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Entrepreneurial CSR, managerial role, and firm resources: A case study approach

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to contribute to the extant body of the entrepreneurship and business management literature, investigating corporate social responsibility and its implications for firms' competitiveness. The cases of four different firms are examined through the lens of the resource-based view of the firm and role theory.

Design/methodology/approach – Face to face and telephone interviews were conducted with the owners and managers of four model firms identified in Western Australia.

Findings – While financial outcomes clearly stand out as the end goal for engaging in CSR related practices, the importance of firm managers' entrepreneurial role emerges, in utilising existing resources to exploit business opportunities to ultimately achieve competitiveness, benefit the organisation, the community, and society. Management's ability to reconcile financial objectives and CSR practices give rise to the notion of entrepreneurial CSR.

Originality/value – The study demonstrates that management's entrepreneurial drive, skills, knowledge, expertise, or strategic strengths can identify substantial opportunities. Furthermore, the investment of resources to develop socially responsible products and services can help achieve CSR and the firm's bottom line. Finally, learning about participants' motivations for engaging in CSR could identify areas, concepts, and directions to be considered by entrepreneurs, compared/contrasted to previous research, or even operationalised by enterprises of different sizes elsewhere.

Keywords: CSR, initiatives, firm ownership/management, motivation, resource-based view, role theory.

Introduction

Increasingly, firms' managers are asked to deliver innovative answers to fundamental problems, and firm leaders are becoming proactive in addressing calls for increased CSR (Margolis and Walsh, 2003). Defined "as any discretionary corporate activity intended to further social welfare" (Barnett, 2007, p. 795), CSR is also related to moral and ethical issues that concern corporate behaviour and decision-making (Branco and Rodrigues, 2006).

The links between CSR and corporate social performance (CSP), and corporate financial performance (CFP) have been investigated (e.g., Brammer and Millington, 2008). However, over the decades, debate has surrounded the discussion of such links (e.g., Barnett, 2007). In their summarisation of CFP-CSR relationships, Margolis and Walsh (2001) identified mixed results. Indeed, analysing CSP an independent variable identified a positive CFP-CSP relationship in 53% of the studies; however, when CSP was analysed as a dependent variable, the percentage increased to 68 (Margolis and Walsh, 2001).

Other authors (Burke and Logsdon, 1997) propose a broader analysis of the impact of CSR by essentially focusing on strategic, as opposed to financial benefits for the firm. The authors identify five strategy related dimensions, namely, centrality, specificity, proactivity, voluntarism, and visibility as potentially beneficial in assessing the value that CSR

programmes may create for firms. One of these dimensions, centrality, provides managers with feedback and direction as to whether or not engaging in actions or making certain decisions may be consistent with firms' goals, mission, and objectives (Burke and Logsdon, 1997).

Despite a wealth of CSR related research, there are knowledge gaps, for instance, in that marginal attention has been paid to smaller firms (Evans and Sawyer, 2010; Russo and Tencati 2009). Indeed, researchers have predominantly focused on large at the expense of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Perrini et al., 2007). Similarly, while the behaviour of large businesses' management is undoubtedly significant to the economy and shareholders, comparatively, small or family businesses are marginally studied (Fitzgerald et al., 2010). In the context of family firms, Dyer and Whetten (2006) affirm that little information exists concerning the impact of management and family ownership on CSP. Additionally, despite the key significance of Western Australia for Australia's economy (ABS, 2014), a literature review conducted for this study identifies a dearth of CSR related research, particularly among family and SMEs.

In choosing a case study approach, this study examines CSR from a sample of four firms operating in Western Australia. Two of these firms employ 40 or fewer people full-time, and two employ between 300 and 1000 people worldwide. Enterprises employing 20 or more people but less than 200 are considered medium in size in Australia, while those employing 200 or above are considered large enterprises (ABS, 2001). Also, three of these firms are currently exporting products/services. The study addresses the following research questions (RQs) related to CSR:

RQ1: How, that is, in what specific ways are the participating firms engaging in CSR activities/initiatives?

RQ2: What, if any, are management's main motivations for such engagement?

In examining these themes from the perspective of owners/managers, also those from two medium size firms, the study contributes in helping address the identified knowledge gaps (Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Perrini et al., 2007). Furthermore, helping answer the research questions above could provide valuable practical insights to industry stakeholders and academics. For instance, learning about participants' motivations for engaging in CSR could identify areas, concepts, and directions to be considered by entrepreneurs, compared to previous research, or even operationalised by enterprises of different sizes elsewhere. In addition, both the resource based view (RBV) of the firm and role theory are incorporated as the theoretical frameworks. This adoption could not only enhance the understanding of the above themes, but also provide a foundation to help illuminate future CSR related research, including on medium size firms. Consequently, the study will also address the following research question:

RQ3: How do the proposed theoretical frameworks help explain CSR among the participating firms?

Literature Review

The RBV of the firm

In seeking to gain understanding of the importance of resources and managerial roles of the studied firms as elements positively affecting their CSR activities and practices, the study incorporates the RBV of the firm as one of the theoretical frameworks. This adoption is also

in alignment with contemporary research conducted among Australian SMEs (Torugsa et al., 2013), which highlights the usefulness of RBV as a theoretical framework to understand CSR initiatives. Barney et al. (2011) underline the usefulness of the theory as a powerful and prominent tool in helping describe, predict, and explain organisational relationships.

The seminal work of Barney (1991) is central to the earlier development of the theory. Barney (1991) conceptualises a firm's internal and external analyses, combining strengths and weaknesses in the first, and opportunities and threats in the second. The internal analysis evolves into a resource-based model, while the external analysis results in environmental models of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). According to Wacker (1998), conceptual definitions are one of the key requirements when developing theory. In line with this point, and in referring to earlier research (Daft, 1983), Barney (1991) provides a broader definition of firm resources, to include capabilities, firm attributes, knowledge, information, and organisational processes.

Similarly, Barney (1991) explains that competitive advantage results when a firm is executing value-creating strategies, which are not simultaneously implemented by any potential or current competitor. These aspects also apply to sustained competitive advantage, with the addition that competitors are incapable of duplicating the benefits of the firm's strategy. Barney (1991) contends that, while sustained competitive advantage may last longer periods of time- and therefore be time-bound as other researchers assert (Jacobsen, 1988; Porter, 1985), fundamentally, it is competitors' inability to duplicate a firm's strategy that determines such advantage.

Heterogeneity and immobility or imperfect mobility in firms' resources are two important concepts Barney (1991) refers to as critical in sustained competitive advantage. Heterogeneity suggests that firms with different capabilities can compete or at least breakeven in the marketplace (Peteraf, 1993). Moreover, within an industry context, heterogeneity may reveal that superior productive dynamics are in short supply (Peteraf, 1993). Also, when firms are heterogeneous concerning strategically important resources they possess, barriers to mobility and entry will exist for potential competitors (Barney, 1991).

Imperfectly mobile resources are those that cannot be traded, particularly in cases where aspiring imitators would have difficulties of repeating and discovering developmental processes (Peteraf, 1989). Furthermore, tradeable resources, with more value for a firm currently employing them, may be considered imperfectly mobile (Peteraf 1993). A similar explanation by Dierickx and Cool (1989) posits that implementing a particular strategy may demand 'nonappropriable' assets. These assets may originate when there is an absence of defined property rights, and not markets exist for such assets, for instance, in the cases of loyalty or trust (Dierickx and Cool, 1989). While clearly not all firm resources may be heterogeneous and immobile, not all firms may achieve sustained competitive advantage. However, to achieve such advantage, Barney (1991) presents four attributes that must be fulfilled; a firm's resources must be:

Valuable, in that such resources enable firms' management to implement or develop strategies to improve their effectiveness or efficiency.

Rare: Barney (1991) acknowledges that the degree of 'rareness' required to generate competitive advantage is difficult to establish. However, he suggests that when firms'

valuable resources are unique compared to those of other potential or actual competitors, at the very least, those resources will create competitive advantage.

Imperfectly imitable: The assertion that firms are intrinsically social and historical entities, and management's ability to exploit and/or acquire resources is based on their place in space and time (Barney, 1991). Once such unique time in history passes, other firms not possessing time and space-dependent resources are unable to obtain them, rendering those resources imperfectly imitable (Barney, 1991).

Non-substitutable, that is, no equivalent substitutes must exist for a particular firm resource (Barney, 1991); this degree of non-substitutability, or inability by would-be-competitors highlights the potential for sustained competitive advantage.

While the RBV of the firm has been applied in research examining CSR as a component of corporations' strategy (McWilliams et al., 2006), this approach has however received limited attention (Jones and Bartlett, 2009). One study, which examined SMEs and CSR practices (Torugsa et al., 2013) revealed the usefulness of the theory in that, by adopting value-creation strategies that make the most of firms' capabilities (RBV-related principle), firms can also "maximise financial returns whilst proactively making progress towards CSR" (Torugsa et al., 2013, p. 383). Similarly, recent research conducted among SMEs (Stoian and Gilman, 2017) adopted a strategic approach to CSR based on the RBV of the firm. The authors' findings confirmed that CSR initiatives associated with the local community were conducive to firm growth, in particular among firms engaging in cost leadership strategies. Furthermore, in employing CSR initiatives associated with their workforce, those SMEs focusing on quality-driven or differentiation strategies can attain fast growth and avoid decline in sales (Stoian and Gilman, 2017).

Role theory

Contemporary research discusses the role of organisations and their leaders in executing CSR initiatives. First, concerning organisations' responses to globalisation forces, Scherer and Palazzo (2011) underscore the importance of acknowledging "a new political role of business that goes beyond mere compliance with legal standards and conformity with moral rule" (p. 906). With regard to organisations' leaders, a study conducted among company managers (Godos-Díez et al., 2011) revealed the role of these individuals in driving CSR practices. Thus, the significance of managerial/organisational role in implementing CSR practices justified the use of role theory in the present research.

Markham et al. (2010) explain that role theory can facilitate examination of or reflection on resources and ancillary processes over which the corresponding role player has influence. The role player assumes "a position or an associated position in any given relationship" (Markham et al. 2010, p. 405), including boss-employee, or seller-buyer. The theory can also help in observation of roles themselves, which, among other outcomes, might lead to action (Markham et al., 2010).

Thus, role theory contributes to the examination of a range of role related behaviours, including evaluation, performance, expectations, sanctions, and norms (Markham et al., 2010). Griffin et al. (2007) identify a lack of theoretical frameworks for integrating or differentiating different constructs that help explain individual performance and its association with effectiveness" (Griffin et al., 2007). The authors hence highlight the significance of role theory in terms of its approach to shed light on the comprehensive set of

work responsibilities that are part of a role, by encompassing individual work behaviour and organisational context.

Biddle's (1986) contribution to role theory is significant to the present research. Based on earlier examinations from the fields of social psychology and sociology, Biddle (1986) discusses the following five perspectives of the theory:

Functional: Generally, functional theory focuses on characteristic behaviours of people occupying social positions within socially stable systems, and helps describe different parts of a stable social system, why the system is stable, and how it might encourage conformity among participants (Biddle, 1986).

Symbolic interactionist: Citing the work of Mead (1934), Biddle (1986) explains that this theory stresses on the evolution of roles based on social interactions, and on different cognitive concepts through which social actors interpret and understand their conduct or that of others. Further, roles are perceived to reflect attitudes, norms, negotiation, or contextual demands. Another emphasis of 'symbolic interactionists' is associated with role taking, relationships among roles, stress (from role-taking), and emotions (Biddle, 1986).

Structural: Essentially, the central focus of structural theory is on social environments, and less on individuals; though these are still significant. Indeed, the theory primarily emphasises on social structures, conceptualised as stable organisations of sets of people, called 'statuses' or 'social positions.' These individuals share similar behaviours or roles, directed towards other sets of people within the structure (Biddle, 1986).

Organisational: Hierarchical, task-oriented, and preplanned social systems occurring within organisations are at the core of this theory; roles in these organisations are suggested to be caused by normative expectations, and related to social positions (Biddle, 1986). However, roles may differ among individuals; indeed, they may reflect pressures from informal groups, and official demands within an organisation (Biddle, 1986). Because sources for norms are numerous, role conflicts among individuals may appear, and subsequently lead to strain. To cope with these potentially negative situations, individuals must find solutions or implement strategies so that they feel happier, and their organisation can prosper (Biddle, 1986).

Cognitive: The fundamental emphasis of the theory is associated with relationships between behaviour and role expectations. In particular, attention is paid to social conditions that result in expectations, to the effects that expectations can have on social conduct, and to techniques for gauging expectations. Cognitive theorists are also concerned with ways in which individuals perceive the expectations of others, and with the potential impacts that these perceptions could have on behaviour (Biddle, 1986).

While there is a growing body of research discussing the links between RBV of the firm and organisations' CSR initiatives, those between role theory and CSR are still absent in contemporary research. This lack of research is surprising given the extensive acknowledgement of the significance of the role of organisations or individuals in facilitating or executing CSR activities and initiatives (e.g., Godos-Díez et al., 2011; Scherer and Palazzo (2011). Despite the richness of its conceptual tools, its potential to tie together agent-structure divides, or various levels of analysis, role theory has not been fashionable (Wehner and Thies, 2014). By incorporating the theory as a lens to examine CSR initiatives from the perspectives of entrepreneurs, the present study will make an additional important contribution.

Methods

The present study adopts the RBV of the firm and role theory to examine management's level of engagement in CSR activities, and motivations among participants for such involvement. The study is based on the cases of four firms, two medium size and to large, one of them family owned, and three operating globally. The identified research gaps in the literature concerning CSR, family and SMEs (Evans and Sawyer, 2010; Fitzgerald et al., 2010; Perrini et al. 2007; Russo and Tencati, 2009), and the dearth of research conducted in Western Australia on CSR, particularly among family and SMEs provided opportunities for addressing some of these limitations.

In line with Yin (1981), and Baxter and Jack (2008), a multiple-case study methodology is used, in that four different firms are investigated. Case studies examine contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, particularly when boundaries between context and phenomena are unclear (Yin, 1981). Importantly, case study research provides opportunities for theory development (Eisenhardt 1989). Moreover, developing theory from case study research could produce theory that is testable, interesting and accurate (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Moreover, the characteristic of theory development "makes inductive case research consistent with the emphasis on testable theory within mainstream deductive research" (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p. 25).

Flyvbjerg (2006) explains that case study research focuses on 'why' and 'how' questions, and can examine views directly related to certain phenomena, as well as "close in" on real-life situations" (p. 235). The present research fits these criteria. For example, RQ1 seeks to answer the 'how' or the extent to which participants' firms are involved in CSR activities, while the 'why' question is represented by the motivations of firms' management/ownership to engage in those CSR activities (RQ2).

In case study research, quantitative or qualitative evidence can be used, for instance, through observations, fieldwork, verbal reports, archival records, or a combination thereof (Yin, 1981). This study adopted a qualitative methodology, which focusses on in-depth explorations (Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, and Gruber, 2011). The qualitative case study method offers researchers tools to investigate "complex phenomena within their contexts" (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 544). The decision to use a qualitative methodology to investigate CSR among entrepreneurs is also based on the usefulness of using such approach, which is demonstrated in previous research. For example, Öberseder et al. (2011) employed the methodology, which also recommends diverse and small samples, to examine the influence of CSR perceptions to make purchases, thereby interviewing 22 individuals. The authors found that participants' assessment of CSR initiatives represented a hierarchically structured, complex process that did not automatically led to their decision to make purchases.

More related to the present research, Jamali et al.'s (2009) also highlighted the value of a qualitative method, when they compares SMEs and multinational corporations (MNCs) with regard to their CSR orientations. Their findings revealed some fundamental differences between the two groups. Among SME managers, there was a philanthropic notion of CSR, namely, as a duty or responsibility parallel to that of the firm, or on top of central business transactions. In comparison, when addressing ethical, discretionary, legal or economic areas of CSR, MNC managers' predominant focus was on economic aspects. This finding led Jamali et al. (2009) to suggest that, among members of the MNC group, CSR was perceived

more holistically, and that economic aspects were highlighted more, and at the expense of discretionary philanthropic elements.

A preliminary round of meetings and interviews with nine industry associations, government, and regional development agency representatives helped identify 24 model firms operating in Western Australia, with known innovative and other forward thinking practices. This identification process follows a snowballing or ‘chain’ sampling, a procedure researchers use to gain access to potential informants through information provided by different informants (Noy, 2008), which in this study is information from experts.

The identified firms were subsequently contacted, informed of the purpose of the study, and invited to take part in the study via face-to-face or telephone interviews. Initially, eight of these firms agreed to participate in the study. In the process gathering data from these organisations, it was determined that, while the majority follow standard CSR practices, particularly in providing employment, donating goods and money, or through sponsorships, four of these firms are implementing, or are planning to implement distinctive CSR practices.

During the months of September and December of 2015, face-to-face interviews were first conducted with four individuals working for three of the firms; the average time of these interviews was 70 minutes. Given the significant geographic distance between one firm’s location and the researchers’ institution, the fourth interview was first conducted by telephone, and lasted 45 minutes. However, the participant agreed to be subsequently visited in December of 2015. The visit allowed for first hand observations of the firm’s operations and for a second, in-depth, face-to-face interview with the same owner; the visit and interviews lasted over 180 minutes. To complement the data collected through the interviews, and aligned with Yin (1981), the participating firms’ websites, as well as industry reports of these firms, whenever available, were analysed.

The five interviews were digitally recorded with participants’ consent; during the interviews, written notes were also taken by the research team. These data were subsequently transcribed verbatim, and cross-checked by the researchers for accuracy and consistency. Content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002) was used to help identify main themes emerging from the data.

The study is limited, particularly in conveniently sampling the participating firms known to industry and government experts; therefore, the findings may not allow for making generalisations. This limitation is recognised by Cavaye (1996), while Darke et al. (1998) note the degree of subjectivity in both the data collection and analysis of case studies. Irrespective of the limitations, the four firms exhibited a unique capacity within their industry to strategically define and execute entrepreneurial and innovative CSR. These firms distinguished themselves from others through their owner/managers’ forward-thinking characteristics.

Demographic characteristics: participants and their firms

Table 1 provides a summary with basic demographic characteristics of participants and the firms where they operate. Given the request by two of the four firm managers to not disclose the names of their organisations, a decision was made to use the same protocol for all four participating firms in this study. Firm 1 (F1) is a family owned firm, medium in size; the participant, labelled as F1P1 in the next sections, is one of the family owners. This firm has operated for over 10 years; however, the owner has over 40 years of industry experience, first

as grower. The firm specialises in packing, marketing, supplying and exporting a food product overseas.

Table 1 Here

Firm 2 (F2) is medium in size, is involved in recycling organic carbon and in composting, and is owned by two business partners. F2 has existed for over 20 years; the participant (F2P2) is the chief executive officer (CEO) and has several decades of industry experience. The participant joined the company in 2011.

Firm 3 (F3) is a large firm (300 employees worldwide), over 30 years old, and trades in technical sales and distribution systems, in mining an industrial mineral, and in different aspects of the supply chain of this mineral in its various processed forms. The two participants, F3P1 (International Sales Manager) and F3P2 (CEO) have at least one decade of experience working at the firm. Firm 4 (F4) is also a large firm, with around 1,000 employees globally, over 10 years old, and operates in the architecture, planning and urban/interior design industry. The two business partners managing the firm have more than three decades of industry experience. F4P4, one of the business partners, is also the company chairman.

Results

RQ1, RQ2: Firms' extent of involvement in CSR activities/initiatives, motivation

Overall, regardless of the industry and the size of the participating firm, involvement in CSR activities denotes participants' entrepreneurial drive, whereby CSR is perceived as a goal to improve their community or society, and at the same time a potential business opportunity. Thus, the emergence of 'entrepreneurial CSR' is a fundamental finding identified during the interviews; entrepreneurial CSR is summarised as follows.

First, the term 'enterprise' is associated with actions consisting of implementing innovations, and the individuals implementing those innovations are the entrepreneurs (Schumpeter 1934). Second, and despite its many definitions (Gartner, 1990), entrepreneurship has been referred to as 'new entry', which can be operationalized in the form of entering either already established or new markets with existing or new goods and/or services (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996). Third, Sweezy (1943) identifies several characteristics of entrepreneurs, including an ability to value the potential of an innovation, being able to overcome social or psychological resistances preventing them from "doing new things" (p. 94), and have leadership qualities. The following sections present how the different firms are engaging in entrepreneurial CSR related activities, and why they are engaged.

Firm 1

F1P1 first reflected on the different phases of her family business. From being exclusively a grower of the product the firm is involved in, increasing competition from growers of the same product forced the family to consider new ideas and possibilities, clearly underlining the firm ownership's entrepreneurial spirit. Today, the family made the strategic decision to discontinue being a producer, and instead, identified opportunities as a packager, marketer, consultant, and exporter of the same product, now grown by several dozen other, near-by producers. The desire to contribute toward the survival of local farming generations, guarantee future food production, and also benefit the firm were at the centre of F1P1's business philosophy. One first important aspect related to CSR and implemented by management was looking after producers' long-term welfare; these managerial philosophy was operationalized through innovation and entrepreneurial drive: "*We created pre-packs,*

and punnets, and net bags... but now we are going to need to do more than that because no matter how great you are in your marketing, you still have to do more than that... so we are constantly thinking of how to do things differently to maximise the return of the growers”

Another key aspect linking entrepreneurship and CSR became obvious when P1F1 identified the significant food wastage across many of Australia’s farms, particularly due to very strict specifications from retailers and the consumer market. In some cases, such wastage is as high as 40% of the final product, which ends discarded, or ploughed on the fields, while growers do not earn any income for the smaller bananas, the marginal rust spots on fruits or vegetables, or small blemishes. Regarding this important aspect, Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2016) identify a growing interest between retailers and food marketers, coupled with innovative ideas, such as cooperation across the supply chain and its actors, in tackling wastage while developing business opportunities.

A third important aspect was management’s moral obligation to look after a vulnerable age group, the elderly: *“We felt that [the age sector’s] ... budget allocations are really low, food wise, they have to feed within budget... So a lot of the problems in aged care is that they get cheaper cuts, but it is too tough [sic] to chew because they do not have the teeth...”*

With some potential threats in the horizon, including oversupply of food production, P1F1 also foresaw the potential for those threats to be transformed into business opportunities. In line with Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2016), the firm management’s philosophy of turning problems into innovative solutions became apparent, seeking to address several social issues while at the same time benefit the firm’s bottom line: *...So, we invested in this processing facility... On-site observations confirmed that the equipment includes latest technologies to process and tenderise foods, which, in the case of consumers in the age care group, could have significant positive implications. The project, developed over a three-year period, and now in its final stages, encompasses the use of local products, including the product the firm markets, as well as other local produce, to produce foods for the elderly population.*

Firm 2

F2P2’s comments underline the potential for the firm to contribute to society in various forms while benefiting financially, again, highlighting the significance of ‘entrepreneurial CSR’ as a business philosophy. Before working at the firm, F2P2 had already been introduced to its philosophy, which was a fundamental reason for joining the firm: *“That was not my plan, but when I looked at this business everything I believe in is here ...”* Earlier on in his life, and by doing consulting work for the current firm, F2P2 became familiar with its way of operating: *“along the way I met this firm... they were one of my favourite clients. I just liked what they stood for, and what they were trying to do.”*

The participant referred to the nature of the business, stating that it generates revenue at both ends of the business spectrum, first, by taking waste (green waste, oil waste), and second, by transforming waste into compost, which is then sold as, for instance, as organic matter for farms. By taking waste that otherwise might take up landfill space, the firm is aligning with socially responsible practices.

Moreover, the intrinsic aspects related to the firm’s philosophy initially motivated the participant to become part of the firm in the role of chief executive officer; these intrinsic aspects eventually merged with those of an extrinsic nature. Indeed, the notion of the ‘triple-

bottom-line', which essentially implies that ultimate success for a corporation not only can be measured by financial, but also by environmental, or social/ethical performance (Norman and McDonald, 2004), were underlying motivational factors.

Furthermore, environmentally friendly practices not only can provide benefits for the environment and society, but also improve the firm's finances (F2P2): *"One of the main reasons why I took this job on...[is] because if I can be part of bringing compost grand scale to broad agriculture, I can fundamentally change... the impact, probability, and health of crops..."* This finding is in clear contrast to that of studies revealing external pressures (García Sánchez et al., 2014; Hond et al., 2014; Tate et al., 2014) as key motives to become engaged in CSR practices. Essentially, firm's management took the initiative in such practices, and maximised business opportunities aligned with their bottom line, while contributing to the overall good of their community or society. Importantly, the participant noted that the firm has been profitable for nearly two decades, clearly highlighting the opportunities for owners/managers to reconcile both CSR and financial goals.

F2P2 also reflected on the leadership role of the two founders of the firm in two different areas, explaining that one co-founder is a 'world-class pragmatist', grew up on a farm, and has a practical attitude concerning business management, the other is a 'world-class scientist', who possesses a wealth of scientific knowledge. After initially meeting, the two founders started the business with two other people; after slow or static growth for many years, in 2014 the firm doubled its size in number of employees, and also grew 50% in terms of capacity. These latest developments again demonstrate the entrepreneurial attitude of the firm's management, including F2P2, the significance of such human resources in tapping into opportunities while at the same time contributing to society; as F2P2 commented: *"So the whole notion of sustainability is: let's try and make the world a better place, take better care of people, and make as much money, or more money... as we can. What a powerful idea..."*

Firm 3

Different aspects associated with entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs' characteristics (Gartner, 1990, Lumpkin and Dess, 1996; Schumpeter, 1934; Sweezy, 1943) clearly play a role in Firm 3's activities, again, illustrating strong associations with entrepreneurial CSR. First, F3P1 used the term 'from cradle to grave' to describe the firm management's proactive strategy to have control over the entire product supply chain, from the moment the mineral is extracted from the ground to the moment it is sold, and, more recently, to recycle the used final product, enabling its reuse: *"It is very unusual for a mining company to be involved in every stage, from the production to the end use basically... we are offering the [mineral] a second 'lease' of life. And we are the only [mineral] mining company that is supplying that service at the moment. It [the product] used to go to the landfill beforehand."*

Second, according to F3P2, the firm's management proactively initiated the recycling alternative; when recycling the used product through an innovative process, *"what comes out at the other end is still a reasonable product... in some instances it can be a better product than the virgin..."* The process demands financial and human resource investments; however, for the firm, as well as for customers, it is a win-win situation (F3P2). Previous research (Green and Peloza, 2011) suggests that CSR practices can provide emotional, functional, and social. Firm 3's initiatives align with notion of functional value, namely, *"aspects of CSR that relate to the actual benefit the consumer receives from the product or service"* (Green and Peloza, 2011, p. 50).

Furthermore, Firm 3 provides various options for the recycling of the mineral. For instance, if geographical proximity allows, firm staff can collect the spent product from customers, and process it at the firm's facilities; alternatively, customers can use mobile recycling plants. In this second option, customers can self-process the spent product through the recycling device, and collect the recycled part of the product at the other end, with the possibility of reusing it 'real time' (F3P2).

Third, this added service represents a further extension- of its supply chain, with clear strategic implications, for example, in terms of decreasing the threat of duplication by potential competitors. The end results of this innovative activity are increasing revenues, additional services; practical, adding value to customers' investments, and environmental. F3P1 explained that the firm's management supported this new innovative CSR related initiative, with the CEO having a very keen interest in investing in technology; the move was also perceived as enhancing the image of the firm: "... *the mining companies are always seen as a bit of a negative blob in terms of pollution.*"

Moreover, F3P1 underlined the critical strategic value of the recycling initiative for the firm, and overall for the firm's customers, some of which are larger organisations whose management are obviously interested in having 'peace of mind' by minimising the threat of publicly damaging their image: "*it [the recycling] has general benefits...we are the only ones who can provide the service, and it gives a tick in many boxes of larger organisations... they obviously like being able to leave someone else with the rubbish to deal with.*"

Firm 4

The case of Firm 4 also underlines strong links between its CSR related initiatives and entrepreneurial CSR. First, F4P4 reflected on the very fast developments and transformations occurring within his firm since 2006. In particular, the firm has experienced a significant, five-fold growth, which has continued at a rate of 25% per year, even during the global financial crisis. The financing for this 'extreme growth', as F4P4 labelled it, is fully undertaken by the firm, which also suggest that organisational growth has been accompanied by financial success.

F4P4 also explained that the firm's management are significantly committing to CSR. One investment stream is the recent establishment of an alliance with an international university of world-class reputation to tackle a massive social issue: "*We are looking at starting investing in research around the problem of urban migration; 2.5 billion people in the next 15 years are expected to migrate from rural areas of developing countries into cities...typically they will go into slums.*" Despite the vital importance of CSR and urban development, research by Werna (2009) acknowledged a gap in the literature. At the same time, Werna (2009) provides a very compelling argument for CSR initiatives to find ways to minimise this contemporary phenomenon. Essentially, the rapid expansion of the urban population has led to coin the 21st century, the 'urban century'. This problem is more accentuated in developing regions of the world, and its tendency is to continue outgrowing rural populations (Werna, 2009), with a number of resulting implications in terms of increasing demands for housing, sanitation, electricity, and other basic needs.

The nearly one million-dollar yearly investment of F4P4 'takes the form of sending a group of the firm's best architectural designers for a week twice a year to conduct a joint study with the university and find ways to tackle mass urban migration (F4P4): "*this... problem is... so huge that if we keep doing it... in this next 15 year term it will add another 50% to the carbon*

footprint... Governments have been abrogating their responsibility, and I think actually our profession has also been abrogating its responsibility.”

F4P4 also acknowledged that personal and commercial advantages align in meeting social responsibility: “... *when I sell an idea like this to my board [of directors], I sell it as both a commercial opportunity and a social responsibility agenda. I convince them that the investment of a million dollars will return its value three times...*”

Moreover, through the firm’s involvement in CSR initiative, the participant recognised semi-tangible benefits such as branding, or strengthening associations with international organisations, enhancing the firm’s international presence, its capacity and networking capabilities, and potential future commercial opportunities. Indeed, when referring to the intangible value that could also be gained through CSR initiatives, F4P4 mentioned: “*learning more, intelligence of the practice will grow; we well do projects with great people, which grows the culture of the practice...*” Firm 4’s gained benefits are therefore clearly aligned with Branco and Rodrigues’s (2006) argument that “From a resource-based perspective CSR is seen as providing internal or external benefits, or both (p. 111).

Discussion

RQ3: How RBV and role theory help explain CSR

Baron (2001) posits that when firms’ “motivation is to serve society at the cost of profits” (p. 1481), then actions are deemed socially responsible (CSR). However, when serving the bottom line is the firms’ main motivation, then actions are privately responsible (Baron, 2001). When strategic CSR is applied, firms are mainly motivated by profits; hence, they adopt socially responsible practices because they may increase demands for their products or decrease costs (Baron, 2001). Thus, strategic CSR represents a mere profit maximisation strategy driven by firms’ self-interest, as opposed to by a notion of CSR (Baron, 2001). In contrast, the cases of the four firms illustrate that motivations for engaging in ‘entrepreneurial CSR’ are only marginally associated with the fundamental notion of CSR, or with that of strategic CSR.

Instead, the findings are strongly aligned with different conceptualisations of entrepreneurship, and characteristics of entrepreneurs, including an innovative mindset and execution capability, and are therefore within the theoretical construct of entrepreneurial CSR. Strong alignment is also identified between the findings concerning entrepreneurial CSR and the RBV of the firm; a conceptualisation of the alignments is illustrated in Figure 1. First, the ‘valuable’ attribute appears to fit, in that, as opposed to developing strategies to gain in efficiency or effectiveness (Barney, 1991), firms are gaining in the number of offerings or alternatives, thus, increase their repertoire of products, services or both (Firm 1). All four firm’s developed CSR related resources also have a degree of uniqueness. In particular, firms possess human and natural resources in the form of forward-thinking individuals who combine both CSR and entrepreneurship principles (Firm 1), or are complemented by unique products that also offer competitive advantage (Firm 3), and are clearly difficult to copy by potential competitors.

Similarly, the four firms’ resources are distinctively imperfectly imitable. Indeed, the time since the firms were established provides a certain degree of advantage, namely, in gaining exposure, market share, recognition, or in cementing networks and associations while further developing business and entrepreneurial CSR related strategies. Finally, concerning firms’ entrepreneurial CSR in the context of non-substitutability, the association of this attribute

appears to be less clear, particularly as both the time the current owners/managers may be active in their firms, and the managerial resources of competitors are unknown. Provided the firms are led by a succession of like-minded individuals, entrepreneurial CSR strategies will continue to be at the core of their sustained competitive advantage. Consequently, these strategies will neutralise the threat of substitutability between the four firms and competitors.

Figure 1 Here

Several associations between the findings and role theory are also noted. First, behavioural characteristics of an entrepreneur (Sweezy, 1943), characteristics of an enterprise (Schumpeter, 1934), and the entrepreneurial environment, which can arguably be considered as a social stable system where members might be encouraged to conform to the system (Biddle, 1986), identify an association with the *functional* perspective.

Second, the *symbolic interactionist* perspective is illustrated in the role of social actors, in this case the entrepreneurs, some of whom are firm owners or managers. Such role clearly entails social interactions (Biddle, 1986), including in the form of negotiations, for instance, communicating with suppliers or staff when investing in resources. Aligned with Biddle's (1986) discussion, social actors' role can also take the form of subscribing to certain attitudes and norms, including the display of emotions during negotiations or when executing firm related decisions, such as entrepreneurial CSR initiatives.

Third, concerning the *structural* perspective, social structures and social statuses defined within the firm or a stable organisation (Biddle, 1986) are clearly illustrated in the findings, particularly in decision making. Indeed, it could be suggested that the firm owner or manager of the medium size firms, or both owner/manager and board of directors in the larger firms, are in a 'structural' position to take decisions concerning the firm, in this case entrepreneurial CSR initiatives. The decisions that originate in roles and/or behaviours from individuals higher in the firm's hierarchy are then channelled through the firm, cascading down into other organisational layers.

Fourth, concerning the *organisational* perspective, and also related to the structural perspective, the firm environment can be categorised as hierarchical in different forms, depending on the size of the firm. Furthermore, based on the findings, the firm environment regarding entrepreneurial CSR initiatives is task oriented, and initiatives require preplanning (Firm 1). A similar argument could be made regarding entrepreneurial CSR, whereby the balancing act of increasing the firm's wealth, and making a substantial contribution to community, society or the environment could lead to strains in the medium or long term.

Fifth, the *cognitive* perspective is demonstrated in the consequences of firm management's successful entrepreneurial CSR initiatives. These repercussions may lead to higher expectations from community/society in future initiatives, in that these initiative have a stronger impact on the community, or in that more significant investment of resources are needed- or expected- to increase the impact of such initiatives.

Conclusions

The present investigation used a case study of four firms to examine the extent of involvement in CSR initiatives, and motivations for such involvement among firm owners/managers operating in Western Australia. The aspect of entrepreneurial CSR emerges as a significant finding, whereby managers/owners identify financial benefits that also align

with firm management's philosophy to engage in socially responsible initiatives. The findings also align with the two chosen theoretical foundations. Overall, the RBV of the firm proved a useful tool to gain understanding of firms' entrepreneurial CSR. For instance, associations were noticed concerning firms' valuable, rare, and imperfectly imitable resources. While information of competitors' management strategies is unknown, an argument is made that firms may also possess non-substitutable resources, provided that similar management strengths and competencies remain in place.

Adopting role theory also helped in clarifying the links between firms' management and entrepreneurial CSR. Indeed, and in accordance with Griffin et al.'s (2007) point that the theory illuminates understanding of work responsibilities in that it incorporates both organisational context and work behaviour, a clear association was found between entrepreneurial CSR plans and initiatives, and participants' role. The fact that most participants predominantly hold positions high in the firms' hierarchy is fundamental in terms of work responsibilities (Griffin et al., 2007). These responsibilities are perceptible in management's decision-making process, particularly when deciding to invest resources associated with entrepreneurial CSR. While these notions are aligned with the symbolic, structural, and organisational perspectives, overall, alignment was also noticed pertaining to the functional and cognitive perspectives.

Implications

The apparent reconciliation of both financial objectives and CSR practices, with significant benefits to be gained by both firm and community/society, has very important implications. This study demonstrates that management's entrepreneurial drive, skills, knowledge, expertise, or strategic strengths can identify substantial opportunities. Moreover, the investment of resources to develop socially responsible products and services can help achieve CSR and the firm's bottom line. This argument also underlines the significance of the role of managers holding leadership positions, in developing, nurturing, and maintaining an organisational environment that instils entrepreneurial/innovative practices, as well as inquisitiveness, research, and trial and error practices.

Firm 1's comments, among others, illustrate the passionate and committed role of the owner in 'problem-solving' strategies designed to both benefit the firm financially, through new innovative initiatives, the community and society. Thus, the findings have practical implications, especially in terms of the significance of instilling or supporting entrepreneurial behaviour. Such support could extend from merely focusing on financial aspects to also consider CSR as a value element of a firm's future business strategy. Guidance and support could be at firm or school level, where, for instance, talent could be identified and further developed. Also, the support of those individuals who already demonstrated leadership, and fulfil a number of entrepreneurial characteristics, including this study's participants, is critical as they epitomise the essence and core of entrepreneurial CSR. Again, these individuals might also be able to help other younger talent to carry on their contribution to firms, community and society.

In addition, there are theoretical implications resulting from the findings. Indeed, the adoption of both theoretical frameworks helps clarify the motivation and drive of management in supporting, planning and executing entrepreneurial CSR initiatives. Role theory contributed to a clearer understanding of the role of entrepreneurs, or that of firms' management. Such role does not only imply their social position, or the directing of their behaviour or role towards other people in their organisation, but also in managing role conflicts, and encouraging

conformity, and in maintaining stability in the ‘social system’ (Biddle, 1989). These aspects are crucial in sustaining or improving forward-thinking work environments, where leadership contributes to innovative practices and their implementation in the form of entrepreneurial CSR, with clear impacts on firms in terms of sustained competitive advantage.

In this context, the importance of RBV of the firm also arises. Moreover, the theory was a valuable tool in understanding those firm management’s attributes, including knowledge, capabilities, and information, that help generate ‘economic rents’ (Conner 1991) from the execution of CSR related activities, and overall, contribute to firms’ sustained competitive advantage. Overall implications therefore relate to the usefulness of the individual theories in guiding and clarifying the relevance of firm resources (RBV), and leadership and management aspects of ‘social stable systems’ (role theory). However, an argument is also made regarding the usefulness of replicating this study’s focus, namely, of utilising both theories to understand associations between resources and the role leaders play in managing those resources and their organisational environment.

Limitations and Future Research

While authors emphasise the strengths of case study research (Yin, 1981), it is recognised that the number of participants/firms represents a limitation, and does not allow for cross regional/industry comparisons. Moreover, only using the cases of four firms prevents from making broad generalisations based on the findings. However, irrespective of these limitations, the research, the combination of individual interviews, site visits, and theoretical research strongly suggests a number of future research opportunities. This type of research would allow for a deeper understanding of firms’ management, particularly regarding ways in which resources are exploited, business opportunities identified, and how such opportunities align with CSR practices, while improving firms’ bottom-line.

In essence, researching a larger number of model firms could help confirm, and strengthen this study’s findings, or even disconfirm these findings associated with the notion of entrepreneurial CSR. New and added information could better inform industry, in identifying ‘good’, sustainable and socially responsible practices; government, in also pinpointing model firms to support them, recognise them, and nurture their talent; educational institutions, in helping them prepare some of tomorrow’s entrepreneurial leaders. Further consideration could also be given to both the RBV of the firm and role theory; alternatively, one of these theories could be adopted with a different theoretical framework. Doing so could not only help illuminate the research community and industry concerning entrepreneurial CSR, but also further contribute to theory development.

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