
Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Societal Relevance	1
1.2	Approaches to CR Communication and Business Ethics	3
1.3	Scientific Relevance and Research Question	5
1.4	Methodology	6
1.5	Structure of the Dissertation	8
2	Understanding Aspirational Talk	11
2.1	Theoretical Foundations	12
2.1.1	Speech Act Heritage	12
2.1.2	Communication as Constituting Organizations	14
2.1.3	The Concept of Aspirational Talk	15
2.1.4	Conditions for Performativity	18
2.1.5	Conclusion	21
2.2	Distinction from Other Concepts	21
2.2.1	Focal Points	22
2.2.2	Promises	24
2.3	Side-Effects	28
2.3.1	Benefits	28
2.3.2	Talk-Action	
	Discrepancies as Greenwashing	32
2.3.3	Harmful Consequences	37
2.3.4	Conclusion	43
3	Business Ethics Perspective on Responsibility	45
3.1	The Positive-Negative Asymmetry	46
3.1.1	Corporate Responsibility as Doing Good	46

3.1.2	Criticism of Corporate Responsibility as Doing Good	47
3.1.3	The Do No Harm Principle	49
3.1.4	Conclusion	51
3.2	Trust and Responsibility	52
3.2.1	Characteristics and Functions of Trust	52
3.2.2	The Trust Relationship	54
3.2.3	Conclusion	57
3.3	Expectations and Responsibility	58
3.3.1	The Concept of Corporate Legitimacy	58
3.3.2	The Shared Understanding	60
3.3.3	Relevant Inconsistencies	64
3.3.4	Conclusion	67
3.4	Ethical Investment and Self-Commitment	68
3.4.1	Two Types of Investments	68
3.4.2	Self-Commitment as Ethical Investment	70
3.4.3	Creating Credible Self-Commitment	73
3.4.4	Conclusion	76
4	Synthesis: Applying Business Ethics to Aspirational Talk	77
4.1	Value: Inspire to Engage	77
4.1.1	Criteria for Analysis	78
4.1.2	Description of the Criteria	80
4.1.3	Analysis of the Benefits	83
4.1.4	Conclusion	87
4.2	Reality: Irresponsibility Analysis	88
4.2.1	Identifying General Expectations	89
4.2.2	Diagnosing Specific Expectations	92
4.2.3	Analysis of Relevant Inconsistencies	97
4.2.4	Conclusion	101
4.3	Investments: In a Shared Understanding	103
4.3.1	Investments in Performativity	104
4.3.2	Investments in Responsibility	105
4.3.3	Conclusion	109
5	Conclusion	111
5.1	Discussion of Findings	111
5.1.1	Findings for RQ1	112
5.1.2	Findings for RQ2	113
5.1.3	Findings for RQ3	117

5.2 Contributions and Limitations	118
5.2.1 Theoretical Implications and Limitations	118
5.2.2 Practical Implications and Limitations	120
5.3 Summary and Outlook	124
References	127