

# **Stakeholder Engagement and Corporate Social Responsibility : A Review and an Integrated Conceptual Framework**

**การมีส่วนร่วมของผู้มีส่วนได้เสียและความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมของบริษัท : การทบทวนและบูรณาการกรอบแนวคิด**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to identify the elements of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and those of stakeholder engagement and investigate the relationship between the corporate social responsibility and the stakeholder engagement. Concerning the study's methods, a review of related literature and an analysis of relevant documents were used. The reports were presented using analytical description. The result of this study revealed that the stakeholder engagement had a direct relationship with the corporate social responsibility. Also, it showed that the stakeholder engagement's elements were the dialog styles and the degrees of participation in decision making. Pertaining to the elements of the corporate social responsibility, they consisted of economic responsibilities, legal responsibilities, ethical responsibilities and philanthropic responsibilities. This model addressed a further empirical study needed to be researched in order to verify the relationship of the construction.

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Tel:0-89734-0750 E-Mail:Teeraporn.tong@gmail.com the construction.

## บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาที่มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาแนวคิดและทฤษฎีที่เกี่ยวข้องเพื่อจำแนกองค์ประกอบของความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมของบริษัทและการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้มีส่วนได้เสีย และเพื่อตรวจสอบความล้มเหลวที่ทางความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมของบริษัทและการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้มีส่วนได้เสีย วิธีการศึกษางานวิจัยเรื่องนี้ดำเนินการทบทวนวรรณกรรมและการวิเคราะห์เอกสารนำเสนอรายงานแบบพรรณนาเชิงวิเคราะห์ ผลการศึกษาพบว่าการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้มีส่วนได้เสียมีความล้มเหลวโดยตรงกับความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมของบริษัท โดยองค์ประกอบของการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้มีส่วนได้เสีย ประกอบด้วย รูปแบบของการสนทนา ระดับของการมีส่วนร่วมในการตัดสินใจ องค์ประกอบของความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมของบริษัทประกอบด้วย ความรับผิดชอบด้านเศรษฐกิจ ด้านกฎหมาย ด้านจริยธรรม และด้านการกุศล ซึ่งรูปแบบความล้มเหลวเชิงสาเหตุจากการศึกษาที่เป็นแบบจำลองความล้มเหลวซึ่งต้องดำเนินการศึกษาในเชิงประจักษ์เพื่อทดสอบความล้มเหลวของตัวแปรดังกล่าวสำหรับงานวิจัย ในอนาคต

**คำสำคัญ** : ความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมของบริษัท การมีส่วนร่วมของผู้มีส่วนได้เสีย ทฤษฎีผู้มีส่วนได้เสีย

## Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) was defined by European Commission (2001) as the concept on corporate support provided to the society with the intention to help create a better society and a cleaner environment through a management process based on a willing interaction of stakeholders. CSR has been globally mentioned as it is perceived as being appropriate to be applied in any business operation. This operation with ethics and responsibilities employed in a business world can lead to sustainable success resulting in variously abstract and concrete benefits. They are, for example, a better corporate image, an increased trademark value, and a more corporate reputation (Bevan et al., 2004; Schaltegger & Burritt, 2005; Weber, 2008). As cited by Porter and Kramer (2006), Stephenson (2009) and Weber (2008), CSR also enables more opportunity sources and expand capacity of innovation

creation. Apart from these, it facilitates the corporation in reducing and managing risks from encounters with social pressures and other benefit groups (Bevan et al., 2004; Schaltegger & Burritt, 2005). Nowadays, CSR has become a standardized criterion and a regulation for business organizations in that they are to run their business virtually to express their social responsibilities. Hence, Cheng and Ahmad (2010) state that CSR is a significant part in developing businesses to achieve successes as well as sustainability under diversified and critical competitions these days.

The CSR concept is influenced from stakeholder theory developed by Freeman (1984) with a definition clarified that stakeholders are groups of people or people who probably affect or may be affected from successes of corporate missions. The theory proposes a new method of thought organization on corporate responsibilities. There is a shift from the concept with attention directed to corporate survival and success on the basis of corporate capability in constructing wealth, values and satisfactions for shareholders to the concept in which stakeholders are taken into consideration. This is in line with Mele (2008) as pointed out that a business organization is one of social units. Hence, it must have a social license to operate to produce goods and services. Besides underlining the construction of economic wealth and growth, the results of such business operation should satisfy social needs and expectations as well. It is only best appropriate to mention that not only should successes on the highest profit be stressed, but the business operation with social responsibilities seriously bear into corporate missions should also be put the accent on. Consequently, any problems affecting the stakeholders, the society, and environment causing business risks can be avoided. Then it is essential that the social responsibilities with respect to the stakeholders are to be

more supported. To be exact, forms of casual relationship between the stakeholder engagement and CSR are needed to be studied. Also, elements of the two should be identified so as to improve and gain CSR operation that can be appropriately used with the business operations in Thailand.

## **Materials and Methods**

In this study, related literatures are reviewed and relevant documents are analyzed. The reports are presented using analytical description. The purpose of this study was to identify the elements of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and those of stakeholder engagement and investigate the relationship between the corporate social responsibility and the stakeholder engagement. The theoretically conceptual frameworks used are the stakeholder theory, the Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility proposed by Carroll (1991), and the Ladder of Participation by Arnstein (1969) and Friedman and Miles (2006). The examined information is taken out of papers, research studies, information searches, and online database such as ABI/Inform, Science Direct, Emerald, Academic Search Premier (ASP), and JSTOR.

## **Results and Discussion**

Pertaining to the study, the results and discussion can be categorized into two major issues: related concepts and theory and relationships between CSR and the stakeholder engagement. They are as follows.

1. Related concepts and theory
  - 1) Stakeholder Theory

The term "stakeholder" was first used in 1963 in the internal record of Stanford Research Institute. Its definition is more well-known

from the book entitled "Strategic Management: a Stakeholder Approach as a New Conceptual Framework for Management". According to Freeman (1984), the stakeholder is a group of people or people who can probably affect or be affected by corporate successes. This definition is similar to that of Post et al. (2002) as claimed that it is a group of people or people who can probably affect or be affected by corporate decisions, policies, and operations when such of these are done with considerations given to the stakeholders. Thus, the stakeholder theory offers a new method of organizational management of thought on corporate responsibilities shifting from the emphasis only on corporate survival and successes depending upon corporate capabilities in contributing wealth, values and satisfactions to the shareholders to the concentration extended to other stakeholders. It is wisely suggested that the needs of the highest profits of the shareholders cannot be achieved without a number of satisfactions and need fulfillments of the stakeholders (Foster & Jonker, 2005; Hawkins, 2006). Furthermore, Freeman (1984) shows the relationship between the stakeholder theory and CSR in that the former is a vital basis for creating the concepts of the latter which is an important element for development of a strategic management of the corporations.

Concerning CSR operations, Simmons (2004) points out that the corporations are expected to take more social responsibilities and pay more attention to the stakeholders. They are to focus on dormant stakeholders such as local communities and environment, too. As revealed in Jonker and Foster (2002), consideration provided to the stakeholders should be more widened: the corporations should not care only their shareholders, customers, employees, and suppliers. Rather, more concerns should also be directed to a new form of understanding on corporate management and operation.

The stakeholders can be sorted into different characteristics. Generally, they are grouped into two categories: primary stakeholders and secondary stakeholders. The first group consists of shareholders, investors, employees, customers and suppliers (trading partners). This group is perceived as being basic for business operation and survival. The other group contains general communities, media, benefit groups and the government. The second group comprises of people or groups in the society who can directly or indirectly be affected from corporate activities or decisions made in the first business level. Besides being affected in some aspects, these groups or people are regarded as the influential groups. Nonetheless, they do not have a strong commitment essential for corporate existence (McAlister et al., 2005).

Freeman (1984) develops the stakeholder theory on account of Barnard's conceptual framework (1938) as claimed in the book "The Functions of the Executive" in which managers' positive perspectives towards social responsibilities are supported and mentioned. According to Freeman (1984), corporate executives are to increase satisfactions of a range of influential people such as employees, customers, suppliers, and local community organizations. It is not at all sufficient if the executives emphasize only the needs of the corporate shareholders or the corporate owners. This then leads to the necessity that the executives themselves must do the right thing apart from paying close attention to effects of formal operation. Briefly, the stakeholder theory is related to the construction of CSR and relevant to stakeholder engagement.

## 2) Concepts on Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR)

The concepts on CSR have begun before 1950. Several scholars have studied development on CSR concepts and found a number of evidences demonstrating business organizations' care and worries given to the society. As a result, these have encouraged

more obvious CSR concepts these days. Yet, definitions of the concepts expressed by different scholars in different eras have been undoubtedly different. According to Davis (1960), CSR was described as decision as well as operation made by businesspeople at least with the intention to contribute to direct economic benefits or technical benefits of the corporations. This was in accordance with Friedman (1970) in that CSR was considered as the only business responsibility with an emphasis on making highest profits to shareholders under legal or religious framework prescribed in that country. Afterward, Jones (1980) proposed that CSR itself lied in the fact that besides groups of shareholders and others as determined in laws and contracts, the companies also contained obligations related to other groups in the society. Interestingly, it should be noted as well that WBCSD (2000) mentioned that an ongoing determination with ethics of the business organizations could help sustainably develop economy and at the same time increase life quality of their employees, the employees' families, communities, and the society. This definition claimed by WBCSD was corresponding to that of Carroll and Bunchholz (2006) given that CSR was able to be generally termed as the concept consisting of economic responsibilities, legal responsibilities, ethical responsibilities, and philanthropic responsibilities that was expected from a society at a certain time.

As earlier mentioned, in the past the CSR concepts have paid major attention to an economic dimension with the aim of enhancing the highest incomes to fulfill the needs of business owners and shareholders. Nevertheless, later such attention has been extended to other aspects and dimensions such as society, law, social ethics, environment, stakeholders. Additionally, operation with concentration on willingness has been increased.

Thus, it can be concluded that CSR is a corporate operation that needs coordination among an economic aspect, law commitment, ethical values, and willingly philanthropic performance so that expectations of various stakeholders can be evenly satisfied and hence lead to a sustainable corporate operation and a happy society.

In reviewing related literatures, a great number of studies on CSR have been found. However, as Crane and Matten cited in 2004 the Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibilities suggested by Carroll (1991) is the concept widely investigated. This is mainly because the model is easy to be understood and logically appropriate (Visser, 2005). Significantly, it is empirically tested in different contexts (Shum & Yam, 2011; Ramasamy & Yeung, 2009; Wajdi et al., 2008; Visser, 2005). So, in this study Carroll (1991)'s Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibilities will be examined. Below is the diagram.

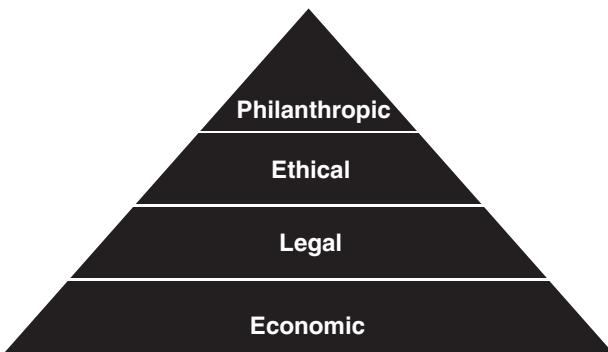


Diagram 1 : Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibilities

Source: Carroll (1991)

From Diagram1, the pyramid can be classified into 4 elements : economic responsibilities, legal responsibilities, ethical responsibilities, and philanthropic responsibilities. Concerning the first element, the business operation stresses increasing profits in order

to express a responsibility to the corporation's founder. Focus is driven to increased earnings per share, clinging to possible profits, maintaining a strong competition position, sustaining effective operation levels, and determining the point that a profit made indicates a business success. Regarding the legal responsibilities, the business is to be operated under social expectation that it must follow the laws and the regulations proclaimed by the government. Therefore, such operation is done without any offences to the laws as if the operation were a good citizen of the country. More to the point, in operating the business goods and services should meet the lowest level of the regulations and the laws. Here, the business success is influenced by corporate capabilities in satisfying legal responsibilities. In connection with the third, the ethical responsibilities, they are relevant to the business operation expected by stakeholders or members in the society. To clarify this, their expectation is that the corporations should have a standard that is higher than that determined in the laws. They also require that the business operation must conform to expectations of social customs and ethical norms. Besides, respects on the ethical norms and social moralities are to be made. This is to say, a condition of being a good citizen of such corporations can be achieved when they complete moral and ethic expectations of the society. Relating to the last, the philanthropic responsibilities, they pertain to the business operation that satisfies social needs in order that the corporations can be good corporate citizens in the society. At this point, the emphasis is on engagements of a human welfare promotion. The promotion is supported with financial and human resources of the business organizations and this is to be willingly done with the intention of boosting communities' life quality.

### 3) Concepts on stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder theory and concepts on CSR represent the business operation's natures that economic dimension, social dimension, legal dimension, environmental dimension, social norm dimension and stakeholders should at the same time be regarded. More supports are given to external stakeholders and considerations owing to them are widened in perspectives: instead of perceiving the stakeholders as just being shareholders, customers, employees and suppliers as they previously were; more concerns are directed to a new form of understanding on management and operation (Jonker and Foster, 2002). For example, corporate policies relevant to corporate stakeholders such as customers, employees, shareholders, trading partners, competitors, government sector and communities are highlighted. To be exact, the corporations are responsible to satisfy the needs of their stakeholders. It is, therefore, crucial that the corporate organizations are to construct a balanced relation among their various stakeholders through a well managed engagement.

Trustworthiness and cooperation building provides the corporations with more advantages in competitions. Importantly, these advantages can be developed through the process of stakeholder engagement. Numerous scholars define the engagement as a process leading to contexts of dynamic interaction, respects given to one another, conversations, and changes with the purpose to create trustworthiness on the basis of participation (Andriof and Waddock, 2002). The explanation is in line with that of Kaler (2003) as cited that the engagement process is related to communication, advisory opinions and exchanges. Gable and Shireman (2005) similarly cite that it is a relation management process done in an attempt to enhance more understanding and integration between the corporations and their stakeholders. Correspondingly,

Manetti (2001) describes it as a process in which the corporations and their stakeholders take part in making decisions, so they can engage in business management, information sharing, conversations and creation of mutual responsibility forms. In conclusion, the stakeholder engagement can be termed as a process on construction of interactions between the corporations and their stakeholders. They participate in decision-making processes and business management. This is operated through information sharing, conversation, advisory opinions, and exchanges to express corporate responsibilities given to stakeholders. In so doing, trustworthiness and respects between both sides of them can be built, and mutual responsibility forms can at the same time be created.

Later, the concepts on the stakeholder engagement are gradually improved with the intention that public sector agencies can join in policy determination. The obvious improvement can be seen in Ladder of Stakeholder Engagement proposed by Arnstein (1969). The ladder has eight steps representing three levels of participation. Step 1 is on manipulation. In this step, the stakeholders are educated and provided with information in order to change their expectations. Therapy is considered as Step 2, and positive information is continuously given to them as a cure to correct their beliefs. The first two steps demonstrate a non-participation level. Step 3, Step 4, and Step 5 are on informing, consultation, and placation, respectively. These three steps represent a medium level of participation expressing humanity and degrees of tokenism. Namely, the stakeholders have a chance to express their opinions and comments. However, there is no guarantee that these opinions and comments will be truly put into practice as the final decision belongs to those empowered to make a real decision. Step 6 of partnership provides the stakeholders with a chance to negotiate with a former authoritarian. Step 7 is on delegated power while Step 8 is with reference

to citizen control that a complete management is empowered. Notably, the last three steps show an advanced level of participation demonstrating levels of citizen power in enhancing decision-making power levels.

Subsequently, Friedman and Miles (2006) construct a developed ladder of the stakeholder engagement with twelve steps illustrating three participatory levels. The first three steps: manipulation, therapy, and informing are recognized as being initial accounting for a low participation level of the stakeholder engagement in decision-making. The stakeholders are informed on decisions made through the Internet, summary reports, leaflets, journals, newsletters, social and environmental reports produced by the corporations, or publications. The next four steps as respectively named as explain, placation, consultation and negotiation signify a medium participation level of decision-making. The participation in these steps is to denote tokenism. That is to say, the stakeholders are able to express their opinions, but the final decision still depends upon the corporations. In connection with the information delivered to the stakeholders, this can be done through two-way dialogs, workshops, advisory panels, task forces, focus groups, roundtables, stakeholder interviews, and multi-way dialogs such as negotiations with the aim of gaining reactions. On the subject of an advanced level of participation, it can be found from Step 8 to Step 12: involvement, collaboration, partnerships, delegated power, and stakeholder control. These steps can be operated through such multi-way dialogues as constructive dialogues, strategic alliances, joint ventures, board representations, and community projects.

Integrating the concepts of Arnstein (1969) and Friedman & Miles (2006), to conclude the element of stakeholders engagement can be categorized as shown in Table 1.

Elements	Ladder of the stakeholder engagement				
	Informing	Consultation	Negotiation	Partnerships	Stakeholder control
<b>Degrees of participation in decision making</b>	Low	Medium		High	
<b>Dialogue styles</b>	One-way dialogue	Two-way dialogue		Multi-way dialogue	

From Table 1, there are five steps of engagement ladder : informing, consultation, negotiation, partnerships, and stakeholder control. The elements signifying quality of stakeholder participation can be categorized into two groups. The first group is involving the degree of participation in decision making. At this point, the stakeholders possess opportunities to express their opinions or recommendations concerning corporate plans and decision-making process. The levels of participation can be ranked in low, medium and advanced levels. The other group is on a dialogue style. Here, the information that can probably be facts, ideas, opinions, feelings, attitudes, and emotions delivering between people from internal and external organizations. The information delivery can be performed through one-way dialogues, two-way dialogues, and multi-way dialogues.

## 2. Relationship between stakeholder engagement and corporate social responsibility

Several scholars have empirically researched the relationship of both of them in different contexts. In the study conducted by Prado-Lorenzo, et al (2009), the stakeholder engagement and reports on CSR under GRI report frameworks is investigated. 99 corporations in Spain except financial corporations are examined. The result reveals that their stakeholders have influences on CSR reports. Particularly, those from governmental sector are related to regulation construction so that the businesses will transparently demonstrate their social and environmental behaviors. Moreover, although the shareholders who are at the same time the corporate stakeholders may in a short term be interested in information disclosure on corporate financial effectiveness, their attentions are also directed to the corporate survival in the long run. Accordingly, they need the corporations to disclose the information on social and environmental operations also. The study is similar to that of Manetti (2011) in that qualities of the stakeholder engagement in 174 corporate sustainability reports under GRI report frameworks in England, Spain, and Portugal are examined. The result shows that the stakeholder engagement is a critical element and it is determined to be a corporate strategy. The operation found is in the forms of meeting and consultation as well as follow and data collection. The stakeholders can be accessed through the Internet, electronic mails, telephones and meetings. Concerning opinions expressed by the stakeholders, they can be done through group discussions and discussions on relevant websites.

According to Kraisornsuthasinee and Swierczek (2006), social responsibilities of the corporations in Thailand are studied. The research tool employed is an in-depth interview. 7 corporations that are members of Thailand Business Council for Sustainable Development were

interviewed. The seven corporations are selected from industrial groups of financial business, industrial products, real estates and construction, and resources. The result again proves that the stakeholder engagement is emphasized and it is a factor affecting CSR operations. Specifically, the corporations in the group of resources pay the highest attention to the stakeholder engagement in the long run. They pioneer community projects on petrol stations for the communities and distribute local products of such communities to the petrol stations' minimarts. As for other corporations, the stakeholder engagement is operated as appropriate. The operation is performed in collaboration with representatives from governmental organizations and nonprofit organizations to develop communities, religions, educations, and sports. This is along the lines of the study done by Greenwood (2007) as mentioned that the stakeholder engagement is related to CSR. In this study, the engagement is perceived more complicated for it is also an element of morality. The model of the stakeholder engagement showing the relationship between the two factors of the engagement itself and the representatives of the stakeholders are then presented in Greenwood's study.

To sum up, the stakeholder engagement has a direct relationship with the corporate social responsibility (CSR) as shown in Diagram 2. The elements of the former consist of the dialog styles and the degrees of participation in decision making. Pertaining to the elements of the corporate social responsibility, they consisted of economic responsibilities, legal responsibilities, ethical responsibilities and philanthropic responsibilities. This framework is developed for a study in contexts of listed companies in the Stock Exchange of Thailand. Since investments in such companies contain high risks, the stakeholders making investment decisions then usually concentrate on the businesses with the social responsibilities in order not to face with problems affecting other stakeholders and the society.

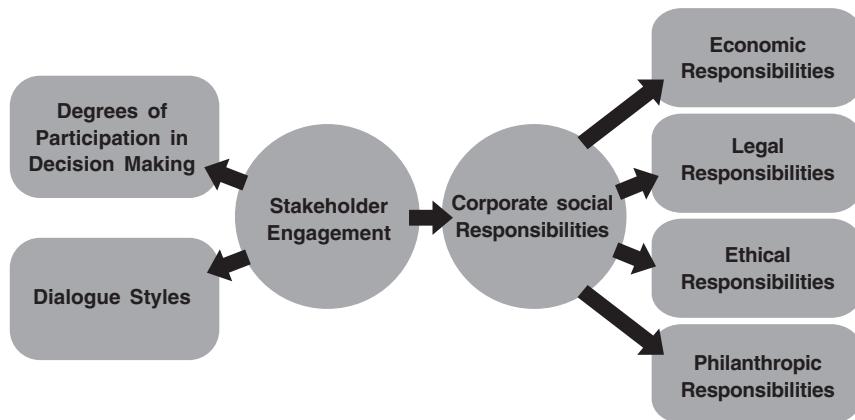


Diagram 2 : Conceptual framework of corporate social responsibility

## Conclusion

This study aims at verifying the relationship between CSR and the stakeholder engagement and classifying the elements of both of them. In so doing, relevant literatures and documents are reviewed and analyzed. The reports are presented using analytical description. Concerning the results of this study, a casual model demonstrating the stakeholder engagement factors influencing CSR is finally gained. However, the variables need to be empirically researched in the future in order to verify their relationship. What is more, internal and external factors of the organizations should be further researched so as to see whether they contain influences on CSR. This can be academically beneficial in enhancing management knowledge. Hopefully, their results can be employed with the purpose of improving CSR in the future.

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