

Corporate Social Responsibility Communication Model for Balancing Efficiency of Business Corporations and Stakeholders in Thailand

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze corporate social responsibility communication among Thai, western, and eastern multinational corporations and to synthesize a corporate social responsibility communication model for balancing efficiency for business corporations and stakeholders in Thailand. The research methodology was divided into two sections: the research on business corporations used a documentary study and Bellwether Methodology, whereas the stakeholders' sections employed the Deliberative Democratic Evaluation Methodology.

The findings of synthesizing this model revealed C-C-S-P-B as the components. The first C represents Concepts in CSR communication which comprised the fundamental CSR concepts and communication direction to emphasize the environment or social issues. The second C, reflects CSR communication in applying the Inside-out approach to building employees' consciousness necessary for corporate sustainable development, followed by raising consciousness in sustainable social and environmental development for outside stakeholders. Then, S is the Strategy of CSR communication, both responding to stakeholders and their participation. P is the Process of CSR communication which is also the continuous process to stimulate responses from the message receivers. B is defined as Balancing effectiveness between stakeholders and business corporations. For the stakeholders, communication could change stakeholders' behavior. For business corporations, communication makes stakeholders approve business operations and gain trust. And even with subsequent social changes, the community still maintains the trust of

corporations. The study recommends the business corporation should focus mainly on CSR communications that respond to the stakeholders' needs, and encourage participation in CSR. Nonetheless, to create balancing efficiency, the adopted model should be implemented with the consideration of different social contexts within Thai society.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility Communication, Model, Stakeholders, multinational corporations

Introduction

Raising awareness on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been an ongoing process throughout the 20th century, causing a wave of worldwide social responsibility which is considered as an essentially contested concept for operations of the organization (Okoye 2009:613). CSR as related to the dimension of rules on social responsibility is defined as business operations that can achieve high social and environmental standards. Corporations has been implementing CSR programs since the year 2000 when the OECD issued the Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises to recommend CSR and only do business with trade partners that practice CSR. Therefore, corporations not implementing CSR would encounter problems trading with member countries of the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2011:19-26).

The recent CSR fever compelled many corporations to be proactive in CSR communication in order to demonstrate their commitment to CSR and their application to achieve the corporation's goals. More importantly, CSR communication helps to create stakeholder participation in the community, leading to ethical business practices (Ihlen, Bartlett and May 2011:10-12). CSR communication must begin with internal to external organization. Therefore, the stakeholders within the organization are important elements, acting as the senders and receivers. Moreover, they are the first group to consider CSR policies and activities. CSR communication itself is the most crucial element with which to bond with stakeholders as outside receivers (Marijke and Fundación 2001:3-4). In addition, data from the Journal of Public Relations Research in 2008 regarding the article on corporate sustainability communications explained in detail the situations in which some countries substituted the term "Corporate Communication" with "CSR Communication" instead (Signitzer and Prexl 2008:1-19).

In the midst of CSR communication, problems occurred in balancing the efficiency of business corporations and stakeholders in Thailand, especially on CSR communication. Some corporations communicate CSR to display their corporate responsibilities towards

society while others used CSR to build their own corporate image. In addition, research from different sources such as the Thaipat Institute, the Stock Exchange of Thailand, and the Network NGO Business Partnership revealed that large numbers of Thai business corporations failed to practice CSR communication for balancing efficiency because some business corporations were unaware of CSR, majority of corporations paid little attention to CSR communication for social changes; instead they choose to donate some money. In addition, some organizations used CSR communication purely to build their corporate images only as being shown.

The Thaipat Institute had presented the preliminary research report under the topic "Responsible Business Conduct in Thailand" during the Regional CSR Conference in 2009 to survey CSR awareness among 76 provinces throughout the country. The findings in Bangkok and its vicinity revealed that out of 4,350 questionnaire respondents, 69.54 percent were fully aware of CSR. At the regional level, CSR awareness reached 38.32 percent (Thaipat Institute 2009:8). As already seen, many Thai business corporations had very few ideas about how to approach CSR so they could not communicate CSR in order to benefit society.

The Network NGO Business Partnership reports on "CSR in Thailand and the roles of volunteers" displaying the survey results from 71 giant business corporations in Thailand. They were categorized into seven CSR issues in which the first three issues dealt with good governance, conducting business fairly, and caring for employees. The final four involved social activities, environment, human rights, and consumer issues. (Prayukvong and Osen 2009:18). It seems that the majority of corporations paid more attention to internal than external corporate responsibilities that related to social activities.

A survey conducted during the first quarter of 2007 on the Thai Listed Companies Association and Listed Companies with the Stock Exchange of Thailand, involved sending a total of 460 questionnaires to the Listed Companies with the Stock Exchange of Thailand, with questions related to budget spending and type of CSR activities. The survey findings indicated that the majority of corporations in the stock market wrongly understood that CSR is simply dealing with donations to some charitable organization (Prayukvong and Osen 2009:18) which goes to show that those companies are unaware of communicating CSR to the public for the betterment of society, perhaps from their ignorance or from failing to see the value of CSR or by thinking that donations are sufficient.

The Network NGO Business Partnership (Thailand) stated in their research findings that amidst the global economic crisis, Thai businesses are now facing a difficult time in the practice of social responsibility aiming for sustainable development. At present, most businesses are practicing CSR for publicity or marketing strategies despite the global development in CSR directed at both business strength and contributions to society and

community (Prayukvong and Osen 2009:4). Therefore, businesses must truly understand the intention of CSR with full desire to better society through CSR communication.

Considering the CSR communication Model, it is obvious that the presentation should be done in a systematic way to reveal the important characteristics of communication (Mortensen 2007:47-52), which contain CSR concepts, internal communication to external communication, strategies, and communication process. The corresponding actions to the key component of the model ensure the success of CSR communication.

The research study on CSR communication model development is essential to raise CSR communication level, not just presenting the corporate image. Rather, it is “CSR communication for social change”, or meaning of “Corporate Social Responsibility communication concerning the balance between efficiency of business corporations and stakeholders”. It is the CSR communication to develop knowledge, share ideas and reinforce bonds through stakeholders’ Participatory interactive decision-making or eventually aiming for better society possible.

In the current situation, practicing CSR communication by the multinational corporations could affect global trade because most corporations are gigantic businesses with advantages in advanced technology, new innovations, and more resources for their management, so they could very well guide global CSR (Beckman 2007:38). CSR communication could display many important social issues for social order and rules, including new patterns for business competition. Furthermore, the multinational corporations should be concerned with “License to operate” from the community, and the general public because those corporations usually conduct their businesses abroad (Bittner and Leimeister 2011:9-10), so they must reveal their true business intentions appropriate to the social norms, and desire to better the society through CSR communication.

The present research on CSR from three multinational corporations is the good practice and should be used as “The Corporate Social Responsibility communication model for balancing efficiency of business corporations and stakeholders in Thailand”. The balance between advantages of corporation advantages and stakeholders is the development in knowledge in CSR communication through interdisciplinary study and build a CSR communication model to match the Thai social context, leading to the sustainability of the corporation and change in behavior among stakeholders as well as aiming for social change.

Research Objectives

The present research has the following objectives:

- 1) To analyze CSR communication which represents three good practice cases for Thai, western, and eastern companies on concepts in CSR communication, CSR communication from the inside out, strategy of CSR communication, process of CSR communication, efficiency of CSR communication towards business corporations and stakeholders in Thai society.
- 2) To synthesize the CSR communication model through three cross case studies of multinational corporations in order to balance business corporation efficiency with stakeholders in Thailand.

Definition of Terms

CSR communication model that leads to balancing effectiveness of business corporations and stakeholders is defined as the systematic presentation of CSR communication to reveal important characteristics of communication which comprises mainly the fundamental concepts in CSR communication, CSR communication from the inside out, strategies of CSR communication, process of CSR communication, efficiency of CSR communication towards business corporations and stakeholders. The corresponding actions to the key component of the model ensure the success of CSR communication, which would lead to sound equilibrium between business corporations and stakeholders.

Stakeholders are defined as those who have been directly or indirectly affected by CSR communication, classified as either internal or external stakeholders.

Internal stakeholder is the stakeholder directly related to the corporation and is the source of information on CSR, namely, the management committee, executives, employee and stockholders.

External stakeholder is the stakeholder living in the same area in which the corporation is located and is the target for CSR communication, namely, the customers, distributors, media or beneficiary of the campaign.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) communication is defined as the communication distribution to display the effort on CSR issues of organizations.

The internal CSR communication focuses on the effort to communicate CSR among stakeholders within the corporation, especially employees, to build knowledge,

understanding, consciousness in mission, philosophy in CSR and to encourage active participation in CSR projects.

The external CSR communication with outside stakeholders through a corporate attempt had been done to display the commitment on mission, and philosophy of CSR by using various communication channels such as the annual sustainable report, business ethical documents, corporate website, and consultation with stakeholders including numerous publicity through television, radio, newspapers, magazines, publications, product labels, and arranging activities.

Multinational Corporation is defined as a company which applies knowledge of its headquarters for business expansion abroad. The corporation establishes many subsidiaries to compete and respond to the demands of consumers in that country. The multinational corporation operates and manages the organization with modern technologies and new innovations with the application of networks in organizing, commanding, controlling, meeting, and consulting to find solutions.

Research Methodology

The research methodology was divided into two sections in order to meet each research objective as follows:

The first section details the analysis of CSR communication case studies and addresses the first research objective, the study conducted as case study research.

The second section concerns the synthesis of the CSR communication model and addresses the second research objective, the study conducted through three cross-case studies of multinational corporations.

Analysis of CSR communication case studies

The study conducted as the case study research to understand the world phenomenon within the context of the case as being the “process of modeling real-world phenomena,” focusing on the multinational corporation as a good practice for CSR communication is based on the following criteria:

- 1) A large multinational corporation operating in many countries had expanded its business overseas through the application of its own expertise, including modern technology and new innovations for corporate management.
- 2) A multinational corporation to represent a good example of each business corporation operating in Thailand with full awareness of CSR communication by adapting a different global vision to match appropriately with Thai society.
- 3) A multinational corporation as a good example of communicating CSR as judged by the international CSR prestige award that had been presented to such a corporation for its effort in communicating CSR with the public.
- 4) A multinational corporation in the major industries such as consumer products, electric appliances, and construction businesses.

In this section, the research methods are discussed in two sections based on the essential CSR communication: business corporations, and stakeholders.

Business corporation study

The study of CSR communication of business corporations used the following research methods for all three case studies:

- 1) **Documentary study:** It focuses on the corporate website, annual report, sustainability development report, internal and external documents in hard copies or electronic reports, various other reports, investment proposals, and marketing tools.
- 2) **Bellwether methodology:** It is the research methodology that searches for decisions in campaigning policy based on classifying issues and the importance of such issue by considering the decisions of “Bellwether” or influential figures on their opinions and reaction towards the policy. The structured in-depth interview used with “Bellwether” as “policy maker” to conduct the interview without detailed questions on the issues, only inform the interviewee of the interview scope which should help the policy-maker give true responses, without being led (Coffman 2009: 3-4).

Based on Bellwether research methodology, in-depth interview was conducted among the CSR communication officers of Thai multinational corporations, Eastern and Western multinational corporations comprised of Corporate Communication Executive, Community Relations Manager, Corporate Relations and Communication Officer or Corporate Communication Officer.

Stakeholders study

The acquired data from selected multinational corporations were specified in the study of CSR communication efficiency towards stakeholders by considering the dynamic connection between business corporations and stakeholders.

Deliberative democratic evaluation methodology: Since the deliberative democratic evaluation methodology with structured group interview is the academic standard measure, this method was employed to allow the stakeholders to express their opinions and perspectives through academic considerations and sensible discussion so that stakeholders would be willing to collaborate with any decisions resulting from the discussion (Stufflebeam and Shinkfield, 2007:28-30).

The Deliberative Democratic Evaluation Methodology has been divided into two parts. The first part deals with the structured group interview with the stakeholders of multinational corporations in all three case studies. The second part is the structured group interview with stakeholders who participated in the CSR project in all three cases.

Part1: The structured group interview conducted with general stakeholders of all three multinational corporations in all three cases: the inclusion criteria are as follows:

- 1) Select 10 stakeholders for each business corporation, from three business corporations to represent Thai, Western, and Eastern multinational corporations, having a total of 30 stakeholders.
- 2) Selected stakeholders must be the major and minor respondents to communicate CSR for each multinational corporation.
- 3) Being the representative of five stakeholder parties who are opinion leaders: mass media, non-governmental organizations, volunteers, consumers, and persons who have CSR knowledge.
- 4) Being the representative of stakeholders, two selected persons from five mixed parties, having a total of 10 representatives per corporation in accordance with "Deliberative democratic evaluation methodology" that requires equal numbers of stakeholders from each party to avoid unjust opinion expression.

Part 2: The structured in-depth interview with participating stakeholders in the CSR project for all three cases was conducted by following CSR communication officer's advice to interview stakeholders initially involved in CSR projects. Three groups of stakeholders from all three corporations consisted of five stakeholders in each group. So, the final count of 15 samples were divided into the following groups:

Group 1 consisted of CSR stakeholders, participants of Thai multinational corporation project, mainly head villager, core villager leader and villager.

Group 2 consisted of CSR stakeholders, participants of Western multinational corporation project as the main targeted group that had adopted the CSR outcome, which was successfully applied to worldwide subsidiaries, including Thailand.

Group 3 consisted of CSR stakeholders, participants of Eastern multinational corporation project as the main targeted group, which had been succeeded in the Thai CSR project that mainly operated under CSR principles.

Synthesis of CSR Communication Model

The findings from analyzing within-case data made a unique CSR communication model for each corporation under the study leading to more transparency. Next, a cross-case analysis was conducted to find a unique CSR communication model for each organization and examine the similarities and differences between each case study. The cross-case analysis searches for explanations for CSR communication similarities or differences. Therefore, performing analyses such as these help to build understanding of association between each case study. The corporation analysis described the cause and effect in the cross-case analysis and explains why such a relationship occurred. In cases where differences were found, there must be a search in order to avoid oversimplified conclusion results. In the meantime, it is to promote better understanding in similar case studies. The cross-case analysis presents the opportunity to learn and gather data for extracting a CSR communication model that balances efficiency of business corporations and stakeholders in Thailand.

Corporate Social Responsibility Communication Model for Balancing Efficiency of Business Corporations and Stakeholders in Thailand

Figure 1 below shows the CSR communication model for balancing efficiency of business corporations and stakeholders in Thailand, and consists of C-C-S-P-B as follows:

C represents Concepts in CSR communication

C represents CSR communication from the inside out

S represents Strategy of CSR communication

P represents Process of CSR communication

B represents Balancing effectiveness

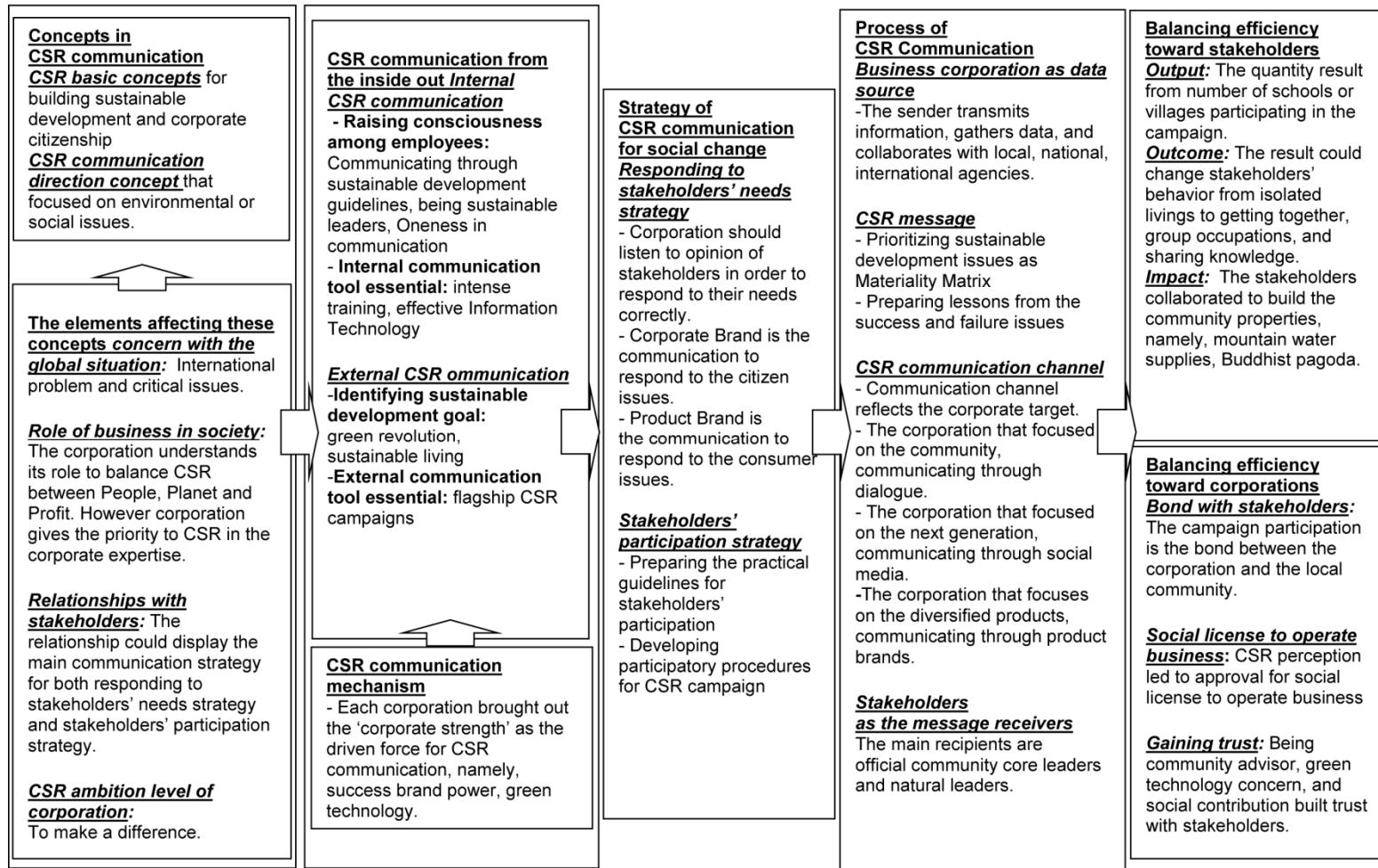


Figure 1: The diagram of CSR communication model for balancing efficiency of business corporations and stakeholders in Thailand.

1) Concepts in CSR communication

The fundamental concepts in CSR communication, can be divided into two types:

- 1) **CSR basic concepts** such as sustainable development, corporate citizenship as equal to CSR, business ideology “Adherence to CSR”, basic management focusing on the environment and the next generation.
- 2) **CSR communication direction concepts** that focused on the environment, such as, water is life, eco ideas or focused on social issues, small actions, big differences.

The elements affecting these concepts are as follows:

- 1) **Concern with the global situation** as the international problems and critical issues that stirred up interest among nations. These are problems in global warming and shortages of food.
- 2) **Role of business in society**, in theory, the corporation understands that its role is to balance CSR between People, Planet and Profit. However, in practice, the business corporation gave the priority to CSR in the corporate expertise, displaying the corporate unique identity. For example, the manufacturer of electrical appliances focused on CSR with the production process and energy-saving products, the manufacturer of consumer goods gave priority to CSR on sustainable living, and the construction company emphasized CSR in natural resource management.
- 3) **Relationships with stakeholders** that could display the main communication strategy, such as the corporation with divisions to promote stakeholders' participation displayed the participation strategy, and the corporation gave priority to the stakeholders' needs by displaying responses to stakeholder strategy.
- 4) **CSR ambition level of corporation** is to make a difference, such as, developing the mechanism to change consumers' behavior, aiming for the environmental revolution, and developing the ideas for the community stakeholders.

2) CSR communication from the inside out

CSR communication from the inside out started with **internal CSR communication** success through the employees' consciousness in sustainable development. Therefore, the organization should prepare the guidelines, projects, and support. Examples include building

practical guidelines for sustainable development, ensuring that the employees recognize themselves as sustainable leaders, building oneness in the communication for the corporate sustainable development. Furthermore, the corporation should prepare internal communication tools essential for intense training, such as, one month orientation, on line learning, tests for career advancement. For effective Information Technology, the examples are the setup of Advance Electronic Office Standards, electronic data management, and the Corporation President opened a Blog to allow all employees worldwide to voice their concerns.

Later, it expanded the success to **external CSR communication** by identifying with the sustainable development goal, for example, building consciousness in resource conservation, green revolution and sustainable living plan through the important communication tool, namely, flagship CSR campaigns. Moreover, the CSR communication mechanism used by each corporation brought out the corporate strengths as the driving force for CSR communication; for example, success brand power, and green technology communication through the corporation expertise in green plan.

3) Strategy of CSR communication

CSR communication strategy for social change, which is two-way communication as follows:

- 1) **Responding to stakeholders' needs strategy** as to create the new definition to Brand Value and understanding of Brand Impacts from the implementation in social and sustainable development. Corporate Brand is the communication to respond to the citizen issues. Product Brand is the communication to respond to the consumer issues.
- 2) **Stakeholders' participation strategy** with stakeholders participating in the perception, expression of ideas, and making appropriate decisions in CSR. Then, the business corporation should build the practical guidelines for stakeholders' participation and developing participatory procedures for the CSR campaign.

4) Process of CSR Communication

CSR communication process is comprised of the following:

- 1) **Business corporation as the sender** directly transmits information, gathers outside data and collaborates with other local, national and international agencies to provide data.
- 2) **CSR message** should include significant sustainable development, give priority to the business corporation and stakeholders, prepare lessons from the

success and failure issues, including searching for the proposition and targets of each community to respond to the needs. The social issues must lead to a sustainable society and corporate sustainable corporate growth. Furthermore, the success of CSR communication is also dependent on the designing of messages to create good impressions on the recipients as well as the business corporation making acquaintance with the community.

- 3) **CSR communication channel** that reflected the corporate target group. For example, the business corporation that focused on the community communicating through dialogue, the business corporation that focused on the next generation communicating through social media, the business corporation that focused on the diversified products communicating through product brands.
- 4) **Stakeholders as the message receivers** who are consumers, media, those affected from the campaign, others divisions as the main recipients, and the community core leaders. The news distribution is directed at the official community core leaders such as Sub-district Administration, District Administration, village chief, headman and unofficial community core leaders as the natural leaders to distribute data, news and expand this concept to other people in the community.

5) Balancing efficiency

Balancing efficiency is the outcome of individual changes from bonding where stakeholders accepted and trusted the corporation enough to allow it to continue the business operation. Even with the subsequent social changes, the community is still maintaining the bond and approving and trusting the corporation.

CSR communication efficiency toward stakeholders appeared in the following dimensions:

- 1) **Output** is tangible and expressed in quantity, such as, number of schools and villages participating in the campaign.
- 2) **Outcome** could change stakeholders' behavior from isolated living to getting together, such as group occupations and sharing knowledge. The stakeholders changed their thinking, enabling them to improve other issues in their daily living.
- 3) **Impact** has led to social change from having the stakeholders' involvement in the CSR campaign which made the community gain benefits as needed and the stakeholders collaborated to build community properties, such as, mountain

water supplies, a Buddhist pagoda, environmental conservation campaigns that created a profound impact on the community society.

CSR communication efficiency toward business corporations appeared in the following dimensions:

- 1) **Bond with stakeholders**, participation as if being the campaign owner and gaining trust from the stakeholders. Therefore, the campaign is the connection between the business corporation and stakeholders to bond between them and the local community.
- 2) **Social license to operate business**, CSR perception sent a direct impact toward the stakeholders for they could allow the business to continue its operation. For reviving and maintaining the environment, including creating employment so they could gain approval to operate the business while good quality products would impact business operation indirectly.
- 3) **Gaining trust from the stakeholders** could develop when the corporation makes good acquaintance with stakeholders until becoming the community advisor to provide the community knowledge. Moreover the corporation aiming for green technology concerning the environment together with the corporation's attention to social contributions, so the corporation is able to win the stakeholders' trust eventually.

Recommendations for Adapted Model Implementation

The findings from the study entitled, "Corporate Social Responsibility Communication Model for Balancing Efficiency of Business Corporations and Stakeholders in Thailand" which could be adapted for use with Thai business corporations, including the useful recommendations for all business corporations as follows:

- 1) Concepts in CSR communication are comprised of the basic CSR knowledge and conceptual guidelines for communication directions. The business corporations should select the acceptable and well-known concepts in Thailand, such as, sustainable development and water is life in order to expand such ideas to the stakeholders.
- 2) Internal CSR communication should start by building consciousness among all levels of employees regarding clear CSR communication visions, missions, strategies and processes, truly agreed in the same direction. The corporation

should prepare the communication tools to provide knowledge and raise consciousness in developing a sustainable corporation and society.

- 3) External CSR communication is done to raise conscious in sustainable development based on the corporate concepts through a CSR campaign that could respond to the needs of the community. In the case where the policy came from the head office it must be adapted to match the community based on the locals' needs as well as encouraging the stakeholders to participate in the campaign.
- 4) The strategy of CSR communication by delivering information is the basic strategy because it is one-way communication. Therefore, the business corporation should focus on responding to stakeholders' needs strategy and stakeholders' participation strategy which is considered as two-way communication, giving the importance to the needs and opinions of stakeholders.
- 5) The process of CSR communication is comprised of the business corporation as the data source, CSR message, CSR communication channel, and stakeholders as the message receivers. The first element, the business corporation as the data source should act as the messenger or data source and also the coordinator with outside data source. The second element displayed the content of the sustainable development essential for the business corporations and stakeholders. At the local level, the lesson should be listed on the success and failure issues. The third element, the corporation should consider the demographic, personality and lifestyles of stakeholders as the key recipients to select proper CSR communication channel. For the fourth element, the stakeholders as the key recipients should be the main focus of the corporation. They are the conceptual leader, official community leader and natural leaders since they have become the key mechanisms for reaching the majority of community locals as the destined recipients.
- 6) Concerning CSR communication efficiency toward stakeholders, the corporation should identify communication efficiency as quantitative and in-depth results. For the quantitative results, they are primary and tangible results, whereas the in-depth results displayed the stakeholders' behavioral change and social change in the same direction.
- 7) In regard to CSR communication efficiency towards business corporations, the corporation should focus on the importance of CSR communication as the communication for social change because the corporation and the stakeholders could gain benefit together. As a result, the stakeholders' behavioral change

would develop the bond with the corporation and allow it to operate its business as well as trusting the corporation. Even with subsequent social changes, the community still maintains bond, trust and approval for operating business.

Recommendations to Raise CSR Communication Levels

The CSR communication situation in Thailand caused by the driving force of numerous business corporations developing differently, which is based on the communication development level as follows:

First level: The business corporations that used CSR communication to provide information for stakeholders should inform the public of the social responsibility so that the stakeholders' perceived CSR roles and true understanding of corporation roles on presenting the facts. However, CSR communication to deliver information to the stakeholder is considered one-way communication to begin developing CSR communication. Therefore, the business corporation should raise the communication level to two-way communication with the stakeholders.

Second level: The business corporation that used CSR communication to respond to the needs of stakeholders should be done with the opinion survey among the stakeholders to understand the needs and respond correctly because the stakeholders in each community have different needs due to differences in social backgrounds and surroundings. Therefore, the key corporate concepts must be adapted to match each community mainly based on the demand of the community as related to CSR communication. However, communication to respond to the need of stakeholders is two-way asymmetrical communication. Then, the corporation used communication to persuade the stakeholders to change their behavior and this should raise the communication level with the stakeholders from symmetrical to asymmetrical, which is the participative communication.

Third level: The business corporation that used the participative communication method with the stakeholders should start with non-official two-way communication as the small group of dialogue comprised of the key core community leaders to discuss the CSR issues. As soon as the communication issues were approved, the participants in the dialogue group could increase and the group becomes official. However, participative communication after being used in Thai society had a few setbacks. When the group became formal, the participants were fewer and declined to sit in the front row, raised their hands at the same time or declined to give their opinions on stage. Then, the communication issues for the dialogue must be verified regularly, and the issues rechecked whenever the numbers of

participants are low. The formal dialogue should derive from combining the informal dialogue groups together.

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