

**Helping a Small Family Business Firm Become Socially Responsible****George El-Rahbani**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to address a gap in the literature regarding the adoption of Social Responsibility (SR) in small businesses and its impact on overall performance. This issue comes from that most of the research has been undertaken in big firms and the subsequent results applied to small businesses. This is a major drawback since the dynamics in large companies and sometimes huge multinationals differ from the ones of small businesses which mostly focus on income. Family businesses find themselves at loggerheads with their stakeholders in an attempt to be socially responsible as they perceive the act as additional expenses. We argue small businesses have to rethink and invent new ways of being socially responsible for operating in a threatening environment. This paper relates an intervention research procedure based on the Socio-Economic Approach to Management (Savall, 1976) which applied management tools aiming to internally reduce dysfunctions and externally reach strategic objectives. The effect of the intervention research on socially responsible activities of small business firms and the results towards stakeholders are detailed emphasizing the increase in administrative personnel's efficiency and productivity towards stakeholders.

KEYWORDS: Social Responsibility, Small family business and Intervention Research.**1. INTRODUCTION**

Large businesses have increasingly been involved in Social Responsibility (SR) initiatives, which focus on how an organization manages social issues (De Silva et al., 2007; Peng et al., 2010). Large companies have known for years that the way stakeholders view a company's SR is an important element of their strategy because stakeholders' perceptions are critical to firm performance and sometimes even their survival (Hart, 1995; Russo & Fouts, 1997; Berman et al., 1999). As a consequence, a lot of businesses try to enhance their environmental image by mitigating the deleterious effects they may produce on the environment and publicizing their successes. While large businesses have been subject to a fair volume of research about their SR initiatives and their impact on performance, the literature does not show the same for small businesses. The purpose of this study is to address this knowledge gap and investigate the relationship which exists between the measure and the management of the performance of a family business and its adoption of SR initiatives. To this end, we use an investigation method based on the socio-economic theory (Savall, 1974) which is intervention research. This method relies on three principles: first, reality can only be known by modifying it, second participation by the researcher with the subjects of the

research facilitates the participation of the subjects between research and action, third the outcome of intervention research is the production of tools and theories about how to change an organization (Cappelletti et al., 2018). This investigation was performed at the XYZ company and explores how a family business that did not consider implementing an SR initiative before achieving profitability and did not want to invest in any SR operation before achieving measurable productivity for greater effectiveness, views SR and its importance concerning performance evaluation. Our findings detail the process by which this small family business became more socially responsible towards its stakeholders (employees, customers, suppliers, society, and the community in general) once it transformed to reach greater efficiency and competitiveness.

2. FOCAL POINT

This study investigates the status of SR in family businesses (hereafter XYZ Company) related to the insurance field in Lebanon. Lebanese family businesses have been the subject of very little scientific research and where few studies have shown qualitative or quantitative results (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011).

The reason for choosing a qualitative methodology informed by an intervention research method based on the socio-

economic theory is to contribute to both knowledge and practice by applying the three principles listed above. The methodology used to perform this investigation at XYZ is a tangible response to a need expressed by the company to improve its performance. As a result of the intervention research methodology, changes within the organization produce both measurable performance improvements and data that contribute to knowledge. XYZ dynamics and properties are completely different from a corporate medium or large-sized company, and from here comes the interest in this firm where SR initiatives can be linked to small family business's performance.

2.1 Social Responsibility: different perspectives

As per Schwartz and Carroll (2003, p. 508), SR is a “moral structure” and supports that “a person should act for the good of society, whether a corporation or an individual”. To sustain stability between the economy and the climate, SR is a responsibility each person has to reach (Sagoff, 2007). SR not only impacts business structures but anyone's actions toward the environment (Carroll, 1991). It is a concept that seeks to guarantee secure healthcare for individuals from diverse societies and remove all obstructions like distance, financial condition, etc. (Werther & Chandler, 2010). This responsibility can be passive, by evading to engage in socially hurtful activities or actions, or active through executing actions that directly improve social objectives (Kourula & Delalieux, 2016). SR may be intergenerational since one generation's decisions have repercussions on the next ones (Puaschunder, 2015). Several businesses have chosen to be mindful of their obligations towards society whether environmental, social, or even financial (Pava & Krausz, 1996). Businesses that have not yet taken action toward stakeholders and SR have recently been forced to do so by government agencies by laws and legislation (Carroll, 1991). Thus, SR no longer is an option, but an obligation, and businesses are kept liable for their actions that will eventually impact the environment of tomorrow.

2.2 Country of the Field Study

The fieldwork takes place in a small family business in Lebanon. The effect on stakeholders will be in the country of origin of the company. Firm XYZ is a small family business insurance brokerage company facing diverse sets of problems

regularly not unlike other businesses in Lebanon: a volatile troubled country for the past few years that recently faces a massive crisis linked to governmental issues undermining its economy and placing it on the verge of collapse. Unlike most developed nations, many of the essential needs are absent in Lebanon. A segment of the population lives below the poverty line and has limited access to food, water, housing, sanitation, transportation, health care, and technology. Companies are thus more vulnerable in such contexts than when placed in any other environment. Being a small family company, which only operates locally is what makes XYZ even more at risk.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH PROBLEM, AND CENTRAL HYPOTHESIS

As shown in Figure 1, the purpose of this investigation is to demonstrate how a family business by increasing profitability and maximizing its internal management effectiveness can become a socially conscious supplier, thus providing stakeholders with better results. In other words, our investigation demonstrates that once this family business achieved better efficiency and competitiveness, it gathered the potential to become more socially responsible towards its stakeholders (employees, consumers, suppliers, society, and the environment in general).

Our intervention research followed a simple process that first aimed at diagnosing and evaluating the cost of the weaknesses or dysfunctions XYZ experienced. Then formulating recommendations to rectify some of these issues and finally evaluating the outcomes of the implementation of these recommendations. The intervention-research method was based on the problem to be tackled and the dual ability of participative action research to:

- Reach measurable solutions to organizational development in family business management and ultimately improve profitability;*
- Develop an applicable plan for the family business to become more socially responsible once it reaches profitability.*

This intervention research showed that this firm was able to reach more effectiveness and productivity, and only then was thinking of implementing SR.



Figure 1-Research Objectives, Central Hypothesis and Research Problem



The investigation method we used aims at producing pragmatic solutions and theorizing findings, thereby bridging managerial theory and practice. This feature is expressed by the following research question: how can a family business firm become a better socially responsible provider for producing greater results toward Stakeholders?

Subsequently, the Central Hypothesis (CH) expressing this research question comes as The organizational change undertaken in a small business using intervention research method yields a socially responsible prescriptive theory seeking to demonstrate rationality by providing a certain guide on how individuals should make decisions, the fact that enhances business performance and results in better outcomes qualitatively, quantitatively and financially.

In other words, this CH expresses that intervention research methodology which aims at unifying both socio and economic aspects of management improves the institutional efficiency of XYZ, increases its competitiveness, and helps it become a better provider of SR for greater stakeholder outcomes. This can be made possible without investing only financially, but through enhancing cooperation between the company's structure and employees about the socio-economic theory. The latter takes place through confidence in the employee's capacity to develop and improve their performance and influence workflow and task accomplishments. From a theoretical perspective, this study is an attempt to integrate insights from the field of a family business

(i.e., ownership and change management) to understand its dynamics. It is through these change dynamics that intervention research recognizes the factors that can lead small family businesses to reach measurable profitability and become more socially responsible as the CH suggests.

4. OPENING IN LITERATURE IN LINKING SMALL BUSINESS AND SR

There has been extensive research into the field of corporate SR. Scholars research the topic to discover various causes, including the effects of SR, the different ways in which CSR is used by organizations, and the intended effects. (Snider et al., 2003; Soundararajan et al., 2018). One such analysis is a study by Snider et al. (2003), who researched the use of CSR in international organizations. The study showed that many corporations use CSR on a global basis to divert the public from controversies that threaten to destroy their image. In the study, the authors purposely chose to exclude small businesses and instead listed multinational companies in various countries. In their study, Soundararajan et al. (2018) noted that the use of SR in small companies has not been discussed in the literature in the past. The field of study, however, attracted numerous scholars and thus became popular. The researchers set out to assess the degree to which established literature in SMEs covered SR. The research found that only a couple of articles concentrated on the subject over 44 years. Figure 2 summarizes the opening in the literature and the contribution of this article.

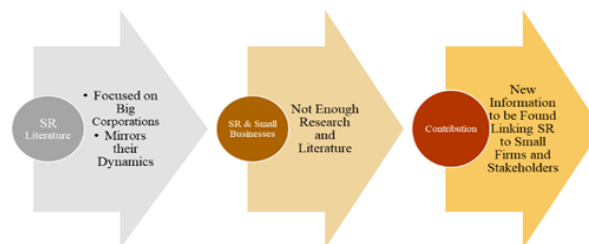


Figure 2-Opening in Literature and Contribution

The research approach will be established in the following section and the reasons for choosing the method will be clarified to predict how the defined openings in the above literature will be addressed.

5. METHOD USED IN THE INTERVENTION RESEARCH

The intervention research we used is a method developed in the '70s by Savall et al. (1975; 2008; 2011) called the Socio-Economic Approach to Management (SEAM). Inspired by the seminal work of Germán Bernácer (1916) and based on the Socio-Economic Theory (Savall, 1975), this qualitative applied-research method aims at improving an organization's management and economic efficiency.

"Socio-economic theory considers an organization as a complex ensemble comprising five types of work structures interacting with five types of human behavior. The structures (physical, technological, organizational, demographic, and mental) are assumed to be relatively stable and permanent. Behaviors (individual, activity group, categorical, affinity group,

and collective) are characterized by their cyclical nature and their relative instability. This theory is based on two assumptions: the first one is that the main factor of efficiency in the short, medium, and long term is the human development of the company. Second, there is in any company, whatever its sector of activity and its size, social, economic, and financial losses due to the existence of dysfunctions linked to the interaction between company structures and human behavior. These dysfunctions are evidenced by anomalies, errors, and disturbances and are expressed in the difference between the desired and the actual operations. They result in atrophy of the economic and social performance of each company and organization because "the economic and social performance of an organization depends on the quality of the interaction of the structures of the organization and behavior of the men who act within this organization" (Savall, 1978; Savall & Zardet, 1989)".

This method works through three axes: a political and strategic decision axis, a change process axis, and an axis of

management tools. It uses the three main axes simultaneously which departs from other change management theories such as Management Strategic Control (MSC) and Organizational Development (OD) which also adopt one of those axes, but not

the three simultaneously. This specificity gives a spiral impact to the method (i.e. qualitative, quantitative, and financial evaluation of performance assessment) as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

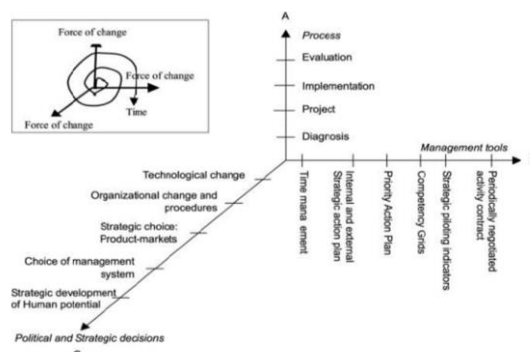


Figure 3-Synopsis of the Three Dynamic Forces of Change-Source ISEOR (1990)

6. THE INTERVENTION-RESEARCH FIELD PROCESS

The intervention research started with a negotiation phase in which XYZ was approached to carry out the study and collect appropriate data for the analysis. The CEO of the company had to be convinced of the potential of the method with some predicted findings which had to be provided. Following the negotiation process, two hearing sessions were held with the CEO on the problems and areas in which he believed some rectifications might have been required. In the hearing sessions, to reassure and stress the value of the intervention study, it was important to concentrate on the concerns and motivations of the CEO. Interviews with all workers were included in the diagnosis; such meetings focused largely on their relative job roles, concerns, and motives. Consequently, from the interviews, a statistical analysis was extracted to gather all the useful information collapsed into topics relevant to the issue raised by the CEO.

Then an overview of the interview was carried out to explain the dysfunctions with examples from collected information such as themes, sub-themes, key ideas, and field note quotes. Meetings were also conducted on two levels; first with the owner and CEO, then with the entire team. Consequently, the

intervention research took place through the introduction of management tools such as time management, competency grid, and economic balance, to eliminate dysfunctions internally and achieve strategic objectives through a plan articulated as helping a small family business firm become a better SR provider for greater results towards stakeholders.

According to SEAM, current accounting does not quantify about 40% of what happens financially in an organization. There can be thousands of dysfunctions in any particular company, and hidden costs may vary from \$20,000 to \$80,000 per employee per year. For an organization to be effective and competitive in the market, executives need reliable and complete input on decision-making (Conbere et al., 2017). Consequently, the hidden cost in XYZ was calculated which made an integral part of the whole intervention. The dysfunctions examined inside XYZ generated hidden costs that are concealed because they are not reported in the accounts and the information systems and affect the firm's performance. They affect both economic performance and social performance on two fronts: immediate outcomes and the creation of potential outcomes. Figure 4 below, illustrates how the hidden costs are measured.

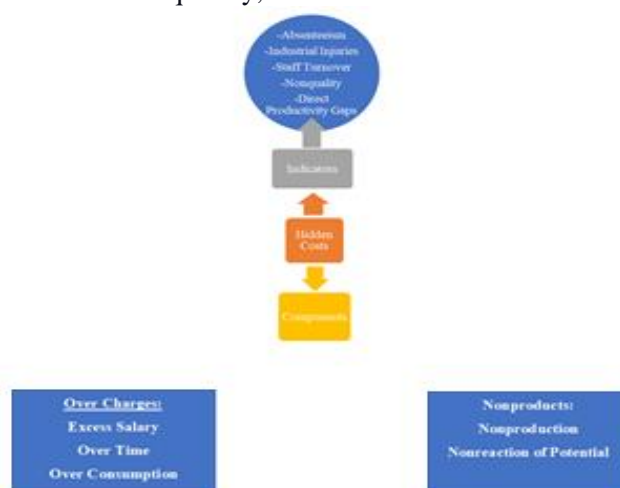


Figure 4-Hidden Costs and Performance



7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this section is to focus on the contributions of the intervention research to management practice, by shedding light on the practical results of this intervention, which would then enable us to take a more critical

view of the way the article seeks to contribute to knowledge. The contribution to knowledge will help put the theoretical contribution into context through interpreting, sharpening, and/or contradicting prior literature. In addition, this section presents the final phase of the intervention of the SEAM method.

Table 1-XYZ Sales Figures Before and After SEAM

Department	Before SEAM		After SEAM	
	Sales USD	%	Sales USD	%
Corporate	2,790,000	26.4731	3,341,000	29.22498
General	3,363,000	31.91005	3,681,000	32.19909
Motor	4,386,000	41.61685	4,410,000	38.57593
Total	10,539,000	100	11,432,000	100

In the corporate department, the overall sales increased by 16.49% as for the general department, an 8.64% rise in sales was observed and a 0.54 % increase in sales took place in the motor

department. The total growth in sales, according to the CEO, is 7.81 %.

Table 2-XYZ Claim and Logistics Figures Before and After SEAM

Department	Before SEAM	After SEAM
Claim	\$3,000,000	\$2,300,000
Logistics	\$700,000	\$550,000

To provide numerical figures to illustrate the success of the intervention in company XYZ, Table 2 above represents logistics figures before and after SEAM. For instance, the cost of the claim department was decreased by \$700,000, reflecting a 30.43% decrease in costs, and the operations department statistics were also decreased by \$150,000, reflecting a 27.27% decrease in costs. If we deduct the claim and logistic estimates from the total sales before SEAM, we will earn a total income of \$6,839,000, but if we do so after SEAM, the revenue will be \$8,582,000. A rise of 25.48%, is observed which is an important and satisfying number, as seen.

Since XYZ was able to achieve a more profitable position after the involvement and use of SEAM and its instruments, it can now be shown that the small family company has become a socially responsible supplier to its stakeholders. This occurred after XYZ reached its full internal management effectiveness and improved profitability to invest in socially responsible behavior.

The first contribution is the main focus and represents the central hypothesis of the research. Therefore, showing how a family business can become a socially responsible provider by reaching its maximum internal management efficiency to increase profitability has been proved, and represents a new contribution to knowledge, as no previous literature found researched the subject. Consequently, it can be said that the present research evidenced through the intervention in firm XYZ, that when a small family business reaches more efficiency and productivity, it will think about investing in SR actions.

Below are sub-sections of XYZ's actions towards employees, clients, suppliers, community, and the environment

in which it operates that have been affected positively by the change that has occurred in XYZ.

7.1 Socially Responsible Actions Towards XYZ's Staff Members

XYZ's employees are considered to be the true assets of the organization.

An organization without its employees even with the best technology and state-of-the-art infrastructure would be a shell of itself if the employees are not motivated to deliver and perform. As such, XYZ has the first obligation towards its employees to ensure they are happy, motivated, and satisfied to carry out their duties. Therefore, after the intervention and the emphasis of SEAM on human potential and the change that has occurred in the culture and behavior of the employees in XYZ, the firm now feels more responsible to ensure its employees are happy, motivated, and satisfied.

7.2 Socially Responsible Actions Towards XYZ's Clients

The company clients or customers are an essential part of a business that every organization should strive to ensure are satisfied and happy. Without the existence of the customers, a business will have no one to serve; and therefore, it will be useless. One of how XYZ has ensured that its clients and customers are happy and satisfied is by ensuring it is socially responsible towards them.

7.3 Socially Responsible Actions Towards XYZ's Suppliers

An organization in general has a virtual duty to act responsibly to protect its suppliers as it does with its employees and clients. XYZ's suppliers who in this case are the insurance companies play a vital role in the success of the business. Thus,



XYZ is now conscious that it must put in place measures that will enable it to act socially responsibly towards them.

7.4 Socially Responsible Actions Towards XYZ's Community

An organization is part of society; and therefore, as a member of a community in which it operates it must act ethically towards the community and the environment. The community expects the business not only to make a profit but also to engage in activities that will improve the economic and social welfare of society and the need to safeguard the environment. XYZ has decided to do so after reaching measurable efficiency and has engaged in SR activities toward the community and the environment.

8. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

This intervention shows how the use of SEAM made the team of XYZ collaborate, engage, and organize more without resistance or friction. Moreover, this revolutionary form of intervention never violates human interests and respects clear moral standards, and intentionally encourages practitioners to aim for the liberty and self-worth of every worker. The present intervention has shown that changing organizational behaviors results in better outcomes for all parties concerned; therefore, all

stakeholders. To retain a strong social and economic role, investment in managerial reform has therefore proved necessary.

Last but not least, the research's central hypothesis indicated that socioeconomic intervention research improved the performance of administrative workers and thus improved productivity for stakeholders; thus, the organization became more likely to behave socially responsibly.

Future research in the field is still vital and especially important and should, for example, aim to test the following:

-How is the output of small family enterprises affected after the adoption of SR?

-How will small family companies support SR in their activities?

-How can the SR provide a small family company with a competitive advantage?

Small family businesses and, in particular, companies operating in the Lebanese market may also be included in other studies and aim to examine how to manage and expand these companies while preserving their values and relative identities. An exploratory study and evaluation of the propensity of small family enterprises in Lebanon to follow SR behavior would also be interesting.

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