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Sustainability and Social Responsibility in Small Food Enterprises: Barriers and Enablers

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

Aurora Dawn Reinke

MIBS, University of South Carolina, 1996

BBA, Georgia State University, 1994

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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June 2017

Abstract

Small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in the food industry contend with a variety of corporate sustainability and social responsibility (CSSR) issues, ranging from the environmental impact of food waste to human health concerns about specific ingredients and production methods. In this qualitative multicase study, based on the conceptual frameworks of strategic development, stakeholder management, and institutional theory, I explored barriers and enablers for Washington, DC-based food SMEs as they proactively addressed CSSR issues. I interviewed five SME owner-managers. The transcripts were then coded and analyzed. Three themes emerged. Strategic development tended to be ad hoc and experimental, but with equal focus on establishing and growing a market for the product and achieving the central CSSR mission. The most important stakeholder was the customer because they are essential to the survival of the company, but also because owner-managers seek to change customers' awareness and behaviors as they relate to CSSR issues. Institutional constructs— such as kitchen incubators— enable entrepreneurs to start up but, along with limited local supply chains and costly and confusing regulations, they represent significant barriers to scale. The implication for social change within the local community is startup food incubators can use the findings to design models more conducive to scaling food SMEs that support local food production. This could benefit both local economic development and health outcomes.

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Dedication

I dedicate this paper to God because it is He who planted in me a passion for social justice and a talent for business. I also dedicate this to my parents, who did not go to college, but reminded me every day that higher education was my destiny. I also dedicate this to my husband who supports and encourages me in my educational and professional endeavors.

Acknowledgments

I appreciate my family for believing in me and spurring me on to greatness. I would also like to acknowledge and thank colleagues and mentors along the way for not letting me quit.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

The concept of corporate sustainability and social responsibility (CSSR) has

emerged as a topic of growing importance as stakeholders have taken note of the

potential negative consequences of corporate operations. The food industry accounts for

an array of social and environmental issues. These include energy and sustainability

(Zanoni & Zavanella, 2012), food safety (Wiese & Toporowski, 2013), obesity and health

(Mialon, Swinburn, & Sacks, 2015), animal welfare (Manning, 2013), and food waste

(Loke & Leung, 2015).

Managers can choose to self-regulate corporate actions, but such efforts in the

food sector may fall short as evidenced by persistent social and environmental problems

listed above (Sharma, Teret, & Brownell, 2010). Government administrators and non-

governmental organizations (NGOs) often intervene, on behalf of constituents and the

environment, to ensure management operates in a way that is ethical, legal, and fair.

Some firm leaders choose to go beyond compliance, embrace social and environmental

stewardship, and try to integrate social and environmental initiatives into their corporate

strategy, listing these in their mission statements. There is no universal definition of

CSSR, nor is there a consistent strategic approach to CSSR, therefore, managers seek

tools and methodologies for guidance (Hahn, 2013). Meznar, Chrisman, and Carroll

(1990) outlined a range of approaches to a CSSR strategy that span from defensive and

narrow to accommodative and broad. Despite some small-to-medium enterprise (SME)

owner-managers' wish to be proactive in addressing their firms' impact on people and the

planet, choosing and prioritizing the issues to address can be daunting; designing CSSR strategy and building an organization to carry out such a strategy are complex tasks (Chalmers, 2013).

Problem Statement

SMEs have a major impact on world economies. Their corresponding social and environmental implications are noteworthy: an estimated 60–70% of pollution worldwide is generated by SMEs (Hoogendoorn, Guerra, & van der Zwan, 2015). However, CSSR activity in food SMEs is lacking. In one study of nearly 5,000 CSSR reports, just over 5% of total reports represented the food industry, and slightly more than 2% of those were SMEs (Hartmann, 2011). SME founders and managers face unique drivers and barriers when addressing CSSR (Shields & Shelleman, 2015). The general business problem is that some SME owner-managers in the food industry fail to accomplish their CSSR goals as listed in their mission statements (Bennington & Minutolo, 2012). The specific business problem is that some SME managers who seek to operationalize a mission-based CSSR policy do not understand the potential barriers or how to address them (Meznar et al., 1990).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, multicase study was to explore the existence of, and management's reactions to, structural and other barriers to integrating CSSR within SMEs in food businesses. These businesses' owner-managers actively sought to include in their mission and implement within their operations CSSR initiatives and policy. The participants were SME owner-managers who sought or were seeking to implement a

CSSR initiative to address their organizations' mission and policy statements. To identify candidates, I reviewed SME food producers' mission statements and CSSR policies and press releases, as available on their websites.

The findings of this study contribute to social change by identifying distinct, firm-level limitations food production SMEs encounter in planning for, and implementing, CSSR initiatives. Other findings included (a) discovering best practices for overcoming obstacles in achieving CSSR goals; (b) a way to enable food producers to provide health conscious and environmentally conscious consumers access to products that meet consumers' CSSR expectations; (c) helping practitioners, such as entrepreneurs and incubator directors, who seek to preserve the environment and advance the social welfare of farmers, vendors, employees, customers, and communities.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study used a multicase study design. Qualitative methodology is appropriate for research exploring complex management topics (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). An indispensable characteristic of SME CSSR is the attitude of the owner-manager (Inyang, 2013); I chose a research method that allows deeper exploration of owner-managers' attitudes and relationships with stakeholders. Another element of the study design selection was my worldview. According to Petersen and Gencel (2013), a researcher's worldview influences research method. While there are many worldviews available, my worldview resonates with an *interpretivist* perspective, which Petersen and Gencel (2013) define as a person who constructs a reality based on contextual factors, such as the context relative to the conditions and environment that exists in each of a

variety of companies. Petersen and Gencel suggested that interpretivists use a qualitative case study with random or purposeful sampling.

The design for this study was multicase study; a cross-case focus can reveal both comparable and contrasting results (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). In a multiple unit case study, multiple sources of data, such as interviews and written materials, strengthen the study (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). I triangulated the interview data with the available documentation; however, given the limited CSSR reporting by SMEs (Hartmann, 2011), other means of triangulation were necessary, such as (a) publicly available customer feedback (b) website content, and (c) information on participating firms' initiatives in the local press. To address the business problem, I designed the research questions to explore barriers, limitations, failures, and successes with the goal of revealing solutions for them. I chose a qualitative design because quantitative research limits the depth of investigation into personal and procedural nuances of implementation experiences. In a quantitative study, the researcher draws upon existing instruments to measure variables; however, there is no instrument to measure what I examined in this study.

Research Question

In this study, I explored strategy, product development, operational processes, and relationships to understand the barriers, limitations, and restrictions that can affect or alter SMEs' CSSR design and implementation. The interviewees were owner-managers of companies with an accommodative or proactive CSSR stance, meaning the CSSR

strategy was central to the marketing or operational strategy. The primary research

question was as follows:

What are the barriers and enablers for food production SME managers in

designing, developing, and implementing an effective CSSR strategy?

The subsidiary research question was as follows:

What means have been developed and implemented to address the barriers and

challenges effectively?

Interview Questions

I used the following questions to guide the participants' interviews:

- Provide a basic description of your business, including ownership, years in
  business, revenues, number of employees, number of products, etc.

- How are CSSR goals integrated into the strategic planning process?

- How has the organization achieved the mission regarding CSSR goals?

- How do laws and regulations facilitate or hinder pursuit of CSSR goals?

- In what ways does the upstream supply chain facilitate the pursuit of CSSR
  goals?

- In what ways does the upstream supply hinder the pursuit of CSSR goals?

- If you have your own facilities of any kind (manufacture, distribution, etc.),
  how do CSSR goals affect those operations?

- How do those operations alter CSSR goals?

- How does downstream supply facilitate or hinder the pursuit of that goal?

- Does the customer (distributor, grocer, consumer) demand CSSR goals?

- How are CSSR goals and achievement communicated to customers downstream (packaging, website, etc.)?

- In what way, do costs and financing relate to the execution of CSSR goals?

- If you could start the business over, would there be different CSSR goals?

- What would you do differently in the future to better achieve CSSR goals?

Conceptual Framework

Given CSSR formation and implementation into business operations touches every aspect of an organization, I enlisted three concepts that would help explain and support this study: (a) strategic development frameworks relate to how management integrates CSSR into its strategies; (b) stakeholder theory is an essential consideration given the multitude of stakeholders involved in CSSR initiatives; (c) institutional theory relates to the evolution of CSSR in the context of firm-level, industry-level, and policy-level structures.

Strategic Development Frameworks

Strategy is the touchstone for owner-managers' decisions on the means to define, operationalize, and achieve market positioning and competitiveness. Classic strategic positioning options, such as low cost or differentiation, have given way to evolved approaches that overlay other goals onto the strategic development process. Some scholars have offered frameworks that managers can use to apply CSSR concepts to their strategic development process. Inherent in strategic development is the contention and elucidation of the values of the employees who carry out that strategy as well as the various stakeholders represented (Freeman, Gilbert, & Hartman, 1988). Venkatraman and

Nayak (2015) recommended that the leadership of a firm approach CSSR from a strategic and competitive stance. They further suggested there will be greater management buy-in when there are clear financial benefits in social and environmental activities. Porter and Kramer (2006) suggested a framework of shared value in the context of the intersection of strategy and society. First, leaders focus on linkages with society, in the context of the firm's competitive market; then managers strategically choose which social issues to confront by allocating resources (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Once managers choose the issue to prioritize, Porter and Kramer advised that managers generate a CSSR strategy in a responsive manner that addresses relevant social concerns and avoids or reduces risk. This strategy should align with business unit's goals and metrics, which entails measurable goals.

Meznar et al. (1990) presented a framework that accounted for not only responsiveness, but also a proactive CSSR stance in strategic development. Using their framework, managers can overlay a desired social return and targeted constituencies onto the value chain to determine the extent to which economic and social and environmental goals can co-exist within and among the various firm activities. Table 1 contains the complete framework.

Table 1

Meznar et al.'s Framework for Integrating CSSR into Strategic Management

	Economic stakeholders	Economic & social stakeholders		Social stakeholders
Beneficiaries		Narrow	Broad	
Economic only	Classical			

Economic and lower social cost	Defensive narrow	Defensive broad
Economic and higher social good	Offensive narrow	Offensive broad
Economic and higher social good + lower social cost	Accomoda-tive narrow	Accomoda-tive broad
Social only		Non-profit

(Meznar et al., 1990)

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholders are the constituents to which an organization's leadership is accountable. The perspective of management's relationship with its stakeholders is often the format for viewing the behavior of a firm's employees. Researchers categorized stakeholders in the following groups: (a) shareholders, (b) consumers, (c) employees, (d) government, (e) suppliers, (f) communities, and (g) the social and ecological realm (Mason & Simmons, 2014). The relative power of different stakeholders translates into different priorities and actions towards each; within SMEs, the stakeholder groups with the most power are employees and customers (Nejati, Amran, & Hazlina Ahmad, 2014). Mason and Simmons (2014) suggested a stakeholder systems model that necessitates a range of stakeholders evaluate CSSR at the strategy, operations, and outcomes levels, resulting in CSSR that accounts for the competing expectations and power of the various stakeholder groups.

The successful and consistent execution of a CSSR strategy necessitates a holistic approach that goes beyond lip service. Indeed, Forsman-Hugg et al. (2013) contended that stakeholders define CSSR within an organization. Manning (2013) presented stakeholder theory as a component in corporate social performance models, claiming

stakeholders (a) dictate acceptable levels of performance, (b) are impacted by corporate decisions, (c) assess how a firm is doing against expectations, and (d) respond with actions. O'Riordan and Fairbrass (2014) put forth a framework for stakeholder management for CSSR that includes stakeholder considerations in setting the context that forms the basis for strategy and decision making, establishing success criteria, and creating accountability. In this way, new opportunities and business model innovations are possible at the intersection of profit, societal, and ecological motives (O'Riordan & Fairbrass, 2014).

Institutional Theory

According to institutional theory the environment in which a business operates shapes owner-managers' responses to market conditions, opportunities, and problems; external parties such as government, associations and groups, customers, suppliers, local community, as well as internal parties such as key management, influence the evolution of the firm (Iarossi, Miller, O'Connor, & Keil, 2011). Glavas and Mish (2015) suggested a symbiotic relationship, whereby, while companies are influenced by their environment, those endeavoring a triple bottom line returns in economic, social, and environmental domains, also seek to change the environment, not just for the organization, but for the supply chain and others in the industry. Jensen and Berg (2012) used institutional theory to conclude which elements were responsible for the approach managers' take in CSSR reporting, for example, political, financial, educational, cultural, and economic. It is the societal and environmental institutional conditions that provide the context for CSSR activities and strategies (Glavas & Mish, 2015; O'Riordan & Fairbrass, 2014).

Roxas and Coetzer (2012) recognized the lack of research on the relationship between SMEs and institutional constructs as it relates to CSSR strategy. The premise of their study resonated with claims from other researchers who focused on the primary role of the owner-manager; in this case, Roxas and Coetzer studied the institutional environment's impact on the owner-manager. The authors built on the three dimensions of the institutional environment that had already been established: regulatory, normative, and cognitive. By considering the interaction of SME owner-managers and their institutional environment, Roxas and Coetzer sought understanding of the dynamics of those who take a proactive CSSR stance. The authors found that the normative aspect, or the values and attitudes of the owner-manager, had the strongest influence on proactive CSSR; however, regulatory compliance had the greatest impact on newer startups and micro-enterprises.

Operational Definitions

Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility (CSSR): Commonly referred to as either sustainability or corporate social responsibility (CSR), has become a ubiquitous topic (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). CSSR has an extensive variety of interpretations, depending on the perspective of the beholder, but researchers tend to use definitions put forth by national or transnational organizations (de Colle, Henriques, & Sarasvathy, 2014). Most commonly, CSSR is considered a triple-bottom line approach to managing a business; that is firm leadership should optimize financial, social, and environmental outputs (O'Riordan & Fairbrass, 2014; Shields & Shelleman, 2015). Researchers have characterized CSSR as discretionary (Carroll, 2016), voluntary

(Turyakira, Venter, & Smith, 2014), transparency (Ciasullo & Troisi, 2013), activity that is beyond legal compliance (Manning, 2013). Researchers often associate values words such as trust and ethics with CSSR (Ciasullo & Troisi, 2013; Mostovicz, Kakabadse, & Kakabadse, 2011).

Small to medium enterprise (SME): The definition of a small to medium enterprise varies based on region and researcher. A common parameters found across regions among various researchers is firms with fewer than 250 employees (Inyang, 2013; Laudal, 2011). Researchers pointed out SMEs are not just smaller versions of multinational corporations (MNCs) and have unique considerations and conditions (Inyang, 2013; Kechiche & Soparnot, 2012).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed the participants met the qualifying criteria of being a small business with a proactive CSSR approach. SME owner-managers have limited documentation to prove size or aspects of their operations. I assumed the participants provided truthful answers regarding number of employees and annual revenues. The intent for this study was to explore barriers encountered by SMEs' owner-managers who have a proactive CSSR stance; that is, they began with a social or environmental focus, or such goals became a principal element of the mission. I assumed interviewees would be forthright and accurate about their CSSR goals and activities.

Limitations

The study relates to SME firms in the food industry in the Mid-Atlantic so results

may not be generalizable to other markets, depending on similarity in conditions and

experiences. The applicability of the study to organizations in other industries, large

firms, or firms of any size that do not have a proactive stance on social and

environmental goals may also be limited. Furthermore, the study was limited to SME

managers who want or have wanted to form the business around a social or

environmental cause and with that cause stated in the mission. Given the different

approaches to setting priorities and making decisions, the findings may not apply to firms

where CSSR is not forefront in the mission.

Delimitations

I based the study on various startup and small food-related businesses whose

owner-managers had committed to address CSSR in their missions and policies. Of the

many types of food businesses, I selected value-add food producers who have common

dynamics in their supply chains and production processes. All the SME food businesses

were in and around the Washington, DC area. The geographical region was selected due

to the proximity and convenience of accessing the owner-managers for interviews.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

Contribution to Business Practice

SMEs with proactive social and environmental intent need tools and processes to

integrate social and environmental goals into their strategic planning and execution

(Hahn, 2013). The ability to establish an achievable social or environmental goal,

implement operations to support it, and measure the outcomes are critical steps to a successful CSSR. SME owner-managers can benefit from education and assistance to accomplish their strategic goals (Urbano & Alvarez, 2014).

Implications for Social Change

There is limited research on how CSSR can be applied to any one industry. The food industry is diverse and global in nature. Research is needed to support SME food businesses whose owner-managers have committed to implementing CSSR initiatives. Business leaders have an opportunity to address world health and environmental issues by addressing concerns throughout the entire food supply chain, from raw materials to consumers' tables.

This study has implications for social change by providing SME food business owner-managers best practices for setting and implementing strategies that support the social and environmental goals of firm leaders, employees, and customers. It is expected this study will also be useful for incubators, certifying bodies, and government agencies that (a) provide resources for enabling innovation and scale in food startups and (b) set policies that enable innovation and scale in food startups.

<div align="center">A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature</div>

This review of the literature covers the following topics: (a) CSSR, including a brief historical overview; (b) leading business case drivers, and some examples of consumer reactions to CSSR initiatives; (c) the application of CSSR to the food industry, which lends support to the context of the present study; (d) an exploration of CSSR applied to the startup and SME environment, which demonstrates the nuances these

firms' leaders face; and (e); details on the operationalization of CSSR through strategic

development, supply chain management, and reporting.

Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility

CSSR, commonly referred to as either sustainability or corporate social

responsibility, has a broad variety of interpretations according to the perspective of the

beholder. Most commonly, CSSR is a triple-bottom line approach to managing a

business; that is, the company's leadership optimizes financial, social, and environmental

outputs (Glavas & Mish, 2015). Table 2 offers a brief history of CSSR.

Table 2

Brief History of CSSR

Decade	Key CSSR Events and Movement
1950s	The beginning of awareness and acknowledgment that corporations have a responsibility to stakeholders other than shareholders.
1960s	Specific causes and language around CSSR begin to emerge.
1970s	Globalization and scandals raise awareness of firm activity, which propagated social ills.
1980s	Observers begin to categorize, define, and research the CSSR phenomenon.
1990s	Firms search for a business case to attach to CSSR activity.
2000s	Increase in both reactive and proactive CSSR efforts.

Authors and advocates began to address CSSR in the 1940s, and each successive

decade has included a shift in CSSR focus (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). One of the first

treatments of CSSR came in 1953 when Bowen, who put the onus on firm leaders to

contemplate the effects of their actions on stakeholders beyond the shareholder; from the

beginning, CSSR was principally the domain of large corporations (Kechiche &

Soparnot, 2012). In the 1950s, outliers began to speak and write about the notion of

business' role in society beyond profit maximization; and, the social movements of the

1960s and 70s brought more attention and clarity to special causes, and CSSR

terminology (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Post (2013) presented three historical phases of

the evolution of CSR; from the 1940s through the 1970s, globalization was occurring,

especially among industries such as petroleum, mining, banking, and agriculture.

Noteworthy scandals began to draw attention to the actions of multinational corporations

and resulted in adopting U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act; two cases rose above others

as pivotal (Post, 2013). First, apartheid in South Africa drew attention to human rights

violations and firms eventually had to change their policies or pull out as consumers

applied pressure (Post, 2013). Second, Nestle received worldwide negative publicity and

boycotts in response to its unethical marketing practices to women in developing

markets; irresponsible advertising resulted in malnourished babies because mothers did

not understand proper usage of baby formula (Post, 2013). In the 80s, researchers sought

to attach theory and evidence to CSSR, and during this decade and into the 90s, the focus

shifted more to establishing the business case for CSSR (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Post

highlighted catastrophic events in the 80s and 90s that underscored the importance of

safety and health of workers and communities, which led to the creation of codes of

conduct and other solutions to protect the public image and secure license to operate.

Today, it is difficult to ignore the proliferation of CSSR focus in the media, on

corporate websites, and in the marketplace. Scandals and atrocities continue while

technology and social media have made it easier for stakeholders to learn about a firm's

role in these issues. This forces managers to consider what CSSR is, and what role it

plays in strategy, marketing, and operations. Complicating matters, as noted by many

researchers, is there has yet to emerge a universal or consistent definition for CSSR (de Colle et al., 2014). Some managers face challenges in clarifying the firm's role in addressing societal and environmental problems. The lines can be gray, especially as leadership grapples with strategy integration, stakeholder management, competing and confusing institutional dynamics, and their personal values and beliefs that drive attitudes and behaviors towards CSSR.

CSSR Business Case and Drivers

The motivations behind CSSR activity range from compliance to proactively addressing social ills in distant parts of the world. The consensus in the research is that the business case has four components: (a) reputation and legitimacy, (b) risk and cost reduction, (c) strategic and competitive advantage, and (d) innovation (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Gupta (2012) outlined key CSSR motivations, which include (a) transparency, (b) societal value, (c) development, and (d) stakeholder management. The approach to CSSR execution is generally either opportunistic, which is a short-term mentality, or stable, which requires long-term thinking (Gupta, 2012). Gupta explained that CSSR evolution within the organization impacts decision to participate further in CSSR. On one end of the various spectrums, financial gain is the primary focus and management may perform CSSR out of obligation; on the other end are firm managers who are responsive and proactive in addressing society's needs and aim to be excellent corporate citizens (Gupta, 2012).

Galbreath (2010) studied the correlation between dimensions of CSSR and employee turnover, customer satisfaction, and reputation. Galbreath dissected CSSR into

four dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary, and results revealed a

positive correlation among all dependent variables with all but the ethical dimension of

CSSR. There is a positive link between CSSR and key performance indicators such as

turnover and customer satisfaction; managers may engage in CSSR for these benefits. On

the other hand, some managers genuinely want positive social and environmental

outcomes.

CSSR can have moderation effects on competitiveness, marketing capability, and

firm performance (Kemper, Schilke, Reimann, Wang, & Brettel, 2013). Using the

marketing mix elements, Kemper et al. (2013) found when both CSSR and competitive

intensity are high, stronger relationships between performance and pricing, product

development, distribution, and marketing communication exist. Isada and Isada (2015)

found a positive correlation between revenue increases and innovations that reduce

chemicals and water usage and increase safety and security in food production. CSSR

adds a dimension of decision-making and stakeholder management that a strictly profit-

oriented approach does not require. In the following sections, I further explore owner-

managers' responses to these business drivers through strategic development, stakeholder

management, and formalizing and operationalizing CSSR in the context of institutional

conditions.

Deployment of CSSR through Strategic Development and Planning

To move beyond lip service in the arena of CSSR, managers must implement

sustainability and social responsibility into business practices. Rather than being an add-

on, managers should internally integrate CSSR into processes and systems (Venkatraman

& Nayak, 2015). One of the problems identified by researchers is a lack of common a
definition of CSSR (Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, & Murphy, 2013), and as outlined in later
sections, industry context and organization size effect respective approaches and
priorities.

Porter and Kramer (2006) pointed out two types of misguided thinking in the
realm of CSSR; business and society are interdependent, not enemies, and firm managers
should approach CSSR from a unique strategic position rather than generically. Starting
with strategic development and following through to product or service delivery and
support, management should intentionally and proactively integrate CSSR. In practice,
this is a challenging proposition. Faced with (a) competing priorities for the same
resources, (b) confounding laws and regulations in each market, (c) complex supply
chains, and (d) changing consumer expectations, management should weigh carefully
decisions and actions to achieve CSSR goals and meet stakeholder expectations. The
introduction of CSSR has the potential to alter the core mission of a business and how
management goes about fulfilling it. The mission gives birth to strategy and all other
decisions in a firm flow from that strategy. If CSSR is to inform strategy, then by
extension, it seeps into (a) market positioning and messaging, (b) organizational
development, (c) operational processes, and (d) allocation of resources.

Management teams go through a process of CSSR discovery. Sharp and Zaidman
(2010) applied the theoretical framework of strategy as practice to the *strategization* of
CSSR within firms to assess how CSSR strategy evolves, the level of CSSR strategy
progress, and how CSSR impacts that strategic process. Sharp and Zaidman further

support strategy as practice by applying strategy to CSSR by highlighting the increased

legitimacy of CSSR over time, and revealed the approach of strategy as practice in the

interplay among management, the organization at large, and the strategic activities. There

are numerous methods and classic strategic planning tools managers can use to scan and

assess how to best integrate CSSR-oriented ideas. Ciasullo and Troisi (2013) profiled a

firm's management who used life-cycle analysis to build knowledge on sustainability and

organizational development to support sustainability initiatives. Shields and Shelleman

(2015) modified the classic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT)

analysis approach to strategic planning to overlay CSSR concerns, but also pointed out

that SME owner-managers are less likely to be familiar with formal planning tools such

as SWOT. It should be noted factoring in CSSR elements to basic approaches like

creating a business model does add levels of complexity (Schaltegger, Lüdeke-Freund, &

Hansen, 2016).

One way in which the *strategization* of CSSR is different from strategic

development of profit-focused activities is the manner in which employees accept these

initiatives; less negotiation and persuasion is needed (Sharp & Zaidman, 2010). Porter

and Kramer (2006) agreed that sustainability outside of the strategic context represents

costs and trade-offs managers are ill-equipped to address. Ultimately, the aim is a tightly

integrated relationship between business and society such that CSSR is an inseparable

activity (Porter & Kramer, 2006). SMEs with proactive CSSR tend to have a more

strategic perspective on how CSSR integrates within the organization (Thorton & Byrd,

2013). Despite the fact that most corporate executives now believe CSSR should be

integrated into strategy; the majority of managers also confess a top challenge is the actual implementation (Iarossi et al., 2011).

In the following paragraphs, I discuss how firm managers approach CSSR in strategy through the lenses of some stakeholders' consideration.

Consumer CSSR Response and Expectations

Customers are significant stakeholders of a business. In regard to any investment, consumer demand and response will drive the top line of the economic evaluation, namely sales revenue. Focusing mainly on customers, employees, and shareholders is a reflection of firm managements' commitment to profits since these are the stakeholders necessary for basic business functions (Öberseder et al., 2013). In this section, I examine consumer attitudes, and given the target population for this study is food companies, I emphasize the context of food purchases.

Consumers do have expectations as it relates to CSSR. Partly attributed to the role of social media, customers wield an increasing influence over SMEs' environmentally responsible practices (Nejati et al., 2014). Hoogendoorn et al. (2015) found SMEs responded differently to various types of stakeholders; consumer markets exerted more influence on green product design than business market customers did, while financial support stakeholders resulted in both the greening of products and the greening of processes. The impact of specific types of stakeholders can even be linked to the type of environmental practices a SME adopts, such as product features or operational processes (Zuraidah Raja Mohd Rasi, Abdekhodaee, & Nagarajah, 2014). Marketers need to know both which stakeholders to target and which CSSR topics are relevant for each.

Öberseder et al. (2013) found the corporate priority and perspective of various issues

differed from the customers'; both see fair treatment of customers as a high priority, but

customers view environmental responsibilities of more importance than the corporate

managers did.

Despite such findings, others have claimed a need to profile more effectively the

emerging environmental sustainability-conscious consumer; research findings in the areas

of knowledge, attitude, and behavior dimensions as it relates to the consumer and the

environment has been contradictory and inconclusive (Ukenna, Nkamnebe, Nwaizugbo,

Moguluwa, & Olise, 2012). The precise formula to target consumers' CSSR needs

remains elusive. The degree to which the brand image fits the social cause is significant;

the social cause has a stronger tie-in when the consumer perceives the brand as altruistic

and credible (Bigné, Currás-Pérez, & Aldás-Manzano, 2012). Retailer managers use

signage and other atmospheric elements to draw attention to the sustainable nature of the

products; consumers, wishing to conform to societal expectations and following the

fashion of sustainability, should be influenced by these methods in purchasing energy

efficient goods (Seifi, Zulkifli, Yusuff, & Sullaiman, 2012). Consumers perceive socially

responsible private label brands as higher quality and assign loyalty to the retailer

(Aouina Mejri & Bhatli, 2014). Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013) determined consumers

are skeptical about CSSR efforts when the motives appear to be egoistic or stakeholder

driven, but when consumers believe the CSSR is a genuine reflection of values,

skepticism diminishes; a CSSR scheme can do more harm than good if not manifested

from authentic beliefs. Öberseder et al. (2013) concluded consumers consider fairness

and honesty essential at any stage of CSSR development, whether a marketing tactic or a fully integrated strategy. O'Riordan and Fairbrass (2014) echoed this advice in their framework in which CSSR communication is a sincere declaration of a completed process involving stakeholders in setting context, making strategic decisions, and measuring outputs.

Studies reveal mixed results regarding consumers' willingness to pay a premium or change their habits towards socially responsible or sustainable goods and services, and management will face challenges in connecting with the consumer on the level of CSSR. Carrington, Neville, and Whitwell (2014) surveyed customers to characterize the gap between ethical purchasing intent and actual behavior, and found the following affect purchasing behavior: (a) how consumers prioritize ethical matters, (b) the extent to which they have a formal plan and routine related to ethical purchasing, (c) disposition towards the sacrifice required to match intention with behavior, and (d) how the consumer shops. For some products and preferences, there are insufficient ethical options in the marketplace, or compromise results from difficulty in accessing sufficient information or unwillingness to significantly alter habits (Carrington et al., 2014). Rousseau and Vranken, (2013) explored the effect of information asymmetries on the price of organic produce. Specifically, they found that while consumers were already willing to pay more for the health benefits of organic produce, but when exposed to information on the environmental impact of organic production, consumers' willingness to pay increased by a wider margin (Rousseau & Vranken, 2013). The organic label garners perceptions that are more favorable than non-organic on global, local, and private label brands;

furthermore, higher purchase intent and price premiums are associated with organic labels, especially at the private label level (Bauer, Heinrich, & Schäfer, 2013).

Managers engage consumers in CSSR in other ways such as encouraging consumer donation to a selected cause, making the customer, in essence, a partner. Mattila and Hanks (2012) investigated the relationship between the nature of CSSR initiatives and consumer motivation to donate funds to selected causes, through a quasi-experimental study; the study results supported two hypotheses. The first hypothesis stated that individuals who are not seeking status would be motivated by an emotional connection to donate to local causes more than national or distance causes; while empathy would not sway those seeking status to give to local needs (Mattila & Hanks, 2012). The second hypothesis was that individuals who are seeking status through their giving are motivated by empathy to support distant causes; while empathy does not influence those not seeking status to give to distant causes (Mattila & Hanks, 2012). Researchers in one study included a comparison of firms' cause marketing efforts as invoking hope of positive outcomes or avoidance of adverse societal circumstances; the relevance of understanding the difference lies in the risk that consumers may perceive manipulation in CSSR marketing and respond negatively (Kim, Kang, & Mattila, 2012). Kim et al. (2012) based hypotheses on three categories: (a) CSSR with altruistic messages, (b) CSSR with no information, and (c) CSSR for strategic purposes; the experimental research results supported that response to CSSR endeavors relates to the type of hope invoked. Consumer purchase behavior related to promotion hope is not affected by CSSR messaging type; however, in the case of prevention hope, strategic

messaging is less effective than altruistic messaging (Kim et al., 2012). Manning (2013)

classified corporate social performance, among other CSSR models, as a push

mechanism and emphasized pull mechanisms are possible as consumers demand CSSR.

Company managers and fundraising organizations' leaders can use this information to

appropriately design giving campaigns to maximize donations.

Internal Stakeholders: SME Owner-Manager and Employees

CSSR effectiveness is contingent upon the personal characteristics of the

managers that make up the organization; Mostovicz et al. (2011) named four principles:

(a) leadership, (b) ethics, (c) personal responsibility, and (d) trust, which are dynamic in

nature. SMEs with proactive CSSR are led by owner-managers with clear conviction

stemming from personal experiences; even SME owner-managers not pursuing a

proactive CSSR stance saw strategic CSSR as distracting, irrelevant, and personal, but

still incorporated some level of CSSR activities such as donating to local charities

(Thorton & Byrd, 2013). Iarossi et al. (2011) concluded the most influential source for

propelling sustainability activity was the internal top management. Owner-managers with

proactive CSSR missions tend to exhibit more passion and emotion about their business

and its ability to address CSSR issues (Chalmers, 2013). In larger organizations, the

diffusion of responsibility, by spreading out the ownership of actions and consequences,

allows employees to deny responsibility by blaming others or justifying actions as

following orders (Mostovicz et al., 2011). In smaller firms, diffusion of responsibility is

divided among fewer employees. Other researchers have demonstrated a need to view

CSSR within SMEs differently than CSSR within MNCs because of the role of SME

owner-manager motivations, values, knowledge, and relationship with the community (Inyang, 2013).

To the extent innovation plays a critical role in CSSR endeavors, Bos-Brouwers (2010) claimed that innovation process within SMEs differs from those in MNCs, partly because scholars characterize SMEs by the prominent role of the owner-manager and a sustainable orientation in this person has a strong influence on sustainable innovation in the organization. SME owner-managers' logic is vastly different from MNC leaders' thinking, particularly related to CSSR, so applying management and scalability principles widely accepted among MNCs does not guarantee success (Schaltegger et al., 2016). Ultimately, the values that drive the firm's direction stem from resolute personal values of the owner-manager (Ciasullo & Troisi, 2013), and ability to control resources in accordance with personal values (Hoogendoorn et al., 2015). Owner-managers have prolific influence on their companies due to proximity, scale, and informality; these conditions tighten the relationship between the strategic nature of the business and the operational elements (Kechiche & Soparnot, 2012). The absences of results as it relates to sustainable measures among SMEs is not an indication of the SME owner-manager attitude or awareness; there is a dearth of tools and knowledge among SME owner-managers to accomplish sustainability goals (Cassells & Lewis, 2011). Cassells and Lewis (2011) found among their study participants, a positive attitude in the owner-manager did not influence improvements and action in the areas of waste management, operations, or design; however, it did increase the likelihood of environmental management. SME owner-managers place a higher priority on internal stakeholders, such

as employees, customers, and vendors than on external stakeholders; however, external focus tends to be on local charities and causes (Kechiche & Soparnot, 2012). Bennington and Minutolo (2012) publicized greater levels of (a) expressed intent, (b) individual attitudes, (c) perceived social norms, and (d) perceived control towards waste management led to higher actual intent; results suggest policies that penalize or incentivize will not be as effective as efforts to change owner-manager attitudes towards waste reduction.

SME owner-managers go through a process of sense-making as they determine where on the reactionary-proactive scale they fall based on their own mental models and how risks and rewards are evaluated (Howarth & Fredericks, 2012). A progression through visioning and engagement leads the owner-manager from negligible recognition of environmental responsibility to noticing signals that change is necessary and adapting accordingly (Howarth & Fredericks, 2012). Lähdesmäki and Takala (2012) showed that SME owner-managers tend to make CSSR decisions along two continuums; owner-managers make philanthropic decisions altruistically or to serve the economic purpose of the business, and those decisions in either an ad-hoc or a strategically deliberate manner. Groves and LaRocca (2012) investigated the role of select values in transformational leadership (TL) and enabling follower cooperation in CSSR initiatives; values considered included (a) openness to change, (b) self-transcendent, and (c) self-enhancement and TL had a strong influence on follower CSSR beliefs. These are not unlike the traits necessary to launch and grow a new business; however, not all owner-managers are naturally transformational leaders.

There is a distinction between those who make an effort to green an ongoing concern from those who found a business based on an environmental principle (Kearins & Collins, 2012). Rodgers (2010) cited various typologies of *ecopreneurs* and sustainability entrepreneurs that researchers can use to categorize the extent to which an entrepreneur balances profit-seeking motives with ecological priorities; there were five themes derived from the analysis. First, the ethical element of the business pursuit provided a boost to the entrepreneurial drive; next, the entrepreneurs are trailblazers in the area of green business but had to educate themselves in the field (Rodgers, 2010). Third, Rodgers found ecopreneurs are more concerned with action and capable of overcoming obstacles in a do-it-yourself fashion. Fourth, the ecological focus required higher levels of risk tolerance, and lastly, all the entrepreneurs had to educate their market with regards to the benefits and role of ecological products and services (Rodgers, 2010). Kearins and Collins (2012) highlighted several examples of ecopreneurs who eventually sold their businesses to large conglomerates, despite the risk of losing the centrality of the environmental cause. In earlier stages of entrepreneurship, owner-managers must compromise; ecopreneurs tend to compromise in favor of the environmental or social pay-off, rather than the financial payoff. Eventually, owner-managers come to the realization that scale and expanded impact are accompanied by more significant financial investments; as their niche markets attract large buyers, *ecopreneurs* employ *sensemaking* to justify the opposition between the core values and the benefits of cash infusion (Kearins & Collins, 2012). In many cases, the examples provided by Kearis and Collins represented products that had garnered sufficient

consumer following to complicate matters if the new owners were to dilute or veer from the original values.

Within SMEs, employees have been found to exert the strongest influence on CSSR behavior (Nejati et al., 2014). Thorton and Byrd (2013) concur, finding SME owner-managers consider employees their most important stakeholder. Furthermore, CSSR with an orientation towards the workforce, society, and customers was linked to greater competitiveness in SMEs (Turyakira et al., 2014). Even consumers view fair treatment and payment of employees as highly important in ranking firms' CSSR priorities (Öberseder et al., 2013). Like any stakeholder balancing act, owner-mangers should consider the full effects of potential CSSR programs for staff. Employee-oriented CSSR could have two opposing effects, rendering overall impact as neutral; for example, training and rewards lead to decreased levels of excess inventory while the focus on long term relationships leads to increased inventory (Barcos, Barroso, Surroca, & Tribó, 2013). Williams and Snow (2012) found while SME firm leaders see employee health initiatives as a way to boost internal morale and external reputation, they did not allocate resources towards evaluating the effectiveness of CSSR programs for employee health, and managers even considered this activity the domain of external organizations.

SME owner-managers are more likely to pursue positive environmental performance when they perceive increased pressure from either internal or external stakeholders (Cordano, Marshall, & Silverman, 2010). However, Delchet-Cochet and Vo (2013) point out a lack of SMEs within the stakeholder groups of certifications bodies

that set CSSR standards and expectations. This and other institutional dynamics are outlined in the following paragraphs.

CSSR in the SME Institutional Context

SMEs constitute 99.7% of U.S. businesses, 50% of U.S. employment, and 51% of U.S. gross domestic product (Thorton & Byrd, 2013), and contribute significantly to global pollution (Shields & Shelleman, 2015). Inyang (2013) pointed out the variety of definitions for CSSR and SME, but established there is no disagreement among scholars that SMEs play a significant economic role globally. Researchers proposed pivotal drivers of CSSR for SMEs are (a) owner-manager values, (b) market pressures and opportunities, and (c) legal requirements; furthermore, there are companies that proactively seek CSSR activity and there are reactive firms (Fraj-Andrés, López-Pérez, Melero-Polo, & Vázquez-Carrasco, 2012). Though SMEs could escape notice of large advocacy NGOs' managers, SME owner-managers are not necessarily lagging in CSSR innovation or leadership. Proactive social entrepreneurs and innovators have an opportunity to fill in the gap left by lessening government support of certain groups and causes (Chalmers, 2013). These managers watch for trends and market activity to respond accordingly to advance environmental and social causes, and are more likely to adopt sustainability related standards and reporting (Fraj-Andrés et al., 2012).

SMEs and MNCs encounter conditions in different ways; therefore, the manifestation of CSSR will differ based on firm size (Baumann-Pauly, Wickert, Spence, & Scherer, 2013). SMEs differ not only in size from larger corporations but also in how SME managers approach and integrate CSSR (Kechiche & Soparnot, 2012). The

distinction between CSSR for MNCs and SMEs is sufficient to warrant research explicitly for the SME environment (Fraj-Andrés et al., 2012). SMEs have a considerable economic and environmental impact; however, most SME owner-managers are unaware of their ecological consequences (Ciasullo & Troisi, 2013). In SMEs, proactive CSSR is incorporated in all departments and levels of the organizations (Thorton & Byrd, 2013). SMEs face both resisting and driving forces as it relates to environmental stewardship; some mediating factors, such as leadership style, and moderating factors, such as resource availability interplay with external factors in the decision making process that determines environmental strategies (Howarth & Fredericks, 2012). A lack of resources is a common barrier for SMEs; SMEs overcome resource limitations through agility, third party partnerships, and pre-packaged solutions (Bos-Brouwers, 2010). CSSR constraints for SMEs include costs, time, lack of capacity, lack of awareness and information on CSSR benefits and opportunities, and insufficient support and guidance from third parties (Inyang, 2013). Precious and limited resources constrain opportunity for SME founders and employees to engage in CSSR. For example, a food business owner might prefer a piece of equipment that reduces harmful emissions by an additional 50%; however, if this drains the line of credit, it impedes the effort towards environmental stewardship.

Institutional structures can lend legitimacy to a company, but some leaders will resist or at least delay conformity (Caprar & Neville, 2012). Caprar and Neville (2012) cited obstacles in widespread adoption of some institutional standards due to differing levels and rates of adoption around the world, as well as the disparity between the

intentions and actions of corporate leaders. Given the lack of formality in SME processes and low levels of public scrutiny, there are virtually no sustainability reports from and little data on SME managers' sustainability efforts; very few SME owner-managers surveyed had any form of code of conduct or formal ethics policy (Bos-Brouwers, 2010). Even if SME managers are able to implement positive environmental policies and practices, their inability to measure results, or the relatively insignificant impact of their efforts compared to larger industry peers, make it burdensome to continue investing time, money, or energy on sustainability initiatives (Cassells & Lewis, 2011). When it comes to Environmental Management Systems (EMS), firm size matters. Most SME owner-managers do not follow formal environmental management practices or standards; however, research has shown the larger the firm in the SME continuum, the more likely management is to implement formal guidelines (Cassells & Lewis, 2011).

Regardless of firm size, managers in certain industry segments may be more apt to adopt EMS. Cordano et al. (2010) found a positive attitude among winery owner-managers towards EMS benefits were associated with adopting more components of an EMS, more so than other tested attitudes; in other words, the economic benefit was more important than being organic or avoiding regulation. Whether on the receiving or dictating end of the CSSR-centric agreements and transactions, SME owner-managers are able to make a significant contribution; however, the leading hindrances are costs of compliance and dealing with more legislation and bureaucracy (Baden, Harwood, & Woodward, 2011). Regarding governmental intervention, researchers have differing reports. According to Gill and Biger (2012), government bureaucracy and regulatory

burdens represent a barrier to SME endeavors. In their study, Williams and Snow (2012) found SME owner-managers participated in government-sponsored programs because such assistance lowered the consideration of the cost barrier, and supplemented time and capabilities to implement and support employee health programs. Despite an acknowledgement that government regulation is not sufficient to protect the environment, Cassells and Lewis (2011) claim SME owner-managers prefer government regulation to proactive sustainability practice because it creates equality among all firms and neither leaders nor laggards standout; regulation promotes reactionary and passive stances among owner-managers.

Baden et al. (2011) demonstrated that top SME management's priorities for CSSR within procurement activity were environmental concerns and employment issues from a social perspective. The effect of including such criteria and other social and environmental problems was managers were discouraged from doing business with other firms that did not meet minimum standards (Baden et al., 2011). More than half the employees surveyed by Bos-Brouwers (2010) noted environmental concerns were predominantly in the area of waste management, suggesting a more reactive than proactive stance. In their survey study, Cassells and Lewis (2011) reported top categories where SME managers make an environmental impact are overwhelmingly in the areas of reducing waste and transportation improvements related to sustainability goals.

Smaller firm owner-managers are generally less likely to perform rigorous strategy development than MNC management; therefore, a standard or certification may provide a framework for integrating CSSR principles into strategy (Hahn, 2013).

Hoogendoorn et al. (2015) found micro-firms, those with fewer than 10 employees, were less likely to pursue environmental process improvements than SMEs with 10 to 49 employees, while those with lower revenues were less likely to incorporate green product features. Klewitz, Zeyen, and Hansen, (2012) explored the role of intermediaries in promoting eco-innovation in SME manufacturers; most reported business case was the primary driver for eco-efficiency, and resource restraints as a material barrier. Many participants were still unaware of their responsibility in environmental matters; Klewitz et al. (2012) speculated intermediaries could provoke awareness, accountability, and action. All of Klewitz et al.'s participants expressed importance of external resources and networks in achieving innovation, particularly in the implementation phase of a change. Results from a study of aid by intermediaries showed that the post-program eco-innovations were low in number, minimal in scope, and ad-hoc in approach (Klewitz et al., 2012). Managers could involve intermediaries in an on-going effort, which is especially helpful to move firms beyond the easy wins that are generally the first eco-efficiency projects undertaken (Klewitz et al., 2012). Barriers to CSSR implementation include: (a) lack of information, (b) daily operations take precedence, (c) regulatory complexity, (d) scarcity of external support, (e) lack of internal ability to collect and evaluate data on CSSR, and (f) doubt about true return and benefits of CSSR initiatives (Kechiche & Soparnot, 2012).

Small businesses need supply chain partners that are willing to support management's CSSR goals and strategies. The coverage of supply chain in the following paragraphs is inclusive of many aspects of production, with focus on outsourcing and

partnerships, given a startup entrepreneur or small company owner-manager is not likely to invest in building a manufacturing facility and relies on copackers and other industrial and commercial providers to get their ideas to market. Outsourcing enables growth by facilitating (a) resource utilization, (b) achieving operational practicalities, and (c) empowerment through relationships (Murphy et al., 2012). In additional to key business functions such as manufacturing, startup entrepreneurs outsource some functions until sufficient funding and capacity to bring it in-house. SME owner-managers derive value from outsourcing but due to relatively lower power their approach is offensive and strategic as evidenced by creative and collaborative outsourcing arrangements; unlike key drivers of large corporation outsourcing, vital drivers for SME owner-managers' outsourcing decisions are both costs and ability to leverage internal operational competencies for access to external opportunities (Murphy et al., 2012).

Along the supply chain, there are opportunities for strategic value added activities. Vitasek and Manrodt (2012) explored approaches to utilizing supplier relationships as a competitive advantage, given the International Association for Outsourcing Professionals placed the trend of collaborative customer-supplier models as the third highest trend for 2012. Similarly, one group of researchers categorized suppliers by a capability for innovation and proper practice matrix resulting in four classifications: risky supplier, at-arms-length supplier, dependable supplier, and proficient supplier (Wu, Li, Chu, & Sculli, 2013). The researchers placed these types on a matrix with the degree of significance and degree of disclosure as variables on the axis; this framework can assist decision makers in choosing the right type of supplier given the degree of

significance and disclosure. Zuraidah Raja Mohd Rasi et al. (2014) found suppliers induce positive environmental practices in SMEs' product design and operational processes. Shields and Shelleman (2015) concur, particularly as it relates to the expectation of larger supply chain participants will demand CSSR reporting from SMEs.

CSSR in the Food Industry Institutional Context

For the purposes of this study, the food industry consists of organizations that produce, process, or supply food products, to sell at any point along the supply chain from raw material to end consumer. Specially, the focus of the study is on value-added or processed food products that typically come in a bottle, jar, box, or sealed plastic packaging. After a brief introduction to CSSR in generic supply chain considerations, the remainder of this section is devoted to highlighting key issues, challenges, and opportunities within the food supply chain.

Ramirez, Gonzalez, and Moreira (2014) explored barriers to adopting sustainable products within a supply chain in a variety of industries. Ramirez et al. (2014) proposed costs are negatively associated with adopting environmentally friendly products; ease of use, credibility, and quality are also of concern as environmentally sustainable products and the firms producing them tend to be newer entrants to the field. Additionally, organizational structure and culture can be barriers; if management does not have the right operational and attitudinal enablers in place, adopting sustainable products is more challenging (Ramirez et al., 2014). Ramirez et al., showed better supplier communication about product offerings and benefits helps decision makers be more confident in choosing the sustainable product; building stronger relationships throughout the supply chain

enables sustainable product vendors to provide better service and be more responsive. Environmentally friendly products should be both sustainable and superior; the suppliers' focus on quality will lead to greater adoption (Ramirez et al., 2014). CSSR initiatives are likely to vary based on industry, given the chief locations of the supply chain and the corresponding local problems. The nuances of the problems in each industry are different; controversies such as (a) toxic dumping, (b) soil erosion, (c) carbon emissions from distribution, (d) safety, (e) forced slavery, (f) bribery, and (g) other infractions demonstrate the variety and complexity of challenges business leaders face.

One industry that accounts for an extensive array of social and environmental grievances is food (Zanoni & Zavanella, 2012). Issues in this industry include, but are not limited to (a) food safety (Wiese & Toporowski, 2013), (b) obesity and health (Mialon et al., 2015), (c) sustainability and animal welfare (Manning, 2013), and (d) food waste (Loke & Leung, 2015). The food industry is particularly diverse and global in nature; therefore, research is needed tailored to this industry to support advancement of CSSR in the food business. An increased demand in a vast array of food product types at any time, at a good price, has led to increased global food trade. With greater variety comes a shift in the supply chain towards a market-orientation; however, not the whole supply chain has caught up with this trend.

An important caveat to accommodate a market-orientation in the supply chain is greater transparency and exchange of complete and correct information facilitated by systems and technology (Trienekens, Wognum, Beulens, & van der Vorst, 2012). Food firms with the consumer facing brand are at the mercy of questionable ingredient supply

chains spread throughout the world, particularly as it relates to food from tropical regions

in less developed regions (Gold & Heikkurinen, 2013). Wiese and Toporowski (2013)

presented the case study of contaminated eggs, and demonstrated the interwoven nature

of the complex food supply chain, and how many in the supply chain can suffer for the

mistake of just one. Depending on brand and market position, a value-added producer

using such eggs might suffer greater brand damage than the egg producer. In a second

case study, Wiese and Toporowski featured a story of chicken animal welfare and

showed while the supplier may have been at fault, there was a penalty to the consumer-

facing brand. Food quality is inherently dynamic, given food is a natural, living,

perishable product; to determine quality, various stakeholders need information on (a)

traceability, (b) farm activities, (c) land site, (d) irrigation, (d) chemical and organic

treatments, (e) worker conditions, and (f) waste (Trienekens et al., 2012).

In their CSSR efforts, managers do not typically focus on just one ethical issue;

rather they address a range of ethical considerations in the food supply chain, which

include (a) improper use of technology, (b) animal welfare, (c) fair trade, (d) labor rights,

and (e) the health and safety of food for public consumption (Forsman-Hugg et al., 2013).

CSSR in food supply chains may be complicated by the variety of ingredients in one

product, each from different vendors with different ethical and quality standards (Wiese

& Toporowski, 2013). Food safety and other issues that get widespread attention have

attributed to this decline. The case of processed foods may involve a variety of

ingredients in one product, each potentially with a different social or safety issue. The

supply chain for processed food consists of a number steps, beginning with raw

ingredient extraction, passing through several processing and packaging steps, and terminating in a variety of distribution channels.

Sharma et al. (2010) highlighted the need for the food industry to engage in self-regulation due to increased health risks and obesity, but advocated for attention to the warnings from other industries in which leaders attempted self-regulation to avoid government intervention. The common weaknesses of attempts at self-regulation in other industries were a lack of the following: transparency, measurable and meaningful objectives, reliable and objective assessment, and oversight (Sharma et al., 2010). The food industry leaders can learn from the evolution of self-regulation in other industries. In forestry and fishing, self-regulation evolved from leaders' desire to compensate for a lack of global governmental regulation needed in these industries; in tobacco and alcohol, self-regulation was born from threats to the industry from health and other risks, especially among youth, which is more akin to the situation in the food industry (Sharma et al., 2010).

Some food sub-industries, such as wine production, tend to be dominated by small to medium enterprises; therefore, research targeted to such industries facilitates definitive environmental management approaches relevant for those scenarios (Cordano et al., 2010). Kasim and Ismail (2012) reported the clear majority of restaurants, a cousin industry to food production, around the world are SMEs and tend to go largely unnoticed with regards to the environmental footprint and management. Although restaurant owner-managers claimed agreement to sustainability in principle, they were unwilling to invest in switching suppliers, installing EMS, training employees, or even complying with laws;

the owner-manager did not connect individual stakeholder pressure to such initiatives

(Kasim & Ismail, 2012).

SME managers, even if CSSR thought leaders, face size and scale challenges. An

SME producer of natural soups will procure ingredients ranging from meat to vegetables

and spices; depending on seasonality and component specifications, producers source

from several vendors. SME food vendors may be limited in supplier options, given the

small order sizes represented; the SME management's ability to meet certification

requirements may limit market opportunities. One way SME owner-managers can

overcome limitations is through trade or marketing associations that introduce economies

of scale and other advantages. A firm's employees may start out compromising

somewhat on ingredients until a supply base can be established for the desired quality and

sources (Kearins & Collins, 2012). Matters are further complicated when firms wish to

expand beyond the local market and must find new suppliers with whom management

can work closely (Kearins & Collins, 2012). Standards for certified organic and other

labeling options are stringent and may demand resources, such as certified and audited

facilities, in order to obtain a label. Furthermore, such claims invite more scrutiny

(Kearins & Collins, 2012).

Within the food industry, the concept of supporting *local* is a noted trend.

Researchers demonstrated reasons for supporting local are to support the local economy,

local food systems, and to access fresher and healthier food (Penney & Prior, 2014). Gold

and Heikkurinen (2013) point out that there is an interplay between the global food

supply chain and local actions, given the overall viewpoint of a worldwide food

ecosystem. Obtaining data on exact ingredients, much less the social or environmental

impact of those ingredients, can be problematic (Forsman-Hugg et al., 2013). Another

most significant CSSR issue within the food supply chain is waste. Aside from the

significant environmental effects of food waste, there is a dichotomy in most markets in

that while many tons of food are wasted each year, there is food insecurity and hunger

(Cicatiello, Franco, Pancino, & Blasi, 2016).

The Role of Regulations and CSSR Standards and Codes

Certifications and codes are examples of tools for the institutionalization of CSSR

standards; bodies that issue and assure those codes are third parties with ties to various

constituents that drive change in business. Regulations, law, and policy also play a part in

CSSR development. Although CSSR is considered voluntary, stricter environmental

regulations lead to greater efforts among SMEs to enhance discretionary environmental

features in products (Hoogendoorn et al., 2015). Third parties', such as standards and

certifications bodies, NGOs, and larger players in the supply chain, can direct the

appropriate resources and methodologies toward the problems most in need of attention,

as well as recommend some best practices for dealing with those social ills. The wide

range of CSSR standards are a reflection of myriad ways managers can manifest their

social and environmental objectives (de Colle et al., 2014). The use of standards and

codes, such as those published by the International Standards Organization (ISO) or the

Rainforest Alliance, brings about cost effective industry practices, validation of claims

related to environmental and social practices, and access to expertise and information

(Radulescu, Ioan, & Andreica, 2014). On the other hand, de Colle et al. (2014) warn that

a focus on compliance can stunt organizational learning that leads to more innovative and authentic CSSR action.

Institutional constructs inform how firms go about performing and communicating CSSR activities. For example, the Benefit Corporation, B Corp, is a certification and a legal corporate status for companies with proactive CSSR strategies and measurable outcomes (Wilburn & Wilburn, 2014). Certified B Corps, who are required to publish certain details of their business dealings, are more likely to donate to charity, use renewable energy, cover employee health costs, and encourage greater work-life balance (Wilburn & Wilburn, 2014). Externally, entities pursue voluntary codes, such as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Organic label, for procedural direction and to signal CSSR. In some cases, management works with government and certifying bodies to proactively establish those standards (Glavas & Mish, 2015). In support of the conclusion that consumers, legislators, and top management had greater influence on CSSR, researchers demonstrated different stakeholders influence managers' choice to engage in either symbolic or substantive self-regulatory codes (Perez-Batres, Doh, Miller, & Pisani, 2012). An analysis of data on 1,145 U.S. firms from a leading CSSR database showed managers approach codes from the substantive perspective when more stakeholder rankings are included (Perez-Batres et al., 2012).

Generally, CSSR in SMEs is informal (Thorton & Byrd, 2013). SMEs may find it helpful to have tools and constructs to guide them into more formal practices. Hahn (2013) demonstrated certification schemes could be a useful guide to conducting a strategy planning process, lending value in some steps but not in others. Use of standards

has been criticized as a crutch business leaders can use to check a box, without having to make their own decisions about the appropriate CSR endeavors (de Colle et al., 2014). While acknowledging there can be benefits to CSSR standards, de Colle et al. (2014) describe other negative outcomes of CSSR standards as being: (a) too vague, (b) too expensive to pursue, (c) difficult to enforce, and (d) a smokescreen to cover up harmful actions. In a study analyzing a myriad of standards setting organizations, Delchet-Cochet and Vo (2013) illuminate the complexity of certifications, codes, and standards; SMEs lack resources necessary to navigate and comply with such complex certifications and codes. Furthermore, SME are underrepresented as a stakeholder group for the certification bodies, which brings into question the legitimacy of their standards and codes (Delchet-Cochet & Vo, 2013). This could lead to a mismatch among supply chain actors about levels of certification and quality control.

Networks, such as Fairtrade Labeling Organization (FLO) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) are a mechanism to facilitate private, public, and consumer cooperation to achieve social and environmental goals since none of these actors has accomplished these ideals on their own (Gandenberger, Garrelts, & Wehlau, 2011). FLO has been associated with growth in product sales and improvements in quality, which benefits FLO producer-participants and represents structural-material effects, but drawbacks are that it leaves many small, poor producers left out, and still much of the overall production of FLO products occurs in industrialized nations (Gandenberger et al., 2011). The structural-material effects of FSC have been minimal in developing countries because the certification is cost prohibitive, and demand for certified woods has outpaced

the ability to harvest quality products; however, FSC has had more success with its substantial political action resulting from its efforts (Gandenberger et al., 2011). Other product and industry level certifications include the Food Alliance, the Sustainable Agriculture Network, Green Seal Businesses, and Underwriters Laboratory (Wilburn & Wilburn, 2014).

Animal welfare is an issue that has been getting increase attention, conspicuously after several documentaries and news items in recent years that exposed more of the vulnerabilities and dangers of the meat and dairy supply chain. Animal welfare is one of many CSSR agendas in the overall food supply chain, and like many other food products, the key problems differ from market to market; therefore, policy makers strive to prioritize and fund competing initiatives (Ingenbleek, Immink, Spoolder, Bokma, & Keeling, 2012). Ingenbleek et al. (2012) studied three methods to animal welfare policy setting and the related pros and cons of each: (a) a government-based approach is only as strong as the enforcement, (b) market-based efforts, such as voluntary labeling, tend to be consumer-oriented, while (c) farmer-based programs generally come in the form of financial incentives to compensate for low consumer willingness to pay. Ingenbleek et al. (2012) prepared a decision tree for determining which policy setting approach is best and concluded overall that a market-based perspective is more likely to change animal welfare conditions but that a legal framework with accompanying enforcement was a precondition.

Some managers choose to adopt their own, internal codes or standards, rather than rely on or associate with third party codes. Decision makers may use such codes

internally, as part of the organizational management, as well as externally to impose

standards on suppliers, or to signal certain standards to buyers and other stakeholders.

When used internally, management refers to these codes as code of conduct. (Frostenson,

Helin, and Sandström (2012) used the case study of two retail companies to demonstrate

the decoupling of codes and actions. In the cases presented, management established

codes at the corporate, rather than store, level to deal primarily with supply chain issues

(Frostenson et al., 2012). The relevance the code had in a store is to address consumer

concerns over ethical behavior as it relates to sourcing and producing goods sold in

stores; store employees recognize codes as part of overall company values, but not

pertinent to daily decisions (Frostenson et al., 2012). As evidenced through the research I

have synthesized, the use of codes can have mixed results. However, codes will continue

to exist as a mechanism to signal intent and quality to stakeholders. Whether standards or

codes are invoked or not, there is an expectation from some stakeholders that firms will

accurately report relevant CSSR details of their supply chains and operations. In the next

section, I review literature related to tracking and communicating CSSR activity.

Measuring and Reporting CSSR Activity

To support their strategic CSSR intentions, management needs systems and

processes for tracking, measuring, and sharing results. Reporting is a critical component

of the overall sustainability strategy and implementation. The challenge is CSSR

practitioners and standards bodies do not agree on what or how to report concerning

corporate social performance, which has centered largely on reporting the inputs or

activities of the firm, not the social implications of those inputs, with insufficient clarity

on how to quantify sometimes immeasurable outcomes (de Colle et al., 2014). Firms are

motivated to share the good news, but audiences expect reports to be authentic,

transparent, realistic, and actionable. Reporting guarantees transparency and helps

establish and reinforce standards needed for sound CSSR strategy. Coombs and Holladay

(2013) suggest transparency quality, viewing it as a process would lead to appropriate

responsiveness to stakeholders. Reporting is not one-way communication; rather it is an

opportunity to engage stakeholders in the discourse. The potential challenge with

reporting is that it may divert attention to one cause and away from others, or even from

the fundamental root cause.

Some companies leverage CSSR communication as a public relations scheme. A

growing assumption regarding CSSR and the Internet is that the latter inherently creates

transparency that guarantees the existence and accuracy of the former. This faulty logic

leads to naïve acceptance of CSSR claims as shown by a study in which more than half of

socially responsible consumers polled reported trusting CSSR information on corporate

websites and advertisements (Coombs & Holladay, 2013). Firms can use Internet

communications to focus on the positive, yet not disclose the negative consequences of

their actions. Furthermore, there are no requirements or guidelines that regulate CSSR

reporting as there are with annual financial reports; third parties, such as GRI, may add

credibility, but are still voluntary. Coombs and Holladay (2013) leverage the examples of

several multinational brands to demonstrate that Internet reporting of CSSR activity is not

equivalent to full accountability and transparency; the myth that information is objective

and sufficient has led to volumes of CSSR data that most consumers cannot access nor

properly understand. Social media has also entered the equation of CSSR reporting. More than 70 percent of organizations use social media as part of their CSSR communication strategy; Korschun and Du, (2013) produced a framework for aiding companies in deriving value from those virtual dialogues for both the company and the cause. Virtual CSSR communications differ from traditional communication because social media allows for peer-to-peer interaction, creating communities of identity among stakeholders; these participants generate content, another distinguishing feature of social media. Firms will foster greater identification with the community the more they allow members to speak autonomously for the company and the cause (Korschun & Du, 2013).

Self-reporting firms who are signaling communicate to society the actual strong CSSR performance that exists in their company; on the other hand, self-reporting firms who greenwash are just seeking legitimacy and perhaps covering up negative activities (Mahoney, Thorne, Cecil, & LaGore, 2013). Costa and Menichini (2013) accounted for the subjectivity of stakeholders' opinions of each of multiple CSSR dimensions in a report, and found a discrepancy in what stakeholders expected and witnessed. An analysis of 156 public corporations that issue reports and 156 matching companies that did not issue reports but whose CSSR activity was measured against a leading CSSR database showed firms are more likely to report for signaling reasons than greenwashing, due to the ramifications and costs of issuing false CSSR claims (Mahoney et al., 2013). Content reveals commitment, societal benefits, motives, and alignment to business, and the channel and source of CSSR communication is paramount; credibility is garnered when third parties endorse the effort (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). Third parties can set

standards or authenticate content. MNCs tend to issue reports according to selected

standards or codes, while SMEs reporting is more ad hoc, upon request by an external

stakeholder (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013).

Schneider and Meins (2012) claimed difficulty in assuring reliability and accuracy

of self-reported information on sustainability. There are increasing numbers of third party

reporting and rating agencies with differing definitions and methodologies; Schneider and

Meins performed a comparative analysis of many of them. First, they found most CSSR

reports do not include financial information, especially since most firms report financial

performance separately. Second, there is insufficient clarity on the exact indicators for

sustainability performance or the proper management process for implementing CSSR.

Third, the linkage of corporate governance to CSSR is inconsistent and is likely to favor

large corporations over SMEs. Furthermore, several items were associated with CSSR

that may not be true indicators of performance, such as existence of a mission statement,

codes of conduct, or certifications. Schneider and Meins suggested distinguishing

between sustainability performance and organizational capacity; the authors pointed to

studies that show disconnect between those who report sustainability performance and

those who communicate a specific strategy for it. The proposed framework consists first

of a present view of sustainability along the dimensions of economic, environmental, and

societal; second, the sustainability governance mechanism has a future orientation and

evaluates strategy, structure, implementation, control, and relationships within and

outside the organization (Schneider & Meins, 2012).

While MNC leaders are adept at publicly touting CSSR and producing extensive CSSR reports, it is SMEs that are best at actually changing processes and culture to execute on CSSR intentions (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013). Mechanisms for collecting and analyzing data, such as EMS, are geared towards large businesses rather than SMEs (Kechiche & Soparnot, 2012). Many SME managers' do not adopt formal, external EMSs due to the cost of implementing and sustaining a comprehensive system; a challenge in researching EMS in SMEs is without a formal certification scheme, it is onerous to assess and compare one SME's EMS to another's (Cordano et al., 2010). Cordano et al. (2010) claimed SME managers select the elements of an EMS, such as (a) policymaking, (b) planning, and (c) implementation that enable them to (a) set goals, (b) assign training and budgeting specifically to environmental objectives, and (c) create qualifications for vendors. Some codes are introduced to bring about positive change, but do not carry the weight of certifications. For example, The Wine Institute has a code of sustainability; like some other such voluntary codes, this code is not validated by third-party audits nor any form of penalty for non-compliance (Cordano et al., 2010).

Arena and Azzone (2012) claimed the expense and complexity of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and other CSSR reporting standards make it unlikely SMEs will participate; they suggested selected key sustainability indicators (KSIs) be promoted by industry so that reports would contain more specific and relevant details. SMEs within those sectors could focus only on necessary elements of operations and activities for reporting purposes; GRI consists of 79 KSIs, but the study of one industry resulted in a list of only 19 of 79 KSIs that were deemed relevant (Arena & Azzone, 2012).

Furthermore, Arena and Azzone's research participants noted that some GRI KSIs, such as absentee rate, were too generic, which makes it problematic to compare and contrast performance among companies. Jensen and Berg (2012) contended that CSSR reporting integrated with financial reporting is too new to be fully institutionalized, as opposed to traditional CSSR reporting which is an add-on to financial reports. In their analysis of reports and institutional criteria, Jensen and Berg determined the following conditions were associated with more integrated reporting: (a) strong investor protection, (b) weak employment laws, (c) high levels of unionism, (d) market orientation, (e) more advanced social and environmental development, and (f) cultures that value self-expression.

The role of third parties in measuring and reporting aspect of sustainability strategy can be significant. Assurance is necessary to demonstrate sustainability reporting goes beyond being merely symbolic and reflects actual practice (Perego & Kolk, 2012). As noted in the section above, certifications carry their limitations but can prove useful in that they perpetuate consistent and transferable metrics and reporting. An evaluation of the three most common reporting standards, GRI, AccountAbility, and the UN Global Compact, against expectations of different types of constituencies, revealed the GRI standard addressed every category of concern while the UN guidelines did not address many of the areas at all (Tschopp, 2012). The AccountAbility standard met many of the criteria to a low or medium degree, but (Tschopp, 2012) stressed that this guideline is more about process than content. While these frameworks can be helpful for both companies and stakeholders seeking to interpret this information, as noted in this section,

it is unlikely SME owner-managers will take part is such costly and sophisticated messaging.

Summary and Transition

CSSR is a concept that has been evolving and gaining traction in recent decades. CSSR is a strategic choice for business leaders. While some proactively integrate a CSSR mission and goals throughout the firm, others resist and eventually react to avoid negative publicity or stakeholder criticism. For business managers that choose to pursue CSSR as a core element of strategy and mission, the operationalizing of that intent may encounter significant difficulties. These business leaders contend with various stakeholders who have expectations and demands regarding CSSR activity. Consumers are of particular concern for business leaders because consumers' perception of the firm and products could affect the bottom line. Consumers whose CSSR values align with the firm's may be willing to pay higher prices for products that reflect implementation of those values. Internal stakeholders such as employees and managers also hold sway over leaders' approach to CSSR. In a SME context, the owner-manager is a significant source of both the drive behind and the direction of the CSSR endeavors.

CSSR initiative execution also occurs within the context of institutional structures, such as industry supply chains, regional business support, and the regulatory environment. SMEs face such conditions in a way that is unique and different from how MNCs deal with institutional constructs. SMEs encounter these operational challenges with greater complications; fewer resources and a lack of clarity on how to implement CSSR creates barriers to achieving desired social and environmental goals. Each industry

reflects a set of common issues CSSR activity can address; the food industry is fraught with social and environmental nightmares, which range from the blame for obesity to inhumane and destructive farming practices. SME food company owner-managers, who wish to address these ills proactively through organic, sustainable, healthy, and responsible ingredients and practices, may lack the strategic focus to generate the best plan, and can find the realities of execution insurmountable.

Section 2 includes the plan for carrying out this research on Washington, DC SME food businesses, whose leaders have chosen to pursue an accommodative CSSR stance, and contains details on the (a) researcher, (b) the participant population and selection, (c) the methodology, (d) data collection and analysis, as well as (d) ethical considerations. Section 2 concludes with a discussion of the concepts, processes, and tools I used to assure the reliability and validity of the study. In Section 3, I present the findings, their application to professional practice, the implications for social change, and recommendations for practitioners and future researchers.

Section 2: The Project

In this section, I describe how I executed this study on CSSR in SMEs in chronological order. I (a) establish the role of the researcher; (b) describe the method and venues used for attracting and soliciting participants; (c) describe the research methodology and design section, with details for a qualitative case study; (d) show how the research participants are aligned with the objectives of the study; (e) review the importance of ethical practices in research through an outline of precautions and procedures I took; (g) explain processes for thoroughly and accurately capturing responses, input, and other sources of data; (h) describe the analytical tools and techniques; and (i) explain the measures followed to assure the reliability and validity of the study

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, multicase study was to explore the existence and management reactions to structural and other barriers to integrating CSSR within SMEs in food businesses whose owner-managers have actively sought to implement CSSR initiatives within the mission and operations. Research participants were SME business owner-managers who have sought or are seeking to implement a CSSR initiative to address their organizations' mission and policy statements. To identify potential participants, I reviewed SME food producers' mission statements and CSSR policies and press, as available on their websites. The findings of this study may contribute to social progress by identifying firm-level limitations food production SMEs encounter in pursuit of planning for, and implementing CSSR initiatives. I may discover best practices for

overcoming obstacles to achieving CSSR goals. Such findings may enable food

producers to provide health-conscious and environmentally conscious consumers access

to products that meet their CSSR expectations. Furthermore, the research findings may

help practitioners who wish to preserve the environment and advance the social welfare

of constituents such as farmers, vendors, employees, customers, and communities.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I had personal interaction with the research participants during

(a) solicitation, (b) communication, (c) scheduling, (d) interviewing, (e) member

checking, and (f) other phases necessitated by the research process. Prior to the

communication related to performing this study, I had not had any relationship or

interaction with the participants. Given I had no previous, direct experience in the food

industry, my interest in and contact with food business has arisen largely due to work

connections and food-related networking events. My former employer, Kendall College,

offers a leading culinary arts program in Chicago; therefore, I learned about the industry

at food related events at Kendall, which attracts many restaurant, catering, nutrition, and

food production industry managers and employees. The personal attitudes and beliefs I

have toward food businesses derive from my experience as a consumer with a moderate

level of health consciousness, the research performed in the last 4 years in preparation for

this doctoral study, and exposure to food-related education and expertise at Kendall

College.

In the interest of full transparency, I divulged to participants any potential

connections, conflicts of interests, or other conditions that might lead to misperceptions

among participants. I did not lead participants to believe that involvement in this research project would garner them special favor from current or former employers. Furthermore, and as detailed below, I followed the ethical guidelines laid out by the Walden University Internal Review Board (IRB), collected signed consent forms, and kept participant information confidential by using codes to hide proper names or other details that would have identified the participants.

Following the model of Lauckner, Paterson, and Krupa (2012), I outlined the evolution of thought that led to the research purpose and questions. As their businesses grew, I sought to help smaller firms' owner-managers identify and implement CSSR activities that aligned with their mission and market. While I hope to work with other industry segments eventually, I chose the value-add food industry as a subtopic for several reasons.

- As highlighted in the review of the academic literature in Section 1, the food industry is one fraught with CSSR controversies that are strikingly visible to consumers and various stakeholders throughout the supply chain.

- My early interest in the intersection between social justice, environmental stewardship, and business was sparked by the fair trade label I noticed on certain chocolate and coffee products I purchased.

- The food industry supply chain is global in nature, even for SMEs, because they often need to source food only grown in tropical climates such as pineapples or coffee; therefore, this industry enables me to indirectly study a more international context.

- The selection of the food industry allowed me to narrow the topic and limit the scope, particularly as it relates to saturation. Furthermore, I narrowed the participants to value-added, or processed, food companies.

- The context of my personal work allowed me access to food businesses more so than other business types within a single industry sector; therefore, I could make initial contact with leading figures in the food industry.

Despite my desire to work with and help SMEs in their CSSR efforts, during this research project I remained neutral. I used qualitative data analysis software to code and analysis the data, further removing bias. When setting up the interviews I made every effort to hold them in a quiet and private space, and I offered the participants anonymity and comfort. The interviews were semi-structured based on the interview questions in Appendix A, so that when appropriate, I could ask other clarifying and probing questions about a process or experience.

Participants

The participants for this study were all located in the Mid-Atlantic region, and were small to medium sized food producers whose owner-managers have set proactive or accommodative CSSR goals as defined by Meznar et al. (1990). I chose firms with processed products, with multiple ingredients because this may pose more compelling dynamics related to pursuing CSSR goals. There are many types of SME companies within the food industry. Research participants could exist anywhere along the supply chain, from raw material growth and extraction to delivery direct to consumer through restaurants and retail. The goal of this study was to target those upstream and not those in

the distribution or raw ingredient growth nodes. Businesses whose employees produce processed foods that require multiple ingredients and vendor-partners are likely to have dynamics that are more complex in their CSSR efforts. I placed priority on securing participants in the processed food category of the food industry.

The SME owner-managers in this domain rely on third parties such as packaging companies, incubators, and copackers, which are manufacturers, but I only included founders in the interviews. The participants included makers of fruit snacks, juice and other beverages, salad dressings, and pantry staple items. The age of the firms ranged from a year and a half to four years, and the number of employees ranged from one to moving-target numbers, due to the use of part-time labor, contractors, and accommodating seasonality of channels such as farmers' markets. The number of products ranged from four to six. Not all participants shared revenue, but those who did all reported less than $100,000 in annual revenue. The participants for this study were in the Mid-Atlantic, all in or near the Washington, DC area, such as Northern Virginia or Southern Maryland.

Upon contact with potential participants, I began to establish a professional relationship initially via phone conversations and emails. I had a personal phone or face to face conversation with each to establish a connection and trust, and I had a brief conversation with them to learn enough about the participant's business to determine eligibility for the study. Each candidate participant received an e-mail with full disclosure of the study, the process, and expectations with regards to time and effort. I also reassured the participants that the research follows a mandated ethical guideline from

Walden University. I shared details on confidentiality and privacy, as well as signed non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements that several of the participants provided. Before proceeding with research on a participant, I collected a signed consent form from each owner-manager participant.

Given that industry groups and startups in general within a city can be a *small world* scenario, it was critical to keep information and details from each participant separate and confidential. I offered each candidate the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews, but not the transcripts of other participants. I saved digital audio files of the interviews, along with transcripts files, and electronic documents obtained with a file naming convention that does not reveal the organization or people's names in the file title. I used the naming convention of *Participant1*, *Participant2*, etc. These files, along with other data for each participant firm are stored in a password protected folder on an external hard-drive placed in a lockbox for 5 years. I offered participants a copy of the final study.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The research method for the study was qualitative. The conceptual framework elements for the proposed research were strategic planning, stakeholder management, and institutional dynamics. Each of these processes is best described and explored in qualitative frameworks as the qualitative method is best for observing context and process (Yilmaz, 2013). CSSR is a multifaceted and overarching concept. An understanding of complex and broad subjects is more easily accomplished with

qualitative research that relies on idiosyncratic reporting of experiences (Harland, 2014). In contrast, quantitative or experimental methods are reliant on predetermined variables and instruments (Yilmaz, 2013). Researchers acknowledge there is much research on CSSR within MNCs, but research within the SME context is still lacking (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013; Fraj-Andrés et al., 2012). While the output of a quantitative study might also explain CSSR barriers, the dearth of research specific to the presented problem supports the goal of this qualitative study to explore the topic. Later studies could include hypothesis and quantitative analysis based on the foundations first established in this work. My goal in the pursuit of this study was guided by the eight quality criteria outlined by Tracy (2010): (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence. In Table 3 are the criteria and a brief example of how I provide evidence of each in the study.

Table 3

Tracy's Eight Criteria for Quality Research

Criterion	Selected practices & methods	Established evidence to support criteria	Means to support criteria
Worthy topic	Timely Significant Interesting	Problem statement Purpose statement Literature review	
Rich rigor	Theoretical constructs Samples Data collection and analysis processes	Three conceptual frameworks	Specific quotes and details included in findings presentation Transcribe, code, and analyze multiple interviews
Sincerity	Research values and bias	Role of researcher Description	Full disclosure to participants Findings report includes personal

	Process Transparency		attitude or behavior changes as a result of the study
Credibility	Triangulation		Triangulate with websites and press
	Member Reflections		Interviewees get an opportunity to review transcripts and participate in ongoing dialogue
Resonance	Transferable findings		Possible application to other SME types
Significant contribution	Practically		Share / publish findings to audiences who can benefit
Ethical	Procedural Relational Exiting	Ethics section	Internal Review Board (IRB) compliance Share / publish findings
Meaningful coherence	Achieve goals Interconnect literature, research, and interpretations		Validation techniques that reflect the conceptual frameworks Clear and purposeful presentation of results

(Tracy, 2010).

Research Design

The research design for the study was case study. The goal of the study was to identify and explore organizational processes for supporting CSSR, or processes and polices that are needed but are inadequate or unavailable. Case studies enable researchers to capture a nuanced and relative perspective of organizational processes (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Case study leverages existing theoretical foundations, which is befitting a study not addressing theory testing, which is the aim of quantitative designs (Yilmaz, 2013). More precisely, the design was a multicase study approach. The case unit of analysis was an SME owner-manager. In their defense of case study research in the construction engineering and management field, Taylor, Dossick, and Garvin (2011) noted case study methodology was apropos due to the dynamics and multitude of variables that could lead to project accomplishment or failure. CSSR is similar in nature

in that a number of variables could lead to success, which is subjectively defined. Furthermore, the case study methodology allows research to be as meticulous as need be on any particular obstacle or facilitator raised in the interview process (Taylor et al., 2011). Quantitative surveys, on the other hand, would only allow analysis of a fixed pre-determined set of variables. A potential limitation of case studies is the inability to generalize statistically the findings; however, results are still useful from an analytical generalization standpoint (Yin, 2013).

To further characterize the case study approach, it is primarily exploratory in nature, designed to extract what and how, rather than explain why something did or did not happen (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). The scope of the case study design entailed looking deeper into processes of strategically planning for and executing CSSR criteria within SME food companies', managing stakeholders, and navigating the industry and relevant institutional structures. I performed the case study research through interviews as guided conversation, not as a pre-set survey. Lauckner et al. (2012) stated the focal issues were starting points rather than destinations (p. 8). This position emphasizes the importance of abandoning assumptions regarding the issues that arose. The consensus is there are barriers and challenges to integrating CSSR; beyond the high level categories such as costs, institutional structures, and people, other details emerged from the interviewees. I chose not to do a phenomenological study as the research question is related to process more than attitude, but attitudes and emotions of participants, as they confront CSSR obstacles, are not easily divorced from the process.

It is necessary to note that social desirability bias may have been present as the topic at hand relates to reputation, ethics, and integrity. Interview subjects may have provided answers that participants felt present their actions and opinions in the best light and may have hesitated to share details that might make the participant appear inadequate, incapable, or unsuccessful. To mitigate the risk of biased answers or interpretations, I was neutral in question composition and framing, as well as in reactions to participants' conveyance of success or failure.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study was SME food production businesses in the Washington, DC area whose owner-managers have put forth proactive or accommodative CSSR goals and strategies as presented by Meznar et al. (1990). In this instance, SME is based on the definition set forth in Section 1 but, for the purpose for this study, the population can be more narrowly defined as startups with less than 15 employees or $1 million in annual revenue. Data, such as the number of employees or annual sales revenue, are common qualifiers to determine size and classify the firm as an SME. As these data are not always readily available in public documents, I asked each participant to state information that would be helpful in qualifying the entity as an SME, more specifically the participants self-identify as startups. Since many SME managers may not share details such as size or annual sales, other indicators such as age, number of products, and number of distribution channels may serve as indicators of SME status.

To create a reasonable scope for the proposed research, I prioritized those in the food production versus food service arena. I did not include restaurants, cafes, bakeries,

or caterers in the study. While these businesses deal with food extensively and play a role in CSSR, their processes and industry classification are different from food producers. The Mid-Atlantic is home to many smaller, upstart food businesses now featured in Whole Foods and other channels that specialize in products designed to appeal to a more health and eco-conscious consumer.

The sampling method was purposeful, combined with snowball sampling. Purposeful sampling is selecting research participants who meet express criteria representing the diversity of potential qualifying (Robinson, 2014). Contrastingly, Baker and Edwards (2012) warn that students have limited resources of time and money; therefore, it may not be possible to represent a *full range* of possible participant types. Snowball sampling occurs when identified participants offer introduction to other potential participants (Robinson, 2014). Prior to starting data collection, I moved from Chicago to the Washington, DC area. Snowball sampling was especially helpful given I did not know anyone in the SME food production industry in Washington, DC, particularly those whose owner-managers pursue a proactive CSSR strategy.

As a mechanism for selecting companies, I sought out organizations' leaders who prioritize social and environmental goals. I performed the first round of participant recruitment by leveraging trusted contacts. I have relationships with a few people who are active in the food and social impact community. I sent an email explaining my study and providing criteria for participants, along with a request for suggestions and introductions. A personal introduction from a mutual connection aided in advancing the relationship with participants and facilitating communications. One of my contacts introduced me to

an employee with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), who introduced

me to some leaders in the area's food startup scene. These contacts included kitchen

incubator founders and food aggregators. I met or exchanged e-mails with two of these

contacts and described my study and the characteristics of the ideal research participants.

One introduced me to a third aggregator contact. These initial three contacts introduced

me via email to the five participants included in this study.

The research focus was on SME food company owner-managers with a proactive

or accommodative stance in CSSR; therefore, I made an effort to seek out firms that have

evidence of such a position. Each of the potential research subjects may purport a CSSR

focus from a variety of concerns within the food industry. For example, many owners are

dedicated to offering foods free of common allergens to provide safer and tastier

alternatives to a population unable to enjoy most items on the shelve. Within the food

industry, CSSR initiatives can include far-reaching activities including (a) educating

consumers on health issues, (b) using certified organic ingredients, (c) promoting animal

welfare practices, (d) preserving soil and seeds, (e) reducing waste in production, (f)

creating jobs for difficult to employ populations, among many other possible social and

environmental causes (Forsman-Hugg et al., 2013). Self-reporting and the endorsement

of the larger food community movements associated with CSSR provided an indication

of the leaders' commitments to CSSR principles.

Given the size of companies was small, there was only one person within the

entity with whom I could conduct an interview. In some cases, the participant was the

only employee, but in other cases, the employees were contract workers or otherwise

inappropriate as research participants. The study included five organizations. A number

of factors dictate sample size. In their presentation of a variety of viewpoints on the best

sample size, Baker and Edwards (2012) included recommendations from a variety of

researcher experts, which range from one to 100. I chose five as I believed it was

sufficient to reveal both similarities and differences in experience and process, but as

Baker and Edwards presented, it is not possible to know at the beginning of a study the

amount of evidence needed. I achieved saturation and acceptable replication for the

themes identified within the research questions after three interviews, but proceeded with

the remaining two as they were already scheduled and would add further richness to the

study.

Table 4

Characteristics of the SMEs' in the Study

Criterion	Qualifier	Examples and comments
Location	Within 1-hour drive of Washington, DC	Washington, DC metro area and suburbs, including Northern Virginia, and Southern Maryland
Size	Startups and SMEs	1-15 employees, 0-$1 million in annual sales
Social mission	Explicit	Organic, animal humane, dietary specialty (e.g. gluten free), hormone-free, fair trade, sustainable sourcing, local, etc.
Participant	CSSR decision makers	Owner-manager, founder

Ethical Research

Specific processes and procedures are necessary to ensure an ethical execution of

the study. The Walden University IRB outlines steps and conditions for conducting

ethical research. In June 2016, I received IRB approval 06-29-15-0304803 to conduct research.

Participant names and details were confidential and protected during and will remain so after the study. I approached qualifying owner-managers to determine if there was agreement to participate, at which time the owner-manager received the consent form. Upon initial verbal or emailed ascent from each individual to participate in the study, participants received a consent form to review and sign. I also agreed to sign any non-disclosure or other protective documents the research participants' may require; three of the five participants requested I sign such a document.

I made participants, via the consent form, aware of the potential risks. In this study, the main risk was when participants share opinions about strategic development and execution of CSSR strategy. Expressed opinions may jeopardize the position of the participant within their entity, industry, or community; therefore, it was critical to hold interviews in a location conducive to privacy, that I coded and kept data private and confidential, and that study reporting was done at the aggregate level to not reveal specifics that would identify a participant. When participants spoke individual names and demographic data in the interviews or data collection, I coded those words in the transcription, using codes such as *participant1*, *participant2*, and so on, and *company1*, *company2*, and so on when the company name was listed. In some cases, participants revealed unique product features, product names, or other identifying characteristics. In those cases, I used codes such as *product*, *ingredient*, or *flavor* to protect the identity of the participant. I was also careful to code partners that would be revealing. For example,

many of the participants used one of two kitchen incubators in the Washington, DC area; I coded those *kitchen incubator1* and *kitchen incubator2*. Demographic data were not necessary as part of the analysis unless an interviewee specifically calls attention to a demographic feature that affected the ability or limitation in achieving CSSR goals. In such a case, I excluded identifying details from the study report.

I did not interview any vulnerable adults. The target population was active business owner-managers. Participants were encouraged to decline if being in the study would in any way detract from their work responsibilities or place any burden on them. Those who volunteered were expected to want to share their achievements in overcoming obstacles to their CSSR mission. Every effort was made to be sensitive to participants and their needs.

Research participants could have decided to withdraw from the study for various reasons, such as time commitment required, concern over confidentiality, and disagreements over case study process or results. I was fully transparent and thorough with details to assure participants; however, those wishing to withdraw from the study had the option to submit a request in writing or via email directed to my attention. If during the research process, I had become aware of any criminal or abuse, I would have contacted the Walden University research committee for proper guidance and action, but participants revealed no illegal activity in the course of research. Similarly, if the research procedures revealed or led to any acute psychological state, I would have contacted the research committee for assistance.

I did not use incentives in exchange for participating in interviews or collecting data. I kept all participant names and company or organization names hidden in the data collection, analysis, and reporting phases. Paper copies of documents were scanned and handled with the same ethical guidelines as handling of emails, webpages, and other electronic documents. After being saved electronically, I shredded all paper documentation. I will protect participants, recorded interviews, electronic documents, and other evidence files in a password protected folder on an external hard-drive placed in a lockbox for 5 years, after which I will permanently delete the files.

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher is the instrument in case study research (Yilmaz, 2013). I interviewed the participants using the questions listed in Appendix A. Through these semistructured interviews with research participants, I collected information on the context and processes related to establishing and pursuing CSSR goals and plans and organized data into themes. The purpose of the research was to identify CSSR facilitators or barriers in the themes that emerged from interview analysis, and such other sources as website content and press coverage. I made an effort to be objective and not insert bias or judgment; however, qualitative researchers serving as data collection instruments introduce the dynamic of researcher interpretation (Harland, 2014). I made an effort to minimize this by invoking the use of a software program to code and analyze the data.

I included website and press coverage review as a form of data triangulation. Data triangulation is one of several methods to establish trustworthiness (Baxter & Jack, 2008). With smaller startups, documents useful for triangulation are scarce. Documents

from the inception of the company, particularly in the case of a newer startup, may reveal

the evolution of thinking and activity; therefore, parameters for the type of document are

necessary. I solicited the following documents such as business or strategic plans and

CSSR-related documents; however, no participant provided any documentation. Several

explained that the business had changed so much since the original written plans, or that

they never created formal written plans. I reviewed pages of each participant's website by

copying them into a document that I could then code for privacy and load into the

software for analysis. Similarly, I copied, coded, and imported press coverage articles and

blogs which featured the participants, their businesses social and environmental

contributions, and their products. I conducted the interviews in a secure a quiet, safe, and

neutral locations. I conducted one of the interviews via video conference, at the

participant's request because she had planned an extended visit to family a few hours

away. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) demonstrated online video interviewing is a valid

and comparable technique to face-to-face interviews and particularly useful to overcome

logistical obstacles. I gave this participant the option of not using the video element of the

technology, as recommended by Deakin and Wakefield, but the participant opted to

employ the webcam and approved the recording for purpose of transcription. Only the

audio portion of the interview recording was used and stored per the data organization

protocol outlined below.

Data Collection Technique

   I recorded the interviews on an iPad. Appendix A lists the set of questions that

guided the interview. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed. I also conducted

document review, which included reviewing websites, blogs, and press coverage. I copied content from the websites and articles and pasted them into documents so that they could be loaded into the qualitative data analysis software. I requested business plans, presentations, and other documents from each participant; however, none of the participants provided additional documentation, perhaps due to the more informal nature of SMEs' approach to CSSR noted by researchers such as Thorton and Byrd (2013). Website and press coverage review enabled me to uncover elements of the plans and processes not revealed in interviews, and to corroborate information shared with me in interviews. The interview protocol containing the interview questions is in Appendix A.

Data Organization Technique

I titled interview audio files with a code assigned to each participant, and will maintain an inventory of documents for each company included in the case studies for five years, after which I will delete data files associated with this study. Each document has a unique identifier code in the file title. I will keep a list of audio and digital files in a spreadsheet with identifying details such as (a) a coded identifier number, (b) file title, (c) file type, (d) document author(s), (e) category from the list above, and (f) document date. I will store all digital files related to the research in a password protected folder while research is underway. Once the research is complete, I will remove the audio files and documents provided by the participants from the folder. All digital files will be stored on an external hard drive in a safe deposit box for five years, at which time I will destroy all files.

Data Analysis

I transcribed the interviews and performed data analysis. I used codes to identify

recurring themes, and compared these codes with (a) the elements of the conceptual

framework strategic development processes, (b) stakeholder theory, and (c) institutional

theory. I also employed data triangulation to compare the themes emerging from the

interviews to documents listed in the Data Collection section. For example, if a company

owner claims CSSR is important to the brand, such a claim would likely be evidenced on

the company website, product labels, and other artifacts. The tool I used was NVivo,

qualitative data analysis software readily available on the market. The interview

questions were:

- Provide a basic description of your business, including ownership, years in

  business, revenues, number of employees, number of products, etc.

- How are CSSR goals integrated into the strategic planning process?

- How has the organization achieved the mission regarding CSSR goals?

- How do laws and regulations facilitate or hinder pursuit of CSSR goals?

- In what ways does the upstream supply chain facilitate the pursuit of CSSR

  goals?

- In what ways does the upstream supply hinder the pursuit of CSSR goals?

- If you have your own facilities of any kind (manufacture, distribution, etc.),

  how do CSSR goals affect those operations?

- How do those operations alter CSSR goals?

- How does downstream supply facilitate or hinder the pursuit of that goal?

- Does the customer (distributor, grocer, consumer) demand CSSR goals?

- How are CSSR goals and achievement communicated to customers

  downstream (packaging, website, etc.)?

- In what way, do costs and financing relate to the execution of CSSR goals?

- If you could start the business over, would there be different CSSR goals?

- What would you do differently in the future to better achieve CSSR goals?

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

To ensure reliability, the researcher must design and execute a case study research

process that could be replicated by others with similar results (Taylor et al., 2011). In

contrast, Sergi and Hallin (2011) described qualitative research as that which cannot be

precisely replicated due to the interpretative nature of analysis, but the authors

demonstrated the benefits of a personal, emotional, and reflective approach to research.

While it is not possible to separate my personal attachment to the study, it is possible to

proceed in a methodical, detail-oriented, well-documented manner.

One way to achieve study reliability is to fully document and clarify case study

boundaries, participants, locations, processes, and nuances that might affect the ability of

others to conduct analogous case studies. Study reliability is enhanced by the level of

detail and transparency for data collection, the expertise of the interviewer, detailed

interview guide (see Interview Protocol in Appendix B) and the process plan (Taylor et

al., 2011). Given the intent of the interview was a guided conversation, I covered all

listed interview questions and documented additional reoccurring questions and

comments that emerged as a result of new knowledge and ideas presented in interviews, thereby promoting consistency and reliability. I achieved dependability through both transcript reviews and member checking.

Validity

A crucial form of validity for case study research is construct, or operational, validity, which can be established through triangulation, an inventory of evidence, and member checking or reflection (Taylor et al., 2011). I accomplished triangulation was through online content such as company websites and press coverage articles and blogs. I ensured research participants had an opportunity to review interview transcription for accuracy by giving them two weeks in which to respond with corrections or comments to both the full transcript and a synthesis of the interview; this serves as member checking. Some participants took the opportunity to clarify points or provide additional information. Including direct quotes from the interviews into the study's findings satisfied both Tracy's (2010) criteria for rich rigor and Taylor et al.'s, (2011) criteria for quality vis-à-vis validity: Including more than a single case unit further strengthened the findings and generalizability of the research.

Relevant to the case study, external validity is satisfied when generalization can through replication (Yin, 2013). Replication is possible with the recording of precise details and processes before, during, and after research steps. I began with the process outlined in the Interview Protocol in Appendix B and saved emails, and tracked adjustments that would be necessary to incorporate when repeating the study. Riege (2003) associated validity approaches to theoretical paradigms, which indicate the

validity types appropriate for my study are *confirmability, credibility, transferability, and dependability*, each of which is the qualitative analogue to construct, external, and internal validity. I can achieve confirmability through a third party reviewer, such as a Walden committee member. Auditing the raw data collected is one way researchers achieve confirmability (Riege, 2003). Upon request, Walden committee members could review coded full transcripts and online content. External validity is achieved by demonstrating transferability of the findings to other situations through thick descriptions (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). I achieved this through thick descriptions that provide the detail and context sufficient to apply findings to other contexts.

Peer analysis also establishes credibility (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I established credibility through triangulation and member checking, but also by requesting a review of the analysis and findings from peers familiar with SMEs active in CSSR, such as consultants who work with firms' leaders establish and implement CSSR strategies. Participants reviewed the findings as presented with no identifying information so that I maintain confidentiality. Using a multiple unit case study and maintaining a database and coding, along with performing cross-unit analysis, a researcher can provide future researchers with sufficient information to draw objective and independent conclusions as to the transferability of findings (Riege, 2003). I have followed such steps such that researchers and practitioners might transfer of the findings from Mid-Atlantic based food startups to food businesses in other regions of the country, or to other industries with similar dynamics.

I emailed the participants asking if they wish to review and provide feedback and provided a timeline for responses. Those who responded received a follow up email with the study attached as a PDF file. The Walden University doctoral process in which my committee reviewed process details, such as interview protocols, consent and confidentiality forms, and confidentiality procedures, supported dependability. Additionally, participants and other interested parties received an executive summary of the study via e-mail.

Summary and Transition

Section 2 consisted of an explanation of the planned study approach, including (a) the methodology and design, (b) population details, and (c) ethical considerations. Participants were drawn from the small food product business community in the Washington, DC area through snowball sampling. Their missions covered a range of social and environmental concerns, including reducing food waste, improving health, protecting and conserving the environmental, and creating jobs. I conducted interviews with each and then coded and analyzed the transcriptions to yield findings presented in the next section. Adhering to the design and implementation processes in this section ensured a reliable and valid study. In Section 3, I present the findings, discuss applications to practice, share implications for social change, and make recommendation of both action and future research. I conclude the study with personal reflections.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, multicase study was to explore the enablers and barriers of proactive or accommodative CSSR strategies in small food enterprises. The major themes that emerged from participants' responses mapped to the conceptual framework used to guide the research process. Using Meznar et al.'s (1990) framework to characterize the participants, all five demonstrated an accommodative broad approach to CSSR, integrating into the core of their firms such causes as reducing food waste and improving human health. Three of the participants had an accommodative narrow approach, addressing barriers to employment for specific populations. While strategic and market development approaches were informal and experimental, the commitment to the mission and stakeholders was unwavering. Participants referred most often to external stakeholders, sometimes in general terms—as the community at large they wished to benefit—or more often the customers they wished to attract and retain. In these micro enterprises, internal stakeholders were less prominent. The participants had all garnered some traction in the local market; however, barriers to scale were at the forefront of each. Challenges related to scaling production space and teams, sourcing in a way that enabled growth and supported the mission, and adhering to laws and certification standards were the key barriers. Each of them has a cost or complexity element that further inhibits growth. Given the minimal outside investment among the participants, overcoming barriers was achieved through creativity, partnerships, or organic and slow growth. Incubator production spaces were the structures credited most with the ability to startup

and grow, but also as structures that limited ability to scale up to the next level. Supply chains were reported to be intricately tied to the mission of the participants because they helped in product differentiation and quality, as well as constituted the very nature of the environmental or social objectives. Likewise, laws, labels, and third-party certifications were mechanisms to demonstrate both minimal and above-and-beyond practices that reflected the social and environmental missions. These standards and verifications were seen as confusing to both the participants and customers, as well as expensive to achieve. While each of the participants wanted to pursue some form of validation in the form of a label, such as certified USDA Organic, none of the participants had been able to do so thus far.

Presentation of the Findings

In this section, I present the findings that answer the research question on the barriers and enablers of food production SME managers in designing and implementing a CSSR strategy. The interview questions were based on the three conceptual frameworks: strategic development, stakeholder management, and institutional theory. Three major themes emerged: (a) the dominance of the mission in all strategic decisions, actions, and planning within the company; (b) the variety of stakeholders and respective influences on mission and strategy; (c) several institutional factors affect the ability of owner-managers to scale and grow their businesses: production infrastructure, supply chain structures, and laws and certifications.

Theme: Mission Core to Strategy

Strategy is management's plan to carry out the firm's mission; therefore, it is logical participants frequently discussed the role of mission. The most referenced and discussed theme among all participants was the social or environmental mission, and in some cases, both, as their differentiation. The genesis of four of the participants' products was categorically grounded in a social or environmental mission (Participants 1, 2, 3, and 4). The fifth (Participant 5) was a marketable family recipe but the owner-manager prioritized multiple social and environmental missions from the outset. The owner-manager's personal values drive strategic direction (Ciasullo & Troisi, 2013). The mission focus of the participants included food waste (all participants), health (all participants), local sourcing (Participants 1, 2, 3, and 5), jobs for specific people groups (Participants 1, 4, and 5), and other general social and environmental causes (Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5). Table 5 shows the list of issues referenced in the research and triangulation sources.

Table 5

Sources and References of Social and Environmental Mission Types

Mission	Number of sources	Number of references
Food waste	7	67
Health	13	66
Local sourcing	13	45
Jobs for targeted groups	6	43
Organic (also linked to health and general environmental)	6	21
General environmental	4	16
Farmer support (aspect of local sourcing called out)	4	4

Not only is mission core to strategy, product development, and marketing, it was a personal motivator that drove participants forward when facing the formidable challenges of entrepreneurship (all participants). This was evident in the interviews conducted for this research and in numerous articles, blogs, and local television spots in which the participants appeared, explaining the importance of their mission. Motivation underpinned by personal passion and a conviction to respond to social conditions is a key driver for initiators of social innovations (Omorede, 2014). Participant 3 claimed it was the only reason even to do the business. Participant 2 remarked, "whether I do this project or another project down the line, [promoting healthy eating] is going to continue to be my mission in some way, shape, or form."

Strategic planning was a foundational concept of the study, but when questioned the participants mentioned having done only some formal planning in the form of competitive research, participating in business plan competitions, or seeking advice from their communities (Participants 1, 3, 4, and 5). Traditional strategic management methods and techniques applied to MNCs do not have the same assurance of success when applied to SMEs (Schaltegger , Lüdeke-Freund, et al., 2016). Strategic planning in early stages was largely about product development and experimentation in ways that supported or enhanced the mission (Participants 1, 4, and 5). As there is no blueprint for any given venture, entrepreneurs must experiment to learn what works and what does not (Kerr, Nanda, & Rhodes-Kropf, 2014). These participants described the process as learning while doing rather than formal planning process. Some participants made efforts to formalize elements of strategic planning. Those with or establishing a formal board

indicated more formalized business planning (Participants 1 and 4) than those without; however, all had done some research on the market and competition. When asked what they would have done differently if they could start over, three participants answered that more planning and research would have helped (Participants 2, 3, 4). According to Participant 3, "I think I do regret initially not having as much of a strategy. Whereas it was really just kind of get out and sell your product and see what sticks. Then use that data to kind of develop a strategy." When participants mentioned competitors, it was to describe how their product differed in ways that showcase the social or environmental mission, and resulting quality as the differentiator (Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5).

Discussion of mission often also involved institutional barriers that prevented participants from achieving their mission. I presented those below in the theme of institutional barriers to scaling such as production facility capacity, supply chain access, and regulatory and certification challenges. Similarly, mission was tied inextricably to stakeholders; I elaborated on this connection in the next section.

Theme: Role of Stakeholders

As shown in Table 6, the stakeholders most referenced were external stakeholders, such as end customers, retail customers, and the community in general. Less prominent were discussions of internal stakeholders such as employees or board members. Table 6 includes references from the study interviews and triangulated resources such as websites, press interviews, and third party product reviews.

Table 6

Number of Sources and References of Stakeholder Types

Mission	Number of references	
Customers	111	
End customers		77
Retail customers		34
Community	65	
General community		49
Friends and family		16
Internal	35	
Employees		23
Board		12

The top priority as it relates to customers is providing a quality product at the right price (P1-P5). All the participants demo their product at stores or farmer's markets and have direct contact with the end consumer. From these interactions, participants learn customers' ideas for product improvements and usage, and to what extent customers are aware of the social and environmental issues behind the mission (P1-P5). Consumers are a vital source of product ideas and innovations (Chatterji & Fabrizio, 2013). Participants frequently spoke of the need to educate their customers on, or as part of, their mission. In all cases but one, the educational focus was on the mission (Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5).

The following are quotes from the interviews regarding participants focus on customer education:

- I don't know how I really came to this conclusion, but my little spiel would be to start with the [simple] ingredients…sourced within 100ish miles…[from] small family farmers. Then if people seemed interested in that, and were sticking around and not just bolting off with their sample, I would go into the

[social mission], and then if they were still there I would go into the

[environmental mission]. It's a lot of reading your customer (Participant 1).

- So for me, the number of people I talk to or engage with, not necessarily just

   the number of sales…because you can do one time sales and people can try

   the product and just not know what it's for, or what it's about, and it would

   lose the purpose of educating (Participant 2).

- We're trying to get people to pay money to drink food waste…so we have to

   do a lot of work in terms of being this is the new cool thing (Participant 4).

- When I'm talking about our value proposition, that we don't use these

   ingredients, but we do use these, and that we're not adding a lot of water,

   which I think is both an environmental and a quality thing…we're not just

   shuttling water from place to place, we're shuttling just the great ingredients

   from place to place (Participant 5).

- I think our first piece of education is on defining what a [product type] is,

   because nobody knows what a [product type] is (Participant 3).

While some customers understand and appreciate the mission, their primary

concern was quality and value for price. Researchers showed that additional information

on the sustainability elements of a product led to higher willingness to pay on for those

products (Rousseau & Vranken, 2013). Three of the five mentioned trying to justify costs

because good, nutritious ingredients are expensive (Participants 2, 4, and 5). Participant 2

explained,

things that cost more for me…are also going to cost more for my

customer. And my customer needs to understand that there is a difference

between the item that I sell and the pantry item you get at [grocery chain].

Yes, it's like three times more or whatever, in price, but that's also

because it's nutritionally 10 times better in the value that you're getting.

Participant 5 also commented on justifying the product price point, saying

this is why, I'm sorry, but it costs what it does, but you're paying for

ingredients, and you're paying for really good ingredients with none of the

tricks, no dilution, no thickeners, no sugar. this is what good ingredients

cost.

Each of the participants' products can be described as premium priced products in their

respective categories as they are priced higher than similar products in their category.

Four of the five participants discussed decisions and debates related to trying to bring

down costs for the benefit of a better price point (Participants 2, 3, 4, and 5). There have

been mixed results among research aimed at determining consumers' willingness to pay a

higher price for goods with an associated social or environmental outcome (Carrington et

al., 2014; Rousseau and Vranken, 2013).

Collectively, the participants have less than 10 full time employees, including

themselves. Contract and temporary employees were necessary due to the fluctuating

demands and limited financial resources (all participants). Food service jobs are well

suited for job training and development for populations with barriers to employment,

such as disabled individuals (Katz, 2014). In one example, the participant's business is set

up for the purpose of providing job training program for difficult to employ women, such as those who are homeless or formerly incarcerated (Participant 1). Once trainees graduate, they may become long term employees of the organization or move onto to other jobs. This participant's employees are paid above minimum wage and their ability easily access to a facility was a determinant in production location and scheduling. Another participant also employs and tracks progress of employees who face barriers to employment; however, in that case, this was secondary to the primary mission of food waste so not highlighted to the same degree (Participant 4). All participants acknowledged the desire or necessity to eventually establish or improve tracking and reporting against social and environmental goals.

Theme: Institutional Barriers to Scale

The three significant barriers to scale were production conditions, supply chain with *local* emphasis, and labels and laws. The commonality among these is that each is related to the owner-manager's ability to scale the business and scale the mission impact. None of the five participants have their own production space and used shared, leased, or outsourced production facilities. One participant produces in a co-packer facility (Participant 5), while the other four use shared commercial kitchens. The participants alluded to both benefits and limitations of the kitchen incubators (Participants 1, 2, and 3). As Participant 1 described it, "when you get to a certain point, the incubator is there; they have to make a profit, they want you to stay there…I mean there's always this sort of revolving door. But there's sort of peak entrepreneur and so they want you to grow but it's also in their interest for you to stay. But there's nowhere for you to go when you

outgrow that model that isn't your own space. There isn't like a medium incubator really."

Three of the four participants who use commercial or incubator shared kitchen space mentioned storage as a significant challenge for scaling within that environment (Participants 1, 2, and 3). The same three participants also mentioned incubator costs and pricing model as barriers. All three noted the incubator model is better suited for other types of food startups, such as bakers or food trucks. Finally, location of these facilities can be a challenge, due to either limited parking or limited public transportation accessibility for targeted employee groups (Participants 1, 2, 3, and 5).

The essential benefit of kitchen incubators mentioned by four of the participants is that the incubator managers create opportunities for the entrepreneurs to meet retail customers and distributors (Participants 1, 2, 3, and 4). This is also supported by the press coverage of the incubators in which the participants' businesses were mentioned and promoted. Industry alliances allow managers to capitalize on institutional economies of scale; such organizations enable firms in the same market landscape to have collective power and learning (Iarossi, Miller, O'Connor, & Keil, 2013). Another key benefit of an incubator or shared space is a startup founder can begin production without investing in land, building, and expensive equipment. Similarly, the owner-managers can share the costs of utilities, health inspections, and other compliance costs. SME teams do not invoke size as an excuse to not pursue their CSSR goals, and find that working collectively and collaboratively with other SMEs is more effective (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2013). Two of the participants are also part of non-kitchen incubators (Participants 4

and 5). Both of these incubators support entrepreneurs with proactive social or environmental missions. Both participants acknowledged the importance of such a community. Participant 5 remarked, "I had no business background, and that was really helpful in giving me the lightning fast MBA. And helping me not only grow the business but also grow the business with these other missions in mind."

When all participants were describing their strategy and activities related to their supply chain, they mentioned the words local and farmer. Consumers shop at farmer's markets is to support local farmers and environmental causes (Harrison et al., 2013). The support among the owner-managers was evident within this theme. *Local* was the third most frequently used word, after *source* and *product*; while *farmer* was the fifth most frequently used word. This affirms the importance of local sourcing and supporting the local economy as mission components. Four participants (1, 2, 4, and 5) referenced their sourcing approach on their websites, emphasizing quality and, where applicable, local. This was also prevalent among the many press interviews and third-party reviews of the participants' products.

A challenge in pursuing a local mission is defining local (Penney & Prior, 2014). Participant 1's characterization of local fit in the range of 100 to 125 miles. Participant 2 described it as "basically driving distance", emphasizing freshness of product to market, and the ability to expose as many customers as possible to the source of their food. Participant 3 struggles with the definition of local because some ingredients are local, but some must come from other regions in order for the owner-manager to create differentiated flavor combinations. Furthermore, Participant 3 supports the local

community and is involved in a local incubator, but the production facility is about 500 miles away. Participant 4 expanded distribution outside the DC area; to be local to each area where the product is sold would require local sourcing and production in each area, which is an expensive and prohibitive proposition with current resources. Participant 5 uses at least one ingredient that simply does not grow anywhere in the region. This participant declared, "my definition changes constantly, and I hope it's not opportunistically, but for me local…it's like concentric circles working their way out." One local grocer, who carries products from multiple participants, has a mission of supporting local farmers and entrepreneurs, and defines it as those operating in the local watershed, which stretches from Virginia to New York (Glen's Garden Market, 2015).

There are some benefits and barriers of local food. According to participants 1 and 3, one benefit is fruit picked locally is sweeter and higher quality because it is picked at peak of freshness, compared to fruit picked in other parts of the world and shipped long distances for sale in the United States. The barrier is a limited growing season for most products, or conditions not conducive to growing some key ingredients locally. Participant 4 has found a supply chain partner with a shared goal of reducing food waste; this source is less dependent on local growing seasons and provides a consistent supply of certain ingredients. A reliable source of ingredients enables Participant 4 to scale. As noted above, price is a barrier for most of the participants. Penney and Prior (2014) found consumers perceive local foods to be more expensive.

Three of the five participants have either a proactive or accommodative CSSR strategy related to food waste, which means they source *seconds* from farmers, or excess

produce that would otherwise go to landfills, from other sources (Participants 1, 3, and 4).

Sage (2014) outlines an argument that local food movements have an impact on the local

constituents and promote lifestyle changes, but more importantly these movements have

the potential to alter the global food system power imbalance. Participants emphasized

local and food waste for both the benefit of local stakeholders, and as a component of a

universal system that does not serve the needs of all. According to Participant 1,

"basically we're trying to address the paradox that we waste 40% of our food while 1 in 6

Americans are hungry." The participants who rely strictly on local farms face challenges

in their supply chain such as consistent and reliable inventory levels, logistics of delivery

or pick up, and dependency on seasonality of available crops (Participants 1, 2, and 3).

Specific to sourcing seconds or other forms of waste suitable for use in a value add

product, Participant 4 pointed out the biggest barrier is the need to create a new supply

chain. "The barrier is that we're creating a new supply chain. That is a huge barrier"

(Participant 4). Participant 3 found small, local farmers do not have sufficient surplus

seconds of some ingredients needed for production. All participants indicated the

availability of ingredients in the supply chain has or will influence the evolution of

product offerings.

Another barrier to scale were the challenge of adhering to laws and certain

labeling standards. CSSR is generally considered voluntary, but there is a link between

legal requirements and CSSR standards within food businesses (Poetz, Haas, &

Balzarova, 2013). While some participants acknowledged labels can signal quality and

health attributes of a product, barriers were a more prominent theme, particularly

confusion and costs. There is a plethora of CSSR codes, certifications, and standards in

the food industry; researchers found more than 200 relevant schemes, included food

safety codes (Poetz et al., 2013). The cost of pursuing CSSR certification from third

parties can be too costly for SMEs (de Colle et al., 2014). Although none of the five

participants was certified organic, four of the five discussed a consideration or desire to

pursue this label, either for personal reasons or due to customer and general market

feedback (Participants 2, 3, 4, and 5). One participant's product is made up of one

hundred percent certified organic ingredients, but the product does not carry the USDA

label due to costs (Participant 2). Participants assume both retail and end customers

would prefer the organic label (Participants 3, 4, and 5). Indeed, customers who buy

organic on a regular basis are less likely to even consider price when selecting a food

product with the organic label (Zander, Stolz, & Hamm, 2013). The common challenges

related to labeling organic were: (a) the small farmers from whom the participants source

are unable to afford organic certification, even though some actually use organic

practices (Participants 2 and 5); (b) the costs and bureaucracy for the participants to be

USDA organic are prohibitive (Participants 2, 3, and 5); (c) most of the products are

already priced at a premium, and the added costs of organic ingredients and certifications

may price the products out of the market (Participants 2, 4, and 5); (d) the regulatory

bureaucracy is burdensome (Participants 2 and 5); and (e) the certified organic supply

chain for some ingredients was nascent and undeveloped, particularly for those preferring

to source waste or seconds (Participants 2 and 3). Small farmers often do not have proper

food safety training, sanitation facilities or processes, or cooling mechanisms for

produce; nor can they afford third party certifications (Harrison et al., 2013). When

certification, either direct or at the supplier level, is beyond reach, there are alternatives.

For example, Participant 2 visits farms where the main ingredient is made and asks for

details about farm practices that impact food quality and health attributes. Finally, there is

an all or nothing dilemma for participants with products containing multiple ingredients:

If every ingredient is not organic, then the final value add product cannot be labeled

organic (Participants 3 and 5).

Several participants mentioned the challenge of trying to provide a broad scope of

customer education in a small space (Participants 1, 4, and 5). Consumer education

through labeling is one approach to addressing the general confusion around what defines

a product as local and what benefits accompany a local sourcing (Penney & Prior, 2014).

As noted above, all participants engaged in consumer education. Each had direct

conversations with customers at farmers' markets or in-store demonstrations and found

this helpful, but time consuming and difficult to scale.

For each social or environmental issue there could be multiple CSSR standards,

which results in muddled terminology (de Colle et al., 2014). Participants discussed the

contradictions and confusion as it relates to laws and certifications, especially dealing

with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) at the national level. Participant 5

explained how this has created the need to seek new suppliers:

One of my suppliers, while regulated by the state, they don't follow any

nationally…they are a small batch manufacturer, so they don't have to follow all

the federal regulations, but my co-packer won't use their product because they're following all FDA regulations.

Another source of confusion is how participants should date a product. Participant 3 stated, "in terms of the FDA, their bureaucracy, I think it's difficult to make sure you're always up to date on everything that they need. I think their website and filing system is slightly complicated." New legislation, such as food safety modernization, does not always lead to clear cut rules and regulations for agencies, such as the FDA, that are tasked with interpretation, application, and enforcement (Wiseman, 2015). Participant 1 described the contradiction among laws in the following statement:

I was aware…there's no federal law requiring expiration dates on any sort of food product, other than infant formula. And so there's a lot of confusion, a lot of tension, over the difference between best by, sell by, use by dates and that there's no standard…inspector that was in on Wednesday was like 'why aren't there dates on the [product]?' So, I guess Virginia has a stricter law than the federal government.

Participant 5 reported a similar experience and explained:

One of the reasons I went to a co-packer in the first place was because laws and regulations in Maryland were so confusing, and I couldn't wrap my head around them because I would talk to one person, get one answer. I'd talk to another person and get a totally different answer, in the same office. And between talking to the county and talking to the state, and knowing what I needed to do for

federal, I figured I'm going to go to a co-packer, and that is going to be their

responsibility because I might get it wrong, and I don't want to get it wrong.

Participants have leveraged third party agriculture departments at nearby universities and

the management of their production space to assist them with testing products and

navigating FDA requirements; however, participants view the complexity and confusion

in this area as a hindrance (Participants 3, 4, and 5). In the next section, I tie these

findings to academic literature and professional practice.

Applications to Professional Practice

An entrepreneur with the goal of starting a socially or environmentally focused

company will face many hurdles. Similarly, an owner-manager of an existing food SME

who seeks to shift the company into a CSSR direction may encounter similar challenges.

Both need guidance and structures that facilitate pursuit of CSSR objectives. As noted in

by the participants of this study, first and foremost is the need to have a product

customers want to buy. The mission may be the reason the entrepreneur stays with the

business, but the customer expects quality and value. In this section, I highlight

applications of the current study that are relevant to such owner-managers and those in

organizations that support entrepreneurship and CSSR initiatives.

The participants in the study approached strategic development in an ad-hoc and

experimental manner. While some formal planning did occur, most participants lamented

they did not do more formal planning and research in the earlier stages of the business.

One area of research encompasses the industry, which includes understanding the general

structure and practices, as well as the competitive landscape. In the present study, none of

the participants explicitly described their strategy using classic strategic categories of differentiation and cost leadership, but given all of the products are priced in a premium range, none is pursuing a low cost leadership approach. In researching the connection between entrepreneurial orientation and competitiveness, Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014) adopted the definition which includes innovation as characterized by experimentation, among other dimensions such as risk-taking, competitiveness, and autonomy. In their study comparing the two basic competitive strategies, the authors found differentiation strategy positively correlated with innovativeness and autonomy, but negatively correlated with risk-taking and competitiveness (Lechner & Gudmundsson, 2014). As noted above, most participants in the current study admitted to doing little or no competitive research before starting their businesses. Furthermore, the participants exhibited innovativeness through product experimentation, and autonomy in their structure and formation decisions; however, most were risk-averse in regards growth and investment. The entrepreneurial process is devoted to creation, while strategic development has a competitor-orientation (Dhliwayo, 2014). The participants in the study have been focused on the early creation stages of establishing a legal entity, formulating a product, and gaining initial distribution channels.

The dominant theme within the participants' discussion of stakeholders was the need to gain and educate customers. In some cases, education was about features and functions of a product many consumers are not familiar with, particularly regarding a justification for the price point. Anselmsson, Vestman Bondesson, and Johansson (2014) found CSSR had a lower correlation to customers' willingness to pay premium prices for

food products, compared to dimensions such as country of origin, uniqueness, and social image. The authors suggested CSSR brands should emphasize one of these other dimensions to justify a higher price (Anselmsson et al., 2014). While researchers showed existence of CSSR certification corresponded to a higher willingness to pay, they also deemed firms would not successfully differentiate products by providing additional information on the certifications' purpose (De Magistris, Del Giudice, & Verneau, 2015).

In most cases, the owner-managers felt the need to make customers aware of the nature of the social and environmental concerns addressed by the company. Moskwa, Higgins-Desbiolles, and Gifford (2015) offered a case study demonstrating how food can be a catalyst to conversation about current social and environmental issues. While the context of their study was in a café where the owner focused on reducing food waste, highlighting local foods, among other CSSR causes, the case study showcased an actor not unlike the current study participants who wished to show customers that food consumption is a form of activism (Moskwa et al., 2015). One mechanism value-add food producers have to communicate their CSSR causes and values is through labeled certifications. Labels affect both the customer stakeholder element and the institutional barrier encountered as participants sought the recognition awarded by certain labels.

As food consumers become more aware of and accustomed to organic products, their expectations may evolve. Education and awareness through labeling and at the retail level could reduce food waste (Cicatiello et al., 2016). Among consumers' top preferences for CSSR practices was providing detailed information, such as country of origin and ingredients, on labels (Öberseder et al., 2013). Zander et al. (2013) studied

consumers' responses to foods labeled organic by overlaying other ethical attributes and found customers were more willing to purchase organic products when labels also indicated animal welfare, local orientation, and farmer treatment. While job creation for disadvantaged populations, reducing food waste were, and other social and environmental causes were not part of the Zander et al. study, the notion that multiple social or environmental causes increase purchasing may translate to the products featured in this study.

Finally, owner-managers seek out sources of assistance when starting their businesses to aid them in overcoming various barriers mentioned here. Incubators were an influential source of help for the participants featured in this study, but incubators and shared kitchens also limited the owner-managers' ability to scale affordably. Incubators are prolific globally, with about 1,800 in the U.S. alone (Al-Mubaraki & Busler, 2014). Incubators have been shown to promote firm survival and job creation; however, their success is linked with other initiatives aimed at infrastructure and reform (Al-Mubaraki, Muhammad, & Busler, 2015). In contrast, Theodorakopoulos, Kakabadse, and McGowan (2014) argued that a lack of agreement on success criteria for incubators would ultimately carry the greatest weight. The authors propose success is contingent on the ability of incubator managers to create a learning community, and to mediate support, funding, and access to customers. The current study participants benefited from introductions to retailers through the incubators, but also appreciated the social environment and comradery facilitated by incubators. Chalmers (2013) proposed organizations with proactive social missions would best avoid risk and achieve success if participating in

collaborative networks. Identifying the function of incubators in different startup

scenarios and in promoting CSSR goals is critical; as noted below in opportunities for

future research, the field especially needs more research on the role of kitchen incubators.

The most significant potential impact of supporting SMEs in pursuing their CSSR goals

and overcoming the barriers to scale is the positive outcomes their entities can have on

society. In the following section, I present implications for social change associated with

this study.

Implications for Social Change

Food is essential to survival and a fundamental part of daily life and culture for

everyone. The food industry accounts for many social and environmental improvement

opportunities, including energy and sustainability (Zanoni & Zavanella, 2012), food

safety (Wiese & Toporowski, 2013), obesity and health (Mialon et al., 2015), animal

welfare (Manning, 2013), and food waste (Loke & Leung, 2015). The participants in this

study directly mentioned all of these issues. The ability for SME food producers to

address these matters directly through their strategy and operations could facilitate

significant improvements in each of these impact categories. Even small players can

influence transformation within MNCs through new business models or imitable actions

(Schaltegger, Lüdeke-Freund, et al., 2016). On the other hand, small firms are more

vulnerable; in the recent economic downturn almost 170,000 SMEs closed (Panwar,

Nybakk, Pinkse, & Hansen, 2015). In their study of sustainability-oriented activities in

small manufacturers, Panwar et al. (2015) showed in such conditions, the peripheral

sustainability activities would suffer but core strategic CSSR activities would be more

challenging to unravel. Nonetheless, the weakness of small organizations exists so research and policy that further stabilizes and strengthens SMEs will guard the CSSR outcomes against future economic hardships.

In this study, I revealed strong intent participant SMEs had towards solving social and environmental problems, but also the barriers to scaling the triple bottom line aims of positive economic, social, and environment returns. The implications for this study are in sharing common success factors such as utilizing kitchen incubators and building close relationships with customers. Similarly, social benefits come from addressing barriers to scaling sustainability such as capacity building in production and supply chain, and access to resources to enable labels and certifications that open market opportunities.

Recommendations for Action

SME owner-managers focused on scaling their CSSR impact through growth need industry infrastructure, policies, and other assistance. The findings of this study could be applied to incubators principally so incubator management and investors can design services and pricing that accommodate, rather than hinder, scale. Innovations and systems necessary to compete at scale are far outside the realm of possibility for small farmers and producers, but those seeking to facilitate the growth of value-add food startups could offer policies and affordable solutions that enable and support efficient and sophisticated production. Legislators may be pay special note to the obstacles participants faced in learning about and properly adhering to relevant laws and standards. Policy makers should consider that small scale manufactures have unique needs, and consequently, should draft laws that lower barriers to access.

Scalability is vital because in order for CSSR endeavors to be truly transformative, they must reach a critical mass, but replication can a substitute for scale in spreading an innovative CSSR approach (Schaltegger et al., 2016). Franchising, or other replication methods, may be particularly useful when the local factor is strong and each location will need to adjust for local employment and supply chain conditions, institutions, and market preferences. I will share this study with those in the food startup community and those seeking to start and grow CSSR-oriented businesses in other industries. SME owner-managers who attend information sessions and seek to network with likeminded entrepreneurs may find this study helpful to consider potential barriers so that proper planning and implementation can occur. Finally, as I consult clients on their CSSR initiatives, the results of this study could be relevant in identifying success factors such as focusing on quality, leveraging local connections, and seeking guidance to traverse the legal landscape.

Recommendations for Further Research

The field of research related to sustainability that addresses the combined focus of social, environmental, and economic returns is still nascent; specifically, there is more opportunity to study how new business model approaches can address CSSR (Schaltegger et al., 2016). While the current study included strategic development, I did not focus on the business models in the conceptual framework nor the interview questions. Other limitations of the current research include geographical focus on the Washington, DC area, participants with very small firms, and those with a proactive CSSR stance. In the future, researchers could expand the scope of the study to compare

the experiences of owner-managers in other regions of the country, or urban area food startup patterns contrasted with rural area patterns. Researchers could also explore CSSR approach. In this study, I focused on owner-managers with a proactive stance; however, even owner-managers with a defensive stance contribute to global food-related social and environmental topics. Researchers may find it worthy to study SME food owner-managers who do not actively seek to set goals associated with such issues and compare their effectiveness at addressing social and environmental problems.

To further pursue themes found in this study, future research should address barriers encountered by the five participants. Researchers could further explore the benefits and hindrances introduced by kitchen incubators and shared commercial production space. Searches in 10 pages of Google Scholar results for articles on *kitchen incubators* revealed no peer-reviewed articles related to topics covered in this study; most results were general studies in which the word kitchen appeared but was not a focus, non-peer reviewed university papers, and scientific studies related to technical or scientific topics. Given the prevalence of both the enablers to starting up and the barriers to scale discussed by participants, the role of kitchen incubators in starting and growing food startups represents an area in need of scholarly research. Supply chains, particularly with local dynamics, could be more clearly delineated and evaluated. Future research could include a more refined definition of SME. While there are agreed upon ranges for SME firm size, it would be valuable to compare the difference between further delineated ranges. Finally, quantitative researchers could analyze stakeholders and institutional

structures through surveys, experimental, or other designs that offer explanation of findings presented here.

Reflections

This study enabled me to focus on an intersection of topics that are meaningful to me personally. Through CSSR efforts, I believe business has an opportunity to be a force for positive change in society. Of all the supply chains to study, I found food singularly important because it is essential and integral to our daily lives. The interviews with participants allowed me to discover practical applications of these interests.

During this process, I followed prescribed protocols to ensure neutrality. Given my background of years of personal experience mentoring entrepreneurs, it was critical that I resisted the temptation to offer advice and commentary to the participants. I personally tried at least one product from each the participants' product lines but my opinion about the quality or taste of the products did not influence my interaction with or treatment of any of the participants. I was impressed with what they have managed to accomplish, and inspired by their perseverance. One of the aspects of this study that surprised me was the intensity and maturity of the overall food startup community in the Washington, DC area. There are many support mechanisms and much local interest in establishing and growing local food brands.

Conclusion

Food production SMEs with a proactive CSSR approach start their firms and build their products around the core idea of making positive impact on social and environmental conditions. While there are a variety of CSSR issues these owner-

managers may address, there are some common challenges they face in scaling and growing their businesses. Using the conceptual frameworks of strategic development, stakeholder management, and institutional structures, I researched barriers and enablers among five small food company owner-managers in the Washington, DC area. The findings showed the participants pursued goals such as reducing food waste, supporting local agriculture and economy, promoting healthy eating, and providing employment to targeted stakeholders. Common dynamics included: (a) informal and evolving strategic development; (b) stakeholder engagement that favored customers over all others; (c) local supply chains not always able support scale; (d) confusion and complexity in laws, regulations, and standards; and (e) difficulty in accessing production facilities conducive to scaling. Incubator owners, investors, and policy makers can use these findings to create mechanisms that better enable the scaling of the economic, social, and environmental output of small food production businesses.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

- Provide a basic description of your business, including ownership, years in business, revenues, number of employees, number of products, etc.

- How are CSSR goals integrated into the strategic planning process?

- How has the organization achieved the mission regarding CSSR goals?

- How do laws and regulations facilitate or hinder pursuit of CSSR goals?

- In what ways does the upstream supply chain facilitate the pursuit of CSSR goals?

- In what ways does the upstream supply hinder the pursuit of CSSR goals?

- If you have your own facilities of any kind (manufacture, distribution, etc.), how do CSSR goals affect those operations?

- How do those operations alter CSSR goals?

- How does downstream supply facilitate or hinder the pursuit of that goal?

- Does the customer (distributor, grocer, consumer) demand CSSR goals?

- How are CSSR goals and achievement communicated to customers downstream (packaging, website, etc.)?

- In what way do costs and financing relate to the execution of CSSR goals?

- If you could start the business over, would there be different CSSR goals?

- What would you do differently in the future to better achieve CSSR goals?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

To secure and conduct interviews with research participants, I proceeded through the following steps:

1. Outreach to potential research participants, known through current professional network, via email and phone.

2. Schedule an initial meeting to establish a relationship, explain my research intent, and determine if the participant qualifies as part of the population.

3. Follow up via email or phone to ascertain the participants' willingness and interest to participate.

4. If interested, send the participant a consent form.

5. Follow up with participant to secure signed documents indicating agreement to participate.

6. Schedule an interview time and location.

7. Two days before the scheduled interview, confirm the meeting logistics and attendance.

8. Arrive at the location with sufficient time to set up for recording the interview.

9. Greet and welcome the participant into the space.

10. Conduct the interview as a guided conversation using the questions listed in Appendix A.

11. Record the interview using a mobile devise (iPad) that has been tested and confirmed to function appropriately.

12. Conclude the interview after approximately one hour.

13. Request an opportunity to review documents mentioned in the interview, or other documents listed in Section 2 that would enable me to triangulate the interview responses.