week following the interview);
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- if you wish, you will be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

If you'd like to participate in this research please contact me by email and I will get back to you to organise a meeting. My details are given below along with details of my supervisors. Please contact me or the supervisors if you have any questions about this project.

Project Contacts

Student Researcher: Kazunori Kobayashi

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Email: k.kobayashi@massey.ac.nz

Supervisor: Associate Prof Gabriel Eweje

Phone: +64 9 414 0800 ext 43388

Email: G.Eweje@massey.ac.nz

Supervisor: Dr David Tappin

Phone: +64 9 414 0800 ext 43384

Email: D.C.Tappin@massey.ac.nz

Ethics

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director (Research Ethics), email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

**Te Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa**

School of Management

Massey University, Private Bag 102904, Auckland 0745 T +64 9 414 0800 <http://management.massey.ac.nz>

Appendix 3 – Consent Form



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

Corporate Approaches to Human Sustainability: Workforce Wellbeing in Japanese Companies

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being image recorded. *(For Skype or WebEx interviews only)*

I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

.....

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....

Appendix 4 – Interview Guide



MASSEY
BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Corporate Approaches to Human Sustainability: Workforce Wellbeing in Japanese Companies

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Questions for managers

1. Can you describe your role in the company?

(Prompt)

Please tell us your position, the number of years, and roles including reporting structure.

Based on your experience, how would you define social responsibility (CSR) in your company?

Have you come across the concept of 'human sustainability' before? How would you describe it?

2. How does your company define social responsibility for the workforce?

What are the underlying principles? How would you include 'workforce wellbeing'?

Can you describe the pressure from society in this area? What change have you observed?

What about pressures and expectations from customers, other companies, or government?

3. What initiatives does your company have to respond to the expectations?

Which initiatives are the most critical to your company? Why?

How does your company implement the initiatives? How do you implement them in different locations?

Who are responsible for the progress? Can you describe the progress? Do you face major dilemmas or difficulties? Could you please give me some examples?

4. How does your company integrate these initiatives into strategy?

How does your company link CSR and company strategy?

Do you see clear connection between these initiatives and company strategy? What about management, managers, and other workforce?

Do you think integration is important? How would your company integrate them better in the future?

5. Some say the progress in these areas in Japan is limited, compared to the expectations and concerns. What do you think?

What might be causing the limited progress?

Which stakeholders share the responsibility for the progress?

What can your company do with the stakeholders?

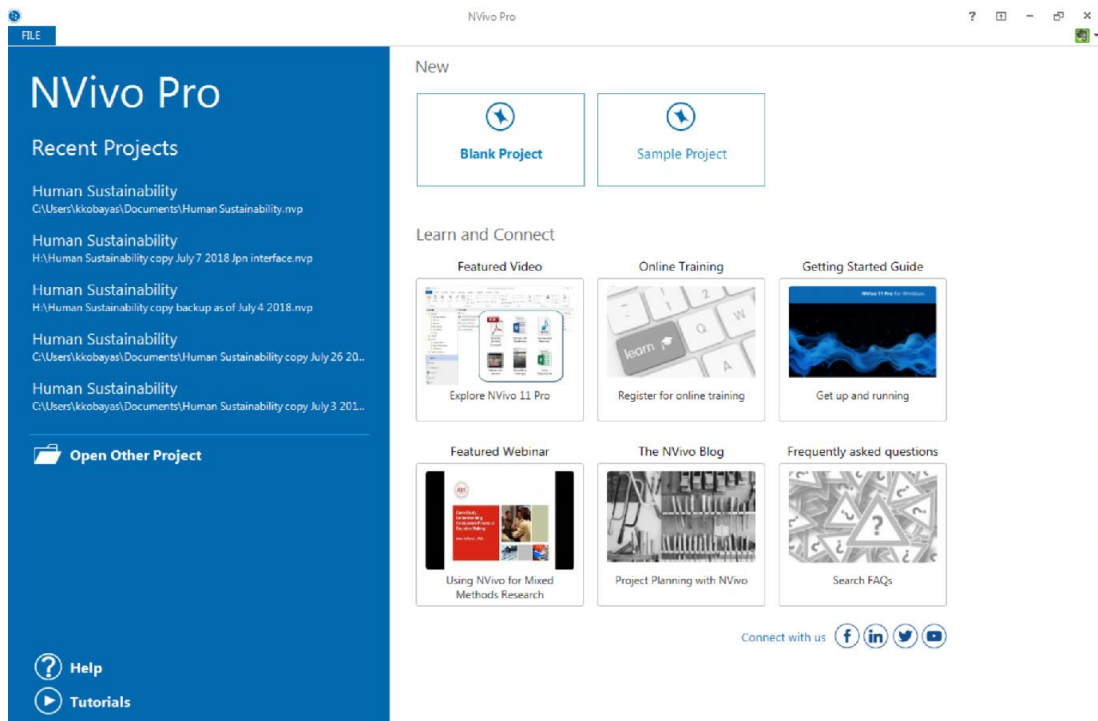
Questions for stakeholders/informants

1. How do you see the progress of corporate approaches?

Do you think that the progress is limited? What might be causing the limited progress? How would you expect the company to address them in the future?

2. Which stakeholders share the responsibility for the progress? What can companies do with the stakeholders?

Appendix 5 – Screenshot of NVivo Project



The screenshot shows the 'Nodes' table in the NVivo Pro software. The table lists various nodes with their names, source counts, reference counts, and creation/modification dates. The 'Industry nature' node is highlighted in blue.

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Being sustainable	21	35	10/04/2017 1:25	KK	11/05/2017 5:05	KK
Chapter 6	28	185	23/07/2017 1:04	KK	26/07/2017 4:08	KK
Chapter 6 must	17	158	25/07/2017 5:37	KK	26/07/2017 4:46	KK
Comparison	37	199	10/04/2017 2:43	KK	26/07/2017 2:34	KK
Continue work	25	48	10/04/2017 2:01	KK	26/07/2017 5:03	KK
Drive, challenge and better: themselves	24	78	10/04/2017 4:30	KK	11/05/2017 3:08	KK
Driving force or drive for change	23	36	10/04/2017 2:02	KK	8/05/2017 5:11	KK
Employment	34	104	19/04/2017 6:12	KK	23/05/2017 6:40	KK
Family role	30	52	10/04/2017 2:23	KK	31/05/2017 5:56	KK
Feel Rewarded in work	19	42	10/04/2017 3:24	KK	22/05/2017 5:27	KK
Global operation	19	53	10/04/2017 1:32	KK	8/05/2017 5:07	KK
How to proceed with work	22	53	21/04/2017 4:23	KK	11/05/2017 4:23	KK
Human	34	104	10/04/2017 1:28	KK	11/05/2017 6:58	KK
Industry nature	30	117	19/04/2017 12:0	KK	31/05/2017 5:52	KK
Innovation, creativity, quality	20	58	20/04/2017 9:00	KK	26/07/2017 5:03	KK
Japanese mentality	17	30	10/04/2017 3:39	KK	26/07/2017 2:34	KK
Male female ratio	17	20	10/04/2017 1:32	KK	3/05/2017 3:52	KK
Mental health	5	6	10/04/2017 3:29	KK	3/05/2017 5:55	KK
Mind set	24	47	10/04/2017 1:35	KK	26/07/2017 5:03	KK
Oversea sales	10	13	19/04/2017 1:22	KK	3/05/2017 4:21	KK
Pressures	31	65	10/04/2017 1:57	KK	9/06/2017 4:06	KK
Productivity and efficiency	24	80	21/04/2017 12:3	KK	11/05/2017 6:55	KK
Relationship among work time, quality, outcome (evalu	28	102	19/04/2017 1:19	KK	9/06/2017 4:04	KK
Social loss, cost, waste, externality	21	44	25/04/2017 12:0	KK	22/05/2017 5:12	KK
Time record and management	25	64	21/04/2017 1:10	KK	23/05/2017 6:42	KK
Wellbeing	5	7	11/05/2017 3:45	KK	22/05/2017 5:04	KK
Work load	19	38	19/04/2017 1:17	KK	31/05/2017 5:53	KK

Human Sustainability.nvp - NVivo Pro

FILE HOME CREATE DATA ANALYZE QUERY EXPLORE LAYOUT VIEW

Look for [] Search In [] Contradictions Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Nodes

- Actors & Stakeholders
- Auto coding
- Contradictions
- Corporate actions
- Interface
- Norm Rules Markets
- Past Now Future
- Stakeholder (Unilever)
- Cases
- Relationships
- Node Matrices

Contradictions

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Career and ikusei (development)	34	125	20/04/2017 3:14	KK	26/07/2017 5:03 p.m.	KK
Education and learning	7	11	8/05/2017 4:28	KK	8/05/2017 4:28 p.m.	KK
generalis or specialist	10	13	8/05/2017 4:25	KK	11/05/2017 6:15 p.m.	KK
Conditions for functioning	37	191	10/04/2017 1:38	KK	23/05/2017 6:24 p.m.	KK
Consistency or contradicted	29	90	10/04/2017 2:36	KK	26/07/2017 5:03 p.m.	KK
Corporate Freedom vs. State	16	26	10/04/2017 4:15	KK	8/05/2017 4:20 p.m.	KK
Cost or Investment in people	31	85	10/04/2017 3:00	KK	11/05/2017 6:48 p.m.	KK
Difficult or not	30	102	10/04/2017 2:41	KK	26/07/2017 5:03 p.m.	KK
Evaluating human capital	23	48	10/04/2017 2:44	KK	22/05/2017 5:37 p.m.	KK
Integrated thinking	13	24	10/04/2017 2:38	KK	11/05/2017 4:45 p.m.	KK
Limitation	21	42	10/04/2017 2:47	KK	23/05/2017 6:30 p.m.	KK
Regardless man or women	22	29	10/04/2017 4:28	KK	26/07/2017 5:03 p.m.	KK
Uniformity or individuality	26	107	21/04/2017 8:53	KK	26/07/2017 5:03 p.m.	KK

Sources Nodes Classifications Collections Queries Reports Maps Folders

Human Sustainability.nvp - NVivo Pro

FILE HOME CREATE DATA ANALYZE QUERY EXPLORE LAYOUT VIEW

Look for [] Search In [Procedure memo] Find Now Clear Advanced Find

Sources

- Internals
 - Evernote memo
 - Interviews
 - Companies
 - Informants
 - Stakeholders
 - Interviews (English)
 - Literature
- Externals
- Memos
 - Interview memo
 - Node memo
 - Nvivo memo
 - Procedure memo
 - Research Journal
 - Theoretical memo
- Framework Matrices

Procedure memo

Name	Nodes	Referen
11th - 20th coding	0	0
1st - 5th coding	0	0
21th - 30th coding	0	0
6 to 10th coding	8	8
Auto coding	0	0
From open coding	0	0
Informants coding	0	0
List of possible indi	0	0
Stakeholder coding	0	0

Customers Other corporate players Overtime is a waste for everyb 1st - 5th coding Node Links

Click to edit

[3]

After the first two interview coding, I reflected how I did by looking through the list of codes.

For the obvious one that seem to be in the same realm, I moved some codes to other codes.

I also largely categories them - total about about 50 codes - into 4-5 folders and 10 or so individual nodes, in order to facilitate the future coding process.

Then I have coded the third interview.

I found that, in addition to coding into existing nodes, I could come up with more codes, sometimes with even more details in the parts that seem to benefit from further scrutiny.

Then I wondered if it is better to go back to the first two interviews and see how the new codes fit.

I had talked with Fatima for her advice, and she suggested several ways herself and her colleague have done.

The most relevant way for me seems to be that I code first 5 interviews, review them in detail, establish 80% of the codes, and apply them throughout the rest of the coding.

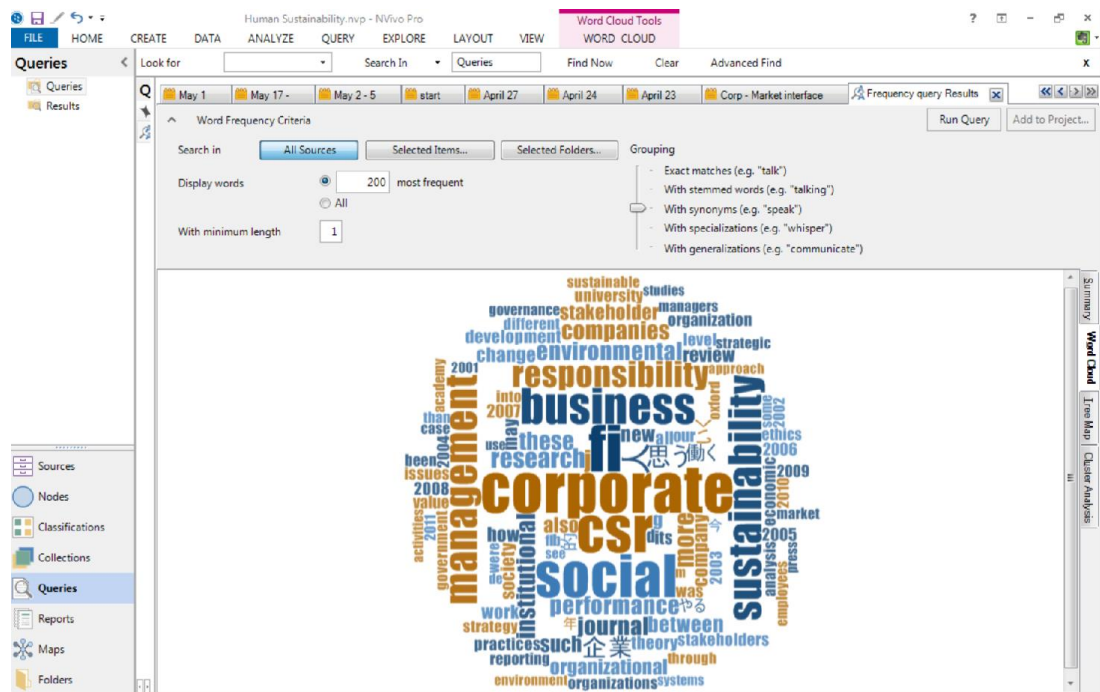
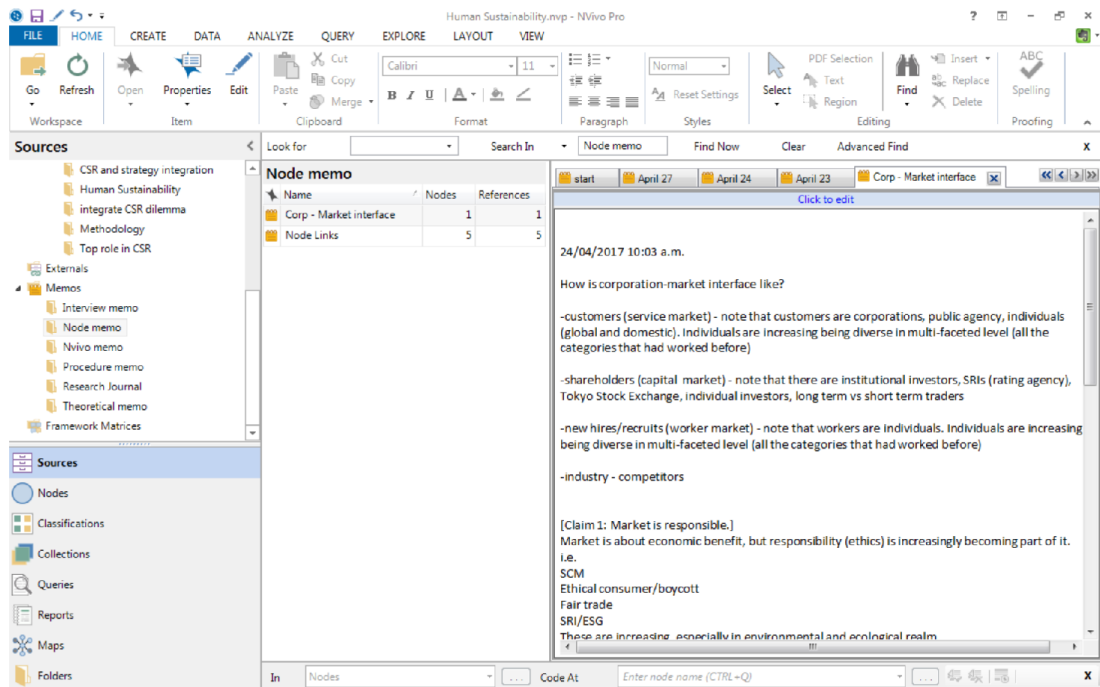
Or I could do 5 each, review and adjust, and then do 5 each, etc.

Also Fatima advised me to keep record of the steps I have taken to increase transparency for methodology.

April 19th, 14:13 pm

[4]

In [] Nodes [] Code At [Enter node name (CTRL+Q)]



Appendix 6 – Ethics Approval Notification

From: <humanethics@massey.ac.nz>
Date: 2016-07-04 17:02 GMT+12:00
Subject: Human Ethics Notification - 4000015738
To: A.Lindsay@massey.ac.nz, Kazunori.Kobayashi.1@uni.massey.ac.nz,
D.C.Tappin@massey.ac.nz, G.Eweje@massey.ac.nz
Cc: M.E.Thomas@massey.ac.nz

HoU Review Group

Ethics Notification Number: 4000015738
Title: Corporate approach to Human Sustainability:
Workforce Wellbeing in Japanese Companies

Thank you for your notification which you have assessed as Low Risk.

Your project has been recorded in our system which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

If situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your ethical analysis, please log on to <http://rims.massey.ac.nz> and register the changes in order that they be assessed as safe to proceed.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

“This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director (Research Ethics), email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.”

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish require evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to

complete the application form again answering yes to the publication question to provide more information to go before one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

You are reminded that staff researchers and supervisors are fully responsible for ensuring that the information in the low risk notification has met the requirements and guidelines for submission of a low risk notification.

If you wish to print an official copy of this letter, please login to the RIMS system, and under the Reporting section, View Reports you will find a link to run the LR Report.

Yours sincerely

Dr Brian Finch
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and
Director (Research Ethics)