



UNIVERSIDADE  
CATÓLICA  
PORTUGUESA

DISSERTATION

Dissertation to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a  
Master's Degree in Communication: Organization and  
Leadership

By

Maximiliane Fuchs

Católica Faculty of Human Sciences

November 2021



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CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND CORPORATE SOCIAL  
RESPONSIBILITY:

A CASE STUDY ON IHG HOTELS & RESORTS AND WHAT  
ORGANIZATIONS CAN LEARN FROM COVID-19

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## **Abstract**

The present study is to be located in the research fields of crisis communication, corporate social responsibility communication, and organizational change. By conducting a case study research on the crisis communication strategy of the Intercontinental Hotels Group, implemented during the COVID-19 crisis, this study aims to find out how an organization's in-depth knowledge about its stakeholders, their expectations and overall profile, can help to improve crisis communication, prevention, preparedness and long-term sustaining business. The case study research is informed by a qualitative document analysis (QDA), conducted on content from IHG's website, its CSR reports and social media presence, which has been coded, categorized and analysed with a focus on answering the main research question "How did IHG engage stakeholders in its COVID-19 related crisis communication and what can be learnt from it?". The discussion of the analysis results leads to the conclusion that IHG as an organization in crisis, is aware about the importance of its stakeholders to maintain steady business and reputation, but still fails to know its stakeholders well enough to communicate to them over the right information channels. The study ends with recommendations for future research on the topic and a personal professional outlook in the context of adding value to the future of organizational crisis communication.

*This work is dedicated to my grandfather,  
who gave me the hunger for knowledge  
and confidence to go into research  
and create positive contributions.*

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## **Introduction**

In the beginning of 2020, the outbreak of the new Coronavirus in most regions of the world, brought a state of crisis on people, their everyday life routines and the world's economy. While the humanitarian consequences of the Covid-19 were hardly fathomable, leaders in politics and economy had to act instantly and in an unprecedented environment. The usually economically strongest industries started to experience an era of sudden and ongoing organizational changes and the need to keep up with the speed of new developments occurring every single day and in every part of their organizations. The challenge arising from these circumstances for organizations is to manage the crisis adequately, get business back on track, and more than anything: communicate all changes, the reasons for them and how the crisis is being handled to all stakeholders, so that long-term impacts can be turned out as positive as possible. While crisis management is a well-researched discipline in many fields of study, crisis communication is rather considered an emerging topic of interest. This is mainly owed to the rising number of crises and disasters organizations have to deal with in a continuously growing and faster developing environment, and also the severity of these, like the Covid-19 pandemic shows.

As all economic sectors and organizations in them suffered unexpected and unprecedented disruption from the virus outbreak and rapid spread, the hospitality and accommodation industry is of special interest while studying the organizational consequences of the most current crisis, because it is one of the most crisis prone sectors overall (Barbe, 2020). In the present situation, this specific economical branch has been hit by sudden travel bans, internationally and locally, posed by almost all nations worldwide. Cross-border movement, no matter if for leisure, business or other motives was cancelled from one day to another, flights postponed and many accommodations even shut down completely, without a notion of when business would go back to 'normal'. Organizations in the industry and all they affect and involve, stakeholders, communities, consumers, had to stop their routines, react to the crisis and manage their expectations in a completely new way. Besides significant financial losses for the organizations, health, safety and reputation suddenly became the number one topics of interest in a formerly stable business environment concentrated on growth. Working in relation to one of the main players in this heavily hit industry, the

Intercontinental Hotels Group, this research is developed on a personal experience of the meaning and impacts of the crisis and how an organization deals with it with a special notion on a stakeholder's role in this process.

In reaction to the COVID-19 crisis the Intercontinental Hotels Group, or short IHG, saw many of its branded and owned hotels being closed, colleagues all around the world going on furlough or even losing their jobs, and the communities it operates in suffering many kinds of losses and disruptions. Getting its business back on track, even despite the virus inflicted crisis, IHG, just as all other organizations around the world, found itself in an urge to communicate the crisis and respond quickly to address colleagues, communities and guests, to secure the future of its brand. All the efforts regarding these entities are usually found in an organization's corporate social responsibility strategy and how it is communicated to all the ones involved in it. Therefore, to tackle the crisis IHG factored it into its CSR strategy and presented its stakeholders in the beginning of 2021 with the campaign 'Journey to Tomorrow'. The concept presents an idea of how to adjust to the "new normal", build a CSR strategy that nurtures on the many changes the COVID-19 pandemic introduced to the sector, and how to strengthen and develop the brand's corporate social responsibility in a future, where crisis prevention but also preparedness are the number one goals in the industry. As all these goals seem to align with what a guest, colleague, supplier or investor wants to hear when being affected by a crisis, crisis communication does not end here.

The present case study research uses IHG's reaction to the COVID-19 crisis and how it has been communicated so far as the unit of analysis to find an answer to the question: **"How did IHG engage stakeholders in its COVID-19 related crisis communication and what can be learnt from this?"**. Other questions to inform the findings in the case study are what communication techniques and channels were used and considered as most important by the organization, what role does the organization's corporate social responsibility strategy play for the crisis communication, and how a deep and detailed knowledge of stakeholders, their personal profile and expectations to the organization can help to improve crisis preparedness, response and recovering. The aim is to collect meanings and answers regarding these questions by conducting an in-depth empirical content and document analysis on relevant communications from IHG, after collecting and consulting relevant existing literature on research and theory on the topics of crisis communication, stakeholders, corporate social

responsibility and organizational change. A detailed explanation of the case itself, the methodology used and the ontology it is based on are included in in the chapters this work is built up by. To conclude it is not only tried to answer the main research question and sub-questions, but also to add value to the emerging importance of the field of crisis communication, how research can learn more about it and improve it in the future and what professional insights can be drawn from the inductive study of an active case, to possibly make the COVID-19 crisis less of a threat to organizations in the future but rather an opportunity for organizational learning, crisis prevention and better stakeholder relationships, as the people in and behind an organization are and should be seen as the driving source of growth and sustainment.

## Part I – Theoretical framework

The following chapter is supposed to start this study off by introducing theory and existing literature from the relevant areas of crisis communication, Corporate Social Responsibility as a topic in strategic communication, organizational change, and how to create long-lasting strategic communication. After reviewing notions on these topics and building a theoretical framework for the research area this work is located in, the case of the Intercontinental Hotels Group will be introduced to forge a bridge to the empirical part of the study where the crisis communication strategy of the brand will be the unit of analysis.

### 1. Literature review

#### *1.1 Crisis communication*

This chapter introduces the literature review by collecting important notions on crisis communication as the core theoretical remark of this study, when it is necessary, what it can do for a brand, how to create sustainable or persistent crisis communication and the role of social media in it, to cover the main backgrounds of the unit of analysis presented later on. Different sources of literature have been consulted to get a basic overview of these topics and how they are discussed in current and established research.

##### *1.1.1 Notions on crisis communication and when it is necessary*

“Crises happen. When they do, organizations must learn to effectively communicate with their internal and external stakeholders, as well as the public, in order to salvage their reputation and achieve long-term positive effects” (Zaremba, 2014).

With these words, Alan Jay Zaremba sums up his notions in: “Crisis Communication. Theory and Practice” (2014). The quote also includes the main variables discussed in this chapter: crisis, effectively communicating about and in it, the parties that need to communicate and have to be communicated with, and why the communication is necessary. To get into the topic of crisis communication, the first interest is to find out how this word combination is put together and how it is defined in parts. One of the main authors that were consulted for this chapter and to answer this initial question, is W. Timothy Coombs, who worked out various notions on crisis communication and the nuances of it. In the context of this research,

it seems appropriate to also take over Coomb's definitions of frequently used terms in the field, even though he explicitly points out that "there is no one accepted definition of a crisis" but that it is still important to come up with a context specific one to choose the right approach on the subject (Coombs, 2015: 2). In the first chapter of his book "Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding" (2015), Coombs starts with talking about crisis *management*, instead of directly getting into communication and agrees with R. W. Perry on the fact that crisis is always "some breakdown in a system that creates shared stress" (Perry 2007 in Coombs, 2015: 2) but then goes on to differentiate the concept in two sub-categories: Disasters and organizational crises. This differentiation is crucial in this work's approach on understanding a brand's reaction to an event that seems to be a disaster on the first take, as it occurred sudden, disrupted a whole system's routines and forces figures in the affected system to a "new course of actions" (Coombs, 2015: 3). Looking at the situation IHG is in after being hit by the pandemic closer, Coomb's ideas on an organizational crisis seem to fit much better though. The two most important components in determining an organizational crisis are, according to the author, an organization's stakeholders and their perceptions of the situation in question. As soon as "important expectancies of stakeholders related to health, safety, environmental, and economic issues" are threatened, disrupted by an unpredictable event or at least perceived as such, so says W. Timothy Coombs, the existence of a crisis in the system can be implied (2015: 3). How it is illustrated on the case of the Intercontinental Hotels Group here, this is exactly what happened when hotels, gastronomy, entertainment and most air and land travel had to shut down with the outbreak of the new Coronavirus in the early months of 2020. The spread of the virus and its consequences were unpredictable for the industry and the people related to it. Everyone involved, starting with the traveller, over the industry's employees, suppliers, executives, investors, communities surrounding it and their everyday lives were suddenly completely disrupted, not functioning in a conventional way anymore and all issues mentioned in Coomb's definition of an organizational crisis, especially health and economy were greatly affected. In "The Handbook of Crisis Communication" (2010), also edited by W. Timothy Coombs next to others, Robert L. Heath introduces the collective volume by naming some reasons of why crisis communication is so important. After explaining that crises reproduce themselves as "issues lead to crisis and crisis lead to issues" (2010: 1), Heath puts a brand's interest in effective crisis communication and management in easy

words: “Crisis costs money, which offers the incentive to avoid, mitigate, and respond in ways that best protect capital and human resources, and generically ‘reputation’ which some feature as the essence of effective crisis response” (Coombs et al., 2010: 1). Transferred to the present case this shows that IHG’s need for employing crisis communication in reaction to the pandemic arises from their daily business and therefore income being in danger and hence their internal and external stakeholders, who can either not profit from the brand’s usual business or spend on it. Not acting on the crisis and avoiding these consequences would imply to endanger the stakeholders’ health and security, and overall, the containment of the crisis and therefore disappoint the stakeholders’ values and expectations to the brand. This is where for Coombs the practice of ‘crisis management’ comes in. “Crisis management represents a set of factors designed to combat crises and to lessen the actual damage inflicted. [...] it seeks to [...] protect the organization, stakeholders, and industry from harm” (Coombs, 2015: 5). The author picks up on Heath’s notion that “crisis prevention, mitigation, and communication response begins with savvy strategic business planning” (2010: 2) and lies down that to manage crises, an organization always needs to employ “four interrelated factors” of preparedness (Coombs, 2015: 5). These include *prevention*, to avoid crises in the first place as far as possible; *preparation*, which tries to cover all possibilities in case of crisis, written down in a so-called crisis management plan. The CMP should not only come into action when the crisis already hit but must also consider vulnerabilities and weak spots of the organization that could be affected in anticipation of a crisis and build a dedicated informed team to go through with the plan when necessary. The preparation is applied in the *response* step of crisis management, which is the point where the organization has to communicate the crisis and its characteristics to its public and is most often the critical point for its reputation and stakeholder perception (ct. Coombs, 2015). In this step “organizations try to limit the threat to public safety, reputation erosion, brand damage, and loss of sales, to name but a few of the common crisis communication objectives” is how Timothy Coombs puts it (2015: 6). If the response part of the crisis management is communicated and done well, it can even strengthen the organizations reputation and stakeholders’ trust in the capabilities and safety of the brand. This is in the most optimal way a part of an organization’s recovery journey after a crisis, if the crisis management plan turned out to work. To evaluate the effectiveness of the CMP, is included in the fourth of Coombs’ crisis factors: *revision*. During the revision it will be decided what went well and what needs to be

adjusted in the previous three steps to be better ‘prepared’ for future crises. The author also suggests in all steps to have the crisis management team play the CMP through on examples and hypothetical crises, to see probable holes and instabilities in the plan (Coombs 2015: 6). This procedure is suggestively what happened in the early months of the pandemic in the communication departments of IHG and lead eventually to the more time spanning new CSR plan, which seems to be the outcome of the crisis’ revision. Another notion on this procedure from a historical point of view was published by Robert L. Heath in another edited volume called the “Handbook of Risk and Crisis Communication”, where Heath is one of the editors. Here he says that the “advise capturing the essence of risk and crisis communication” can be summed up as “let experts determine the probabilities of risks, hold a public meeting, share this expertise with those who attend, and move on with the project” (Heath, 2009: 5) which informally concludes on the same four steps Coombs suggests. While W. Timothy Coombs’ conceptualization of crisis communication is also taken over in this edited volume, Heath sends ahead that who talks about crisis needs to talk about risk as “crisis is a risk manifested” (Heath 2009: 15). The author explains that both, risk and crisis getting bigger as topics in applied communication theory but that “over the years, risk is likely to surpass crisis in volume of discussion merely because it is foundational to crisis” (Heath 2009: 1) which is the reason why the topic is brought into this chapter even though the main interest is still crisis communication and what it can do for brands. The handbook is introduced by framing risk as interesting because “it can help to explain interpersonal relationships, and the communication used to create, maintain, and terminate them” (Heath 2009: xi), which directly points at the research area where this study is located in, even more so by explaining that “likewise, risk is a central feature of organizational communication, and strategic business management” (Heath 2009: xi). Especially in the eye of the crisis named in this study, the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of risk and its growing importance stems mainly from the growing economy that includes industries, organizations, and social institutions and the simultaneous development of their stakeholders’ expectations and values towards these institutions in terms of having “a role in deciding how health, safety and environmental risks will be managed” (Heath 2009: 34). Heath is one of the most named organizational factors when it comes to crisis or risk communication and management and will be discussed more detailed in the next chapter.

Other characteristic of crisis communication that need to be considered in the frame of this study are for one, that it is not one coherent concept that has one 'recipe' to follow when needed and that there are various situations and circumstances where it can become necessary, which are important to be distinguished. To the first instance for example Matthew W. Seeger says that "one of the challenges in developing a best-practice approach is to identify a sufficiently large sample of cases" to draw from but that "crises and disasters are, by definition, relatively rare events" (Seeger, 2007: 233). That crises and disasters usually also happen disseminated through large timespans and spaces, it makes it particularly hard for researchers to gather in-moment or at least timely relevant information on how to 'best-practice'- wise treat crises in communication. The other point here is that there are various different kinds of crises and disasters that can appear, as well as tools they can be treated with, and groups of people and topics who are concerned with them. A 'best-practice' in this case would seek to "improve organizational and professional practice [...], including many communication contexts" (Seeger, 2007: 232). Seeger includes communication here in the fields of corporations, health, public relations, addressing employees, stakeholders and organizational change (ct. Seeger, 2007). This leads to the fact that "crisis communication usually has a variety of goals, some of which may conflict", Seeger says (2007: 234). Even though the beforementioned goals within the crisis management plan are common to almost all crises, there also might be more specific issues within a crisis to one individual organization. Also, how the organization eventually goes through with the plan is highly case specific and depending on the advancements of the crisis. Robert R. Ulmer from the University of Arkansas, a colleague and co-writer of Matthew Seeger, put his whole focus on the phenomena of specifically organizational crises. In the introduction to his book, he states close to Seeger that "increasingly, crises are common parts of the social, psychological, political, economic, and organizational landscape of modern life. They affect more people than ever before, are more widely reported in media" (Ulmer et al., 2003: 3). Ulmer already wrote the perceptions back in 2003, which leads to the idea that these notions and characteristics of crises only grew and increased in the past 18 years. In either way also for Ulmer it is essential to understand that as far as "crisis as an organizationally based phenomena with profound effects on individuals, institutions, communities, and society as a whole" (Ulmer et al., 2003: 3), its communicative dimensions are the most important ones to learn, get better, and overcome crises more easily. In terms of an ontological background

for Ulmer it is also interesting “how meaning is constructed” during a crisis and it being communicated (ct. Ulmer et al., 2003). Another interesting point Robert Ulmer presents is that the consequences of an organizational crisis often exceed the ones of a “regular” crisis and are as such often not sufficiently covered in the media during the aftermath of a crisis (ct. Ulmer et al., 2003). For Ulmer it is critical to see that especially the stakeholders of an organization are hit hardest by disruptive, unforeseeable events. Stakeholders are what holds an organization together and build it up in different parts. The author says that in this notion both, external and internal, individual and community stakeholders have to be considered, which paints a much better and larger picture of how deep the impact of an organizational crisis can even go and with how many parties has to be communicated in a way they individually understand and gain from (ct. Ulmer et al., 2003). That crisis communication can really work for industries, brands or enterprises, the people and entities concerned with the task within them should know about by which forms of crises their area can be affected and how they can and should be handled, Ulmer says (2003). “Similarities, although not universal, allow for crisis-type classification and subsequent planning, management, and crisis response” (Ulmer et al., 2003: 15). While the outbreak of a virus, like the topic of the present case, is not really industry or life-circumstance specific but affects all parts of life and economy when it turns into a pandemic, individual industries suffer in different ways on an organizational level. Here Ulmer et al bring in a similar idea like W. Timothy Coombs by recommending that planning, response, mitigation, and structured communication are the essential steps for any organization to deal with a crisis (Ulmer et al., 2003).

In summary all these notions characterise incidences like the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the hospitality industry as an organizational crisis. It came unexpectedly, disrupted all normality within the industry and had heavy impacts on and even endangered the lives and routines of all stakeholders of the industry. Although the whole world was and still is under the influences of the virus outbreak, organizations need to deal with the crisis on an individual level first, to be able to keep their internal and external stakeholders, help the communities they are located in, and secure ongoing business, which then again ensures resources to take care of stakeholders. Strategic, planned, and informed communication is the tool of choice in this situation according to the consulted literature. As communication is the most natural and information loaded form of social interaction, brands can directly and imminently address their employees, customers, suppliers, investors, shareholders etc.

through it, while reacting to a crisis. Effective crisis communication, so the literature shows, can not only limit the damage a sudden state of disruption can bring onto an industry, but also save its reputation, strengthen the trust of its stakeholders, and can even ring in a brighter future post-crisis, if done well.

### *1.1.2 The stakeholders' role in crisis communication when health is at risk*

One of the most cited topics in Timothy Coombs' handbook of crisis communication is health and how the public risk of it is one of the main motives in crisis communication (2010). The characteristic of crisis communication and management, which is so adamant to this study's theme, that comes out in terms of health is that disasters and crises that affect the health and wellbeing of a large amount of people in the public field are often the most unforeseeable and sudden to appear. An and Cheng count health to one of the most common "crisis issues" next to business, political, environmental, or religious issues (Coombs et al., 2010: 74). Gabriel L. Adkins further brings up that often health risks come forward from initially different disruptions or crises like it happened during hurricane Katrina, where the lack of organization and public information about hazards and medical care lead from an environmental disaster to a health crisis (Coombs et al., 2010: 99f). In the chapter of educational crisis management practices in the handbook of crisis communication it is stated that the problem with this special trait of health crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic is one, is that a "study notes that while progress is being made in the area of health emergency preparedness, [nations] are still not ready to respond to a major health crisis" (Coombs et al., 2010: 303). It comes to mind now that crisis communication research would have already enough best-practice advices for situations like that and intersecting issues like these ones should be easy to overcome and learn from, even though the profile of each crisis is so distinct. In the previous point Coombs' four interrelated factors were already introduced and of course there are many other models for crisis preparedness, response, and often even prevention, such as Ulmer's five-phase crisis management model or others. What Eva-Karin Olsson criticizes here is that "crisis communication research has traditionally focused on private corporations and their efforts in sustaining and restoring image and trust", but that there was no "sufficient attention given to the distinctive nature between corporate and

public communications” (Olsson, 2014: 113). While neither Coombs, nor Ulmer directed their crisis action models to any certain entity dealing with a disruption, Turner does review Ulmer’s notions on “Effective Crisis Communication” positively in 2008. She does so, because in her opinion Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow set an emerging example research wise by not again pointing out what all can go wrong or where crisis communication has “gone bad”, but that the authors rather give “systematic, clear advice that is grounded in social scientific theory” (Turner, 2008: 105). What Turner further speaks in high terms of is that the authors “by means of research out of public relations, business communication, and risk communication [...] put a particular emphasis on building relationships with stakeholders” (Turner, 2008: 105). Because the case in this study is a not only publicly perceived brand, but also an enterprise that lives and conducts daily business by being consumed by the public in public places, this seems to be one of the key factors when in the need of reacting to a crisis affecting all of the named entities. As IHG did certainly not start the spread of the new Corona virus itself out of misconduct or devious business decisions, the turning point in all the crisis is how fast and in what way the organization perceives that, it is still people and especially their stakeholders, who can decide in which direction the crisis can be handled out. Either good, with a better future and new learnings, or bad with permanent damages to the brand’s reputation and trust towards future handling of disruptive situations. This being said, the interest is not how mad or disappointed stakeholders are at the IHG brand for doing something wrong, but rather how their perception is of IHG’s actions, taken to not handle the situation wrong, that was initially not their fault, but is their matter to deal with now. The question is thus, how involved the stakeholders really are in the scene, how much they know about it, and what values they want to uphold or are even strengthened in the face of crisis. The “situational theory of publics” is tackling exactly these aspects of a crisis. Defined by Aldoorj et al. as a “well-tested, heuristic theory in public relations” it

“[...] can help explain how publics form in the face of risk and crisis communication. The theory purports that certain factors – problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition – influence whether individuals will merely process

information about a problem or whether individuals will actively seek out more information about a problem” (Aldoory et al., 2010: 134).

To get this information, as far as it is in demand, stakeholders are highly dependent on what their organization is giving out to them. Tomasz A. Fediuk explains the stakeholders’ receiver role as that

“the messages communicated by an organization in crisis are expected to play a vital role in the alleviation of a crisis situation. More specifically, communication assist in reducing the damage incurred by the impacted organizations due to the crisis event. Therefore, understanding how individuals perceive and cognitively process crisis events and post-crisis messages is crucial to the crisis manager” (Coombs et al., 2010: 635).

The other factor is how the organization is communicating with its stakeholders, which includes the tone, the credibility of what is communicated and the tools or media being used to transmit information. The role of choosing the right media for communicating with stakeholders will be discussed in a later point in this chapter, but it is already clear that - especially in a health crisis that has so many aspects that can never be generalized - it is vital to not only understand the organization in crisis’ work, but mostly the receiver of the communication’s standpoint. Fediuk and Coombs also draw on the situational communication theory to make this “stakeholder’s point of view” better understandable. The authors built their definitions on the research questions “How do stakeholders react to crises?” and “Why do they react in the ways they do?” (Coombs et al., 2010: 636). While the present study is still all about the organizations work to communicate during a crisis, understanding the entity that is addressed by the communication is essential for a) the organization itself to know how to design the communication and b) the researcher to understand the communicator’s motives.

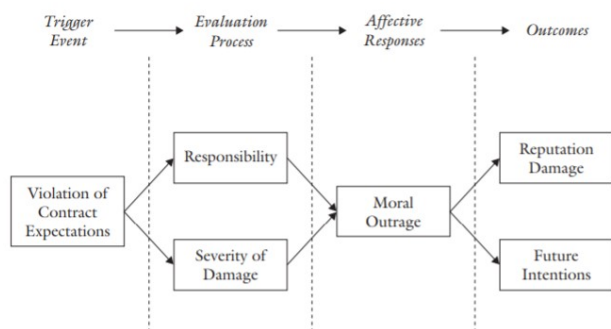


Figure 31.1 Stakeholder’s cognitive model for information processing during and after organizational crises

Figure 1 Stakeholder’s cognitive model for information processing during and after organizational crises (Coombs et al., 2010: 637)

Fediuk, Coombs and Botero visualize “crisis from a receiver perspective” in their “stakeholder’s cognitive model for information processing during and after organizational crises” (Coombs et al., 2010: 637). Applied to the present unit of analysis the authors’ scheme would start with the trigger event, where the stakeholders’ expectations are “violated”, namely the outbreak of the corona virus and the resulting travel and accommodation bans. Expectations to the IHG brand were violated as stakeholders were not able anymore to consume the brand, work for it, or treat any other relations they had with it in the usual manner. The here investigated situation fits in this structure as the creators quote Hermann (1963) by stating that “he suggests that organizational crises threaten high-priority values of the organization, [...] and are events that are unexpected and sometimes unanticipated by the organization” (Hermann 1963 in Coombs et al., 2010: 637). The high-priority values that were not able to be met anymore here were conducting business in usual routine, safety and health at destination or workspace, not being able to go on – possibly necessary – travel and having accommodation on it, being able to consume what was probably already paid, and many others. Hence, safety, health, economic means, and routines were endangered and not possible to be met by the organization. The next phase for Fediuk et al. is the evaluation process, where stakeholders try to find out who is responsible for their disappointed expectations and how severe the damage of the crisis will turn out to be. The authors describe this as “when a crisis incident occurs, it is human nature to want to know what happened and why it happened” and explain that “greater personal relevance and implications are expected to act as motivators to carefully scrutinize information about the crisis episode, as well as comments made regarding the crisis by the organization” (Coombs et al., 2010: 642). This translates to the present case in so far, as that because IHG was not able to act according to their stakeholders’ and its own expectations anymore due to the outbreaking pandemic, stakeholders on every level needed to be informed and demanded information about what will be done to comply with their needs and values. After this the phase of affective reactions or responses comes in. This, for the authors, is the point where a stakeholder’s emotions and moral values come into the judgement of and reaction to the crisis, and how the organization is dealing with it. To bring both sides in Fediuk et al. state that “crisis incidents are not only inconvenient times for organizations, but also are important psychological event experienced by individuals” and explain further that especially negative emotions as stakeholder reaction to crisis can be very costly for organizations and that

“moral outrage”, as they call it, is most commonly to be expected from stakeholders when there is a case of perceived injustice towards them or others (Coombs et al., 2010: 646). Because in this case IHG as an organization was similarly affected by the crisis as its stakeholders, the immediate crisis did not bring up feelings of unjust treatment by the organization, but consequences of the disruptive situation were prone to do so. Two examples that immediately come to mind is firstly, that hotels’ employees were laid-off or just could not work in the usual extent and suffered salary cuts and every-day life disruption from their organization for something they were not responsible for. Secondly, many travels and accommodations are usually long planned and pre-paid. External stakeholders might have felt unjustly put in a place where pre-crisis cancellation policies did not cover the crisis situation, long refund waiting times came onto them, or money was lost without being able to consume the paid goods. The last phase of the stakeholders’ place in crisis perception is of course the outcome of the critical situation they are finding themselves in. This is the stage that decides over the level of reputational damage on the organization’s side and how stakeholders will set their intentions towards the organization in the future. This is where the present study comes in for the case of IHG, how they handled the momentary crisis situation and disruption and what the organization did, or better, does to communicate their improved and adjusted values to its stakeholders and why they will be able to trust them in the future. Summing this up Fediuk, Coombs and Botero underline the importance of the stakeholder’s or receiver’s role in crisis communication by stating that “a receiver-oriented cognitive model would allow for a better understanding of how individuals react to crisis events” (Coombs et al., 2010: 650). For the authors this is of utter importance as, while the crisis or disruptive event is initially and directly hitting the organization, all other levels of how the crisis is going and how strongly the organization will suffer from it, is usually determined by the reflection and perception of its stakeholders. Or in other words: “if stakeholders did not respond to negative expectancy violations in ways that are detrimental to the organization, then exploring crisis management and crisis communication would be of limited practical utility” (Coombs et al., 2010: 647).

### *1.1.3 Creating long-lasting communication strategies: organizational learning and crisis management*

“Crisis communication and risk communication scholars have noted that some distinctive characteristics of a crisis are the uncertainty of the situation as well as the urgency of the stakeholders’ need for information” (Turner, 2008: 106) says Monique Mitchell Turner reviewing Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger’s approach on effective crisis communication. As illustrated in the chapters before, this uncertainty is most commonly the crux of organizational crises, for organizations and their stakeholders. On the stakeholders’ side Aldoory et al. describe that the heavy impact of a crisis on them stems from the stakeholders not having immediate personal knowledge or enough information about what caused the crisis, its severity, and how things are going to work out for them individually, so they have to rely on others and external sources to gather this information, which is always a selective process. The authors define this as

“because individuals typically lack direct experience with the risk associated with major crises, [...], they rely on others to interpret technical jargon and threat, and then they negotiate the boundaries between the scientific and their everyday world” (Aldoory et al., 2010: 136).

Another problem of crises is, as Seeger has also been quoted here before, that every crisis is so individual, rare, and usually never come in the exact same composition twice, that it’s extremely hard to condense all learnings from previous crises to be fully prepared for others to come. Moreover, Seeger says that “type, organizational history, and the specific dynamics of the crisis are critical factors in determining strategy and approach”, and further cites Coombs by saying that “many crisis plans, for example, are developed as general outlines rather than step-by-step guides. The former are more adaptable to a variety of situations while the latter approach may be too constraining and misleading” (Seeger, 2007: 234). The problem that inevitably births out of all these characteristics is that making crisis communication, risk management and regarding stakeholder engagement long-lasting and a sustainable concept is a hard and often unachievable task for brands and organizations. Seeger (2007) explains that, to tackle this issue, research aims to fuse the two concepts of crisis and risk communication, to draw from the ad hoc character and addressing individuals with necessary information of risk communication and the damage and reputation repair post-crisis actions of crisis communication. The author stresses that “this merged approach is, in part, a larger acknowledgement of the developmental features of risks and crisis, and

recognition that effective communication must be an integrated and ongoing process” (Seeger, 2007: 234). Another aspect to consider when learning from crisis for Seeger is to be able to differentiate and distinguish crises and their origins to determine the requirements to communicate about them. Dennis Tafoya addresses the issue of handling crises in moment but with potential for the organization’s future that organizations should “resist to simply ‘get the crisis behind us’ by building a plan that is timely, inclusive, and yet still with a sense of the future for all involved” (Tafoya 2013: 10). To do so the author provides a “Crisis Management Template” in his work, which is could be a in practice stand-in for Seeger’s crisis communication best-practice. Tafoya says the template is a “working document comprised of four elements”, which focus more on the effects a crisis can have on an organization, how to deal with them, and how they could be met if they reoccur in the future, rather than discussing the “event causing it” (Tafoya, 2013: 10). Organizations in crisis must factor in that

“they are comprised of different stakeholders, they seek different ways to meet stakeholder needs, and they utilize processes and procedures particular to their operations. But the one thing that truly differentiates one organization from others is the organization’s brand” says Dennis Tayofa (2013: 11)

explaining the various influences that help to understand an organization in crisis. For the researcher an organization’s brand equals its image and reputation, which both are in distress during a crisis and are wanted to be always stable and disrupted as minimal as possible because of a previously established strength and trust from stakeholders. Also in 2014, William Crandall et al., similarly to Coombs before, count down four stages of crisis but focus a big part of their work on the postcrisis state, which is the phase where organizations can make learnings and experiences from their crisis last and make a difference for the future. For the authors postcrisis is “when the acute phase of the crisis is over, [so] the management should reflect on the event and glean lessons on what changes need to be made to prevent future crisis events” (Crandall et al., 2014: 6). As the topic of long-lasting crisis communication and management is – as described – so hard to grasp or break down to a trial and error based scientific best practice, literature that really goes into the matter and provides information and guidelines for research can barely be found. While this is a solid sign of what the present study can do for the research area, William Crandall and his colleagues offer a well-considered approach to the individualistic and undeterminable character of crisis

and the communication needed to prevent and get over it, only from a managerial perspective.

They talk about “organizational learning” for that matter and discuss a similar question posed in the present study: “what can be learned from the crisis?” (Crandall et al., 2014: 14). Organizational learning, for the authors, starts with not letting too much time pass while in or after a crisis to actually apply the learning and not just going back to pre-crisis conditions, because mostly they will not be the same and the organization is at risk to stagnate and not evolve according to its stakeholders’ needs and expectations (ct. Crandall et al., 2014). At this stage William Crandall and his co-writers suggest that “the focus of learning should centre around two themes: (1) what can be done to prevent the crisis from recurring, and (2) if a similar crisis does occur, what can be done to soften its impact?” (Crandall et al., 2014: 14). They further explain that organizations often do not adequately evaluate what went well during the crisis and what should have been handled differently, so mistakes are not clearly tackled and probably being repeated in upcoming crises. Stakeholders are people so they often excuse a one-time failure, but will lose more and more trust in their organization, the more often a mistake is being done over and over again. Long view and sustaining thinking are what needs to be implemented in a whole organizational culture to learn from the moment for the future. Another factor Crandall et al. consider in their organizational learning, that is even more interesting in the long run for the present case, is the external influence governmental regulations have on an organization and its stakeholder relationship after a crisis. “In the external landscape, government regulators often re-evaluate and renew their directives after a crisis” the authors explain on the example of improved air-travel security after the 9/11 terror attacks, and say that these regulations “are often implemented or upgraded after a crisis, usually to increase the safety of stakeholders in the affected industry. [...] At a minimum, such stakeholders will be more aware and compassionate toward an organization that has experienced a crisis” (Crandall et al., 2014: 14). Key here is again how to communicate with stakeholders about the external regulations that are laid upon an organization due to a crisis. In the present case governments, as well as the industry itself, of course only had the motive to prevent the further spread of the Coronavirus, and their stakeholders to not get sick. But that also meant to, in the first place, not let people travel, come to work, produce or supply at all, and now that there are certain obligatory measurements and restrictions implemented for stakeholders to keep all processes secure

and steady. Health regulations like physical distancing, mask wearing, constant disinfection of hands and surfaces, and especially in the hotel industry, the cleaning concept of guest rooms and public areas are procedures that need to be communicated and after all sold right to the persons who have to stick with them. As well as the fact that these measurements will probably be staying and become a part of the revisited routine for everyone involved in the hospitality industry's daily business. Fitting to the current situation and the unit of analysis here, J. Batorski only recently wrote that

“in a quickly changing environment, with growing uncertainty and complexity, the ability to predict changes controllable by an enterprise is decreasing. However, its survival in certain conditions depends on being able to predict such conditions correctly and make relevant changes within the organization” (Batorski 2021 in Bilgin 2021: 76).

The author who also takes up on the concept of organizational learning being a key formula for organizational crisis communication and management, picks up on the previously introduced writers in this chapter by saying that organizations in the best case should always be prepared to prevent, handle, and overcome crises and see the potential to learn from them. But for this to work out, the processes and strategies related to crisis and risk need to be conceptualized (cf. Batorski, 2021), or, as seen before with Ulmer, Coombs and others, planned, structured, monitored, and understood, as not only a threat but a chance for an organization, its stakeholders, reputation and survival during disruption. Batorski also describes crises as “a stimulus for intensive organizational learning”, that it “encompasses its processes”, that it’s a matter of development, a “transformation catalyst, a source of recovery” and that “a crisis is a chance for revitalizing changes that would otherwise be impossible to implement” (Batorski 2021 in Bilgin 2021: 80f). What is always the driving factor for these characteristics to come true, is to make the learnings gained from the crisis last for the future, and make learning and developing accordingly an ongoing process to reproduce safety and stability in upcoming times of crisis. Therefore, the literature’s consensus on creating long-lasting crisis communication strategies is to make it an organization’s inherited culture to always learn from disruption, mistakes, and any kind of event threatening the organization’s and its stakeholder’s routines. The outlook and aim should always be looking into the future and how to make it better and more stable for everyone involved with the knowledge gained in the moment of crisis. Batorski sums this up as “organizational learning requires efficient communication, which means that all the [stakeholders] of an [organization] provide one another with comprehensible information” (Batorski 2021 in

Bilgin 2021: 83). This goes the same way for stakeholders between each other, organization and stakeholders, and all other combinations and entities involved, as seen in previous chapters. Batorski also advocates for informational openness, free information flow, and for leaders and managers to promote organizational learning in their organizations' culture and structures, so all parties have a same basic understanding of its importance (2021).

Creating communication strategies, which address crises in an organization, and to be able to learn from crises, is a rather internal process but needs to be an implemented part of an organization's brand and therefore, of how stakeholders identify with it. As internal stakeholders are directly affected and involved in these processes, it's much easier to reach them with the according communication than external stakeholders, who after all are the ones furthest away from the direct information flow and therefore most conflicted by their perception. To directly reach those who are outside of the internal processes, but bring in the life and ongoing business to a brand, it is necessary for an organization to choose the right channels to target all stakeholders equally but individual to their needs and expectations. Notions on the role of media in these circumstances in existing literature and research will be collected in the following point, to find out what these right channels can be.

#### *1.1.4 The role of media in crisis communication*

In his notions about ongoing crisis communication, Timothy W. Coombs brings up the discussion about communication technologies used in crisis management and when it is most urgent for an organization to communicate and transmit information to its stakeholders. Back in 2015, when Coombs tried to figure in the role and importance of media and communication technology in times of organizational crisis, he especially stresses the huge advances and progress the available communication tools have made in quality and quantity in the past decades. He sums up the purpose of these technologies as "these advances make the transmission of communication easier and faster. Another way to think about communication technologies is that they make the world more visible. Events that would have gone unnoticed a decade ago are now highly visible" (Coombs, 2015: 14). The other side of the progressing media for Coombs is that "there are no remote areas of the world anymore. [...] Moreover, crises are now global, thanks to communication technologies", and that therefore, "organizations no longer have isolated crises because the once remote or far-

flung areas of the world are accessible to the media and other stakeholders” (Coombs, 2015: 14). In the second chapter of the same work, the author explains that in his own new media research in the context of crisis communication and management, *social* media and online communication seem to be of the highest interest (ct. Coombs, 2015). While Coombs does not actively share the stance that the technological progress should be titled a “revolution”, he rather builds his ideas on the internet as the central factor of it all and lays down that “the internet is many communication channels, not just one. [...] Internet communication channels emphasize the interactive and interconnected nature of the internet”, and then cites Twitter as an example, which “is often hailed for its ability to facilitate interactivity between organizations and stakeholders” (Coombs, 2015: 17). As described in the previous chapters, one of the main focuses in crisis communication strategies should be transmitting information about what is happening to all concerned and involved parties, mainly stakeholders inside and outside of the organization. This can prevent several levels of damage to reputation, stakeholder trust and relation and the spread of uninformed assumptions, which can lead to an even higher number of crisis consequences than the initial disruption. Timothy W. Coombs tries to show that the introduction of organizations to using a diverse set of media to stay in contact with their stakeholders has been highly improved since as soon as 2005, from when he quotes Taylor and Perry, who “observed how important it was to incorporate web sites into crisis communication efforts as more and more stakeholders were utilizing this channel during a crisis” (Coombs, 2015: 18). The evolution of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and later on Instagram and cloud services even heightened the potential for stakeholders to always stay up to date and in direct information flow with their concerning organization. Coombs describes this as to “social media is an evolutionary stimulus because users, not organizations or the traditional news media, now control the creation and distribution of information” (Coombs, 2015: 18). These advancements allow stakeholders to feel more in their own power to timely, easily, and individually to their expectations and needs access information and form their perceptions. Keri K. Stephens and Patty Malone summarize the new media environment and the organizational possibilities that emerge out of it as follows:

“Not only can organizations involved in the crisis issue press releases, update their stakeholders using television, and establish phone lines to respond to questions, but now they also need to consider the resources found on the internet. Organizational websites offer a highly accessible resource that provides a variety of stakeholders with crisis

information. Increasingly, social networking tools are also used to communicate and establish dialogues with stakeholders” (Coombs et al., 2010: 381).

The keyword the two authors introduce in the handbook of crisis communication is ‘dialogue’. The technological advances make it now possible for crisis communication not being a one-way road anymore, as already depicted in Coombs’ notions. Stephens and Malone stress further again that now communication about an organizational disruption does not solely happen anymore with the organization as sender and the stakeholder as receiver. Stakeholders are now able to gather their own information, also from other stakeholders and organization related entities, and even create or emit their own perceptions and make them available for others. Another advantage of this model is, according to the authors, that “when crisis victims use social networking sites to find others, they are not limited by geography. Stakeholders can meet virtually, share stories, form coalitions, share the latest information, and even seek collective legal action” (Coombs et al., 2010: 381f). Tackling one of the possible problems of this multi-level dialogue, Seeger reminds in his crisis communication best-practices that

“in order to achieve a standpoint of dialogue, an organization managing risks or experience a crisis must listen to the concerns of the public, take these concerns into account, and respond accordingly. In fact, understanding audiences is associated with effective communication in any context” (Seeger, 2007: 238).

What he points at is that organizations should be aware of the target group their stakeholders make up, which media and communications channels they are most likely using, and even before crisis hits, should always understand who they are dealing with and how to best reach out to them. For example, should an organization with a more diverse demographical set of stakeholders, portrayed in different age groups, cultural background, or financial abilities, also widen its spectrum of communication channels used to stay in contact with them. While Instagram is often used by younger demographics in a higher extent, Facebook might reach a bigger age range of stakeholders. While maybe resorting to rather classic media, a young to middle aged business traveller on the run might rather consult Twitter for updates than Instagram, and so on. An organization should therefore be aware and informed about the media consumption profile of their stakeholders and how to cater to it appropriately, especially in the most urgent times of information transmission. In 2011 Brooke Fisher Liu et al. investigated this interplay further in their paper on “How publics respond to crisis communication strategies: The interplay of information form and source”. In the

introduction to their paper the authors explain that, while “social networks and blogs account for one in every four and half minutes spent online worldwide. During crises, publics spend even more time online, changing how organizations manage crises” (Liu et al., 2011: 345), also “many communicators have reservations about the credibility of social media while others do not know how to obtain management support for social media” (Liu et al., 2011: 345). While the time spent online and especially on social media platforms, consuming information has probably strongly increased since Liu et al.’s paper was released, research about the advantages of social media in crisis communication and reputation management has most likely much improved the standing of the topic in most organizations. The Before mentioned “reservations about credibility” might still be in place, perhaps mostly owed to the growing range of platforms, outlets, channels, and forms of information transmitted. Brooke Fisher Liu, Lucinda Austin and Yan Jin illustrated the interaction and interdependence of all these factors in a communication flow diagram, which can be seen here.

Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model

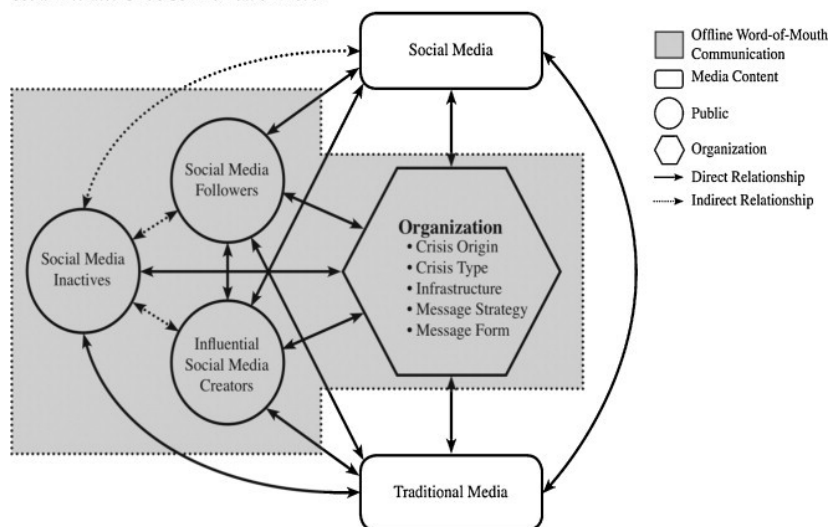


Figure 2 Social-mediated Crisis Communication Model (Liu et al., 2011: 347)

What the authors did is to put “a given organization experiencing a given crisis” (Liu et al., 2011: 346), sometimes multiple of them in the centre of the scheme. Then they put offline communication, such as through “word-of-mouth communication” as the base of all interactions and then introduced traditional media vis-à-vis of social media in the information flow. Interacting with the organization, the crisis situation, and between each other are people who do not consume social media, those who follow and consume the

content of social media, and those who create content on social media and – so called – influence others with the created content (ct. Liu et al., 2011). Veil, Buehner, and Palenchar describe this in the same year as Liu as

“social media is at its core human communication, possessing characteristics of participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness. New media technology allows private individuals to become sources of information online ‘sharing opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives with others’” (Veil et al., 2011: 110).

Directly aligned with Liu et al.’s model they further say that “consumers of information are simultaneously contributors of information, thereby providing the basis for user-generated media” (Veil et al., 2011: 110). While also recommending that an organization needs to internalise the advantages social media use as a stable part of its culture can offer and be prepared when communication about crisis is due, the authors also name other benefits of it such as that

“new media tools have much potential for encouraging preparedness, knowledge, and involvement in crisis response by making the topic visual and interactive. Social media can invite individuals to self-identify as supporters of the organization. For example, fan pages on Facebook allow the public to display awareness and support” (Veil et al., 2011: 112).

While these are all good points that are indicative that social media can highly improve crisis communication, there are also possible downsides of it that need to be considered, as already mentioned before. The high number of social-mediated communication channels an organization, as well as the different kinds of stakeholders have at their disposal, can lead to a lack of intersection when the communicating parties are not adequately informed of the needs and expectations of one another regarding media use. Then there is also the old problem of too many cooks can spoil the broth, meaning in this context that no limitation on participation and opinion or perception sharing on all sides is good in many ways described before, but can also lead to confusion, insecurity about the information’s and source’s credibility, and the danger of overwhelming instead of safeguarding. An up-to-date example, especially in regards to the present case investigated, is Yu et al.’s content analysis on how the outbreak of COVID-19 was perceived on different social media outlets. By analysing different key words, when media coverage came into talk the main concerns to be found were “the spread of fake news and exaggerating reports by different media”, “communication on social media might cause misleading information” and that “more accurate information should be acquired from official sources” (Yu et al., 2020).

Summing up the role of social media in crisis communication it can be said that next to the usual concerns regarding social media, such as credibility doubts, highly varying information flows and contents, and the unsupervised access and ability to spread and inform by also unofficial sources, in general social media is seen as a big advance in crisis communication research. This is so, as it transformed a hard to transmit, one-way information process into a dialogue between all parties affected and involved in a crisis. Social media strengthens and offers new opportunities for the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders, as long as social media use in crisis communication is well planned and implemented in the organization's culture and informed by the organization's deep knowledge of its stakeholders, their expectations, needs and demographic.

## *1.2 Corporate Social Responsibility*

After discussing existing research literature on the concept of crisis communication, the second big topic of interest for the analysis in the latter part of this study is the one of Corporate Social Responsibility, commonly shortened to CSR, as a communication form and ground of strategy for organizations and the brand they are representing. To forge a bridge of relevance of this concept for the present investigation literature has been consulted on the evolution of CSR and its relation or connection to organizational crises, and what role stakeholders play within the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility and how it strengthened the meaning of stakeholders for organizations.

### *1.2.1 CSR and its relationship with organizational crisis*

As many communication theorists, whose notions are incorporated in earlier chapters of this work manifest, tackling an organizational crisis efficiently is only possible if the right communication measures, tools, preparedness, and knowledge of an organization's stakeholders are in place. Crisis management plans, actions and preparations regarding risk evaluation and communication, as well as detailed profiles of stakeholders and processes involving and surrounding them are most usually put down in an organization's CSR plan. To get a picture of the opportunities and possibilities a proper CSR strategy can provide for crisis communication and management in an organization, it is necessary to first understand where the idea has its origins. Introducing their most current literature review on the history of businesses' social involvement and obligations, Agudelo et al. explain that "the current

belief that corporations have a responsibility towards society is not new”, but might already go back a couple of hundreds year and was probably latest introduced in economics literature in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Agudelo et al., 2019: 1). In the light of the present topic, the authors mention that it is necessary to “recognize CSR as a concept that reflects the social expectations of each decade and be able to explore if it will remain relevant in the near future” (Agudelo et al., 2019: 1). Agudelo and his colleagues break down that, while social engagement of public and private institutions and organizations can be traced back through all higher developed societies since the Romans, the CSR concept in the modern understanding was pursued when “by the 1920s and early 1930s, business managers begun assuming the responsibility of balancing the maximization of profits with creating and maintaining an equilibrium with the demands of their clients, their labour force, and the community” (Agudelo et al., 2019: 3). This gives to understand that between the wars, businesses evolved in their culture as far as maximizing profit and growth was still the highest but not the only target of business strategies anymore. An awareness had entered the economic world that there is not only a moral necessity to take care and responsible actions toward persons and groups involved in production chains and daily ventures, but that this is another opportunity to seek after more and balanced profits. The role of the stakeholder was put in a new and seemingly better place within corporations. Rapid population growth and movements because of better work conditions, higher levels of pollution, and political involvement of people from an economy background then led to the development of the CSR statutes that are most often still used today: Consumer and people, environment and sustainability, and communities (ct. Agudelo et al., 2019).

Just like the crises discussed in an earlier chapter, economy became a more and more global issue, with businesses operating across borders, entertaining international partnerships, often implementing different production steps in geographically dispersed locations, and therefore not being bound to their country of origin’s laws and regulations. Globalization and disparity called up international institutions to set goals and regulations for all economic players. What conceptualizes Corporate Social Responsibility nowadays is the standardization of the idea and processes behind it. “The modern concept of CSR attention paid to social (non-financial) statements – tools to inform all interested parties about how the company is implementing measures to achieve economic stability, social welfare and environmental safety” describes Firuza Madrakhimova the current state of corporate social responsibility. The author goes

on to sum up the main tasks of CSR as “the relevance of social conduct and reporting of public accountability by the need to strengthen the trust of all stakeholders: employees, shareholders and partners, corporations, government agencies, local communities and the media”, and spins back to the original idea of maximizing growth behind CSR by saying that “in addition, the social reporting allows obtaining a competitive advantage, developing strategies for the company” (Madrakhimova, 2013: 512). Also reminiscing the origins of CSR as a concept in business and economics, Farcane and Bureana explain that in a historical, as well as a modern view, corporations’ main responsibility toward society is to exist to produce profits. For itself as that it can go on existing, provide work and monetary exchange for their employees, who then bring their own profits into their communities, which then again form – in the optimal circle – better awareness about keeping this cycle going and improving the environment and conditions it is placed in (ct. Farcane & Bureana, 2015). The authors then sum up that “today, the concept of CSR is discussed in terms of several approaches” which include the rational approach of “long-term competitive advantages” from social engagements; obviously the ethical approach, where an organization’s moral should demand taking responsibility for its community and environment, and finally the approach of social pressure, which is basically a mixture of the first two (Farcane & Bureana, 2015: 43). But the most important take on recent CSR research the authors propose for the present study is the one of CSR communication, where one of the core elements of a CSR strategy is “communicating information included in the Corporate Social Responsibility Reports” (Farcane & Bureana, 2015: 45), which includes the ongoing and properly planned distribution of relevant organizational information to all stakeholders. This strengthens the stakeholders feeling of inclusivity, being in the picture and actually involved in the organization, its decisions and culture. This is also where the risk evaluation and crisis communication part of a CSR strategy sits and where planned and organized communication strategies can cater to all CSR approaches introduced by Farcane and Bureana. So, in summary, the evolution and development of Corporate Social Responsibility grows and progresses with the economic and organizational environment it is applied in, the life and cultural situation stakeholders are in and their demands and expectations growing out of these. This asks for corporations, organizations and their brands to not only act on their purely economic purpose of constantly increasing profits, but to internalize an awareness of the bigger picture and what they can gain for their economic

purposes from factoring all parts involved in their processes into their target setting. An elaborate Corporate Social Responsibility strategy and how it is communicated by the organization, can do exactly that, even, or especially, when the usual economic process is being disrupted, stopped, or threatened by disaster or crisis.

In the 2011 edited collection “The handbook of communication and corporate social responsibility” by Ihlen, Barlett, and May, the authors bring together all aspects of communication during an organizational crisis described earlier in this review with the most current concept of Corporate Social Responsibility. In the book various contributors write on definitions of the two theoretical areas, organizational communication, reputation management, risk communication, dialogue, the relevance of stakeholders for both concepts, and communicating CSR through social media (ct. Ihlen et al., 2011). While explaining the connection between theories of CSR and communication through all notions in this edited version would be way too extensive, it offers a good ground to sum up the state of the art of literature bringing both scientific ideas together and forge a bridge between the two main research influences for the present study. For Ihlen et al. the most grounding argument for communication being the most essential process to keep an organization alive through a thoroughly planned CSR strategy is that “a social constructivist perspective maintains that communication is constructing and modifying reality, social conditions, and relationships”, and that “our knowledge about the world is generated and socially shared through communication and is situated materially and historically” (Ihlen et al., 2011: 10). One concept that comes out of these social constructs and affects all human interactions is subjective perception and how reputation can influence it. As reputation “is one of a firm’s intangible assets [and] a key ingredient of corporate success” (Ihlen et al., 2011: 28) it is one of the most significant drivers of the incorporation of Corporate Social Responsibility for a brand. In the same time

“growth in corporate branding and identity has meant that companies not only need to learn how to communicate their brand and sustain their reputation, which can be instantly damaged for the long term with a negative incident, [...] but also think carefully about how to establish credibility around their [corporate responsibility] as they begin to promote it to a sceptical public” (Ihlen et al., 2011: 28).

This is where reputation as an essential brand asset, the protection or regaining of it becomes one of the foremost reasons to also implement crisis communication and risk management into CSR strategies. The “sceptical public” the authors are also talking about in this chapter,

bring up a phenomenon Ihlen et al. describe as a paradox of communicating Corporate Social Responsibility, which can only be partially tackled by the right handling of a brand's reputation (ct. Ihlen et al., 2011). While it was discussed in an earlier chapter that, especially for the CSR module of crisis communication, social media and the various technological advancements the organizational world has experienced in the last decades, pose mainly positive gains for businesses, the overload on options of implementing socially responsible actions and initiatives as well as the diverse environment stakeholders get to know about them and rapidly build opinions on them, can evoke a paradox. By the pure number of possible steps to take for a CSR programme, especially evolving stakeholders, communities and engaging for environmental purposes, if not chosen and communicated carefully enough, the measures can provoke scepticism, mistrust, and disbelief in the brand's honesty or level of transparency of their CSR initiatives (ct. Waddock & Googins in Ihlen et al., 2011). According to the authors "trust in business today has fallen to an all-time low" and that "the more a company touts its corporate responsibility overtly and publicly, the less likelihood there is that it will be believed by many important stakeholders" (Waddock & Googins in Ihlen et al., 2011: 25). Waddock and Googins trace this back to weak corporate rhetoric, a lack of partnering with "civil society organizations and (non)governmental organizations", and incidences of so-called greenwashing, where an organization communicates but does not act on their social responsibility for marketing and reputational causes. The latter are most often suspected and stoking mistrust and scepticism, when a large number of CSR related initiatives and implementations are brought to stakeholders on a voluntary basis and not directly promoted or incorporated in the brand's image and culture (ct. Waddock & Googins in Ihlen et al., 2011). What stakeholders demand to overcome or even prevent mistrust, scepticism, and emerging confusion about the values and goals of an organization, is that they can always feel secure and properly informed by their organization, especially when crisis and disruption threaten their position and relation to it.

Christine Vallaster aligns with these stakeholder expectations by proposing that "adopting a strategic CSR perspective, by enlarging the company's focus on economic *and* social/environmental goals, can help companies to recover from a crisis" and that it's well worth to invest resources into crisis prevention and management, even in economically challenging times, as this can be the only way to survive a crash afterwards (Vallaster, 2017: 510). To do so, Vallaster suggests according to existing research, that companies and their

brands need to understand that strategic CSR offers new sources of revenue, a transformative organizational culture, that reproduces a better environment and communities out of itself through its stakeholders who internalize better social practices through their organization's values, which all together is a constant production process of competitive advantage (ct. Vallaster, 2017). In a case study the author conducted to find out what strategic CSR can do for an organization in crisis, two of the main findings are that CSR related initiatives that helped the company out of the disruption were "aligning the organization with business and social needs" and communicating with and most of all learning from stakeholders and their feedback on the crisis and the company's actions in regards to it (ct. Vallaster, 2017).

In summary, what brings together organizational crisis and the necessity of a strategically planned CSR communication to overcome or prevent it is the internal and external stakeholders' or "public perception of organizational responsibility for the crisis" (Kim et al., 2009: 86). Bringing all previously introduced notions and theorists together on the topic of this chapter, Kim, Kim, and Cameron conclude that "when a corporate crisis occurs, publics make sense of the crisis based on not only the objective facts regarding the crisis, but also the aspects of reassurance emphasized by the company in the media or news releases" (Kim et al., 2009: 86). By putting their focus on the "interaction between crisis types and crisis responses", Kim et al. (2009) "assume that different types of crisis responses [...] will influence consumers' perception of the crisis messages and, in turn, their attributions of crisis responsibility" (Kim et al., 2009: 86). Hence, while Corporate Social Responsibility is there for and important to be properly worked out and applied to handle an organizational crisis, the determining factor in it and judging its value from outside, are yet again stakeholders.

### *1.2.2 The role of stakeholders in CSR and how to communicate with them*

As it has now been elaborated, when looking at Corporate Social Responsibility communication and organizational crisis, the focal intersecting determinant of both concepts are an organization's stakeholders, who are being addressed by CSR communication. In their investigation on opportunities and challenges of CSR, Crane and Glozer state that "it is now widely acknowledged that responsible corporations should engage with their stakeholders on CSR issues, and regularly communicate about their CSR programmes, products, and impacts with concerned stakeholders" (Du et al. 2010 in Crane & Glozer, 2016: 1223). What the two authors bring into their discussion is the principle of actively engaging stakeholders

into organizational matters. In their “thematically driven approach” on an inclusive literature collection and review on existing sources about CSR communication, Crane and Glozer (2016) found that the primarily involved and addressed audience of CSR communication – according to general research on the topic - are external stakeholders, “most notably consumers [...] but also [...] investors, and non-governmental organizations” and oppose that “only in the organization studies literature have internal audiences been addressed substantially as individuals who might embody organizational CSR practices and identities” (Crane & Glozer, 2016: 1228). This might come as a co-dependent factor of the literature’s understanding of CSR communication happening “*to* audiences *from* companies rather than *with* them”, as the authors suggest (Crane & Glozer 2016: 1230). This is where a potential hole in the usual practice of CSR communication could possibly surface. Shim and Yang, who are also quoting Du, figure that when stakeholders do not feel involved enough but only addressed by the CSR communication, there is a possibility of stakeholders perceiving an organization’s CSR related efforts as exaggerated in comparison of what the actual outcome of them could be (ct. Du et al., 2010 in Crane & Glozer, 2016). In contrast to this probable situation stands a well working CSR communication, which binds an organization’s stakeholders’ trust and positive perception. This generates a good reputation among stakeholders, internal and external, and a state of safety and connection to their organization. The issue then only arises in times of crisis, as “some researchers have noted that a good reputation will have a boomerang effect in a company’s bad times, as high expectations toward a firm will turn into a sense of betrayal” (Shim & Yang, 2016: 69). As illustrated before, these times then demand a longer-lasting, crisis sustaining, and therefore strategic communication model.

According to Juliana Raupp, and bringing up again the previously introduced situational theory of publics, the most popular overlapping concept between strategic management and communication research is indeed, the stakeholder theory.

“There is a close affiliation between stakeholder thinking and the equally popular concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). As business is supposed to show responsibility towards society, stakeholder theory can offer an operationalization of a complex concept of society by focusing on certain groups within that society” (Raupp in Ihlen et al., 2011: 276).

The author goes as far as to cite Freeman, saying that an organizations stakeholders’ thinking is already its CSR, and that a better name for the concept would be “company stakeholder

responsibility” (Raupp in Ihlen et al., 2011: 277). When breaking down the origins of the stakeholder thinking theory, Juliana Raupp goes on agreeing to Freeman’s definition of stakeholders’ role for an organization from a managerial view, which says

“the effects of the actions of an organization on others must be taken into account, as well as their potential effects on the organization. Doing so means that the behaviours, values, and background of stakeholders have to be understood. Moreover, a company has to ask itself what it stands for” (Raupp in Ihlen et al., 2011: 278)

and sums Freeman’s notions up by saying

“Freeman constructs the stakeholder concept as a comprehensive and all-encompassing strategy which refers to all levels and all aspects of a company: stakeholder relationships are seen to be working on the level of the organization as a whole, on the level of standard operating procedures, and on the level of day-to-day bargaining” (Raupp in Ihlen et al., 2011: 278).

Even though Raupp considers Freeman’s definition of stakeholder thinking as valuable but still “relatively unspecific” (2011), it is proposed to be the central notion helping to analyse and understand the case of the present study.

In the chapter “Who is a stakeholder and how can stakeholder relationships be managed?”, Juliana Raupp addresses and in the same time tries to act on the main suggested goal for an organization operating through its CSR: to understand who its stakeholders and their demands and needs are, and how to deduce the correct way to communicate with them from these understandings (ct. Raupp in Ihlen et al., 2011). For the author, the direct relation to strategic CSR comes in when organizations or rather their management understand their stakeholders so well, that they can clearly see the opportunities and advantages non-financial or “nonmarket”, stakeholder related social responsibilities can offer to, at a later point, again transform these arrangements into a competitive and profitable advantage. The key is to become aware of how to turn a stable relationship and taking care of the social demands of the people who bring the profit in, into actual profit, even though this does at a first glance not appear to be the goal. Zukauskas et al. sum this up as

“the axis of corporate social responsibility concept is the harmonious relationship among stakeholders and compromise among individual benefits for greater opportunities of general social benefits, ensuring sustainable economic and social development. [...] Corporate social responsibility confirms legitimate stakeholder involvement, citing the fact that corporate profitability demands responsible strategies reflecting social problems” (Zukauskas et al., 2018).

So, while CSR is still a managerial but also scientific “multidimensional phenomenon” (Zukauskas et al., 2018), it can be concluded that an organization’s stakeholders, no matter in what form or expertise, should always be understood as the core of CSR actions and communications. Benefitting and in the best way profiting from social and well perceived engagement of stakeholder relationships, is only possible when the organization culture demands a wide and detailed mutual insight of values, needs, consumer expectations, and the general profile of the stakeholder on the one side and the organization on the other. CSR endeavours can therefore only be successfully and properly communicated to the ones most concerned with it, when the organization knows how to reach them best. Channel, ideology, and personal preferences wise.

The now collected notions and ideas on the stakeholder’s role in an organization’s CSR strategy suggests that a profound knowledge of stakeholders’ characteristics, their demographics, and personal demands and expectations to their organization are the formular for companies and their brands to comprehend how to get into a dialogue with them, what should be communicated, and what communication media should be used to reach as many stakeholders as possible. As shown before in the chapter of crisis communication, this awareness can be essential especially in times where the day-to-day communication flows to stakeholders are being disrupted or need urgent updates or changes because of unexpected circumstances interrupting usual business. In the best case, risk, how to react or ideally prevent crisis, and how stakeholders stay informed about the related procedures, should be calculated and planned out in a proper corporate social responsibility strategy. What Kucukusta et al. say in regard to CSR communication and stakeholder engagement with a focus on the hospitality industry is that “apart from building trust relationships, communication with stakeholders is crucial for companies because it helps them to obtain feedback about their existing CSR practices” (Kucukusta et al., 2019: 2130). The authors lead to their own notions on the topic by taking over Morsing’s definition of CSR communication, saying that it’s “communication that is designed and distributed by the company itself about its CSR efforts,’ and which can be achieved through a number of channels, such as sustainability reports, media or the internet” (Kucukusta et al., 2019: 2130). The authors from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University stress especially the interactive nature of social media and how it poses a new and transforming opportunity for organizational communication strategies and state that “the ability of social media to

facilitate two-way communication can lead to stronger stakeholder engagement” (Kucukusta et al., 2019: 2129). The hospitality researchers go on to explain the previously stated situation, that CSR efforts need to be aligned with stakeholders’ goals and needs and communicated to them over the right channel often becomes an issue as “despite overall increases in corporate reporting and the ease of disseminating information on the internet, most corporations have been slow to adapt their CSR efforts to the contemporary media landscape” (Kucukusta et al., 2019: 2130). What Kucukusta et al. want to achieve with their research is to find out which communication strategy is most effective to get into dialogue with stakeholders in the hospitality industry, and if organizations are not perhaps missing out on choosing more popular communication channels, such as Facebook and other social media platforms, to adequately reaching out to their stakeholders, as it is suggested in this chapter.

What should be made clear up until now is the most essential core role stakeholders play for an organization’s CSR endeavours, how well they are working, and how this can be crisis preventing or at least reputation saving in times of disruption. Brands need to establish a constant and healthy dialogue with their stakeholders to not only get to know them but reach out to them timely and in the right way when most urgently needed. A proper Corporate Social Responsibility strategy should therefore incorporate the organization’s stakeholders as the focal point of all efforts, a complete and flexible profile of them, how and for what reasons to hold up the two-way communication, and align its goals and long-term targets with these points. When all this is done, it should remain a constantly growing and branching out process to stay up to date with the most suitable tools to realize all these principles. For instance, to release CSR related communication not only over traditional channels, but – as far as the stakeholder profile demands – go through a more diverse set of media and communication distribution tools, such as social media and more engaging online presence. Because this implies organizational change and the necessity and demand from it regarding functioning CSR, the idea and importance of it will be discussed more quickly in the following chapters.

### *1.3 Organizational change*

Gilley et al. cite in their 2009 paper on the motivation, communication, and leadership behind organizational change that “recent decades have seen increasing emphasis on change

as a critical driver of organizational success” (Gilley et al., 2009: 76). This might be related to Fragouli and Ibidapo quoting Ayaz, who states that “organizations today face the challenges of globalization, knowledge-based competition and digital revolution which have changed the business environment” (Fragouli & Ibidapo, 2015: 71). These are firstly all reasons why organizations do experience frequent changes in their structures and secondly, why ongoing organizational change is necessary for an organization’s lasting success. In the light of the present study, it is necessary to distinguish intended changes in an organization to secure progress, innovation and competitive continuity, and organizational change that is inflicted by external catalysators such as disasters or crises.

Gilley et al. explain that organizational change exists and happens in different states and types. It can either be episodic or continuous, transitional, transformational, or developmental (Gilley et al., 2009). The difference is if changes happen frequently and continuously, in gradual steps, management-driven, in individual departments of an organization or in it as a whole (Gilley et al., 2009). What all these change types have in common is that they are mostly planned, intended and can be structured and worked out in detail before actually being implemented. Senior and Fleming mention here that “most people asked about organizational life today agree that it is becoming ever more uncertain as the pace of change quickens and the future becomes more unpredictable” (Senior & Fleming, 2006: 12). This unpredictable character is what most often inflicts unexpected disruption or crisis on organizations and forces sudden change on them, instead of being planned out. This arising, Fragouli and Ibidapo take up Kumari’s perception that “inasmuch as the anticipation of a crisis is tied to risk management and strategic planning, there is a need for leaders to deal with each crisis that occurs adeptly” and that therefore “leaders must consolidate the lessons learnt from crises and communicate the same to the people as organizational learning, and also drive sense for initiating change in the organization” (Fragouli & Ibidapo, 2015: 72), which includes important notions from all previously consulted literature for this study in relation to organizational change in the light of organizational crisis. As organizational learning has already been discussed in an earlier chapter, Ulmer and Seeger explain that various forms of disaster and crisis can inflict very negative consequences to organizations and are often even blamed on the leadership, but that in the best case they “can also serve as powerful forces of organizational change, learning, normative readjustment and, in some cases, renewal” (Seeger et al., 2005: 79). For the

previously consulted authors it is clear that “the ways in which participants, stakeholders and leaders frame and make sense of these events, as reflected in post-crisis discourse, shape both the nature and degree of change” (Seeger et al., 2005: 79). They further explore “organizational crises as significant change-inducing events” and the “ways post-crisis discourse constitutes prospective meaning among stakeholders” (Seeger et al., 2005: 82). What the authors manifest here is that even if change is not planned but put on the organization or just becoming necessary by an external or internal disruption, it depends on the leadership within the organization and the relationship established with perceiving stakeholders how the crisis poses an opportunity for positive and long-lasting change instead of only threatening the organization.

This in the same time makes organizational change a core value of an organization’s corporate social responsibility efforts, that should also not stagnate but be worked over and adjusted with time and external factors. This is what happened for IHG when the Covid-19 crisis unexpectedly interrupted its business year in the beginning of 2020 and with it the plans and strategies that were implemented for the 2018-2020 term. The brand still states that most of the targets for this period have been achieved but that the unprecedented crisis of course asked for several changes and adjustments in the future Responsible Business plans (ihgplc.com 2020). While IHG promotes continuous improvement and change as a value of its company culture, the changes that became necessary due to the Covid-19 crisis have most certainly not been anticipated and were planned for. As organizational change and the concept of crisis are latently implied concepts and phenomena in all the previously discussed literature and state of the art research, this chapter is held rather short to just round up the literature review with an all-overarching principle.

## Part II – Case Study: IHG Hotels & Resorts and its ‘Journey to Tomorrow’

### **2. The Intercontinental Hotels Group as a main player in the hospitality industry**

This first chapter is meant to introduce IHG, namely the Intercontinental Hotels Group as the case investigated in this research and to give a brief overview over the impact the “crisis” of COVID-19 had on the economic sector it is located in, which is the hospitality and accommodation industry. While the “industry is made up of four distinct sectors” (EHL insights, 2020): Lodging, Food & Beverage, Recreation and Travel & Tourism, this research is especially interested in the first one on this list, which is most dependent on a personal and individual relationship of trust with its stakeholders. The following points are supposed to draw an idea of IHG’s role in the hospitality industry, how the sector was affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore, elucidate why the brand is a suitable case for the present study. It is also aimed to shine a first light on why big industry brands like IHG

are in the urge to react to the “new normal” in a way to keep and renew business and the relationship to their stakeholders.

### *2.1 IHG – facts and figures*

Oxford University tourism researcher David Bowie states in his 2018 paper “Innovation and 19<sup>th</sup> century hotel industry evolution”, that research in the field of hospitality, mostly operates on a plainly explanatory and micro-level basis, rather than empirically analysing the development of the sector since the early 1900’s (Bowie, 2018). This fact makes it especially hard to find any one valid existing scientific definition for the subject of this research. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the current understanding of the hospitality industry is that it’s made up of four sectors, which cover basic needs of travelling people, such as food, beverage, accommodation and means of transportation. What was added more recently, is the sector of recreation, which makes hospitality not solely the economy of moving from point A to point B and staying for a limited amount of time, but brings in a concept of “entertainment and relaxation” (EHL insights, 2020). What EHL Insights also describes is that Hospitality is one of the fastest growing economic industries since the end of the financial crisis, namely around 2010, as “all hospitality sectors are quickly evolving due to new technologies and a changing customer mindset” (EHL insights, 2020). Ricardo Siu defines hospitality in a purely economic view as “the provision of what people perceive as friendly and helpful services, [which] require a set of factor inputs like labour and related facilities (e.g., hotel, restaurant, theme park, etc.). [The] acquisition of these services is largely due to the willingness to sacrifice resources such as time and money in exchange” (Siu, 2019: 2). Offering these services, the hospitality industry is not only one of the biggest industries on the market but also one of the most commonly used in some form, and welcomed “more than 1.3 billion international arrivals” in the year 2019 (EHL insights, 2020), just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the ground. This sums up the current economic importance of the hospitality industry as a growingly consumed good, operating ever closer to the individual and diverse needs and expectations of its stakeholders, who have more resources than ever at their disposal, to access, inform, consume, and entertain their travelling habits.

The mentioned 1.3 billion travellers have an inexplicably large number of services offered to them by the whole of the hospitality industry. Accommodation wise, next to hostels, bed and breakfast and the increasing sector of “self-lodging”-services, like AirBNB, hotels are still the go to facility for most travellers of any kind. As Lock states on [statista.com](https://www.statista.com), different hotel types can usually be “categorized by size, function, service, and cost”, which are usually summarized in a more commonly known star-rating system (Lock, 2021). At its peak in 2018, the hotel and resort branch of the hospitality industry reached a marked size of 1.24 trillion US Dollars, with about six main player brands providing properties (Lock, 2021). While the well-known chain Marriott International leads this list revenue wise with a yearly average of 10.5 billion US Dollars in the last few years, according to [statista.com](https://www.statista.com), IHG ranks number five on the list of the leading lodging companies by number of properties worldwide as of June 2020 (Lock, 2021), right behind the revenue leader.

With almost 6000 properties actively running in the middle of 2020 and another 1820 new hotels in the pipeline ([ihgplc.com](https://www.ihgplc.com), 2021), IHG was even at the height of the first COVID-19 wave and amidst unprecedented travel bans, in a leading and still growing position within its own industry. Supposedly, these numbers are the result of a diverse portfolio of over 16 individual hotel brands, spanning from a solid range of midscale accommodations for business, leisure and long-term stay travel to a steadily growing upscale and luxury segment, including five-star resorts as well as boutique, lifestyle and health tourism options, offering conveniences for travellers from any kind of background and expectations. With Holiday Inn (express) and InterContinental being the better known and biggest brands within the franchise, making up about 4600 of IHG’s 6000 properties, the conglomerate looks back on an almost 250-year long history of being present as a main figure in the hospitality industry in over 100 countries in the world. Starting out as a brewery in 1777, going into business with Pan American Airways in the first half of the 1900s and then going global on the accommodation market with Holiday Inn in the 1970s, IHG covers three of the hospitality industry’s four distinct sectors, that were mentioned above. Arriving to the new millennium, IHG finally became a standalone dedicated hospitality business, with a focus “on its leadership in worldwide hospitality” ([ihgplc.com](https://www.ihgplc.com), 2021). And with the new business model came new statutes, values, visions and missions, that are constantly tried to be communicated to stakeholders through a steady business model. Under the slogan “True Hospitality for Good”, IHG communicates “recognizing, respecting and caring for people”, including all

their stakeholders, “doing right for the world around [them]”, as they are present “at the heart of thousands of local communities, and being “passionate about making a positive difference to the environment”, as the core of their “purpose and culture” on their corporate website (ihgplc.com, 2021). A closer look on the more recent extensions and details of these base values can be consulted in the annual responsible business report, which will be analysed in the latter part of this study. The most current report reminisces about the 2018-2020 targets and what has been achieved since the last big goal setting, but most importantly acknowledges the heavy and unexpected impact of the COVID-19 crisis, which no one could have known about when the last long-term goals were set 3 years ago. According to the 2020 report, IHG’s approach on Corporate Social Responsibility and the core of their business is to

“use [their] scale and expertise to create the exceptional guest experiences and owner returns needed to grow [their] brands in the industry’s most valuable markets and segments. Delivered through a culture that attracts the best people and has a positive impact on the world around [them]” putting business growth, stakeholders, and environment in the focus of their actions (ihgplc.com, 2020: 10).

This approach is proposed to operate on four priorities, which include brand trust, creating digital advantage, customer centric operations and care for people, communities and the planet (ihgplc.com, 2020: 10). Other essential points in IHG’s Corporate Social Responsibility plan are, but not limited to, stakeholder engagement, internal and external in almost equal parts, working in accordance to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, where IHG currently fully aligns with five of the 17 statutes, and the IHG Code of Conduct which promotes “responsible attitudes and ethics” in all corporate processes (ihgplc.com, 2020: 15-19). Orienting the 2018-2020 targets along these priorities and counting in the early impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, IHG still reports met and sometimes overly met targets in their latest three-year achievement plan. The 2020 report shows that core values and missions such as environmental sustainability, IHG’s community impact regarding education, traineeship and community work at least scratched on, but mostly exceeded the lower target lines. Topics like diversity increasement, female representation, responsible procurement such as heightened ethical supplier awareness, and overall employee engagement were also essential aims, which in the same time made space for new brand visions (ihgplc.com, 2020: 20-22).

In summary the Intercontinental Hotels & Resorts Group as a franchise company is operating on five broad values: Do the right thing, Show we care, Aim higher, Celebrate Difference, and Work better together (ihgplc.com, 2020: 25). As a hospitality brand they try to openly show that they are aware of their corporate social responsibility and the impact and scale their operations and industry itself has in the world and on its people. The values, vision, mission and numbers listed and explained in this chapter are intended to show the “as-is”-situation of IHG as a brand in an industry how it was before and up until its environment and operations were completely interrupted. In later parts of this research, the explanations in this chapter are supposed to give a guideline of what was, what is, and what is to come, and how IHG, as a self-titled socially and environmentally responsible corporation, was and still is in the urge to react and be flexible according to the new circumstances the COVID-19 pandemic came with. Especially the value related bond between the brand and its stakeholders will be in the focus of the present study’s analysis and will hence be discussed in greater detail in the method part.

## *2.2 The impact of COVID-19 on the brand and its stakeholders*

The above-mentioned new circumstances hit the world, its people, economies and routines in the beginning of 2020. The year in which IHG’s last CSR plan was supposed to come to a conclusion after three years. Introducing last year’s annual business report, IHG’s chairman Patrick Cesau writes: “The Covid-19 pandemic gripped the world in 2020, changing lives and challenging economies, social norms and the existence of many businesses. Without doubt, hospitality was one of the sectors hardest hit, [...]” (ihgplc.com, 2021: 1). This directly aligns with Deloitte’s report from their Fall 2020 issue on the impact of the pandemic on especially the hospitality industry, where it is explained that “the near-complete lockdown imposed to battle the pandemic led to a 98 percent decline in international tourists globally in May 2020 compared to 2019” and that the industry’s financial loss due to the pandemic was thrice as big as during the 2009 economic crisis (Deloitte.com, 2020). Regarding IHG’s before-mentioned visions and targets, which reached into the first year of the pandemic, the 2020 CSR report says that IHG was “on track to meet all targets heading into 2020. However, the impact of Covid-19 in what was the most difficult year [the] industry has ever faced, hindered the progress with some of these [...]” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 20).

Crisis communication researcher Danielle Barbe notes that “in the event of a crisis, tourism faces greater challenges than any other industry due to its high vulnerability and interdependence with multiple other economic sectors” and, in accordance with IHG’s CSR targets, that crises “can significantly harm tourism organizations, the destination and local communities” (Barbe, 2020). The immense role, notions on crisis and regarding communication play for the purpose of this research has already been elaborated in the literature review preceding this chapter. Barbe’s statements on the topic at this point are meant to illuminate the found connection between the unit of analysis and the area of research in this study.

What Danielle Barbe is trying to show can be seen here as for IHG, just like for many other industry players, the travel bans that were issued for most parts of the world in April and May of 2020, meant a complete turnover of their hotels’ daily business. One in six IHG franchise hotels were closed during this peak and traveller accommodation occupancy sunk to a historic low of about 20% in total in these initial months of the pandemic (ihgplc.com, 2021). The overall revenue therefore sank from US\$2.083m in 2019 to US\$992m in 2020. While these numbers seem horrendous business-wise, IHG’s leadership still tries to appear positive towards their stakeholders and their public perception, putting all their focus and efforts not on numbers but on their values, vision and mission, which needed to be adjusted in the light of the outbreaking pandemic. In a February 2021 interview with CNBC, CEO Keith Barr ensures that, while travel restrictions and physical distancing sure had a massive impact on revenues for IHG, they were still able to look after their stakeholders, like customers and owners due to a resilient business model and small but useful cashflows that were still up (CNBC, 2021). Taking N. Ntounis’ et al. in consideration, and also the previously collected notions on crisis communication and how it works, CEO Keith Barr seems to be on a good way with stressing the importance of leading a resilient business during a global pandemic. Ntounis and his co-authors state in their work “Tourism and Hospitality industry resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic: Evidence from England”, that pandemics and their heavy effects on industries around the world are, indeed, not an entirely new occurrence (i.e. SARS) and are being researched already (ct. Ntounis et al, 2021). Nevertheless, what the British authors aim to make clearer is, that resilience is the key factor for crises prone industries like the hospitality one, that is not only directly affected in one sector but usually suffers a chain-reaction of sectors and finances going down as soon as one

of them is impacted by a sudden change of routines. “Jamal and Budke (2020) further observe that pandemics are likely to become a common feature of the tourism industry, requiring greater stakeholder collaboration to plan for and manage resilience” (Ntounis et al., 2021), Barr’s perception of what is necessary to maintain and do in the future is further supported by research on the topic as seen in priorly included research on past crises and how it has been reacted to them.

In summary, until now the understandings of this study are that the current situation the hospitality industry finds itself in, is in fact unprecedented in its extent and impact. In hindsight of an unforeseeable future, that still needs action, it is most essential for brands to understand the long-term consequences a crisis can inflict on them and internalize the understanding of how it remains in their power to control, or at least influence these consequences, into their business culture. There have been other pandemics and resilience demanding crises and disasters before, but – according to the latest research - never one that had such a sudden but long-lasting effect on the entire world. Hence, it is now more important than ever to find new solutions and listen to and learn from the factors that keep a business going and are most co-affected by an organizational crisis: the stakeholders. As IHG promotes in its CSR plan, as well as in its new ten-year contingency plan “Journey to Tomorrow”, they are aware of the fact that only working together and taking care of each other while trying to adapt to “the new normal”, is the best way to keep their business resilient and flowing (ihgplc.com, 2021: 43). As the consulted literature already implicated, the organization or brand itself is not the only entity to consider when investigating the circumstances mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph. The one, often not adequately looked into but nonetheless important component while looking at an organizational crisis situation, are the stakeholders, who are tried to be pushed in the centre of attention in the present study. Their role within an organization, especially in the here treated case, has already been explained in a more general way. The scientific view on stakeholder perceptions and experiences towards an organizational crisis they are attributed to has also been described previously in Coombs et al.’s “Stakeholder’s cognitive model for information processing during and after organizational crises” (Fediuk in Coombs et al., 2010: 637) and identified with direct examples from the case of IHG. This has shown that, especially for the goal to find out what IHG and other brands can learn from the current crisis communication for a future that might be more prone to crises than ever, the stakeholders’ point of view on

the distressed and disrupted organization is more essential for brand survival and post-crisis recovery than often expected. Bringing stakeholders - quite literally - back on board after the crisis hindered or even prohibited them to travel, accommodate themselves in hotels, meet people in public places, or consume vacations and free time entertainment in a hospitality environment, should be the focal aspect of a brand's crisis communication strategy within its CSR plan. Stakeholders need to trust, consider the brand resilient and able to adapt, see the organization react to crises in early stages, and feel that they are treated as respected and most considered parts of a business model. This only works through both way communication fitted to the very individual circumstances of any crisis. The brand's Covid-19 response website states in regards that "managing the effects of Covid-19 on our industry and our company is a team effort. [...] We're responding quickly and thoughtfully, ensuring that we do the right thing for our guests, colleagues, hotels and owners, plus the many local communities of which we're proud to be a part. [...] We make responsible choices for both today and the long term" (ihgplc.com, 2021). The following empirical analysis is aimed to gain a better understanding of how exactly IHG tries to realize these promises, how stakeholders are involved in and engaged by it, how IHG is handling the crisis communication wise, and to get an idea of if they really went the right way in accordance with their risk and crisis management and communication plans.

### **3. Methodology: Qualitative Document Analysis in Case Study Research**

Centre of the present research is the case of the Intercontinental Hotel Group's corporate social responsibility communication strategy, and how it changed recently in the face of an external crisis, namely the COVID-19 pandemic. As the development of the new CSR strategy and the interest in it came as a consequence to the disrupting appearance of the new Corona-Virus, the research intentions here arise from a "pragmatic worldview" paired with the seeking for understanding and meanings of the situation of a constructivist paradigm (Cresswell, 2009: 10). The partial mixture of these two ontologies, suggests a qualitative research approach, which will inductively carry the findings about the particular case of IHG to the general theme of the future of CSR in the hospitality industry. While Robert K. Yin is usually the first source consulted when conducting a case study is the method of choice, the "pragmatic constructivist" philosophy behind this research rather leads to the guidelines of

Sharan Merriam (2016), who shares said philosophy. What both case study researchers have in common is the belief “that when information is plentiful and concepts abstract, it is important to utilize processes that help interpret, sort, and manage information and that adapt findings to convey clarity and applicability to the results” (Harrison et al., 2017: 10). Merriam furthermore stresses that when conducting a case study “the unit of analysis, not the topic of investigation, characterizes [it]” (Merriam, 2002: 8) and that therefore “the data collection strategy used is determined by the question of the study” (2002: 12). In the present case the question is what IHG’s new CSR strategy can tell about the future of the concept in the hospitality industry, hence the consulted unit of analysis is the published documents, which hold information and evidence for this question. It’s not the topic of investigation (IHG case) but the unit of analysis (CSR related documents) that will be used to find an approach to the research question. Merriam, as well as Glenn Bowen, both highlight the advantage of analysing such documents while doing a case study, as they are efficient, because highly available on mostly low-cost channels, and next to the great broadness of information they can provide, documents are more than any other source of qualitative data: non-reactive and non-obtrusive (Bowen, 2009: 31 and Merriam, 2016). Although the general tonus in research is that analysing such documents alone is usually not enough to fulfil the expectations of convergence, versatile evidence and reducing the danger of potential biases, Glenn A. Bowen states that “in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of research reports and journal articles that mention document analysis as part of the methodology” (Bowen, 2009: 27). He then spans the circle to Yin, saying that “as a research method, document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies”, and that “it [document analysis] has also been used as a stand-alone method” (Bowen, 2009: 29).

The succeeding points should illustrate the method of analysing documents in a qualitative case study, explain in more detail why this approach was chosen for the empirical part of this study, and justify it therefore. In a third point will then be presented how and why the documents for this analysis were chosen and why they are relevant for the conduct of the case study.

### *3.1 Description*

In the sixth and most recent edition of his most popular work “Case study research and applications – design and methods” (2018), Robert K. Yin added a preface where he explains

that, especially in the last few years Google was able to provide data that suggests that the interest in and overall popularity of case studies is steadily increasing (2018: 16). Nevertheless, he also puts to mind that this might stand in direct correspondence to the increasing trend of “popular” or “non-research” case studies (2018: 22). These are cases used for illustrations of businesses, economic occasions or as “supplementary materials in professional trainings” (2018: 22). Yin states that even though this kind of case studies are “highly informative and useful”, they “do not necessarily follow any explicit research procedures” and much rather just “present information about practical situations” than working empirically towards answering a research question (2018: 22). Although the case chosen for this research also comes from an economic sector and has many such popular case studies already conducted about it (i.e., IBM 2013 or learningpool 2019), the purpose here is not the illustration of the case object but the scientific approach to the unit of analysis to answer a research question. This is what Robert Yin calls a case study research, a “mode of inquiry” (Yin, 2018: 21), which in popular methodology is mostly mentioned to be a qualitative research method but might as well, as the author remarks, “need to follow their own customized research procedures” (Yin, 2018: 25).

Sharan B. Merriam, who was introduced above, counts the method of case study research definitely into the types of qualitative research practice (2002). For her it is most important to distinguish what is a case that can be qualitatively researched and what is a qualitatively researchable unit of analysis but not a case per definition (ct. Merriam, 2002). Therefore, she does not consider the remarks of Yin but says that “since it is the unit of analysis”, which needs to be able to be considered a case, “this type of qualitative research stands apart from [other qualitative research methods]” (Merriam, 2002: 8), can be combined or applied within other qualitative methods but most importantly is “a vehicle for in-depth description and analysis” (2002). What defines qualitative research and with it the method of case study for Merriam, is the philosophical worldview that for her lies to the ground of said approaches. As mentioned introducing to this chapter, the ontology this research is linked to is a pragmatic constructivism, which is characterized by a problem-centred, real-world practice oriented understanding of meaning of social situations and actions (ct. Cresswell, 2009). This, for Sharan Merriam, is the key to understand qualitative research and stands as the direct counterpart to “positivist, quantitative research”, which rather considers the world as a “fixed agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon” and not as a carrier of diverse meanings

of social interactions which can be inductively investigated on alone-standing cases (Merriam, 2002: 3).

These characterisations of case studies by either Merriam and Yin, do ask for or propose that within the “mode of case study research” (Yin, 2018), in this case definitely qualitatively conducted, an “iterative research process” (Yin, 2018: 30) is used and that “the case study intensively examines the interplay of all variables in order to provide as complete as an understanding of the phenomenon as possible” (Merriam, 1985: 206). For Robert K. Yin this means that after planning the basic outline of a case study, there will be an ongoing back and forth between design, preparation, data collection, analysis and sharing about the process and findings (Yin, 2018). For Sharan Merriam it also often includes that “several methods of collecting data are used to reveal the total picture of the case under study” (Merriam, 1985: 206). The reiterative process Yin foresees for a case study came into action quite fast in this research when the plan was made, a design thought of and first preparations in the making. While it has already been clear that the method will come down to a qualitative case study, the tools to conduct it were firstly composed of a document analysis and qualitative interviews with probands involved in the specific department concerning the unit of analysis to find the recommended triangulation of evidence (Merriam, 2002 & Bowen, 2009). After all the process didn't directly go on to the “data collection part” but went back to preparations when it became clear that conducting interviews in an adequate extend would not be an option in the desired or achievable research setting. As it is often the case in any kind of research there was simply no granted access to the needed entity. To not jeopardize the work

that had already been done and preserve the core interest of the study and research question, adjustments have been made and new sources for data, evidence and information found.

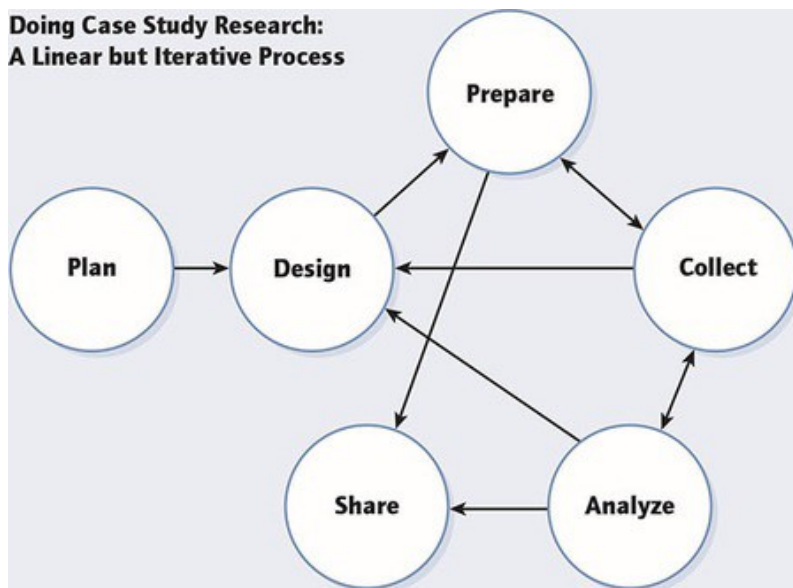


Figure 3: Case study research design (Yin 2018, p. 30)

The main alteration in the preparation process came down to limiting the methods to only one, the qualitative document analysis (QDA) but work it out in a bigger range to still achieve a justifiably sufficient level of collected data. This is, as explained before, not the most usual way to undertake research but “whereas document analysis has served mostly as a complement to other research methods, it has also been used as a stand-alone method” and that “indeed, there are some specialised forms of qualitative research that rely solely on the analysis of documents” according to Glenn Bowen (2009: 29). Why the present research was considered to be perfectly applicable to this concept will be justified in more detail in the next chapter, after an explanation of what approach on document analysis was chosen for this study and how it is applied on the research subject.

Glenn Bowen introduces his article on document analysis with the words “organisational and institutional documents have been a staple in qualitative research for many years” and that “in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of research reports [...] that mention document analysis as part of the methodology” (Bowen, 2009: 27) but questions in the same time if the method has always been used effectively, as there are only few research articles that extensively describe the analysis procedure or the degree of results a qualitative document analysis can really produce (ct. Bowen, 2009). In regards to Sharan Merriam’s

ontology behind case studies, Bowen defines document analysis as “like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (Bowen, 2009: 27) in which he refers to Corbin and Strauss, 2008. Documents can be of various kinds. Printed and electronic, historical artifacts, or written protocols, diaries, but also brochures, journals, maps, newspapers and so on and so forth (Bowen, 2009, Merriam, 2016). They “exist prior to commencing the research study” and “are most typically a natural part of the research setting and do not intrude upon or alter the setting in the ways [interviews or observations do, where the investigator is present]” (Merriam, 2016: 162). Sharan Merriam further elaborates that no matter in which setting documents are selected, consulted and analysed, the research process is always “guided by questions, educated hunches, and emerging findings” and underlines the correspondence with a case study’s reiterative character by saying that “although the search is systematic, these settings also allow for the accidental uncovering of valuable data” (Merriam, 2016: 175). As mentioned before, the present case required the going back and forth in the planning state of the study, and so it did in the document selection process, as described by Merriam. When the adjusted research topic and questions were found, there firstly was an obvious first selection of openly accessible units of analysis, like the new CSR strategy plan of IHG’s journey to tomorrow and the official statements made by the company about it. As communication is the supposed research area of the present study, it was necessary to also include “documents” and data sources that were published on different channels of communication such as social media, namely Facebook and Instagram. As will be shown in a later part of the method chapter, in the procedure of analysing the initially selected documents, it came up that adding previously published CSR reports or plans of the IHG brand might need to be consulted for comparison to be able to really understand the changes that had to be made because of the pandemic and anticipated changes in the industry’s future because of it. On his list of specific uses of documents in qualitative research, Glenn Bowen exemplifies in point four that

“documents provide a means of tracking change and development. Where various drafts of a particular document are accessible, the researcher can compare them to identify the changes. Even subtle changes in a draft can reflect substantive developments in a project” (Yin, 1994 in Bowen, 2009: 30).

Furthermore, according to Bowen, Documents are a useful method in qualitative research because they “can indicate the conditions that impinge upon the phenomena currently under

investigation”, “information contained in [them] can suggest some questions that need to be asked and situations that need to be observed as part of the research”, “information and insights derived from documents can be valuable additions to a knowledge base”, and that they “can be analysed as a way to verify findings or corroborate evidence from other sources” (Bowen, 2009: 30). According to both, Glenn Bowen and Sharan Merriam, the various previously mentioned advantages of using QDA as a method mostly outweigh its limitations, always depending on how it is incorporated in the research.

After going into detailed justification why the specific method of a qualitative document analysis (further mentioned as ‘QDA’) in a case study is being used in this research, the documents’ exact selection process will be outlined and checked upon with earlier introduced arguments and a checklist fused together from notions by Glenn A. Bowen and Sharan B. Merriam, as they continue to be the mainly consulted methodologists in this matter.

### *3.2 Justification*

As quoted before, Robert K. Yin declares the phase of “planning” as the first step in any case study research. What has to be inevitably done in a very early stage of this phase is to determine, whether the use of case study even is an appropriate research method for the topic in question (Yin, 2018: 32 f.). While Yin still defines case study research as “one of the most challenging of all social science endeavours” (Yin, 2018: 32), Merriam insists that as long as the beforementioned “unit of analysis” is one “bound system” and concentrates “upon a single phenomenon or entity” in depth, “because it was typical, unique, experimental, or highly successful, etc.” (Merriam, 2002: 8) it is quite easy to determine whether or not the method of case study research is of use. In the present study, a higher interest of finding out new aspects of a disruptive phenomenon proposed to find a single applicable case to read said aspects and characteristics out of it, if existent. The hospitality industry was affected and disrupted by the outbreak of the Coronavirus as a whole, as it was explained in an earlier chapter, but to truly see the first effects of the disruption, the new challenges and therefore the new situation of the industry’s stakeholders, it makes sense to be rational about the possible extend of a study bringing valid data and evidence on the matter. To find a more specific case that is involved in the studied phenomenon, closer explorable and easier

accessible to find explanations and probable answers to the research question, seems to be the logical consequence in this process of a qualitative study. Yin annotates this with the formular “the more that your questions seek to *explain* some contemporary circumstance (e.g., ‘how’ or ‘why’ some social phenomenon works), the more that case study research will be relevant” (Yin, 2018: 33). The social phenomenon here is the pandemic that changed the daily lives of all people all of a sudden and had an especially hard impact on a certain industry which concerns a large number of people at all times. As it would go way too far for any valid and tangible research framework to try to examine this contemporary circumstance for the whole of the hospitality industry in all its facets, narrowing the ground that needs to be explained or delivers explanations down to a significant but more specific case, here the reaction of one main player in the industry to the social phenomenon, is what makes the research more graspable and justifies the use of case study research as a method. What is so important about this justification is that Yin suggests, that once decided that case study is the methodology to go with, the researcher should set high expectations in their chosen field which should follow a clear methodological path (Yin, 2018: 34), that is aimed to be illustrated here.

Even though the authors Harrison et al see the consensus of the three main case study methodologists, Merriam, Yin and Stake in the rationale that case studies are “primarily exploratory and explanatory in nature, [...] used to gain an understanding of the issue in real life settings and recommended to answer how and why or less frequently what questions” (Harrison et al., 2017: 12), Yin’s later connotation that case studies can also be descriptive or all three of these characters in the same time (ct. Yin, 2018), should be held up in the present framework. This is, because exploring the case of IHG’s reaction to the contemporary circumstance of a pandemic disrupting its industry and urgently asking for a new approach on their daily business and routines, is aimed to describe in detail what exactly lead to this necessity for better understanding of the meaning of the phenomenon, and in a next point to explain 1. How the COVID-19 pandemic lead IHG to create a new CSR strategy, 2. Why this step was necessary, and 3. How they did it.

After determining that using a case study as a method is appropriate for the research, what kind of case study is most suitable, and what can be expected from the method, Robert Yin goes over to identifying the case to work on. In the present study this is obviously the Intercontinental Hotels Group and its Corporate Social Responsibility programme, as

outlined several times before. Moving forward, both Sharan Merriam and Robert K. Yin stress the importance of using a quality case, which constructs validity and reliability (Yin, 2018) and is carefully planned and prepared while a “systematic implementation structure” is developed (Merriam, 2009 in Harrison et al., 2017). To ensure such a systematic implementation structure, Yin further suggests to always run a case study protocol, which “contains the procedures and general rules to be followed” and is “desirable under all circumstances” while conducting a case study (Yin, 2018: 132). The methodologist additionally explains that “the protocol is a major way of increasing the reliability of the case study and is intended to guide [the researcher] in carrying out the data collection from a single case” (Yin, 2018: 134). Additional justification for the quality of the chosen case for the present endeavour can hence be found in Section C., point 2. of the case study protocol listed in the Annex. Harrison et al.’s point of “aligning philosophy and methodology with the research purpose and methods employed” (Stewart, 2014 in Harrison et al., 2017) has already been explained and justified by connecting the theoretical basis of the methodology with Sharan Merriam’s ontology of a pragmatic constructivist world view.

As it has been described before, one of the main points to be justified in this study is that, within the case study, there is only one method used to collect and analyse data. The general consensus in science is that the more methods are used, the higher the triangulation and overlapping of evidence can be, and the more valid and set in stone are the results and notions that can be taken out of the data (Bowen, 2009; Merriam, 2002; Cresswell, 2009; Yin, 2018 etc.). Because of the previously described hurdle in the initial planning phase of the study, namely that there was no access granted to interviews in an appropriate and fertile area, the method plan was revisited and adjusted to the single method of QDA. What has to be justified here is firstly, why no other qualitative method was implemented as a substitute for the lead one on one interviews, as there are plenty other options, and secondly, why using only one tool for data collection, analysis and evidence gathering is still sufficient for the purpose of the present study.

Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter, and Ajay Bailey published a new handbook on qualitative research methods in 2020, where they not only give a highly exemplified introduction to what qualitative research is and how to use it, but also use case studies as the example of choice to illustrate their methodological guidelines. Where they agree with the previously introduced methodologists is, that qualitative research is a cycle, reiterative and often asks

for going back and forth in the process, especially while collecting and analysing data (Hennink et al., 2020). For them also the “selection of research methods needs to be a logical progression from the earlier tasks in the design cycle and also reflect the paradigm underlying [the] research” (Hennink et al., 2020: 41). While the authors only discuss three qualitative methods in depth in their book, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, which all usually create a very rich source of data, the argument of the method reflecting the underlying paradigm, already points to a justification of the single method use in the present study. As the unit of analysis in this study is the case of IHG and their new CSR strategy, incorporating people into the fieldwork would mostly make sense if interviews, focus groups, or an observation of the creating process were an option. The other option would have been to acquire external stakeholders for such in-person data gathering, which is still by far not as close to the desirable data as getting direct insights in the investigated matter by just researching the matter itself. The pragmatic constructivist ontology and interests this study is based on imply by name that it should be constructed in a most pragmatic way. Cresswell, for instance says here that “pragmatism as a world view arises out of actions, situations, and consequences” and that “instead of focusing on methods, researchers emphasize the research problem” (Cresswell, 2009: 10). The situation here is that the desired action of finding out about the research problem by interviewing persons involved with it was not possible to go through with. The arising consequence is that a pragmatistic researcher needs to find other, more accessible ways to still tackle the issue in question. Of course, the method and its justification make up a huge part of this study, but going along with Cresswell’s definition, the method was not the focus to build the study on. In the manner of a case study, it had to be flexible, able to be revisited and adjusted and to make compromises to be able to focus on the unit of analysis and the problem to be addressed. Hennink et al. describe the selection of their three dedicated qualitative methods as follows:

“The method you select depends on your research questions and study objectives. If your aim is to gather in-depth and personal information you would choose in-depth interviews; however, if you wish to identify a range of opinions or understand social norms, focus group discussions would be a better method, or if you aim to understand the context of specific behaviours or people’s living conditions, you would select observation as a method of data collection” (Hennink et al., 2020: 41).

Sharan Merriam also counted “three major sources of data for a qualitative research study” (Merriam, 2002:12) but added after interviews and observations documents as the third

method of choice and delivers the main reason for it to be chosen for this study in the same sentence: “The data collection strategy used is determined [...] by determining which source(s) of data will yield the best information with which to answer the question. [...]. Sometimes only one method is used” (Merriam, 2002: 12). With this Merriam closes the circle to the last paragraph of this justification. The still present issue of missing triangulation of evidence to undermine the validity of the findings while using only one method is countered by Florian Kohlbacher, who says that “in the case of using qualitative content analysis in case study research, triangulation takes actually place on two different levels” (Kohlbacher, 2006). According to the author the merging of the two allows to, firstly integrate “different material and evidence”, which happens here by consulting various documents about the same matter but with different backgrounds and also comparing them to each other and secondly that “triangulation takes place by applying a method of analysis (qualitative content analysis) that has not been particularly developed for this purpose to a different research design (case study research)” (Kohlbacher, 2006). Other reasons for the practical use of QDA in a setting where the understanding, meaning and development reasons of a written document, here the new CSR strategy plan of IHG, are the focus of the research are obviously the nature of the data and, compared to interviews and observations, the advantages of document analysis described by Bowen, as well as Merriam, which were already shortly introduced above. Because the consulted documents for this study are openly shared and accessible, even wanted to be consulted for information and communication purposes, QDA is highly efficient as there is barely any time needed to retrieve them and absolutely no costs. The researcher does not rely on the responsiveness of a third party to work on the documents, which was the problem with conducting interviews in this setting. The documents and their content, once published, is highly stable and non- reactive, which can have— especially in a qualitative research environment – strong influence on the outcome of the data’s tone and substance. Over all, as annotated in the next point, documents immediately provide a high coverage of possible evidence and topics to be included; documents do not forget or purposefully leave out information, and often cover more facets in an area in less extend, than perhaps a person who is specialized on only one aspect investigated.

To round up the justification chapter, there are two more recent examples that should be employed at this point of the study. These two case study researches, published in 2020, in

a way debilitate Kohlbacher's notion from 2006, that QDA produces triangulation in case studies, as it has not been commonly used until that point in a case study context, by saying that currently "qualitative document analysis [is] a method widely used in case study research" (Wood et al., 2020: 456) and that documents can "provide critical insight and advanced empirical and theoretical understanding" of a case (Dalglish et al., 2020: 1424). But this rather means that QDA has not been, but has become more particularly developed for the purpose of conducting a case study, as it turned out to be highly useful. Especially Wood, Sebar, and Vecchio plead, just like Bowen for "rigour in naming assumptions and explicitness about the procedures employed" (Wood et al., 2020: 456) and further discuss the informative application of QDA in case studies on an example and how its limits and strengths become visible in practice. Sarah L. Dalglish and her colleagues go even one step further along the present research approach and show how to use QDA most efficiently in a specific thematical environment, where documents and the policies found in them are the core and often even the only source of needed data (ct. Dalglish et al., 2020). These two examples do not only inform the present study and its method part with in practice insights and helpful experiences in the process of applying QDA in case study research, but also justify the use of the two methods together as sufficient and probably even the best option on the ground of documents regarding IHG's CSR strategy being the heart of interest in this context. Both also conclude in a practical application the already introduced methodologists by stressing the premise that the QDA and case study mix stands and falls with the rigour and consistency of explaining every step and finding in the research process in abundant detail. This has often been a neglected stage in such study models and the main reason for the rather understated reputation of QDA as a single method to inform case study research. Before explaining findings, the same rigour needs to be applied to the selection of documents and the explanation why they were chosen.

### *3.3 Selection Process of Documents*

Sharan Merriam, who poses the base methodological frame for this study, defends using documents in qualitative research because "using documentary material as data is not much different from using interviews or observations" (Merriam, 2016: 175). Why analysing documents is the method of choice in the present context has already been explained and

also justified, but what is still of interest is, what documents were chosen to be analysed and why those and not others. For Merriam it is obvious that “the researcher must keep an open mind when it comes to discovering useful documents” (Merriam, 2016: 175) and needs to be aware of possible sources and places to look for them, how to acquire the documents, and what is even sensible to consult. For the researcher to be absolutely sure about the relevance, authenticity, usefulness, and origin of a document, the methodologist proposes a check-list with relevant questions to answer before a document can eventually be judged as fitting for the research inquiry. She took the list over from earlier notions on qualitative document analysis by Clark (1967) and later on Guba and Lincoln (1981). Although Sharan Merriam warns that the points on the list have been composed before the internet became the foremost source of acquiring documents for analysis purposes, most of the questions can still be applied in some extent (cf. Merriam, 2016). To compose a more up to date version, the documents for this study were chosen based on checkpoints that were extracted in parts from the one Merriam provides, as well as from notions Glenn Bowen included in his own views about evaluating evidence in QDA.

The first question leading into looking for suitable documents, obviously was to determine the intended purpose of the records. This can be described as that the chosen documents are supposed to hold necessary information and details, able to be put into any relation with the variables of the proposed research question “How did **IHG** engage **stakeholders** in its **COVID-19** related **crisis communication** and what can be learnt from this?”. Following this intent, the direct way was to find out which channels IHG uses to communicate about the crisis and what document sources these channels provide with open access. The open access is a relevant characteristic itself, as it is not only the premise to be able to use the document for the research, but also that the stakeholders the communication is meant for, can retrieve the communication without any actively implemented hurdles. This appears to be a must for the chosen documents, because otherwise they would not qualify as a piece of, to stakeholders communicated, information. Regarding the relevance, it was necessary to find out where IHG communicated information about their crisis management and therefore CSR efforts, especially connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. Making sense about the target group IHG supposedly like to reach out to most, namely the affected travellers, or in other words, consumers of their brand, the search led to the presumably most frequented communication outlet for brands nowadays: social media platforms. The next closest step to

expand the groups of stakeholders addressed was to look for the company's CSR reports, which was further supported by the social media publication about the most current of these reports and the new strategy, which was implemented through it. Finding out that IHG has communicated about a new CSR strategy in the light of the current Coronavirus crisis, is not only a confirming factor of choosing a valid case in the brand, but also made the CSR related social media posts relevant documents for the analysis. Included from these posts on the platform Facebook, are the first official publication about the new long-term CSR strategy called "Journey to Tomorrow", from the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2021; a publication from the same day, which refers readers directly to IHG's corporate website and the CSR related publications made on there; The direct link to the 2020 responsible business report, put out on Facebook on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2021; and lastly a later post from March 9<sup>th</sup> 2021, where Journey to Tomorrow was put into relation with the COVID-19 pandemic for the first time on a social media outlet. A hashtag has also been created, to make it possible to identify with the social media publications. Looking into #IHGJourneytoTomorrow further led to a resource search on the platforms Instagram and Twitter, which – as a possible communication channel for organizations in crisis – has already been named in the theoretical framework, but turned out to be less fruitful, what will be described in more detail in a later chapter.

Taking the stakeholder's point of view, the links incorporated in the Facebook posts were followed to IHG's corporate website, which opens up directly with information and a branded presentation to Journey to Tomorrow and other shortcuts to relevant publications on the website. While these lead to an open letter from CEO Keith Barr, the official press release, a consumer survey providing data for the creation of the new strategy, and the dedicated web page for Journey to Tomorrow, the "Responsible Business Report" from the first year of the COVID-19 crisis, which led to the new implementations in IHG's corporate social responsibility, is not instantly linked to the welcome site of ihgplc.com. To retrieve these reports, going back until 2015, the consumer has to go through the "Responsible Business" tab on top of the site and choose the sub-category "Reporting", which is easy to find but separates the report from the campaign it has implemented, visually and associatively. To get a better grasp of what communication has been issued in the new CSR concept regarding the unanticipated crisis, an earlier CSR report has been taken into account to have a source of comparison. While skim reading through the reports available on the

corporate website, it was most sensible to choose the report from 2018 for a comparing analysis, as this has been the last report mentioning “long-term” responsible business targets, lined out up until the year 2020, which marked the beginning of the current crisis the organization is suffering.

So, after a thorough search for possible sources of documents or content to be analysed, always with the premise of what the intended purpose the documents should fulfil, it was decided to conduct the method on the documents provided by the brand under the headline “Introducing Journey to Tomorrow: our 10-year responsible business plan” on the home page of its corporate website [ihgplc.com](http://ihgplc.com). These include the open letter from CEO Keith Barr on the release, the official press release, and the report on the consumer survey “a passion to travel better” which provided numbers and figures on stakeholder perception, values, and expectations for creating the new CSR programme. In addition to the communication issued over the medium “website”, the previously introduced social media posts on the platform Facebook will be analysed as well as a short notion about the Hashtag #IHGJourneytoTomorrow and how it has been parallelly used on other social media platforms aside of Facebook. Finally, the origin of the CSR communication, the responsible business report in which it was introduced, will be examined on how and what is being communicated to stakeholders within it, with a special focus on the COVID-19 crisis, long-lasting communication efforts, and how stakeholders and their values and expectations are identified in the report. Like it has already been explained, the findings about what effects the crisis had on the composition of Journey to Tomorrow will be contrasted against the goals and comparable efforts from the 2018 responsible business report.

Another question retrieved from Bowen (2009) that was included in this document selection was why the documents are relevant for the study, which has already been discussed in the remarks above. Further it needs to be scrutinized if the documents eventually chosen, are balanced enough in their origin, coverage, and range to get sufficient data out of them, which might seem questionable on the first look, as they are basically only retrieved from two or three different communication channels, but this is owed to the very object of this analysis and what is aimed to be found out about it. Bowen further suggests to consider the target audience of the documents (2009), which in this case makes up a complete part of the analysis, as the “who” is being addressed by the communication is a variable in the research question. Other questions like who the author of the documents is and what context they

were produced in goes under the same situational principle, as the answers are determined by the purpose of the study and the research question.

To finally get a detailed picture of the units of analysis' source, namely IHG's corporate social responsibility, the next chapter will illustrate the main statutes of the strategy, its take on crisis and risk, leading up to a complete profile of the Journey to Tomorrow campaign.

#### **4. IHG's corporate social responsibility**

For the Intercontinental Hotels Group all corporate social responsibility efforts are combined under the statute of being a "responsible business". On its corporate website [ihgplc.com](http://ihgplc.com), consumers can find everything CSR related under a "responsible business" tab, which opens with a description of the brand's approach on CSR stating: "the definition of what it means to be a responsible business continues to evolve. How companies operate and behave is receiving more focus from wider society than ever before. This in turn is having a greater influence on the perceptions and decisions of a broader set of stakeholders, including investors, consumers and colleagues" ([ihgplc.com](http://ihgplc.com), 2021). While this short introduction aligns well with the previously introduced theory related to the topics of corporate social responsibility and organizational communication, to really understand IHG's corporate social responsibility strategy, its efforts and initiatives, and how the brand works, it is necessary to gain a profound knowledge about the different parts and motivations within the strategy. To do so, a description of the CSR strategy's main statutes, its notions on crisis and risk management, and a short excursion to the UN sustainable development goals will be provided in the following chapters. All in alignment with the most recent CSR report, which elaborates the brand's goals, visions, and missions for a ten-year period ahead and is introduced as the "Journey to Tomorrow" CSR campaign. On a side note, it has to be mentioned that all remarks in the following four sub-chapters are plain descriptions and quotes from the Corporate Social Responsibility report of the brand in question, which are reproduced solely for the purpose of description and do not underly any valuation or analytical judgment of how true or applied in reality they are, or in any way partial or impartial towards the company. This was thought to be a necessary statement, as effects like greenwashing and CSR for marketing purposes only are a bias building topic in the study of corporate social responsibility, as the literature review has already shown.

#### *4.1 Main statutes, vision, mission and goals*

Under the brand identity slogan “True Hospitality for Good” and with almost 6000 Hotels running under the IHG brand by the end of 2020, the Intercontinental Hotels Group introduces its 2020 responsible business report, which can be consulted in the annex of this study, by saying “by caring for our guests and colleagues, recognising and respecting one another, protecting the environment and giving back to our communities, we deliver our purpose” (ihgplc.com, 2020). This statement covers in some extent all of IHG’s CSR relevant topics: stakeholders and the relationship to them, communities, and environmental sustainability efforts. To elaborate on these topics, IHG builds its CSR strategy on “four strategic priorities for the company” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 10), which have already been discussed shortly in the chapter about the case. These priorities, which can be related to the company’s vision, mission and goals, include “building loved and trusted brands”, “create digital advantage”, “being customer centric in all we do”, and since 2020 the “refreshed strategy” also involves “care for our people, communities and planet” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 10). The strategy behind these principles “is continually reviewed and refreshed, building on reflections from the COVID-19 pandemic” and summed up in a mission statement, which explains that IHG aims to use their “scale and expertise to create the exceptional guest experiences and owner returns needed to grow [our] brands in the industry’s most valuable markets and segments. Delivered through a culture that attracts the best people and has a positive impact on the world around [us]” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 10). Looking back on the previously reviewed literature, this is the point where the company tries to communicate that they aim to align their economical growth and advantages with the socially responsible measures needed to increase them.

The statute used by IHG to implement, conduct and hold up its values, visions, missions, and goals in all areas of business and its culture, is the IHG Code of Conduct or short “Code”. According to the responsible business report the Code helps the company and its brand to visualize “responsible attitudes and ethics”, to “act responsibly” and “sets out the value we place on being trusted by our colleagues and guests, those who do business with us, and the communities we work in” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 18). While being directed to all different sets of stakeholders, as the quotes show, wider extended goals and company principles, such as

“human rights, diversity and inclusion, accurate reporting, information security, anti-bribery and the environment” are also included in IHG’s Code of Conduct (ihgplc.com, 2020: 18).

In the CSR report from 2018, which will also go into the analysis of this study for comparison reasons, IHG formulated two-year targets, which were set to be attained or at least pursued for the fiscal years of 2018 until 2020. These included more comprehensive versions of the generally articulated mission components mentioned before, like environmental sustainability, community impact, people, and responsible procurement. Evaluating the encompassment of the sub-targets in these categories, IHG rationally states that “we were on track to meet all our targets heading into 2020. However, the impact of Covid-19 in what was the most difficult year our industry has ever faced, hindered our progress with some of these, along with the wider developments we would have made against the responsible business agenda this year” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 18). This point in the latest CSR report of the organization demonstrates the direct transition to the need of implementing new targets, which respect the crisis situation the brand finds itself and its industry in, the new global circumstances the COVID-19 crisis created for businesses, as well as creating a greater focus on crisis prevention, intervention, and reaction.

In response to this emergent necessity, the new targets were developed around the topic of “our people and communities”, “planet”, and the implementation of a much longer forecasting “responsible business plan”, which proposes the “Journey to Tomorrow” strategy to be followed up until 2030, plus to meet full alignment with the UN sustainable development goals. The sub-goals in every chapter go into more detail about individual achievements that are proposed to be met, as well as conduct and relationship guidelines for all involved entities. Next to the particular UN sustainable development goals that are targeted with every sub-goal, a recurring thread throughout all newly implemented aims is the reference to COVID-19, what the organization has learnt from the crisis so far, and how its mission can approach this and future crisis situations. Starting out with the ‘people and communities’ section, the organization clearly calls its values by their names for the first time throughout the report. These are concluded under the statements “do the right thing”, “show we care”, “aim higher”, “celebrate difference”, and “work better together”. The values are applied to different matters such as safety and security at once, where the COVID-19 response is expressed in the “enhanced cleaning standards” realized through the initiatives “IHG clean promise” and “IHG way of clean”, as well as complying with

distancing and safety rules (ihgplc.com, 2020: 24). Further IHG is aiming to engage its people and communities by “creating a great place of work”, “supporting employees” with a special focus on the new working conditions inflicted by the pandemic, “employee engagement”, launching an “employee share plan” so that stakeholders can easily trespass to become shareholders, and investing increasingly into learning and development. While these goals are mainly directed to stakeholders at a corporate level, an extra section follows, addressing the ones working and cooperating at the hotels that are mostly franchised properties. This section of the CSR plan aims at “supporting our hotel colleagues” by creating diverse ways of interpersonal connecting, career opportunities and awareness of them and learning and training modules to stay up to date and feel close to one another during the remote times of uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic (ihgplc.com, 2020: 27). Going on “human rights” are discussed as one of the more overarching goals in the strategy, and mainly identified with risk, how to evaluate it, and how to train stakeholders properly to approach and handle it. The list proceeds with creating “diversity and inclusion”, and subscribes to making it a cornerstone of the organization’s culture, allowing an open dialogue, learning and gathering a higher level of diversity in all brand processes.

Showing awareness of who was hit hardest by the COVID-19 crisis within the hospitality sector, the CSR plan’s chapter on “supporting our communities” has been subtitled with “responding to the crisis” and later on includes notions on organizational change and how to achieve it and disaster relief initiatives. The content and efforts lied out in this section of IHG’s new strategy will be attended to in a bigger extent in the analysis chapters. After the community goals, the report goes over to address environmental issues and topics and how IHG is willing to take them in hand. This section opens with a statement of the Vice President of IHG’s Global Corporate Responsibility department, Catherine Dolton, who remarks that “COVID-19 has emphasised more than ever the importance of collective action on sustainability, with businesses and governments coming together to tackle the climate emergency” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 37). The page further introduces the initiative “IHG Green Engage”, ideas and facts on how IHG treats topics like carbon, energy, water, and waste, and finally how sustainable sourcing can make a difference throughout all process steps and parties involved in them.

Wrapping up the 2020 responsible business report, the Intercontinental Hotels Group introduces the brand mark of its 10-year responsible business plan “Journey to Tomorrow”,

which will be given detailed information on in a later part of this section. Concluding IHG's company and brand values, vision, mission, and goals, which are the pillars a corporate social responsibility strategy should be built on, the latest report on them lets the consumer assume that IHG is well aware of the crisis that came over its organization, and its demands of actions towards it, and a balanced future with stable business and met stakeholder expectations. Covering the main corner stones of entities involved in all of the organizations processes, such as internal and external stakeholders, communities, environmental issues and what can be done for them, often in form of dedicated initiatives, proposes that IHG has an elaborated and theoretically aiming for completeness CSR strategy on its hands. To understand if this really is so in the relevant CSR statutes for this study, a closer look will be taken into IHG's stakeholder engagement strategies, crisis communication and risk management procedures, and what the UN sustainable development goals can cater to these efforts motivation wise, before presenting the brand campaign "Journey to Tomorrow".

#### *4.2 Stakeholder engagement*

Opening the 2020 responsible business report, the Intercontinental Hotels Group's Chair, Patrick Cescau speaks for his organization by saying

"Today's stakeholders are increasingly looking at companies through an environmental, social and government (ESG) lens. At IHG, we know our colleagues, owners, guests, suppliers, partners and investors are making decisions based on how we act as a company, including how we operate our hotels, the diverse and inclusive culture we create for our workforce, how we care for our communities and how we manage our environmental impact. Supported by the Board, we take great care to ensure those voices are listened to and reflected in our policies, plans and overall governance approach" (ihgplc.com, 2020: 4).

In this statement, one of IHG's leaders names all different groups that are considered stakeholders by the organization, what they are concerned with, and how the company tries to act on these concerns. By saying that stakeholders are being listened to, and later on even bringing stakeholder expectations and the company's purpose together in a sentence, the Chair implies that there is communication happening with the stakeholders, but not necessarily in a dialogical way, as it seems. A previous statement from the 2018 CSR report describes similarly how the organization tries to reflect its stakeholders' interests in their actions and that they "increasingly follow" the company's decisions regarding CSR effort

(ihgplc.com, 2020: 5). What IHG does point out defining their stakeholders is that, although the people who work at its mainly franchised hotel, are not directly employed by the Intercontinental Hotels Group but by a partnering owner they still “are committed to delivering a consistent brand experience” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 7) for everyone involved, which point to the organization’s awareness of its greater stakeholder pool and expectations to consider in its decisions. As shown before, IHG especially stressed the growing focus on stakeholder and community issues in the new CSR report and directly starts the report by an extensive break down of who they consider to be stakeholders to its organization, how it’s being tried to engage with them and an extra section to illustrate how specifically the 2020 engagement efforts looked like. The stakeholders counted into the engagement report include, in the order published, shareholders and investors, hotel owners, colleagues, guests and corporate clients, suppliers, industry associations, academic institutions, and finally NGOs, governments and community groups. For all these groups but especially the colleagues or employees, the 2020 responsible business report describes key projects taken by the organization in reaction to the unexpected challenges the COVID-19 crisis put distinctively on this stakeholder pool. These, to weave in an example of stakeholder engagement initiatives, include the creating of a “Colleague Emergency Support Fund”, which aims to provide financial aid to employees who needed to go on furlough or at least reduce their working hours due to hotel closures and travel bans. In relation to the fund there has also an IHG Family network been implemented, as well as the IHG Employee Assistance Programme and an employee resources pool, providing advice and exchange tools for employees working remotely, suddenly with their children around, wellbeing, learning materials and even offering free and confidential counselling.

While all these engagement strategies and expectations to full awareness of what stakeholders need, how they should be engaged and addressed on these topics and how they are supposed to ideally feel and cope as a part of the organization, there is not much said about how stakeholders get to know about these efforts, other than through reading the reports and actively engaging on all the internal platforms created and updated by the organization.

### *4.3 Crisis and risk management*

Risk being a general topic to always be aware of and also open to take risks for business ventures and development, it makes up a good part in all efforts discussed in IHG's responsible business report and strategy. Managing risk within the organization includes being in the picture of potential crises that could be inflicted on the organization, how to deal with a crisis occurrence, and also how to engage stakeholders on these topics. As it has already been made clear, is the approach and handling of the most current crisis the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic brought to the company and its respective sector the central thread spinning through the most current CSR report and the future efforts and plans regarding it. Patrick Cesau addresses the effects of the Coronavirus on his organization as "the arrival of the pandemic of course meant that a busy year turned into the most difficult period IHG and the hospitality industry has ever faced" (ihgplc.com, 2020: 4) and that IHG's main focus for the ongoing crisis and the brand's future lies on ensuring "the impact of the crisis is managed responsibly and that we emerge an even stronger business" (ihgplc.com, 2020: 4).

While indicating that management, evaluation, and control of risk and possible risk sources is an executive level responsibility at IHG, during the COVID-19 crisis a heightened awareness of including all parts and processes of the company into risk assessment and crisis management has emerged. The current crisis also led IHG to reassess the potential risks and probable future crises, what the sources could be for these and how long-term effects and prevention should be considered. In referral to this, the risk management chapter of the 2020 responsible business report is introduced by the statement that "throughout the management of the COVID-19 crisis, the Board has also considered the long-term impact of the pandemic and other external and internal factors on our risk profile" and that "during 2020, alongside the close focus on responding to COVID-19, Board and Committee discussions have allowed for consideration of other emerging and evolving risks" (ihgplc.com, 2020: 13). In contrast to the increased urge to gain knowledge about negative effects the current crisis had on the organization, how to deal with it and what such consequences other risk factors could bring upon the company, IHG also talks about a healthy appetite for positive side effects the taking of calculable risks can achieve. Here, the in-moment example of dispersing and decentralizing control processes during the most tumultuous times of the COVID-19 crisis, and making communication paths shorter and quicker, is underlined in the report. Next to

the COVID-19 related risk and crisis management goals, IHG concentrates highly on “understanding and managing the impact of potential climate-related risks and opportunities on IHG’s business and strategy” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 14). This is aimed to be realized in accordance to the recommendations of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures or short, TCFD and includes increasing knowledge about the long-term effects of climate risks on the overall risk pallet of the organization and what this heightened understanding can do for the prevention and handling of future crises as well. In terms of crisis communication to other sets of stakeholders than just the ones on the executive end, in the chapter “supporting our communities” of the 2020 responsible business report, IHG tries to illustrate its efforts and implemented guidelines of crisis response. This does not only include the most recent attempts in the wake of the pandemic, but also ongoing crisis work like establishing food banks for those in need within the communities where IHG and its hotels are present, working closely together with NGOs, and addressing matters of equality, education, health and wellbeing etc in communities where these topics are by themselves affected by crises. Especially in “people and community” related issues, IHG does not only address how it is responding to crisis as an organization but also advocates for change, organizational and other, being an essential part on the way to prevent crises in the long run and learn from the ones already being tackled.

#### *4.4 UN sustainable development goals*

In the declaration of its 2015 Heads of States and Government and High Representatives meeting, the UN states in point two that

“on behalf of the peoples we serve, we have adopted a historic decision on a comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred set of universal and transformative Goals and targets. [...] We recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. We are committed to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – in a balanced and integrated manner” (UN, 2015).

The organization thereby outlines its commitment until 2030 to propose 17 formulated goals to “all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership” (UN, 2015) to achieve them. IHG acts as one of these stakeholders in many different countries and subscribed itself to reach as many of the 17 goals as possible fully, or at least in parts, if not

otherwise possible. These 17 main statutes are written down as No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, Industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, Climate action, Life below water, Life on land, Peace, justice and strong institutions, and Partnership for the Goals. The United Nations remind throughout the declaration that creating sustainable development asks for sustainable management and forward thinking, long-lasting preparedness, determination and solutions. The greater procedure behind the Sustainable Development Goals and its 169 sub-targets are the very reason why they are usually included in the CSR programmes of each stakeholder organization subscribing to them. They are a strategy plan, built on detailed visions, missions and goals related to the world's people, equality, wellbeing, economy, environment and many others. Just as the strategy plans of a corporation aiming to realize and act on its social responsibilities and communicating them to stakeholders of its own.

Including IHG's efforts regarding the UN Sustainable Development goals in this study is important because these statutes are a core topic in contemporary CSR communication and stakeholder engagement discussions and research, and also because the 2021 Sustainable Development Goals Report points out one of the main theories of the present research on a higher level. While one question in this study is what long-lasting crisis communication can do for an organization and the prevention of future crises based on what IHG could learn from the COVID-19 crisis, the UN report suggests in referral to the same crisis situation that "had the paradigm shift envisioned by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development been fully embraced over the past six years, the world would have been better prepared to face this crisis" (UN, 2021: 2). While the 2021 report pillories the missing capability of nations and stakeholders to see the long-term advantages of rapidly investing in and realizing the UN SDG before the outbreak of the pandemic and the related crises it brought on the world, it also states learning and newly advanced opportunities nations and organizations can take away from the current crisis. Regarding this, the foreword of the 2021 Sustainable Development Goals Report ends with the outlook that "the challenges are immense, but there are also reasons for hope. The COVID-19 crisis demonstrated inspiring community resilience, highlighted the Herculean work by essential workers in myriad fields and facilitated the rapid expansion of social protection, the acceleration of digital transformation

[...]. We must use the crisis to transform our world, deliver on the 2030 Agenda and keep our promise to current and future generations” (UN, 2021: 2). By taking the pursuit of the UN SDGs into its CSR strategy and especially the new 10-year plan, IHG subscribes not only to the goals and targets themselves but also to the UN’s efforts to promote sustainable thinking and management of the issues addressed in the Goals and the long-lasting learning from crises. Relating to many of the 17 SDGs, IHG’s CEO Keith Barr describes his organization’s immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis as that

“we’ve proudly welcomed frontline workers into hundreds of our hotels around the world and provided shelter for the homeless, while also offering meals and care packages to those in need in our communities. [...] we also supported relief efforts and donated to food bank networks that have provided meals to almost 27 million people facing hunger” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 5).

The head of IHG goes on to illustrate the crisis response regarding its own stakeholders’ well-being, workforce security, reacting to the vastly changed trading environment, and addressing social inequity (ihgplc.com, 2020: 5). Wrapping up his statement in the 2020 responsible business report, Keith Barr discloses that “we are also excited to have launched Journey to Tomorrow, a series of clear commitments for the next 10 years in areas aligned to both our purpose and the UN Sustainable Development Goals” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 5), which further spins a bow between the present study’s topic of interest and the role of the UN SDGs. The importance of the UN Goals for IHG’s long-term CSR efforts gets further elaborated in the 2020 report’s responsible business approach section, where it is stated that “IHG is determined to play its part in supporting them over the next decade”, and that because

“the events of 2020 have underlined the significance of the UN SDGs [...] it’s now more important than ever that organisations play a coordinated role in driving a recovery that not only recognises the environmental challenges the world faced before the pandemic, but also the increased societal imbalances that will exist after it” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 17)

It is added that all upcoming CSR plans are aimed to be further aligned with even more of the SDGs and that previous efforts work towards the statutes of clean water and sanitation, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, climate action, and partnerships for the Goals, which gets clear by the explanations in the previous three chapters. How and with which of the 17 goals the new or revisited CSR targets for the next 10 years are aligned with, is indicated in every individual chapter of IHG’s 2020 responsible business report.

#### *4.5 Introducing “Journey to Tomorrow”*

As mentioned in the previous chapter does IHG’s CEO Keith Barr introduce the organization’s new corporate social responsibility strategy, “Journey to Tomorrow” in his statement at the beginning of the 2020 responsible business report as an exciting new set of commitments. The executive displays his awareness about the fact that “people want to see clear and measurable targets; they want organisations to initiate change rather than wait for it; and they want companies to understand and adapt to what’s happening around them” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 5). Barr then explains the brand’s fresh endeavours by saying

“our Journey to Tomorrow plan will help us make changes for the better – not only for our company and stakeholders, but also our industry as we collaborate and share best practice, and for communities as we use our scale and resources to make a positive difference to those around us” (ihgplc.com, 2020: 5).

One continuous thread that leads the idea of Journey to Tomorrow up until its implementation in the end of the responsible business report is the reoccurring explanation of ideas and expectations for the future of the individual CSR targets. Defining the plan, IHG declares aiming toward achieving the UN SDGs by 2030 by constantly monitoring, evaluating and improving all beforementioned implementations. One major focus in these pursuits is the future of the organization, their business principle, and the engagement and care taking of all entities involved, namely the stakeholders. These key stakeholders are defined as “colleagues, owners, suppliers, guests and charity partners” with whom should be worked closely together as “fulfilling the aims of our plan will require investment not only in the right infrastructure, products and partnerships – but also in relationships”, because, IHG states “success will be a team effort, sharing best practice as an industry” ((ihgplc.com, 2020: 43).

The IHG Journey to Tomorrow CSR campaign was released to the public on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 on different channels through the company and has been built on not only the UN Sustainable Development Goals, but also on the findings of a worldwide study of circa 9000 adult people inquiring their perceptions and opinions on mindfulness, responsibility and the future in the travel industry. The core value that led IHG to work over and revitalize its CSR strategy was that “in the space of a year, COVID-19 has increased awareness of responsible travel more broadly, with 60% of people saying the pandemic has made them

more socially and environmentally conscious about their impact on the world when travelling” (ihgplc.com 2020). While a more detailed roll-out timeline is not further defined in any of the campaign related documents and publications, it is implied that the future progress of the new CSR strategy will be built on the pillars of the 2018-2020 targets which will be taken into comparison in the analysis part of this study.

Journey to Tomorrow is the allegory for IHG’s revisited corporate social responsibility values, visions and missions, motivated by the changes, challenges and new insights the COVID-19 crisis has brought onto the brand and its respective industry. While acting as a stakeholder itself by subscribing to the pursuit of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, IHG puts a greater focus on its communities, people and the planet with the aim to change their circumstances for the better and complying with the SDGs until 2030. As the UN suggests in their own development outlines, a heightened awareness about the importance of sustainable business management and significance of long-lasting crisis learning is essential for all stakeholders and nations subscribing to its 2030 Goals. Aligning with this, IHG declares its own stakeholders as the definite core of all future CSR endeavours as a part of developing and growing its business and economy sustainably. How these endeavours were evolved towards IHG’s stakeholders, how they are being communicated during the ongoing crisis situation and what this says in relation to the previously introduced theory in research and literature, will be analysed and discussed in the upcoming chapters.

## **5. Analysis**

The following sub-chapters will illustrate how the method of qualitative document analysis (QDA) was applied to work on and analyse the in point 3.3 introduced documents, which pose the unit of analysis of the case study research in this work. While the general method of qualitative document analysis in case study research has already been defined and justified for this research context, the first paragraph in this chapter will go into detail on how the documents in question were skimmed, read, dissected and the information in them organized. Various documents with the same source or background were taken together in main categories indicating their origin in relation to its significance for the analysis. The analysis itself is written down with the focus of answering or finding relevant notions for the research question “How did IHG engage stakeholders in its COVID-19 related crisis communication

and what can be learnt from this?”. After the findings of the social media content sources, documents and publications from IHG’s corporate website [ihgplc.com](http://ihgplc.com) will be analysed, which is the first and foremost channel over which the brand communicates to its stakeholders within the frame of its brand identity. The final and largest part of the methodological application in this study will be a comparative document analysis of IHG’s current, crisis marked responsible business report from 2020 and a previous decisive version of the CSR report, from 2018.

### *5.1 Methodology in practice: how documents were analysed*

Sharan Merriam explains in her qualitative research guidelines, that after the questions posed in point 3.3 are answered and relevant documents collected, “the researcher must adopt some system for coding and cataloguing them”, and that “by establishing basic descriptive categories early on for coding, the researcher will have easy access to information in the analysis and interpretation stage” (Merriam, 2016: 179). To do so, premeditating the actual analysis the main questions are how, where and following what pattern should the information from the documents be sorted and organized. This usually already happens in the very beginning of an inductive process, as while skimming the documents to find out if they are suitable for the study, the researcher inevitably makes, at least, mental notes about relevant topics and information included in the document, to even be able to judge the suitability. This is a first form of what qualitative researchers call open coding, which should in the back-and-forth process of the document analysis go over into axial or analytical coding, which puts together these various notes made during the first readings, in more general categories that should be in any way connected with the purpose of the research (ct. Merriam, 2016). The codes in this case were retrieved directly from the variables posed by the research question, and aim to extricate notions and meanings from the documents related to “brand identity/CSR from the company’s view”, “organizational change/consequences due to crisis”, “long-lasting or future oriented efforts”, “stakeholder related communication”, and “stakeholder involvement/dialogue”. This has not been a linear, step by step process but an ongoing one, where code names or topic were renamed, cut off or added many times during the reading and organizing process, based on newly won information from different documents and thoughts that built up in the process. The idea is not, as it is done in quantitative document analysis, to count and weigh which notions were transmitted by IHG

more often than others, and then pull a conclusion about importance from it, but rather concentrate on the chosen sources to communicate, the value IHG seemingly connects with the different notions, and the bigger meaning behind the connection of ‘what is said and what is done’. Schreier, according to Merriam, calls this the “latent and more context depending meaning” (Schreier, 2014 in Merriam, 2016: 179). To shortly describe the codes, it is important to note that the brand identity/CSR one is the most dominant one as it describes the actual unit of analysis, but even though all documents are CSR related, they of course still contain statements and ideas that are not necessarily only related to the brand’s identification with its CSR strategy. Under “organizational change/ consequences due to crisis” content was organized that implicates CSR efforts and company values have been adjusted or implemented newly as a reaction to the Covid-19 crisis, with sustaining and aimed to be long lasting implementations gathered under the “long-lasting/future oriented” code. This code aims to show more meta-ambitions and if IHG’s adjustments are only momentarily or thought to sustain on a longer term. The codes “stakeholder related communication” and “stakeholder involvement/dialogue” seem to be targeting the same thing, but what is distinguishing them is the previously introduced theory that it does make a difference in CSR communication if a brand simply communicates to its stakeholders, or actively engages them and goes into a dialogue with them to retrieve valuable feedback on CSR actions and efforts. All data sorted into the involvement/dialogue category is in the same time also stakeholder related communication, but not necessarily the other way round.

These codes were catalogued in a table, with columns identifying the data sets taken out of the documents and one indicating the source of the citation. The sources are identified by short labels, which is mainly a support measure for the researcher to know where to look the data up in the document, when necessary, but will also be used while writing down the analysis for associative reasons. For example, data from social media is shortened to F1 to F4, which stands for “Facebook post 1” and so on, or a more extensive source indicator RBR18/5C, which stands for “Responsible Business Report 2018, page 5, Chair statement”. To associate sentences containing data sets from the document with the applying codes from the table while skimming, reading and understanding the content, each of the codes was assigned a colour in the table, which was also used to highlight the related text in the documents. This method is called colour-coding and is basically just there to facilitate the identification of sources and association with meanings. To rapidly put the sources and codes

together in a visually comprehensible way, each code column was assigned with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ option to apply on the connected citation from the documents. As the analysis of data taken from the code categories should rely on the fact that “a particular unit of data should fit into only one category”, and that those categories are “mutually exclusive” (Merriam, 2016: 212), the individual quotes taken from the documents and sorted into the colour coding scheme, will be taken apart while writing down the analysis, into notions that only congregate with one code at a time.

There were 15 sets of data retrieved from social media sources, 90 from documents and content retrieved from ihgplc.com, 118 data sets were extricated from IHG’s 2018 Responsible Business Report, and to compare with that, another 117 from the 2020 Report. While this system does make it possible to detect frequencies and interconnections in the codes and to the sources, it is mainly an easy but complete way to collect and manage the study’s data and to then retrieve notions on similar topics from different sources in a fast and organized way to better see what connects the ideas and sources they come from. Sharan Merriam’s advice on this is to “create an inventory of your entire data set”, including notes and ideas coming up during the collection and investigation process, how or from where documents were acquired as this can often hold additional meaning in qualitative research, and several copies of the data set to ensure nothing gets lost while working on the data (Merriam, 2016: 200f). The biggest part of the actual analysis, usually comes at the end of organizing all collected data and “is the process of making meaning”, as well as it is “inductive and comparative”, according to Merriam (2016: 201f). The following chapters, where this analysis is written down to make meaning and sense of it, are split into the sources of data, so that it’s possible to not only divide the analysis by the categories, but to completely include all “field notes”, thoughts, ideas, and the meaning of the source itself for the research next to the purpose of organizing the data in a sensical way.

## *5.2 Social media*

Following IHG’s advice on its website, to check up on the new corporate social responsibility strategy and the according progress of it by following the hashtag #IHGJourneytoTomorrow on social (PR32), the search for content to analyse led to the main social media platforms using hashtags to identify related topic in posts. These included Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. When looking up the hashtag on Twitter, there are no

direct search results, which was the reason to leave this platform out of the document selection process. Until the 29<sup>th</sup> of October, #IHGJourneytoTomorrow was associated with 55 posts on the platform Instagram, mostly in shared videos and pictures from IHG branded hotels and external partners of the company. These contents were shared mostly on the release day of the new campaign, 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2021. Between April and October of the same year, there were no posts mentioning Covid-19 in relation to the new CSR strategy. When going over to Facebook, there were 47 postings found using the hashtag, 30 of which are directly related to the CSR campaign and stakeholders, but only few of the posts were published by an official IHG site. The publications that went into the analysis were all taken from the officially verified IHG Corporate Facebook profile, while the IHG Hotels & Resorts page does not use or interact with #IHGJourneytoTomorrow or promote the new CSR strategy, at all. In terms of reaching as big of an audience as possible, this decision makes sense only in so far, that the corporate profile is subscribed by over 260.000 followers, while the more customer experience oriented IHG Hotels & Resorts page is only followed by about 37.500 people. Most of the posts shared on Instagram are re-postings from the respective Facebook profiles of the publishing entity.

The social media publications being used for the analysis ended up to be the announcement of the new CSR strategy's launch, from the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 (F1), interacted with 199 times until the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2021; the publication of CEO Keith Barr's statements from the same day (F2), interacted with by 1254 people; a later post from the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2021, connecting the newly implemented campaign with the Covid-19 crisis (F3), which was only interacted with 47 times; and the announcement of the 2020 Responsible Business Report (F4), from the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, interacted with 77 times. All the figures identified in these paragraphs are openly accessible on the indicated social media pages. What was noted in the coding and categorizing process of the social media content, is that there is almost no engagement of stakeholders or consumers on how to interact with the few communication sources published, like for example telling readers that they can also use the hashtag, go to the website or use any other form of engaging language in the posts. Only in F1, the last line says "Join us on the Journey. #IHGJourneytoTomorrow. Find out more <http://ihg.co/6187H9VyV>", with the link leading to the 'Responsible Business' tab on the IHG corporate website. As previously explained, is the hashtag used in all of the analysed postings, but coding this rather puts #IHGJourneytoTomorrow into the stakeholder related

communication that implies that the consumer knows what to do with the #, but not in the stakeholder involvement category, as this would ask for an active engagement directed at the reader to interact with the social media publications. In F2, when sharing his thoughts on the new CSR strategy, CEO Keith Barr hints at this kind of involvement by sharing why the newly implemented strategies are so important for IHG “and all those we interact with” (F2). Otherwise, the posts do not address or appeal to the reader (stakeholder) directly, but only depict the brand’s strong identification with the new CSR plan and the future of the industry. The brand identity is transported through the posts by short inclusions of the main company slogans and values, like “shape the future of responsible travel by caring for our people, communities and planet” (F1), “It’s a journey at the heart of our purpose of True Hospitality for Good” (F1), or “we do what’s right, not just what’s needed” (F3). “True Hospitality for Good”, the CSR pillars “people, communities and planet” and the caretaking of them are the main recurring themes in all analysed posts. As shown in the literature review, social media is an important tool nowadays for companies to manage their public perception and reputation, as the majority of all stakeholders, internal and especially external ones, is reachable through these channels and regularly consumes these outlets to inform their perception of a brand. What IHG transmits in the publications related to its new CSR strategy are the main motives for the implementation, which includes their brand identity and culture (True Hospitality for Good; people, communities and planet; proactively guiding actions proactively towards these), creating an environment that ensures “travel has a beautiful future for everyone” (F2), and of course to manage the impact the Covid-19 crisis had on the industry in general and the company specifically (F3). Even though some stakeholder groups are named in the posts and also interact with them on social media, there is no direct indication of what role they play in the new CSR strategy or active engagement of stakeholders with the content of the publications. The only implied but not openly communicated engagement is for social media consumers to activate the links to IHG’s corporate website, which are included in the postings, to find out more about how they are affected by the new strategy, what the brand is doing for them, and what they can do to be involved. This is all information stakeholders are looking for, especially in times of crisis, to build their perception and reaction to the brand’s handling of the crisis. This again is what can save, improve or revitalize a brand’s reputation and ongoing success when coming out of a crisis, but only if done right. Besides F2, the detectable interactions from the target

audience with the communication about the changes and new implementations, are extremely low in comparison to the over 260.000 people it could reach, even despite the fact that more people see and recognize a post than liking or sharing it. The other finding is, as described before, that there is no detectable consistency of social media communication regarding IHG's corporate social responsibility strategy and its connection to the crisis, which on one hand motivated most of the new efforts and on the other hand is the reason for more stakeholders, looking for more information and being addressed and cared for by their organization.

In reference to the research question, the analysis shows that IHG did communicate its Journey to Tomorrow CSR strategy, a summary of the new goals and missions, which includes stakeholders, and also in one post what the current crisis has to do with the new implementations. What is missing in a broader meaning is the active engagement and addressing of those who are supposed to interact with the new strategy, the communication about it and are also supposed to be the core focus of a company's social responsibility, especially when this relation is in distress due to an organizational crisis, and also if the aim is to create long-lasting and sustaining stakeholder engagement through crisis and CSR communication.

### *5.3 Corporate website: What IHG wants to be seen*

As explained before, the first way when looking up IHG's response to the Covid-19 crisis leads to its corporate website where its Responsible Business approach and all facets of it are the main topic. The Journey to Tomorrow campaign is introduced right at the start screen and further information sources found on the website indicated on top of the page. These include an open letter from CEO Keith Barr, a press release by IHG to announce Journey to Tomorrow and the related CSR innovations, and the summary of a survey from late January 2021, commissioned by IHG, on which's results the adjustments and developments in the new strategy were built on. As these are the most promoted information and communication sources about IHG's new CSR strategy and crisis response, all three of them are being analysed for this study in the context of the website they are published on. The difference to the social media sources is that these documents were one-time releases but persist in their importance for communicating the adjustments and advancements in response to the COVID-19 crisis and do not ask for maintenance and updating as does an actively interacted

with and ever-changing social media feed. Starting out with CEO Keith Barr's open letter to his organization's stakeholders, including "colleagues, guests, hotel owners, suppliers and investors" (CEO5), the analysis resulted in a perception of a good and balanced mix of meaning being transported through it for all categories. The Executive represents his own stance as a testimonial of his company, strongly identifying with IHG's brand identity and values in statements like "[...]how we define success in the context of social and environmental responsibilities, alongside growth and profitability" (CEO7), "[...] how organisations stand up for diversity, equity & inclusion and human rights, contribute towards positive social and economic change, or make better environmental choices" (CEO8), "[...] strengthen our commitment to make sure we do what's right, not just what's needed" (CEO17), or "this is what our purpose of True Hospitality for Good means to us" (CEO28). In the same time, he bases his own identification with the brand on insights he has on the stakeholder relationships and their perception within the organisation, by repeatedly connecting what he has to say about the company's values with the stakeholders' point of view, as in "I know that our colleagues, guests, hotel owners, suppliers and investors feel the same way" (CEO5), "They want to see us and other organisations drive change" (CEO6), "[...] and we can see that our guests feel the same" (CEO28). In some cases Barr does not only recall his stakeholders' sentiments and perceptions but involves them actively in his outlooks, for example by citing the most important findings of the survey mentioned before (CEO29 – CEO31), or addressing industry partners and colleagues by saying "I'm proud of how IHG and others in hospitality have contributed so meaningfully[...]" (CEO14), and also concluding in "we are empowering our colleagues, and working with our hotel owners and industry to help shape the future of responsible travel" (CEO37). While IHG's CEO talks about the happenings around the world in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and other important issues to tackle in the first half of the letter ("Now, perhaps more than ever, it's really important that we think about how our actions affect others and the world around us" (CEO1), "The response to Covid-19 from organisations around the world has shown what can be achieved" (CEO11), "[...] in such incredibly difficult times for our industry" (CEO15)), he compactly but completely gets into how IHG took up the pace with the crisis and the actions and efforts taken to align the new situation and brand values and goals with each other, in the rest of the letter. He does so, as mentioned before, by bringing in the survey results as a base to build on, and also by explaining that this "[...] will challenge us to deliver

on new ambitions” (CEO21), “[...] we continue to promote wellbeing in the workplace, champion an inclusive culture, and advance human rights” (CEO22), and by introducing Journey to Tomorrow by name and saying “As a company, we’ve given great thought to how we can retain that proactive force for good on a far wider scale in our everyday business, and strengthen our commitment [...]” (CEO16). By addressing brand values and identity, as well as stakeholders, by including them in the new ventures and showing that these are necessary due to the changes and disruption the crisis inflicted on the industry and everybody in it, CEO Keith Barr also verbalizes that his words are not supposed to be a momentary reaction to the crisis, but that the changes the crisis brought should be seen as an opportunity for “growing sustainably” (CEO32), “to see that we’re on a journey” (CEO35), to “drive social and economic change” (CEO24), and “to help shape the future of responsible travel” (CEO38). With this, IHG’s Executive connotes that the “longer-term roadmap” (CEO20) the new CSR strategy Journey to Tomorrow poses, is supposed to bring sustaining and long-lasting change for the organization, all its stakeholders and therefore the communities and the world they live in.

To reach a wider range of recipients and involving the media in publishing the new CSR strategy, IHG also composed a press release, which is openly accessible on the corporate website and has been used by online magazines and consulting websites related to the hospitality industry, like for example [hospitalitynet.org](http://hospitalitynet.org), who just took over the press release as is, [lodgingmagazine.com](http://lodgingmagazine.com), [travelweekly.com](http://travelweekly.com), or more prominently [forbes.com](http://forbes.com). While a big part of the press article references Keith Barr’s open letter, it also builds up on the brand’s identity and values (“IHG [...] publishes series of ambitious commitments to drive change for people, communities and the planet” (PR2), “when it comes to operating thoughtfully” (PR32) etc) but then goes on to really depict and further build up a dialogue with stakeholders, especially with industry partners, institutions and NGOs IHG is working with to realize its CSR goals and targets. One core ingredient of this is again the consumer survey IHG conducted in anticipation to the new CSR strategy, which will be analysed a little later in this chapter, and which is already cited in the headline of the press release by introducing that “new insights reveal that consumers overwhelmingly want to chose hotels that operate in the right way” (PR5). Looking into a brighter future with the new CSR efforts, IHG then states that “we will work side by side with those who stay, work and partner with us” (PR10) to include a more defined range of stakeholders engaged in the new strategy and explains

that “IHG’s Journey to tomorrow plan is rooted in an understanding of what is most important to our colleagues, guests, hotel owners and investors” (PR30), what is aimed to be realized “through a comprehensive assessment process involving external experts, stakeholder consultation and industry collaboration” (PR33). The press release further indicates the stakeholder involvement by explaining that the survey and other interactions show that “IHG’s commitment to collective action is shared by consumers around the world” (PR37) and breaking down some more figures from the assessment results and how they are connected with the crisis. To actually illustrate the dialogue happening with the brand’s stakeholders, industry partners also get a word in into the press release, starting with “Gloria Guevara, CEO & President, The World Travel & Tourism Council” (PR55), who says that for her and her organization “IHG is a key contributor to our Sustainability Taskforce” (PR62) and that they will be “working together towards these common goals” (PR65), which can be identified as a direct evidence of stakeholder engagement and involvement in the new CSR strategy. Another stakeholder voice comes from “Wolfgang Neumann, Chair, Sustainable Hospitality Alliance” (PR68), who does firstly identifies with IHG values (“needed to drive meaningful change from within the hospitality industry” (PR70), secondly advocates “to leave a lasting, positive impact” (PR71) which stands for the sustaining, long-term character of Journey to Tomorrow, that apparently reached the partnering stakeholders, and says about his organizations engagement with IHG that the “collaboration will continue to be key as we press ahead to 2030” (PR74). Following up on these stakeholder voices, the press release wants to highlight the conclusion that “progress is best achieved when we work together, and we will collaborate closely with those who stay, work and partner with us, and empower our people to make a difference in helping us get there” (PR77). Communication wise stakeholder engagement is targeted in the end of the press release, where the reader is told to “find out more” (PR122) and to “join us on the journey: You can visit IHG’s Journey to Tomorrow web pages to find out more about our plan, ambitions and detailed commitments, and follow our progress. On social follow the hashtag #IHGJourneytoTomorrow” (PR127) and informs that “A detailed update on this will be shared in our 2020 Responsible Business Report to be published in March 2021” (PR132). Next to this more extensive depiction for the public media of how stakeholders are, and are supposed to be involved and engaged in the new CSR strategy, mentioning of the Covid-19 crisis as one of the main driving and motivating factors for the innovations in the brand’s

social responsibility, happens mainly introducing or summing up the survey results or newly implemented or revised actions. This includes insights like “Covid-19 has increased awareness of responsible travel more broadly” (PR43), “With the world travelling more locally during the pandemic” (PR48), or “It will play a crucial role in our sector in a post-COVID world [...]” (PR64). The effect of the Covid-19 crisis of heightened awareness in organizations of crisis preparedness, prevention and long-lasting crisis management is communicated in statements referring to the new CSR strategy as a “decade of action” (PR5), “over the next decade” (PR9), “preserving our planet’s beauty and diversity long into the future” (PR13), “for a better, more sustainable future for us all by 2030” (PR36), “we can ensure that the communities and destinations that make this world so special will continue to thrive for many generations” (PR66), and showing that stakeholders apparently share this sentiment by “showing a long-term shift in their thinking” (PR54).

The survey that has been included in both previously analysed documents was commissioned by IHG to the UK based marketing research company OnePoll, who surveyed 9,000 adults, meaning ages 18 and older from the United States, United Kingdom, Greater China, Germany, the United Arab Emirates and Australia between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2021, so almost a year into the COVID-19 pandemic. Of all the documents provided on IHG’s corporate website announcing, explaining and promoting the organization’s newly implemented CSR strategy Journey to Tomorrow, the one introducing the survey, its purpose and summarizing its results, is the one most depicting IHG’s stakeholder engagement connected to its corporate social responsibility and how it uses the involvement of its most valuable assets, in this case foremost the stakeholder group of consumers/travellers, to build and create a most effective CSR strategy and a dialogue about its goals to the stakeholders. The purpose of the survey is titled as to “reveal guests’ growing passion to travel better” (QA1) and is introduced by identifying the Covid-19 pandemic as the reason for a) conducting the survey and b) travellers’ new or alternated expectations and needs while consuming the hospitality industry’s goods. This is stated as “People are more mindful than ever about travelling consciously following the Covid-19 pandemic” (QA5). Other turns the pandemic brought on this specific stakeholder group are according to the survey that “with the world travelling more locally – or not at all – right now, it seems the pandemic has made consumers more mindful about preserving and connecting with communities around them” (QA19), “More than half of the respondents across the globe say

they care more about doing their bit for local communities” (QA21), and “in fact, 46 per cent of people say they are more likely to be mindful about avoiding tourist activities that have a negative impact on the local environment and communities since the global pandemic” (QA23). Further values and expectations stakeholders told IHG to be important are “to get to know the local community” (QA27), “stay with travel companies that offer local community programmes” (QA31), and “taking [...] everyday sustainable habits with them when they travel” (QA37). These demands are also connected to Keith Barr saying that “a great guest experience at our hotels is inextricably linked to operating thoughtfully and growing sustainably” (QA55), and the growing awareness during the Covid-19 crisis that “the ambitions and commitments are firmly rooted in an understanding of what is most important to colleagues, guests and partners across the world” (QA59) which subscribes to the strong will of stakeholder engagement as a core value and pillar of the new CSR strategy. Communicating about the crisis that led to these innovations, IHG lets “Laurie Lee, Chief Executive Officer, CARE International UK” (QA67) get a word in, ensuring the recipient that “IHG Hotels & Resorts has demonstrated its commitment to responsible travel by working with CARE International UK to respond to emergencies around the world [...]” (QA68) underlining that aligning its new CSR strategy with needs and demands arising from the crisis, IHG does work in a manner rooted in its organizational culture. Further related to IHG’s crisis management routines, the CARE CEO states that “life-saving humanitarian efforts are critical to helping communities respond to, and recover from, crises wherever they happen” (QA79), followed by the organization itself saying that “IHG is here when travellers are ready” (QA83) and that “IHG recognises the power of collaboration and will join forces with all who stay, work and partner with” (QA84). According to the survey results all these consequences and outcomes of the crisis have their biggest effects on especially younger stakeholders in the age group of 18- to 24-year-olds, who make up almost 70 per cent of respondents agreeing to seeing their personal stance towards IHG’s CSR values having been increased as a result of the pandemic.

While this surfacing of a concrete target group for IHG’s stakeholder, crisis and CSR communication will play a major role in the conclusion of this analysis, summing up the analysis of documents provided on [ihgplc.com](http://ihgplc.com) regarding the response to the COVID-19 crisis, aka the implementation of the new CSR strategy Journey to Tomorrow, there are several points to be calculated in, in the attempt to answer the research question. Regarding

the question how the Intercontinental Hotels Group communicates its new CSR strategy to its stakeholders it can be said that, in the order the website documents were analysed here, there is an increasing string of communicated stakeholder involvement and, through this, their engagement with the CSR plan, from the first to the last document. While the open letter by CEO Keith Barr still mainly concentrates on transmitting the organization's values, vision, mission and goals and how the pandemic inflicted crisis changed or adjusted them and even created new ones, the press release already gives more insights about how stakeholders, their expectations and role they play for the company are factored in the implementation of journey to tomorrow, followed by the OnePoll survey that was used to actively engage stakeholders in a dialogue about these expectations and values, on which the CSR strategy was supposedly eventually based on. Even though this shows in big parts IHG's awareness of the importance of its stakeholders and what they can contribute to its CSR and what big influence they have in times of an organizational crisis, in all these publications it is rather spoken to instead of with stakeholders, besides the partnering stakeholders included in the texts. As seen in the literature review of existing theories on stakeholder engagement, this can be, and in the most researched circumstances is a big problem for organizations in crisis, as the stakeholder relationship is often one sided and creates a lack of identification of stakeholders with the company and its purpose and as a result of this, often in a lack of trust and being well perceived. In all the documents IHG distinguishes itself as an organization from its stakeholders by using exclusive language like we/us against them/they, which suggests that stakeholders are not seen as a part of the brand, but as a separate entity or even entities divided by where they come from or what they can do for the company. The attempt to get over this barrier by actively asking a big audience for its insights, feedback and ideas on how the Covid-19 crisis shifted or influenced its travel habits and where the biggest values lie for travellers in a future where the hospitality industry has to live and operate with Covid-19 existing, gives more meaning to stakeholder communication by IHG on one side, as it assumes a dialogue to happen. On the other hand, the actual two-way communication happen through the survey is rather questionable, as it seems to be a qualitative poll with closed questions, which does give insights on the exact variables asked for but does not give any space for individual and more extensive feedback, especially on topics or issues the brand did not think about creating the survey, but might be still very important for the stakeholders on the other end. This creates the meaning that IHG

is open to get into a dialogue with its stakeholders and to use their opinions, needs and expectations as a basis to develop a long-lasting CSR plan, but still fails to properly communicate this back to the stakeholders. As the CEO's letter, as well as the press release show, does the ongoing collaboration with stakeholders and basing CSR efforts and goals on research backed data from stakeholder communication pose great opportunities for IHG to further engage its stakeholders, especially as the survey revealed a clearly defined target group, who needs to be addressed and interacted with adequately. So, the essence of the website documents, and as it will be illustrated in the next chapter, also other documents, is that IHG does put its stakeholders, their needs and expectations in the centre of its CSR planning and strategizing by collecting their opinions and values. What is apparently still missing is the idea of keeping up this dialogue in the later practice of the CSR strategy, what also poses the question if IHG puts the appropriate effort into really knowing its stakeholders well enough to know how to communicate with them in the best possible way and how these needs might change or require a heightened level of attention during times of crisis and uncertainty.

#### *5.4 IHG's annual business reports over time: comparing documents*

To learn about a company's corporate social responsibility, crisis management and how stakeholders are planned to be addressed and engaged by it, the best source to consult is the document where all of these things are written down by the organization itself: the CSR report, or in IHG's case, their Responsible Business Report. As one of the variables of this study is how CSR was communicated in light of the Covid-19 crisis, it seemed necessary to include not only the most current report, which addresses the crisis and related actions, but also a pre-crisis report to see what changes were actually implemented due to the unexpected disruption. The Responsible Business Report analysed here, that had not have to deal with a concrete and extensive crisis like Covid-19, is the one from the year 2018, concluding its approach to risk management by saying that the "principal risks facing the Group, including those which would threaten its business model, future performance, solvency or liquidity and reputation" (RBR18/15), and that "The Group's asset-light business model, diverse brand portfolio and wide geographical spread however contribute to IHG's resilience to events that could affect specific segmental or geographical areas" (RBR18/15). This shows that, not only is the organization aware of the risks that can either threaten or pose growth

opportunities to it, but also that it feels relatively secure and resilient towards possible crises. This stayed kind of stable in the first year of the Covid-19 crisis but led to adjustments like “In 2020, our Board and management team, supported by the Risk and Assurance team, have reviewed our risk profile with increased frequency, and evaluated the appropriateness and resilience of our risk management” (RBR20/13) and that “Throughout the management of the Covid-19 crisis, the Board has also considered the longer-term impact of the pandemic and other external and internal factors on our risk profile” (RBR20/13), which already points at the first changes that have been necessary due to the crisis and especially the part of the CSR strategy that controls how to react to and prevent crises like that. To be able to focus more on these changes and what the meaning behind them is for answering the research question of this study, the similarities and points that have been taken over from pre-crisis to post-crisis will be first pointed out. What has in most ways stayed the same are the core values and pillars IHG’s CSR strategy is built on, which include “our culture; our hotels; and our communities” (RBR18/3) with “responsible business targets in the areas of environmental sustainability; community impact; our people; and responsible procurement” (RBR18/3), which is in 2020 described as “IHG made caring for our people, communities and planet one of four strategic priorities for the Company” (RBR20/10), realized “By caring for our guests and colleagues, recognising and respecting one another, protecting the environment and giving back to our communities” (RBR20/3). What did change is that “care for our people, communities and planet” became a whole fourth pillar in the responsible business strategy approach in 2020, compared to the only three pillars in 2018 (RBR18/3) and that “we’ve chosen to evolve our purpose from True Hospitality for everyone, to True Hospitality for good”, “because of the way we’ve rallied together in response to this pandemic, and the real passion and desire colleagues share to make a difference for our guests, one another and the world around us” (RBR18/4C). Replacing “for everyone” by “for Good” first gives the impression that the focus shifted away from the stakeholders, but by explaining the motivation behind the change and implementing “caring for our people” as an alone standing pillar of the new CSR strategy, reverses this assumption. Another similarity is that besides the survey conducted preceding the 2020 CSR plan, both reports include a materiality assessment to “identify and prioritise the key responsible business issues relating to our core business activities” (RBR20/12), which relies on the fact that “we consult our stakeholders to determine the issues most important to them and IHG”

(RBR18/7). While this statement gets repeated in RBR20/12, it is also explained that “this year, material issues have naturally shifted in response to the dramatic global impact of Covid-19” (RBR20/12), as well as that “in such a challenging year, these shifts are as expected and reflect the switch in focus to social challenges and their impact on people around the world” (RBR20/12). This directly implicates again that “people”, who are always stakeholders in some way, became an even greater focus in the new CSR strategy due to the crisis and how IHG is aware and prepared for this shift. Pre-crisis and during crisis, “safety and security” has been determined to be the value and goal that is most relevant to IHG in the same time as most important to stakeholders, according to both materiality statements. The stakeholder groups these materials are based on are in both reports identified in eight sections, including “shareholders, colleagues, owners, guests and corporate clients, academic institutions, suppliers, NGOs, government and community organisations, and industry associations” in RBR18/8SE, whereas in RBR20/15 “shareholders and investors” are in one group and then followed by “hotel owners, colleagues, guest and corporate clients, suppliers, industry associations, academic institutions” and lastly “NGOs, governments and community groups” (RBR20/16). One of the biggest differences in the stakeholder engagement segments of both reports is the language used to actually transmit the role of them in the organization to the stakeholders in question. Even though in 2018 the report does say “regular dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders important to our business ensures we can be confident that we are identifying areas where our actions can deliver the greatest impact” (RBR18/SE8), which is a desirable idea according to existing theory of stakeholder communication, the language in actually explaining how the organization engages with its stakeholders in the 2020 report is much more involving, easier to understand and more straight to the point of what is important for the company in communicating with its people. For IHG “it’s important to regularly inform [the shareholders and investors] of our responsible business practices and progress” (RBR20/15), hotel owners are described as “integral to our reputation” (RBR20/15), which should be a motive and awareness of greatest importance especially in times of crisis. Colleagues are valued for their “diverse set of opinions” (RBR20/15) and guests and corporate clients are known of for their demand of wanting “to know the role we can play in driving positive change through our business and in collaboration with others” (RBR20/15). While these all represent good insight about how well IHG knows its stakeholders and of the why to communicate with them through the CSR

strategy, there is still no mentioning of how to adequately communicate with them. What the 2018 Responsible Business Report says to this is that “we participate in a number of public-private forums and are engaged in several strategic partnerships spanning the areas of human rights, employability and disaster relief” (RBR18/9) which are all relevant topics in the relationship with partnering stakeholders and addressing others from one side, the main way to engage stakeholders are programmes and associations working together with IHG, like the organizations mentioned in the documents before: CARE International UK, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (RBR18/9), or initiatives implemented in 2020 like the new IHG Way of Clean, the Colleague Emergency Support Fund, the IHG Employee Assistance Programme, or the Global FoodBanking Network (RBR20). Only in the 2020 plan the Covid-19 crisis introduced segments that also explain how the actual communication and involvement process is led through, for example by “an increased number of video meetings and virtual town halls” and encouraged regular conversations on feedback and performance between managers and their team members” (RBR20/26) or that consumers can access “detailed cleanliness information [...] that is available for guests across IHG’s website, app and in our hotels” (RBR20/24). In regards to the most common denominator in IHG’s materiality in both years analysed, safety and security, one repeated statement is that the “well-tested crisis management system enables us to bring the necessary skills and expertise together so that we can quickly direct resources and support exactly where it is needed worldwide” (RBR18/21), even though in 2020 this circumstance has been named to have happened due to the threats the Covid-19 crisis inflicted on the organization and made this procedure specifically necessary, while the 2018 statement was held more general. This habit can be seen throughout most of the sub-targets, such as “creating a great place to work” (“A diverse and inclusive culture enriches all of this, and it plays a critical role in how we work better together, growing our business and delivering on our purpose” (RBR18/18 + RBR20/25), with the 2020 statement being added to by including that “we have also recognised that working remotely full time in response to the pandemic has been a significant change for employees” (RBR20/25). Or in another example, IHG is holding up its Code of Conduct in the “responsible attitudes and ethics” segments in both years’ reports, saying that “all colleagues working in IHG corporate offices, reservation centres and managed hotels must comply with the Code and the policies and procedures it refers to” (RBR18/16 + RBR20/18), which was added in 2020 with a “privacy and information security” section,

which ensures “the privacy and security of personal data”, which makes special sense in the light of the progressing digitalization while overcoming the Covid-19 related issues and minimizing human contact as much as possible. This is supposed to strengthen the stakeholders trust in several ways, as for example in the guests, who can now book again in a safe and contactless way, while the employees in the hotels and reservation offices can keep their jobs but still do not have to fear health issues in the workplace. IHG explains that “employees are made aware of this through regular internal communications, including posters displayed in staff areas, training, as well as ihgethics.com, our dedicated website” (RBR20/19).

The most extensive changes have probably happened in the Chair’s and CEO’s statements in the respective Responsible Business Reports. While both Patrick Cescau and Keith Barr make unambiguously clear that how they conduct business and the relationship they keep up with their stakeholders while doing so is at the absolute core of IHG’s corporate responsibilities (“which illustrates the importance we place on operating with integrity with our colleagues, third-party hotel owners, partners, investors and the local communities in which we work” (RBR18/5C), “Whether an investor, a third-party hotel owner, a guest or one of more than 400,000 colleagues, our ability to operate in a sustainable and transparent way is of increasing importance to them and to the reputation of IHG and our brands” (RBR18/CEO)), in the 2020 report Cescau still opens with “we have strived to do what’s right for our colleagues, guests, owners and communities” (RBR20/4C) and “engaging and inspiring our stakeholders to continue making a positive difference to our business” (RBR20/4C), but also saying that “the arrival of the pandemic of course meant that a busy year turned into the most difficult period IHG and the hospitality industry has ever faced” (RBR20/4C). This, as well as CEO Keith Barr’s introduction of “the magnitude of the pandemic means billions of lives have been changed, economies damaged, and societies challenged, while our hospitality industry has experienced the hardest period in its history” (RBR20/CEO), definitely make the organizational crisis due to Covid-19 the centre of attention in the 2020 Responsible Business Report, next to how to care for the stakeholders in this challenging time, while they were the single main focus in the 2018 statements.

### *5.5 Discussion of analysis results*

After assessing, dissecting and analysing IHG's openly published communication on the implementation of its new corporate social responsibility strategy Journey to Tomorrow and the contained crisis communication, many meanings, insights and revelations have been built up to be discussed in reference to the research question: "How did IHG engage stakeholders in its COVID-19 related crisis communication and what can be learnt from this?". The documents themselves pose already an answer to the part asking about how IHG engages stakeholders in the crisis communication. IHG communicates through the analysed CSR documents and the channels they are published on and made available for every consumer or stakeholder who is looking for information on the CSR strategy, how the organization is responding to the current Covid-19 crisis, and what the connection of the two means for the future of the hospitality company. While the communication through the extensively worked out and stakeholder friendly formulated 2020 CSR report is stable and balanced in how much each stakeholder group is being addressed in it, for example the social media outlets of IHG are less frequented with content about stakeholder relevant information on the new strategy and how it helps to manage the current crisis and preventing such big impacts coming from future disruptions. What the Intercontinental Hotels Group shows in this imbalance is that they are indeed aware of the crucial importance and role its stakeholders play in keeping up its business, pursuing its social responsibilities and that this has to be communicated to them in a manner that unites the organization's identity with the stakeholders' one. But what seems to be missing is that IHG translates this awareness about what its stakeholders need and should identify with, to an actual knowledge and awareness of who it is communicating to and over what channels these people consume information most probably. The significance of this careful assessment of stakeholder profiles and communication channels, has been widely illustrated in several chapters of the theoretical framework. As the analysed survey showed is the major age group of IHG's audience between 18 and 24 years old, at least that is who showed the largest levels of change in attitude and expectations in questions of future travel and the impact of the crisis their organization and their lives have been hit by. The most discussed stakeholders in the documents, who are also often called by name, are industry partners, collaborating NGOs or government entities and the owners of IHG branded hotels. These groups might be interested in and aware of the possibility to gather their information about their organization over official corporate channels, such as the

website or the annually released reports on business, responsibility and finances. But who most probably does not go this way directly are lower level employees, who have not fully identified with the brand yet, maybe because of missing information or awareness of the whole scale of values transported through all company assets, and the day to day guests and customers of IHG's owned and franchised hotels, the consumers of its goods. Or: younger people. These groups, as explained, make up a majority of IHG's stakeholders and also stand on the bottom line of keeping business going, profits growing and more than any other group, how IHG's reputation is perceived. Especially the younger audience will most likely go to other information outlets in a first attempt, than the corporate website or looking for the responsible business report and going through the whole of it. These stakeholders will gather their information, especially in times of crisis as the literature shows, on platforms where they can form their opinion and attitude towards how a company is operating and handling issues, also where they can go into a dialogue with others with the same experience, or where they can easily retrieve more information from other stakeholders, who take on an expert role in the public conversation. To prevent a high level of misinformation or a lack of trust and credibility, a company should be fully aware of its target group and where to encounter them when information is asked for most urgently, which is seemingly an issue for IHG according to the analysis. In this case it seems desirable for IHG to invest more in social media presence in response to the crisis and the generally already excellent attempts to manage it and to maybe even increase the stakeholders' involvement in the long-term social responsibility strategy. Through this the aim to come out of this crisis better and more stable than before, with a preventive and prepared future, which is actually a reputation saving and trust strengthening approach, could be followed through on a whole other level. But only if it reaches all those who build the brand's reputation and rely on the trust towards their organization.

The Intercontinental Hotels Group is apparently on a very good way to a well preserved and stable "post-Covid" time, or at least is well prepared for a world where people and businesses have to live with the presence of an increasing number of threats like diseases, natural disasters and economic uncertainties, as the research state of the art shows. The main pillars and stakeholder expectations and needs, Journey to Tomorrow is built on include all necessary base indicators for IHG to do its part in fighting, or at least enduring these possible disruptions in the future, especially by further aligning the existing expertise with the UN

Sustainable Development Goals until 2030. As was shown in a previous chapter, the UN SDGs advocate as well for organizations, who know who and what they are fighting for, and that long-lasting communication and progress in crisis management, massively relies on the relations to stakeholders and how organizations take care of them. The great involvement and appreciation of its stakeholders' role in the whole business picture is the best way for IHG to operate CSR and business matters, as the previously introduced literature showed. What should still be done is to also make this awareness public over the right channels to show the appreciation and therefore further engage stakeholders in the CSR and brand dialogue. This can only furtherly stoke the people's trust and reputation in the organization and prevents it from figuratively standing in the rain with a confused and accidentally misinformed group of stakeholders, even despite having an actually well worked out CSR strategy for them, but not the right way of communicating it to those who most ask for the information.

## **Conclusion**

Concluding this study, the main guiding research question “How did IHG engage stakeholders in its COVID-19 related crisis communication and what can be learnt from this?” can be answered in a few easy steps. The Intercontinental Hotels Groups implemented a new corporate social responsibility strategy called ‘Journey to Tomorrow’ in February 2021, almost a year into the COVID-19 crisis. This strategy has been built on previously existing and internalized brand values, visions and missions, like the care for the organizations culture, hotels and communities they operate in and a strong awareness about all involved stakeholder groups and their expectations and needs towards the company. These have been extended by a greater focus on people, planet and communities and qualitative research-backed insights about stakeholder values and how they have changed due to the COVID-19 crisis. The crisis itself and the pandemic that inflicted it on the hospitality industry became a main focus in the new CSR strategy and with that the necessity and urge to communicate the crisis-based changes and adjustments to those who run, support, and frame the public perception and reputation of IHG as an organization. Even though IHG decided to tackle the crisis communication on several different channels, what the study shows is that it might not have been the right channels or at least not in the right balance and extent. As IHG complies with most of the consulted research literature in this study, but fails to match their actions with the survey findings these actions are based on, a suggestion for the future of crisis communication and the necessity of organizational change, is for organizations to not just include their stakeholders in these natural and ever lasting processes, but to know them well enough to find the right way to get into a dialogue with them about it over the right communication channels. To also answer the sub-questions from the introduction, it has already been revisited that IHG considers its CSR reports and corporate website as the most important channels to communicate with its stakeholders, but not so much other, more stakeholder just outlets like social media platforms, which might be closer to its target group and therefore more effective. As the role of the organization’s CSR strategy in the crisis communication process has already been described in a wide extent, it is only left to answer that creating sustaining and long-lasting crisis communication and successful organizational change, means to know all parts of your organization equally well, especially the ones in the core of it, and not to tackle every disruption in the moment and forget think ahead. Well established relationships with those who bring in profits, active

or passive, can prevent and secure more than any uninformed kneejerk reaction, especially in a highly digitalized and fast changing information environment. No matter if business is going well or less well, crisis can strike any time and according to research and also the UN Sustainable Development Goals report, more often in the future than ever before. The stronger an organizations reputation and relationship to those who form and act on it is, the less fear it needs to have and actions to take when crisis and disruption hit. From a personal but professional point of view, I would have wished for this closer knowledge of myself from the company I worked for before, in the beginning and long into this unprecedented crisis. I would even go as far as to say that feeling misunderstood or left out in responding to the crisis, played a major role in the decision to leave the job about one and a half years into the pandemic. Based on this I hope to contribute not only to the hospitality industry, but to many others as well, to prevent such unpreferable experiences for others and myself in the future and possibly even get into strategizing organizational crisis communication on a professional background myself. Also, there are future research efforts to recommend to intensify or further back up these findings and motives, as for example a comparative case study, to see how other hospitality players communicated with their stakeholders during the crisis; a long-term study to see how communication is continuously realized and held up, which has been missed out on, in IHG's attempt of crisis communication through social media; or a study on how CSR communication that is not directly linked to a crisis, is perceived by stakeholders in general, and what this could do for crisis prevention and awareness in the future of organizational change. For this study the future is determined by long-lasting communication concepts, strong stakeholder relationships, and an even stronger organizational knowledge of who stakeholders are and how crucially important they are for all other business ventures of any organization. This also concludes the value this study is aimed to bring to the scientific field of communication in general and crisis and organizational communication in specific, which has been a personal objective to obtain a master's degree in these areas.

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These are not distinguished from each other in the full text, as they actually all stem from the same source and are coded and analysed into different quoting abbreviations.

## **Annex**

### ***A. Case study protocol after an example and guidelines by Yin 2018, p. 134***

#### **Section A. Overview of the Case Study**

1. *Mission and goals reflecting the interests of the case study's sponsor (if any) and audience*

The mission of the present case study is to inductively find out about the changes and challenges the COVID-19 pandemic inflicted on one of the biggest economic industries on the world market: the hospitality industry. The goal is to do so, using the case of the Intercontinental Hotel Group as one of the statistic main players in this industry and the brand's newly implemented Corporate Social Responsibility policy, in which the mainly affected topics in a communication crisis are covered an implemented. The case study aims to show the importance of a flexible CSR communication in times of disruption, how crisis and communication influence each other, and what the current situation and the example of how IHG reacted to it can tell about the future of the industry and communication strategies in it.

2. *Case study questions, hypotheses, and propositions*

The main research question of this study, directly connected to the case is “How did the **COVID-19 pandemic** lead the **Intercontinental Hotels Group** as a main player in the hospitality industry to create a new **Corporate Social Responsibility strategy** and why is this step necessary to secure the brand's future?”. This question, with several sub-levels which are described in a later point in the protocol, aims at the topic of what structured communication can do for economically leading brands in times of crisis and disruption. Hypotheses on this issue are that a) appropriate communication internal and external to a brand can help overcome a crisis and find new ways to do business, b) the issue of working on Corporate Social Responsibility concepts are essential for a brand's survival in

an uncertain economic and political future, c) that the current crisis and regarding social phenomena signify a turning point for brands to make their CSR strategies more crisis proof or crisis aware for the future, and d) that long term CSR concepts can either mean that a brand is well prepared for all eventualities or that they did not learn from the sudden rise of the latest crises and the flexibility they ask for. The main proposition behind these initial assumptions is that because of its size and market place, the Intercontinental group might depict the current situation of business and everyday life in the hospitality industry well and will bring relevant and valid notions on the mentioned hypotheses. This is proposed to lead to an attempt of answering the research question and make prognoses about the meaning and value of good CSR communication strategies for brands in the future.

3. *Theoretical framework for the case study; key readings*

- Infos about ihg
- Infos about the industry + covid
- Literature review including crisis communication, corporate social responsibility, organizational change, and creating sustainable strategic communication
- Yin + Merriam as core lit. for empirical part

4. *Role of protocol in guiding the case study researcher (notes that the protocol serves as the agenda for the researcher's line of inquiry)*

The protocol is being filled out step by step along the research and writing up process. Either in anticipation/preparation for a point in the procedure or after finishing up sufficient investigation and collection of content/information. It is supposed to offer a point of orientation and guidance to come back to for consultation. The notes in the protocol are an initial framework for the final study and there to paint a first picture for better identification of the researcher with the topic.

## **Section B. Data Collection Procedures**

1. *Names of contact persons for doing fieldwork*

As the data collection is solely based on Qualitative Document Analysis, there are no direct third parties involved in the fieldwork.

In an earlier attempt of the study, qualitative interviews were considered as an addendum to the QDA method. People involved in the fieldwork would have been contact persons in dedicated departments within the IHG brand, to give direct in moment insights to the investigated “social phenomenon”. Because the company decided to not offer access to these interviews after all, the methodology was revisited and accordingly adjusted in the reiterative research process.

2. *Data collection plan (covers the types of evidence to be expected, including the roles of people to be interviewed, the events to be observed, and any documents to be reviewed in the field)*

Data for the case study will exclusively be collected through publicly accessible documents and the analysis of them. These documents include IHG’s online publications regarding the new CSR plan, former CSR plan(s), and the campaign’s social media coverage. Because of cooperation difficulties in the acquisition of interview partners, there will be no other people involved, also because the collection for documents to be analysed does not require further contact persons. The expected evidence these documents are proposed to deliver is to get insight data about the how, why and what of the new communication strategy and what the researcher can read out of it while comparing it to previous practice. More detailed description of the selected documents is noted in section C.

3. *Expected preparation prior to field work (identifies specific information to be reviewed and issues to be covered prior to fieldwork)*

The preparation for the fieldwork requires the researcher to skim through the case’s online presence, find out which documents, delivering what kinds of data are accessible on which medium and in which extend. As the new CSR strategy was not only communicated internally to the brand but as well has the purpose to appeal to external stakeholders, all documents and sources are luckily openly accessible through IHG’s online presence. A great tool that needed to be considered is the social media presentation and communication of the changes, which the brand uses to reach a higher and more diverse number of external and internal stakeholders and engage with them. The only issue existing prior to the eventual fieldwork was to overcome the lack of access to relevant interviewees to cover more than one methodology in the data collection process, which is always recommended, but

under the justified circumstances in this case not implicitly necessary. The data selection process was oriented on the desired gain of information about the main variables covered in the research- and sub-questions, such as brand values, goal, mission, visions, stakeholder engagement, sustainability, reaction to crisis and hope for the future of the brand and cooperating parties.

## **Section C. Protocol Questions**

### *1. Data collection in process and related questions:*

- a. What are the sub-questions to be answered in anticipation to the main research question?
  - What communication techniques and channels were used and considered as most important by the organization?
  - What role does the organization's corporate social responsibility strategy play for the crisis communication?
  - How can a deep and detailed knowledge of stakeholders, their personal profile and expectations to the organization help to improve crisis preparedness, response and recovering?
- b. What communication channels and tools did the brand, standing in as the case, use in the process in question?

The communication channels used in a wider context were the brand's corporate website, including communication through the CSR reports, open letter from CEO, survey summary, press release and dedicated website for CSR campaign; social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram; and internal communication channels like the intranet which is only known from an analysed source but not openly accessible and only concerns internal stakeholders.

- c. Why were these channels supposedly used?

Supposedly, these channels were used to bring information about the new CSR strategy and how the crisis it has been based on is managed, to the organization's stakeholders and all who are concerned with it.
- d. How long was the new communication strategy already in the making, or was it purely a reaction to the disruptive circumstances?

It can be assumed that the CSR strategy itself has been worked on according to previous targets and reports on it, but has been newly implemented and adjusted in acute reaction to the crisis.

- e. Why could it be necessary in the research process to not only analyse documents directly related to or promoting the new communication strategy, but to compare them with previous, pre-pandemic versions of them?

To find out what really changed due to the crisis and what are values and goals that the organization has already implemented and worked out in its culture.

- f. Explain first ideas on desirable codes that could come up during qualitative document analysis.

Codes should rely on both, variables asked for in the research questions and the preceding theoretical framework and important notions within it. They could include ideas on stakeholder engagement, crisis communication, corporate social responsibility communication and others.

## 2. *Evaluation of the unit of analysis' quality:*

- a. Why is the chosen unit of analysis valid, reliable, and suitable for the case study?

Because it not just a topic but an actual object that can be analysed and add value to the case study research. The documents that are supposed to make up the unit of analysis are openly accessible, directed to the variable stakeholder and created by the organization posing the case itself.

- b. Why can the chosen case be used representatively in an inductive process to make assumption about the whole industry it's located in?

Because the organization is respectable in size and operations, especially within the hospitality industry, which is even harder affected by the crisis than some other sectors, and can lead as a good example for any kind of organization.

## B. Reference tables for analysis

### Social Media

Source	Quote	CSR for the con	stakeholder inv	change/conseq	Future/longlas	stakeholder communication
F4	Today we published our 2020 Responsible Business Report, which captures our commitment to open	yes	no	no	no	no
F4	Our purpose of True Hospitality for Good	yes	no	no	no	no
F4	In the face of such a challenging year	no	no	yes	no	no
F4	Our new 2030 Responsible Business plan, Journey to Tomorrow	yes	no	no	no	no
F4	How we pledge to make a positive difference to our people, communities and planet throughout th	yes	no	no	yes	yes
F3	The Response to Covid-19 all around the world has shown what can be achieved when we focus on	yes	no	yes	no	no
F3	Our Journey to Tomorrow plan is all about retaining that proactive force for good on a far wider sca	yes	no	yes	no	no
F3	It strengthens our commitment to make sure we do what's right, not just what's needed, for our pe	yes	no	yes	no	yes
F2	We want to ensure travel has a beautiful future for everyone	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
F2	[JIT helps] guiding our actions to care for our people, communities and planet	yes	no	no	no	yes
F2	Our CEO Keith Barr shared his thoughts on why this is so important to us at IHG Hotels & Resorts ar	yes	yes	no	no	yes
F1	Today we're launching Journey to Tomorrow	yes	no	no	no	yes
F1	Our 10-year action plan to help shape the future of responsible travel by caring for our people, com	yes	no	no	yes	yes
F1	It's a journey at the heart of our purpose of True Hospitality for Good, which guides us to make a di	yes	no	no	no	no
F1	Join us on the Journey. #IHGJourneytoTomorrow. Find out more <a href="http://ihg.co/6187H9VyV">http://ihg.co/6187H9VyV</a>	no	yes	no	yes	yes
Notes:	Facebook posts just copy from open letter by CEO					
	Almost no engagement of stakeholders on how to interact with the communication (use #, go through website/ other platforms etc)					
	Posts do not address or appeal to the reader (stakeholder) directly, but only depicts the brand's strong identity and identification with the new CSR plan and what it can do for stakeholders and the future of the industry					
	Stakeholders' engagement and involvement is only indirectly implied, just as is the brand is convinced that all consumers of the brand know and identify with the brand enough, that further clarification from the brand's side is not necessary					
	Does the use of the # and links to more CSR related communication already count as stakeholder engagement?					

### Website

Source	Quote	CSR for the con	stakeholder inv	change/conseq	Future/longlas	stakeholder communication
QA	IHG Hotels & Resorts reveals guests' growing passion to travel better	no	no	no	no	yes
QA	People are more mindful than ever about travelling consciously following the C	no	yes	yes	no	yes
QA	The research is commissioned as part of IHG's launch of 'Journey to Tomorrow'	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	a 10-year action plan comprising a series of far-reaching new commitments to r	yes	no	no	yes	no
QA	60 per cent of the 9,000 adults surveyed across the US, UK, Germany, Greater C	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	This is led by 69 per cent of younger travellers (aged 18 to 24)	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	travellers not only intend to do more for the planet and communities around th	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	Community first: Guests connecting with purpose	yes	yes	no	no	yes
QA	With the world travelling more locally - or not at all - right now, it seems the pa	no	yes	yes	no	yes
QA	More than half of respondents across the globe say they care more about doing	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	46 per cent of people say they are more likely to be mindful about avoiding tou	no	yes	yes	no	yes
QA	86 per cent of people say it is important to get to know the local community	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	A further 3 in 10 choose to stay with travel companies that offer local communi	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	As for activities such as volunteering and restoration projects, young travellers	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	Travelling better for a sustainable future	yes	no	no	yes	no
QA	An incredible 82 per cent of adults around the world say they are committed to	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	Our Journey to Tomorrow	yes	no	no	no	no
QA	A great guest experience at our hotels is inextricably linked to operating though	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
QA	The ambitions and commitments are firmly rooted in an understanding of what	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	from providing skills and education to supporting young people, taking action f	yes	yes	no	no	yes
	relief efforts.					
QA	Laurie Lee, Chief Executive Officer, CARE International UK said	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	IHG Hotels & Resorts has demonstrated ist commitment to responsible travel b	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	IHG's support of CARE has remained firm despite the unprecedented challenge	yes	no	no	no	no
QA	In the past year alone, CARE and IHG provided essential Covid-19 prevention re	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
QA	with IHG's support, CARE helped nearly 20,000 people	no	yes	no	no	yes
QA	These life-saving humanitarian efforts are critical to helping communities respo	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
	of action with IHG					
QA	IHG is here when travellers are ready	yes	yes	no	no	yes
QA	IHG recognises the power of collaboration and will join forces with all who stay,	yes	yes	no	no	yes
QA	Join the journey: More information on IHG's Journey to Tomorrow can be found	no	yes	no	no	yes

Source	Quote	CSR for the con	stakeholder inv	change/conseq	Future/longlas	stakeholder relat
CEO	Now, perhaps more than ever, it's really important that we think about how our	yes	no	yes	no	no
CEO	I believe that behaving this way is not just the duty of individuals, but it should	yes	no	no	no	no
CEO	At IHG Hotels & Resorts, I know that our colleagues, guests, hotel owners, suppliers	yes	yes	no	no	yes
CEO	They want to see us and other organisations drive change and to think about how	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
	responsibilities, alongside growth and profitability.					
CEO	How organisations stand up for diversity, equity & inclusion and human rights, or	yes	no	no	yes	yes
	make better environmental choices - those actions matter.					
CEO	The response to Covid-19 from organisations around the world has shown what	yes	no	yes	no	no
	resources and compassion for the greater good* [...]					
CEO	I'm proud of how IHG and others in hospitality have contributed so meaningfully	yes	no	yes	no	yes
CEO	As a company we've given great thought to how we can retain that proactive focus	yes	no	yes	no	no
	our commitment to make sure we do what's right, not just what's needed.*					
CEO	It's why I'm so proud to see us launch Journey to Tomorrow, our new set of ambitions	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
CEO	We've already made important achievements in these areas over many years, but	yes	no	no	yes	no
CEO	which will challenge us to deliver on new ambitions, including how we continue	yes	no	yes	no	yes
CEO	In our communities we will seize opportunities to improve millions of lives, while	yes	no	no	yes	yes
	providing skills training that drives social and economic change					
CEO	This is what our purpose of true hospitality for good means to us, and we can sustain	yes	no	no	no	yes
CEO	A recent IHG survey showed more than 80% of consumers think it's important	no	yes	yes	no	yes
	about doing their bit for local communities and the planet while travelling than they					
	did 10 years ago.					
CEO	We care as much about operating thoughtfully and growing sustainably, as we do	yes	no	no	yes	yes
CEO	That's why our Journey to Tomorrow plan ties in closely to the UN Sustainable	yes	no	no	yes	no
CEO	Development Goals. We want every IHG stakeholder - our guests, colleagues, owners, partners, investors	yes	yes	no	no	yes
	to see that we're on a journey to be successful in every sense of the word.	yes	no	no	yes	yes
CEO	So, we are empowering our colleagues, and working with our hotel owners and	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
CEO	suppliers to ensure we're all on the same page. It's never been more crucial that we do.	yes	no	yes	no	no

Source	Quote	CSR for the con	stakeholder inv	change/conseq	Future/longlas	stakeholder relat
PR	IHG Hotels & Resorts publishes series of ambitious commitments to drive change	yes	no	no	no	yes
PR	Decade of action announced as new insights reveal that consumers overwhelmed	no	yes	no	yes	yes
PR	a series of ambitious new commitments to make a positive difference for our planet	yes	no	no	yes	yes
PR	We will work side by side with those who stay, work and partner with us, to help	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
PR	supporting our people and making a positive difference to our local communities	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
PR	IHG's Journey to Tomorrow plan is rooted in an understanding of what is most important	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
	and growing sustainably.					
PR	Formed through a comprehensive assessment process involving external experts	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
	and a framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which aims to provide a					
	better, more sustainable future for us all by 2030.					
PR	IHG's commitment to collective action is shared by consumers around the world	yes	yes	no	no	yes
PR	A global study commissioned by IHG of around 9000 adults revealed that consumers	no	yes	no	no	yes
PR	with 82% saying it is important to choose a hotel brand that operates responsibly	no	yes	no	no	yes
PR	and research found consumers will spend an average of 31% per night more on accommodation	no	yes	no	no	yes
PR	Covid-19 has increased awareness of responsible travel more broadly	no	no	yes	no	yes
PR	with 60% of people saying the pandemic has made them more socially and environmentally	no	yes	yes	no	yes
PR	conscious. This rises to 58% among travellers aged 18-24, compared to 36% for over 55s	no	yes	no	no	yes
PR	and 24% for those aged 25-34. With the world travelling more locally during the pandemic	no	no	yes	no	no
PR	and consumers are showing an overwhelming appetite to show care for the community	no	yes	no	no	yes
PR	and 86% of people say it is important to get to know the local community when visiting	no	yes	no	no	yes
PR	and 57% say they care more about contributing to their local communities and the	no	yes	no	yes	yes
PR	local economy. Gloria Guevara, CEO & President, The World Travel & Tourism Council commented	no	yes	no	no	yes
PR	that "IHG is a key contributor to our Sustainability Taskforce	no	yes	no	no	yes
PR	and it will play a crucial role in our sector in a post-COVID world (JtT)	no	no	yes	no	no
PR	and by working together towards these common goals, we can ensure that the community	no	yes	no	yes	yes
PR	is thriving. Wolfgang Neumann, Chair, Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, commented	no	yes	no	no	yes
PR	that "[JtT] is exactly the type of action needed to drive meaningful change from within	yes	no	no	yes	no
PR	the industry and collaboration will continue to be key as we press ahead to 2030	no	yes	no	yes	yes
PR	and progress is best achieved when we work together, and we will collaborate closely	no	yes	no	no	yes
	with our partners, suppliers and local communities, helping us get there.					
PR	Our plan sets out five clear ambitions, building on our long-term commitments	yes	no	no	yes	no
PR	and these include: our people, communities, etc	yes	no	no	no	yes
PR	Find out more	no	yes	no	no	yes
PR	Join us on the journey: You can visit IHG's Journey to Tomorrow web pages to find	no	yes	no	no	yes
PR	out more. On social follow the hashtag #IHGJourneytoTomorrow	no	yes	no	no	yes
PR	and a detailed update on this will be shared in our 2020 Responsible business report	no	yes	no	no	yes

# Responsible Business Report 2018

Source	Quote	CSR for the core business	stakeholder involvement	change/consistency	Future/long-term	stakeholder relevance
RBR18/3	Our commitment to operating our business responsibly underpins our entire strategy and the reputation of IHG and our brands	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR18/3	The actions we take as a business [...] increasingly shape how IHG is perceived by important stakeholders	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/3	This can range from how attractive IHG is as an employer, to a decision to invest in our company or brands, or whether a guest chooses to stay in one of our hotels	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR18/3	At IHG, we understand how crucial it is to operate with integrity and rigorous high standards, and to grow our business in a way that positively impacts on our environment and local communities	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR18/3	our responsible business commitments are closely aligned to our purpose of providing True Hospitality for everyone	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR18/3	including the expectations we place on our suppliers and third-party hotel owners	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/3	We work with our partners to ensure the actions we take continue to be effective	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/3	including the UN Sustainable Development Goals to build a fairer and more sustainable world	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR18/3	We are proud of our commitment to growing our business in a sustainable way that delivers long-term value for shareholders and owners	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
RBR18/3	we recognise the need to take time to evaluate and adapt our approach, and we are actively reviewing the areas we feel IHG can have the biggest impact in.	yes	no	yes	no	no
RBR18/3	three key pillars: our culture; our hotels; and our communities	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR18/3	With these pillars, we show our progress against our 2018-2020 responsible business targets, in the areas of environmental sustainability; community impact; our people; and responsible procurement	yes	no	yes	no	no
RBR18/3	From our direct hotel operations, to our relationship with owners and our supply chain, we consider the entire hotel lifecycle when looking at how to best operate responsibly	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/3	We understand that our success and the well-being of those who work in and around our hotels are closely linked, and we seek opportunities to be a force for good.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/4	We have engaged with internal and external stakeholders to define our responsible business targets for 2018-2020.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/4	We will collaborate with colleagues in our owned, leased, managed and franchised hotels and corporate offices around the world to deliver these targets in the years to come	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/5C	the importance we place on operating with integrity with our colleagues, third-party hotel owners, partners, investors and the local communities in which we work.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/5C	with a strong track record of successfully delivering against our commitments for all stakeholders.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/5C	Underpinning our financial and operational performance is a deep-rooted culture of clear ethics and governance led by the Board; close trusted partnerships with our third-party hotel owners and a passion among colleagues to do the right thing and care for others.	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
RBR18/5C	they require us to have a robust and comprehensive approach that ensures our responsible business commitments are aligned to our strategy and felt in all aspects of our operations.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/5C	We focus on three areas: the culture we create; our hotels, guests and third-party relationships; and our local communities.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/5C	This reflects the interests of all our stakeholders, who increasingly follow the decisions we take to grow and operate our business, the working culture we create for colleagues, and the commitment we make to defining and delivering on a broader social purpose.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/5C	nurturing a culture of shared values and expectations with colleagues, owners and suppliers.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/5C	In all these aspects, we know our work is never done.	no	no	yes	no	no
RBR18/5C	There is always a need for education, action and collaboration.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/5C	We continue to engage with key stakeholders to ensure our actions meet their needs.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/5C	A key focus in 2019 will be further developing this work to think about the long-term steps we need to take as a responsible business.	yes	no	yes	no	no
RBR18/5C	Within a travel and tourism industry that accounts for 1 in 10 jobs globally and touches many lives, there are lots of opportunities to make a difference.	no	no	no	no	yes
RBR18/5C	As IHG grows, so does our ability to positively impact others - whether through creating jobs, promoting skills and education, helping our hotels manage natural resources and their environmental footprint, or by being there for our communities.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/5C	Partnerships are crucial to our work.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/5C	we work closely with our hotel owners and their teams to embed our responsible business approach, and within our communities we support charities doing incredible work globally in the area of disaster relief and building hospitality skills.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/CEO	from our operations, policies and programmes, to the expectations we place on colleagues, owners and partners to uphold our values and help deliver our purpose of providing True Hospitality for everyone	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/CEO	Whether an investor, a third-party hotel owner, a guest or one of more than 400,000 colleagues, our ability to operate in a sustainable and transparent way is of increasing importance to the reputation of IHG and our brands.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/CEO	In 2018, we made some important structural changes to our business that together with a series of strategic initiatives will help us grow at an even faster pace.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR18/CEO	It is a great testament to colleagues and our owners that during this time we have still continued to make good progress against our 2018-2020 Responsible Business Targets and successfully delivered on our True Hospitality for Good programme that will strengthen the good we can do for local communities.	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR18/CEO	Clear policies, standards and informative training on key issues help ensure we embed the right culture at IHG, and in 2018 we saw colleagues complete more than 180,000 e-learning modules on human rights to our Code of Conduct.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/CEO	In recent years, we have collaborated with peers on key issues across the industry.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/CEO	building on our clear commitment to respecting the human rights of all those that work with us.	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR18/CEO	We also continued to underline how important diversity and inclusion is to a global company like IHG by establishing a D&I Board.	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR18/CEO	we are also focused on the many practical actions we can help our owners and their teams take to ensure we operate and grow in a way that both respects and protects the environment	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/CEO	we also recognise the potential positive impact we can bring to our communities by building skills and education in hospitality, and helping people prepare and recover from disasters around the world	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/CEO	Whether it's the culture we're building at IHG, or the work we do with our hotels and in communities, it is important to all of us that we do things in the right way.	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR18/CEO	We are committed to keeping responsible business at the heart of our approach, evolving and adapting as the world changes, and ensuring the actions we take continue to be effective.	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
RBR18/CEO	I'd like to thank all colleagues, owners and partners for their commitment to this important area.	no	no	no	no	yes
RBR18/7	In developing our approach to responsible business, we consult our stakeholders to determine the issues most important to them and IHG.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/7	We know that our colleagues, guests, hotel owners, investors and other stakeholders want to engage with a company that has strong values, a respect for everyone and a commitment to responsible business across all our communities and the environment in which we work.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/7	underpinning our purpose to provide True Hospitality for everyone.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/7	We consider the areas where we can make the greatest positive contribution and the matrix, together with stakeholder feedback, helps us identify our responsible business targets.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/8SE	Regular dialogue with a wider range of stakeholders important to our business ensures we can be confident that we are identifying areas where our actions can deliver the greatest impact on our business	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/8SE	We regularly consider the steps we can take to further embed a culture of responsible business; to protect the reputation of IHG and our brands.	yes	no	yes	no	yes
RBR18/8SE	Shareholders: Our shareholders are placing an increased emphasis on environmental, social and governance issues. We engage with them through a variety of mechanisms. [...] We welcome their engagement and over the course of 2018 have provided data and insights by engaging with several organisations	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/8SE	Colleagues: There are a number of ways we engage with our colleagues, including conferences, our intranet, in-house publications, Town Halls and blogs. We stay close to important topics such as well-being, diversity and inclusion, remuneration, learning and development and societal and environmental issues. We measure employee engagement through our bi-annual survey	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/8SE	Owners: We continue to evolve our culture of responsible business through engaging with third-party hotel owners. Partnering with them, we identify the issues relevant to them and are taking the necessary steps to mitigate against these. We engage with them through regular meetings, surveys and regional conferences.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/8SE	Guests and corporate clients: Increasingly consumers are making sustainable choices in their purchasing decisions. [...] Demonstrating a strong track record of sustainability to our corporate clients is important with almost 60% requesting key responsible business data relating to our carbon, energy, and water consumption and waste diversion.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/8SE	Academic institutions: We regularly collaborate with academic institutions across the globe to share best practice and contribute to the development of responsible business solutions for the whole industry	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/8SE	Suppliers: [...] work with thousands of suppliers who share our commitment to our responsible business agenda and ethical standards of business.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/8SE	NGOs, government and community organisations: We collaborate with a number of organisations and governments to develop policies and initiatives to embed our culture of responsible business across all our communities	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/8SE	Industry associations: Across a number of associations, we take a leading role in working groups to share best practice and promote responsible business practices across the industry.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/9	We participate in a number of public-private forums and are engaged in several strategic partnerships spanning the areas of human rights, employability and disaster relief.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR18/10	Supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals [...] IHG has identified the specific goals we feel we can make the greatest contribution towards.	yes	no	no	no	yes

RBR18/10	With tourism generating one in 10 jobs globally we are uniquely positioned to help more people into employment and deliver local economic impact through our entire estate.				yes
RBR18/10	Our colleagues represent many cultures, religions, races, sexual orientations and backgrounds and our diversity and inclusion strategy reduces any potential equalities.				yes
RBR18/10	When it comes to our local communities, we work with our hotels to ensure that they are prepared and able to play an active role in the event of a disaster, ensuring our local communities can get back on their feet.	yes			yes
RBR18/10	We have established a Strategic Supplier Management Office	yes			
RBR18/10	Through our Greener Stay programme, we reward our loyalty members who defer housekeeping services.		yes		yes
RBR18/10	We continue to collaborate with industry associations, NGOs, government and community organisations to embed our programmes and to deliver positive change.		yes		yes
RBR18/11	Our approach to responsible business underpins our entire business strategy and impacts all aspects of our operations.	yes			
RBR18/11	We ensure that our expectations are clear to all that we work with, be that colleagues, owners, investors or suppliers, and that we operate our business in a fair and robust manner.	yes			yes
RBR18/14	risk management: We continue to assess our risk management system, ensuring it remains appropriate to support our growth ambitions and decision making in line with our appetite and tolerance for risk.	yes			
RBR18/14	Our strategy, business model and the way we do business present a number of risks and opportunities.	yes			
RBR18/14	There are risks we are willing to take, and areas where we have less tolerance for uncertainty.	yes			
RBR18/14	to ensure that risks and opportunities are appropriately identified and managed to an acceptable level in relation to IHG's appetite and tolerance for risk.	yes			
RBR18/14	Our risk management system is fully integrated with the way we run the business through our culture, processes, controls and reporting, and is reflected in our strategy.	yes			
RBR18/14	The Risk and Assurance function is responsible for the support, enhancement and monitoring of the effectiveness of this system and focuses on culture, process, control, monitoring and reporting.	yes		yes	
RBR18/14	IHG's risk appetite is visible through the nature and extent of risk taken by the Board in pursuit of strategic and other business objectives.	yes			
RBR18/14	In 2018 the Board and Board Committees again reviewed many of these aspects directly through their meetings and discussions of principal risks, and through their close oversight of IHG's risk management system.	yes			
RBR18/15	Our efficiency programme to realise savings for reinvestment, organisational changes and focus on strategic initiatives have also required us to evaluate and evolve our risk management system to an appropriate level of control within our levels of risk tolerance.	yes		yes	
RBR18/15	principal risks facing the Group, including those which would threaten its business model, future performance, solvency or liquidity and reputation.	yes		yes	yes
RBR18/15	We have included factors relating to third parties across many of our risks, reflecting the increasing importance of our relationships with partners to our growth ambitions.				yes
RBR18/15	The focus on executing our strategy at a faster pace emphasises the importance of the steps we take to consider risk explicitly as part of decision making.	yes			
RBR18/15	Our more structured strategic programme management and financial planning processes, have also included regular 'pulse checks' of emerging risks requiring management attention.	yes			
RBR18/15	The Risk and Assurance team provides support and intelligence on emerging threats and will continue to provide advice to management on procedures for risk identification and mitigation.	yes			
RBR18/15	The Group's asset-light business model, diverse brand portfolio and wide geographical spread however contribute to IHG's resilience to events that could affect specific segmental or geographical markets.	yes			
RBR18/16	We take steps to ensure that there is a culture of responsible business across IHG and that our employees act with integrity	yes	yes		yes
RBR18/16	Our Code principles help us to act responsibly at all times and set out the value we place on being trusted by our guests, those who do business with us, the communities we work in and our partners.	yes	yes		yes
RBR18/16	The Code is reviewed annually by the Board to ensure it reflects and responds to changes in the external environment and ensures our culture supports our purpose and strategy.	yes			
RBR18/16	All colleagues working in IHG corporate offices, reservation centres and managed hotels must comply with the Code and the policies and procedures it refers to.	yes			yes
RBR18/16	It is extremely important that our people feel comfortable reporting ethical concerns. Colleagues are made aware of this through regular internal communications, as well as through a dedicated website, ihgethics.com	yes			yes
RBR18/16	We understand the importance of ensuring that the human rights of all those who work with us, whether directly or indirectly are protected, and we passionately promote this on behalf of our guests and partners.	yes			yes
RBR18/16	Our commitment to respecting human rights is made clear to colleagues as soon as they start working for IHG through the Code of Conduct		yes		yes
RBR18/16	we continue to focus on ensuring our frontline facing colleagues at corporate and hotel level have access to this material to ensure they are better placed to identify any potential risks.		yes		yes
RBR18/18	Being a responsible business cannot be achieved without the support and active engagement of colleagues all around the world		yes		yes
RBR18/18	Track and report employee engagement each year.	yes			
RBR18/18	We are a people business. Whether someone is a guest staying in one of our hotels, an owner investing in our brands, or they are joining us as a colleague, their choices are shaped by our people.	yes			yes
RBR18/18	A diverse and inclusive culture enriches all of this, and it plays a critical role in how we work better together, growing our business and delivering on our purpose of providing True Hospitality to all.	yes			yes
RBR18/18	Guiding us all is a set of everyday values, which shape the way we work and provide a strong sense of shared purpose.	yes			
RBR18/18	Attracting, rewarding and developing talent: We took steps in 2018 to evolve our talent practices and enhance our Room to Grow promise. [...] and initiated frequent check-in conversations to provide more opportunities to gather feedback on their performance, and discuss development and career aspirations.	yes	yes		yes
RBR18/18	Understanding how our employees feel is important to us. Twice a year we measure this through our employee engagement survey	yes	yes		yes
RBR18/19	As a global organisation operating in more than 100 countries, we recognise the importance and benefit of ensuring our workforce embodies the communities in which we operate.	yes	yes		yes
RBR18/19	We understand the importance of having a culture that values and promotes diversity and inclusion, and we take pride in ensuring our colleagues feel this in their working environments.		yes		yes
RBR18/19	We also recognise how crucial this is to attracting, building and retaining the talent we need to continue growing our business at pace. Colleagues expect it.		yes	yes	yes
RBR18/19	we have implemented several successful programmes across IHG which have helped build high levels of colleague engagement		yes		yes
RBR18/20	As a predominantly managed and franchised business, we work hand in hand with our hotel owners to make sustainable choices and take opportunities to do things differently. Working together with our colleagues, guests, partners, and investors, and we take seriously issues such as climate change, water scarcity, utility consumption and waste management.	yes	yes		yes
RBR18/21	We believe in the importance of providing a safe and secure environment for all colleagues, guests and visitors.	yes			yes
RBR18/21	We manage safety and security through a global management system that includes Brand Safety Standards and a suite of risk guidance, training and toolkits that are available to all hotels, brands and franchisees.	yes			
RBR18/21	This system is designed to provide an appropriate level of control to mitigate against a systematic issue with safety and security in our managed and franchised hotels.	yes			
RBR18/21	Our team of global intelligence specialists use an intelligence-led, threat-based security approach to monitor the risks and threats posed to our hotels and to set the mitigations and policies to address them.	yes			
RBR18/21	Our well-tested crisis management system enables us to bring the necessary skills and expertise together so that we can quickly direct resources and support exactly where it is needed when it is.	yes			yes
RBR18/22	Our colleagues are the ones who bring our brands and purpose of True Hospitality for everyone to life, build relationships with guests and work with hotel owners to drive performance.		yes		yes
RBR18/22	We offer hotel colleagues True Hospitality Service Skills training. Guests can expect a consistently great experience delivered by colleagues trained in True Attitude, True Confidence, True Listening and True Hospitality.		yes		yes
RBR18/29	we work to have a positive impact on communities by creating jobs, stimulating local economic development, and helping create more sustainable communities through hospitality skills training.	yes			
RBR18/30	We have a proud history of helping local communities and our colleagues in times of need	yes			yes
RBR18/30	In 2018, we responded to 12 natural disasters in 10 locations, across six countries that impacted our hotel based colleagues.	yes			
RBR18/30	educating people in disaster preparedness. When our hotels and offices are involved in disasters, we aim to provide a consistent response, working closely with our global NGO partners.	yes	yes		yes
RBR18/30	we have delivered a series of disaster preparedness training sessions to teachers and students across schools to help them [...] be better prepared in the event of a disaster.		yes	yes	yes
RBR18/31	Across the globe our colleagues are passionate about many local community projects, charities and NGOs, and we give them a say in how we support causes all around the world.		yes		yes
RBR18/33	We engage with internal and external stakeholders to set our 2018-2020 responsible business targets		yes		yes

# Responsible Business Report 2020

Source	Quote	CSR for the comp	stakeholder in	change/conseq	Future/longlas	stakeholder relevant
RBR20/3	With hotels in thousands of communities all over the world, our business and brands touch the lives of millions of people every day.	no	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/3	By caring for our guests and colleagues, recognising and respecting one another, protecting the environment and giving back to our communities, we deliver our purpose of True Hospitality for Good.	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/3	Our actions as a responsible business not only shape our culture and operations but also reflect our commitment to positively contribute to the world around us - from supporting Covid-19 recovery efforts, to promoting social equality and tackling climate change.	yes	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/3	the actions we have taken to operate responsibly and how we'll continue to help shape the future of responsible travel.	no	no	no	yes	no
RBR20/4C	In addition, work had begun to define our future path with a longer-term set of commitments capable of engaging and inspiring our stakeholders to continue making a positive difference to our business, communities and environment.	no	yes	no	yes	yes
RBR20/4C	The arrival of the pandemic of course meant that a busy year turned into the most difficult period IHG and the hospitality industry has ever faced.	no	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/4C	In an unprecedented environment, and with our business, hotel owners and industry under immense pressure, we refocused many of our efforts and acted with great speed, care, thought and compassion.	yes	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/4C	We have strived to do what's right for our colleagues, guests, owners and communities	no	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/4C	we have worked to ensure the impact of the crisis is managed responsibly and that we emerge an even stronger business.	yes	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/4C	the fact that such a huge amount has been achieved on so many fronts is testament to the strength of IHG's leadership, colleagues, owners and partnerships.	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/4C	it's because of the way we've rallied together in response to this pandemic, and the real passion and desire colleagues share to make a difference to our guests, one another and the world around us, that we've chosen to evolve our purpose from True Hospitality for everyone, to True Hospitality for Good.	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
RBR20/4C	But in a changing world, our teams have underlined the importance of purpose, giving new meaning to our potential to effect positive change, and highlighted the growing expectation that we must deliver that change in a challenging world.	yes	no	yes	no	yes
RBR20/4C	see us focus on the positive impact we can have on our people, guests, communities and planet.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/4C	Today's stakeholders are increasingly looking at companies through an environmental social and governance (ESG) lens.	no	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/4C	At IHG we know our colleagues, guests, suppliers, partners and investors are making decisions based on how we act as a company, including how operate our hotels, the diverse and inclusive culture we create for our workforce, how we care for our communities and how we manage our environmental impact.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/4C	Supported by the Board, we take great care to ensure those voices are listened to and reflected in our policies, plans and overall governance approach.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/4C	Caring for our people, communities and planet is one of four priorities in our refreshed corporate strategy, and it is supported by our new 2030 Responsible Business plan, Journey to Tomorrow, which includes science-based targets alongside other stretching ambitions.	yes	no	no	yes	no
RBR20/4C	developing these plans, which I believe represent a clear and compelling road map for IHG's responsible and sustainable future growth.	no	no	no	yes	no
RBR20/4C	This will enable us to identify the potential climate-related risks and opportunities for IHG and will allow us to take action to build resilience accordingly.	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/4C	there is a bigger role to play that involves understanding the power of acting with purpose, reaching your targets in the right way, and collaboration with others for greater change.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/4C	As a company, we understand how important it is that we act with awareness, consideration, responsibility and transparency, and I look to the next decade with great optimism that we can build an even stronger company, which makes an even greater impact on our communities and planet.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/CEO	The magnitude of the pandemic means billions of lives have been changed, economies damaged, and societies challenged, while our hospitality industry has experienced the hardest period in its history.	no	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/CEO	and yet despite this, I am deeply proud of how our colleagues, owners, charity partners and so many other stakeholders came together to support one another and those around them.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/CEO	It requires constant thought and investment in our culture and the governance that sits around our actions; a deep understanding of what's important to our stakeholders, including colleagues, guests, owners, and investors; a clear grasp of how our operations impact the environment; and a passion to our scale as a global company to greatest use among the communities in which we operate.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/CEO	not only were we able to respond to the crisis with such warmth, care and compassion, but also continue to move forward as a company in several important areas.	no	no	yes	yes	no
RBR20/CEO	From the onset of the pandemic, the health and safety of our colleagues and guests has been a key priority, supported by significant enhancements to our IHG Clean programme.	no	no	yes	no	yes
RBR20/CEO	We've proudly welcomed frontline workers into hundreds of our hotels around the world and provided shelter for the homeless, while also offering meals and packages to those in need in our communities.	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/CEO	Mental health and wellbeing resources were provided to our thousands of corporate colleagues working remotely, all-colleague calls were held more frequently to keep everyone informed, and smaller feedback groups took place to hear our team's thoughts.	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
RBR20/CEO	Programmes and support networks were also put in place for all those who sadly saw their jobs impacted by such a vastly changed trading environment.	no	yes	yes	no	yes
RBR20/CEO	addressing social inequity through strengthened D&I commitments, continuing to help our communities during natural disasters, [ ... ]	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/CEO	As we made sure to respond to what was needed, we have maintained a focus on ensuring both IHG and our industry emerges from the pandemic in a stronger position.	yes	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/CEO	We are also excited to have launched Journey to Tomorrow, a series of clear commitments for the next 10 years in areas aligned to both our purpose and the needs of our stakeholders.	yes	no	no	yes	no
RBR20/CEO	to promote wellbeing in the workplace, champion an inclusive culture, and advance human rights.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/CEO	collaborate with local stakeholders to tackle water sustainability issues in areas of greater risk.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/CEO	People want to see clear and measurable targets; they want organisations to initiate change rather than wait for it; and they want companies to understand and respond to what's happening around them.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/CEO	Our Journey to Tomorrow plan will help us make changes for the better - not only for our company and stakeholders, but also our industry as we collaborate to drive the best practice, and for our communities as we use our scale and resources to make a positive difference to those around us.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/CEO	I want to thank our incredibly dedicated colleagues, owners and partners for keeping responsible business at the heart of IHG during a very difficult year.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/9	The definition of what it means to be a responsible business continues to evolve.	no	no	no	yes	no
RBR20/9	How companies operate and behave is receiving more focus from wider society than ever before.	no	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/9	This in turn is having a greater influence on the perceptions and decisions of a broader set of stakeholders, including investors, consumers and colleagues.	no	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/9	At IHG, we understand the importance of operating responsibly and sustainably - it is absolutely core to our business and culture.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/9	We are proud of our progress on what a Journey towards making an increasingly positive difference to our people, communities and the world around us.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/10	We are an ambitious company, with a clear strategy to strengthen and grow our hotel brands around the world by investing in the right guest experiences and technology, and driving owner returns.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/10	IHG made caring for our people, communities and planet one of four strategic priorities for the Company.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/10	Our responsible business strategy is continually reviewed and refreshed, building on reflections from the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as more formal insights from our materiality and risk assessment, stakeholder engagement and external frameworks such as the UN SDGs.	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

RBR20/12	In 2020, we undertook a detailed materiality assessment to identify and prioritise the key responsible business issues relating to our core business activities.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/12	A long list of ESG issues were consolidated and ranked based on relevance to IHG and importance to our stakeholders, helping to prioritise significant issues that have the potential to create both risks and opportunities for our business.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/12	This year, material issues have naturally shifted in response to the dramatic global impact of Covid-19, and so has the social dialogue on topics such as racial equality and diversity.	no	yes	yes	no	yes
RBR20/12	In such a challenging year, these shifts are as expected and reflect the switch in focus to social challenges and their impact on people around the world.	yes	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/13	establishing a framework of prudent and effective controls, which enable risk to be assessed and managed.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/13	In 2020, our Board and management team, supported by the Risk and Assurance team, have reviewed our risk profile with increased frequency, and evaluated the appropriateness and resilience of our risk management	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/13	Throughout the management of the Covid-19 crisis, the Board has also considered the longer-term impact of the pandemic and other external and internal factors on our risk profile.	no	no	yes	yes	no
RBR20/13	During 2020, alongside the close focus on responding to Covid-19, Board and Committee discussions have allowed for consideration of other emerging and existing risks.	no	no	yes	yes	no
RBR20/13	The short- and medium-term uncertainties created by Covid-19 led to active 'real-time' consideration of acceptable risk tolerances and whether any adjustments were required to financial and operational controls.	no	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/13	Enhancements were made to controls to enable effective and efficient management risk throughout the crisis, including the decentralization of decisions to front-line crisis teams within a framework of agreed principles.	no	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/13	After the initial operational disruption of Covid-19, additional adjustments to controls were required to maintain acceptable risk levels during IHG-initiated changes to the workforce and to safeguard continuity across our supply chain.	no	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/13	These changes were guided by principles developed by the Executive Committee to ensure that any actions taken were not disproportionately destabilising, and were supported by communication plans.	yes	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/13	While the Covid-19 crisis has not fundamentally changed the principal risks to our business and strategy, it has heightened the uncertainty we face in the short-term and also created the potential for the longer-term impacts based on trade-offs that have been required to protect liquidity in 2020.	no	no	yes	yes	no
RBR20/13	The crisis has also accentuated the increasingly interconnected nature of risk.	no	no	yes	yes	no
RBR20/13	We have not managed Covid-19 as a separate risk during the year, as the pandemic has increased the risk profile across many of our existing principal risks.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/13	This is most obvious in relation to the continuing significance of the safety and security of our colleagues and guests, government regulations impacting domestic and international travel, consumer confidence and appetite to travel internationally in the longer term, how we operate our hotels and the overall impact on our business resilience.	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
RBR20/13	The necessary response to Covid-19 safety concerns has also created several secondary impacts and the potential for disruption and additional stress on our business management and internal control arrangements.	no	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/15	We collaborate and engage with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure we can work towards common goals and create shared value.	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/15	Shareholders and investors: it's important we regularly inform them of our responsible business practices and progress	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/15	Hotel owners: they are integral to our reputation and long-term success. Through our collaboration, we aim to affect change on issues that are relevant to the industry as a group.	no	yes	no	yes	yes
RBR20/15	Colleagues: Our colleagues working in our corporate offices, and managed and franchised hotels, represent a diverse set of opinions that help us shape our strategy.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/15	Guests and corporate clients: Our guests and corporate clients see us as both operators and destinations. They want to know the role we can play in driving positive change through our business and in collaboration with others.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/16	Suppliers: The provision of goods and services by our suppliers is critical to our ongoing operations and we want to make sure we engage with suppliers that share our values.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/16	Industry associations: not only create shared value, but also drive greater momentum behind a common purpose.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/16	Academic institutions: We regularly collaborate and engage with academic institutions to share best practice	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/16	NGOs, governments and community groups: We engage with NGOs, governments and community organisations to ensure the programmes and policies we have in place meet the needs of our guests, communities and owners.	no	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/17	UN Sustainable Development Goals: They have provided an important focal point for governments and organisations throughout the world and IHG is determined to play its part in supporting them over the next decade.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/17	The events of 2020 have underlined the significance of the UN SDGs - it's estimated that 71 million people have been pushed back into extreme poverty as a result of the crisis.	no	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/17	We are committed to ensuring our responsible business targets contribute towards the UN SDGs to tackle societal problems, along with the challenges that must be met if the worst consequences of climate change are to be avoided.	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/19	It is extremely important to our employees and any person with a relationship to IHG, including our suppliers and their workers, feel comfortable reporting ethical concerns.	no	no	no	no	yes

RBR20/24	As identified in our materiality assessment, safety and security is a key area of focus for our business.	yes	no	no	no	no	no
RBR20/24	IHG employs a team of global risk specialists to coordinate and monitor a safety and security management system to mitigate systematic health and safety or issues across our hotels.	yes	no	no	no	no	no
RBR20/24	oversee key areas of uncertainty and the effectiveness of risk management and internal control arrangements.	yes	no	no	no	no	no
RBR20/24	The standards specify reasonable and practicable measures to mitigate foreseeable health and safety, and security risks in IHG hotels.	yes	no	no	no	no	no
RBR20/24	Risks that pose a threat to IHG's operations are managed through multi-layered trained guidance that is specific to frontline and supervisory/managerial colleagues.	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/24	This year, our crisis management system has enabled us to bring the necessary skills and expertise together to quickly direct resources and support to exacted is needed around the world in response to Covid-19.	no	no	yes	no	no	no
RBR20/24	We know that people's appetite to explore, rest or work on their travels hasn't changed, but understandably their confidence in when it's safe to do so has.	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/24	Cleanliness, health and safety are now top priorities for many customers, and while the wellbeing of our guests has always been important to us, we've enhanced part of the experience to further reassure them.	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/24	Our hotels are working to best practice COVID-19-specific training and operating procedures, aligned to regularly monitored advice from global health bodies.	no	no	yes	no	no	no
RBR20/24	We've assessed every step of the stay experience to ensure guests have a safe environment they feel they can control through cleaning and distance.	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/24	We launched Hotel Cleanliness Ratings, which customers can see as they book one of our properties. Plus, detailed cleanliness information is available for guests on IHG's websites, app and in our hotels.	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/25	We care for all of our employees and aim to create an environment where people feel a sense of belonging and enjoyment in their work, and where they are able to be at their best and grow their careers.	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/25	A diverse and inclusive culture enriches all of this, and it plays a critical role in how we work better together, growing our business and delivering on our purpose of providing True Hospitality for Good.	yes	no	no	no	no	no
RBR20/25	Due to the severity of the impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry, IHG has needed to make difficult decisions around pay and jobs.	no	no	yes	no	no	no
RBR20/25	At a corporate level, every effort has been made to reduce costs in ways that do not impact jobs, including limiting all discretionary spend and withdrawing our support from shareholders for the first time in our history.	no	no	yes	no	no	no
RBR20/25	We have also recognised that working remotely full time in response to the pandemic has been a significant change for employees.	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/25	While working in this way brings with it many challenges, it also brings lessons we want to build on in the future, such as working in simpler ways and with greater flexibility.	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes
RBR20/25	To keep employees feeling supported and engaged during this challenging year, we have put some key things in place.	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/26	Throughout 2020, we took a creative approach to employee engagement, with an increased number of video meetings and virtual town halls, etc.	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
RBR20/26	We have encouraged regular conversations on feedback and performance between managers and their team members.	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
RBR20/26	Given the unusual and challenging year in 2020, we have also run bespoke ad hoc surveys to understand colleague sentiment and their needs, with regard to such as remote and flexible working, and mental health and wellbeing. These have enabled us to provide the appropriate care and support for our employees.	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
RBR20/26	Due to the impact of the pandemic, our employee engagement survey, completed by employees in corporate and reservations offices and General Managers in hotels, was only conducted once during the year.	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/26	The survey provided employees the opportunity to share their views on key issues relating to company culture, IHG's Covid-19 response, working from home, and more.	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/26	We want to ensure that all our employees feel recognised for their efforts and contributions.	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/26	It is important that everyone feels part of an inclusive and safe environment. We empower our employees to develop and try new things by offering guidance and support, ensuring that they have the tools and resources necessary to grow and develop their careers.	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/27	Despite best collective efforts to protect our hotels and teams by working with our owners to lower operating costs and access financial support, the severity of the crisis and historically low levels of demand have led to difficult decisions to furlough or let go many talented and passionate hotel colleagues.	no	no	yes	no	no	no
RBR20/28	Respecting human rights is fundamental to achieving the UN SDGs and it's an integral part of our global commitment to responsible business. We understand the importance of human rights in relation to our colleagues, guests and the communities in which we operate.	yes	no	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/30	Our colleagues should feel included, valued and respected - not just because it's the right thing to do, or the best way to behave, but because people are the heart of the business. When this happens, colleagues are empowered to voice ideas, while diverse opinions and perspectives spark the innovation IHG needs to stand out.	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/31	We also work globally with several NGOs to employ colleagues with disabilities and ensure we create a supportive environment for them.	no	no	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/32	With more than 5,900 hotels in over 100 countries, we are proud to be at the heart of local communities and recognise the opportunity we have to make a real difference.	yes	no	no	no	no	no
RBR20/32	We form strategic partnerships with NGOs and community organisations, with a focus on providing assistance in times of need and access to valuable skills and opportunities that can help stimulate social and economic growth.	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/32	In 2020, as the impact of Covid-19 affected the everyday lives of billions of people globally and hit our hospitality industry hard, we stepped up as a business and stood beside our partners in these extremely challenging times to play our part in both the response and the recovery.	no	no	yes	no	no	no
RBR20/32	From China and Australia, to the UK and US, we have worked with governments, local authorities and our owners around the world to help hundreds of our hotels provide accommodation to those who need it most during the Covid-19 pandemic.	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/33	To recognise the incredible efforts of frontline workers and our NGO partners around the world, we launched an IHG heroes rate for them, which offers discounted flexible rates at participating hotels.	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/33	In response to Covid-19, many of our hotels found ways to provide food to frontline responders and those in need within their communities.	no	yes	yes	no	no	yes
RBR20/HT	Our new Journey to Tomorrow 2030 plan provides IHG with a powerful framework for the next decade that aims to ensure travel has a beautiful future for everyone.	no	no	no	yes	no	no
RBR20/HT	It's a plan that will make IHG a stronger organisation, where we build upon our inclusive culture and help people thrive.	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
RBR20/HT	By engaging IHG's key stakeholders - colleagues, owners, suppliers, and guests - we can unite behind a shared objective for the greater good.	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/HT	Fulfilling the aims of our plan will require investment not only in the right infrastructure, products and partnerships - but also in relationships.	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/HT	Success will be a team effort, sharing best practice as an industry and working with colleagues, owners, suppliers, charity partners and guests to shape responses far into the future.	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes
RBR20/HT	Our goal is to help shape the future of responsible travel together with those who stay, work and partner with us.	no	no	no	no	no	yes
RBR20/HT	We will support our people and make a positive difference to local communities while preserving our planet's beauty and diversity... Not just today but long into the future.	yes	no	no	yes	no	no