

# The 7Ps in Corporate Social Responsibility – Insights from Explorative Case Studies in Singapore

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**Abstract** - Here, in this research paper, the authors proposed, examined, and discussed the Ps for companies and, in fact, for all of us to advance and enhance Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This paper extends the discussions on green CSR with examples, which can be understood from the Asian perspectives concerning Singapore. The practical suggestion of the paper is to offer an accurate outlook for innovative concepts of green strategy from the Asian perspectives with specific regard to Singapore. Finally, results are reviewed for their theoretical and managerial contributions, and businesses can make recommendations to achieve an appropriate CSR strategy.

**Keywords** — CSR, people, plastics, Singapore

## I. INTRODUCTION

### Paper's Aims and Objectives

In this secondary research paper (with primary inputs from four associates), the authors would like to: (i) propose, examine, and discuss the 7Ps in advancing and enhancing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); and (ii) these discussions will also be seen and appreciated in terms of the Asian perspectives and examples.

### Definition of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) [in a general way,] can be defined as firms should not just go after their primary objective in maximizing profitability but also contribute to the well-being of society through voluntary efforts (Barauskaite & Streimikiene (2021).

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

While the research depended mainly on secondary literature, like Low's (2019) research, respondents who approached the researchers to give their inputs were relied upon; they gave some primary data. These were combined with the authors' observations. Here, an observational study is a method of gathering data associated with qualitative research (Richie and Lewis, 2003; also cited in Low, 2019), and the critical advantage of an observational study is flexibility.

The four (4) respondents approached the authors to volunteer, entrusting their inputs when they knew the authors were doing the CSR research (Period: 7 Nov 2020 to 16 Jan 2021). Each respondent took approximately twenty to thirty minutes, giving their inputs from the Asian's perspective regarding Singapore.

Note that the triangulation of data from the three (3) sources is the triangulation of secondary literature reviews, observations, and inputs/comments of the interviewees. [Triangulation means utilizing data and the information obtained through secondary research, getting a data series that are complementary to each other by applying several categories of sources. Hence boosting the integrity of your research (Honorene, (2018).]

## III. The Literature, Observations & Discussions The 7Ps in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

(i) The authors identify the first of the Ps as **No (Zero) Plastics** as one of the most important P in the Ps of CSR to cure or repair our planet. "Pampers, plastic bottles are dirtying the environment" (Low, 2019: 159). Indeed so, "plastics have been the scourge of Mother Earth" (four respondents' inputs; mentioned ten times), as animals – land, sea, and air – are found to have been trapped, injured, or died through eating plastics irresponsibly left behind by humans.

[Yes, there is no good evidence that people can get cancer from using plastics. And there is limited scientific evidence that suggests a link between the use of plastics for food packaging and wrapping and cancer; Cancer Society of New Zealand, 2012.] Nonetheless, it is mooted those plastics can cause cancer; depending on where one lives and works, one is likely to be exposed to many plastic products every day (Breastcancer, 2020). Food and beverage containers, disposable plates, and toiletry bottles are all plastic, all made from chemicals. Research suggested that all plastics may leach chemicals if they are scratched or heated. The study also strongly suggested that at certain exposure levels, some of the chemicals in these



products, such as bisphenol A (BPA), may cause cancer in people (Breastcancer, 2020).

Indeed, habits and things are evolving. "People seem to have forgotten the old way of doing things" (Khee Shihui cited in Hicks, 2018). The four respondents also opined that "a generation or two ago in Asia, countries such as Indonesia, India, Malaysia, and cosmopolitan island-nation Singapore, hawkers used leaves, for example, banana leaves and papers for wrapping their food like nasi lemak or coconut-enriched rice. Paper straws were also commonly used, and little or no plastics are used." In a similar vein, Singaporeans brought home takeaway food from hawker stalls in *tingkat* (the Malay word for tiffin carrier), and groceries they bought from wet markets were wrapped in newspaper and palm leaves. They brought them home in bamboo or mat shopping baskets (Hicks, 2018). The usage of paper and even leaves instead of plastics should therefore be encouraged.

The average Singaporean uses an unacceptable 13 plastic bags a day (Hicks, 2018). And only 6 percent of the city-state's plastic waste was recycled in 2017 (Hicks, 2018). People in Singapore take 820 million plastic bags yearly from supermarkets, and consumers recycled only 2 percent of these supermarket plastic bags. Two-thirds were used for disposing of waste (Hong, 2018). Hence, the recycling efforts of plastics must therefore be fearlessly championed by civic groups.

Additionally, some conventional vendors such as Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) have taken positive steps to reduce their plastic footprint in June 2018. KFC became the first fast-food chain in Singapore to remove plastic straws and lids from its restaurants. This change will save 17.8 metric tons of single-use plastic yearly.

Consequently, there is a need for a switch in the mind-growth (not mindset as it implies a fixed or rigid thinking). Of significance, all four respondents agreed (mentioned 16 times) with this mind-growth and change concept. (Note that these coincide with the words of Ms. Jen Teo, executive director of the SEC: Singapore Environment Council, cited in CNA, 2020: "One of the biggest challenges for improving recycling rates in Singapore is still the mindset and behavior of the public").

Undeniably so, when it comes to the plastic bags given out by retailers, there is, however, a vast black hole. There are supermarkets and bubble tea/ cake shops or bakeries that give (multiple) plastic bags (Hong, 2018; four respondents' inputs; mentioned seven times). While educating the people, the Singapore Environment Council (SEC) calls on every person in Singapore to use one less plastic item per day. SEC also intends to encourage shoppers to use not more than two plastic bags per trip. (Hong, 2018).

According to Hicks (2018), although the BYO (bring-your-own) campaign is taking off in pockets around the

island-Republic, some large food and beverage retailers are opposed to the idea. A mind-growth perspective and attitude are very much needed. Low (2012) asserts that "The Confucian leader or for that matter, anyone with mind growth, does not indeed subscribe or fixed to one particular way of thinking. One with mind growth ordinarily accepts criticisms or feedback and values these feedbacks as learning points or lessons. For example, people with mental growth thinking out of the box or lateral thinking can thus be said to be creative, adaptable, and flexible. This is because such people listen and are usually willing to learn and explore more..." (Low, 2012: 121). "Mind growth is about having an un-trapped mind. The individual is willing to learn." (Low, 2012: 124) and "grow... to unfold gradually, just as a flower unfolds, phase by phase, petal by petal, from the bud. To grow means to expand by process of development" (Low, 2012: 121).

As can be seen, the significance in going green in the right direction, biodegradable bags (as first steps) appear to make more sense (Hicks, 2018), and such thinking or reasoning must be encouraged and supported. RedMart, for instance, in 2017, switched to oxo-biodegradable bags, which the company claimed to require 50 percent less material to make than regular bags (Hicks, 2018).

Overall, **No (Zero) Plastics** is a vital CSR tool to heal or fix our Earth.

(ii) The second P of CSR is that of Product. The Product should not use or at least use little or no plastics. The Product, in essence, should be of (all) natural ingredients and undoubtedly beneficial to not only humans but also other creatures.

"Products made should also be kind to the environment" (respondents' inputs; authors' observations), and the finished product has a shallow environmental impact. By illustration, a product such as a toy should be safe and not harmful to the child. The product should also not endanger the environment and the ecology. To cite Low (2019: 157), he concurred that every product is naturally harvested in an eco-friendly and sustainable manner, is dedicated to preserving the heritage while adjusting to the likings of the modern people. Every product purchased contains the hopes, cultures, and beliefs of every Bhutanese farmer (Bhutan Natural, 2018, cited by Low, 2019: 157).

Take another product such as a building or a shopping complex – if it saves electricity, water and makes full use of the sunlight, it uses fewer resources and is a clean building. Family-friendly City Square Mall is the first eco-mall in the Republic of Singapore to have been built with eco-conscious principles in mind, such as green, paving the way for other malls to follow suit. It saves on electricity by allowing natural sunlight to pass through its glass roof, optimizing daylighting, and using light-emitting diode (LED) lighting on its façade (Insights,

2011). [City Square Mall was awarded the BCA Green Mark Platinum Award, and its eco-friendly features include a 49,000 square feet urban park. An eco-playground made of child-friendly hardened wood is accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), a green roof with photovoltaic panels and water-harvesting capabilities, recycling containers, as well as in-mall informative visuals on the environment.; Insights, 2011].

The current eco and green messages within the City Square Mall are decorated in several locations. These messages, for example, include:

- “Our water-efficient features save up to 10 Olympic-sized swimming pools of water yearly.”
- “As the roof allows natural lighting to pass through, electricity usage is reduced.”
- “The lifts, escalators and travelators aren’t a drain on power, thanks to auto-lighting and slow-down features.” (Source: On location, City Square Mall, Jan 2021)

Arguably these messages are excellent to raise public awareness and their mind growth, albeit it may take some time for such statements to sink into the social consciousness. It is not surprising that these notions are aligned with all four respondents’ views.

To ensure sustainability and the future of landscape architectural advances, what is essential is to operate greenhouses at Garden-by-the-Bay in an energy-efficient way. To facilitate this, Wilkinson Eyre, who designed sophisticated systems, says the envelopes are imperative to the entire process. The countless glass plates permit light to enter, simultaneously lessening the solar heat gain. According to Meinhold (2013), the low-e panels allow about 65 percent of the incident daylight, conversely only 35 percent of the solar heat. Next, the cool, dry air is permeated at the base of the greenhouses, along with the shrubs and humans. Invariably, the system cooling processes act as a dehumidifier and produce hot water and electrical energy for the entire complex. A local biomass boiler delivers electricity and thermal energy and is powered totally with organic waste from the parks. In 2012, it was a small wonder that Garden-by-the-Bay is awarded the World Building of the Year, WAF Awards, and the BCA Green Mark Platinum. These initiatives mentioned are also timely reminders and shining exemplars for a green mind change among the community.

(iii) The third P of CSR is that of **People**, a vital resource, that is, companies being responsible while taking care and volunteering in the community; the people must be cared for. A human need is that all of us want to be valued and not treated as unimportant (Low, 2012a). And more so, from the Chinese perspective, man is a miniature of Heaven and Earth. Compassion and love for our fellow beings are fundamental tenets in Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism (Low, 2018; 2010; Low, 2012a; Low, 2009). [Taoism speaks of, “A compassionate

nature – human-heartedness – is inherent in all of us; all good deeds spring from compassion” (Low, 2009: 22)].

Ang and Low (2015: 312) found that when corporates take care of their HR or human capital/talent and grow, nurture or train and develop them, they are socially responsible. Child labor should be avoided, and corporates need to ensure that their employees work or operate in workplaces with suitable or acceptable working conditions. They need to ensure the safety and health of their employees. Overall, the employees’ terms and conditions should be fair and equitable, or in short satisfactorily, and the employees’ needs are looked after. One can also see the positive impact of CSR on employees in terms of various organizational outcomes, including organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and employees’ motivation.

Taking all this together, everyone would like to feel happy, and they want to be included and not be excluded; this is very motivating if not inspiring to the people (Low, 2018). CSR is crucial for the community and is valued and cherished for a company by the same token. CSR activities can promote an endearing relationship between people (such as the employees) and the corporations, increase self-esteem and help both employees and employers sync with the world around them (Fernando, 2020). Corporate responsibility programs are a pronounced way to improve morale in the workplace (Fernando, 2020).

With this model, based on the work of Fernando (2020), one can also advance the **People** element of CSR; therein lies the vital value of returning to the community (researchers’ observations). Almunawar and Low (2014) have identified that the Asian importance of paying back to the community, such as Confucian ethics (Low 2008; cited in Almunawar and Low, 2014) and Islamic ethics (Almunawar and Low, 2014). It includes building trust and the stakeholders, which is predominant in Asia, such as Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and China. Profits are plowed back to be spent for the community’s well-being, such as the building of hospitals and charities, etc. Asian companies, when pursuing and practicing Asian values and CSR, take it that they are contributing or be part of the cause to their communities. And these motivate them to be socially responsible. “More so, they see themselves as bearers and practitioners of Asian values” (Almunawar and Low, 2014: 182).

(iv) Existing literature suggests that it is necessary to assess involvement, which brings us to the fourth P of CSR: Participation. Without the participation of the people, there is no involvement (“Why should we be bothered?”), contribution and care for CSR on their part. And without the latter, apathy, passivity, and failure are likely to ensue for any (CSR) program. There can be an indifferent (passive) attitude and outlook in both the Singaporean and Malaysian contexts, implying that I do not care since I am not involved and engaged. I care less,

and I cannot be bothered! In short, “Who cares! and don’t bother me!”

Ang (2015: 411) identified participation in social science was associated with different mechanisms for people to express opinions and effectively exert influence concerning political, economic, management, or other social decisions. As opposed to autocratic ways, participation is defined as the engagement and involvement of the people or employees in the organization’s processes, such as problem-solving and decision-making. When participating, employees can express their viewpoints, contribute their ideas, give their inputs or feedback to their superiors, and provide suggestions for improvements.

From the administrative viewpoint, CSR can rally public support for socially responsible activities in the competitive world. It can also inform or educate (**especially here when one speaks of mind growth**) about agency and CSR activities. It can also make easy, helpful information exchange regarding local and foreign conditions. Moreover, participation is often legally mandated. And from the citizen viewpoint, participation enables individuals and groups to influence social responsibility decisions **plus ideas, suggestions, and actions** through representation (Ang, 2015, **in bold, authors’**).

In this study, the authors consider expanding participation and raising public awareness of green or green issues to introduce fun elements. The example of Punggol Waterway Park is a great place for park users to enjoy a fun-filled day of leisure activities. Fitness buffs may go jogging or riding bicycles on the nicely kept paths along the boardwalk on either side of the Waterway while taking in the magnificent vista. On the other hand, anyone can sit on the many benches placed around the park and enjoy the breeze as one listens to the restful sounds of the waterfalls (NParks, 2021). [Punggol Waterway Park is one of four parks connected by the North Eastern Riverine Loop of the Park Connector Network. The Waterway passes through the Punggol Waterway Park, enhances the park and water frontage for housing development, and provides a green respite for residents (NParks, 2021).] More so, Singaporeans can enjoy taking photographs, be the scenic views of the waterways or that of flora and fauna (NParks, 2021).

(v) The fifth P of CSR is that of **Protection of all creatures, nature, and the environment**. It is a Western concept or attitude that humans are the superior creature and dominates the world, and hence humans destroy and are recklessly damaging Mother Earth. Sadly, man has destroyed much of the land, animal life, and nature through deforestation, logging, and soil erosion. Deforestation is the clearing, obliterating, or if not, destroying of trees through deliberate, natural, or accidental methods. Living things on land, sea, and air are likewise to be cared for. In Singapore, this can be

illustrated in the form of the Eco-bridge built. This 62m-long wildlife link is the first purpose-built bridge for wildlife in Southeast Asia. This bridge links the 163ha Bukit Timah Nature Reserve to the Central Catchment Nature Reserve and is Singapore’s largest at more than 2,000 hectares. The two nature reserves were originally linked until the BKE was built in 1986. But 30 years later, the linkage between the two was resurrected. To observe if animals’ movements along the eco-link, camera traps were set up in nature reserves (Chew and Pazos, 2015). Interestingly pangolins and other animals have been sighted traveling on the Eco-Link@BKE to the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve and Central Catchment Nature Reserve (Chew and Pazos, 2015).

Given the importance of Asian religious practices and thinking, kindness should be extended to creatures and animals (Beasley, 2019; Bariyah, 2019). Concerning building the foundation for long-term success and avoiding animal suffering and ensuing regret, pet guardians **develop the mind-growth** to build a successful long-term relationship. Potential conflicts can be avoided by understanding and respecting the dynamic each pet elicits (Beasley 2019: 66, **in bold, authors’ words**). Potential conflicts can be avoided by understanding and respecting the dynamic each pet elicits. The pet guardians can help quickly dissipate unwanted behavior and restore orders when dogs and other animals/pets are experiencing loud noise phobia, separation anxiety, and healing from traumas.

Another influential factor highlights the rainforest, which covers approximately 30 percent of the world’s landmass, vanishes at a startling pace. From 1990 till 2016, the world lost 502,000 square miles or 1.3 million square kilometers) of the forest — an area larger than South Africa. It is further reported that 17 percent of the Amazonian rainforest has been destroyed over the past 50 years (Nunez, 2019). One of the most dangerous and alarming impacts of deforestation is the loss of fauna and habitation. According to Pachamama Alliance (2020), seventy percent of land animals and plant species live in forests. So not only does **deforestation** endanger species, but the biodiversity is severely affected. The rainforest trees that supply shelter for some species also support the canopy that regulates the temperature. Deforestation causes a more drastic temperature variation from day to night, much like a desert, which could prove fatal for many inhabitants (Pachamama Alliance, 2020; Nunez, 2019).

As the number of trees is fast diminishing, more greenhouse gases are released into the atmosphere (Pachamama Alliance, 2020). Healthy forests soak up carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, driving valuable carbon absorption. But deforested areas lose that ability and release more carbon. In short, deforestation increases the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere leading to global warming due to the greenhouse effect (Nunez, 2019; Kamran, 2012). The discussions from respondents

postulate that they also positively influence a firm's subsequent growth. This result is also in line with Hallinger & Nguyen (2020), who showed that education and mind-growth must occur, and logging and deforestation must stop.

Government can beautify their countries with nature reserves and parks (marine and gardens) while planting more trees, ferns, and plants along the roads. And businesses too can embellish their buildings with trees and plants. Former mines or land scars can be transformed into ponds such as Little Guilin, Bukit Batok in Singapore.

Along the same lines, authors such as Almunawar and Low (2014: 190) have related Singapore was beautifying its environment. For example, the "Keep Singapore Clean" campaigns and the endearing efforts to be sustainable in its clean environment and water requirements. The polluted Kallang and once foul-smelling Singapore River also made a clean comeback. And Singapore also opened a garden-city image to boost its tourism and educate its citizens about green recovery and climate change.

The unwavering support from the National Parks Board of Singapore has been extraordinary. It has been enthusiastic and dedicated to transforming Singapore into a City in Nature. Furthermore, to create the best living environment through nature conservation, greenery, and recreation (National Parks Board, 2021). Singapore, the Garden City, has 350 parks and four nature reserves (National Parks Board, 2021a), including the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve and the Singapore Botanic Gardens. (The Gardens has been included as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2015. The Gardens is the exclusive tropical botanical gardens on the UNESCO's World Heritage List; NParks, 2020).

In addition, the National Parks Board is also actively involved in community engagement championing conservation and appreciation of the island republic's urban greenery. First, nature, including trees, animals, and marine life, has been conserved, and biodiversity has been encouraged. A case in point is Singapore's first marine park, The Sisters' Islands Marine Park, which spans about 40 hectares around Sisters' Islands; and along the western reefs of both St John's Island and Pulau Tekukor, is a stage for outreach, educational, conservation and research activities. This is associated with the island republic's native marine biodiversity. The site was chosen due to its various habitats, including coral reefs, sandy shores, and seagrass areas. Such initiative indeed aims to give Singaporeans a first-hand experience of our rich biodiversity, submerged most of the time (NParks B; 2021).

Notwithstanding the numerous campaigns on cleanliness in the past, the need for public education is still ongoing. The elevators in the public housing blocks are vandalized (or found with graffiti), littered, and sometimes

used as toilets, angering residents and the general public (Jacobs & Yuen, 2019). Likewise, the ban on the import of chewing gum in the early 1990s can also be set within this context, that substance having appeared for infrastructure builders as not just a nuisance but a tool of low-level damage (Clancey, 2018).

Much of the literature on greening and sustainability has focused on conservation and beautifying the ecological community. Still, the safeguarding of water in the resource-scarce Singapore is of utmost importance to the government. Since 2011, the water catchment area has improved from half to two-thirds of Singapore's land surface with the achievement of the Marina, Punggol, and Serangoon Reservoirs, making Singapore a distinct country internationally to harvest urban stormwater extensively for potable consumption (PUB, 2021).

(vi) The sixth P of CSR is that of Ploy or Strategy. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has drawn considerable interest not only in the press but also in the scholarly literature. From the philanthropic and commercial lens, we see that firms participating in CSR pursuits will eventually reap competitive advantage (Dupire & M'Zali, 2018). In light of recent studies on CSR, Fernando (2020) purported that to engage in CSR means that a company is striving towards enhancing society and the environment instead of negatively impacting them in the usual course of business. This implies that firms should participate in CSR selectively in line with top management corporate strategic vision from a business perspective.

In 2010, the International Organization for Standardisation (ISO) released a set of voluntary standards designed to help companies apply CSR certification. In contrast to other ISO standards, ISO 26000 offers instructions instead of conditions. Since the spirit of CSR tends to be qualitative than quantitative. Moreover, it cannot validate its standards.

As an alternative, ISO 26000 clarifies social responsibility and helps organizations transform CSR standards into practical and workable actions. The standard is targeted at all sectors of the industries irrespective of their activity, size, or location. It is precisely because various important stakeholders worldwide came together to develop the ISO 26000; this standard represents an international consensus (Standards ISO 26000, n.d.; also cited in Fernando, 2020).

However, a study was done by Kenexa High-Performance Institute in London in 2015 (cited in Great People Inside, 2018) uncovered that organizations that had a genuine interest and commitment to CSR outperform those who restraint from such activities. The study has also highlighted that CSR-based organizations enjoyed higher employee engagement and offered better customer support service. CSR offers tremendous satisfaction and enthusiasm at a corporate level, even though at the

organizational level, companies do not always accept or admit their responsibilities for CSR, with many businesses welcoming adopting CSR purely as a marketing ploy (Great People Inside, 2018).

Based on the above, Low (2011, cited in Almunawar and Low, 2014: 190) argued that Singapore's audacity of going towards a green environment from the beginning makes good business sense; it is thought that going green will help to reduce pollution as well as cutting business costs. The critical problem of setting up the requisite infrastructure and port facilities, the cleaning of the Singapore River and Kallang River, is an excellent example of Singapore's priorities and challenges after gaining independence in 1965. It becomes relevant to recognize potential cleaning, upgrading, and improvement of facilities as well as the greening is an integral part of the country's "strategic maintenance" (**Ploy or Strategy**) efforts (Low, 2009a, also cited in Almunawar and Low, 2014: 190, **bold the authors' emphasis**). The citizen, too, through education, campaigns, and various efforts by the government, are starting to become eco-conscious. At least they get more empathetic or better appreciate nature and the environment. This kind of citizenry allows the authors to explain the value and potential of the fifth P of CSR.

(vii) Finally, the essential seventh P is that of **Proactiveness**. Situations in the global context necessitate employers and workers to be proactive and passionate in their personal and professional pursuits to survive and stay in business. According to Nissen & von Rennenkampff (2017), proactiveness is derivative from both the individual ability to act and the intellectual ability to think, plus the capacity to learn and apply knowledge for companies to be competitive and succeed in the ever-changing and volatile, disruptive environments. With the emergence of the digital economy, intellectual capital is an acutely precious source of proactiveness (Liu et al., 2016).

The changing faces and the rising importance of environmental sustainability; construction of a robust, equitable, and eco-friendly can be traced to fostering "proactiveness is necessary" in national policy agendas.

In Singapore, an excellent example of such proactiveness is that of Chek Jawa. Pulau Ubin, off mainland Singapore, a wonderland of nature, stayed hidden from locals for centuries in the corner of a rustic island. The ecological charms of Chek Jawa were uncovered only when the area where it lies was scheduled to take place for redevelopment in 2000. When the authorities realized what had been found – a 100-hectare wetland heaving with wildlife – the redevelopment plans were halted. The chance discovery of this green reserve has since given thousands of visitors the opening to explore a treasure trove of biodiversity (STB, 2021).

#### IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

"THINK Green and ACT Green." "Stay green, be resolute and think of our future generations" (All four respondents' inputs). And in handling greenness or CSR as a way forward, all of us should be adaptable, embracing mind-growth; and this is certainly much needed. We need to be progressive, participative, and proactive, making full use of our gifts and strengths and capitalizing on new opportunities for both our sake and the sake of our future generations and that of our Mother Earth.

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