A Theoretical Hypothesis on Ferris Wheel Model of University Social Responsibility

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Abstract—According to the nature of the university, as a free and responsible academic community, USR is based on a different foundation —academic responsibility, so the Pyramid and the IC Model of CSR could not fully explain the most distinguished feature of USR. This paper sought to put forward a new model— Ferris Wheel Model, to illustrate the nature of USR and the process of achievement. The Ferris Wheel Model of USR shows the university creates a balanced, fairness and neutrality systemic structure to afford social responsibilities; that makes the organization could obtain a synergistic effect to achieve more extensive interests of stakeholders and wider social responsibilities.

Keywords—USR, Achievement model, Ferris wheel model.

I. INTRODUCTION

UNIVERSITY Social Responsibility (USR) has emerged as an inclusive and global concept to embrace the entire spectrum of socially beneficial activities of the university.

There are emerging responses of USR coming from world-wide higher education leaders, thinkers and researchers. These passionate discussions are charting a gorgeous model of USR.

The modern university is not affording social responsibilities in an "isolated space" in the traditional concept. If the university creates a healthy climate in which to function in the future, it will ensure its long-term viability and competitiveness. The achievement of USR based on the continual interaction between the organization and the external environment. The theoretical model of USR illustrates the nature of USR and the process of achievement, which includes structure, process and interactive relationship. The study of USR model is a valuable tool, which is helpful to solve the problem of uncoordinated and unbalanced fulfillment of social responsibility of universities.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Conceptual Framework of USR

The ambiguity of the concept of USR has obstructed the further development on its theory and practice. Of the numerous definitions, most of the scholars agree with the USR is refers to the university through ethical, effective management of its activities to achieve the university, society, people and the environment for sustainable development.

François Vallaeys outlines a conceptual framework of USR that encompasses four steps: commitment, self-diagnosis, compliance, accountability. It is precisely in this fourth step where reporting to stakeholders and dialogue takes place. Vallaeys refer to "stakeholders" as a term that encompasses a wide range of individuals, such as: Teaching and research staff, non-teaching staff, authorities, students, providers, graduates, recruiters, competitors, local communities, partner organizations and public/governmental entities [1].

As Radiah Othman points out, universities should make social responsibility part of their triple bottom lines - economic, environment and social. Their empirical findings shows universities have responded differently to social responsibility, the study revealed social responsibility was important to universities for survival, some universities use social responsibility platforms as part of their response to the ever-changing demands and pressures [2]. These theoretical and empirical studies provide some enlightenment for this paper.

B. Models of Corporate Social Responsibility

A leading model of CSR is Archie B. Carroll's Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility– is often used to explain the construct of CSR. Carroll explored the nature of CSR with an eye toward understanding its component parts and the relationship between domains of responsibility. In this model, four kinds of social responsibilities constitute CSR: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic [3].
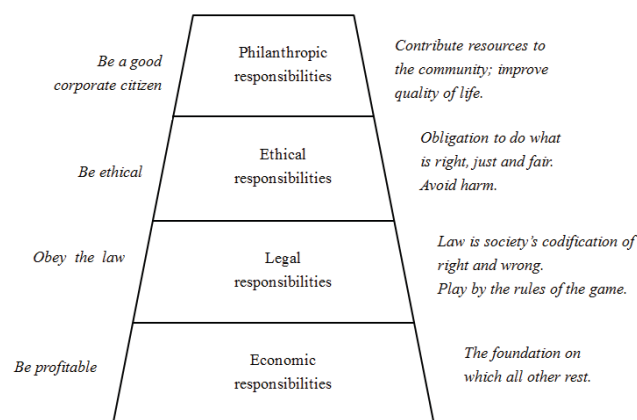

Fig. 1 The Pyramid of CSR

The fundamental of CSR Pyramid is the economic responsibility. Other responsibilities are predicated upon the

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economic responsibility of the firm. Carroll contended that the economic and legal responsibilities are "required", the ethical responsibilities are "expected", and the philanthropic responsibilities are "desired". The CSR pyramid suggests that businesses can not only be profitable and ethical, but they should fulfill these obligations simultaneously. However, understanding CSR as an array of separate domains naturally leads to narrow definitions of the different responsibilities [4].

Schwartz and Carroll (2003) develop the Pyramid Model to the Intersecting Circles Model (IC). The IC model of CSR contrasts with the pyramid model in two main aspects: it recognizes the possibility of interrelationships among CSR domains; and rejects the hierarchical order of importance. Considering that social responsibilities are in dynamic interplay with each other, the role of the social organization is not only to resolve existing conflicts or, better, to prevent them before they develop, but to advance harmony and create opportunities for beneficial partnerships [4]. That is an important inspiration to USR model.
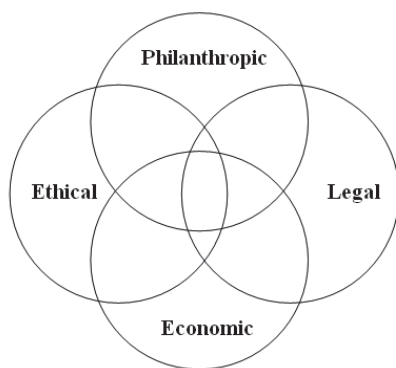

Fig. 2 Intersecting Circles of CSR

C. Models of University Social Responsibility

Some scholars argued that implementing comprehensive sustainability policies and reporting on economic, social and environmental outcomes is one way of making higher education institutions more accountable to their regional stakeholders and more responsive to the needs arising from the region. However, most existing research in CSR fails to take into account how universities cope with the development of CSR [5].

The nature of the university, as a free and responsible academic community, USR is based on a different foundation — academic responsibility, without it the other responsibilities become moot considerations. That is the mainly difference between USR and CSR. The economic responsibilities of the university are also based on the fulfillment of academic responsibilities. In the dimension of ethical responsibilities, customers and investors require companies should not ignore ethics for the sake of the bottom line while also keeping an eye on profits. The university is and is regarded as a special moral institution, even more, it is in a position to be attacked on fundamental moral grounds for any move, such as violence on

campus, steep hikes in tuition, personal misconduct, usually identified in media and by angry groups of [6].

The research of USR model has gained increasing acceptance in recent years. The model of university social responsibility shows the realistic ways how the university undertakes social responsibilities, as a kind of unique and important social organizations, USR model reflects the governance characteristics, advantages and limitations of USR fulfillment.

This study puts forward a new model— Ferris Wheel Model, to illustrate the nature of USR and the process of achievement. In order to provide a useful interpretation to explain the complex issue of USR, although this model is still imperfect and subjective. The findings may inform universities who aim to better understand the USR. The USR Ferris Wheel still need empirical study on contents and structures of USR in future studies, and the prospect looks bright.

III. The Theoretical Model of USR Ferris Wheel

2015 XIII International Conference on Higher Education will be held in London. The London Eye, a famous landmark of London, enlightened scholars to imagine a new USR model.

Valuable as it is, USR is like a giant and gorgeous Ferris wheel, it is not just designed for scholars, specialists or rich people, but everybody. That's the beauty of it: it is public and accessible, it is in a great position at the heart of a university, and it keeps moving, neither too fast, nor too slow, it essentially fulfill functions of the university, to lift people up, to promote the development of the society.

The Ferris Wheel Model of USR is composed of three main parts: the cabin, the drive mechanism, roulette structure and the supporting tower. The "cabin" represents stakeholders of the university. The roulette structure represents the responsibility structure and its motivation mechanism. Supporting tower shows the foundation of USR.
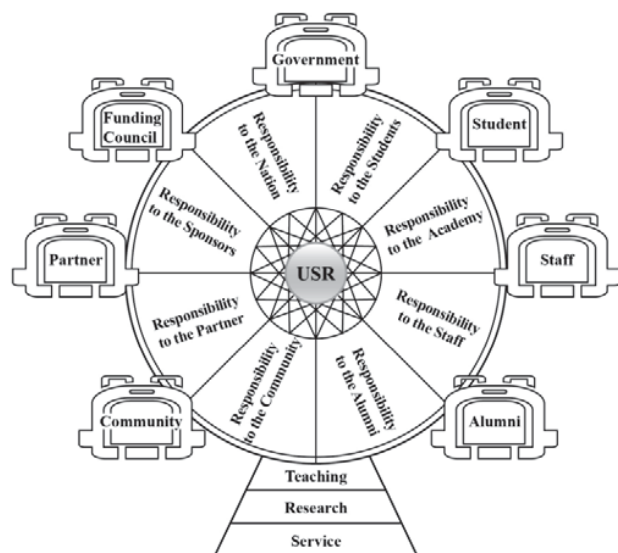

Fig. 3 The Ferris Wheel of USR

A .The Cabin

A broadening group of stakeholders of the university may be on the wheel at a time. The cabins will be on slew bearings and will rotate as the wheel turns, so stakeholders have equal rights and opportunities to enjoy the landscape of USR. If the university is believed to be effective and accountable, it should meet the expectations of multi-stakeholder. They have the right to be informed, to participate, to be heard, to influence, to make decisions, and the corresponding accountability requirements they imply.

A list of stakeholders may include one or more of the following: Students, faculty, staff, alumni, government departments, funding councils and other sponsors, employers, partners, competitors, local communities, national communities, and the society in large. For instance, the responsibility to the students included:

- Accessible and affordability;
- Quality and diversity;
- Social responsible graduates;
- Best learning experience;
- Well-being and ownership of students

Compare with the accountability, USR embraced the scope and criteria of accountability, and do more things beyond the indicators. More importantly, USR is a double-way responsibility. The university meets its responsibility to the stakeholders, while the stakeholders also have direct or indirect obligations and responsibilities to the university. They can help the university fulfill USR by affect the organization's objectives, policies, actions.

Compare with so much social responsibilities the university affords, social resources the university could dominate are rarely. Society should not blame the University use social responsibility platform to get useful resources. According to the resource dependence theory, an organization will pay more attention to and be more concerned with the issues of stakeholders groups who control resources critical to its survival. It is necessary for a university to pay special attention to the most important stakeholders in a certain period, commit to pursuing "social responsibility priorities". For example, the public university which struggled to preserve its organizational identity focused its social responsibilities internally (towards existing students and staff) rather than towards the outside communities.

In sum, the modern university should increase the efficiency of the university's adaptation to internal and external demands, balance all stakeholders' interests, as well as work closely with them to help achieve the mission and responsibility. Otherwise, the Ferris wheel of USR may have uncoordinated and unbalanced conflicts and problems.

B. Drive Mechanism

Drive mechanisms of USR model comprising external social needs and internal motivation mechanism will keep the university with its stakeholders throughout the ride, and keep the cabins balanced.

If the model lacks of external social needs, there are none of stakeholders would like to participate in the work, USR will not be accomplished.

When some kind of social needs is getting stronger, the related social responsibilities will be in the rising period. When some kinds of responsibilities decreasing, they shouldn't be ignored; instead, the movement of Ferris wheel shows they will move in up-and-coming circles over a period.

For an instance, in China, the environmental responsibility of university did not attract much attention until the late of 20th century. Chinese universities and colleges response to green initiatives lags behind other public sections and universities of other countries. In the first decades of 21st century, China has built a huge system of higher education institutions, including the number of 2790 colleges and universities, with 33 million students and 1.5 million teachers. While, only 105 colleges and universities have the recognition of the Ministry of education and the State Environmental Protection Administration on the green campus construction. Recent years, owing to severe air pollution and smog problem, environmental responsibility is gaining increasing concern in China. In this context, the university need to be more sensitive to environmental responsibility, and committed to sustainable development on a much larger scale. The Green University action is considered to be inevitable. More Chinese universities are willing to make extra efforts to combat environmental problems; they put forward optimal operations to reduce the university's carbon dioxide emissions, changing individual and institutional behavior to become a more climate-conscious community.

Seen from the inside of this model, the university can promote social responsibility performance by internal motivation mechanism. One is the principle of academic freedom and university autonomy is an important internal mechanism to balance and coordinate the fulfillment of USR [5]. Secondly, in many cases, the university also uses market mechanism to allocate internal education resources, and exercise their rationality to undertake corresponding economic, legal, ethical responsibility.

C. Roulette Structure

The power of stakeholders is tied together and integrated to make this "USR machine", and many social institutions were involved to make this happen. USR of the established model, whatever else its strengths and weaknesses, reflects the desire of specific stakeholders. The university creates a balanced, fairness and neutrality systemic structure to afford responsibilities to stakeholders. However, stakeholders with unequal resources has full of expectations and diverse interests that sometimes make the university may have difficulties to adapt to objectives of social responsibility.

Sometimes the conflicts do exist, so the wheel will be equipped with "lateral restraint devices" to prevent any part of the wheel from striking the USR platform during a "windstorm". The "lateral restraint devices" is the USR governance. Common governance structure makes the university easier to obtain a synergistic effect, so as to achieve more extensive interests of stakeholders and wider social responsibilities.

D. Supporting Tower

Vincent E. Barry has defined the term *responsibility*, "a sphere of duty or obligation assigned to a person by the nature of that person's position, function, or work" [7]. USR could thus be viewed as a bundle of obligations associated with the function of the university. The foundation of USR implies the university performs certain functions associated with social roles. Management techniques do not evaluate acts on the rationality behind them but on the processes and consequences of teaching, research and social service. In this sense, USR refers to the multiple facets of function—both processes and outcomes. Based on the functions of teaching, research and public activities, USR therefore sits at the heart of everything the university does.

Modern Universities have a key influence on society in a three-fold manner: they educate people, they create and transform science, technology and management expertise into viable, practical, environmentally desirable solutions that enhance social development, and they participate in governance at local, national and global levels. All of the features of USR make its achievement model unique, posed significant challenges, also imbued with extraordinary potential. USR is a positive and creative concept; it is not restricted by social functions or some principal-agent relationship.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Ferris Wheel Model of USR shows the university creates a balanced, fairness and neutrality systemic structure to afford social responsibilities; that makes the organization could obtain a synergistic effect to achieve more extensive and wider interests of stakeholders and social responsibilities. Based on this study, some practical recommendations included:

1) More universities should regard the USR as the positive strategies. More information of USR needs to be disclosed, and accessible to stakeholders, and encouraging more independent monitoring and reporting. This may in turn maintain the University's efficiency, transparency and inclusiveness, so as to promote public trust and the self-governance on USR. China, for example, has initiated the widespread promotion of information disclosure through such efforts as *University Information Disclosure Regulations* in 2010, *University Information Disclosure List* in 2014, promulgated by the Ministry of Education. Some Chinese top-level universities have started to release annual social responsibility report under the guidance of ISO26000 - Social responsibility, and the guidelines and documents of local government since 2011.

2) The trend of social development and the structure of the social demand for higher education have also changed; the university could gain valuable insights on institutional change and social responsibility. Although a university has obvious structural inertia, in order to be creative in achieving social responsibility, the university should release running energy through necessarily institutional change; particularly an informed social responsibility strategy of action forms and develops over time. For example, social responsibility is one of three core strategic goals in the University of Manchester 2020 strategy, sitting equally alongside commitments to world-class research and outstanding learning and student experience University of Manchester also have a number of signature programs for research, teaching, community engagement and processes, allowing them to focus and measure efforts [8]. The future institutional change and strategy are expected to bring positive innovations and behaviors to motivate more universities to achieve the USR objectives and activities, particularly regarding how to maintain dynamical balance of long-term and short-term social responsibilities, properly handle the conflicts between service to today's society and future guidance.

3) USR models can be considered as a network composed by the structure, process and interaction. The university is facing the diversified interests, asymmetric resources and decision-making power of stakeholders. The participatory models of collaboration and decision-making, with necessary institutional mandates and delivery mechanisms, may offer new collaborative and networked approach to university actually work. It is considered to be helpful to solve the issue of uncoordinated and unbalanced fulfillment of USR. For example, China has begun to promote the modernization of governance capacity of colleges and universities, attempts to explore the ways to construct an internal governance structure characterized by "lateral balance in power" and "longitudinal lowering of gravity", to build cooperation of the university and the community. The partner ability and public demand were the main external concerns whether the university chose to cooperate or not. The public service quality and response were the internal driving force of synergy.

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