

2D - Emerging Resources: Entrepreneurial incentives for addressing the challenges of sustainable growth through inventing new business models

In an economic environment where Corporate Social Responsibility (“CSR”) has become a fashionable, if not, a compulsory topic, entrepreneurs have begun to rethink their approach to CSR not just as a cost or expense but as an opportunity to create sustainable growth.

The speakers, Xavier Pescenda (Vitam) and Vincent Capa (Synexer) are both entrepreneurs based in the emerging economies of Czech Republic and Vietnam respectively. Though the main goal of achieving sustainable growth through CSR is similar for both entrepreneurs, the challenges and the economic context in which both operate are different.

This year alone, in Vietnam, Mr. Vincent Capa’s firm Synexser has raised funds to perform corrective surgery on 3,000 children who suffered split cleft defects. The mission was fully aligned with Asia’s philanthropic approach to CSR. In general, the challenges Mr Capa has to face include lack of governance in CSR, no interest in social and community problems by large state owned enterprises, language barriers, scarce resources, government bureaucracy. However, there is an opportunity in the growing interest in CSR by the young Vietnamese population. Synexser has also used information technology such as applications or games on the i-pads to foster interactions with the youth which form a large portion of the Vietnamese market. These interactions have boosted the reputation of the firm.

Mr. Xavier serves as the Managing Director of Vitam in Czech Republic. He considers that integrating the CSR approach into the activities of the company was very helpful in creating opportunities in midst of an economic crisis. Vitam’s drive to build a solar plant was more out of necessity than of a philanthropic gesture but ended up in the opportunity of a new market for the firm (building and installing solar plants). Mr. Xavier opines that entrepreneurs have to keep themselves updated with global social and environmental issues and to be open to seizing opportunities despite the lack of expertise or despite the political or legislative issues that might exist (such as Czech Republic’s retroactive taxes on energy).

Both speakers agree that CSR can be useful as a managerial tool to boost motivation and innovation amongst employees. In Synexser for instance, it is required that the company works on a number of projects each year that are of value to both the company and the community. The integration of CSR into an organization’s DNA is a gradual process in which regular meetings with employees to explain the issues and to exchange ideas usually increases staff participation and motivation.

CSR integration into business activities is a long term project, “but it is worth it because we build the society we live in”.