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Corporate social responsibility attitudes of board directors in Australian firms: The role of gender and spiritual wellbeing

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Abstract
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an important element in portraying corporate identity and building a positive reputation for firms (Cornelius et al. 2007). While at the overall board level, there have been several studies examining the effect of boardlevel attributes on CSR (Dalton et al. 2003; Bonn 2004; McWilliams and Siegel 2000, Bear, Rahman, and Post 2010), at the individual, director level, there has been little research conducted. This study examines individual characteristics of Australian company directors to identify the contributing factors that shape their attitudes to CSR. In particular, in this study, we examine the impact of spiritual wellbeing, ethical ideology, gender, and altruism. To investigate the existence and nature of these relationships, we conducted face-to-face interviews of 20 Australian board members (10 males and 10 females). Each interview was audio recorded and lasted for about an hour. Questions focused on the impact of gender, spiritual wellbeing, ethical ideology, and altruism on directors' attitude to CSR. Our interview findings show a link between directors' level of spirituality and their attitudes to CSR. Although due to professional and economic reasons, some CSR initiatives might not eventuate, directors' attitude to support specific CSR activities appeared directly linked to their level of spirituality. Furthermore, gender appeared to moderate the relationship between directors' attitude to support specific CSR activities and their level of spirituality. Based on our interview analysis, it is suggested that women directors tend to care more for employees and society as a whole due to their feminine and nurturing characteristics. Female directors who are confident in their roles, showed better communication skills and tend to interact more with other stakeholders both internal and external to the organisation. The interviewees generally agreed that women board directors appeared to be better listeners and can initiate the conversation easier than their counterparts. They also seemed to raise issues, even on very difficult subjects, easier than their male colleagues. In summary, our findings suggest that there is a direct relationship between CSR attitudes of directors and their level of spirituality. Gender plays a moderating role in this relationship. Female directors show higher levels of spiritual wellbeing which seem to be more developed than in male board directors despite their religious, cultural, professional and educational background. Our findings shed new light on this little researched area and could be of considerable value to corporations, boards and state and federal policy makers.

Keywords
gender, role, firms, Australian, directors, board, attitudes, wellbeing, responsibility, spiritual, social, corporate

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Corporate Social Responsibility Attitudes of Board Directors in Australian Firms: The Role of Gender and Spiritual Wellbeing

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Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an important element in portraying corporate identity and building a positive reputation for firms (Cornelius et al. 2007). While at the overall board level, there have been several studies examining the effect of board-level attributes on CSR (Dalton et al. 2003; Bonn 2004; McWilliams and Siegel 2000, Bear, Rahman, and Post 2010), at the individual, director level, there has been little research conducted. This study examines individual characteristics of Australian company directors to identify the contributing factors that shape their attitudes to CSR. In particular, in this study, we examine the impact of spiritual wellbeing, ethical ideology, gender, and altruism.

To investigate the existence and nature of these relationships, we conducted face-to-face interviews of 20 Australian board members (10 males and 10 females). Each interview was audio recorded and lasted for about an hour. Questions focused on the impact of gender, spiritual wellbeing, ethical ideology, and altruism on directors’ attitude to CSR.

Our interview findings show a link between directors’ level of spirituality and their attitudes to CSR. Although due to professional and economic reasons, some CSR initiatives might not eventuate, directors’ attitude to support specific CSR activities appeared directly linked to their level of spirituality. Furthermore, gender appeared to moderate the relationship between directors’ attitude to support specific CSR activities and their level of spirituality. Based on our interview analysis, it is
suggested that women directors tend to care more for employees and society as a whole due to their feminine and nurturing characteristics. Female directors who are confident in their roles, showed better communication skills and tend to interact more with other stakeholders both internal and external to the organisation. The interviewees generally agreed that women board directors appeared to be better listeners and can initiate the conversation easier than their counterparts. They also seemed to raise issues, even on very difficult subjects, easier than their male colleagues.

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**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Spiritual Wellbeing, Gender, Board Directors, Communal wellbeing