CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ENGAGEMENT LEVELS AND
EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

by

Omotola Idowu

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Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

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Liberty University, School of Business
August 2022
Abstract

Organizations have always practiced social responsibility in many forms, but in recent years the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become a forefront subject, frequently addressed at the strategic levels. Employee performance has always been a subject of interest and concern for organizations because employees are an organization’s most important asset. CSR has an impact on both internal employees and the external community. Studies have shown CSR has an impact on employee performance, but a lack of proper CSR implementation has a negative effect on them. In this qualitative study, the researcher explored the leadership behaviors that affect CSR implementation and employee performance in information technology firms in the Washington, DC metro area. Twenty-one participants of both the executive and regular employment levels were interviewed to obtain their unique perspectives. This study’s findings provide the leadership behaviors and attributes that affect CSR implementation observed through the four emergent themes of leader behavior, leader involvement, CSR program development, and CSR practices. These themes developed out of the data provided by participants and were carefully analyzed. The right leadership behaviors can improve how leaders are engaged in CSR initiatives and implementation, increasing successful CSR programs, and improving employee performance.

Keywords: leadership behaviors, CSR implementation, CSR programs, employee performance
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my late mother, Omolola Idowu, who passed on in the third year of doctoral study. You have always supported me in this journey right from the beginning, from college campus visits with me to those early mornings when you begged me to go to sleep and continue my work the next day, and always praying for me. It breaks my heart that you will not be here to celebrate this accomplishment with me. You taught me to always trust in God and to leave everything in His hands. That is what propelled me to the finish line, along with knowing that I have His strength to depend on when mine was gone from the sadness of your passing. I miss you, Mommy.
Acknowledgments

“In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:6, NKJV)

First and foremost, I want to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for this accomplishment. If not for God, this would not have happened. I prayed to God and asked if I should even take this journey. He made some unusual things happen even before I was admitted into the program. The journey has been hard, with many obstacles, but I kept going back to Him because I knew He had a purpose for me. I have grown stronger mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and in many other ways because I got to some points where I had nothing left but Jesus. For this, I am very grateful for His love, strength, grace, and mercy over my life.

I want to thank Dr. Ahmed, my dissertation chair, for all the prayers, encouragement, and guidance and for just always being there when I needed you. I appreciate the hours you spent reviewing my work, making it better, and keeping me on track. I also want to thank my dissertation committee members for all their input which helped to improve my work.

I would like to thank my family for their understanding, support, and encouragement right from the beginning of this journey. They constantly checked on my well-being, knowing how tough this was for me and cheering me on (and refusing to let me quit). The words of encouragement and visualizations of the finish line kept me going. I am so grateful.

Aunty Carol, my partner in doctorate, we bounced off each other’s energy and encouraged each other. You understood exactly what I was going through when no one did because you were in the same situation, albeit in a different school and program. Thank you for listening to hours of venting and frustration and telling me to hang in there. We both did it.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The purpose of this flexible qualitative case study was to expand the understanding of the factors that affect leadership’s implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives within technology firms and the effects the results can have on employees and their performance. Chaudhary (2018) conducted a study and linked employee performance outcomes to employee perception of firms’ CSR. Chaudhary explained that CSR perceptions significantly influence both employee job performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Employee perceptions are driven by how they view leader behaviors toward CSR initiatives and implementation (Khattak et al., 2019; Schmitt et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2011). However, very few researchers explored what and how leaders’ behaviors explicitly affect CSR perceptions and employee performance outcomes (Chaudhary, 2018; Gottfredson & Aguinis, 2017). Consequently, the goal of the study was to identify the leadership behaviors or styles that can positively influence the successful implementation of CSR initiatives and improve employee performance within IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area. This research consists of three sections to the entire study.

Section 1 provides the background on the problem that was studied, including a literature review on the problem. Research literature showed a correlation between CSR programs, initiatives, and employee performance. For example, Testa, Boiral, and Heras-Saizarbitoria (2018) found that leaders’ actions when implementing CSR initiatives set the tone for how employees view, behave, and participate in the implementation process. Therefore, a qualitative research case study was designed to explore and understand the effects of leadership behavior factors on the implementation of CSR initiatives and the impact on employee performance. The
study specifically addressed three research questions on the impact of leader behaviors on CSR implementation and employee performance.

Section 2 provides detailed information on the research design process, including the methodology, population and sampling, participants, and data collection and analysis plan. A flexible qualitative research design was utilized to conduct the study. Twenty-one participants were recruited to participate in the interview. The participants, who consisted of both executive-level and regular employees, were recruited from information technology (IT) companies within the Washington, DC metro area. The combination of information from both executive and regular employee participants provided rich data for triangulation. To supplement the interview data, information about some participants’ organizations was retrieved using their organizations’ websites to learn about CSR strategic missions, activities, and programs, including any CSR documentation as allowed by each organization.

Section 3 includes the findings from the data analysis. The analysis resulted in the four themes of leader behavior, leader involvement, CSR program development, and CSR practices. Each theme is discussed in detail, including the interpretation of the themes and the relationship of the findings to the research questions, the conceptual framework, the anticipated themes, the literature, and the problem being studied. The findings of the study are further discussed with applicability to professional practice, which includes improving general business practice and potential application strategies, as well as recommendations for future research. Next, the background of the problem is presented to begin the full study.

**Background of the Problem**

CSR is a high-level topic of interest for many organization leaders, especially considering its impact on planned strategic organization outcomes (Rahman & Norman, 2016). CSR is no
longer an optional practice for any business intending to thrive and remain competitive. As organizations differ in their businesses, so does the meaning of CSR and its interpretations, but most organizational leaders have consistently focused mainly on the social, environmental, economic, ethical, and legal aspects (Latif & Sajjad, 2018). The mention of CSR is mainly associated with an organization’s impact on the external environment, sustainability, or societal implications. An internal CSR is concerned with an organization’s responsibility toward its workforce regarding the employees’ well-being, work environment, training and development, job satisfaction, growth opportunities, work-life balance, and general corporate citizenship behaviors (Nguyen et al., 2019). These factors provide a positive image for the organization internally, which contributes to better employee work engagement and improved overall performance (Jia et al., 2019). Thus, CSR, in addition to having an overall external strategic implication, is a significant factor in the successful internal performance of the organization.

Organizational success depends on organizations’ leaders and their ability to lead people to achieve intended strategic goals. On this premise, leaders are responsible for CSR as a business strategy and ensuring that employees are on board with an organization’s CSR initiatives. According to Northouse (2019), leadership behaviors, usually classified as either task or relationship behaviors, are what leaders do and how they act to influence followers to achieve a common goal. Leader behaviors influence their followers and can affect employee performance outcomes, which in turn affects organizational performance (Diebig et al., 2016). Therefore, leaders need to be proactively engaged with employees to effectively implement CSR initiatives and enhance employee performance. According to Inceoglu et al. (2018), leadership behavior substantially impacts employee behavior, employee performance, and employee perception of the organization.
While the general implications of leadership behaviors on employee performance and the formal management systems and practices relative to CSR have been studied (Testa, Boiral, & Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2018), there is a lack of sufficient study on leadership behaviors, specifically on CSR. However, Alonso-Almeida et al. (2017) found that dominant leadership behavior, which can affect how leaders interact with employees, had a negative effect on employees’ performance and the deployment of CSR initiatives. Testa, Boiral, and Heras-Saizarbitoria (2018) stated the importance of leaders leading by example in their behaviors which enhances their credibility toward CSR and which employees perceive as a strong indication of their organization’s true intent toward CSR. They found that leaders’ actions toward implementing CSR initiatives, going beyond just talking about the initiatives, set the tone for how employees view, behave and participate in the implementation process.

Problem Statement

The general problem addressed was the failure of leaders to effectively implement CSR initiatives resulting in a negative impact on employee performance. In Mahmood et al. (2020), leadership behaviors, such as abuse, apathy, dishonesty, disrespect, and intimidation, were found to negatively affect employees’ CSR perception and led to adverse employee outcomes, including low performance and high turnover. Employees observe leaders in action and use that information to form their opinion. The inability of leaders to implement CSR initiatives can be viewed as a form of greenwashing. Greenwashing is a prevalent issue in many organizations, and employees tend to take a negative approach toward CSR initiatives when an organization’s intentions do not appear as genuine concern for the environment and society but do appear to be part of the profit-making strategy (De Jong & Van der Meer, 2015). Leaders who can provide a clear vision, affect organizational culture, and clearly communicate performance measurements
are more likely to achieve CSR goals and motivate improved employee performance (Ming et al., 2018). According to Bernal-Conesa et al., 2017, while there is ample literature on CSR of small and large corporations, there seems to be insufficient information on the technology sector, which is considered a major contributor to innovation, and its competitiveness which can influence employee performance. The specific problem addressed was the failure of leaders to effectively implement CSR initiatives resulting in a negative impact on employee performance in IT organizations in the Washington, DC metro area.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to expand the understanding of the factors that affect leadership’s implementation of CSR initiatives within technology firms and the effects the results can have on employees and their performance. The researcher comprehensively addressed leadership behaviors and how they impact CSR implementation in IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area. The issue of employee performance was explored through an in-depth study of leadership behaviors. This study may help leaders address implementation issues that may arise from their behaviors and identify behaviors or actions that are essential for successful CSR implementation. To achieve the intent and purpose of this study, the researcher reviewed currently available scholarly literature to gain a better understanding of leadership behaviors and literature on successful CSR implementation. Through interviews and questionnaires, the information garnered from literature, and the information gathered from leaders and employees in IT firms could provide leaders with the necessary information to improve CSR implementation and employee performance, a two-fold benefit. The outcome of this research can help those leading IT firms to consider behavioral factors when implementing
CSR initiatives and can provide useful information on what employees view as positive CSR efforts that they can buy into as ways for performance to be improved.

**Research Questions**

The research questions allowed for studying the problem and identifying causes and potential resolution by asking questions that explore deeper into leadership behaviors and employee performance (Lim, 2014; Newman & Covrig, 2013). The variables explored with the research questions included leader behaviors, CSR within IT organizations, CSR impact on employees, and employee performance. Employees are a major factor to consider when organizations are designing and implementing CSR initiatives because their involvement or lack thereof could significantly affect their organization’s outcomes (Story & Castanheira, 2019). Moreover, employees take a keen interest in their organization’s CSR initiatives to determine their bottom line and can exhibit work behaviors that do not promote positive performance depending on their perceptions of their leaders’ actions (Jia et al., 2019).

There is literature on CSR concerning specific industries, indicating that corporate responsibility differs among organizations based on who they are, their products and services, and how they influence their environment. Understanding CSR within the construct of IT organizations can shed some light on how the differences might play a role in how leaders implement CSR. Three research questions (i.e., RQ1, RQ2, RQ3) explored why leaders fail to successfully implement CSR, what behaviors determine the outcome of CSR initiatives, what makes IT organizations different with respect to CSR, and what drives positive CSR results and performance. The three research questions included:

**RQ1.** How do leaders of information technology firms in the Washington, DC metro area implement CSR initiatives to affect employee performance outcomes?
**RQ2.** What leadership actions or behaviors within information technology firms in the Washington, DC metro area contribute to a successful implementation of CSR initiatives?

**RQ3.** How does the implementation of CSR initiatives affect employee performance within information technology firms?

The purpose of RQ1 was to explore CSR specifically for IT firms. Exploring CSR in the context of technology firms could explain what constitutes good CSR initiatives (from both leader and employee views) and the implications of such views on the employee’s performance. The question explored the intent of CSR initiatives which may possibly determine how leaders go about the implementation and both of which may potentially affect employee behavior, leading to performance outcomes.

The intent for RQ2 involved addressing the leadership behaviors that can possibly contribute to the failed implementation of CSR. The question explored the actions or behaviors that contribute to a successful CSR implementation and leadership behaviors on employee performance. It was important to identify negative leader behaviors from employees’ perspectives so that leaders can become aware of such behaviors for future efforts. The question explored the steps taken by leaders for the continuous improvement of CSR implementations that could impact the improvement of employee performance.

The focus of RQ3 allowed for exploring how factors of the CSR implementation process have an impact on employees and the outcome of such impact on how employees behave on the job. Organizations have their own unique cultures and processes that form the basis of how things are done. RQ3 explored how employees perceive such processes (or implementation activities) if they are in line with their ideas of how things should be done and the results on their
overall performance (for example, are they motivated to be good citizens of the organization, going above and beyond the call of duty, or are they disgruntled and only do the bare minimum to get by).

All three questions together addressed the effect of leaders on employee performance, the impact of leaders’ behaviors on the outcome of CSR implementation, and the effect of CSR implementation on employee performance. At an in-depth level, all three questions helped to identify the concept of CSR in technology companies, where or how leaders are possibly failing in CSR implementation, and behavioral factors that may be present and how they affect CSR as well as employee performance. In addition, the research questions allowed for gaining insight into employees’ perspectives of CSR within technology firms and how CSR affected how they performed.

**Nature of the Study**

It is important for a researcher to think through the steps of conducting a study and obtaining accurate results. When conducting research, it is imperative that the right research tools, such as the research paradigm and research methods, are employed. Several elements need to be considered, including the purpose of the research, questions to be answered, the data to be collected, analysis of results, and the plan for presenting the research report (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There are multiple ways to conduct research, so researchers must recognize it is important to understand the different options and choose the most appropriate method in designing the research (Verleye, 2019). Researchers conduct investigations for many reasons, and it is necessary to ensure that research is not influenced in any way to distort the outcome of the result. The following subsections contain the research paradigm, design, and methodology utilized for the research.
Discussion of Research Paradigms

A research paradigm is the way one sees or views the world around them and forms the basis of how researchers ask questions and conduct their research (Bogna et al., 2020). It influences how the research is carried out and why researchers conduct their studies (i.e., the aim of the research). Several research paradigms guide the practice of research. For applied business research, the primary paradigms to explore include positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, and pragmatism (Allen & Davey, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Panhwar et al., 2017). Bogna et al. (2020) encouraged researchers to adopt more than one paradigm where possible because it can further facilitate the analysis of data and draw more meaning and information out of the research than if using a single paradigm.

**Positivism.** Positivism takes a scientific approach to research and beliefs in a single reality that can be measured using quantitative data (Saxena, 2019). An overwhelming number of research studies on organizational teams and studies in organizational sciences used positivism as the dominant framework (Nyein et al., 2020). Corry et al. (2018) asserted that there is confusion regarding the origin of the positivism paradigm, adding that many authors classify all quantitative research as originating from positivism, and the lack of consistent terminology and definition has not helped the situation either. The positivism paradigm relies on a system of hypotheses and developing models to test the hypothesis utilizing several quantifiable independent variables that can be manipulated for different outcomes, but it is not always a quantitative method (Park et al., 2020). The researcher depends on quantifiable observations to explain the phenomenon and predict future occurrences.

**Post-Positivism.** Post-positivism is an approach to research in which, unlike positivism, there is no single cause and effect; therefore, there can be multiple realities. Post-positivism
emerged out of the shortcomings of positivism which rejects the existence of a subjective perspective of realities and serves as a bridge to triangulate qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the varying individual realities (Panhwar et al., 2017). Though it might resemble it, this is not necessarily a mixed-method approach. “Post-positivists do not believe in strict cause and effect but rather recognize that all cause and effect are a probability that may or may not occur” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.23). A post-positivist approach seeks to explore multiple perspectives from several participants and therefore uses rigorous methods of qualitative data collection and analysis to get answers.

**Pragmatist.** Pragmatist researchers are concerned mainly with solving the problem and are not in favor of a particular method or design. Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) identified the main ideology driving pragmatic inquiry as actionable knowledge that can be used for solving actual problems by ruminating on all the experiences in whatever way they occur. A study based on pragmatism is not inclined toward following any particular research design but involves every research tool available, multiple methods of data collection, and multiple sources of data collection for improving the outcomes of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In research that involves large-scale studies with varied sample representation and an extensive collection of data and sources, a pragmatic approach may be the best option to study and find a solution to the problem (Parry et al., 2020). Pragmatism does not specify specific methods of data collection to use but instead provides a framework that researchers can use to determine the best method for data collection (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020).

**Constructivism.** The constructivism paradigm is an interpretive view that seeks to understand how others see and interpret a phenomenon. Researchers who use the constructive paradigm are mostly interested in how independent experiences can be extracted to form theories
regarding the collective relationship between all individuals involved (Allen & Davey, 2018). Several people can observe the same event and interpret it differently. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), constructivism is a worldview in which individuals try to understand the world in which they live, and their understanding is subject to their experiences and how they interpret those experiences. The constructivism paradigm is thought to complement pragmatism inquiries because it offers the opportunity of hypothesizing and presenting how meaning and action impact each other (Charmaz, 2017).

**Researcher’s Paradigm and Why**

The researcher’s research paradigm was constructivism. The researcher investigated how employees in IT organizations perceived leader behaviors and CSR and what shaped those perceptions. A constructivism paradigm can be used to describe the experiences of a group that forms certain behaviors or leads to certain decisions as explained by the group participants themselves (Kelly et al., 2018). While there are CSR initiatives existing in many organizations, some organizations are not able to successfully implement and achieve their set goals.

The constructivism paradigm was chosen because the research problem is why leaders may not implement CSR initiatives successfully, and this failure might negatively impact the employees’ performance. According to Creswell (2014), people seek an understanding of their world and develop the individual meaning of their experiences, which contribute to the complexity of views. By using the constructivism paradigm as a guide, the researcher explored the experiences of employees and their experiences with their leaders and CSR in their organizations, how they perceived and interpreted their leadership’s CSR initiatives and implementation, and the factors that influenced their actions toward executing CSR actions (thereby affecting performance levels). By seeking to understand the experiences of the leaders
as well, the researcher generated a holistic view and understanding of the general organizational environment as seen from the participants’ different perspectives.

**Discussion of Design**

According to Creswell (2014), there are three designs to research, namely fixed design, flexible design, and mixed-methods design. Quantitative and qualitative methods are associated with fixed and flexible designs, respectively. Stake (2010) explained that although science is mostly quantitative, its qualitative side incorporates the experience, intuition, and skepticism of human nature, which is used to refine scientific theories and experiments. The nature of the study was used to guide the research method and design of the study.

**Fixed Design.** Fixed design is predetermined, uses identified variables for the collection of data and comparison, and uses quantitative methods to measure the variables to arrive at the answer (Creswell, 2014). Fixed designs are best used in research designed to answer questions of who, what, when, where, or how many. “Quantitative research methods involve the manipulation of the research field, a potentially careful choice of subjects… and standardized data collection” (House, 2018, p. 7). Tools include close-ended surveys, questionnaires, or structured interviews. These tools were not appropriate to fully capture the experiences of employees and CSR implementation in their organization. A fixed design, therefore, was not an appropriate design for this study.

**Mixed Methods.** Mixed Methods “involve combining or integration of qualitative and quantitative research and data in a research study” (Creswell, 2014). Turner et al. (2017) asserted that all the designs are flawed independently, but their limitations can be reduced by utilizing mixed-method research. By collecting both quantitative and qualitative data (or utilizing elements of both fixed and flexible designs), the researcher can enhance the credibility of the
study through data triangulation. Mixed methods can be used when the researcher wants to validate qualitative findings with a quantitative data source or use qualitative data to enhance quantitative results. The nature of this study made the mixed methods inappropriate for the study.

**Flexible Design.** Flexible design is associated with qualitative research in which the researcher seeks to answer the question of why and how. Unlike a fixed design, it provides more freedom to collect data, such as using open-ended questions and allowing the researcher to expand the understanding of the phenomenon. Flexible designs are best suited for research that seeks to understand the deeper meaning of an event, how it’s happening or why it happened. Tools include open-ended survey questions, focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires that are very descriptive. The flexible design was appropriate for this study because the available tools helped collect data for a deeper understanding of the experiences possible.

**Appropriateness of Flexible Design.** A flexible qualitative method using a single case study research design was considered best for this research study for a couple of reasons. According to House (2018), “the basic function of qualitative research is to understand human behavior, which is rooted in the philosophical strand of Hermeneutics, whereas the basic function of quantitative research is to explain human behavior” (p.7). Hermeneutics is the methodology of the interpretation used for understanding and communicating a phenomenon (Koskinen & Nyström, 2017; Maxwell et al., 2020). A flexible design was chosen for this research because it allowed the researcher to collect data and modify the data collection as things evolved or there was a recurring theme that needed to be explored further. Qualitative methods of research examine the social processes, relationships, and settings in which individuals interrelate with one another, and researchers interact with individuals to understand their subjective thinking (Abkhezr et al., 2020). Qualitative research collects data to gain deep insight.
In contrast, quantitative methods seek to test or confirm pre-existing theories by comparing relationships between variables and by taking a numerical approach using statistical methods to measure and make predictions (Murshed & Zhang, 2016). Quantitative researchers collect numerical data to measure variables. This prevents participants from being able to provide a detailed rationale behind their responses, which in turn, does not provide the researcher with in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon.

Mixed-methods research combines aspects of quantitative and qualitative research to enhance the study by expanding and strengthening the study outcome with more breadth, depth, and richness and gives the researcher multiple perspectives to draw conclusions (McKim, 2017; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Due to not having a predetermined notion, this design provided an opportunity to explore as many possibilities as possible and provided a deeper understanding of the problems that may be associated with leader behaviors, CSR implementation, and employee performance. This made a flexible design (using qualitative methods) more appropriate. There were no quantifiable data to be measured, and the three research questions were designed for a deeper exploration of the issue. Therefore, a fixed design (using quantitative methods) was not suitable for the research. A mixed-methods design was inappropriate due to the absence of quantitative data or the need to validate the qualitative data using quantitative data.

Based on these research methods, what they aim to accomplish, and based on the problem and research questions identified in this study, a flexible design was the best fit for this research study. The research questions were intended to understand at a deeper level why leaders are potentially failing to implement CSR initiatives, what causes these failures, and how the phenomenon affects employee performance. The answers derived from the questions might be
utilized to provide a solution going forward. There were no pre-existing numerical variables that needed to be measured or qualitative data that needed to be quantified; therefore, using a fixed quantitative method or mixed-methods approach was not appropriate. Mixed-methods research has been shown to be a very involved and time-consuming process (McKim, 2017), which made it unsuitable for the research due to its time, scope, and resource limitations.

**Discussion of Method**

This study was conducted with a flexible design using qualitative methods, specifically, a single case study design. The following subsection discusses the key approaches to qualitative research and the case study design that was used for this study. The single case study and multiple case study designs were also discussed.

**Qualitative Methods.** Qualitative designs help to further understand an experience and its meaning (Denny & Weckesser, 2018). This usually entails the active involvement of the researcher with the study population to gather data. Creswell and Poth (2018) named five approaches to qualitative research (flexible designs), which include narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, and case study. The design chosen by a researcher is dependent on what the researcher wants to study/explore, why, and the intended outcome (Creswell, 2014).

**Narrative Design.** In a narrative, participants in the research tell their personal stories, which the researcher observes, collects, and interprets (Carless & Douglas, 2016). Narratives provide meaning to life experiences and the world and can enlighten as a form of knowledge and communication (Hamilton et al., 2017). Ethics is a significant concern for the narrative design, which has made the process of the extensive ethics committee and approval process a barrier to timely data collection and analysis (Bruce et al., 2016). As the process evolves, there is a need to
ensure that proper approvals are acquired or maintained. A narrative method is best when the researcher wants to get the experience or information directly from the participant.

**Phenomenology Design.** With phenomenology, research participants describe how they experience a phenomenon, which is then described by the researcher (Creswell, 2014). The emphasis is on the description of the participants being studied without context to the experience (Gaus, 2017). The researcher seeks to understand how participants interpret what they have experienced. A phenomenology study is best suited when the researcher wants to understand the participants’ lived experiences from their points of view.

**Grounded Theory.** Grounded theory is both a methodology (by providing a framework of principles) and a method (by providing a strategy, techniques, or approach to how data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Bakker, 2019; Turner & Astin, 2021). Grounded theory is used to generate an explanatory theory based on data that is systematically collected and analyzed, and the theory is used to explain the phenomenon (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Data analysis occurs as the collection takes place, leading to the evolvement of the study over time. While most research designs initially require literature reviews for identifying gaps, grounded theory is against using literature review as a starting point (Konecki, 2018). The methodology is used when little is known about the phenomenon.

**Case Study.** The case study method is used to conduct an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon, in a real-world context, to better understand all variables involved, how they interact together, and how the phenomenon is interpreted from the context (Ridder, 2017; Verleye, 2019; Yin, 2014). A case study can be quite intricate, and Rashid et al. (2019) recommended following a checklist broken down into phases (i.e., foundation, pre-field, field, and reporting) for an effective study. There are four designs within the case study research
design (no theory first, gap and holes, social construction of reality, and anomalies) that can further guide the research (Ridder, 2017). Case studies are useful in probing a phenomenon more deeply and intensively to understand the how and why an event or problem is taking place without having to put any controls in place (Denny & Weckesser, 2018; Yin, 2014).

**Single Case and Multiple Case Study.** Case study research can be conducted using a single case or multiple cases to explore and understand a phenomenon. With the multiple case study design, data can be obtained from multiple sources to make it easier to generate conclusions. The distinction between a single case study and a multiple case study lies mainly in the data collection process for the purpose of variety, saturation, and triangulation (Yin, 2014). Harrison et al. (2017) encouraged the use of multiple methods for data collection and analysis to provide greater synergy and comprehensiveness of the phenomenon of study. A single case study is beneficial to studying an exclusive case. A multiple case study provides many data points but can become time, labor, and resource intensive due to interaction with multiple sources.

**Appropriateness of Single Case Study.** The use of a single case study is appropriate when the focus is human interpretation and the ascribed meaning to the event (Oliver, 2004). How each individual perceives and understands the same event is different. Qualitative research is a method used to discover and understand how individuals perceive, interpret, or ascribe meaning to an experience or a problem (Creswell, 2014). The problem addressed in this research was the failure of leaders to implement CSR, whereby if the employees perceive leadership behaviors negatively, they could react in ways that cause negative performance.

A qualitative study allows the researcher to gain insight into the thoughts and feelings of the individuals, why they have those thoughts and feelings, and how those thoughts and feelings motivate them to exhibit a particular behavior (Sutton & Austin, 2015). As such, this research
provided insight into how employees in IT organizations perceive their leaders’ initiatives and behavior toward CSR implementation, why they felt engaged or disengaged in their work, and how CSR affects employee performance. According to Koch et al. (2013), qualitative research is instrumental in helping an observer to describe and analyze the social processes, practices, and phenomena and to understand the differences in how participants interpret those social processes, practices, and phenomena according to their situation and social environments. The use of a case study was suitable for this research because it allowed the researcher to study the behaviors of leaders toward CSR initiatives in IT organizations. The case study helped to understand how employees perceive their leaders’ behavior and how these perceptions influence employees’ behavior toward CSR implementation.

The case study design method was suitable for this research because it allowed the researcher to study the event within a real-life setting. The researcher wanted to answer the question of why leaders fail by exploring their behaviors. By using the case study, the researcher could answer the question of why leaders fail to successfully implement CSR by asking the right questions that probed into their CSR-related leadership activities and decisions and the effects of those on employee performance.

Due to the nature of this study, a narrative design was not appropriate due to its inadequacies for collecting enough viable data to understand why leaders fail at implementing CSR. A phenomenology design was inappropriate for this research study. While the participants could describe their experiences in relation to failed CSR implementation and their experience with performance, phenomenology could not provide a holistic view of the issue. The researcher wanted to explore why the issue exists, not just provide a description of it. Grounded theory was not appropriate because using this design required systematic data collection and analysis of data
over an extended period that could lead to developing a theory, which was not the purpose of this study. The issue was confirmed by performing a literature review, which contradicts the premise of grounded theory, where little is known about the issue, and a literature review does not form a foundation for the study.

**Discussion of Triangulation**

Nyein et al. (2020) made a compelling argument for research studies of real-world organizational teams that involve “qualitative methods to complement and enhance quantitative findings” (p. 87). Researchers use triangulation to confirm and validate data and acquire differentiation in data to add depth to the study and to test the quality of data collected (Stake, 2010). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), triangulation originated from researchers’ efforts to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research by addressing credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Triangulation allows the researcher to achieve these in different ways. Tonkin-Crine et al. (2016) asserted that “a triangulation protocol to integrate qualitative and quantitative data can reveal findings that need further interpretation and highlight areas of dissonance that lead to a deeper insight than separate analyses” (p. 7). The four types of triangulations are data, investigator, methodological, and theoretical (Jackson, 2018). According to Moon (2019), each triangulation type can be used as a single method or in combination with any of the others; however, the research questions and research design dictate the type of triangulation necessary as well as how triangulation is applied in a study.

**Triangulation Types.** Data triangulation uses multiple sources of data in a study. According to Yin (2014), the use of data triangulation allows the researcher to collect data from multiple sources for the purpose of authenticating the same finding. This process of authentication can help strengthen the researcher’s confidence in the study. In addition to
collecting multiple sources of data, the provider of the data, location of the data, and timing of the data need consideration (Flick, 2017; Gibson, 2017). The use of data triangulation helps with complementing data, whereby one source of data that might seem weak can be complemented and validated by another set of data that makes the weak data reliable for use (Flick, 2017).

Investigator triangulation involves the use of more than one researcher (investigator, interviewer, observer, analyst) to collect and analyze data. According to Turner and Turner (2009), investigator triangulation is mostly used in studies with qualitative methods where data coding is required. Archibald (2016) stated that investigator triangulation is highly regarded in mixed-methods research because it offers the collaboration of individuals with different research skills (qualitative and quantitative) on a study, giving it more credibility. To enhance the credibility of the research finding, the investigators do not have prior discussions or collaborations to mitigate bias in the research process (Moon, 2019). While investigator triangulation has value among the different research designs, it comes with some drawbacks, such as increased complications of the research making it more laborious, difficulty acquiring the needed analysts, lack of uniformity across multiple investigators, and cost (Noble & Heale, 2019).

Methodological triangulation promotes the use of more than one data collection method and includes a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Noble & Heale, 2019). Creswell (2014) mentioned two forms of methodological triangulation: (a) simultaneous (using two methods concurrently) and (b) sequential (using the results of one method to design the next method). Achieving similar results from the methods used is likely to improve the validity of the study, with the most common approach being the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Turner & Turner, 2009). Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012) stated the benefit of
methodological triangulation in the areas of validation of discoveries, providing more inclusive data, enhanced validity, and comprehension of the phenomenon.

In theoretical triangulation, researchers consider “more than one theory to help guide the research design, research study implementation, and interpretation of data” (Moon, 2019, p. 103). Flick (2017) regarded theoretical triangulation as applying multiple perspectives and propositions to the research process. The use of theoretical triangulation can help provide multiple explanations for a phenomenon by applying multiple perspectives. The use of theoretical triangulation in the interpretation of data is not common but can yield rewarding conclusions when used (Turner & Turner, 2009). It is probable that with multiple theories, perspectives, and hypotheses, this type of triangulation might not always work in many research situations.

Summary of the Nature of the Study

In order to achieve as accurate as possible the desired study results, it is necessary that the researcher uses data triangulation to ensure that all possibilities are explored. A major strength of case study research is the opportunity to use multiple sources of data collection (Yin, 2014). For triangulation, data were collected from both organization leaders and employees who have had experience with CSR initiatives and implementation. This allowed the researcher to have a deeper understanding of how the two groups view CSR, its implementation, and its effects. Qualitative methods that were used for the case study included interviews and questionnaires.

Conceptual Framework

This research framework was built upon the knowledge of leadership as the catalyst for organizational success and especially how leadership behaviors can shape the behaviors of
employees to cooperate with leaders in achieving performance goals (Mastrangelo et al., 2014). This research examined leadership behaviors, how they impact CSR initiatives, how employees perceive leaders’ behaviors and their leaders’ or organizations’ intentions, and how these perceptions affect performance. This framework consists of several elements, including concepts, actors, a theory, and constructs. In this research study, the three main actors were leaders of the organizations, employees of the organizations, and the organizations in which the potential issue was being explored. Therefore, the concepts relating to leadership behaviors, employee performance, and organizational performance were explored. The constructs explored to answer the research question included leadership behaviors, employee performance, and CSR. Together, these helped to understand the issue, why it was happening, and potentially generated a possible resolution. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the conceptual framework and the relationship between the related constructs, concepts, theories, and actors.
This research was focused on concepts found in leadership, employee performance, organizational performance, and CSR activities. The relationship of leadership behavior to employee performance is a widely studied subject (Gottfredson & Aguinis, 2017). Employees value their leaders; consequently, leaders must actively engage or run the risk of disconnecting from employees.

**Proactive Leadership Behaviors Lead to Increased Employee Engagement.** Certain leadership styles which involve influence, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and considerations of the individual employee are important variables in driving organizational performance (Khan et al., 2018). Employees of an organization, as one of its most important assets, must be provided with a sense of commitment to the organizational goals. The
involvement of employees in an organization’s CSR is important because their involvement can form the culture and fabric of the organization, eliminating any appearance of an insincere or artificial attempt at CSR (Nejati et al., 2019).

Leadership styles, such as transformational, servant, and charismatic, are more associated with successful employee engagement and performance. Manzoor et al. (2019) revealed that organizational performance can be influenced by leadership directly on performance and indirectly on performance with CSR and found that “transformational leadership positively and completely predicts job performance” (p. 2). Transformational leaders can communicate effectively with followers, provide clear vision, inspire followers to go above and beyond the call of duty, and they themselves act as role models for followers to emulate, all the while ensuring the needs of their followers are also met (Budur & Demir, 2019).

Strong CSR Initiatives Can Drive Better Employee Engagement. Better employee engagement leads to improved innovation, creativity, and job satisfaction, all of which can lead to better performance for the organization. Employees want meaning in their work that makes them a contributor to society, serve others, use their skills, and fulfill their destinies (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016). One of the ways organizations can engage employees is by allocating adequate resources to implement their CSR initiatives, which increases CSR credibility amongst employees (Nejati et al., 2019). This can positively affect employee perception, which in turn can lead to better engagement.

CSR in organizations has been shown to improve employee engagement because they appeal to the need of an employee to do good in society. When organizations display a genuine interest in their society, they develop better CSR initiatives that enhance their employee OCB,
thereby encouraging creativity and providing employees with a good level of job satisfaction (Sheik & Anisa, 2014).

**Increased Leadership Engagement in CSR Leads to Better Organization**

**Performance.** Better organizational performance is achieved by increasing profit and giving the organization an enhanced positive public image. The level of leadership involvement, which encompasses self-leadership, people leadership, and organizational leadership, is a major factor in determining organizational performance (Koohang et al., 2017). Society tends to view businesses engaged in CSR activities as companies to work for or conduct business with, which contributes to these organizations’ positive image, brand awareness, and profitability (Sinha, 2018). Not all CSR initiatives are a success. The level of involvement of top leadership contributes to CSR success.

**Theories**

Leadership theories explore leadership styles and behaviors that are associated with this research study. Based on years of research studies, organizations continue to put strong leadership at the forefront of vital quality to have, some going to the extent of rigorous vetting to ensure the right leaders with the right style or leadership behaviors are tapped to lead their organizations (Khan et al., 2017). Leadership theories were important to this research study because the central theme of this research was how leaders in IT organizations affected the implementation of CSR initiatives, the CSR perceptions of their employees, and employee performance outcomes. There has been a significant amount of investigative research on authentic and ethical leadership pertaining to CSR, but limited research was available on transformational leadership and its effect on CSR (Manzoor et al., 2019). This research explored the effects of transformational leadership on CSR to gain and expand knowledge.
**Transformational Leadership Theory.** Transformational leadership, which is one of the newest approaches to leadership (Northouse, 2019), has been recognized as one of the leadership styles that has a big impact and direct correlation to improved performance. Transformational leadership involves leaders who influence, motivate, and provide intellectual stimulation to their employees to achieve set goals. According to Korejan and Shahbazi (2016), transformational leaders who motivate, influence commitment, and gain loyalty from other leaders and employees improve organizational performance better during a downturn or threatening business environment and are highly valued by their organizations.

**Servant Leadership.** The servant leadership style has a positive correlation with improved performance. A positive correlation exists between servant leaders and employee performance when leaders allow employees to design their job function, which increases their level of engagement and therefore increases their performance (Yang et al., 2017). There are a few characteristics associated with servant leadership, of which persuasion and conceptualization are reviewed for this research. Persuasion is constant communication leading followers to change, while conceptualization is the leader’s ability to create a vision for the organization, thereby creating the right goals and direction (Northouse, 2019). In order to reach performance goals, leaders need to create a vision and communicate it, and employees must understand it and how it fits into their work.

**Actors**

The actors affected by the problem were top-level leaders responsible for CSR initiatives, organizational employees directly or indirectly engaged in CSR initiatives, and technology organizations as the settings for studying the specific problem.
Executive Leaders. The role of executive leaders as change agents to drive and support socially responsible agendas both internally and externally is expanding as well as becoming critical, as more evidence points to organizational influence on societal issues (Krause & Miller, 2020). The creation of CSR programs, initiation and implementation, and the overall outcomes of CSR can be dependent on several variables, such as a leader’s ideas, influences, and style (Gupta et al., 2020). In this study, leaders are central to the success of CSR, employee performance, and organizational performance.

Organization Employees. Employees represent organizations’ top assets. Research continues to be needed to explore how to properly engage them, keeping them satisfied, committed, enthused, and energized for the work (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016). In relation to CSR, an employee’s role involves giving back to the community, so effectively engaging the employee helps with developing a sense of meaning and commitment that can be incorporated into a company’s practices (Nejati et al., 2019).

Technology Organization. For this study, the technology organization not only uses technology extensively but has the main function of creating and providing technology products and services to its customers.

Constructs

The constructs found in the problem statement and addressed by the research questions included leadership behaviors, employee performance, and CSR. These constructs were explored to understand the nature and outcomes of the interactions.

Leadership Behaviors. Leadership behaviors emphasize what leaders do and how they act with respect to task behaviors and relationship behaviors (Northouse, 2019). Gottfredson and Aguinis (2017) examined four leadership behaviors which include consideration, initiating
structure, contingent rewards, and transformational leadership, as the most dominant behaviors. These behaviors affect task performance and employee performance in various ways.

**Employee Performance.** Employee performance is the measurable outcome set against predetermined criteria or targets for a specific period of time, agreed to by all parties in advance (Pawirosamarto et al., 2017). Employee performance is essential to the success of the organization as a key factor, in addition to leadership competency (Almatrooshi et al., 2016). Performance levels are important to the employee as an indication of the employee’s competency, job satisfaction, and overall organizational fit.

**Corporate Social Responsibility.** CSR is becoming more subjective depending on the industry and organization’s true aim but generally revolves around the use, treatment, and protection of resources, employees, consumers, and the environment, with both internal and external considerations (Sarkar & Searcy, 2016). The outcomes of a few studies pointed to CSR as a corporate reputation and attractiveness enhancer. However, limited study has been made available on how CSR affects existing employees (Chaudhary, 2018). Hastings (2016) asserted that CSR is just another marketing tool for corporations to maximize profits, as the bottom line of any corporation involves enhancing shareholder value and maximizing profitability. The perception of employees on why the organization engages in CSR becomes essential to overall organizational performance.

**Relationships Between Concepts, Theories, Actors, and Constructs**

The concepts found in this research revolve around leadership, employee performance, organizational performance, and CSR. The executive leaders are responsible for CSR initiatives, and successful implementation plays a significant role in employees’ work outcomes and goal achievements which ultimately contributes to the overall organization’s performance goals.
Leaders are examined within the behavioral constructs, while employees are explored within the performance constructs, understanding the various factors that can contribute positively or negatively to performance. CSR links all the actors and concepts found in the study and serves as the point of reference from which all the constructs were studied.

**Summary of the Research Framework**

In conjunction with the conceptual framework, the researcher examined all the variables surrounding leadership, employees, CSR, organizational performance, the applicable concepts, and how they interact to form the basis of the issue. The leadership aspect plays a major role for understanding the leadership behaviors and how they play into CSR initiatives and employee perception and performance. This research study focused on the problem within the IT industry; therefore, technology-oriented organizations formed an appropriate industry of emphasis. The IT industry is unique in regard to CSR because it is dissimilar to industries whose social and environmental impact is readily observable (like the petroleum industry and water pollution, the manufacturing industry and toxic waste runoffs, the clothing industry, child/slave labor, etc.). The effects of industry on society create an opportunity to explore and understand how IT organizations contribute to sustainability.

**Definition of Terms**

The terms listed below are meant to provide an understanding of the recurring themes that are central to this research and are defined as it relates to the study.

**Corporate Social Responsibility.** CSR initiatives are voluntarily undertaken by organizations to address any business social, economic, environmental, and sustainability impact and go beyond any legal/regulatory requirements to do good and address all stakeholder needs (Sarkar & Searcy, 2016).
**Greenwashing.** This term refers to the act of misleading consumers and other affected groups about a firm’s environmental impact or the effects of a product or service on consumers, stakeholders, and sustainability (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

**Employee Performance.** Employee performance is the measurement of an employee’s job duty outcome and roles against set parameters as previously agreed upon by the employee and the organization (Gong et al., 2016).

**Transformational Leadership.** Transformational leadership is the process by which leaders set examples, encourage creativity, motivate, inspire, support, and mentor followers to achieve common goals (Mahmood et al., 2019).

**Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations**

**Assumptions**

Several assumptions guided the study. The first assumption for the study was that the sample participants would accurately represent the larger IT industry. It was assumed that enough participants would participate in the research study. Next, it was assumed that the research tools utilized in the study were valid, reliable, and effective. Another research assumption was that IT organizations had well-defined CSR initiatives that were effectively communicated to employees. Brunton et al. (2015) expressed the importance of CSR communication by leaders to all stakeholders, especially to secure buy-in and agreement. By extension, it was assumed that the research participants fully understood their organization’s CSR initiatives and implications for their roles and the external environment. Thus, it was assumed that employees had an awareness of their internal feelings about their organizations’ CSR programs and could accurately explain how CSR affected their performance. A further assumption was that the study participants had a genuine interest in the successful
implementation of CSR and wanted to provide honest and truthful input into resolving implementation issues. Employees have been found to understand the significance of organizational brand alignment with CSR and to work with such consciousness in ensuring successful CSR implementation (Carlini & Grace, 2021).

Concerning leadership behavior, it was assumed that employees would be truthful in expressing their individual experiences with their leaders and provide unbiased, uncoerced views of leader behavior. By eliminating leadership influence in creating and administering evaluations, and along with confidentiality or anonymity parameters in place, employees can provide unbiased and honest assessments of leader behaviors (Syed et al., 2021). An additional assumption was that both leaders and employees would have a long enough tenure at the organization to accurately understand and assess the CSR landscape of the organization and provide genuine responses in order to provide valid data. When the proper orientation of CSR and company values are readily communicated to employees early on in their tenure, these values encourage positive OCB (Choi et al., 2020).

**Limitations**

A limitation of this study was the eligible organization willing to participate in the study. To ensure adequate participation, the researcher offered a thorough and adequately communicated explanation of the research process to the organizations. Another possible limitation was the number of employees willing to participate in the study, the number of viable results, and the amount of time available to conduct the study. The researcher took all necessary precautions to protect the confidentiality of each participant and communicated these strategies to increase the odds of participation. The interview and survey questions were kept simple for easy understanding but comprehensive enough to elicit detailed responses for in-depth data
collection. The limited number of participants might have reduced generalizability. Generalizability is the measure of the level of applicability of a research study result to a larger or broader group (Hays & McKibben, 2021). While Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that most research studies typically utilize up to five cases, the challenge lies in deciding how many cases to use from the onset of the study.

The ability to gather complete and truthful data was a potential limitation of this study. The use of multiple cases can reduce the limitations that affect the viability of the results. With multiple cases, the number of participants increases, as does the likelihood that the data become representative of the target population. One of the avenues to reduce the limitation of incomplete and inaccurate data involves the use of data triangulation (Yin, 2014). The study might possibly be limited by the time required to access all participants. In addition, personal experience as a research student, resources, and time limitations might have affected the outcome of the study and its generalizability.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations help to define the boundaries of a research study (Creswell, 2014). The effect of leader behavior on CSR implementation and employee performance was the focus of this research. This study was limited to employees of IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area. Therefore, the data collection was delimited to leaders and employees of IT organizations with established CSR initiatives and employees with knowledge of their firms’ CSR initiatives. There were no external participants, and the IT organizations were solely responsible for their CSR implementation. Additional delimitations included research location, population, and sample selection criteria. The research location was the Washington, DC metro area that includes nearby cities in the states of Maryland and Virginia, as well as Washington, DC. The study was
limited to IT firms in Washington, DC metro area due to the time allotted to complete the research study. Due to this delimitation, the result of the study may not be transferable to IT firms outside of the Washington, DC metro area or employees of other IT firms.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant to the field of leadership and the subject of employee performance because this field continues to evolve. CSR is an important topic for organizations as issues of environmental sustainability, and societal concerns by consumers continue to be at the forefront (Hastings, 2016). An organization’s participation in socially responsible initiatives, especially taken at the strategic levels, is considered a predictor of how the organization will perform (Nguyen et al., 2019). Current literature seemed to point to a significant impact of the undertakings of CSR influencing employee performance (Story & Castanheira, 2019) but did not pinpoint specific or conclusive factors for the impact. The significance of employees as organizations’ most important assets (Northouse, 2019) commanded the necessity and importance of understanding and finding a solution to employee performance for technology firms. CSR has been shown to have a positive influence on employees; however, the outcome of employee performance is largely influenced by how leaders perceive their intent toward company CSR initiatives (Inceoglu et al., 2018). This study’s findings helped provide understanding for those behaviors helpful in successful CSR implementation and employee performance and significant to IT firms, as research on CSR in this industry was lacking.

**Reduction of Gaps in the Literature**

The significance of this study was that the information derived from the research might help to reduce the existing gap in the knowledge of effective leader behaviors needed for successful CSR implementation in IT firms. According to Bernal-Conesa et al. (2017), while the
literature focused on large and small companies’ CSR exists in different sectors, just a few studies were available for or referenced IT companies, creating gaps this study could fill (Guadamillas-Gómez et al., 2010). The larger category of IT firms might find this study useful as a starting point to address issues they might be facing with their CSR implementation and employee performance by examining their leader behaviors. In a survey of employees involved in CSR implementation, participants stated leaders tend not to follow through on CSR initiatives, giving them a perception of not having a genuine interest in socially responsible actions that depresses their enthusiasm toward their job roles, place of work, and purpose (Latif & Sajjad, 2018). This finding is not surprising considering that Keller and Alsdorf (2016) expounded on the need for employees to have a sense of purpose that goes beyond earning a living and exists beyond just their personal lives.

Therefore, this study was conducted to accomplish two outcomes. First, the purpose was designed to close the gap between behaviors and actions exhibited by leaders toward CSR implementation that employees might perceive as deceptive and the effects on employee performance. Second, the research findings added to the existing literature on behaviors for successful CSR implementation, specifically in IT firms.

**Implications for Biblical Integration**

This research study included leaders, employees, CSR, and performance. Each of these concepts has the backing of the scriptures, indicating the importance of each subject matter to God. Leaders and leadership are essential in every area of life, including self-leadership (leading oneself). Indeed, “without wise leadership, a nation falls; there is safety in having many advisers” (NLT, Proverbs 11:14); this proverb is an indication of the impact of leadership and why the process of leadership must be performed right. The Bible implores leaders to “be sure
you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds” (NIV, Proverbs 27:23), as demonstrative of the importance and impact of leaders on their employees. One can infer from this passage that the flock (i.e., employees) are so important that the leaders have been commanded not to take them lightly. This proverb offered an example of the impact leaders have on their followers’ performance and should not be taken lightly. Leaders hold the key to employee performance and in essence an organization’s success.

Employees want work that is meaningful, rewarding, and dignified and makes them feel like contributors to the good of society (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016). Engaging in CSR provides some level of fulfilling this need because “if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (NKJ, 1 Timothy 5:8). This admonition is an expression of social responsibility to others who are, at least, the closest to each other. Similarly, organizations’ leaders and employees are expected to behave responsibly toward those impacted by their business activities. The Bible contains directions on how employees ought to conduct themselves: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (NKJ, Ecclesiastes 9:10). Therefore, employees in whatever capacity they find themselves must give their very best effort in whatever they have been tasked to do.

While a leader’s actions can be demoralizing at times, employees must, in “whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (NIV, Colossians 3:23). In other words, employees should do their best regardless of how they perceive their leaders. One can reason from this passage that employees need to produce their best effort, regardless of leadership or management’s accountability, but such effort is not always seen in
today’s society. Incorporating biblical truths into this study can provide all actors with improved ways of conducting business for successful outcomes.

**Benefit to Business Practice and Relationship to Cognate**

This researcher’s field of study is leadership. This research study is directly related to leadership and how leader behaviors can affect the implementation of CSR initiatives in their organization. CSR is a strategic business practice for many firms because of its impact on organization’s reputation and as a predictor of growth and competitiveness (Rahman & Norman, 2016). The successful implementation of strategic plans falls under the purview of executive leadership. In relation to the leadership cognate, it is important that leaders set the right tone, attitudes, and expectations for CSR and be visible as credible champions of a good cause or good social stewardship and not be in it just for image, profit, or for competitive purposes. This research study ensured that leader actions and behaviors that contribute to success are discussed and expounded on.

**Summary of the Significance of the Study**

This study directly explored leadership behaviors, CSR, and employee performance, topics that are very relevant to organizations. These three interrelate with each other and have a direct cause and effect. Employees are considered organizations’ most important asset, whose needs are becoming relevant to leaders, and understanding what affects employees’ performance is important in order to have an efficient and productive organization. This makes this study significant to the field of leadership. The study was conducted to reduce the research gaps between leader behaviors, CSR implementation, and its effects on performance issues. The study addressed leader behaviors, CSR implementation, and its effects on performance issues in relation to IT firms with the intent to add to the existing literature on CSR in IT firms, currently
expressed by several studies as lacking and needing more research for future growth. The Bible is sometimes referred to as the manual for life, and in both the old and new testaments, many passages support leadership, CSR, employee performance, and how work should be conducted.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The main objective of this research study was to explore the relationship between leadership behaviors, implementation of CSR initiatives, and the impact of both on employee performance. The starting point of any research is the discovery of existing information that may be used as foundational knowledge and as a guide for the research. A literature review can assist researchers in identifying the nuances of a particular subject, identifying missing information, or presenting areas of further study on a subject. While aggregating information from literature, it is important to explore both supporting and contradictory information to provide a well-rounded view of the subject or topic. Snyder (2019) affirmed the importance of the literature review’s relevance in business research as a research method itself to address issues present in traditional literature reviews.

The primary focus of this literature review was to accumulate and analyze as many available peer-reviewed scholarly resources as possible to identify recurring themes relating to leadership behaviors, CSR initiative implementation, and employee performance. The researcher explored the literature to learn about the relationships between leader behavior and employee performance, leader behavior and CSR implementation, and CSR perception and employee performance. By understanding the current and existing literature, the researcher could identify certain characteristics that might interplay together and how these could be applied to the research purpose and problem. The literature review acted as a foundation to study patterns and find missing connections and fill in gaps and add to existing knowledge with the concluding
research. The most recent literature on these topics was used to ensure up-to-date information appeared in the review.

**Business Practices**

Almost every organization has some level of CSR involvement within (and/or without) the organization considered to be essential for business survival in the present climate. This is because the business world is fraught with a history of unethical behaviors that result in consequences that not only affect culprit organizations but also affect other organizations in similar industries (Lamberti & Lettieri, 2009). Engaging in CSR-related activities has become a way for organizations to show both internal and external stakeholders, consumers, communities, etc., that they are ethical and trustworthy in their business practices.

In many cases, CSR is synonymous with business ethics. Organizations get involved with CSR to show they care about how they impact others directly or indirectly and are diligent in using and replenishing resources. According to Lamberti and Lettieri (2009), one of the highly affected industries is the food industry, where the globalization of the supply food chain, lack of transparency, food safety and security issues, increasing food-related health issues, past issues with labeling and ingredients, and GMO related concerns causes a very high level of mistrust. It is not enough to tout CSR on corporate documents and newsletters or corporate websites because consumers want to see actual evidence of such endeavors.

Both consumers and employees share an interest in seeing organizations’ leaders do what they say and behave ethically. Organizations have multiple options to undertake CSR initiatives, and these can both be internal and external (Hameed et al., 2016; Jia et al., 2019). Undertaking CSR activities is a strategic endeavor for any organization. The decisions on what, when, and where CSR takes place must be well planned and executed, and all financial implications must
be identified and addressed (S, 2018). Despite what organizations might portray, the financial implications of CSR are at the forefront as leaders balance stakeholders’ needs and others who are affected (Singh & Misra, 2021). In addition to internal versus external CSR, organizations can decide to outsource CSR to take full advantage of CSR activities, which otherwise might not be possible if undertaken in-house.

**Corporate Social Responsibility**

**CSR Definitions/Overview.** As organizations are increasingly seen as an essential part of the immediate community and society at large, so has CSR involvement and evolvement increased (Ahmadian & Khosrowpour, 2017; Gamble et al., 2019). As businesses have evolved into a myriad of business activities, so have the types of CSR addressing such business activities. CSR has evolved over the years from simply doing good within the immediate society to addressing issues, such as labor standards, human rights, anti-corruption, and environmental, all at the local and international levels (Wang et al., 2016). CSR applies to most businesses and organizations, regardless of industry. There is a need for responsible action toward direct and indirect consumers of products and services in all industries, some more significantly than others.

The definitions of CSR abound as much as there are different organizations, creating an absence of a universally accepted definition and many referring to it in different terms altogether (Ahmadian & Khosrowpour, 2017). CSR is used interchangeably with sustainability, which covers the economic, social, and environmental aspects, the three scope of issues under which all other issues can be classified (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018). Sometimes, CSR may be used synonymously with business ethics. CSR is practiced worldwide and produces different models of implementation in different parts of the world, such as the American model, European model,
Russian model, and Latin American model. All the models are characterized by the social, cultural, and governmental landscapes in which the organizations operate (Madrakhimova, 2014). These different models address issues pertaining to the culture and governmental landscape in which an organization operates. Consequently, it is imperative that organizations operating in the international market space are knowledgeable of these models and understand the cultures in which they operate to ensure CSR success and avoid running afoul of laws and regulations. Gamble et al. (2019) emphasized the need for leaders and corporations operating internationally to be aware of local ethical standards as these vary by location; moreover, leaders must identify the extent to which some standards of right and wrong transcend all cultures.

The different types of organizations involved in practicing CSR and the ever-evolving concept of CSR increase the difficulty of providing a standardized CSR definition. The following six recurring themes of what constitutes CSR have been used over the past six decades: (a) economic, (b) social, (c) ethical, (d) sustainability, (e) stakeholders, and (f) voluntary (Sarkar & Searcy, 2016). The presence of these six themes suggested the proper or legitimate practice of CSR. Sarkar and Searcy (2016) postulated the following about CSR:

Firms must foremost assume their core economic responsibility and voluntarily go beyond legal minimums so that they are ethical in all of their activities and that they take into account the impact of their actions on stakeholders in society, while simultaneously contributing to global sustainability. (p. 1433)

The abundance of definitions may be counterintuitive to the intention of many organizations. According to Ahmadian and Khosrowpour (2017), too many definitions of CSR exist because of industry type and special organizational interests and deter organizations from properly implementing CSR. They posited that ensuring organizations’ CSR initiatives are
closely related to the organizational purpose and solving a problem within the organizational sphere of practice increases the possibility of a successful implementation.

**History of CSR.** The word CSR may sometimes connote a recent mainstream phenomenon, even though CSR is not new to the business or the governmental/regulatory world. CSR was first used in 1950 by Howard Bowen when highlighting the need for businesses to participate in issues that affect society and presenting it as an area for academic research (Tsilikis, 2020). Issues are not just ones created by businesses because of their business activities. Issues naturally occur within the communities served. Businesses can be a source of solutions within their communities.

CSR has been around for more than six decades and is practiced in various forms, even as organizational behaviors and societal norms change. CSR continues to evolve as social and public expectations of organizations change; however, CSR depends on internal employees as a major factor for success (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). Due to the undeniable effects of CSR on organizations and businesses, it has become an increasingly relevant area of study with high academic and professional interests as different dimensions emerge (Nave & Ferreira, 2019).

While Latapí Agudelo et al. (2019) noted that the responsibilities of executives and the social performance of organizations began to appear in literature as early as the 1930s, Barić (2017) explained that the concept of social responsibility took prominence in the 1950s and 1960s, especially within the scientific and business circles. Understanding the origin and history of CSR and its trajectory through time can be beneficial to academic and business practice. CSR is still developing as the nature of business is changing and requiring newer ways to address social responsibility. Previous CSR practices can aid the continuous development of the field. Phillips et al. (2019) recognized the importance of understanding the historical context of CSR.
and how organizations in the past had handled CSR-related issues or wrongdoings from a scholarly standpoint in order to provide depth to future CSR practices. Chung and Jiang (2017) reasoned that for long-standing organizations, CSR could help with avoiding repeating mistakes, while younger organizations could learn from others’ experiences. With historical context, organizational leaders might have information to help define and implement CSR initiatives successfully within their organizations.

**Benefits of CSR.** The benefits of CSR are perceived according to who is affected, the reasons for CSR activities, and the level of involvement. The benefits of CSR include enhanced employee engagement, enhanced organization-stakeholder relationships, improved public trust, better financial performance, increased profits, improved support for local and global communities, and growth and investment opportunities (Stawicka, 2017). The perception of benefit depends on the direct impact of CSR to the beneficiary.

CSR can be exercised from four dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2018). Organizations can benefit from a wholesome image and reputation, which can lead to increased profits, while employees can benefit from community involvement and the opportunity to have a positive impact (Koch et al., 2019). The legal dimension of CSR seems to elicit the least favorable amongst stakeholders due to the notion that legal obligation is usually enforced in CSR, probably due to wrongdoing and not a voluntary activity (Lee, Cruz, & Shankar, 2018). These firms tend to suffer from financial losses and unfavorable reputations amongst stakeholders. Aswani et al. (2020) asserted that firms that practice voluntary CSR, such as those with philanthropic intentions, tend to benefit more than firms where CSR participation is mandated. In contrast, Juniarti (2020) showed that CSR-mandated firms tend to be more favorable for conducting business due to the mandated requirements in place that hold them
accountable for doing the right thing, making them safer for transactions. This does not necessarily mean the organizations are trusted, even though consumers appreciate the businesses being regulated for their protection.

Employees’ perceptions of their benefits can affect their levels of work engagement. Employees and other stakeholders take into consideration the four dimensions from which the organization is operating its CSR and determine their levels of involvement accordingly (O’Brien et al., 2020). Employees of sin organizations (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, firearm, adult entertainment), which are mostly mandated for legal and ethical reasons, view CSR with skepticism and limit their participation (Oh et al., 2016). For example, an employee of a tobacco company might question the benefits of a community information session on the ill effects of tobacco usage in an underserved area because the company continues to produce tobacco products.

CSR within such firms is considered a deflection or distraction from the actual ill effect of their business products and services. Research showed the CSR activities of sin organizations are not altruistic by design, contrary to previously held beliefs. They, in fact, engage in contrary activities to recoup financial resources and lost profits affected by mandated CSR (Ullah & Mateti, 2020). Employee perceptions of benefit are measured by their levels of CSR activity and how active or passive the employees consider their CSR involvement to be (Koch et al., 2019). A well-documented CSR strategy with no tangible organized related activities might raise a red flag. Employees actively participate in an organization’s CSR activities that they consider philanthropical, more beneficial to the community than to the organization (i.e., not profit-driven), not legally or regulation driven, and to have leadership actively involved (O’Brien et al.,
Active participation contributes to employee job satisfaction, which contributes to general well-being, job performance, and organizational performance (Almatrooshi et al., 2016).

**Internal CSR.** Corporations have a responsibility to their employees, their most important assets, to ensure a healthy workforce (Chen & Sriphon, 2021). De Silva and De Silva Lokuwaduge (2020) noted that the impact of CSR on employees had been mostly ignored, with most CSR initiatives focusing on external outcomes. According to Golob and Podnar (2021), CSR literature showed that employees are considered vital stakeholders for CSR results, so research studying employee CSR perceptions and the consequences of those perceptions continues as a prominent area in business and academics. Internal CSR is social responsibility targeted toward employees. The role of internal CSR is geared toward ensuring that the expectations of employees are met, and the environment is conducive to employee growth; job satisfaction; and overall safety, health, and happiness (Jia et al., 2019).

A major influence on employee CSR perception is internal CSR communication and flow of information, disseminated effectively to stakeholders (including employees) in a manner that is favorable and creates positive impressions (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018). Employees’ perceptions of their organization’s CSR initiatives can lead to a varying number of outcomes, including job dissatisfaction, general life dissatisfaction, reduced job performance, lack of engagement, a negative organizational citizenship behavior, and lack of loyalty to the organization (Golob & Podnar, 2021; Hur et al., 2019; Koch et al., 2019; Stojanovic et al., 2020).

Strategic and well-implemented internal CSR initiatives that are properly communicated, where employees are part of the decision-making with results that are evident, influenced improvements in employee outcomes; enhanced organizations’ external CSR strategies; and branded organizations positively with current employees, potential employees, and other
stakeholders (Carlini & Grace, 2021). In contrast, Chang et al. (2021) revealed that internal CSR could backfire with unintended consequences when employees perceive the CSR communication disseminated by organizational leaders has ulterior motives. In such cases, communications are contradicted by leaders’ lack of follow-through or observed inconsistencies between CSR communication and organizational behavior. CSR’s impact on employee commitment, productivity, and loyalty to the organization (Stojanovic et al., 2020) should not be taken lightly because disloyal employees can be problematic to the organization and other important stakeholders.

**External CSR.** External CSR is geared toward an organization’s external stakeholders and environment/community. Examples of external CSR included addressing issues such as poverty reduction, climate change action, and environmental sustainability (Shen & Zhang, 2017). External CSR may directly focus on a business’ consumers but not necessarily always. The extent to which external CSR aligns with employee interest may be a contributing factor to the level of involvement. Several studies showed employees’ perceptions of CSR as having a significant relationship to the outcomes of their organizations’ CSR activities and external CSR as affecting on employee productivity. For example, Deng et al. (2019) found a direct correlation in the consistency between internal and external CSR and employee perception and productivity levels toward external CSR. They further explained that if employees positively view internal CSR, there is an increase in the efforts toward pushing their organization’s external CSR practices.

While many organizations may equally engage in both internal and external CSR activities, Ye and Li (2020) posited that newer organizations, those typically classified as being in existence less than 8 years, tend to engage more heavily in external CSR than internal CSR.
This may be a strategic action for the organization to build recognition. While this is acceptable in the short term, it creates a problem long term due to a perceived notion that internal employees and their needs are not as important as establishing the organization. This contradiction in messaging can result in stunted organizational growth.

External CSR initiatives receive scrutiny from external stakeholders, considering such efforts are geared toward them. When external CSR activities are examined, the correlation and congruence between the CSR activity and an organization’s business activity can be viewed as the organization’s true intent (Ferreira & Real de Oliveira, 2014). The idea is that when organizations genuinely participate in external CSR in any form, they contribute to their external environment in ways that positively influence, create opportunities, or solve problems (Testa, Boiral, & Iraldo, 2018). Problems do not have to be created by the organizations, but the main goal of implementing CSR is about contributing to the betterment of the community and environment in a tangible capacity while complying with industry or government rules and regulations.

**CSR Disclosure.** CSR disclosure is not a financial disclosure report and serves as a tool to legitimize CSR activities, shape an organization’s public perception, and gain the support and confidence of all stakeholders in the firm’s activities (Gavana et al., 2018). There is an increasing interest in organizations’ CSR initiatives, plans, and activities. In some cases, it is not enough for organizations to acknowledge their involvement in socially responsible activities. Stakeholders (both internal and external) want to see the evidence. Many driving forces dictate if, why, and how an organization chooses to report its CSR activities. According to research conducted by Ali et al. (2017), who studied CSR disclosure in both developed and developing countries, the CSR disclosure agenda is dictated by an organization’s size, sector, and corporate governance and the
political, social, and cultural climates in which an organization operates. Several stakeholders, such as regulators, shareholders, investors, environmentalists, and the general public, influence the CSR disclosure agenda (Ali et al., 2017). This influence determines what is included or not included in the CSR report and how what is included is reported. The various stakeholders use the disclosure information in different capacities as their roles demand.

Some studies showed that CSR disclosure provides organizations with a competitive edge in the marketplace, especially when disclosure is voluntary and not enforced by a regulatory or governing body (Mukherjee & Nuñez, 2019; Sharma & Song, 2018). Sharma and Song (2018) further posited that sin organizations involved in the tobacco, alcohol, gambling, and firearms sectors stand to benefit more from CSR and often engage more in socially responsible activities. In contrast, Yu et al. (2017) studied both state-owned and privately owned enterprises and found no significant differences in the outcomes of CSR disclosure and organizational competitive advantage.

CSR has become a worldwide practice making it necessary to regulate organizations’ CSR activities. Mandatory nonfinancial CSR disclosures serve as a regulatory mechanism across many industries (Jackson et al., 2019). Mandatory requirements provide a standard and the general public with some measure of confidence that organizations follow the rules and are held accountable for their actions (Boiral et al., 2016). Mandatory requirements also mean systems of verification for accuracy are in place, making it more pertinent for organizations to engage in appropriate CSR activities.

**CSR and Information Technology.** IT firms have a significant impact on the practice of CSR. Research findings showed a positive relationship between CSR, competitiveness, and sustainability that fosters innovation (Bernal-Conesa et al., 2017). CSR has been shown to
improve technological innovation outcomes as organizations develop internal resources and capabilities to enhance corporate culture, which in turn enhances the skills and knowledge vital and beneficial for innovation success (Jia et al., 2022).

As IT firms become competitively innovative, emerging initiatives, such as green IT systems, green IT policies, green IT human capital, green IT structural capital, and green IT relational capital, permeate the sector, further demonstrating the significant impact CSR has on the sector (Chuang & Huang, 2016). All these emerging CSR trends use IT to accomplish their initiatives. The benefit of CSR in the IT sector goes beyond cost savings. With a well-crafted IT-related CSR strategy, IT firms can reduce waste, save energy, and reduce carbon footprint. They consequently can become highly efficient in product manufacturing and service delivery and develop concepts that allow for IT operations in an environmentally and socially conscious manner (Chuang & Huang, 2016). An example is a responsible way in which IT organizations use and protect user information. With the proliferation of data generation, data ownership, data accessibility, and data storage, IT firms are constantly conscious of being socially responsible with user/customer data and other forms of electronic information, creating a type of CSR referred to as corporate digital responsibility (Lobschat et al., 2021).

Corporate digital responsibility addresses issues pertaining to the safeguarding of user data from malicious and destructive access and utilization, both from external forces and from nefarious use by the organization, such as selling user data without consent for company gain. Thus, IT firms utilize CSR to address IT security implementation issues based on known CSR influences that include employees’ perceptions and attitudes toward organization outcomes, with the notion that CSR will improve compliance with IT security measures (Kim & Han, 2019). The knowledge of the extent to which security issues can affect any personnel both within and
without the organization makes corporate digital responsibility a forefront issue for mitigating problems.

**The Problem**

**CSR Implementation Practices.** Several factors influence the development of CSR initiatives and the implementation practices of CSR. CSR can be undertaken directly by organizations in a direct hands-on approach, while other organizations outsource their CSR initiatives by encouraging donations to or partnerships with designated charities or nonprofit organizations (Elembilassery & Gurunathan, 2018). The stakeholders affected by CSR are the drivers for how CSR implementation is designed to ensure the intended outcome. According to Singh and Mittal (2019), primary stakeholders consist of customers, employees, and shareholders who have a significant impact on CSR implementation practices. Those identified as secondary stakeholders, such as community groups and nongovernmental organizations, have an insignificant effect on the organizational implementation of CSR practices.

Primary stakeholders, such as the organization shareholders with financial power, have significant input on how the organization should implement CSR (Jamali et al., 2019). They want to ensure CSR outcomes do not negatively impact their financial interest. Rogowski (2018) attested to secondary stakeholders as equally significant and, in some cases, can affect enough change to attract the attention of primary stakeholders who enforce major changes. Rogowski (2018) warned organizations of the implications of placing a certain class of stakeholders above other classes of stakeholders in exercising social responsibility, as this may present a negative perception for the organization. CSR implementation decisions geared toward profit maximizations are perceived as organizational hypocrisy and can cause a mismatch between company purpose and CSR activity and implementation (Zhao et al., 2020). The negative
correlation between these attributes signals a less than altruistic perception and a barrier to successful implementation. Businesses operate to make money, but CSR should not be engaged for the sole purpose of financial gain, although financial performance is an outcome of CSR.

An identified CSR implementation challenge is organization leaders’ lack of total commitment to the CSR initiative (Yamak et al., 2018). Leaders are meant to lead the charge, which followers then take as a sign to follow. Organization leaders should go beyond just being knowledge contributors to CSR initiatives and fully participate in CSR-related activities to show genuine interest (Nejati et al., 2019). Nejati et al. (2019) showed that when leaders believe in CSR activities, they signal to their employees that they value their employees by virtue of their CSR engagement. According to Yamak et al. (2018), leaders’ disinterest and lack of support and participation in CSR activities signal to employees that CSR initiatives are not important for management and not essential to the success of the organization. The practice of outsourcing CSR can represent an organization’s leaders as lacking a genuine interest in committing to worthy causes as they are merely checking off another requirement expected of the organization (Elembilassery & Gurunathan, 2018).

The majority of employees in Nejati et al.’s (2019) survey study believed that being socially responsible meant being close and directly engaged in an organization’s social activities as opposed to other activities like donating funds to other groups to fulfill CSR. Outsourcing CSR deprives employees of the opportunity to participate on a voluntary basis causing some employees to participate in other organizations’ CSR initiatives (Oh et al., 2016). The outsourcing of CSR implementation can contribute to the lack of information on CSR initiatives to employees because leaders do not see a need to communicate details except to those directly involved, further reinforcing a negative view of the organization and leaders (Hultman & Elg,
Lack of knowledge of the extent to which organizations engage in CSR may trigger a negative perception of an unconcerned organization to the employees. Therefore, communicating CSR information about how it is taking place is important.

**Greenwashing.** Greenwashing is the act of misleading consumers and other affected groups about a firm’s environmental impact or the effects of a product or service on consumers, stakeholders, and sustainability (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). When employees perceive their organization’s CSR activities as greenwashing, they are less likely to take a keen interest in related activities and may develop negative behaviors as a way to protest leadership’s perceived deceptive behavior (Rahman et al., 2015). Research showed that the intentional and unintentional act of greenwashing by organization leaders could serve as a deterrent for employees to get actively involved with the implementation of CSR activities and can lead to performance issues (Testa, Boiral, & Iraldo, 2018). Many terms are used to imply environmental, social, sustainable, and ethical products, services, and practices which have created confusion for many consumers and increasing distrust (De Jong et al., 2017; Gosselt et al., 2017). This is mostly due to the creative way organizations use these terms to portray their goods and services in ways to avoid being excluded from certain categories.

Setting regulatory guidelines is seen as a way to address greenwashing by creating standards across industries and monitoring bodies (M. Lee, 2018). Mandatory compliance has helped in many sectors to limit the incidences of greenwashing, but not all industries/sectors are strictly regulated. Pimonenko et al. (2020) disagreed that regulations work because many terms and nuances exist and allow organizations to bypass regulatory requirements. This is due to the fact that many organizations continue to create innovative marketing campaigns and creative
advertising and labeling for their products which inadvertently (or on purpose) convey deceptive messages to consumers (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2018).

In cases where executive leaders are the last point of authorization for certain activities to occur, it has become evident that leaders are the drivers for misleading CSR practices under pressure from stakeholders (Testa, Boiral, & Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2018). Stakeholder pressure has been shown to encourage greenwashing. Several studies showed stakeholder pressures contributing to what is known as CSR-washing: “a disconnect between the positive image projected to stakeholders with regard to CSR and a company’s actual internal practices” (Boiral et al., 2016, p. 57). These stakeholders have financial interests which they are attempting to protect by trying to control the expenditures caused by CSR activities.

Not all stakeholders have the same level of power or authority to affect CSR in ways that leads to greenwashing, and only those stakeholders have the power to impose their will on desired organizational outcomes (Phiri et al., 2018). De Jong et al. (2017) concluded that “greenwashing has only limited benefits (perceived environmental performance), poses a major threat (perceived integrity), and has no true competitive advantage (purchase interest)” (p. 77). Greenwashing affects employees’ green behavior by limiting green and sustainability consciousness in employees and leading to behaviors that are contrary to green practices, further putting the organization at risk of possible violations (Tahir et al., 2020). Additionally, future CSR participation endeavors can be clouded by past misconduct, preventing employees from engaging.

**Employee CSR Perception.** Employee perception of CSR can be driven by several factors, and leaders play a significant role in shaping the perception of CSR in the organization.
Employee perceptions can determine employee performance, and social identity theory can be applied to employee performance in an organization (Davis et al., 2019).

Social identity theory addresses the ways individuals perceive themselves, whether individually or collectively, and how these perceptions shape individual and group behaviors (Davis et al., 2019). Hur et al. (2019) claimed that job performance is influenced by how employees perceive company CSR initiatives. Consequently, a negative perception leads to job dissatisfaction, a low sense of self, negative OCB, and poor job performance. Issues arise when employees do not perceive a connection between their leader’s actions and what the leader communicates, when CSR-related initiatives and related activities are not being supported by leaders, and when CSR initiatives are not in line with an organization’s mission or purpose (Jia et al., 2019).

Another significant perception issue is a lack of communication between leaders and employees, which suggests a lack of transparency about CSR activities, such as expecting employees to engage in CSR activities blindly or without adequate information (Schaefer et al., 2019). Just as employees are unlikely to work for corporations that go against their social, moral, or religious values, they are less likely to get involved with CSR activities that are not in line with those values. According to Schaefer et al. (2019), employees are more likely to perceive CSR unfavorably when they are not well informed about their organization’s CSR activities and purpose or find CSR not to be aligned with what the company does. An oil company running an orphanage in a low-income area in a foreign country might be viewed less favorably than an oil company running an ecological protection and improvement program in the same community where it conducts its business.
In a study examining employees’ knowledge regarding CSR in their organization, employees disclosed that while their organization’s business documents showed a detailed CSR plan, the plan was not communicated to the employees (Brunton et al., 2015). Employees who perceived their leadership as incompetent and dishonest had a negative perception regarding their organization’s CSR activities (Chaudhary, 2020). Boğan and Dedeoğlu (2019) produced conflicting findings on this outcome, showing that despite leadership’s failure in other areas, positive CSR results are perceived favorably. Also, in certain industries, such as sin firms in the alcohol, tobacco, and firearm sectors, employees perceive CSR activities as a positive way to deflect from their organizations’ other irresponsible activities (Sharma & Song, 2018). A negative CSR perception has been shown to result in a lack of creativity and innovation among employees, reducing the eventual performance of the organizations (Choi et al., 2018; Hur et al., 2016). The result of a negative perception is that employees lack the desire and enthusiasm to fully devote time, energy, and other resources to CSR initiatives that they do not view positively.

**Leadership Behavior Challenges.** Leadership is a concept with many facets. There is no one definition. It has evolved over many years and has been studied extensively in academic research, even though explicating it adequately continues to challenge both practitioners and researchers (Northouse, 2019). Leaders can make or break an organization. The leadership challenge for most organizations is finding the right individuals with the skills, knowledge, and competence to lead others (Wieringa, 2019). Leaders’ behaviors matter. Leaders lead their followers in various ways. Northouse (2019) described leadership as either task oriented or relationship oriented, but in both instances, leaders provide structure and nurture their followers.

Followers observe leaders for direction, making the right leadership behavior an important element of leadership. Studies have shown that followers are known to absorb and
exhibit the characteristics of their leaders over time and determine the effectiveness of an organization, making it imperative that leaders’ character and behavior are vital to an organization (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019). Leaders are expected to have a certain level of moral or ethical behavioral aptitude, but incidences of controversial leadership behavior are becoming more rampant, exposing the shortcomings of many leaders at various levels in government, corporations, and educational institutions (Grolleau et al., 2020). Religious institutions are not exempt, either. Some argue that leaders are human and should not be inundated with the expectation that they are on their best behavior at all times (Keck et al., 2018). The problem with this notion is that leaders are meant to set an example, including exercising self-control when it comes to certain situations. If they cannot set this example, their followers cannot be expected to exhibit good behavior.

Others like Grolleau et al. (2020) posited that the role of leadership requires exhibiting the appropriate behavioral qualities to followers who can emulate those qualities while leaving the personal and behavioral challenges experienced in nonwork situations private. This distinction has not always been the case, as high-profile leaders have been reprimanded publicly for negative nonwork-related incidents and forced to resign from their top positions. The premise is that they should be leaders who set examples both during and away from professional situations. CSR is an ethical issue for many organizations, but not all leaders are ethical, as seen in many organizational scandals that tend to be affected by a leader’s personal motives, an organization’s bottom line, and stakeholders’ concerns (Munro & Thanem, 2017).

Studies showed responsible leaders with the right moral identity and behaviors foster environments where green practices and CSR results are easily achievable (He et al., 2020). Unfortunately, leaders are constantly faced with situations that challenge their moral ideas and
affect their leadership behaviors. According to Emler (2019), leaders encounter seven challenges by virtue of their position that can affect their behaviors over a lengthy period. The seven challenges that leaders face include “resisting the temptation of personal gain at collective expense; foregoing the attractions of tyranny; managing justice; pursuing a moral mandate; avoiding mission failure; minimizing collateral damage in pursuit of the mission; and doing good” (p. 35). These challenges can lead to leaders exhibiting negative behaviors toward their followers or employees. According to Mahmood et al. (2020), negative leadership behaviors include apathy, dishonesty, disrespect, and intimidation of employees and negatively impact employees’ perceptions of leadership and overall performance. Finally, CSR-related activities are not viewed favorably with a negative view of leader behavior.

**CSR Implementation Challenges/Barriers to CSR Implementation.** Several barriers to the proper implementation of CSR have been identified and are not uncommon, just as with any project or initiative within an organization. CSR implementation challenges can originate from both leadership and employees (Singh & Mittal, 2019). Lack of leadership support or direction can pose a problem. Employees may lack understanding of the work to be done, be uninterested, or not perceive the work as beneficial to their needs or in line with their value system. Organizational stakeholders and other external factors can create challenges to the successful implementation of CSR when varying views are present among the internal participants, along with pressure from the external community on the organization for various reasons (Nave & Ferreira, 2019). Organizations receive scrutiny for their CSR actions for any reason. It is imperative for leaders to understand the reason for undertaking CSR within their organizations, be clear on intended outcomes, develop and communicate achievable plans to stakeholders, and incorporate the right resources to execute their CSR initiatives (Shen & Zhang,
These efforts can help with properly developing an implementation plan with a higher probability of success.

A major barrier to CSR implementation is communication. Absent, inaccurate, and incomplete communication to any stakeholder of the organization can present a cause for implementation challenges (Friske et al., 2019). Communication is a problem in many organizations, whether lack of communication, overcommunication, or no communication at all. Leaders need to be clear on the mission and use appropriate communication so that followers engage. Constant communication using various effective formats to the right recipients is important to success.

Another mitigating factor for CSR implementation arises from the difference in a company’s products and services and the type of CSR activities it chooses to pursue, causing skepticism both internally and externally (Chung & Jiang, 2017). Lack of congruence between organizational purpose and type of CSR embarked upon can give an impression of less responsibility to the community than to an organization’s profit levels (Pérez, 2019). A questionable CSR initiative is not readily acceptable to affected parties and raises scrutiny of organizational intentions, and employees tasked with CSR-related activities are likely to deflect from participating (Schmitt et al., 2016). Within the organization itself, it can be a challenge to get everyone on board. Since CSR initiatives are usually part of an organization’s strategic mission and purpose, every department must be involved in getting everyone to participate (Schmitt et al., 2016).

Departmental priorities usually present a barrier to a collaborative approach, and leaders must make additional efforts to incorporate all parties (Wieringa, 2019). The collaboration of all departments within the organization toward CSR initiatives is seen as a vital part of the process.
both to the internal and external communities and as an enhancement to a CSR initiative. Some studies suggested organizations create a specific department or group to undertake CSR exclusively to provide adequate expertise and oversight, as opposed to having multiple departments involved (Yu et al., 2017).

Another implementation challenge is cost. This is probably why new firms do not typically engage in CSR. When newer and small firms engage in CSR, they tend to outsource CSR activities due to a lack of in-house resources (Chinomona & Omoruyi, 2016). A true CSR initiative is not geared toward profit enhancement but is developed as an altruistic endeavor toward the community (Abratt & Mingione, 2017). This altruism does not negate the fact that CSR costs an organization in resources. However, the issue is the synergy of agreement amongst organizational leaders about the levels and amounts of resources dedicated to CSR initiatives. CSR becomes a financial decision that needs to be approved by financially affected stakeholders (Bocquet et al., 2015). Leaders may be able to eliminate some of these challenges by planning ahead.

**Concepts**

**Proactive Leadership.** An essential attribute of an effective leader involves being proactive by anticipating events and taking the necessary precautions to enhance or mitigate them, and enhancing current conditions regardless of state (Lam et al., 2018). Proactive leaders tend to be at the forefront of an organization’s mission, can achieve goals easily, and effectively encourage others to join them in taking action (Huang et al., 2019). Due to strategic planning, usually common with proactive leaders, they can quickly take advantage of opportunities and mitigate threats (Yang et al., 2020). Reactive leaders, in contrast, tend to take on issues or deal with events as they come (LeChasseur, 2017). They tend to lose out on opportunities due to a
lack of planning and inability to react quickly and when required and are more likely to be affected by threats due to unpreparedness (House, 2018).

A proactive leader is most likely to promote better engagement amongst employees. According to Yang et al. (2020), proactive leadership is a catalyst for a highly engaged workforce because leaders are highly organized, highly interactive, develop strong communication structures, thrive on information sharing, are very good at inspiring others, and are passionate about organizational mission and purpose. In addition, proactive leaders set priorities and engage in activities that are necessary, making use of employee time and company resources appropriately (Lam et al., 2018). Huang et al. (2019) added that proactive leaders better garner cooperative team support and commitment, which is a direct prediction of team performance. According to Schmitt et al. (2016), “being proactive means anticipating future outcomes, striving to control and improve the environment, and to initiate action and change without being asked to do so” (p. 590). Barić (2017) noted that being proactive regarding CSR involved leaders having a solid understanding of past CSR-related incidences, whether internally or in other similar organizations, and using the knowledge to preempt potential issues as they lead their organization. This usually involves a thorough examination of business practices to identify potential green/environment-related areas of concern and a strategic plan for possible events (Kumar & Paraskevas, 2018).

Just as with other strategic planning, a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis could be utilized to develop CSR activities. Proactively undertaking CSR-related activities in anticipation of a potentially negative event is seen as a genuine effort by an organization to mitigate problems or enhance its communities (Štumberger & Pauly, 2018). Others see may see a proactive coverup. Rim and Ferguson (2017) noted the skepticism of some
environmental crisis victims gave the impression that the culprit firm’s CSR initiatives were designed to deflect from the damage the firm had already done and to avoid public exposure that could reveal the magnitude of the crisis. Facebook, an IT/social media organization, came under much scrutiny after it was revealed that it had leaked user data without user knowledge and consent, and the follow-up attempts to rectify the issue were considered worse than an attempt at CSR (Grolleau et al., 2020).

Many IT organizations have been caught unprepared for events involving user information and other privacy matters. Investigations showed that many would have been avoided, and in some cases, leaders of some IT firms knew the potential issues looming but did not take action to mitigate them. Proactively preventing data breaches by putting in the appropriate measures would indicate a genuine effort by leaders wanting to show responsibility for protecting users’ data (Grolleau et al., 2020).

**CSR Implementation and Employee Engagement.** Properly defining the purpose of CSR implementation and increasing employee awareness of CSR activities builds employee loyalty and leads to an increase in employee engagement (Stojanovic et al., 2020). The level of leadership involvement, which encompasses self-leadership, people leadership, and organizational leadership, forms a major factor in determining how CSR is implemented and the resulting organizational performance (Koohang et al., 2017). Society tends to view businesses engaged in CSR activities as companies to work for or conduct business with, contributing to a positive image, brand awareness, and profitability (Sinha, 2018). CSR implementation must be well crafted for success and to include all affected stakeholders.

Not all CSR initiatives are a success. The level of involvement of top leadership contributes to the level of success, a critical aspect considering that CSR falls in the strategic
component of the organization (Munro & Thanem, 2017). Without the expressive involvement of leadership, it is difficult to sell the plan to employees, who view their leaders’ involvement as a window into the importance of CSR. Best practices indicate engaging employees in the planning and implementation process increases general work engagement as well as CSR performance (Mishra & Schmidt, 2018). Engaging employees gives them a vested interest in the outcomes of CSR and a sense of ownership, driving forces to ensure the CSR initiatives are successful.

**Benefits of Enhanced Employee Engagement.** Better employee engagement leads to improved innovation, creativity, and job satisfaction, all of which can lead to better performance for the organization (Hur et al., 2016). Employees want meaning in their work that makes them a contributor to society and people who serve others, use their skills and fulfill their destinies (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016). Employees of an organization, as one of its most important assets, must be provided with a sense of commitment to the organizational goals. The involvement of employees in an organization’s CSR is important to forming the culture and fabric of the organization and eliminating any appearance of an insincere or artificial attempt at CSR (Nejati et al., 2019). Employee engagement costs organizations billions of dollars per year, as employee disengagement is considered a threat to global socio-economic sustainability (Khattak et al., 2019). A very high percentage of workers are not engaged in their work, which costs companies in productivity and profits (Wolff, 2019).

CSR in organizations has been shown to improve employee engagement because they appeal to the need of employees to contribute positively to their community (Vlachos et al., 2013). Organizations benefit from the external feedback they receive, which could be used to further develop better initiatives. One of the ways organizations can engage employees is by allocating adequate resources to implement their CSR initiatives and increase CSR credibility.
amongst employees (Nejati et al., 2019). This can positively affect employee perception, which in turn can lead to better engagement. Improved engagement is directly correlated to increased financial bottom-line for the organization (Mukherjee & Nuñez, 2019). When organizations display a genuine interest in their society, they develop better CSR initiatives that enhance their employee OCB to encourage creativity and promote employees’ job satisfaction (Sheik & Anisa, 2014).

Theories

Leadership Theory. Leadership theories have emerged over time, continue to evolve, and new knowledge continues to be developed. Based on years of research studies, organizations continue to put strong leadership at the forefront of organizational quality and use rigorous vetting to hire the right leaders with the right leadership style or behaviors to lead their organizations (Khan et al., 2017). Many theories on leadership exist, but the earliest definitions emerged in the early 1920s when the roles of leaders began to gain attention as an important area of interest (Khan et al., 2017). According to Northouse (2019), despite the numerous evolutions of leadership definitions over many decades, the central tenets are leadership is a process that involves influence, occurs in groups, and requires common goals.

Leadership styles are observed with effects on the topic of CSR and its implications. There is a significant amount of investigative research on authentic and ethical leadership in CSR, but limited research is available on transformational leadership and its effect on CSR (Manzoor et al., 2019). Although the research may not be as robust as with authentic and ethical leadership, in a large-scale study conducted by Du et al. (2012), organizations with transformational leadership demonstrate high engagement in CSR practices over other forms of leadership. This finding provided the grounds for more investigative research into
transformational leadership and CSR to expand the available knowledge. The knowledge and understanding of the various styles of leadership can facilitate the process of hiring the right leaders who are properly matched to the right organization and culture and the right job (Yang et al., 2020). For CSR, the leadership behaviors exhibited by transformational and servant leaders seem to resonate more effectively for CSR success than leaders who apply any other leadership styles (Schmitt et al., 2016; Yamak et al., 2018).

**Transformational Leadership.** Transformational leadership is one of the newest approaches to leadership, according to Northouse (2019, and has been recognized as one of the leadership styles that has a significant impact on and direct correlation to improved performance. Transformational leadership is a highly sought-after style desired by organizations in the business world and includes qualities believed to enhance organizational outcomes significantly in many areas (Yang et al., 2020). The four distinct behavioral attributes associated with transformational leadership are inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Kim & Shin, 2017). Transformational leaders, in addition to servant leaders and charismatic leaders, are more associated with successful employee engagement and performance (Mahmood et al., 2019). Transformational leadership, whose underlying concept of vision and influencing followers to adopt the vision, is considered one of the most popular models of leadership. More leaders are developing their transformational behaviors in order to change their organizations and followers (Bush, 2018).

Transformational leadership involves the influence, motivation, and intellectual stimulation of the employee to achieve set goals. According to Korejan and Shahbazi (2016), transformational leaders who motivate, influence, show commitment, and gain loyalty from other leaders and employees improve organizational performance better during a downturn or
threatening business environment. Transformational leaders are highly valued by organizations because they communicate effectively with followers, provide a clear vision, inspire followers to go above and beyond the call of duty, and act as role models for followers to emulate, all the while ensuring the needs of their followers are met (Budur & Demir, 2019). In a study conducted by Manzoor et al. (2019), leadership behaviors directly influenced organizational performance and indirectly influenced CSR performance to suggest that “transformational leadership positively and completely predicts job performance” (p. 2). Breevaart and Zacher (2019) further pointed to the high levels of trust between transformational leaders and their followers as a factor affecting job engagement and performance.

**Servant Leadership.** Servant leadership is an approach to leading through which leaders focus their behaviors on the needs of their followers to nurture, empower, and help them to develop their full potential and capacity (Liao et al., 2020; Northouse, 2019). The servant leadership style has a positive correlation with improved performance, and a significant increase in performance occurs when employees are given a certain level of autonomy at work, which increases their awareness of responsibility for tasks. A positive correlation exists between servant leaders and employee performance when leaders allow employees to design their job functions, which increases employee engagement and performance (Yang et al., 2017).

The characteristics associated with servant leadership are persuasion and conceptualization. Persuasion involves constant communication for leading followers to change, and conceptualization is the leader’s ability to create a vision for the organization, thereby creating the right goals and direction (Northouse, 2019). According to Lee et al. (2019), servant leadership has been shown to affect performance-related areas and behavioral areas, including task performance, team performance, work performance, organizational team behaviors,
counterproductive behaviors, and creativity. In addition to the high level of communication taking place between servant leaders and their followers, servant leaders are known to walk the walk to set the example to follow, thereby giving followers the confidence that tasks are worth performing (Brunton et al., 2015). Additionally, the altruistic nature of servant leaders has been shown to have a positive impact on employee creativity, encourage an environment of trust and safety, and inspire new and better innovative ways of thinking and working (Lee et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, the behaviors and characteristics found with servant leadership may be an issue in some circumstances. According to Liao et al. (2020), the dynamics with which servant leaders operate and engage daily with followers can be detrimental to the leaders’ well-being and could be a cause of daily depletion, leading to an increased laissez-faire behavior on subsequent days. Servant leaders are highly engaged with multiple employees on a regular basis which may be a cause of energy depletion and mental burnout. Liao et al. (2020) suggested that servant leaders need to engage in greater perspective taking (from others) and daily self-control from the urge to do everything by allowing followers to take more risks on tasks. Servant leaders have a great need and desire to meet the needs of others and often put themselves at risk. The needs of the servant leader translate well with CSR and the desire to see the needs of the community are being met (Song & Ferch, 2020). Leaders with other behavioral traits or styles may be able to learn certain attributes of the servant leader and include them into their styles when needed.

**Constructs**

**Leadership Behaviors.** Leadership roles exist at different levels within an organization. Leaders perform various tasks and responsibilities and set examples for followers to emulate (Yang et al., 2020). Emery et al. (2019) asserted the importance of leadership roles, behaviors,
and attitudes and how they are perceived by employees and how the employees take on leader attributes or shun them, and outcomes, including performance issues.

**Significance/Impact of Leadership Behaviors.** The impact of leadership behavior was explored in relation to CSR and employee performance. Leader behavior can have a significant impact on the organization as a whole and has been known to create certain cultural environments within an organization, as described by employees, either positively or negatively (Barksdale & Werner, 2001). The so-called leader culture dictates the organizational culture and is usually brought about by the style or behavior of the leaders and how they interact with their fellow leaders and followers. Leader culture has such a strong connection that, in most cases, an organization’s culture will change along with a change in leadership (Budur & Demir, 2019).

Organizational culture can exist departmentally, meaning different sectors or departments within the organization could have different cultural experiences from each other based on their leaders’ characteristics and behaviors. These differences may contribute to the reasons why some departments are considered better than others within the same organization and why employees would rather work in those departments. According to Gottfredson and Aguinis (2017), a group of employees may find it difficult to perform and excel at their tasks if they have a negative view of their leader’s behavior toward them or others, reducing their motivation to perform.

Performance issues may extend toward interactions in any capacity with fellow employees. In severe cases, negative leader behaviors can lead to high turnover, with employees relocating to different departments or exiting the organization altogether. Leaders’ behaviors toward CSR initiatives can directly affect CSR performance outcomes as a strategic activity with business value and with long-lasting implications (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2017). CSR outcomes affect a firm’s reputation, and perceived leader behavior may be seen as a genuine interest of the
organization toward its stakeholders and the community (Testa, Boiral, & Iraldo, 2018).

According to Mahmood et al. (2020), the leadership behaviors of abuse, apathy, dishonesty, disrespect, and intimidation were found to negatively affect employees’ CSR perceptions and led to adverse employee outcomes, including low performance and high turnover. When operating from the social dimension of CSR, leader behavior becomes critical to socializing CSR not only with the community but also with internal stakeholders who could view certain behaviors as counterproductive to the intent of a CSR initiative (Lamberti & Lettieri, 2009).

**Leadership Behaviors and Employee Engagement.** Employee engagement can be defined as the level at which employees express their work roles physically, emotionally, and psychologically with passion, immersion, eagerness, energy, commitment, and satisfaction (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016). According to Wiley (2010), leaders must first understand the nature of employee engagement and set the right environment to facilitate positive employee engagement. The effects of lack of employee engagement are considered so devastating for organizations that employee engagement has become a major area of concern for organizations and research fields. Energy has been devoted to finding new and better ways to engage employees. The issue is of national consequence causing the federal government’s Office of Personnel Management to create an initiative specifically to address employee engagement and performance (Hameduddin & Lee, 2019).

Lack of employee engagement is a drain on financial resources for everyone concerned and prevents organizations from accomplishing their purpose or mission as planned. Emphasizing the need for increased levels of business success for organizations, highly motivated and engaged employees are needed, and leaders are responsible and need to be empowered to build such an environment to achieve goals (Wiley, 2010). Although not the only
factor for employee engagement, the role of leadership has been well documented, especially transformational leadership and its effect on employee engagement daily (Breevaart & Bakker, 2018). Nikolova et al. (2019) pointed out the large body of studies demonstrating the strong connection between employee work engagement and favorable leadership behaviors, such as those found with transformational, authentic, and servant leadership, and specifically mentioning the predominance of transformational leadership on employee engagement.

Ethical leader behaviors contribute to positive well-being and encourage employee energy, interest, commitment, and engagement in their work (Mitonga-Monga, 2018). As followers watch their leaders, they emulate their behaviors. Wiley (2010) provided some drivers for employee engagement stating leaders must minimize uncertainty by providing employees with confidence in the future. Leaders “must demonstrate respect and recognition for their employees, and the organization must demonstrate genuine concern for employees and the communities in which they operate” (Wiley, 2010, p.49). Wiley added that employees should have a job they find exciting and interesting, emphasizing that employee engagement is not completely the sole responsibility of leaders because employees have a role to play. The first step to employee engagement involves organizations hiring employees who fit the right job and show the right organizational fit.

Considering the implications of CSR, studies showed CSR as a tool to improve employee engagement. Ferreira and Real de Oliveira (2014) showed that “the more a company actively engages in CSR practices, the more engaged their employees are” (p. 233). While such studies are not novel to the field, delving further into the CSR dimension being utilized by the organization can offer useful information due to differences in purpose and execution. Ferreira and Real de Oliveira further suggested more employee engagement with the practice of both
internal and external CSR, attributing equally to the outcome. With internal CSR, employees are catered to and more readily engage in external CSR. With external CSR alone, employees might view an organization’s intent negatively by viewing the organization as neglecting its workforce, its most important asset. They may perceive the organization as having more value for the external community to which they are providing free services. Balancing internal and external CSR is critical for organizations.

**Leadership Behaviors and Employee Performance.** Leaders have the task of evaluating or assessing the performance of their employees. A specific leader behavior known as empowering leader behavior has been shown as an important behavior in encouraging employee performance (Huang et al., 2018). The empowering leader behavior is closely related to the idealized influence attribute of transformational leaders, which encourages “strong work commitments and determination to achieve the organization’s mission and vision” amongst employees (Kim & Shin, 2017, p. 252). Transformational leaders are known to empower and inspire followers to produce the most performance outcomes (Huang et al., 2018).

Leaders’ relationship-focused behaviors directly affect employees’ attitudes toward their work, which in turn affects their performance (Wang et al., 2011). When employees feel empowered, they are more likely to perform better. Empowering leader behaviors toward employees that enhance their job skills and promote performance include leading by example (i.e., servant leader, transformational leader), communication, coaching, team relationships, and inclusive decision-making (Huang et al., 2018). These leader behaviors toward employees can engage employees, and engaged employees foster positive performance outcomes (Obuobisa-Darko, 2019). Leaders are expected to exhibit ethical behaviors in their relationships with
employees to prevent employees from developing negative attitudes toward their leaders, fellow employees, and the entire organization.

**Employee Performance.** Employee performance is the measurable outcome set against predetermined criteria or targets for a specific period and agreed to by all parties in advance (Pawirosumarto et al., 2017). Employee performance plans are created and reviewed at the beginning of the year (fiscal or calendar) to provide employees with a template of what goals or accomplishments are expected of them and the criteria on which they are measured. Employee performance is essential to the success of the organization as a key factor, in addition to leadership competency (Almatrooshi et al., 2016). Performance levels are important to the employee as an indication of the employee’s competency, job satisfaction, and overall organizational fit.

Many factors can affect employee performance within an organization, including leader behavior and perception, organizational culture, work assignment, and human resource practices, such as recruitment, training, appraisals, and compensation (Barksdale & Werner, 2001). The appropriate resources and skills are needed for the employee to perform successfully and should be provided by the organization. The environment or culture created by leaders is a precursor to performance outcomes, including providing the resources required by employees to perform their work effectively (Schmitt et al., 2016). Considering performance tasks are assigned in relation to organizational objectives and outcomes, employee performance could directly be indicative of the organization’s performance.

**CSR and Innovation.** One of the effects of CSR on firms is innovation, as organizations continue to develop ways to enhance their products, reduce their impact on the environment, increase sustainability, and find better ways of conducting business (Wu et al., 2018). Other
studies showed a contrasting outcome on CSR and innovation. While Bocquet et al. (2015) concluded in their findings that CSR impacts firm performance through increased innovation, Mithani (2017) revealed CSR can have a negative impact on research and development. This typically occurs with new or smaller firms due to limited resources. Chinomona and Omoruyi (2016) posited that this negative impact may be a contributor to why smaller organizations do not typically engage in CSR-related activities or do so in a limited scope. Smaller organizations are more likely to outsource their CSR than larger organizations due to their limited resources being initially targeted toward growth and sustainability (Chinomona & Omoruyi, 2016).

Bocquet et al. (2019) presented a correlation between CSR, innovation, and diversity, postulating that the more diverse organization has increased opportunities for innovation within its CSR strategies. Diversity is generally important for organizations in terms of innovation and creativity, but CSR and diversity together establish a winning combination of attributes within many firms (Mishra, 2015). Two paths are identified as processes to innovation shaped by CSR, which are proactive CSR and reactive CSR (Ji et al., 2019). In proactive CSR, the organization plans ahead for potential issues or opportunities accordingly. In reactive CSR, the response occurs based on CSR incidences. Innovation can be identified as either exploratory or exploitative and is promoted by both proactive and reactive CSR (Ji et al., 2019).

Innovation is perceived as a means for organizations to balance their social and financial performance meaning innovation can add back to the financial resources used to implement and run CSR activities (Jia et al., 2022; Sinha, 2018). To further explore the relationship between CSR and innovation, García-Piqueres and García-Ramos (2021) studied the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of CSR and concluded that the social dimension of CSR has the most significant impact on radical innovation, while the economic and environmental dimensions
significantly impact incremental innovation. García-Piqué and García-Ramos posited the information is useful when organizations strategize and design CSR in order to include and maximize innovation outcomes.

Beyond strategy and implementation, Chtourou and Triki (2017) stressed the importance of total commitment to CSR from organizational leadership in order to maximize innovation and financial outcomes, stating that in the event that financial performance goals are not realized, the organization still gains positively for its commitment in other areas. It is important to note that firm size plays a role in CSR and innovation, as smaller firms or organizations typically do not engage in CSR. The firm size affects whether it has adequate resources to fully commit to CSR-related objectives and the productivity levels needed for full-scale innovation (Børing, 2019). Technological innovation and CSR are considered significant for organizational growth regardless of a firm’s size (Bocquet et al., 2015).

**CSR and Job Satisfaction.** Job satisfaction is often referred to as employee satisfaction and is a measure of how content, happy, and fulfilled employees are with their jobs, whether with the job as a whole or at least with some aspects of it (Tatsuse et al., 2021). Job satisfaction is a concern for organization leaders because of its significant impact on job performance and overall firm performance (Kessler et al., 2020). Many organizations are going beyond traditional pay and benefits packages and taking unusual steps to keep employees satisfied and engaged in their duties (Tatsuse et al., 2021).

The first two decades of the 21st century shepherded a change in the demographics of the workforce with an influx of younger workers replacing the older workforce (Abeysekara et al., 2021). Younger generations of workers are known to have a high awareness of CSR, green/environmental protection, and sustainability to the extent that they selectively choose to
work only for firms meeting their desired criteria (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2021). Level of involvement in and success with CSR can provide corporations with positive images through which they gain the best place to work status, which is then used as a hiring strategy to recruit top talent (Hejjas et al., 2018). Beyond recruitment, employees want to find meaning and fulfillment in their jobs, and participation in organizational CSR activities has been identified as one avenue for finding meaning (Nejati et al., 2019).

Several studies linked CSR and increased job satisfaction (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2016; Ferreira & Real de Oliveira, 2014). The effect of CSR on job satisfaction can vary and depends on how employees perceive their organizations’ CSR initiatives and how and what steps leaders take to implement CSR (Vlachos et al., 2013). The involvement of employees in CSR activities can provide an avenue for them to express their desire to do something meaningful and selfless so that they contribute to the good of the immediate environment (Shen & Zhang, 2017). Furthermore, the desire to engage in something meaningful and worthwhile that goes beyond a salaried job is significant enough that employees typically engage in such activities outside of their organizations (Shen & Zhang, 2017). Organizations benefit from a CSR strategy that encourages participation from willing employees (Carlini & Grace, 2021). Employee CSR participation can be both internal and external. External opportunities may not necessarily be company specific, but participation still fulfills the employee’s needs.

**Related Studies**

**Corporate Identity.** Corporate identity is formed from the strategic choices made by an organization and how it chooses to express those choices, usually in the form of branding images, slogans, trademarks, and product designs (Abratt & Mingione, 2017). Corporate identity is what gives organizations a sense of self and individuality and factors expressed in different
ways that distinguish a business from other organizations (Simões & Sebastiani, 2017). When these are done properly, they create a positive reputation for the organization and financial success. Corporate identity is a major concern for leadership and management. Advancements in research, technology, and communication provided the means for businesses to delve into many practices revealing the negative and unglamorous side of conducting business (Leiva et al., 2016). Many organizations’ identities and reputations have been marred by negative revelations, requiring them to reclaim their positive identities. CSR is then used to clean up a negative image, rebrand, and regain the trust of stakeholders (Leiva et al., 2016).

**CSR** is a dominant strategic decision and a necessity for many organizations seeking a reputation of existing beyond just profit and financials that includes being viewed as responsible, contributing members of the community (Ullah & Mateti, 2020). Tourky et al. (2020) asserted in their findings that corporate identity serves as a building block for CSR and drives what CSR initiatives are created and how they are implemented. Organizations create CSR initiatives directly in line with or complementary to the products and services they offer; organizations use CSR to counteract a concern created by their activities (Simões & Sebastiani, 2017).

There are organizations whose CSR widely deviates from their products or services. An example is ExxonMobil, whose CSR initiatives involve improving education and helping women in developing countries, promoting biodiversity and climate change research, and supporting programs relating to the treatment and prevention of malaria and HIV/AIDS (Singh & Misra, 2021). Despite these initiatives, ExxonMobil is constantly criticized for its high carbon dioxide emissions and contributions to climate change. It is, therefore, important that organizations understand the impact of CSR on their organization’s identity and its utilization in creating a desired identity or image.
**Organizational Citizenship Behavior.** Frequently, several opportunities about for employees within organizations to volunteer in any capacity, whether related to their job, in another department, or in a nonwork-related activity organized by the organization (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2021). According to Ferreira and Real de Oliveira (2014), employees take these as opportunities to break from normal repetitive work activities, socialize with fellow employees, and explore other areas of interest within the organization that may help them refocus on job tasks. These tasks are not directly related to job duties.

OCB refers to employee behavior that goes above and beyond what the employee is contractually obligated to do and has been known to improve overall performance (Deery et al., 2016; Sheik & Anisa, 2014). CSR goes beyond good external perception generation for organizations or looking good to stakeholders and the community; within the organization, CSR can encourage the need for employees to do good work proactively. When OCB is practiced within the CSR construct, studies showed an increase in the employees’ overall job performance (Chaudhary, 2018; He et al., 2020). Employee performance is linked directly to organizational performance. Organizations and employees experience increased benefits in performance when CSR implementation occurs in-house with a significant amount of input and actions from employees, making them more aware of their work behaviors (Gosselt et al., 2017). Golob and Podnar (2021) posited that the increased performance is likely due to the notion that employees can balance the negatives of their jobs with CSR-related activities, giving them some level of balance and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a known predictor of OCB because employees who are satisfied with their jobs are less likely to engage in activities that are damaging to the organization (Kessler et al., 2020). OCB does not only occur toward the organization or leadership but also involves behavior directly toward fulfilling the employee’s job.
CSR Reporting. Organizations share through various communication channels their CSR activities to keep stakeholders informed on CSR outcomes (Gavana et al., 2018). According to Friske et al. (2019), CSR reporting has evolved over time, and while CSR reporting is not mandated for many industries, organizations typically report their CSR activities and outcomes voluntarily as a form of transparency, but such reporting can sometimes have unintended consequences. When CSR reporting is not governed by a regulatory body, there is a higher probability of embellishing the information or providing inaccurate information, leaving consumers to conduct their own due diligence (Gavana et al., 2018).

The benefits of CSR reporting range to include brand recognition, positive firm reputation, customer loyalty, ability to attract and retain top talent for financial performance, organizational growth, and investment opportunities (Mukherjee & Nuñez, 2019). These reports are usually publicly available so firms to produce the best image they can generate. To protect stakeholders from misinformation and inaccuracies, third-party organizations review CSR reports and validate CSR data, reducing potential concerns (Schaefer et al., 2019). This CSR auditing is not always available in some undeveloped countries or corrupt firms with leaders who use outcomes and influence for the wrong reasons (Ali et al., 2017). Stakeholders internal to the organization may have first-hand access to the CSR activities of the organization and may be negatively affected by inaccurate CSR reporting, possibly leading to performance issues (Friske et al., 2019). Organization leaders are responsible for conducting accurate CSR reporting that is disseminated effectively. Therefore, they can impact the organization in multiple areas and affect overall performance outcomes (Zhao et al., 2020).

CSR and Leader Gender Differences. Several studies indicated few differences in relation to CSR when the gender variable is used to define certain variables, including leadership
outcomes, CSR implementation outcomes, employee perception, consumer perception, and a firm’s CSR performance (Hur et al., 2015). Similar to leadership and gender studies, CSR and leader gender has been addressed in several studies and specifically on the effects of women leaders on CSR (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2017). Rao and Tilt (2020) posited that improved decision-making occurs when female leaders are at the top of the decision-making process, but in relation to CSR specifically, there is inconclusive evidence. According to McGuinness et al. (2017), the increased gender balance in top management increases a firm’s CSR performance, and CSR performance is stronger in firms with female officers at the CEO or vice-CEO levels. Harjoto et al. (2020) found that CSR reporting was more readable, and reports contained greater accuracy when female executives held signatory authority on such reports. Many studies seem to support improved CSR outcomes with women leaders based on their leadership style. According to Fiebig and Christopher (2018), female leaders typically demonstrate transformational or servant leadership traits or styles, and these styles lead to improved firm performance.

**Anticipated and Discovered Themes**

Anticipated themes for this research study were expected, as leadership behaviors do not complement behaviors needed for the success of CSR initiatives. Without the direct involvement of leaders to champion CSR initiatives, there is the existence of poor communication, making employees unaware of CSR activities. Another theme involved developing CSR initiatives for IT organizations could be difficult to accomplish, and equally implementing IT-related CSR initiatives could be difficult to implement, leading to low levels of engagement among a firm’s leaders and employees. Additional anticipated themes included the existence of dishonest CSR practices that could deter job satisfaction and lead to low job morale and low employee performance.
Discovered themes for this study were leader behavior, leader involvement, CSR program development, and CSR practices.

**Leader Behavior.** The participants noted that their perception of their leaders’ behavior was a major factor with which they viewed their organization’s CSR activities. While some participants were not biased toward a specific type of CSR program, as long as there existed a tangible and beneficial program, what they all wanted to see was active sponsorship and direct roles in CSR programs, beyond presenting ideas/plans and waiting for results. Participant 4 (P4) said, “Sometimes he seems detached from the plan and changes his mind often, so it’s difficult to get a program through,” in reference to a CSR director’s leadership. These sentiments were echoed by the executive leader participants of the study. Some recognized this issue as a pain point in their leadership to implement CSR initiatives and programs. As one participant expressed, they have others they answer to, which may cause a bottleneck in the actions they can take and what they can do (paraphrased). These data impressed upon the researcher to note whether leader behaviors can be influenced by others under such circumstances.

Participants voiced a unified perception of seeing leaders taking an active role in initiating, implementing, promoting, and supporting CSR initiatives and activities. P6 and P14 expressed having similar experiences with the CSR leaders directly participating in volunteer activities and which was important. Executive-level participants echoed the same concern, with some stating they needed to take more action for successful CSR programs. Leaders’ active behavior formed a catalyst for an interest in participating in a successful CSR initiative. When asked about the most important leader behaviors for successful CSR implementation (Q5, Appendix A), the words empathy and compassion were two dominant words. The word empathy was used by eight participants, and the word compassion was used by five participants.
Participants discussed CSR against recent social issues, especially in the past 3 to 5 years, voicing the importance of organizations taking on more socially conscious activities and affecting their communities positively. P9 said, “These are moral responsibilities that should not be forced.” Empathy to the participants meant that their leaders had a deep understanding of the groups they served and the communities affected directly or indirectly by their organizations’ activities. Because of empathy, leaders endeavored to understand the various minority groups and the issues they faced and to contribute to alleviating issues directly or indirectly. P21 stated, “Ignorance is not acceptable or excusable. [There are] too many issues in your face you can’t hide from it.” Most participants noted that in light of the recent developments relating to social issues, such as social injustice, they had an opportunity to step forward and be responsible and help to alleviate some of the social issues being discussed in society.

Participants felt their organizational leaders should be responsible for the welfare of the communities and not think only about making a profit and keeping it. This is observed through their behaviors and attitudes toward social issues. The issue of recent mistreatment of Black people and other minorities was brought up by some of the participants who felt their organizations’ CSR programs might help to curb some of the social issues over time. For example, some of the participants revealed that they have CSR-related programs to train high schoolers in Black communities for IT skills that include application coding and software programming. These CSR programs aim to help minorities develop skills from a very young age that they can further pursue in college. This training can help them to start good careers and secure well-paying jobs. The first premise is that by starting or targeting these groups earlier or at such a young age, they positively redirect these high school students’ minds into positive engagement and reduce the probability of young Black children getting into troublesome
activities that could have negative consequences in the future. The other premise is that by targeting these students at such young age, they can start their careers earlier, develop economic strength from a very young age, and provide for themselves and their families.

The organizations benefit from these CSR-related training programs. P13 stated that the organization had recruited these students into the organization as full-time employees. Not only did the IT organization provide training for high schoolers, but they also provided college scholarships and internship opportunities. These internships were instrumental to the organization’s recruitment of new talent.

Some participants expressed their organizations’ programs indicated to them that their organizations’ leaders and executives are genuinely concerned and empathetic toward the minority groups. The participants considered these programs as directly helping to alleviate some of the societal issues by empowering local community members through these training opportunities. Other participants were not certain of the intent of the CSR programs they have, stating that they had not seen the intended outcomes nor had much interaction with their leaders.

Some participants stated that their program’s objectives involved providing some level of compassion to their communities, such as social services for helping with issues like homelessness, food shortages or food access, and employment assistance through workforce re-entry services. The show of compassion in any area is important, as stated by participants. When asked about what the participants meant by compassion, which came up a few times, they voiced the same sentiment by using the word empathy, but most stated that compassion is exhibited by the actions taken by their organizations or organizational leaders.

During the interviews, the issues of profit-making were brought up by participants, where some stated the leaders’ attitudes and behaviors are geared toward activities to increase profit
and make stakeholders happy. P21 responded that “retaining profits and keeping company stakeholders happy” contributed to the organization’s lackluster concern toward some communities. None of the participants had any issue with their organizations making a profit, but they all stated their organizations should at least dedicate a bit more resources or part of the profits to helping their communities.

Some participants noticed some inconsistencies in programs in the past due to funding issues, which caused them to question leaders’ commitment to CSR programs. P7 talked about the profit, recognition, and accolades that some leaders seek by creating CSR programs but not being able to achieve CSR goals due to lack of resources. P15 emphasized the need for leaders to encourage employees toward volunteerism and stated that profit should not be a reason for organizations to hold back in contributing to their communities. Therefore, volunteerism should be encouraged within the organization as part of its CSR framework. Most of the participants stated that they eagerly looked forward to helping or volunteering in their various communities as long as their CSR efforts did not affect their work. But they felt even more encouraged when they had the backing of their leaders through direct participation.

Regarding the theme of leader behavior, all participants, including the executive-level participants, stated that behavior was an issue that needed attention. It is viewed as an indicator of their organization’s response to CSR and whether they are in it for genuine reasons or to check off needed tasks. P11 admitted that areas for improvement in how CSR is approached existed. P11 further stated that sometimes things happen not for lack of genuine interest but for other circumstances that may put some hindrances to the organization’s proposed CSR initiative. The programs that deal directly with people and provide service need careful, comprehensive
planning and organization. Notwithstanding, perhaps open communication can help alleviate distrust employees have toward their leaders whose behavior seems detached.

The interview data suggested that leaders’ CSR behaviors have a major implication for employee performance because employees look to their leaders for direction. Other behavioral actions expected from leaders include listening, active communication, consistency, fairness, lead-by-example, honesty, caring, showing concern, and a hands-on approach. Leader proactiveness was noted as a positive attribute for CSR implementation success and better employee performance. This is consistent with the findings of Yang et al. (2020), in which proactive leadership is a catalyst for a highly engaged workforce because leaders are highly organized, highly interactive, develop strong communication structure, thrive on information sharing, are very good at inspiring others, and are passionate about the organization’s mission purpose.

Leader Involvement. A recurring theme of leader involvement was echoed by a few of the participants, who were mostly regular employees of their organization. The size and longevity of the organization played a role in that due to the nature of their organizations’ CSR activities. The participants expected their leaders to participate in the CSR process. When asked about what they meant by the process, they talked about CSR from inception to execution. Further questioning showed that some leaders simply instruct middle managers, for example, to come up with initiatives the organization can take on and report back when completed. One participant stated it is a concern when leaders just ask their managers to come up with a program and report whether it was successful or not. P12 said, “They don’t know in detail what the program is or does, what are the performance criteria and measurements of success, and how the community benefits from it. They just want to check it off.”
Other participants believed that because CSR is considered a strategic level initiative, the executive leaders are responsible and need to see it through. Some participants painted their organizations’ CSR activities against the backdrop of recent social events of the past 3 to 5 years and believed that their organizations or leaders jumped on the CSR bandwagon for fear of negative press. According to P17, “They don’t want to seem oblivious or unconcerned about the things going on and make their company a target for the cancel culture.” For clarification, cancel culture is a “collective of typically marginalized voices “calling out” and emphatically expressing their censure of a powerful figure” (Ng, 2020, p. 623). Also, Merriam-Webster (n.d.) described the term cancel culture as the practice or tendency to engage in mass withdrawal of support for something and “as a way of expressing disapproval and exerting social pressure” (para. 1). While the participant used this word somewhat incorrectly, it was understood what the participant was trying to convey: Customers could potentially boycott their products and services and provide bad press or label them as an undesirable company with which to conduct business.

The lack of involvement of leaders is tied to the lack of proper or adequate CSR communication with employees. P4 clarified, “Leaders cannot communicate what they don’t know about. What could they possibly tell us?” Without adequate communication, employees might lack awareness of ongoing activities in which they could participate, whether these CSR programs are internal or external.

The theme of leader involvement by the participants who were executive-level leaders was presented differently as an attribute that helped them to engage more in CSR activities, engage their employees in CSR-related activities, and have a good measure of success. They understand their responsibility fully as leaders to champion the CSR cause all the way. One participant stated that due to his level of involvement in the programs, he had a great opportunity
to interact with employees that would not have ordinarily taken place within the work
environment. The data showed that leaders who were very involved in CSR had CSR as part of
their organization’s strategic plan. Therefore, they were vested in its successful implementation
and performance. The issue of leader involvement was closely tied to the leaders’ behavior. The
participants had varying responses about their leaders’ activities and engagement with employees
during CSR implementation (Q3, Q6, Appendix A). Participants wanted more involvement from
their leaders throughout the CSR process, from conception to implementation of CSR programs.
The participants expressed that developing a sense of connection to CSR programs is effective
for their buy-in, support, and participation.

CSR Program Development. Several participants stated that CSR programs are difficult
to initiate or develop. This response came mostly from the participants who were at the executive
level within the organizations and were responsible for developing and initiating programs.
Either other organizations already occupied the CSR space or the size of the organizations
limited the extent to which others could practice CSR. Employee participation sometimes posed
a problem for organizations which could be due to a lack of interest in the program offered or a
lack of awareness by the employees. The organizations that tend to have problems with initiating
CSR programs are usually of a smaller size or have been in business for a very short period. All
the participants in the interviews participated in CSR programs, but most of them noted that
developing CSR programs was an issue at first. The participants who stated that the
organizations had difficulty initiating and implementing CSR programs were the executive-level
participants who had the responsibility of developing programs as part of their organizations’
strategic initiatives to serve their communities.
According to responses provided by participants after follow-up questions were asked, it seems that the issue of difficulty was related to finding a program or initiative aligned with their organizations’ business agendas. Some participants stated that they involved their employees by providing an avenue to offer potential ideas that they would be interested in participating in, and the executive leadership would review and decide on viable programs. By doing this, organizations could develop CSR programs that appeal to the employees likely to participate, thereby increasing the level of engagement and leading to success. A helpful advantage to employees’ involvement is the additional knowledge of the various communities with which employees have familiarity at a granular level so that knowledge could translate to developing programs that meet the community’s needs. This fit increases the likelihood that the program achieves all the right buy-in for proper and successful implementation with high engagement.

Two of the participants who described their organization as a small, minority-owned business organization that had only been in business for the last 6 years stated that they partnered with a couple of other larger organizations within the community to sponsor CSR-related programs. By taking this approach, the small businesses could affect their communities positively and give back without incurring the financial burdens that come with developing and running a successful CSR program. Most of the CSR programs described by the participants were not IT related. For example, a lot of the organizations had programs that included feeding the hungry through food drives or helping to build affordable housing in several communities. Most of the leaders who were interviewed expressed it was important to have a solid CSR program that lined up with the organization’s strategic agenda, appealed to the employees, and provided a beneficial service to the community. They believed that having a strong connection in these areas would improve employee engagement and ensure the CSR program’s success.
In order to combat some of the social issues currently being observed at a larger scale, multiple organizations started providing awareness programs, such as training and education on diversity and inclusion issues, to employees. This programming was in addition to training minorities in IT-related programs to alleviate hiring issues which the organization benefits from, and by doing this, the organizations help relieve some of the social issues going on in the country. The study findings suggested that the size of the organization is a factor in the ease or difficulty of developing, initiating, and successfully implementing CSR programs. The findings indicated that most small businesses avoid difficulties by simply partnering with other organizations. The overall ratio of participants who stated being involved in CSR partnerships was 48:52 (10 participants out of 21).

**CSR Practices.** Several participants expressed being sometimes concerned about organizational CSR practices. The main concern involved a renewed, vigorous interest in CSR programs within organizations in the last 5 years. The reasons for this renewed interest are being questioned as employees attempt to decipher the true purpose of the organization’s leaders.

Participants stated there were occasions when they felt the purpose of CSR was to broadcast the organization’s public image and increase the potential for company profits. This finding aligns with the issues identified in the literature. CSR implementation decisions geared toward profit maximizations were perceived as organizational hypocrisy and a mismatch between company purpose, CSR activity, and implementation (Zhao et al., 2020). The lack of correlation between these attributes signals a less than altruistic perception and a barrier to successful implementation. Participants reported instances where leaders have held back from supporting CSR programs financially, further raising the question of why an organization plans for CSR programs but does not follow through.
All participants at all levels stated that they had some form of documented CSR initiative or program provided by the organization. The participants of organizations where the employees were allowed to participate in CSR program ideation stated they did not have issues with dishonest CSR practices. In contrast with participants where the leaders are fully responsible for developing, initiating, and implementing CSR initiatives, few had a concern about what and why they are involved in their organizations’ CSR activities. Two participants stated the CSR program they are currently involved in was not in congruence with the organization’s business practices. The employees had also reiterated their concerns and lack of interest and complained about it several times but felt like they were forced to volunteer in CSR programs that were only of interest to their leaders. The participants said their participation was required as part of their performance plans, increasing the potential for them to experience the adverse employment effects of a lack of participation. This defeats the whole purpose of volunteerism.

Next, some participants expressed an issue with the fact that they were not given the time to participate in these programs without affecting their regular work. Participants collectively agreed that they wanted to participate in CSR-related initiatives, programs, and activities that they found enjoyable but did not want to participate in CSR programs created and enforced by the organization. A participant stated that being forced to participate in an activity that is not in line with their beliefs is a problem. The same participant added that engaging in a CSR program or activity should necessarily be beneficial to everyone involved, including the target groups and CSR participants, in addition to how the organization is viewed by the public.

Lack of employee consultation and open communication presents a few issues for CSR implementation. A few participants stated that they felt like their organizations were being dishonest because, in the past couple of years, when implementing CSR initiatives, the leaders
did not consult with the employees living and working in the various communities. Participants agreed that it seemed dishonest when potential programs were presented to leaders, and the leaders did not provide the resources to implement the programs initiated by employees successfully. This concern resonated among the participants both in organizations where the leaders were responsible for CSR-program initiatives and in those organizations in which the employees were encouraged to bring ideas for implementation. This aligns with the conclusion of Yamak et al. (2018), in which the disinterest in support and participation in CSR activities is a signal to employees that the initiatives are not important enough for management and not essential to the success of the organization. One participant noted that even after a couple of employees submitted ideas and discussed in detail the benefits of the program both to the organization and to the community, they did not receive any communication from the firm’s leaders afterward, and when several employees reported attempting to get an update, they were told: “Leadership is looking at it and other several submitted ideas.”

Organizations that started CSR programs in the past 2 to 3 years, even though they had been in existence for much longer, sought not to be left out in the CSR movement and not to look like uncaring organizations. A participant suggested their organization was worried about the cancel culture that has become prevalent within industries where people and business enterprise relationships are severed when such entities are deemed apathetic to current issues (whatever the case may be) and not caring enough or helpful to their communities.

**Summary of the Literature Review**

The general problem addressed by this study was the failure of leaders to effectively implement CSR initiatives within IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area, possibly resulting in a negative impact on employee performance. Reviewed literature pointed to several factors
from the leadership angle as a significant source of influence on the outcomes of CSR and employee performance. This literature review revealed that an organization’s CSR and leadership behaviors could affect employee performance, but CSR cannot exist without first the leaders including CSR as part of the strategic goals of the organization. If CSR initiatives do not get the complete buy-in of the leadership, which is perceived by the level of involvement as observed by the employees and employees may view CSR initiatives as insincere attempts to promote good organizational reputations.

The literature review showed that leadership behaviors expose leadership attitudes toward CSR and employees see and react to these. The literature revealed that employees value CSR activities and the opportunity to engage in them, as evident by the performance outcomes. Additionally, the literature revealed transformational and servant leadership styles involve behaviors suited to implementing CSR initiatives and enhancing employee performance. Transformational leadership qualities represent a highly sought-after behavioral attribute and are linked to successful organizational outcomes.

Concerning the IT field, the literature review showed a significant impact of IT on CSR initiatives and implementation, especially in the area of innovation and how organizations can leverage IT to accomplish CSR goals. Within IT organizations, the literature suggested improved success and better performance are needed for IT firms to accomplish CSR activities. Leadership plays a significant role in developing the right CSR initiatives, and employee involvement is critical to successful CSR initiatives.

**Summary of Section 1 and Transition**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to expand the understanding of the factors that affect leadership’s implementation of CSR initiatives within technology firms and the effects
the results can have on employees and their performance. The purpose of Section 1 was to provide a background of the issue through a literature review that could explain why CSR and leadership are business problems. This section presented the design and methodology by which the issue would be addressed and how the research was conducted to find a potential resolution to the problem. By developing the appropriate research questions, the study was used to explore different angles and related topics central to the issue. In Section 2, the questions and research foundation set in Section 1 depict how the research was conducted to gain insight into leader behaviors, CSR, and employee performance.
Section 2: The Project

The impact of CSR can be felt in virtually every business sector, emphasizing its importance to many businesses and their communities. With global reach, CSR transcends the local communities by the firm’s activities directly or through partnerships, making its success more important for organizations. Being part of the mission strategy, CSR often falls under the top leadership’s purview, making its role in the successful implementation of CSR a critical one (Yamak et al., 2018). This research study examined the roles and impact of leaders and leader behaviors on the implementation of CSR initiatives and the effects on employee performance. This section discussed the different aspects of this study by reviewing the purpose of the research and the researcher’s role in the study. The research methodology is discussed, including the appropriateness of the design, method, and triangulation method utilized for the study. In addition, bracketing, as a strategy to avoid unintentional tainting of the study with personal biases, is explained. The population for this study, an important piece, is described. The sampling criteria, selection, and method are explicated. The section ends with descriptions of the data collection and analysis, as well as how the study’s reliability and validity were ensured for obtaining accurate and unbiased study results.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to expand the understanding of the factors that affect leadership’s implementation of CSR initiatives within technology firms and the effects the results can have on employees and their performance. The researcher took an in-depth look at leadership behaviors and how they impact CSR implementation in IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area. The employee performance issue was explored through an in-depth study of leadership behaviors. This study may help leaders address implementation issues that may arise
from their behaviors and identify essential behaviors or actions for successful CSR implementation. To achieve the intent and purpose of this study, the researcher reviewed current scholarly literature available to gain a better understanding of leadership behaviors and literature on successful CSR implementation. Through interviews and questionnaires, the information garnered from literature, and the information gathered from leaders and employees in IT firms could provide leaders with the necessary information to improve CSR implementation and employee performance, a two-fold benefit. The outcome of this research might help those leading IT firms consider behavioral factors when implementing CSR initiatives and might provide useful information about employees’ views of positive CSR efforts that they buy into. With the information, overall employee and organizational performance could be improved.

**Role of the Researcher**

This research sought to understand the roles leaders play in implementing CSR initiatives and how their leadership styles and behaviors affect employees. Therefore, to better understand these from the perspective of the leaders and employees, the role of the researcher was to identify the appropriate participants to gather information. The researcher played three roles in this study as follows: (a) identified participants for the study, (b) conducted interviews with participants to gain insight into the study, and (c) analyzed the results from the interview and any other survey instrument used. In order to prepare for a research study that involves human subjects, the researcher took training in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program course to acquire the knowledge and skills to conduct the study in an ethical and noninvasive manner.

There were actions that the researcher needed to take to conduct the study successfully. The researcher first identified the right participants for the study. To identify the participants for
the study, the researcher recruited participants from IT firms located in the Washington, DC metro area. Potential organizations in this category were accessed through organization directories, professional social platforms like LinkedIn, or social group platforms like Facebook groups.

To conduct the interviews, the researcher prepared the interview questions with questions designed to empower the participants to describe their experiences with CSR initiatives and implementation. The purpose of the interviews was for participants to relay experiences with CSR in their organization as detailed as possible. Once any required approvals or consents were completed, the researcher scheduled the interviews with participants using telephone communication or other electronic means, such as Zoom, WebEx, or WhatsApp video. The participants had the option to choose the communication medium that worked best for them in a conducive environment. Once all interview questions had been collected, the researcher then analyzed the results to draw conclusions.

Bracketing

In a study that involves understanding others’ perceptions and the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ experiences or events, it is important for researchers to extricate their feelings or biases and focus solely on the information provided by the research participants (Gregory, 2019). Bracketing is used to avoid interjecting the researcher’s personal bias during data collection, interpretation, and analysis. According to Tufford and Newman (2012), bracketing is used by researchers to mitigate any preconceived knowledge of the research topic that may become harmful to the research study, whether in selecting the topic, developing interview questions, gathering and interpreting results, or in reporting findings. Bracketing
served as a mental check for the researcher to keep personal feelings in check and focus solely on the participants’ experiences without prejudice.

**Research Methodology**

A researcher needs to think through how a research study is conducted to obtain accurate results. When conducting research, it is imperative to employ the right research tools, such as the research paradigm and research methods. Several elements were considered, including the purpose of the research, the research questions, the data collection, the analysis of data, and how the research would be presented or reported (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

There are multiple ways to conduct research. It was important for the researcher to understand the different options and choose the most appropriate method in designing the research (Verleye, 2019). Given the many reasons why a researcher conducts research, it was necessary to ensure that researcher was not influenced to distort the outcome of the result. The following subsections present the appropriateness of the design, chosen method for the research study, and the triangulation methods applied to this study.

**Discussion of Flexible Design**

A flexible qualitative method using a single case study research design is considered best for this research study for a couple of reasons. According to House (2018), “the basic function of qualitative research is to understand human behavior, which is rooted in the philosophical strand of Hermeneutics, whereas the basic function of quantitative research is to explain human behavior” (p. 7). Hermeneutics is the methodology of interpretation used to understand and communicate a phenomenon (Koskinen & Nyström, 2017; Maxwell et al., 2020). A flexible case study design was chosen for this research to allow the researcher to collect data and modify the data collection as things evolved or a recurring pattern in the data needed further exploration.
Qualitative research methods examine the social processes, relationships, and settings in which individuals interrelate with one another, and researchers interact with individuals to understand their subjective thinking (Abkhezr et al., 2020). Qualitative researchers collect data to gain deep insight. Due to not having a predetermined notion, this design afforded the opportunity to explore many possible angles and attain a deeper understanding of the problems associated with leader behaviors, CSR implementation, and employee performance, making a flexible design using a qualitative methodology more appropriate.

In contrast, quantitative methodology applies a fixed design to test or confirm pre-existing theories. Researchers compare relationships between variables by taking a numerical approach using statistical methods to measure and make predictions (Murshed & Zhang, 2016). Fixed design is predetermined with identified variables for data collection and comparison through quantitative methods to measure the variables to arrive at the answer (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative researchers collect numerical data to measure variables. “Quantitative research methods involve the manipulation of the research field, a potentially careful choice of subjects, … and standardized data collection” (House, 2018, p. 7). Quantitative methods tend to involve close-ended items in survey instruments or questionnaires and in structured interview protocols to collect data and prevent participants from providing detailed rationale behind their responses, which in turn does not provide the researcher with in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon. This study included no quantifiable data for measurement, and the research questions were designed for a deeper exploration of the issue. Therefore, a fixed design using quantitative methodology did not suit the research purpose.

The mixed methods design was inappropriate due to the absence of quantitative data or the need to validate the qualitative data using quantitative data. Mixed-methods research
combines aspects of quantitative and qualitative research to enhance a study by expanding and strengthening the study outcome through breadth, depth, and richness and gives the researcher multiple perspectives from which conclusions might be drawn (McKim, 2017; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Mixed methods can be used when the researcher wants to validate qualitative findings with a quantitative data source or use qualitative data to enhance quantitative results. However, mixed-methods research can be a very involved and time-consuming process (McKim, 2017), which made it unsuitable for the research due to time, scope, and resource limitations.

Based on these research methods, what they aim to accomplish, the problem identified in this study, and the questions it aims to answer, a flexible design represented the best fit for this study. The research questions were intended to understand at a deeper level why leaders are potentially failing to implement CSR initiatives, what the causes are and how this is affecting employee performance. The answers derived from the questions might be utilized to provide a solution going forward. There were no pre-existing numerical variables to measure or qualitative data to quantify; therefore, using a fixed quantitative method or mixed-methods approach was not appropriate.

Discussion of Case Study Method

A single case study is appropriate when the focus is on human interpretation and the ascribed meaning to the event (Oliver, 2004) and how each individual perceives and understands the same event as different. Qualitative research is a method used to discover and understand how individuals perceive, interpret or ascribe meaning to an experience or a problem (Creswell, 2014). The problem addressed in this research was the failure of leaders to implement CSR, whereby the employees perceive leadership behaviors negatively and react in ways leading to negative performance.
Researchers use a qualitative study to gain insight into the thoughts and feelings of the individuals, why they have those thoughts and feelings, and how those thoughts and feelings motivate them to exhibit a particular behavior (Sutton & Austin, 2015). With this study, the researcher gained insight into why employees in IT organizations perceive their leaders’ CSR initiatives negatively, how they perceive their leaders’ behavior toward CSR implementation, why they feel disengaged in their work, and how disengagement leads to negative employee performance. According to Koch et al. (2013), qualitative research is instrumental in helping an observer describe and analyze the social processes, practices, and phenomena and understand the differences in how participants interpret those social processes, practices, and phenomena according to their situation and social environments. Therefore, a case study was suitable and allowed the researcher to study the behaviors of leaders toward CSR initiatives in IT organizations. The case study design helped the researcher understand how employees perceive their leaders’ behaviors and how that behavior influences employees’ perceptions and behavior toward CSR implementation.

The case study design method was the most suitable for this research by allowing the researcher to study the event within a real-life setting. The researcher’s objective was to discover why leaders fail by exploring their behaviors. Of course, not all leaders fail, but the researcher explored what was peculiar to the leaders in IT firms that could cause CSR failures. Using the case study design helped the researcher answer why leaders fail to successfully implement CSR by asking the right questions that probed into their leadership activities and decisions regarding CSR and the effects on employees’ performance.

Due to the nature of this study, a narrative design was not appropriate and would have been inadequate to collect enough viable data to understand why leaders fail at implementing
CSR. Participants tell their personal stories in a narrative, which the researcher observes, collects, and interprets (Carless & Douglas, 2016). Narratives provide meaning to life experiences and the world and enlighten as a form of knowledge and communication (Hamilton et al., 2017). Ethics is a significant concern for the narrative design, which makes the extensive ethics committee and approval process a barrier to timely data collection and analysis (Bruce et al., 2016). As the process evolves, there is a need to ensure that proper approvals are acquired or maintained. A narrative method is best deployed when researchers want to obtain the experience or information directly from the participants.

A phenomenology design was inappropriate for this research study because while the participants could describe their experience concerning failed CSR implementation and their experience with performance, it would not have provided a holistic view of the issue. With phenomenology, research participants describe how they experience a phenomenon, which is then described by the researcher (Creswell, 2014). The emphasis is on describing the participants being studied without context to the experience (Gaus, 2017). The researcher seeks to understand how participants interpret what they have experienced. A phenomenology design is best suited for understanding the experience as a phenomenon from the participants’ points of view. In this study, the researcher explored why the issue exists, not just a description of it; therefore, making phenomenology design inappropriate.

Grounded theory is both a methodology that provides a framework of principles and a method that involves a strategy, techniques, or approach to collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Bakker, 2019; Turner & Astin, 2021). Grounded theory is used to generate an explanatory theory based on the systematically collected and analyzed data, and the theory is used to explain the phenomenon (Chun Tie et al., 2019). The issue for this study was confirmed by existing
literature reviews and contradicted the premise of grounded theory, which is used when little is known about the issue. Further, grounded theory discourages the use of a literature review as a starting point. Grounded theory would not have been appropriate because using this design would have involved a systematic collection and analysis of data over an extended period with the intent to form a theory, which was not the purpose of this research study.

**Discussion of Method for Triangulation**

The four types of triangulation are: (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) methodological triangulation, and (d) theoretical triangulation (Jackson, 2018). According to Moon (2019), each triangulation type can be used as a single method or in combination with each other, the research questions, and the research design dictating which one (and how) would be used. Data triangulation was used for this research study.

Data triangulation uses multiple sources of data in a study. According to Yin (2014), data triangulation allows the researcher to collect data from multiple sources to authenticate the same finding. This authentication process can help strengthen the researcher’s confidence in the study. In addition to collecting multiple sources of data, the provider of the data, location of the data, and timing of the data require consideration (Flick, 2017; Gibson, 2017). Data triangulation can allow for the use of complementing data. When one source of data appears weak, it can be complemented and validated by other, more detailed data, making it reliable for use (Flick, 2017).

Investigator triangulation involves using more than one researcher (investigator, interviewer, observer, analyst) to collect and analyze data. According to Turner and Turner (2009), investigator triangulation is mostly used in studies with qualitative methods where data coding is required. Archibald (2016) stated that investigator triangulation is highly regarded in
mixed-methods research because of collaboration between individuals with different research skills (qualitative and quantitative), giving a study more credibility. While investigator triangulation might be valued amongst the different research designs, it had drawbacks, such as increased complications of the research making it more laborious, difficulty acquiring the needed analysts, lack of uniformity across multiple investigators, and cost (Noble & Heale, 2019). In addition, the nature of this study made investigator triangulation inappropriate.

Methodological triangulation promotes more than one data collection method, which includes quantitative and qualitative methods (Noble & Heale, 2019). Creswell (2014) mentioned two forms of methodological triangulation: (a) simultaneous (using two methods concurrently) and (b) sequential (using the results of one method to design the next method). Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012) stated that the benefit of methodological triangulation is validating discoveries, providing more inclusive data, enhanced validity, and comprehension of the phenomenon. However, methodological triangulation was not appropriate for this research study.

In theoretical triangulation, researchers consider “more than one theory to help guide the research design, research study implementation, and interpretation of data” (Moon, 2019, p. 103). Flick (2017) regarded theoretical triangulation as applying multiple perspectives and propositions to the research process. The use of theoretical triangulation can help provide multiple explanations for a phenomenon by applying multiple perspectives. The use of theoretical triangulation could help provide multiple explanations for a phenomenon, thanks to the multiple theoretical postulations. However, theoretical triangulation was not appropriate for this research study because this study was not conducted using multiple theories as a guide.
Data triangulation was the most appropriate for this research study. In order to achieve accurate study results, the researcher applied data triangulation to ensure that all possibilities could be explored. A major strength of case study research is the opportunity to use multiple sources of data collection (Yin, 2014). For triangulation, data were collected from both organization leaders and employees who had experiences with CSR initiatives and implementation. These multiple perspectives allowed the researcher to understand how the two groups viewed CSR, its implementation, and its effects. In addition, the responses to the interviews and questionnaires were the data used for triangulation.

**Summary of Research Methodology**

The flexible design was chosen for this research because it offered the opportunity to explore the factors at play with CSR, leadership behaviors, and employee performance as extensively and in-depth as possible. By choosing a flexible design with a qualitative method, the researcher attained a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from both leaders and employees, which might not have been possible using either a fixed or mixed methods design. Detailed information was needed for this study. The flexible qualitative method allowed the researcher to use interviews and questionnaires as tools to collect data. The data collected from both leaders and employees provided triangulation to complement, authenticate, and confirm the collected data.

**Participants**

The participants for this study included regular full-time employees of IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area and senior-level managers, including directors, vice presidents, presidents, and chief executive officers. The criteria for all participants were that they had to work in IT companies located within the Washington, DC metro area, including those operating
in the states of Maryland and Virginia. Eligible IT organizations were identified through public records, online resources that included professional and social platforms, and personal connections. Once eligible organizations were identified, the researcher then initiated contact directly through listed contact information or through their human resources department and provided all necessary information regarding the study. In addition, information on the nature of the study, anonymity of the company, participants, and the study results were provided to the contacts for informed decision-making and to help with recruiting. A total of 21 participants were recruited to participate in the interview.

**Population and Sampling**

This subsection addresses the appropriate population for this research study and includes the characteristics of the chosen population, why the population was chosen, and the appropriate size of the population for the study. This subsection also explains the rationale for the sampling method utilized. A target population is an entire group to which a study’s results are designed to generalize, while the sample is the specific individuals from which data are collected (Turner, 2020).

**Discussion of Population**

This study addressed leadership behaviors geared toward CSR initiatives and their effects on employee performance, specifically in IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area. Asiamah et al. (2017) defined the general research population as the entire group of participants who can participate in a study and the target population as a more refined population on the basis of defined characteristics and importance to the research study. The employees of IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area represented the research population for the study. They were upper-level managers and regular employees who had a good knowledge of CSR and had to have been
at the organization for more than a year. The researcher believed these selection criteria were enough to ensure the employees would be familiar with any CSR-related activities. This population was appropriate for the study because, with the research questions, information could be gathered from leaders to understand their experiences in implementing CSR initiatives and from employees who could provide different perspectives on CSR implementation within their organizations, how they perceived leadership behaviors, and how they believed CSR affected them.

The size of the sample was set at 20 to reach data saturation and form a sample large enough to conduct in-depth interviews and questionnaires. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) assessed 23 qualitative research studies to identify the point of saturation in each study and concluded that saturation was reached below 25 interviews, specifically between 9 and 17 interviews. The researcher expected to make adjustments to the sample size based on the outcome of the field research. Consequently, the study’s actual data saturation occurred with the 18th participant, but the researcher continued data collection to include 21 participants.

**Discussion of Sampling**

The two main sampling methods include probability sampling and nonprobability sampling. Within these methods are several sampling types, such as simple random, systematic, convenience, and purposive (Turner, 2020). Based on the flexible design of the study, the sampling method chosen for this research study was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a well-utilized sampling method in qualitative studies and allows researchers to select participants based on predetermined criteria related to the research topic, thereby enhancing the data collection (Campbell et al., 2020).
A sample frame is a source from which a sample can be drawn that includes directories of individuals, groups, or organizations; telephone number lists; physical address lists; and email lists (Mooney & Garber, 2019). For example, the sample frame for the study was a directory list of top-level managers and employees. This frame was appropriate because the selected sample within this frame included individuals who experienced the phenomenon and should have been able to provide data appropriate to the research questions. This sampling frame helped eliminate potential bias and ensure the participants were those best suited to provide pertinent data for the study.

The desired sample size was 20. The researcher expected that this number of participants would ensure data saturation. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) assessed 23 qualitative research studies to identify the point of saturation in each study and concluded that saturation was reached below 25 interviews, specifically between 9 and 17 interviews. Braun and Clarke (2019) defined data saturation as no information redundancy or new data emerging. According to Saunders et al. (2018), data saturation occurs when additional data collection is not considered necessary or beneficial because new data fail to add anything necessary to the study. Data saturation was reached by the 18th participant, but the researcher continued data collection to include 21 participants.

**Summary of Population and Sampling**

The target population of this study was the existing IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area and these firms’ employees. Specifically, the sample came from top-level managers and employees with IT firms. The top-level managers could provide pertinent information regarding CSR initiatives and implementation, and employees could provide their experience with leader behaviors and outcomes. While the projected sample size was 20 participants, the
point of data saturation was reached at the 18th participant, but a total of 21 participants’ data were included in the sample. Purposive sampling was the best method to enhance the study and increase the quality of the data collected.

**Data Collection & Organization**

Creswell and Poth (2018) described data collection as an activity that goes beyond data types and collection processes and the ethical issues with data collection, required permissions, sampling strategies, recording and storing data and using the right tools. In qualitative research, data are collected until no new information is observed, which has reached saturation (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Several data collection methods can be used in qualitative studies, and Heath et al. (2018) encouraged using more than one method to improve recruitment and encourage participation. Barrett and Twycross (2018) posited that interviews, focus groups, and observations represent the core approaches used in data collection in qualitative research studies because they provide rich and detailed data regarding the phenomenon of study.

**Data Collection Plan**

Data collection in qualitative research requires a detailed and organized plan to ensure a smooth process for the research and the research participants and the viability of collecting data (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). The process of data collection and analysis is studied in most research-oriented curriculums, but many programs lack actual hands-on practice, which can make data collection daunting, especially for a first-time researcher with no previous field experience (Ehrmin & Pierce, 2021). A data collection plan can help organize and direct data collection activities from start to finish, ensuring all necessary protocols are accounted for and ensuring data collected is properly collected and useful (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). The data collected in this research were the experiences of leaders with CSR implementation, the
behaviors that affect CSR implementation, and the effects of CSR on employee performance. The data were collected by conducting semistructured interviews with open-ended questions that were carefully designed to support the study’s research questions (Williams & Kobak, 2018).

A semistructured interview can be conducted in multiple ways that include face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, or video conferencing interviews. Several factors were considered, such as the ongoing pandemic that limited participants from engaging in face-to-face interviews and the logistics of direct access. Lobe et al. (2020) noted that global events and crises like the pandemic should not deter researchers from conducting quality interviews and can offer opportunities to take advantage of the increasing growth in communication technologies using various platforms and applications to collect research data.

The researcher planned to collect the data by conducting face-to-face interviews. If this method was not available, the researcher planned to use video conferencing tools. Video conferencing applications are preferable to telephone interviews because the researcher can capture or observe nonverbal cues during the interview, just as would have been observed in a face-to-face interview. While telephone interviews have many benefits that include making participants more relaxed, open, and able to talk freely; eliminating access limitations, ensuring safety and anonymity, and decreasing pressure (Novick, 2008). A benefit of video conferencing involved the ease with which the interviews could be recorded and transcribed directly within the application, such as Zoom and WebEx. However, observing and notating nonverbal responses was more difficult and led to asking for additional data through follow-up questions.

The one-on-one, semistructured interviews were conducted over a 4-week period with each individual participant. Each interview lasted an average of 55 minutes. The open-ended interview questions were asked in sequential order, with follow-up questions being asked for
clarification as needed. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, such as Participant 1 through Participant 21 (P1-P21), to maintain confidentiality. The use of the videoconference application assisted the researcher’s observations of the participants’ nonverbal cues, which at times, led to further probing and improved data.

This collection plan was appropriate, especially considering the current climate and the needs of potential participants. Opara et al. (2021) asserted that the use of online technologies for qualitative data collection is well established in academia but still underutilized. Providing the participants with options to participate in the interview in multiple ways improved recruitment, participation, and response rates. Because the participants in this study were a technology-savvy group, the researcher did not see any potential issues with using technology to conduct the interviews. The various available communication platforms, such as Zoom, WebEx, and Skype, had recording and transcribing features that enhanced the researcher’s interview efforts (Lobe et al., 2020).

It is important to verify and validate participants’ responses to improve the collected data (Candela, 2019). This effort can be done through member checking, which involves following up with participants and asking for them to update, correct, or clarify data and interpretations as needed (Stake, 2010). Member checking is a commonly used validation practice to confirm the trustworthiness and credibility of data by allowing participants to deny or confirm study data analysis and interpretations (Birt et al., 2016; Candela, 2019). In addition, member checking can help control researcher bias, which can easily occur when the researcher is both the data collector and analyst, inadvertently imposing personal beliefs (Birt et al., 2016). With member checking, the researcher confirmed whether the information presented resulted from personal bias or the participants’ actual voices.
A benefit of utilizing a semistructured interview for data collection is the flexibility. It allows for further exploring a theme and capturing the true experiences of people without deviating too far from the phenomenon (Rabionet, 2016). During the interview process, some study participants’ responses led to additional follow-up questions, which provided further insight into previous answers or provided new information (Saxena, 2017). When this occurred, the follow-up questions and responses were captured as part of the interview data and recorded accordingly.

**Instruments**

One of a qualitative researcher’s primary roles is collecting data (Chandra & Shang, 2017). The role of the researcher was to conduct semistructured interviews; therefore, the researcher served as the instrument for the data collection by asking questions, recording the interviews, and transcribing the data. According to Stake (2010), researchers prefer data collected by the researcher directly instead of other means. The interview process can be challenging for qualitative researchers because of the procedures and systems involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, some interview guides can manage the process to reduce or manage such challenges. The interview guide that the researcher used included the researcher’s introduction as well as the study’s introduction, the interview procedure, a review of consent, the interview questions, follow-up questions, and the closing statement (Williams & Kobak, 2018).

Interview questions are considered an effective and dependable tool qualitative researchers use to study and gather data on a phenomenon (Rabionet, 2016). The interview questions (Appendix A) were designed to address the three research questions and the problem statement. The same questions were posed to all participants. The researcher purposely crafted the interview questions so that a minimum of three interview questions were asked of each
participant to address each research question. The first question was a general question to ease the participants into the interview mode and make them comfortable (McGrath et al., 2018). The next three interview questions were used to address the first research question (RQ1), which is how employees of IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area perceive CSR initiatives, their implementation, and their effects on employee performance. The next three interview questions addressed the second research question (RQ2) and provided answers to what leadership behavioral factors and actions contribute to the outcomes of CSR implementation and how. The last four interview questions addressed the third research question (RQ3), and by their responses, the participants provided factors of the CSR implementation process that impact employees and the outcome of such impact on how employees behave on the job. RQ3 addressed what the participants saw as a possible solution to the problem by asking what they think is an alternative direction to the current state.

The interview questions were semi-structured; therefore, the researcher had the flexibility to ask follow-up questions during the interview process. The follow-up questions included asking for how, what, and why details so that the researcher could encourage the participants to dig deep and express their experiences regarding the phenomenon. The researcher used the flexibility of the semi-structured interview format to produce enough data to draw conclusions reliably (Williams & Kobak, 2018).

Information on past CSR implementation performances afforded further insight into the data; therefore, where available, the researcher researched the archival data of the participants’ IT organizations. Archive data included organization newsletters, performance reports, project documents, internal employee surveys, and program plan documents. Many participants provided these additional data sources. Archival data provided insight into how the IT
organizations’ leaders performed CSR implementation, what leaders did, and employee performance outcomes.

**Data Organization Plan**

McGrath et al. (2018) recommended starting the initial data analysis as soon as the interview data are collected. Planning how to organize the data for easy access was advantageous to avoid the process of analysis becoming cumbersome very quickly (McGrath et al., 2018). The researcher organized the data starting with a file name for identification. As the interviews commenced, the researcher tracked the data sources, methods, dates, times, and locations (as applicable) to customize the data collected and for future reference when needed. The researcher planned to use the NVivo application to assemble and organize the interview data. NVivo is a well-regarded qualitative data management and analysis tool used for assisting in a researcher’s classifying, coding, and arranging of data (Woods et al., 2016). It allowed for tracking data at different stages, emerging themes, and interpretations (Bonello & Meehan, 2019).

Additionally, NVivo software offered the ability to transcribe imported audio which was useful for recording interviews with different media and devices (Woods et al., 2016). NVivo software was acquired in advance and tested in preparation for usage. In addition to NVivo, the researcher used Microsoft Office tools, such as MS Word and MS Excel, for organizing data collection, note-taking, and tracking information during all phases of data collection.

This process was appropriate for the data organization because this research study produced large quantities of recorded data that needed accurate transcriptions and effective management. The process for data organization was planned and tested to ensure its effectiveness (McGrath et al., 2018). This plan considered sources available to the participants and how these could be used in integration with the researcher’s tools. For example, using
qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo, eliminated a number of research data processes that could have been manually conducted and could have led to errors that invalidated the research findings (Bonello & Meehan, 2019).

The researcher took the necessary steps to protect the participant’s anonymity and the data provided. This was done by assigning an identification code to each participant and recording data against the code. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym (P1 to P21) to maintain confidentiality. This allowed easy analysis (who said what) and the ability to contact the right participants for follow-up interviews, member checking, and other reviews as needed.

**Summary of Data Collection & Organization**

Data collection was carefully planned to include the right population, a data collection plan that helped to guide the process so that research bias is not introduced into the process, and using the appropriate tools to ensure that the data addressed the problem identified in the study. To enhance participation and increase data collection, the researcher provided multiple avenues for participants to engage by considering each participant’s situation and comfortability. The researcher used NVivo, a well-recognized research data analysis program, to input, organize, and analyze data. Additionally, the researcher used the applications of MS Word, MS Excel, and Notepad.

**Data Analysis**

One of the most challenging steps in qualitative research is data analysis (G. Lee, 2021; Lester et al., 2020). Data analysis is a continuous process that may occur during different phases, from initial interviews to final follow-up interviews and analyses (Saxena, 2017). Lester et al. (2020) suggested qualitative data analysis in phases because it provides transparency for the researcher and the reader of the research and is receptive to flexibility. Data initially collected
was stored on the researcher’s hard drive by Zoom. The data were then imported into NVivo and cataloged methodologically (QSR International, 2020). Once the interviews had been completed and transcribed, the researcher analyzed the data for relevant themes and emergent ideas. Theme and emergent ideas were developed by employing the auto-code functionality in NVivo (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). NVivo software functionality can be used to organize, analyze, code the collected data, and identify themes. The researcher started the process of manually coding when possible and during the interviews. With data analysis, the researcher was able to identify emergent themes, code themes accordingly, and interpret and draw conclusions from the analysis.

**Emergent Ideas**

The researcher expected to discover and capture emergent ideas during the interviews. All participants were asked the same questions, and depending on the answers, they were asked follow-up questions for further clarification. Initial reviews may generate ideas that need further probing, and it is helpful for the researcher to capture the ideas as they materialize (Lester et al., 2020). Throughout this process, the researcher continued to capture ideas as they came up, which were quickly captured with memos. Memos are short phrases that capture key ideas and concepts that emerge as researchers review, organize, and analyze data and can be organized as part of the coding processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These data were captured in a journal and saved in MS Word. Memos written during the coding process are similar to notes found in classroom journals or lab notes and allow the researcher to reflect and record procedures and code words and develop reminders of how ideas, patterns, and concepts take shape (Rogers, 2018). Memoing involves reflecting on data and taking notes of information emerging from that data (Lester et al., 2020).
This process was repeated continuously throughout the analysis process. After each interview, the researcher reviewed the interview transcripts and field notes as many times as possible and made notes of ideas that emerged (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher captured additional notes or memos during data analysis as ideas emerged. The participants’ follow-up responses helped the researcher to identify emergent ideas. All data from all sources, including the memos, were uploaded to the NVivo software for coding.

**Coding Themes**

In qualitative data analysis, a code is a word or phrase that essentially captures, in summary, the essence of the data collected (Rogers, 2018). The coding process in qualitative research serves as an intermediary between the data collection process and the data analysis process (G. Lee, 2021; Rogers, 2018). This process involves summarizing data into a word or phrase that captures its true meaning (Rogers, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) described it as breaking down large data into segments and giving each segment a name (code) identification. “Codes represent the earliest stage in the analytic process” (Lester et al., 2020, p. 101). The researcher used both open and automated coding for this research study data analysis. The open coding process occurred during the participants’ interviews, including written notes, memos, and observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Automated coding occurred when the researcher imports all data in NVivo. Another feature of the NVivo software is the automated coding capability with data imported from multiple sources. NVivo can identify similar words and facilitate the creation of unique codes in the data (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). The advantage of automated coding is that the software can read through the data and identify and create codes to reduce the errors that could occur with manual coding (Sotiriadou et al., 2014).
The data included the interview questions, interview responses, follow-up data collected, member checking outcomes, and field notes, all of which were imported into NVivo software. The codes generated by NVivo can be aggregated into groups to form the themes of the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data are first imported into NVivo software after collection. Next, codes are generated, and the codes are further grouped into themes. NVivo has robust data management capabilities, capable of producing responses to complex qualitative questions, and all data can be recalled quickly (Maher et al., 2018). All the data coming from multiple sources are filed in one place in NVivo, which is secure and offers collaboration capabilities.

**Interpretations**

According to Stake (2010), all research requires interpretation, and interpretation depends on the researcher’s reflection and defining the meaning of what is observed or said. The researcher ascribes meaning to the discoveries of the data analysis (Creswell, 2014). The discoveries are the emergent themes that develop out of the grouped codes. According to Rogers (2018), “all coding is considered a judgment call, and researchers must identify their biases, subjectivities, and predispositions within the research process” (p. 889). It is also important to take note of these biases during the interpretation of the data as well. Interpretation of data analysis is subjective to the information provided by participants of the study, and the researcher must adequately analyze the information and reflect upon it exhaustively before concluding (Ballesteros & Mata-Benito, 2018).

The researcher reviewed the codes and the categories generated manually and by NVivo from the interview data until no new information emerged. The categories were reviewed and narrowed down by grouping them into similar themes. The themes were expected to align with the research concepts of the study; therefore, the final group of themes was expected to help
address the study’s three research questions (Lester et al., 2020). The research utilized the notes that were taken during the interviews, the initial coding information, the review of the recorded interviews, and the information from follow-up questions to interpret data and form the themes. The themes represented the findings and were carefully formed after taking into consideration all the participants’ interview responses, the notes taken during the interview sessions, and the follow-up questions and answers that were asked for verification or clarification of statements made by participants. The final interpretation of the discovered themes occurred after several rounds of data were coded and reviewed to ensure that the researcher did not infuse any personal bias or preconceived ideas or knowledge into the interpretation.

**Data Representation**

Initially, the themes were developed and assessed manually. NVivo software was used to further develop and assess themes once all the data collection was completed. Discovered themes were coded together into groups for interpretation. Codes’ patterns were represented by grouping participant responses to the discovered themes. A chart can visually display participants’ responses, data interpretation, and themes. The researcher conducted the study to answer the research questions; therefore, data were presented in conjunction with the study’s research questions to address how the findings answered the three research questions identified in Section 1. The findings were reviewed alongside the themes identified in the literature review. Parts of the data representation included diagrams, charts and tables, and other visualization aids used to convey the results of the study in an easy-to-understand format.

**Analysis for Triangulation**

The purpose of triangulation was to develop an all-inclusive understanding of the phenomenon by using multiple data sources (Carter et al., 2014). Data triangulation was used for
this research study. Data triangulation uses multiple data sources collected within a single data collection method (Moon, 2019). The researcher conducted interviews that included both leaders and employees as described in the population for this research study, yielding data from leaders and regular employees. The use of data triangulation helped with complementing data, whereby one source of data that seemed weak was complemented and validated by other data that showed the weak data’s usefulness and reliability (Flick, 2017). In addition to the interview data, archival data, including CSR performance reports, organizational performance reports, and CSR program plan documents, were used for additional data synthesis. By triangulating the interview data from the organization leaders and the regular employees, the researcher was able to achieve a holistic view of the phenomenon by triangulating data from both leaders and employees of multiple IT firms. By examining the archival data, the researcher was able to validate the data obtained from the interviews. This method was possible due to the nature of the study. Performance reports, for example, provide a summary of the business outcomes of organizational activities. These reports can corroborate employees’ experiences.

The data collected from both leaders and employees were triangulated to compare responses to the same questions. This helped to understand how the participants see the issue from different approaches. According to Yin (2014), data triangulation allows the researcher to collect data from multiple sources to authenticate the same finding. This authentication process can help strengthen the researcher’s confidence in the study. In addition to collecting multiple sources of data, the provider of the data, the location of the data, and the timing of the data must be considered (Flick, 2017; Gibson, 2017). The use of data triangulation can help in complementing data whereby one source of data that seemed weak could be complemented and validated by other data to build reliability between all sources of data (Flick, 2017). The simplest
way to triangulate data involves reviewing and examining data over the course of many rounds of analysis (Stake, 2010). The researcher applied data triangulation by reviewing the data several times until there was a level of certainty that the data were thorough and accurate across participants. Stake (2010) recommended member checking as another form of triangulation. The researcher conducted member checking for the interview data with the participants and established the validity of the data.

**Summary of Data Analysis**

The data analysis consists of developing emergent ideas, coding themes, and interpreting all the data to form a conclusion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The four themes identified during data analysis were leader behavior, leader involvement, CSR program development, and CSR practices. Collecting and analyzing data responses from multiple sources and perspectives helped to validate and complement the study and improve outcomes.

**Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are two common criteria used to judge the quality of research designs (Yin, 2014). Reliability pertains to consistency in the researcher’s approach, while validity means that the researcher can validate the study results by using defined procedures that can be replicated (Creswell, 2014). The following subsection discusses the steps taken by the researcher to ensure the reliability of the study outcome (through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research analysis process) and the steps the researcher used to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the study results.

**Reliability**

Reliability in a qualitative study is the aggregation of adequate research data to show consistency across all study participants and support the researcher’s data analysis (Spiers et al.,
Yin (2014) referred to reliability as a repeatable research process, where replication of the same processes would yield the same results. “The goal of reliability is to minimize errors and biases in a study” (Yin, 2014, p. 48). Creswell and Poth (2018) posited that reliability could be achieved by capturing detailed and precise research process steps, detailed field notes through quality recording devices, and detailed transcription to include even the smallest nuances observed. According to Lock and Seele (2018), reliability means no random error exists in the study so that other researchers have confidence in the findings and can arrive at the same results by following the same procedures. The researcher was able to ensure reliability in this study with an interview guide, well-documented processes, and member checking, all of which provided a repeatable process for all participants. Consequently, the researcher established a set of procedures that were credible, transferable, and dependable.

The researcher increased the credibility of the research study by showing consistency in the collection, processing, and analysis of the data (Lester et al., 2020). By capturing and documenting the steps taken throughout the research process, readers can confidently depend on the transparency of the process (Lock & Seele, 2018). This transparency enhanced the credibility of the report. In addition, the researcher conducted member checking of interview responses and documented this step to add to the credibility of the study data and findings (Birt et al., 2016). Another step to establish credibility included the triangulation of the interviews and existing literature for relevance.

The steps taken to document the researcher’s processes added to the transferability of the study’s findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Documenting processes as data were collected and analyzed throughout the study enabled the researcher to solidify what works. These established, effective, and documented processes can be employed in similar studies to achieve similar
results. The researcher documented the data analysis process from codes to categories to themes so that readers could have a transparent view of the researcher’s process (Lester et al., 2020). These processes provided a form of established protocol that the researcher included as part of the study so readers could access the established guidelines (Lock & Seele, 2018). Yin (2014) emphasized the effectiveness of developing a study protocol to deal with the problem of reliability in case studies.

The steps to produce a study with credible and transferable results made the study dependable. Dependability was accomplished by the process of auditing. It included the researcher’s continuous review and recording of data, documenting processes, ensuring the validity of data through member checking, and performing data triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All these efforts contributed to a study with verified and reliable findings. In addition to reducing errors, these processes established consistency to make the study’s interpretations dependable.

The results must be confirmable to reduce or eliminate any assumption that the study results were produced through bias or fabrication. Confirmability can be established through the research auditing process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For auditing, the researcher continuously reviewed and reflected on the study data; employed member checking, data triangulation, and bracketing for accuracy; and followed a guide throughout the study process. The auditing process included maintaining accurate records of all activities throughout the research process. These steps ensured that the study results would be reliable and confirmable. The trustworthiness issues were addressed with the steps taken to ensure credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.
Validity

Validity refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of a study’s results. A valid study has results that are relevant and can be verified, justified, and confirmed by the researcher, the participants, and readers (Cypress, 2017). Validity is an ongoing procedural process that the researcher incorporates from the proposal through the presentation of the findings to validate the results (Creswell, 2014). Hayashi et al. (2019) suggested that the validation process should be incorporated during data collection, data coding and analysis, data triangulation, and result verification. The two common validity strategies of triangulation and member checking were utilized in this research study (Creswell, 2014). The researcher included data triangulation with data from participants’ interviews, the researchers’ notes and memos, follow-up interviews with participants, and the use of archival data. These efforts helped establish validity. The researcher performed member checking to validate the data’s results.

Bracketing

In a study that involves understanding others’ perceptions and interpretations of experiences or events, it is important for researchers to extricate any personal feelings or biases from the entire research process and focus solely on the information provided by the research participants (Gregory, 2019). Bracketing is used to avoid interjecting personal bias during data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Bracketing helped the researcher report the actual themes discovered in the data versus focusing on the anticipated themes. Bracketing ensured the bias of previous knowledge was removed. According to Tufford and Newman (2012), bracketing is used by researchers to mitigate any preconceived knowledge of the research topic that may become harmful to the research study, whether in selecting the topic, developing interview questions, gathering and interpreting results, or in reporting findings. Bracketing served as a mental check
for the researcher to keep personal feelings compartmentalized away from the data and to focus solely on the participants’ experiences without prejudice.

Data saturation increased the study’s content validity. Braun and Clarke (2019) defined data saturation as when there is neither information redundancy nor new data emerging. According to Saunders et al. (2018), data saturation can be achieved when additional data collection is not considered necessary or beneficial, and the new data do not add any information necessary to the study. For example, the researcher conducted participant interviews until no new data were observed. The researcher conducted the follow-up interviews until no new data emerged or the data became redundant. The same process was applied to the member checking process for result verification before the findings were presented.

**Summary of Reliability and Validity**

To ensure the reliability of the study, the researcher used an interview guide during the interview and data collection process. In addition, data were collected to the point of validation to enhance the validity of the results. The data collected from all interviews, surveys, and member checking were triangulated to produce reliable data. Further, the validation process helped produce credible, dependable, transferable, and confirmable results.

**Summary of Section 2 and Transition**

The main purpose of Section 2 was to discuss the details of the research study and the necessary actions and processes used to study the issue. First, the purpose of the research was revisited to reinforce the purpose and direction of the study. The role of the researcher and the steps taken to adequately conduct a research study that involves human subjects, such as CITI training and certification, were explained. The research methodology was revisited to discuss the design and method and why these are appropriate for the study. Triangulation methods
appropriateness to enhance data collection, analysis, and accuracy were explicated. The population from which data were obtained or collected was discussed, including the criteria, needed sample size, and methods. This group was very important to the study because of the data component of the study. The importance of data to this study was reiterated by providing specific detail on the collection of data, the roles of the researcher as the main instrument for data collection, the plan for data saturation, and the tools to gather, store, and analyze data. Section 2 discussed how the collected data were analyzed, ensuring that no researcher bias was involved and that errors were eliminated through member checking, triangulation, bracketing, and overall continuous data review. Research reliability and validity were discussed in detail to outline the processes used to increase the credibility, dependability, transferability, and trustworthiness of the study.

In the next section, Section 3, the researcher presents the findings. The collected data are presented, and the outcomes are discussed. The study results addressed the three research questions and included the themes discovered along with the interpretations, a relationship of the findings, application to professional and general business practice, and any recommendations for additional study. Finally, the personal and professional growth of the researcher, biblical perspective, and reflections are discussed, and the research study is concluded.
Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In this section, the researcher discusses the findings of the qualitative case study on the effects of leadership behaviors on CSR implementation and CSR impact on employee performance. This section provides an overview of the study, including the problem that was addressed, the questions that were explored, and the process of data collection used to obtain answers from the appropriate participants. Based on the data analysis and the discovered themes, interpretations of the themes and their relationships are provided. Utilizing the findings of the study, the researcher developed some key applications and strategies for professional practice that could improve general business practice and used to leverage the findings of the study in business organizations. Those are described in this section, along with the researcher’s rationale and recommendations for further study.

Next, the researcher explores the findings of this study from a biblical perspective. By exploring scriptural references, the researcher addressed leadership behaviors and CSR from a Christian worldview. The researcher could then explicate the importance and benefit for organizations to apply this worldview to their business practices or business functions. The researcher provides some reflections on the personal and professional growth experienced during the process of the research study. Lastly, this section concludes with an overall summary of the research study.

Overview of the Study

This qualitative research case study was conducted to explore and understand the effects of leadership behavior factors on the implementation of CSR initiatives and the impact on employee performance. Research showed a correlation between CSR programs and initiatives and employee performance. Testa, Boiral, and Heras-Saizarbitoria (2018) showed that leaders’
actions toward implementing CSR initiatives set the tone for how employees view, behave, and participate. The specific problem addressed by the current study was the potential failure of leaders to effectively implement CSR initiatives within IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area, possibly resulting in a negative impact on employee performance. The study specifically answered three research questions about CSR implementation, leader behaviors, and employee performance. A flexible qualitative research design was utilized to conduct the study.

The researcher developed 11 semistructured interview questions designed to answer the research questions. Twenty-one participants were recruited for interviews. The participants consisted of both executive-level and regular employees and were recruited from IT companies within the Washington, DC metro area. The participants were required to have been at their organizations for more than a year, have knowledge of the organization’s CSR initiatives and programs, and be involved in CSR. This was to ensure that participants could provide valuable information regarding CSR implementation practices in their organization and provide their experiences. A list of screening questions was asked of each participant to certify they adequately met the criteria for participation in the research study.

The one-on-one, semistructured interviews were conducted over a 4-week period with each individual participant. All interviews occurred through the Zoom video conference application and lasted an average of 55 minutes. The interview questions were open ended and asked in sequential order with follow-up questions for clarification as needed. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym (i.e., P1 to P21) to maintain their confidentiality. Executive-level participants provided valuable data on CSR initiation and implementation from the leadership perspective, while regular employee participants provided details of their experiences by describing CSR practices in initiation, program development, and implementation, as well as
their participation. The combination of information from both executive and regular employee participants provided rich data for triangulation. All interview recordings, notes, and transcripts were loaded into NVivo software. Microsoft Word and Excel software were used to organize data, take notes, and track emergent codes in addition to NVivo. The interview took varying times, but all participants were asked the same questions.

To supplement the interview data, information about some participants’ organizations was retrieved using their organizations’ websites to learn about CSR strategic missions, activities, and programs, as well as CSR documentation as allowed by each organization. Other participants provided links to useful information on CSR activities and programs by their organizations and documents as allowed by the organization. During the interviews, some of the responses to the interview questions led to asking follow-up questions that contributed more information to the data. The data helped to provide more insight into CSR initiatives and implementation. There was a myriad of CSR programs and initiatives being practiced actively by the participants’ organizations in the Washington, DC metro area.

CSR can be both internally and externally based. CSR geared toward internal employees varies in different aspects depending on the organization’s goals with its workforce. The organizations in this study engaged in several CSR initiatives, such as training programs, career development programs, diversity and inclusion programs, and other programs that help employees develop work-life balance. External CSR initiatives are targeted toward the external communities that are impacted in any way by the organization’s business and operations. In addition to this, employees can be members of the community being serviced or are contributing to the external communities through their organizations’ CSR programs. The problem with CSR
programs and initiatives is that programs might not be well developed or might not be implemented effectively, which can affect employees and the organization.

The literature suggested some of the problems with CSR implementation might be related to leadership behaviors and leadership behaviors have an effect on employee performance (Diebig et al., 2016). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to expand the understanding of the factors that affect leadership’s implementation of CSR initiatives within technology firms and the effects the results can have on employees and their performance. The specific problem explored was the potential failure of leadership in IT organizations in the Washington, DC metro area affecting employee performance.

**Presentation of the Findings**

The findings of this study were the result of the interviews conducted with 21 IT professionals working in IT firms located within the Washington, DC metro area. This interview group consisted of eight executive-level leaders and 13 regular employees. All participants were required to be employed full-time, must have been employed for at least a year, and needed to have knowledge of the organization’s CSR activities. Employee gender was not a criterion. The interview was conducted using an interview guide which consisted of 11 open-ended questions (see Appendix A), and all participants were asked the same questions. Follow-up questions were asked in some instances for clarification. The primary research questions were the context on which the interview questions were based, while the conceptual framework served as the backdrop for the interview and data analysis. Data analysis was a continuous process, from individual interview analysis to a collective analysis after the completed interview process. The following subsections contain a presentation of the themes discovered, interpretation of the
themes, and relationship of the findings to the research questions, the conceptual framework, the anticipated themes, the literature, and the problem being studied.

**Themes Discovered**

The four themes identified in this study were leader behavior, leader involvement, CSR program development, and CSR practices. These themes were identified during data collection and analysis using both the written notes and the recorded sessions within the NVivo software. Table 1 summarizes the themes.

**Table 1**

*Discovered Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Leader behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Leader involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CSR program development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>CSR practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At least 18 of the participants identified with each of these four themes. Data saturation was reached by the 18th participant, but the researcher continued data collection to include 21 participants. While organization size and longevity in business were not criteria for the study, these business aspects had an impact on some of the responses to the questions during data collection. For example, larger organizations were more likely to have more than one CSR program operating at a time and a more robust impact within their communities and organization, while smaller organizations tended to have a smaller footprint in their communities, choose a singular program that was implemented with success, and work in
partnership with other similar organizations to extend their CSR reach. Communities in this study included everyone affected by an organization, whether the customers that used the products and services of the organization, the employees of the organizations, the suppliers and distributors, or the communities where the organizations operated (directly or indirectly).

**Theme 1: Leader Behavior.** The participants’ perceptions of their leaders’ behavior represented a major factor affecting how they viewed their organization’s CSR activities. While some participants were not biased toward a specific type of CSR program as long as a tangible and beneficial CSR program existed, what they all wanted to see was active sponsorship and a direct role in CSR programs by their leaders beyond presenting ideas and plans or waiting for results. Participant 4 (P4) said, “Sometimes [the CSR director] seems detached from the plan and changes his mind often, so it’s difficult to get the program through.” These sentiments were echoed by the executive leader participants of the study. Some recognized this as a pain point in their leadership to implement CSR initiatives and programs. As one participant expressed, they have others to whom they answer, which can cause a bottleneck in the actions they can take and what they can do (paraphrased). This observation impressed upon the researcher to note whether leader behaviors can be influenced by others under such circumstances.

Participants voiced a unified concern that they would like to see leaders taking an active role in initiating, implementing, promoting, and supporting CSR initiatives and activities. P6 and P14 stated having similar experiences with their CSR leaders directly participating in volunteer activities, which they said was important. Executive-level participants echoed the same concern, with some stating they needed to take more actions to lead to successful CSR programs. A leader’s active behavior is a catalyst for interest in participating in a successful CSR initiative. When asked about the most important leader behaviors for successful CSR implementation (Q5,
Appendix A), the words empathy and compassion were two dominant words. The word empathy was used by eight participants, and the word compassion was used by five participants.

Participants discussed CSR against recent social issues, especially in the past 3 to 5 years, voicing the importance of organizations taking on more socially conscious activities and affecting their communities positively. P9 said, “These are moral responsibilities that should not be forced.” Empathy to the participants meant that leaders had a deep understanding of the groups they served, the communities that could be affected directly or indirectly by each organization’s activities, the various minority groups and the issues they face, and opportunities for alleviating societal issues directly or indirectly. P21 said, “Ignorance is not acceptable or excusable. Too many issues in your face you can’t hide from it.” Most participants expressed that in light of the recent developments relating to social injustice issues, they had an opportunity to step forward and be responsible and help to alleviate some of the social issues being discussed in society.

Participants said organization leaders should be responsible for the welfare of the communities and not think only about making a profit and keeping it. This was observed through their behaviors and attitudes toward social issues. The issue of the recent mistreatment of Blacks and other minorities was brought up by some of the participants who thought their organizations’ CSR programs could curb some of the social issues over time. For example, some of the participants described CSR-related programs to train high schoolers in Black communities for IT careers, such as application coding and software programming. These CSR programs have aimed to help minorities develop skills from a young age so they can further pursue college in the future and start good careers with secure, well-paying jobs. The first premise is that by starting or targeting these groups earlier or at a young age, children can positively redirect their minds
toward engagement. Intervention can be used to reduce the probability of young Black children getting into potentially troublesome activities that lead to possible negative consequences in the future. The other premise is that by targeting children at a young age, they can start careers earlier and develop economic strength from a very young age to provide for themselves and their families.

The organizations benefit from these training programs. P13 stated that they have been able to recruit such students down the road into their organization as full-time employees. Not only do they provide training for high schoolers, but they also provide college scholarships and internships. The internships have been instrumental in recruiting new talent to the organization. Some participants in organizations with CSR programs reported believing their organization leaders and executives were genuinely concerned and empathetic toward the minority groups and considered these programs useful in alleviating some of the societal issues. Other participants were not certain of the intent of the programs they had, stating that they had yet to see the intended outcomes and had seen little interaction from their leaders.

Some participants stated that their CSR programs provided some level of compassion toward their communities. They reported being involved in some CSR programs and noted that not all CSR programs are about providing IT training to the youth. Some CSR programs provided social services to help with issues like homelessness, food shortage or food access, and employment assistance through workforce re-entry programs. The participants stated that showing compassion in any area is important. When asked about what the participants meant by compassion, which came up a few times, they voiced the same sentiment regarding the word empathy, but most stated that compassion is exhibited by the actions taken by their organizations or organizational leaders.
During the interviews, profit making was brought up by participants. Some stated their leaders’ attitudes and behaviors were geared toward activities to increase profit and make stakeholders happy. P21 said that “retaining profits and keeping company stakeholders happy” may contribute to the organization’s lackluster concern toward some communities. None of the participants had any issue with their organizations making a profit, but they all stated their organizations should at least dedicate a bit more resources or some of the profit to helping the communities.

Some participants noticed some inconsistencies in programs in the past due to funding issues, which caused them to question leaders’ level of commitment to programs. P7 talked about the profit, recognition, and accolades that some leaders sought by creating CSR programs but not being able to achieve CSR goals due to lack of resources. P15 emphasized the need for leaders to encourage employees toward volunteerism, stating that profit should not be a reason for organizations to hold back in contributing to their communities. This is why volunteerism should be encouraged within the organization as part of its CSR framework. Most of the participants stated that they eagerly looked forward to helping or volunteering in their various communities as long as their CSR involvement did not affect their work. But they feel even more encouraged when they have the backing of their leaders through direct participation.

Regarding the theme of leader behavior, all participants, including the executive-level participants, stated that behavior was an issue in need of attention. It is viewed as an indicator of their organization’s response to CSR and whether they are in it for genuine reasons or to check off needed tasks. P11 admitted that there are areas for improvement in how CSR is approached. P11 further stated that sometimes things happen not for lack of genuine interest but for other circumstances that hinder the organization’s proposed CSR initiative. The programs that deal
directly with people and, depending on what the service is, need to be thought out carefully. Open communication can help alleviate any distrust employees have toward leadership when their behavior seems detached.

The interview data suggested that leader behaviors toward CSR have a major implication for employee performance when employees look to leaders for direction. Other behavioral actions expected from leaders included listening, active communication, consistency, fairness, lead-by-example, honesty, caring, showing concern, and a hands-on approach. Leader proactiveness was noted as a positive attribute for CSR implementation success and better employee performance. This finding is consistent with the findings of Yang et al. (2020), in that proactive leadership is a catalyst for a highly engaged workforce because leaders are highly organized, highly interactive, develop strong communication structure, thrive on information sharing, are very good at inspiring others, and are passionate about the organization’s mission purpose.

**Theme 2: Leader Involvement.** Leader involvement became a discovered theme as it was echoed by the regular employee participants. The size and longevity of the organization played a role in their discussions of leader involvement in their organizations’ CSR activities. They expected their leaders to participate actively in the process. When asked about what they meant by the process, they talked about CSR from inception to execution. Further questioning showed that some leaders simply instruct middle managers, for example, to come up with initiatives the organization can take on and report back when completed. One participant stated it is a concern when leaders just ask their managers to come up with a program and report whether it was successful or not. P12 said, “They don’t know in detail what the program is or does, what
are the performance criteria and measurements of success, and how the community benefits from it. They just want to check it off.”

Some others believed that because CSR is considered a strategic level initiative, the executive leaders are responsible solely responsible and need to see it through. Some participants painted their organizations’ CSR activities against the backdrop of recent social events of the past 3 to 5 years, and they believe that their organization or leaders jumped on the CSR bandwagon for fear of negative press. According to P17, “They don’t want to seem oblivious or unconcerned about the things going on and make their company a target for the cancel culture.”

For clarification, cancel culture is a “collective of typically marginalized voices ‘calling out’ and emphatically expressing their censure of a powerful figure” (Ng, 2020, p. 623). Merriam-Webster (n.d.) described cancel culture as the practice or tendency to engage in mass withdrawal of support for something and “as a way of expressing disapproval and exerting social pressure” (para. 1). While the participant used this word somewhat incorrectly, it was understood what the participant was trying to convey: Customers potentially boycott their products and services and promote bad press or label them as an undesirable company with which to conduct business.

The participants tied the lack of involvement of leaders to the lack of proper or adequate CSR communication with employees. “Leaders cannot communicate what they don’t know about. What could they possibly tell us,” said P4. Without adequate communication, employees appeared not to be aware of ongoing activities in which they could participate. These could be internally related programs they could participate in or external programs where employees volunteer in the community.

The theme of leader involvement by the participants who were executive-level leaders was presented differently as an attribute that had helped them to engage more in CSR activities,
engage their employees in related activities, and helped to have a good measure of success.

Executive-level participants fully understood their responsibility as leaders to champion the CSR cause all the way. One participant stated that due to his level of involvement in CSR programs, he had great opportunities to interact with many employees, which would not have ordinarily taken place within the work environment. The data from follow-up questions indicated that leaders who were very involved had CSR as part of their organizations’ strategic plans and were vested in the successful implementation and performance of CSR. The issue of leaders’ involvement was closely tied to the leaders’ behavior. The participants shared varying responses about their leaders’ activities and engagement with employees during CSR implementation (Q3, Q6, Appendix A). Participants reported wanting to see more involvement from leaders throughout the process, from conception to implementation of programs. A sense of connection to CSR programs perceived by participants is effective in getting their buy-in, support, and participation.

**Theme 3: CSR Program Development.** Several participants stated that CSR programs are difficult to initiate or develop. This response came mostly from executive-level participants who were responsible for developing and initiating CSR programs. Either other organizations were already in the CSR space, or organizational size limited the extent to which IT firms could practice CSR. Employee participation sometimes posed a problem for the organizations, which could be due to a lack of interest in the program offered or a lack of awareness by the employees. The organizations that tended to have problems with initiating CSR programs were smaller in size or had been in business for a brief period.

All the participants participated in CSR programs, but most of them noted that developing CSR programs was an issue at first. The participants who stated that the
organizations had difficulty initiating and implementing CSR programs were the executive-level participants. They had the responsibility of developing programs as part of the organization’s strategic initiative to serve their communities.

According to responses provided by participants after follow-up questions were asked, it seems that the issue of difficulty was related to finding a program or initiative that is in line with the organization’s business agenda. Some participants reported involving their employees by providing an avenue to offer potential ideas that they would be interested in participating in and following up after the executive leadership reviewed and decided on viable programs. By doing this, organizations can have CSR programs that appeal to employees to participate and increase their level of engagement to ensure CSR program success. Employee involvement offers an advantage because they tend to have additional community knowledge at a more granular level, and their knowledge could ensure that CSR programs fit their community’s needs. This could increase the likelihood that the program earns all the right buy-in from employees and is implemented properly by highly engaged employees who make it successful.

Two of the participants who described their organizations as small, minority-owned businesses that had only been in business for the last 6 years stated that they partnered with a couple of other larger organizations within the community to sponsor CSR-related programs. By taking this approach, they could effectively affect their communities and give back without incurring the financial burdens that come with developing and running a successful CSR program. Most of the CSR programs described by the participants were not IT related. For example, a lot of the organizations had programs that included feeding the hungry (food drives) or helping to build affordable housing in several communities. Most of the leaders who were interviewed stated it was important to have a solid program in line with the organization’s
strategic agenda and appealed to the employees who could provide a beneficial service to the community. They believed that having a strong connection in these areas could improve employee engagement and increase the program’s success.

In order to combat some of the social issues currently being observed at a larger scale, multiple organizations started providing awareness programs, such as training and education on diversity and inclusion issues, to employees. These programs operated to alleviate hiring issues and benefit the organization in addition to training minorities in IT-related programs. By doing this, the organizations’ leaders believed that they helped address some of the social issues going on in the country. The study findings seem to suggest that the size of the organization is a factor in how easy or difficult it is for an organization to develop, initiate, and successfully implement CSR programs. The findings indicate that most small businesses can get around difficulties by simply partnering with other organizations. The overall ratio of participants who stated being involved in CSR partnerships was 48:52 (10 participants out of 21).

**Theme 4: CSR Practices.** Several participants stated that they are sometimes concerned about organizational CSR practices. The main concern related to a renewed, vigorous interest in CSR programs within organizations in the last 5 years. The reasons for this renewed interest were being questioned as employees attempted to decipher the true purpose of CSR by their organizational leaders. Participants stated occasions where they regarded the purpose of CSR as publicizing an organization’s public image and increasing the potential for company profits. This finding aligns with the issues identified in the literature. CSR implementation decisions that are geared toward profit maximizations are perceived as organizational hypocrisy and involve a mismatch between company purpose, CSR activity, and implementation (Zhao et al., 2020). The lack of correlation between these attributes signals a less than altruistic perception and a barrier
to successful implementation. Participants reported instances where leaders did hold back financial support for CSR programs, raising the question of why an organization plans for CSR programs but does not follow through.

All participants at all levels stated that they have some form of documented CSR initiative or program provided by the organization. The participants of organizations where the employees were allowed to participate in CSR program ideation stated they did not have issues with dishonest CSR practices. In contrast with participants where the leaders are fully responsible for developing, initiating, and implementing CSR initiatives, few had a concern about what and why they are involved in their organizations’ CSR activities. Two participants stated the CSR program they are currently involved in lacked congruence with the organization’s business practices. This would not have been a problem, except the employees had reiterated their concern and lack of interest and complained about it several times, but they expressed feeling forced to volunteer in a program only of interest to the leaders.

Other participants described their CSR participation as a required part of their performance plan, leading to a potentially adverse effect on their annual performance evaluations for lack of CSR participation. This defeats the whole purpose of volunteerism. Also, some participants reported having an issue with the fact that they did not receive time to participate in these programs without participating, affecting their regular work output. Participants collectively agreed that they wanted to be involved in the CSR-related initiatives, programs, and activities that they found enjoyable. However, they did not want programs solely created and enforced by organizational leadership. A participant stated that being forced to participate in an activity not in line with their beliefs was a problem. The participant further stated that engaging
in a CSR program or activity should be beneficial to necessary to everyone involved, both for the organization’s public perception and for the targeted groups and participants.

Lack of employee consultation and open communication presents a few issues for CSR implementation. A few participants stated that they perceived their organizations as being dishonest because, in the past couple of years, they seemed to be interested in implementing CSR initiatives without the need to consult the employees living and working in the various communities. Participants agreed that it seems dishonest when potential programs are presented to leaders, and the leaders do not provide the resources to implement the programs successfully. This is resonated by participants both in organizations where the leaders were responsible for CSR program initiatives and where the employees were encouraged to bring ideas for implementation. This aligns with the conclusion of Yamak et al. (2018) that the lack of disinterest in support and participation in CSR activities is a signal to employees that the initiatives are not important enough for management and not essential to the success of the organization. A participant noted that even after a couple of employees submitted ideas and discussed the benefits of the program both to the organization and to the community in detail, they did not receive any communication afterward. When several employees sought an update, they were told: “Leadership is looking at it, and several other submitted ideas.”

Some organizations started CSR programs in the past 2 to 3 years, even though the organizations had been in existence for many years. The participants expressed a belief that the organizations did not want to be left out of the CSR bandwagon or to look like an organization that does not care. A participant said the organization was worried about the cancel culture that seems to be prevalent within industries where people and business enterprise relationships are
severed when such entities are deemed disinterested in current issues and perceived as not caring enough to help in their communities.

**Interpretation of the Themes**

Several steps were taken to properly interpret the data collected from participants. According to Ballesteros and Mata-Benito (2018), the interpretation of data is subjective to the information provided by participants of the study, and the researcher must adequately analyze the information and reflect upon it exhaustively before drawing conclusions. In addition to being used in data collection and analysis, bracketing was used in the interpretation as a mental check for the researcher to keep personal feelings in check and focus solely on the participants’ experiences without prejudice. To accomplish this, the researcher utilized the notes taken during the interviews, the initial coding information, the review of the recorded interviews, and the information from the follow-up questions to interpret the themes. The themes discovered during the analysis were carefully considered after taking into consideration all the participants’ interview responses, the notes taken during the interview sessions and the follow-up questions, and answers received during the verification or clarification of statements made by participants. The final interpretation of the discovered themes occurred after several reviews to ensure that the researcher did not infuse any personal bias or preconceived ideas or knowledge into the interpretation.

During the interviews, several statements were captured and assigned an individual code. The codes were later reviewed, grouped, and combined to form a single theme. Table 2 represents how participant statements received codes and how the codes became grouped together to form a discovered theme. To ensure accuracy, the researcher asked clarifying questions on statements before assigning the initial codes.
### Table 2

*Initial Codes and Developed Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview statement</th>
<th>Initial code(s)</th>
<th>Developed theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think it is important for managers to back up their words with action and exemplify a good corporate citizen.</td>
<td>How to lead others</td>
<td>Leadership behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will like to see less lip service.</td>
<td>Taking action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not sure what is expected of me if my supervisor can’t communicate what the project is about or we hear of it once in a while but no concrete steps. Makes you wonder if they care.</td>
<td>Improved communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The CEO has joined in a couple of the Saturday outings. It’s kind of refreshing, and it gives the volunteer program some legitimacy.</td>
<td>Empathy toward and identification with the cause</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We all have diverse minorities in our organizations. If they care about what is happening, they have the resources and power to effect tangible change.</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They don’t know in detail what the program is or does, what are the performance criteria and measurements of success, and how the community benefits from it. They just want to check it off.</td>
<td>Program knowledge and understanding</td>
<td>Leader Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent reporting out and asking questions.</td>
<td>Active participation in program updates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The all-hands meeting provides an avenue to see what everyone is up to.</td>
<td>Feedback and review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program initiative announced for the year, directly from the top.</td>
<td>Strategic plan</td>
<td>CSR program development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas submitted for community projects still waiting on response.</td>
<td>Program ideation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make it a priority list and make sure everyone knows about its importance.</td>
<td>Drivers for success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business practice not community connected, but they seem to appreciate the program.</td>
<td>Linking objectives with stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are able to collaborate with XYZ company which helps to keep the cost down for us as an SMB and still be able to make a meaningful contribution.</td>
<td>Business partnerships</td>
<td>CSR practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing the company’s carbon footprint by investing in green systems and practices.</td>
<td>Environmentally conscious investments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As much as I want to help, I am uncomfortable around them, but I have to go with the team to serve.</td>
<td>Implementation and execution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interpretation of the data on leader behaviors based on the study finding is that leader behaviors have an effect on CSR implementation and employee performance. Leader behaviors are observed in two ways. Leadership behavior affects CSR implementation in the sense that leaders who do not have the right mindset regarding CSR initiatives and programs may not necessarily put in the effort required to make CSR successful. For a CSR program to be successful, leaders must show an interest in CSR through their behaviors that include providing guidance, sponsorship, and help; being honest with the intent; constantly communicating about their expectations; being open to feedback; and being willing to listen.

The employees expected that their leaders would be honest with them about the CSR programs and the reason and purpose for undertaking CSR initiatives. Employees expected their leaders to have a genuine interest in making a difference both internally and externally and would communicate about CSR programs constantly and effectively to promote CSR success. Profits and meeting stakeholders’ demands should not be the reasons for CSR programs. Empathy and compassion were two behavioral attitudes and actions viewed positively by employees that motivated their performance.

Regarding the discovered theme of leader involvement, the interpretation of the findings is that employees expect leaders to be involved in CSR programs and implementation at every level. Some employees expected a very hands-on approach from their leaders. Leaders are supposed to guide followers by example; therefore, their noninvolvement signaled the CSR program or initiative as unimportant. Participants noted that they valued leaders who were physically present and involved in CSR activities, including occasions where they would actually go out to perform volunteer activities. This level of involvement added credibility to the program. To the employees, this involvement indicated that their leaders did more than talk
about CSR and demonstrated their interest in its success. This level of leader involvement can influence employee participation in CSR and the success of CSR. The exception to employee participation is in certain situations where employees lack a total interest in a specific CSR program or a CSR program conflicts with their belief systems. Participation might be affected by day, time, location, level of activity, etc., which could reduce participation opportunities.

The interpretation of CSR program development from the findings indicates that developing CSR initiatives and programs is not as difficult as one might think. For example, all organizations’ participants reported some level of CSR involvement. The issue seems to be with choosing from the many opportunities to affect positive change or contribute to the community. For organizations with CSR initiatives geared toward internal employees, many opportunities exist, but the employees found it difficult to choose the most viable and provide the largest advantage. The least effortless CSR activity was making a regular donation to a company cause. Other participants discussed direct CSR programs that they participated in that were run by their organizations, or in some cases, participants’ organizations partnered with other organizations on the same issue or community interest.

CSR programs varied across the border. Some organizations tied their CSR programs and initiatives directly to their operations, such as reducing their carbon footprint and contracting their data center, thereby reducing electricity use and reducing costs of operations. Another organization’s CSR program involved training and developing different members of minority groups with marketable skills for elevating their socioeconomic circumstances and gaining employment opportunities. The IT training program tied directly with many organizations’ diversity and inclusion programs and hiring practices was a form of CSR.
Representation and Visualization of the Data

Twenty-one participants were interviewed for the research study. Eight of the participants held executive-level positions (e.g., chief executive officer, chief information officer, or director), and the remaining 13 participants were regular employees. The ratio of executive participants to regular employee participants was 38:62 (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Participants’ Roles

The interviews took place between February 12, 2022, and March 11, 2022. Several factors affected the length of data collection, such as time availability, participant response time, conflicting schedules, and participants withdrawing from the study. The interviews were conducted over Zoom because all participants were comfortable with the system and preferred it over meeting with the researcher in person (due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions). Table 3 provides a breakdown of the participants’ employment statuses and interview durations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Employee status</th>
<th>Interview duration</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Employee status</th>
<th>Interview duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>00:52:10</td>
<td>P12</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>01:07:52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>00:39:28</td>
<td>P13</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>00:46:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>00:26:59</td>
<td>P14</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>00:39:37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>00:37:12</td>
<td>P15</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>00:31:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>00:37:02</td>
<td>P16</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>00:36:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>01:00:57</td>
<td>P17</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>01:29:54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>00:40:34</td>
<td>P18</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>00:45:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>00:56:11</td>
<td>P19</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>00:58:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>00:40:14</td>
<td>P20</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>00:38:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>01:06:46</td>
<td>P21</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>00:55:01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>01:15:51</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on participation criteria, all interview participants participated in CSR in their organizations. To examine the extent to which CSR operated within their organizations, participants discussed if CSR was included as part of their organizations’ strategic mission and if CSR was defined at the strategic level. Fourteen participants said, “Yes.” The participants discussed CSR partnerships with other organizations, which were commonplace, especially within small organizations. Out of 21 participants, 10 discussed their organizations’ external partnerships, as seen in Table 4.
Table 4

*Organizational Partnerships*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Org defined CSR</th>
<th>External CSR partnership</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Org defined CSR</th>
<th>External CSR partnership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>P12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>P13</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>P14</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>P15</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>P16</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>P17</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>P18</td>
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<td>P8</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>P19</td>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>P20</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>P21</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of participants who had external CSR partnerships was 58%, as seen in Figure 3. Only 48% of participants did not participate in CSR partnerships. It is important to note that almost all the participants who did not have CSR as part of the organization’s strategic mission had ongoing CSR partnerships that involved collaborating with other organizations.
The data were further broken down into participants with CSR defined at the organization level (strategic) to see who was most likely to partner with other organizations. Out of the 14 participants who described strategic CSR, four reported having CSR partnerships with other organizations. Although seven participants did not have CSR included in their corporate strategy, six of them stated they participated in CSR partnerships with other organizations. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of these data.
Several key areas identified earlier in this study included the research questions to address the research problem, the conceptual framework that served as an instrument to investigate the problem-related variables and their interactions, the anticipated themes, the existing literature and relationship to the study, and the problem being studied.

**The Research Questions.** Three research questions helped study the problem, identify causes, and explore deeper into leadership behaviors and CSR. RQ1 asked: How do leaders of information technology firms in the Washington, DC metro area implement CSR initiatives to affect employee performance outcomes? The purpose of RQ1 was to explore CSR in IT firms. Three of the interview questions (Q2, Q3, Q4) were used to address RQ1, which is how employees of IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area perceive CSR initiatives, their implementation, and their effects on employee performance. The themes of leader involvement
and CSR program development related to RQ1, with participants providing insight into their experience with how their organization leaders initiate and implement CSR initiatives. The findings indicated all participants considered the right leadership engagement levels were essential for successful CSR programs and provided experiences whereby they have been affected by certain attitudes exhibited by leaders and others involved with CSR implementation. The level of leadership engagement was linked with leadership styles. The leaders who could influence, motivate, and encourage their employees were deemed transformational leaders. The findings provided insight into various ways IT organizations develop and implement CSR programs and how employees perceive the programs and what perceptions led to their participation or lack of participation.

RQ2 asked: What leadership actions or behaviors within information technology firms in the Washington, DC metro area contribute to a successful implementation of CSR initiatives? The purpose of RQ2 was to address leadership behaviors that can possibly contribute to the failed implementation of CSR, as well as identify positive behaviors and actions. Interview questions (Q4, Q6, Q7) were used to study what leadership behavioral factors and actions contributed to the outcomes of CSR implementation and how. The theme of leadership behavior relates to RQ2. The findings indicate all participants considered the right leadership behaviors were essential for successful CSR programs and provided experiences in which they have been affected by certain leader behaviors or attitudes. The findings identified empathy and compassion as attitudes that employees expect from leaders for successful CSR initiatives.

RQ3 asked: The interview questions (Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11) helped address this with participants providing factors of the CSR implementation process that impact employees and the outcome of such impact in how employees behave on the job. The questions provided an
opportunity for participants to provide possible solutions. The theme of CSR practices relates to RQ3. Participants provided various scenarios and experiences with various CSR practices within their organization and how such practices affected their work and performance.

**The Conceptual Framework.** For this research, the conceptual framework consisted of the four elements of the construct, concepts, leadership theory, and the actors. The construct on which this research was based were leadership behaviors, employee performance, and CSR programs and initiatives. The concepts this research was built around involved proactive leadership, increased leader engagement, and strong CSR initiatives. Leadership theories examined for this research study were transformational leadership and servant leadership. The actors identified for this research study included the organization type of the IT organization, the executive leaders responsible for the CSR planning and implementation, and the employees whose performance is affected by the outcomes.

**Constructs.** The constructs of leadership behaviors, employee performance, and CSR were explored for the understanding of how they interact and the outcomes of these construct interactions. The data analysis from the interview showed that there is a strong relationship between leadership behaviors, employee performance, and CSR. The findings of the study showed that leadership behaviors do affect how various CSR initiatives and programs are created and implemented, as well as CSR outcomes. Due to the responsibility of leadership to strategize, initiate, and implement CSR programs and initiatives, it is crucial and imperative that they exhibit the appropriate behaviors to ensure the organization achieves the goals of its CSR program.

The four discovered themes support the information existing in the literature, confirming the interaction or intersection of leadership behaviors as well as other factors. The four themes
correlate with the information in literature citing the emphasis of leadership behaviors on what leaders do and how they do it, which has a significant effect on task performance and employee performance in various ways. Prior research showed a correlation between leader behaviors and CSR outcomes. The employees’ explanations of why their organizations engaged in CSR related back to how they perceived their leaders’ behavior. For example, a P12 stated the organization leader wanted them to participate in a particular volunteer program even though many employees expressed no interest in this specific CSR and suggested alternatives; however, the leaders did not take into account any suggestions and continued to force the current program, leaving the employees to wonder if there was an ulterior motive to volunteer with the particular organization. The situation developed into a perception of dishonesty toward the leaders, which was made worse when participation became a work requirement.

These findings contain a myriad of CSR programs and practices across the board. Based on the several programs practiced by participants, the type of CSR did not dictate leader behavior and did not have an impact on how employees viewed leader behaviors. None of the participants suggested they had a bad or inappropriate program. It was the leaders’ reasons for the CSR engagement, which might not have been well articulated, that presented an issue, especially without a direct correlation to the organization’s practices. The lack of genuineness can be seen as a precursor to negative behaviors, such as lack of communication, honest discussions, and lack of transparency, which are likely to affect employees’ participation and performance.

**Concept.** The concept of proactive leadership for this study suggested that proactive leadership behaviors lead to increase employee engagement. The findings of the research study and data analysis indicated that employees are more likely to engage when they observe proactive leadership behaviors from their leaders. P16 recognized this behavior as “walking the
talk and putting the money where your mouth is.” Employees expressed commitment to the organization when they observed their leaders as committed. If the CSR was good enough for the leaders, these participants said the program was good enough for them. Participants observed commitment through leader proactivity within their departments or within their organizations and in how proactive their leaders were with CSR and other programs. These proactive leadership behaviors included the use of influence, efforts toward motivation, and the intellectual stimulation of the organization’s employees and the CSR programs.

Participants linked proactive leadership to increased leadership engagement. Levels of engagement included CSR creation, implementation, and engagement. The increased leadership engagement increased CSR engagement and produced better CSR engagement among employees while increasing general organizational performance. Increased leader engagement fostered stronger CSR initiatives that influenced improved employee engagement. Proactive leadership and increased engagement meant that leaders invested more time and resources to develop stronger CSR initiatives to help facilitate better implementation of the program and a higher success rate. A higher success rate occurred when both the leaders and the employees were fully engaged from initiation through the planning, implementation, and completion of CSR programs.

The concept that strong CSR initiatives can drive better employee engagement was observed in the findings of the study. According to Keller and Alsdorf (2016), employees want to give back to their communities through their work, be of service to others, and use their skills in more ways than earning a living for themselves. Participants expressed experiencing fulfillment by serving their communities, but these participants also considered their CSR programs strong and relevant. Proactive leadership, with a strong CSR program, and a very engaged workforce, produces strong organizational performance.
**Leadership Theory.** The leadership theories used to explore this research study are an important element considering the study was based on leadership behaviors and CSR implementation. The two main leadership theories for this study included transformational leadership and servant leadership. A significant amount of literature exists showing the effects of authentic and ethical leadership on CSR, but limited research on transformational and servant leadership and their effect on CSR exists.

This research included transformational leadership as well as servant leadership in relationship to CSR to expand the depth of knowledge. The findings showed that transformational leaders had a positive impact on their employees’ outcomes by helping to improve difficult performance through influence, motivation, and intellectual stimulation. Participants who perceived their leaders as transformational leaders expressed having a very high level of respect for their leaders, which influenced their performance on the job. Only two participants (P5, P14) used the word transformational during their interviews. Other participants used words that characterize transformational leadership, such as visionary, motivation, integrity, communication, and accountability.

Servant leaders are characterized by empathy, honesty, ethics, selflessness, listening, constant communication, and directly leading change. They create the vision, communicate the vision, set goals, and make sure that employees understand the goals and purpose. P9 referred to the “ability to nurture employees for success.” Participants who perceived their leaders as servant leaders had higher job satisfaction and an increased engagement in CSR program participation. They attributed their job satisfaction and CSR engagement to their leaders’ active engagement in CSR activities and constantly communicated with them as an incentive and a source of encouragement for participation. The issue of ethics was addressed with the participants, who all
agreed that ethical behaviors were essential to the development and implementation of CSR programs. This was important with CSR at the strategic level and matching with the organization’s implementation plan.

**Actors.** The three main actors for this research study were the executive leaders, the organization employees, and the IT organizations where the experience of CSR took place. The purpose of this research study was to explore the role that leader behaviors and actions play in implementing CSR initiatives and programs and the effects on employees and their performance. Therefore, all three actors were the main requirements for the study to occur.

The findings of the study via the themes of leader behavior, leader involvement, CSR program development, and CSR practices were directly provided by the actors or participants of the study. The executive leader participants provided valuable information about CSR practices from the leadership angle. When asked about the importance of CSR initiatives and programs, all the executive leader participants agreed that CSR is an important component of their organization and has become increasingly important, leading them to ramp up their involvement in recent years. Most of the executive leader participants articulated clearly their CSR programs, their reasons for undertaking those programs, and their CSR programs’ relationships to their organizations’ strategic missions. P19, for example, provided details on the historical progression of CSR and how the organization encountered some issues that prompted the organization to start CSR initiatives, including the creation of the CSR department. According to P19, the CSR department grew exponentially, and the firm’s CSR programs included responsibilities to their internal employees and to the external community.

Some of the executive-level participants detailed issues that affected their efforts in initiating and implementing CSR programs. For example, a few encountered difficulties in
creating programs well suited to the organization, while others had issues with acquiring enough resources and manpower to run those programs and with trying to get employees on board to participate. This issue included programs geared toward helping employees both professionally and personally, and in some cases, employees may not respond well to the programs.

The executive leader participants were honest in detailing their experiences and recognizing the areas in which they believed they needed to improve in order to increase the probability of CSR initiatives and programs being successful. P13 explained the difficulties in running a CSR program could go back to the organization not setting defined and measurable strategies and objectives. P13 said, “We jump on opportunities to serve the communities when they show up.” Participants noted that in order to ensure they are constantly engaged with the community, they tend to partner with other organizations to overcome organizational shortcomings. The findings of this study showed that the executive leaders implementing CSR initiatives and programs could have issues attributable to their own personalities, behaviors, or actions, as well as to the organization’s structure itself. For example, four of the five executive-level participants who defined CSR as part of the organizational mission statement seemed to do better than those who did not.

The regular employee participants in this study were affected in two ways by CSR programs and initiatives. First, they could be the direct recipients of CSR initiatives and programs that were targeted toward them as part of their organizations’ internal CSR. Secondly, they could be impacted by their organizations’ CSR programs that were geared toward the external community and as part of the implementation team or members of the affected community. The findings showed that either way, employees are affected by how they perceive and interpret CSR programs directed toward them or how they perceive and interpret the
organization’s social responsibility commitment to the external community. These perceptions affect how they perform on the job.

The employee participants provided information that either corresponded to the information provided by executive leader participants or refuted the information provided by executive leader participants. They discussed how they viewed their leaders’ behaviors, actions, and attitudes toward CSR programs, and they translated those behaviors and actions in different ways. Almost all the participants echoed the same sentiment that they looked to their leaders’ behaviors to determine their own activities’ impacts and performance in CSR programs and initiatives. Some of the participants talked about some of their organizations’ practices with which they did not comply for various reasons, including their own personal belief systems. Others questioned the intent of their organizations’ CSR programs due to practices, such as enforcing mandatory participation by employees and promoting CSR activity that failed to resemble the organization’s typical operations. The findings showed the importance of employee satisfaction for the success of any CSR across all the discovered themes.

IT organizations were specifically chosen for this study because they represented a unique opportunity to involve a little-used actor in research. Also, as of the time of this study, little CSR-related research specific to IT organizations, especially those located in the Washington, DC metro area, had been conducted. Therefore, this study presented an opportunity for the IT sector. The participants provided unique and interesting information and described a plethora of CSR initiatives and programs being undertaken in their organizations. For example, not all IT organizations participated in IT-related CSR programs or activities, but these organizations still had an impact on the community. The findings of this study suggest quite a lot of room exists for improvement in what and how organizational executives and leaders initiate,
develop, and implement CSR programs and in how they influence increases in employee performance. Increased success in the implementation of CSR initiatives and programs leads to increased employee performance which is very important and essential to an organization’s overall performance.

**Anticipated Themes.** The discovered themes in the findings were related to the anticipated themes of the study. The anticipated themes of the study were that leadership actions would not support or complement the behaviors needed for successful CSR implementation; that leadership would not be involved enough to encourage employee engagement, therefore leading to CSR failure; that IT organizations would have difficulty developing CSR initiatives and implementing them; and that organizations had dishonest CSR practices with the intent not to serve the community but to provide their organizations with wholesome external perceptions and increase business relationships. The discovered themes were similar to the themes anticipated for the study. However, there was a difference in the findings regarding CSR program development from the anticipated and the findings of the discovered themes.

The findings suggested that, contrary to previous literature, all participants actually had different CSR initiatives ongoing within their organizations. Although the IT organizations did not have strictly IT-related CSR programs, they were involved in other CSR-related programs that were successful. In some cases, rather than not participating in CSR at all, some organizations partnered with other organizations to use their similar interests to further their CSR initiatives. In some cases, the executive leaders chose the CSR initiative for the organization to implement, while in other cases, the organizational leaders allowed employees collectively to provide CSR ideas for which a well-planned process was used to decide which initiatives could be viably implemented.
The Literature. The findings from this study were similar to those found in the literature. The literature revealed that leadership behaviors were indicative of their attitudes toward CSR implementation. Employees use their leaders’ attitudes to determine their own actions and responses toward CSR. During the study, participants echoed the same sentiments toward leadership behaviors or attitudes. They tend to follow their leaders’ lead. In the same way, the literature revealed that employees value CSR activities and the opportunity to engage in them. Many participants in the study voiced the same attitude toward CSR within their organization. CSR implementation challenges can originate from both leaders and employees (Singh & Mittal, 2019), which the responses from the participants affirmed.

In relation to the literature, a lack of leadership support or direction can pose a problem. Due to insufficient communication, some participants lacked an understanding of the work they needed to do. Some participants had low levels of interest in their organizations’ CSR programs because they did not perceive the programs as beneficial to their needs or in line with their value systems. Most participants stated that CSR only recently became important because of social issues currently affecting many communities. They felt that their organizations’ involvement became a positive opportunity to participate in contributing socially to their various communities.

A slight difference in the research finding pertains to the transformational and servant leadership styles. While literature lacked enough information about the specific effect of the transformational and servant leadership styles on CSR, the findings suggested that transformational and servant leadership styles are the most effective in galvanizing employees for better performance. These two leadership styles and behaviors were instrumental in
increasing employee performance, CSR implementation success rates, and organizational performance.

Another slight difference between the findings of the study and the literature concerns the impact of IT on CSR initiatives and implementation, especially around innovation. Only a few participants’ organizations were involved in CSR initiatives that dealt directly with IT product and service innovation. For example, an organization’s CSR initiative was to go green. The organization engaged in various activities like contracting their data centers to reduce the carbon footprint by buying green IT equipment and products and putting into place several initiatives to encourage employees to take certain steps that reduce their energy usage and waste, such as reducing paper usage.

For most of the other organizations, their CSR initiatives involved programs such as training disadvantaged minority groups in IT education and services like programming languages, computer systems, and engineering. Other participants had a narrower focus on IT education and targeted training to minority women groups. Some of the IT firms’ CSR programs were community ingrained, such as helping with housing issues by partnering with Habitat for Humanity and helping to sponsor food banks and other community feeding programs. P3’s organization focused on providing financial donations to other organizations that practiced CSR-related programs in line with the interests of the leader of the organization. Employees were encouraged to volunteer with those organizations on a regular basis.

Compared to the literature on IT, CSR, and innovation, the findings of this study were mixed. Participants were involved in various forms of CSR that were equally effective even when not directly IT based. General literature revealed that employee involvement in creating viable CSR initiatives in collaboration with their leadership was critical for success. It promotes
engagement, increases buy-in, and facilitates the generation of ideas. The findings of the study showed that a majority of the participants did not have direct engagement, contribution, or participation in CSR initiation with their organizations’ leaders. They were merely participants in fulfilling the CSR mission.

An additional dissimilarity of the findings with that of the current literature is the mandating of CSR-related activity participation on employees. Although just five participants provided this information, it was important to note. In all five cases, participation in CSR activities was included as part of these employees’ performance metrics. Two of the participants used the word “forced” to describe their feelings on mandatory volunteering as part of their yearly performance appraisal. Although leaders said mandatory CSR was a way to actively engage employees, the employees reported being forced to participate in activities that might not appeal to their interests or beliefs. These situations are met with resistance.

**The Problem.** The findings of this research indicate that a real problem exists with the implementation of CSR by organizational leaders, and the problem directly impacts employee performance and overall organizational performance. Based on the findings of this study, numerous opportunities exist for organizations to develop and choose an appropriate CSR initiative or program that equally benefits the organization, its employees, and its community. The major problem is that participants were usually not involved in the development of their organizations’ CSR program initiatives. The lack of employee involvement means that employees are not likely to have a full understanding of the CSR program and may not participate in it because lack of communication limits their involvement. This lack of involvement could lead to the likelihood that programs designed by leaders lack pertinent information and ideas, reducing CSR effectiveness at capturing the needs of the community and
interests of the employees and leading to no participation. These are factors that can affect successful CSR programs.

Behavioral issues were among the most mentioned issues by the participants as one of the major problems encountered in CSR implementation. The behavioral problems mentioned by participants included dishonesty, lack of communication, lack of commitment, and lack of employee involvement. Leader attitudes and behaviors can deter employees from participating in CSR service. For example, participants expect leaders to lead by example. The findings showed organizations whose leaders were highly involved in CSR implementation had a better chance of CSR success. The findings further demonstrated that CSR initiatives differ between organizations. For example, some IT organizations’ CSR programs are not IT based, while some organizations’ CSR programs are very technically based. Overall, the findings of the research showed similar issues relating to the problems found in the literature.

Summary of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to find answers to the three research questions on the impact of leadership behaviors on CSR and employee performance. The specific problem was the potential failure of leaders to effectively implement CSR initiatives within IT firms in the Washington, DC metro area, possibly resulting in a negative impact on employee performance. Eleven interview questions were developed to address the three research questions and produce insight into the specific problem addressed. To understand the experiences of employees with CSR, 21 participants were interviewed and asked the same questions. The interview questions were open-ended and ensured participants had the opportunity to provide details about their experiences. During the data analysis stage of the research, four themes
emerged. The four themes were leader behaviors, leader involvement, CSR program development, and CSR practices.

The leaders’ behaviors offered insight into how certain behaviors or actions taken by leaders are perceived by employees and the effects on their performance. Leader involvement provided insight into the level of engagement with CSR initiatives and implementation likely to affect the success of a CSR program and the level of engagement by the employees in a CSR program. The level of leader involvement was seen as a signal for the level of importance of CSR programs and how employees measured their participation.

CSR program development across the IT sector varied. Some CSR initiatives dealt directly with IT, such as reducing carbon footprints in data centers and procuring green systems. CSR programs geared toward internal employees included diversity and inclusion training and development. Another group of CSR activities was focused on the external community, such as offering minority training programs and addressing social issues like food scarcity, homelessness, and community volunteerism.

CSR practices contained details on various ways organization leaders executed their CSR initiatives. Issues with CSR practices included a lack of adequate funding and support for program initiatives, mandatory employee participation (including adding CSR as part of employee performance measurement metric), and misleading activities and reporting. The conclusion from these four themes is that leadership behaviors affect CSR implementation and employee performance in IT organizations in the Washington, DC metro area.

**Application to Professional Practice**

The findings of this qualitative research case study are significant to the field of leadership, CSR, and the subject of employee performance. There is a substantial impact of
leadership behavior on employee behavior, employee performance, and employee perception of the organization, as suggested by Inceoglu et al. (2018). CSR has an impact on organizations as issues dealing with climate change, environmental sustainability, and societal concerns continue to be on the minds of employees, stakeholders, and consumers (Hastings, 2016).

An organization’s participation in socially responsible initiatives, especially taken at the strategic levels, is considered a predictor of organizational performance (Nguyen et al., 2019), and CSR has been shown to have effects on employee performance (Story & Castanheira, 2019). Successful CSR implementation and improved employee performance lead to improved organizational performance. As previously noted, the significance of employees as organizations’ most important assets (Northouse, 2019) commands the necessity and importance of understanding and finding a solution to employee performance for technology firms. CSR has been shown to have a positive influence on employees, but the outcome of employee performance is largely influenced by how leaders are perceived in their intent toward company CSR initiatives (Inceoglu et al., 2018). The findings of this research study, specifically the themes discovered, could be applied to improve various business outcomes in IT organizations.

**Improving General Business Practice**

The findings of this qualitative research case study could be used to improve the understanding of the leader behaviors that affect CSR initiation and implementation within organizations and how the behaviors can affect employees. Because CSR is directly linked to employee performance (Story & Castanheira, 2019), CSR initiatives and programs, from inception to implementation, must be successful. For CSR initiatives to succeed, leaders must demonstrate the right attitudes and behaviors, as revealed in the discovered theme of leadership
behavior. The right leadership behaviors are essential to making sure that any employee or business endeavors are successful.

Due to CSR being considered a moral issue or a moral obligation by an organization to its employees and communities, it is essential to have the right leader with the right behaviors and attitudes. The findings showed that employees look to their leaders for direction and have expectations of how their leaders should behave, making the right behaviors more important. The combination of leader and employee behaviors and attitudes could potentially contribute to the outcomes of the organization’s cultural environment. Therefore, organizations could benefit from incorporating behavioral assessments into their hiring practices.

The study findings revealed that transformational leaders or servant leaders who drive an organization’s CSR goals successfully and positively influence employees toward success. This is done through a transformational leader’s ability to inspire, communicate, and lead toward a vision and a servant leader’s ability to care, provide trust, set an example, and put others first. With these findings, organizations can have improved screening processes for hiring potential leaders who possess the right behaviors and attitudes.

For successful CSR program implementation, the participants said empathy, compassion, kindness, and honesty were required in the attitudes leaders should have toward employees and communities. These behaviors or attitudes should apply both to the people affected and to the CSR initiatives and programs themselves. This is a signal of the program’s importance to the organization’s leaders as perceived by employees.

Another area of improvement for business practice relates to the theme of leader involvement. Organizations can improve the outcomes of CSR initiatives and programs (or any other work-related activity) by getting more involved to increase productivity, quality, and
outcomes. Involvement means sometimes being hands-on with the programs through direct and frequent interactions with employees, community members, and other stakeholders. Additionally, leaders need to request and utilize feedback and input provided by employees to show that employees are valued. These communication activities may involve direct sponsorship of programs suggested by employees.

The attitude of leaders in creating CSR initiatives and not following through has been viewed by many employees as greenwashing. Greenwashing is a prevalent issue in many organizations, and employees tend to take a negative approach toward CSR initiatives when the organization’s intentions do not seem like a genuine concern for the environment and society but as part of the profit-making strategy (De Jong & Van der Meer, 2015). Such dishonest practices influence the outcome of the CSR programs and affect employees, as seen in the findings of this study. When leaders are more involved in their CSR programs, they send a positive signal to employees, who then become more likely to increase their involvement. Organizational leaders and employees can improve their involvement capacity by restructuring and eliminating programs and activities that add no value to the organization, thereby increasing the time and resources spent on CSR programs.

CSR program development is an area that can be improved in terms of what organizations decide to do and why. Organization leaders should have well-considered CSR initiatives and programs and solid reasons for those programs having a strong tie to the organization’s business. While not compulsory that organizations must practice CSR in the same subject as their business practice, it does lend some credence to their CSR initiatives and programs when they do. For example, in the data, some participants expressed confusion and stated their indifference to certain programs within their organizations because they did not see a
correlation between their organization’s business and the programs and could not be certain of the value. Some other participants expressed current programs had no real effect on the community being served, but no changes had been made. The participants expressed the importance of CSR programs aligning with their organizations’ line of business or providing real value and benefit to the community served.

When leaders view CSR initiatives and programs as a way for an organization to increase relevance and profit, there is the propensity that the programs created could serve only the organization’s purpose and not the community. To improve the viability of CSR program development and success, organizational leaders should consider the organization’s business and strengths, solicit ideas from employees and the community, and ensure they process feedback adequately and without bias. Therefore, organizations can benefit by showing how their CSR programs and initiatives relate to a relevant aspect of their organizations so that employees can easily understand the program’s value and the community can view the program as meaningful.

CSR practices by businesses can be improved. The practice of CSR must have an impact on employees (internal CSR) and the community (external CSR). This impact must be measurable to determine the value of the program. Only a few of the participants in this study lacked an awareness of the criteria used to identify the success of their CSR programs. By measuring the effectiveness of CSR programs, organizations can better align them with intended outcomes.

Another area of practice that can be improved involves allowing employees to take ownership of their organizations’ CSR programs. Some of the participants noted that their organizations’ CSR priorities came from above them in the organizational charts, and their lack
of involvement in setting CSR priorities decreased their desire for participation. Leaders can benefit greatly by incorporating employee ideas when sponsoring CSR programs.

An additional area of concern that can be improved is the practice of forcing employees to participate in CSR initiatives and programs by making it part of their yearly performance plan. The findings showed that employees disliked being forced to participate in CSR activities by their organizations. This dislike is especially problematic if a CSR activity does not match the ideals and core values of the employee or represents an activity in which they have an interest. When employees are mandated to participate in CSR programs, both leaders and employees if employees may benefit by empowering employees to have some level of ownership. Organizations might benefit from CSR programs and initiatives developed with the help of the employees most familiar with the surrounding community.

**Potential Application Strategies**

The findings of this research study can be leveraged by organizations for hiring practices, developing their CSR strategy framework, and sustaining ongoing CSR practices. For organization hiring practices, by incorporating behavioral assessment tests as part of the interview process for leaders or managers, organizations can have an increased opportunity to hire leaders and managers who possess the right behaviors and attitudes toward CSR initiation and implementation and toward employee performance. The assessment can help to narrow down potential leader candidates that have the essential behaviors and attitudes found in transformational and servant leaders, the two leadership behaviors that have been recognized during this study as essential to successful CSR implementation as well as employee performance. By understanding the characteristics of transformational and servant leaders,
organizations can begin to incorporate the types of behaviors and actions and the activities that complement leadership skills and characters.

Organizations might leverage the findings of this research study by incorporating aspects of leader involvement into their regular leadership activities. To increase the level of involvement needed to have a successful CSR program and increase employee participation, leaders and organizations can begin to take steps to enhance the probability of improving leader involvement. This includes consciously and intentionally eliminating organizational activities that take away from being able to participate fully in CSR programs.

The findings of this research study provide some information on what not to do when it comes to creating and developing CSR initiatives and programs and some of the steps that may work. For example, the study showed that involving employees and allowing them to take ownership may be an added value for the organization. Therefore, organizations can leverage the findings of this study by increasing the involvement of employees in developing CSR programs. Organizations, for example, can create a repository of ideas to which employees may submit the ideas and explain why the idea would work and what would benefit the organization and the community. The organization can organize brainstorming sessions periodically to discuss and choose ideas for CSR program implementation. This transparency may lift some of the burden from the organization leaders tasked with CSR programs.

Regarding CSR practices, the findings of this study provided some opportunities for employees and leaders. Leaders may benefit from reassessing their current CSR practices, which could influence them to design better practices for successful CSR development and implementation that might enhance employee performance. Overall, organizational leaders can review the findings to develop an understanding of how to use the information provided by the
participants to address their individual organizations. These leaders might leverage the findings holistically in their organizations and make changes to their organization’s CSR. They could use or leverage the findings of this study internally to gain a better knowledge of the inner workings of their CSR programs, their employees’ perceptions, and how they can overall increase employee participation and performance. Increased employee CSR participation and performance benefit organizational performance and success. These steps could be applied to external CSR programs targeting various communities and lead to increased participation from employees who improve their overall job performance.

Summary of Application to Professional Practice

The purpose of this study was to expand the understanding of the factors that affect leadership’s implementation of CSR initiatives within technology firms and the effects the results can have on employees and their performance. The findings could be used to improve some general business practices. The discovered themes of leader behavior, leader involvement, CSR program development, and CSR practices could be reviewed by businesses and organizations as they implement changes to their CSR practices.

The findings on leader behaviors could influence organizations to improve their hiring strategies by incorporating behavioral elements into their job interview and assessment practices. Applying these findings could improve the probability of hiring leaders who exhibit the right behaviors and attitudes toward CSR implementation and toward employee performance. With leader involvement, organizations can improve their work strategies by eliminating programs or activities that reduce the time and resources that could be dedicated to the proper running of CSR programs.
CSR practices can be improved by leveraging the research findings to develop new or better ways of developing programs and initiatives by gaining input from employees or the community. Organizations might benefit from participating in CSR programs that are well defined, developed, and implemented to maximize success rate. Organizations could benefit from not enforcing CSR activities on employees and instead by leveraging employees’ skills and services as volunteers. Overall, the findings might benefit business organizations seeking to develop and improve their CSR practices, improve how their businesses function, and ensure their CSR programs are successful. By incorporating these strategies, they might generate improved employee performance and organizational performance.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

During this research, subsequent questions for the researcher came to the fore in response to the answers to the three research questions. Some of these questions seem important enough for further study or research. The first study question was about the introduction of the participants and their organizations and CSR practices. One area that stood out was the size of the participants’ organizations. During the data collection, the researcher noticed a few differences in some of the responses based on the participants’ firm sizes. The researcher observed and tracked the sizes of the participants’ organizations in correlation to the number of CSR programs and potential for partnerships.

The findings suggest the size of an organization can impact what and how CSR programs are developed and implemented and determine if an organization is likely to partner with another organization to accomplish a CSR goal. Organization size was not a factor in this study, but additional research could be used to determine the impact of organizational size on CSR initiatives and program implementation. The data suggested a possible association between the
size of the organization and its number of CSR programs, as well as between the size of the organization and its CSR types.

The researcher observed the participants who described their organizations as small businesses tended to keep CSR programs very simple. The researcher noted that the size of the organization could play a role in whether the organization partners with other organizations to implement CSR programs. The organizations that identified as small businesses stated most of them had partnerships with other organizations for participating in CSR. For most small businesses, partnering with other businesses was easier than doing nothing at all to benefit their communities. By partnering with other organizations, small businesses share the costs associated with running CSR programs. Therefore, further study is needed on the influence of organization size on CSR partnerships and how CSR partnerships add value to both the organization and the community.

Another consideration for further research is an organization’s size and CSR practices. The researcher noted a trend with leaders of small organizations tending to perform CSR activities as a group, whereas leaders of larger organizations were less likely to be involved directly with any CSR field activity (a matter linked to the theme of leader involvement). Some participants in the self-identified large organizations stated employees were expected to perform or participate in CSR activities, and in some cases, CSR participation was mandatory as part of their performance evaluations. Also, for the big organizations, most of the participants reported CSR as part of the strategic mission and how they conducted business, about which the employees were made aware. Future researchers could explore how organizational size affects how employees conduct CSR activities and what the consequences might be for the organization, the employees, and the community.
A few participants of the large organizations stated they did not enjoy some of the CSR program activities in which they were asked to participate. By further studying the effects of CSR activities organized by large organizations versus small organizations, employee performance can be explored for increased understanding. In the findings of this study, employees of smaller organizations tended to describe enjoying participating in their CSR programs more. The immediate difference that stood out between the two groups related to CSR activities and practices. The employees in the smaller organizations during this study tended to have more direct involvement in the CSR programs being implemented and expressed their overall satisfaction with CSR practice. Smaller organization leaders tended to implement simplified activities, while larger organizations developed more elaborate CSR programs. Some of the larger IT organizations’ CSR programs involved data center reconstruction to a green data center, reducing carbon footprint, eliminating computer waste, and other complex program activities. However, these larger organizations had the resources to implement such programs. The smaller organizations might not be financially robust enough for complex activities and might mostly take part in CSR programs geared toward the external community for solving societal problems, such as addressing housing issues, addressing food-related issues, and improving community mental health by working with other organizations. They also have very simple and straightforward CSR programs for their employees geared toward building a strong employee base and organization. These were observations based on the findings and were not conclusive. Therefore, further study is appropriate.

A final area for further study involves gender and CSR implementation. The number of female executive leader participants in this study was minuscule compared to the number of male executive participants. Future researchers could examine how gender may possibly affect CSR
implementation and involve transformational or servant leadership attributes. Research questions for future study include: (a) Does gender dictate the leadership behaviors or attitudes required to successfully implement CSR initiatives? (b) How do female leaders drive employee CSR performance compared to their male counterparts? (c) Are female leaders able to initiate, develop, and implement CSR better than their male counterparts? The gender aspect should also be studied in a replication of this study to determine if outcomes change if most participants are female.

**Reflections**

Conducting this study exposed the researcher to a few things in the business world. There was personal growth in the researcher’s knowledge in conducting research, facing adversity, and perseverance. There was professional growth in the knowledge and understanding of CSR, the opportunity to meet and interview organization executives and professionals, and the experience of conducting research. The following subsections provide the researcher’s reflections on the personal and professional growth that occurred as a result of this study. As a person of faith, the researcher reflects on the findings of this study from a biblical perspective and discusses how the findings can be integrated into the business world.

**Personal & Professional Growth**

There was a lot of knowledge gained during the entire process of this study. This research was rigorous and exposed the first-time researcher to the breadth of research methodologies and tools available. The researcher gained proficiency in conducting literature reviews and case study research. The researcher acquired a wealth of knowledge about CSR and improved as an academic writer. The information gained from the research provided the researcher with knowledge about all the possible avenues for conducting business research. The literature review
provided a wealth of knowledge in the field of CSR, leader behavior, and employee performance being studied. The time spent reviewing the literature on CSR and leadership behaviors was eye-opening. The researcher gained in-depth knowledge and understanding of the existing issues relating to CSR, especially in the IT sector. This research was very helpful in understanding CSR, its importance for organizations and employees, and how it can be improved for the overall community. During the data collection process, the researcher developed a better understanding of the nature of social responsibility and the different ways organizations fulfill CSR. Before the study, the researcher had limited knowledge of the subject. However, the experience of conducting the study enlightened the researcher with ideas about CSR ranging from the individual level to the societal level.

In another growth area, I gained knowledge from having to use different technology tools to conduct this research. It was eye-opening to see the interconnectedness of information and the accessibility available through this technology. An ongoing pandemic caused establishments like schools and libraries to be closed and physically inaccessible, but this study had to be conducted. Because of the electronic tools available, the research design remained appropriate. The online library and databases were accessed from a distance for the literature review, and the interviews were conducted by using video conference tools that allowed the researcher to view and observe participants, just like what would have happened in a face-to-face interview. Technology increased the efficiency of data transcription, note-taking, and data analysis, all of which would have been tedious and time-consuming if done manually. The pandemic forced the researcher to perform an in-depth investigation into all possible IT tools that can be used to perform this research successfully. This effort led to the discovery of a plethora of IT tools beneficial for research.
The researcher gained interpersonal skills, especially with participants. From the process of recruiting and assessing participants to interviewing them, the researcher developed interpersonal connections and learned how to interact with various people from different backgrounds. Learning to connect with people for the first time virtually and requesting them to relate personal job experiences to a stranger was daunting at first. The researcher learned to observe and read body language and facial expressions while using technology. These lessons helped with probing participants further using follow-up questions as part of taking time to develop the appropriate questions for thorough data collection.

The researcher developed higher levels of perseverance, commitment, and total reliance on God for emotional and mental strength when faced with a devastating loss that almost derailed this research endeavor. Personally, the study process helped to develop the researcher’s time and activity management because of having to juggle full-time employment with school, church, and family obligations. The researcher increased in prioritization skills and maximized the time available each day to accomplish set tasks.

**Biblical Perspective**

Integrating the biblical perspective into business functions benefits businesses operating with high moral standards, ethical practices, and integrity. The findings of this study on leader behavior, leader involvement, CSR program development, and CSR practices can be integrated into business from a Christian worldview. The Bible contains many examples of great leaders and some examples of bad leaders. However, there is a substantial amount of the Bible that is steeped in love toward God and one’s community, signifying the importance of social responsibility.
From a biblical perspective, leadership is a widely popular topic with different examples of what leadership should be or not be. Leadership is essential because “without wise leadership, a nation falls; there is safety in having many advisers” (NLT, Proverbs 11:14). How the Bible wants leaders of organizations to behave appears in many Bible passages. The Bible directs leaders to guide their followers with love, empathy, and compassion.

This study addressed transformational and servant leadership attributes as desirable leadership behaviors. These attributes include integrity, vision sharing, motivation, communication, empathy, honesty, selflessness, and listening abilities. The Bible supports using these attributes during leadership. CSR leaders must lead with integrity because “it is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness, for the throne is established by righteousness” (KJV, Proverbs 16:12). Leaders should have high moral standards and principles because “happy is the land whose king is a noble leader and whose leaders feast at the proper time to gain strength for their work, not to get drunk” (NLT, Ecclesiastes 10:17). CSR leaders need to “know the state of your flocks, and put your heart into caring for your herds” (NLT, Proverbs 27:23). Such knowledge requires leaders who are empathetic toward their employees and external community and aware of concerns that affect their followers as they ensure effective CSR.

An example of a compassionate and empathetic leader is Moses. On several occasions during God’s leadership, the Israelites angered God so much He was ready to destroy them, but Moses interceded (NLT, Exodus 32:11-14, Numbers 14:11-19). King David can be viewed as both a transformational leader and a servant leader in different phases of his life. But the ultimate leadership can be found in Jesus Christ who not only transformed the lives of His disciples but also showed them that being a leader means being a servant. By being a servant leader, Jesus
showed His disciples and followers what He expected of them by modeling the necessary behaviors Himself (NLT, John 13:12-15).

Additionally, Jesus led His disciples and followers in a way that they became leaders themselves. This alludes to the importance of leaders developing their employees and enabling their growth. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father” (NLT, John 14:12). Training and development should be part of an organization’s CSR toward employees. Unfortunately, training budgets are usually among the first budgets cut when organizations need to restructure financial resources (Sung & Choi, 2021). Jesus trained His disciples and followers to commission them as ambassadors of the gospel, which they carried forward throughout their lives. The Bible documented evidence of Jesus’s efforts, and the leadership of Jesus’s disciples continues to this day.

Jesus’ ministry was an example of CSR. Jesus healed the sick, fed the hungry, raised the dead, and served all the people who came to Him to learn about the kingdom of God (NLT, Matthew 9:35, Matthew 4:23, Acts 10:38). He felt socially responsible for them. Therefore, organizations can learn from the work, journey, and ministry of Jesus Christ to understand the importance of addressing social issues through servant leadership.

Another biblical perspective can be drawn from the way the leaders (priests and rulers of Israel) administered the Hebrew laws. For example, Jesus was not pleased with the Pharisees and the Sadducees because they did not obey the laws that did not suit them even as they taught the law to the people and enforced it (NLT, Matthew 23:1-30). In the same manner, organizations and leaders might sometimes give a misleading impression of their CSR activities, which can be seen as a form of greenwashing. Greenwashing is misleading and can be a deterrent to employee
and organization performance and growth because of its inherent deceit and dishonesty, implying consequences for the leader (NLT, Proverbs 20:17).

In sum, CSR practices must be genuine and implemented with the right intent (not just for profit) to impact the lives of an organization’s employees and communities positively and effectively. “Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labor will increase” (NKJV, Proverbs 13:11). Profit should not be the sole purpose of an organization, even though it is important to organizational sustainability. Keeping in mind that employees are impacted by their leaders’ behavior, leaders must operate as servants to set the example they want to observe in their organizations.

**Summary of Reflections**

The findings of this research provided information on the various leadership behaviors and attitudes that can impact CSR implementation and employee performance. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher reflected upon the entire process. The researcher expressed both the personal and professional growth experienced while conducting a flexible qualitative case study research to gain new knowledge in the area of leadership and CSR and its impact on business organizations. Additionally, the researcher conveyed the need to initiate and implement socially responsible programs that are beneficial to employees and impactful to the community. With the knowledge gained from the study, the researcher has become equipped to contribute to organizations seeking to lead CSR efforts.

With CSR practices and other business functions, it is important that a Christian worldview be integrated into business operations. Integrating CSR and business operations with a Christian worldview provides organizations with a solid foundation of moral, ethical, and integrity principles on which the business operations or functions can be built. The themes
discovered in this research are well represented in the Bible that contains instructions on how they should be put into practice. In addition, the Bible discloses the negative implications of operating a business in an immoral or unethical way, and the biblical examples are not bear similarities to the outcomes experienced by today’s organizations that lack CSR practices. Just as Jesus instructed his disciples to set examples, it is important for organization leaders to set the right examples in their behaviors and actions. As organizations practice CSR, leaders must ensure that they provide the right environment and behaviors, such as showing genuine care for their employees and communities. And as employees perceive these behaviors, their own performance on the job will benefit and lead to increased organizational performance.

**Summary of Section 3**

This study was conducted to explore leadership behaviors on CSR implementation and their impact on employee performance. The data collected from the 21 participants provided insight into leadership behaviors exhibited toward the implementation of CSR and how the perceived behaviors affect employees. The four themes of leader behavior, leader involvement, CSR program development, and CSR practices emerged from the study and provided details into these four areas of concern regarding CSR implementation and employee performance. Each theme was supported by data provided by the participants of the study.

The findings were examined in the context of key areas of the research that included the research questions, the conceptual framework, the anticipated themes and existing literature, and the problem. Leadership behaviors have an impact on CSR implementation and employee performance. The participants provided specific behavioral attitudes and actions that they observed of leaders toward CSR implementation. This finding was important because, at the time of the study, current literature did not provide exact information on the behaviors that affect CSR
implementation and employee performance. Based on participants’ responses, transformational and servant leadership behaviors and actions were significant to successfully implementing CSR programs and positively influencing employee performance. These leadership behaviors were significant in how leaders engage in CSR implementation and employees.

The benefit of the findings involves applying them to improving general business practice. The researcher expressed how the findings can be leveraged for various CSR applications and strategies within organizations. The researcher noted the potential opportunities for further study, such as studying organizational size in relation to CSR programs, CSR implementation based on gender and leadership, and the impact of CSR collaborations between organizations. Section 3 concluded with a reflection on the personal and professional growth experienced by the researcher conducting the study. The researcher reflected on gaining personal growth and learning by conducting the study, including learning about the various research types and processes involved in quality research. Professionally, the researcher had the opportunity to interact with IT industry professionals and leaders and gained insight into business processes relating to opportunities for CSR. Finally, Section 3 concluded by reviewing the four themes discovered during the study from a biblical perspective and how the themes relate to the aspects of leadership found in scripture. Scriptural references related to each theme in the findings to explain the benefit and reasons why a Christian worldview would be beneficial to organizations and CSR.

**Summary and Study Conclusions**

The general problem addressed by this study was the failure of leaders to implement CSR initiatives, effectively resulting in a negative impact on employee performance. The existing literature showed that leader behaviors have an impact on the successful implementation of CSR
initiatives and on employee performance. However, no specific leader behaviors or actions were specifically identified as the cause of an inability to successfully implement CSR initiatives and programs or affect employee performance positively (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Testa, Boiral, & Iraldo, 2018). This study addressed the gap in the current body of literature regarding the leader behaviors that affect CSR implementation and employee performance in IT firms.

The findings of this study provided specific leader behaviors and attributes for a successful implementation of CSR initiatives and programs and improved employee performance for contributing to the body of knowledge on leadership behaviors and CSR implementation in IT organizations. The research was conducted with a total of 21 participants, from which four different themes were identified as potential areas of interest for the implementation of CSR. These four themes of leader behavior, leader involvement, CSR program development, and CSR practices provided areas that were identified as concerns relating to several CSR issues. Participants also provided possible alternatives to current issues. Therefore, these themes contributed new knowledge on how organizations can better improve the rates of CSR implementation success and improved employee performance. By exploring the discovered themes, the study findings provided in-depth insight into how each of the discovered themes can be implemented practically in organizations to improve their performance outcomes. Due to the significance of the identified leader-related behavioral actions and attitudes, which appeared across the four themes, implementing behavioral factors in the hiring of leadership and implementing behavioral components into CSR implementation was recommended as possible options for organizations to improve overall outcomes. Several other strategies were also provided by participants that could be of benefit to IT organizations implementing CSR initiatives and efforts to improve employee performance.
The themes of this research were also reviewed from a biblical perspective to provide insight inside into the importance and the benefits of implementing CSR with the right behaviors and attitudes from a Christian worldview. Overall, the study findings can be used as a guideline in identifying and addressing organizations’ potential behavioral issues toward CSR. The identified leadership behaviors and actions attributed to transformational leadership and servant leadership may be used as a guideline for an organization’s leadership assessment process. During the interview and data collection from the participants, potential areas for further study were identified that could further add to the literature and knowledge of leadership behavior and CSR in IT firms.
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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about yourself, your organization’s CSR activities, and the level of your involvement with CSR.

2. How do you perceive CSR initiatives and implementation within your organization?

3. How do you perceive leader activities in CSR implementation?

4. How does CSR implementation impact your work activities and progress?

5. What do you perceive are the most important leader behaviors that can contribute to successful CSR implementation within your organization?

6. How frequently does leadership engage employees in CSR implementation, and in what capacity?

7. What are the CSR outcomes you perceive as successful CSR implementation?

8. What drives employee engagement in the organization’s CSR initiatives?

9. What does your organization’s CSR mean to your community?

10. What changes would you like to see regarding your organization’s CSR initiatives?

11. What changes would you like to see regarding your leadership’s implementation of CSR?
Appendix B: Screening Questions

1. Are you at least 21 years of age or older?
   Yes/No

2. Are you still currently employed at (ABC) organization?
   Yes/No

3. Are you still located in the Washington, DC metro area?
   Yes/No

4. Are you employed full-time or part-time?

5. Are you either a top-level leader or a regular employee? What is your title or role in the company?

6. Are you knowledgeable about your organization’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities?

7. Have you been employed by the organization for more than a year?
   Yes/No

8. Have you changed roles?
   Yes/No
   a. If yes, please explain your role

9. Are you still interested and able to participate in the study?
   Yes/No
Appendix C: Research Consent Form

Title of the Project: Corporate Social Responsibility Engagement Levels and Employee Performance
Principal Investigator: Omotola Idowu, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be at least 21 years old, male or female, must work in an IT firm located in the Washington, DC metro area, be either a top-level leader or regular employee, and have been employed by the organization for more than a year, and are knowledgeable about your organization’s CSR activities. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?
The purpose of the study is to expand the understanding of the factors that affect leadership’s implementation of CSR initiatives within technology firms and the effect the results can have on employees and their performance. The research will help to identify behavioral attitudes toward CSR initiative implementation and how they can be improved to improve successful implementation rates.

What will happen if you take part in this study?
If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Initial Interview - Complete phone, web-conference/virtual/remote, or face-to-face interview. During the initial interview, audio and video recordings will be utilized to help ensure accuracy. The initial interview process should take between 45 to 60 minutes.

2. Follow-up Interview – A follow-up interview (for member checking) to review the interview transcript may be needed for data accuracy and validity and should take 15 to 20 minutes. The follow-up interview will take place via phone, web-conference/virtual/remote, or face-to-face. During the follow-up interview, an audio-recording will be utilized to help ensure accuracy. The follow-up interview process should take approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

The benefit to society may include an increase in knowledge and identification of leadership behaviors that can improve successful CSR implementation within IT firms so that organizations may address implementation issues and achieve improved success with their CSR initiatives.
What risks might you experience from being in this study?
The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?
The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Published reports will not include any information that may identify a subject. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of codes (such as P1, P2, etc.). Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. Only the researcher will have access to the password-locked computer and the interview data. Any physical paper transcripts will be filed in a locked cabinet in a room accessible only to the researcher. All data, interview responses, recordings, transcripts, etc., will be destroyed, and paper copies will be shredded after 3 years.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?
Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?
The researcher conducting this study is Omotola Idowu. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at . You may also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor, Dr. Betty Ahmed, at .

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.
Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

### Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

[ ] The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

____________________________________
Printed Subject Name

____________________________________
Signature & Date
Appendix D: Participate Recruitment Email

Dear [Recipient Name],

My name is Omotola Idowu, and I am a doctoral student in the School of Business at Liberty University, and I am conducting research on corporate social responsibility (CSR) engagement levels and employee performance as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Business Administration degree. The purpose of my study is to expand the understanding of the factors that affect leadership’s successful implementation of CSR initiatives within technology firms and the effects the results can have on employees and their performance. I obtained your contact information from your displayed profile on LinkedIn, and I am inviting you to participate in my study.

Participants must be at least 21 years of age or older, work in an IT firm located in the Washington, DC metro area, be either a top-level leader or regular employee, have been employed by the organization for more than a year, and are knowledgeable about their organizations’ CSR activities. You are being asked to take part in an audio-and video-recorded interview on your experiences with CSR implementation in your organization. The interview will take place via telephone or web-conference/virtually/remote and should take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. A follow-up interview (for member checking) to review the interview transcript may be needed for data accuracy and validity and should take 15 to 20 minutes. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but this information will remain strictly confidential.

I will follow up via email with the screening questions for you to complete in a few days. If you are willing to participate, please contact me at             or              to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this letter and contains additional information about my research. Once screening questions are completed, you will be asked to send the consent form. Please sign the consent document and return it to me before the scheduled interview. You may do this by scanning the signed document and sending it to me as an email attachment, or you can return it to me before the start of the interview in person.

Sincerely,

Omotola Idowu.

Doctoral Student

Liberty University
Appendix E: Telephone Recruitment Form

Participant Recruitment Script (Verbal)

Hello [Potential Participant],

As a graduate student in the School of Business at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Business Administration degree. The purpose of my research is to expand the understanding of the factors that affect leadership’s successful implementation of CSR initiatives within technology firms and the effects the results can have on employees and their performance. If you meet my participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be at least 21 years of age or older, work in an IT firm located in the Washington, DC metro area, be either a top-level leader or regular employee, have been employed by the organization for more than a year, and are knowledgeable about their organizations’ CSR activities. If you are willing, you will be asked to take part in an audio-and video-recorded interview on your experiences with CSR implementation in your organization. The interview will take place via telephone, web-conference/virtually/remotely and should take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. A follow-up interview (for member checking) to review the interview transcript may be needed for data accuracy and validity and should take 15 to 20 minutes. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

Would you like to participate?

Yes: Great. Could I get your email address so I can send you the screening questions for eligibility to participate for you to answer? Can we set up a time for an interview?

No: I understand. Thank you for your time.
A consent document will be emailed in addition to the screening questions. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate and successfully complete the screening questions, you will be asked to sign the consent document and return it to me via email or in person before the interview.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?