

Case Study on the Implementation of G Company's Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility

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Abstract: Over the years, scholars have verified that corporate social responsibility activities can bring sustainable competitive advantages to enterprise, but few have studied how to apply the corporate social responsibility theoretical framework to corporate activities. This paper selects G company, a listed company in China, as the case. It is an excellent company rated as “five-star social responsibility fulfillment enterprise” by CFIE (China Federation of Industrial Economics) from 2014 to 2017, we explore the way of combining social responsibility activities with corporate strategy, so as to provide experience and reference for other companies in fulfilling social responsibility continuously. We found that G company took the R&D of green silicone material products as the main driving force to fulfill its social responsibility, and closely combines its core business activities with social responsibility activities, runs the concept of social responsibility through the whole process of production and operation, and strives to build a social responsibility management mechanism with the characteristics of company, thus bringing sustainable competitive advantages of enterprise.

Key words: strategic corporate social responsibility; corporate sustainable competitive advantage; four-dimensional model of strategy CSR; G company, corporate strategy

JEL codes: M14, D21, L25

1. Introduction

Burke and Logsdon (1996, pp. 495-501) first put forward the concept of strategic corporate social responsibility (CSR) and a theoretical framework for strategic CSR, which is just to integrate CSR activities into corporate strategy to ensure that enterprises implement social responsibility activities and create value for enterprises. In recent years, scholars have verified that the implementation of CSR activities will bring sustainable competitive advantage to enterprises. However, the application of the strategic CSR theoretical framework is rarely studied, enterprises cannot be guided by theory when in the implementation of strategic CSR. In fact, many Chinese enterprises have been striving to fulfill their social responsibilities, and some have good results, thus gaining a sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, we believe that the process of the implementation of

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strategic social responsibility of these enterprises and their results should be analyzed and summarized.

By exploring the way to combine CSR activities with corporate strategy, we hope to provide experience and reference for other companies in the continuous and stable implementation of social responsibility.

2. Literature Review

The proposition of the concept of "Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility (strategic CSR)" put forward a comprehensive standard to clarify the relationship between CSR and corporate strategy (Burke & Logsdon, 1996). The standard helped firms identify all strategic behaviors that benefit from CSR, including Centrality, Specificity, Prospective, Voluntarism and Visibility (Lantos Geoffrey P., 2001, pp. 595-632). In 2001, Lantos divided Carroll's philanthropic responsibilities into altruistic CSR in conflict with the enterprise's profit-seeking goals and strategic CSR bringing economic benefits while improving social welfare (Lantos Geoffrey P., 2001, pp. 595-632). Porter and Kramer (2006) divided CSR into reactive CSR and strategic CSR on the basis of Lantos's research and the theory of competitive advantage. They believed that strategic CSR is not only strategic charity activities, but also CSR activities that can provide opportunities for the innovation of product and supply chain, and further bring competitiveness to enterprises. They clearly put forward that the combination of core business and CSR can bring competitive advantages to firms (Porter Michael E., Mark R. Kramer, 2006, pp. 78-163). Husted & Allen (2007) improved the five-dimensional model of Burke and Logsdon, and they believed that voluntarism is not necessary for strategic CSR (Husted Bryan W., David B. Allen, 2007, pp. 594-610). But in fact, Burke and Logsdon do not analyze the connections between the five dimensions and strategic CSR, and voluntarism and visibility are not essential evaluation dimensions of strategic CSR (Peng X. & Liu Y., 2015).

In recent years, it has become a general consensus that enterprises should assume social responsibilities. In fact, traditional CSR behaviors in the past were not always undertaken voluntarily by enterprises, and they were still misunderstandings in connotation of social responsibility. They only considered social responsibility as charity and donation, or they unilaterally believed that social responsibility would increase the cost of enterprises and go against the purpose of making profits (Qiao F., Zhou L., Huang W., 2017, pp. 90-94). In addition, enterprises often failed to combine social responsibility with strategic planning, core business, operation process and other links when fulfilling social responsibility, resulting in the failure to see the positive role of social responsibility (Liu J., Sheng M., 2019, pp. 59-63), so the performance of social responsibility was not good.

To address deficiencies in fulfilling CSR, the emphasis of the shift from traditional CSR to strategic CSR is to integrate social responsibility into the internal strategic planning of enterprises. On the basis of previous studies, the evaluation model is built and summarized to the four evaluation dimensions of strategic CSR: Centrality is in line with the enterprise's mission and vision, Proactive pays great attention to the changes in the environment and has a long-term vision, Specificity makes CSR with unique specificity, and Systematic is to ensure the systematic of social responsibilities to be fulfilled orderly (Liu J. & Sheng M., 2017).

Furthermore, strategic CSR is all responsible behavior bringing sustainable competitive advantage to enterprises regardless of any motivation. It must be underlined that strategic CSR can bring corporate sustainable competitive advantage (CSCA) (Mc Williams, Siegel, 2011, pp. 1480-1495). And especially, enterprises can combine strategic CSR with core business to increase CSCA (Fu H., Wang G., 2018, pp. 99-100).

From the perspective of the RBT theory, key resources with meeting the requirements of the theory can be indeed brought by strategic CSR, and help enterprises form CSCA (Shao X., Meng X., 2015). That is to say,

strategic CSR could bring financial performance (immediate benefits) and intangible resources or capabilities (long-term benefits), and thus form CSCA. Based on the theory of the composition of competitive advantage, Wu D. (2018) analyzed the data of the top 100 listed companies with social responsibility in China and figured that strategic CSR behavior is conducive to the transformation of CSCA (Wu D., 2018, pp. 122-132). On the basis of the empirical investigation of listed companies and the satisfaction of stakeholders, Fu H. and Wang G. (2018, pp. 99-100) proved that enterprises can combine strategic CSR with core business to increase CSCA.

In conclusion, in order to enable enterprises to achieve sustainable competitive advantages by implementing CSR activities, enterprises should identify them one by one according to four dimensions and reconsider whether the social responsibility they are fulfilling has strategic characteristics or not. The four dimensions can help managers truly integrate social responsibility activities into corporate strategy, so that enterprises have the chance to obtain short-term interests and especially resources conforming to the RBT theory, which contribute to the formation of unique CSCA.

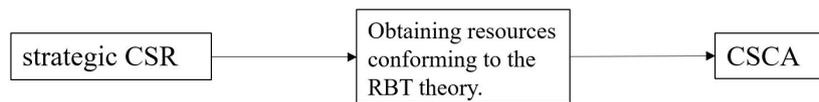


Figure 1 The Structure of the Article

3. About G Company

G company (Guibao scientific and technical company), listed on the GEM (Growth Enterprises Market board) in 2009, is mainly engaged in the research and development, production and sales of organosilicon materials and special equipment¹. Since its establishment in 1998, G company, having been adhered to the core values “Responsible to customers, responsible to employees, responsible to society, responsible to investors”, regarded integrating social responsibility into the daily management of the company as a fundamental requirement to promote the company’s capacity for sustainable development². By this means, the company hopes to create greater value for its customers, employees, society and other stakeholders while realizing its own development.

Based on this, in 2013, G company officially launched the SA8000 Social Responsibility System Certification. In the same year, in accordance with the world’s first international standard of ethics SA8000 the company further improved the “Social Responsibility Management Manual”, and gradually clarified the division of social responsibility and management structure about this³. In 2014, it set up a dedicated leading group for CSR work to further explore the CSR system that integrates with existing management systems. In 2015, the company began to form a Social Responsibility Management Mechanism with company’s cultural characteristics, and gradually achieved the win-win goal of economic and social benefits⁴.

In recent years, G company has been greatly concerned about the combination of ideas and actions about CSR. It attaches importance on building core resources with competitive advantages, including technology, talent, and platform virtue, and actively assumes social responsibility on the premise of paying attention to the demands

¹ Available online at: <http://www.cnguobao.com>.

² G Company (2015). G company: CSR report in 2014, CNINFO, available online at: <http://www.cninfo.com.cn/new/disclosure/detail?orgId=9900008407&announcementId=1200723779&announcementTime=2015-03-21>.

³ G Company (2014). G company: CSR report in 2013, CNINFO, available online at: <http://www.cninfo.com.cn/new/disclosure/detail?orgId=9900008407&announcementId=63646843&announcementTime=2014-03-07>.

⁴ G Company (2016). G company: CSR report in 2015. CNINFO, available online at: <http://www.cninfo.com.cn/new/disclosure/detail?orgId=9900008407&announcementId=1202058154&announcementTime=2016-03-19>.

of internal and external stakeholders. At the same time, among the procedure of this, G company strives to converge with international standards. From 2014 to 2017, G company had won the honor of “Five-star Enterprise of Chinese Industrial Corporate Social Responsibility” for four consecutive years, which is the recognition for G company’s social responsibility to the public.

Since its listing in 2009, G company has achieved nine consecutive years of steady growth in gross sales and total assets. Net profit overall shows a steady upward trend, except for a decrease in net profit due to a sharp rise in raw material prices in 2017 and 2018.

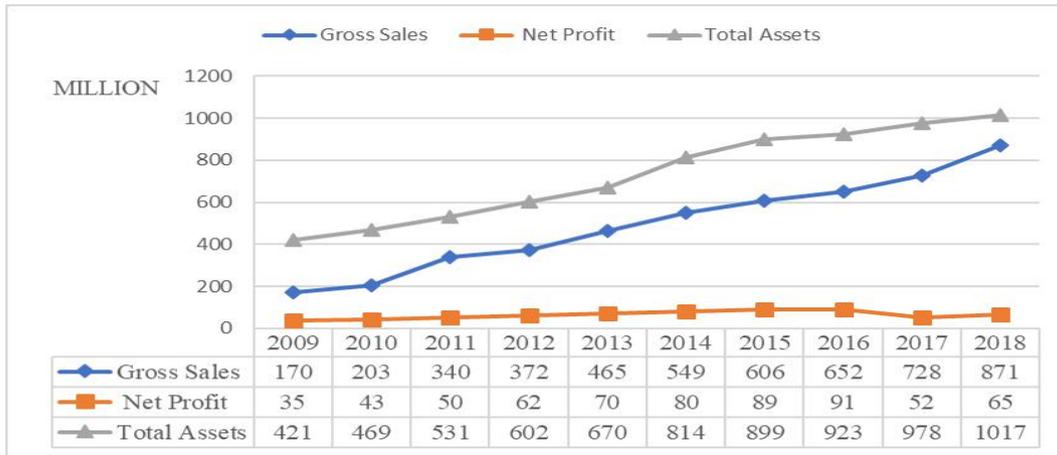


Figure 2 The Financial Indicators of G Company

Sources: Annual financial reports from 2009 to 2015 of G company

4. Analysis of G Company's Strategic CSR

4.1 Identification of Four Strategy Dimensions

In terms of information from annual reports and CSR reports from 2014 to 2018, this paper analyzes the CSR actions of G company from four aspects: Centrality, Proactive, Specificity and Systematic, then further analyzes the relationship between corporate strategy and strategic CSR. Further, the implementation of the new concept of strategic CSR of G company is summarized.

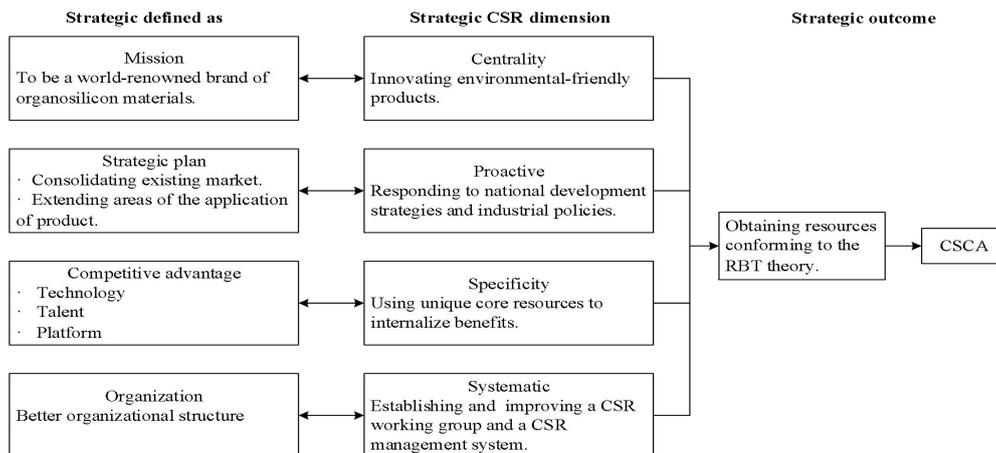


Figure 3 How G Company's Strategy Is Linked to CSR

Sources: Annual financial reports, CSR reports from 2014 to 2018

4.2 Centrality

CSR behavior with Centrality is highly consistent with the vision and mission of the enterprise, which goes deep into the daily operation of the enterprise gradually, so as to promote the organic linkage of various resources controlled by the enterprise and thus make it acquire more value. G company's strategic mission is being a world-renowned brand of organosilicon materials. Therefore, G company starts from this point and uses its own advantages of technical research and development, to continuously innovate environmentally-friendly products and makes them popular at home and abroad. At the same time, it also takes the initiative to participate in the formulation of various industrial standards at home and abroad, to accelerate the sustainable and healthy development of the industry and further realize its vision and mission. By 2018, the company had led and participated in the formulation and revision of more than 40 domestic and foreign standards⁵.

G company in the downstream of organosilicon industry, knows what impact their main business activities will have on the environment. Therefore, G company insists on the concept of innovation-driven growth and green development, constantly innovating products to meet the environmental requirements, and consolidating its leading position in the organosilicon material industry. In 2015, prefabricated building glue was developed and generalized by G company, which provided a guarantee and more choices for the promotion of energy-saving, efficient and environmentally-friendly prefabricated construction model. At the same time, G company's business revenue of building glue reached 425 million yuan, with a year-on-year increase of 10.99%⁶.

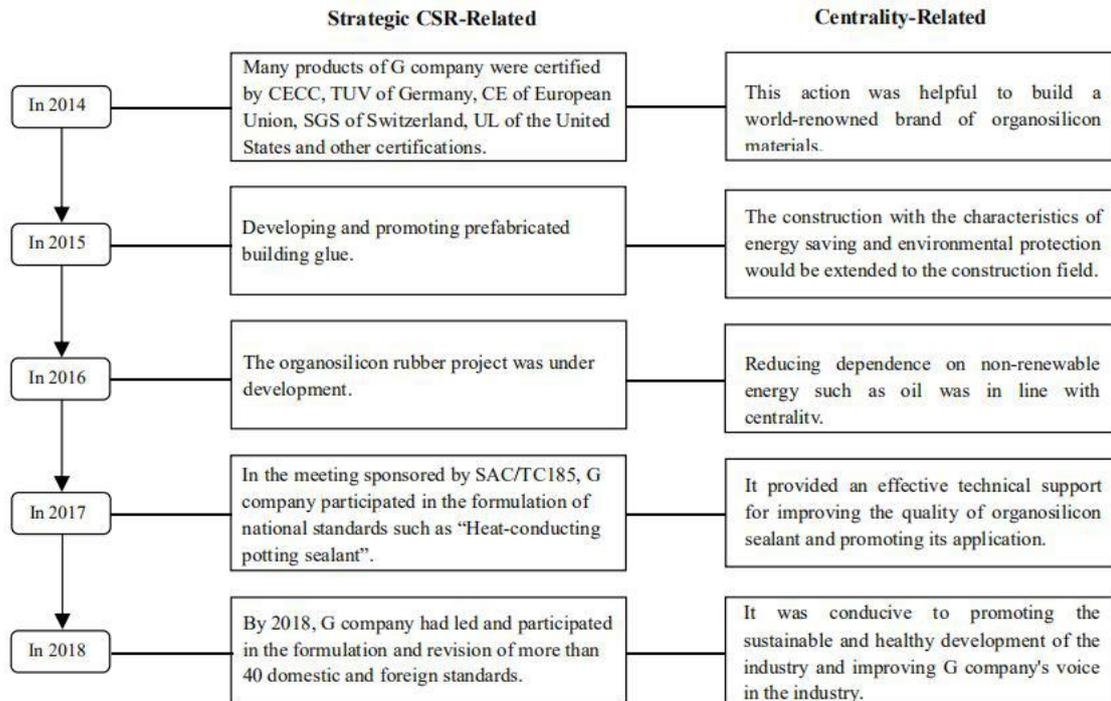


Figure 4 Strategic CSR-Related Activities Identified by Centrality

Sources: annual reports, CSR reports from 2014 to 2018

⁵ G Company (2019). G company: CSR report in 2018, CNINFO, available online at: <http://www.cninfo.com.cn/new/disclosure/detail?orgId=9900008407&announcementId=1205967188&announcementTime=2019-03-30>.

⁶ G Company (2016). G Company: Annual financial report in 2015, CNINFO, available online at: <http://www.cninfo.com.cn/new/disclosure/detail?orgId=9900008407&announcementId=1202058176&announcementTime=2016-03-19>.

The Figure 4 is a summary based on the Centrality of the activities related to the strategy CSR from 2014 to 2018.

4.3 Proactive

Enterprises that invest just a small amount of resources in CSR are often not nimble enough to perceive changes in the external environment and fail to seize opportunities brought by changes in the external environment, and thus probably miss good opportunities (Yu Tao, 2019, pp. 96-106). Therefore, under the guidance of Centrality, enterprises should also lay great emphasis on the changes of market which requires CSR behaviors to be performed with Proactive. This dimension emphasizes that when fulfilling CSR, they should not only conform to the strategic planning of long-term development of enterprises, but also attend to concentrate on changes in the external conditions. They are supposed to adjust and implement corresponding CSR activities by identifying opportunities and threats, consequently providing paths for the new value creation of the enterprise. CSR activities with Proactive strategic dimension ask that enterprises need to choose the field of CSR behaviors from a strategic perspective, including thinking about how to use resources, improve organizational execution, so they can finally achieve a high degree of social and economic interests.

G company's future development plan is that on the basis of consolidating the existing market, pays active attention to the changes in the macro environment, takes government policies as the guidance, attach importance to the urgent social problems, and expand its application area of main products to a wider range of fields such as construction, automobile manufacture and new energy industry. Based on this, G company formulates and carries out strategy CSR, further enhances its adaptability to the changes of social market economy, and is committed to achieving a win-win situation between economic benefits and social benefits. It is because of its proactive CSR that G company is widely recognized by the public and the industry. From 2016 to 2018, sales revenue of G company increased by 7.64%, 11.61% and 19.55% respectively, with good financial performance. In the meanwhile, G company had been awarded the honor of "Leading Enterprise in Fluorine and Silicone Industry in China" by CAFSI (China Association of Fluorine and Silicone Industry) for three consecutive years.

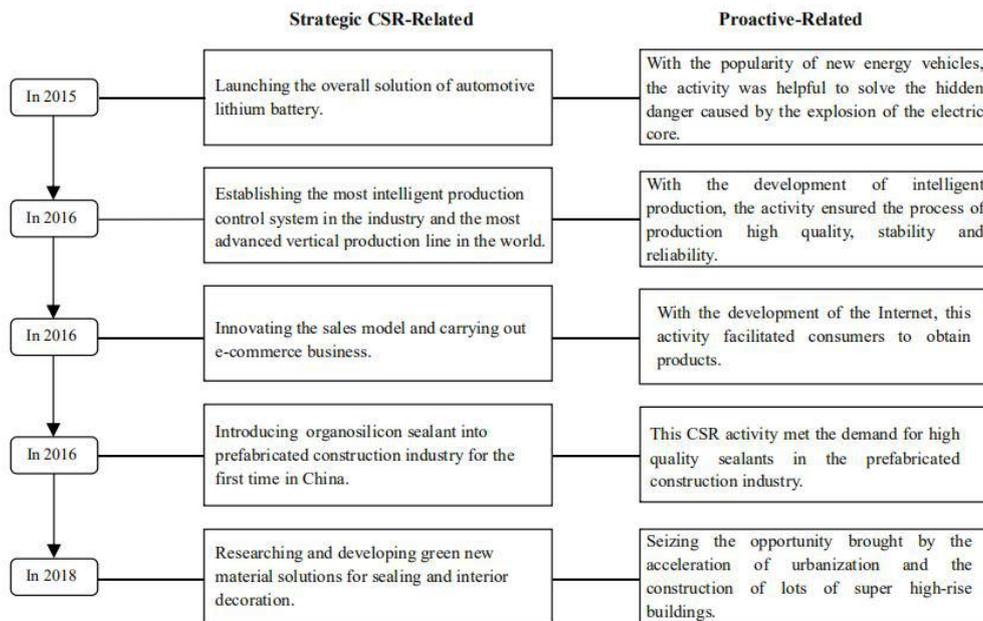


Figure 5 Strategic CSR-related Activities Identified by Proactive

Sources: annual reports, CSR reports from 2014 to 2018

The Figure 5 is a summary based on the “Proactive” of the activities related to the Strategic CSR from 2015 to 2018.

4.4 Specificity

After identifying the business areas that enterprises ought to focus on in the strategic dimension of the proactivity, enterprises need to think about how to do it well. Then, in order to achieve the dual goals of promoting social welfare and providing CSCA, strategic CSR must be specific. This dimension measures the enterprise's ability to acquire and internalize CSR benefits. It includes two levels of meanings:

- Under the guidance of strategy, the enterprise needs to combine the most competitive core resources with the problems in society. So, when in the acquisition of unique advantages different from other competitors in the industry, the enterprise can bring specific benefits for the community.
- The ability of the enterprise to acquire or internalize the benefits of CSR projects. That is, when social benefits drive the innovation of the internal value chain, the production and operating activities of enterprises can be truly transformed and improved at the CSR level, so that the value of enterprises can be truly combined with social value.

From the strategic level of the enterprise, G company adheres to the market-oriented, and focuses on independently researching and developing a series of high-performance organosilicon products to satisfy the demand of many fields. Research and development investment accounted for more than 4% of the parent company's revenue from 2015 to 2018. As of 2018, the company had granted a total of 110 patents, including 1 international invention patent, 47 national invention patents, 59 utility model patents. In 2018, “the first prize of scientific progress of Sichuan Province” was awarded to G company, which fully demonstrated the leading position of the company in the industry⁵.

In CSR activities, matching the strategy of technology and talent, with the support of the strong research and development foundation and technical strength of universities and research institutes, G company applies various patents and innovations in CSR projects, and develops a series of environment-friendly organosilicon material products, which will help attain CSCA. For example, in 2014 G company developed anti-corrosive products with excellent performance which featured desulfurization and denitrification bringing social benefits, it has also obtained corresponding economic interests. Through the operation of the project for about three years, in 2017 anti-corrosion products' revenue was about 466.4 million, accounting for 8.50% of revenue⁷. In 2017, G company was awarded the first prize for scientific and technological progress by China Industrial Anticorrosion Technology Association for its contributions to anti-corrosion products⁸.

The Figure 6 is a summary based on the Specificity of the activities related to the strategy CSR from 2014 to 2018.

⁷ G Company (2019). G Company: Annual financial report in 2018. CNINFO, available online at: <http://www.cninfo.com.cn/new/disclosure/detail?orgId=9900008407&announcementId=1205967201&announcementTime=2019-03-30>.

⁸ G Company (2018). G company: 2017 CSR report. CNINFO, available online at: <http://www.cninfo.com.cn/new/disclosure/detail?orgId=9900008407&announcementId=1204556073&announcementTime=2018-03-31>.

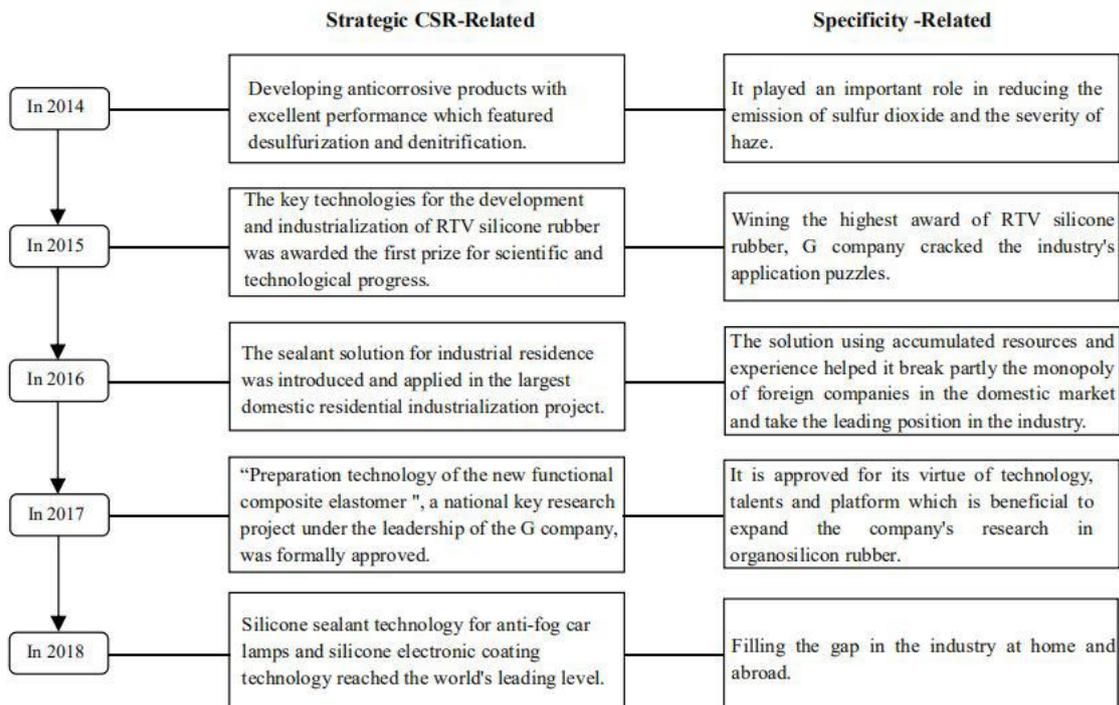


Figure 6 Strategic CSR-Related Activities Identified by Specificity

Sources: annual reports, CSR reports from 2014 to 2018

4.5 Systematic

To keep CSR projects running in a sustainable and effective way, one important dimension that strategic CSR also needs is Systematic that must be reflected in the whole process of CSR projects implementation. Systematic requires enterprises in the implementation of CSR activities, on the basis of the enterprise's original overall organizational strategy, should carry out the corresponding planning and maintain an attitude of importance, and in the process of carrying out CSR actions to effectively supervise and control its problems, timely response to the problems and propose improvements.

In the operation of CSR projects, it is only through effectively organizing and managing strategic resources with competitive potential that it can truly realize its value, which is the guarantee of attaining CSCA. In the exploration of many years, G company gradually formed social responsibility management ideas, which is "Strengthening responsibility integration, maintaining responsibility communication, maintaining brand image". Combining with the demand of the company's management, G company further carried out missions of the leading group for CSR, and optimized social responsibility workflow. Finally, the CSR activities are standardized and normalized, and social responsibility management mechanism with corporate culture characteristics is formed. Furthermore, being align with its green operation philosophy, G company is also constantly adjusting its own allocation of resource to satisfy CSR projects. Over the years, G company is committed to the appropriate configuration of plants, including planning for the recovery and storage of various waste. G company also plans to increase the update and renovation of glue equipment.

It can be seen that G company keeps a watchful eye on the shortcomings in the operation of CSR activities. Through reasonable allocation of resources, G Company can achieve a systematic and continuous greenization in

the process and results of production. As an industrial company that produces chemicals, G company's efforts to protect the nature have attained public and social recognition. In 2015, G company invested 4,936,500 yuan in environmental protection. In the same year, it was awarded the honorary title of "the most socially responsible enterprise" by Chengdu high-tech zone government.

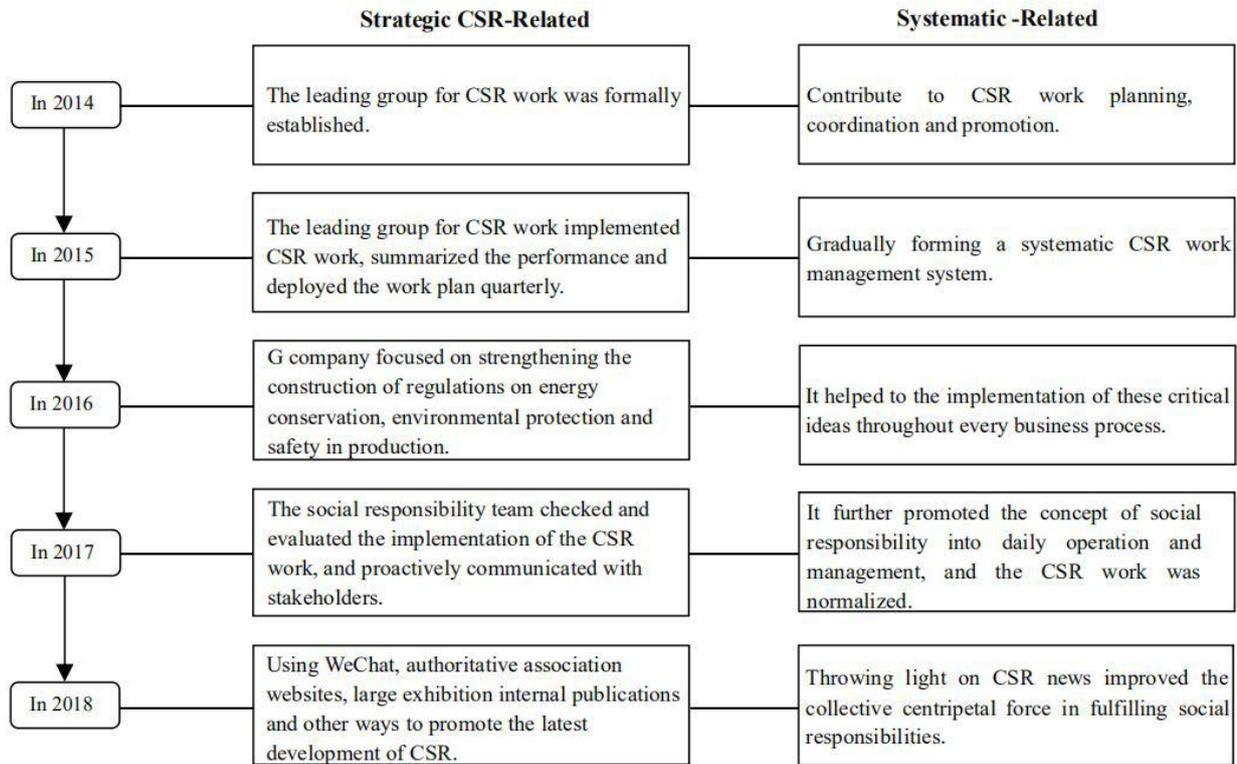


Figure 7 Strategic CSR-Related Activities Identified by Systematic
Sources: annual reports, CSR reports from 2014 to 2018

The Figure 7 is a summary based on the Systematic of the activities related to the strategy CSR from 2014 to 2018.

4.6 The Relationship of Four Strategy Dimensions

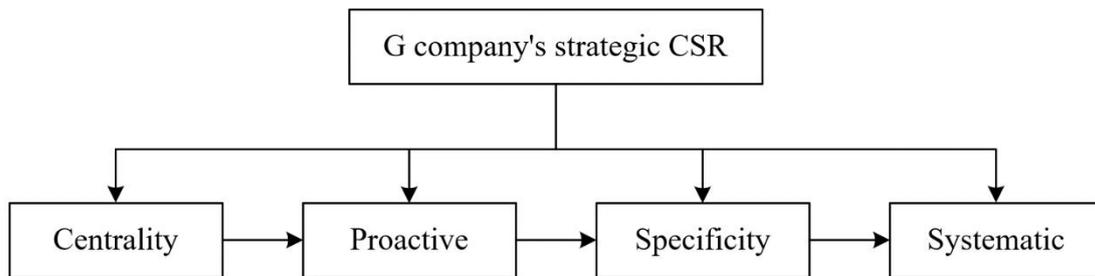


Figure 8 The Relationship of Four Strategy Dimensions

On the basis of the analysis and collation of CSR report, this article finds that G company's CSR mission can be summarized as "innovative products, service to society". Thus, G company upholds the mission of becoming a world-known brand of organosilicon materials, regarding innovating environment-friendly products as the core driving point (Centrality), and round the closely guidance of national policy (Proactive), utilizes enterprise-owned

talent, technology, platform and other core advantages of resources, to strive to meet the social environment-friendly new materials, higher performance and a wider range of application requirements (Specificity). At the same time, in the process of the entire research and development, production, sales of innovative products, CSR activities are systematically organized, so that more long-term CSR can be fulfilled (Systematic). Accordingly, this article thinks that the four dimensions of strategy CSR are hierarchical and closely linked and indispensable.

For example, in 2014, applications of environment-friendly anti-corrosion materials developed by G company that significantly helped reduce sulfur dioxide emissions from the atmosphere. With the increasing of the country's efforts to control air pollution, G company seizes the opportunity to further increase the research, development and investment of electric anti-corrosion products, in order to make a positive contribution to China's environmental governance. At the same time, under the planning layout of the company's strategic level, the leading group for CSR, in accordance with the SA8000 standard, organized the anti-corrosion material project systematically from the whole process from planning to output, and promptly monitored and evaluated.

5. Corporate Sustainable Competitive Advantage of G Company's Strategic CSR

Xing-dong Shao and Xian-zhong Meng (2015) put forward that the strategic CSR behavior of can form the following four key resources: corporate reputation and brand, strategic entrepreneurship, the corporate key human capital and CSR culture, with the four characteristics of value, scarcity, organization and non-complete imitation, and thus promote the formation of CSCA.

From the actual business activities of G company, this paper finds that through the implementation of strategic CSR activities, G company forms at least four resources listed above, which constitute the source of CSCA. The details are as follows:

- Since G company released its social responsibility report in 2010, it has made a lot of achievements in social responsibility fulfillment and has been widely recognized. It has won many honorary awards such as "five-star enterprise for social responsibility fulfillment" and "excellent private enterprise in Sichuan province". The "G company" brand owned by G company won the title of "China well-known trademark" recognized by the state administration for industry and commerce in 2012, and its products have been widely recognized in the domestic and foreign markets.
- At present, chairman You-zhi Wang, vice chairman Bu-chun Li and deputy general manager Su-lan Yuan of G company are all expert members of the national standardization technical committee. Under their leadership, G company actively undertakes the important task of making and revising international, national and industrial standards, stronger leading and participating in those standards and revising work, and actively communicate with industry colleagues to share the company for many years to fulfill its social responsibility, which leads industry standard healthy and orderly development. G company is committed to making positive contributions to the revitalization of national industries, the service of local economy and the construction of social harmony.
- After years of operation, the talent agglomeration effect of G company is reflected, which has gathered a core team who are high-level, high-quality and have the same business outlook. Besides, they have a wealth of scientific researches, production, marketing and management experience, which has laid a solid human resources foundation for company's new technology and new product R&D, sale,

standardized management. The core team members of G company are all from industry experts with an average industry experience more than 20 years, holding dozens of important positions in the industry.

Through participating in and carrying out CSR-related training for many years, G company has effectively improved employees' awareness and skills of carrying out CSR activities, as well as their initiative, creativity, management level and practice level of fulfilling CSR. In addition, G company actively publicizes the latest developments of CSR and shows the progress of CSR management in various aspects.

6. Conclusion

Fulfilling social responsibility has been accepted by companies, and they know that it gives them CSCA. However, the specific application of the theoretical framework of strategic corporate social responsibility always needs to be explored and improved. After sorting out the CSR reports and annual reports of G company, this paper finds that G company implements CSR activities in accordance with the theoretical framework of strategic corporate social responsibility, which can be embodied in the following three concepts:

- The concept of social responsibility is definite. G company elevates social responsibility to a strategic level, continues to explore the way in which it integrates CSR activities and corporate strategy. Since 2014, G company has always adhered to the core values of "Responsible to customers, responsible to employees, responsible to society, responsible to investors". The company endeavors to root CSR in the corporate culture, and focuses on improving all administrative staff and junior employees' social responsibility consciousness.
- Form a social responsibility management mechanism with cultural characteristics of G company. In 2014, G company established the leading group for CSR work, and further promoted the concept of CSR into daily operation and management. Through improving relevant regulations, G company addressed the question of who is responsible for social responsibility and who benefits from it.
- On the basis of the characteristics of itself and the industry in which G company is located, it identifies the areas that the company needs to focus on when fulfilling its social responsibility. As an industrial enterprise in the downstream processing of organosilicon materials, G company knows that society urgently needs it to attach great importance to the impact on the natural environment. All of the company's products have passed the CBMTC (National Research Center of Testing Techniques for Building Materials), "Green Trademark Use Certificate" and "Environment-friendly Building Materials Certifier Standard" certification. In 2018, the company added appraisal of 2 sci-tech achievements, 16 new invention patents, and 4 national invention patents. Furthermore, G company puts emphasis on environmental protection and sustainable development in a series of company activities including R&D, manufacturing, and sales process.

Therefore, in the concrete implementation of the strategy, G company has achieved the close connection between social responsibility behavior and its core business, actively integrates the concept of social responsibility into the whole process of formulating enterprise development strategy and organizing production and operation activities, which truly put the four-dimensional framework of strategic CSR -Centrality, Proactive, Specificity, Systematic into practice.

Conclusion can be drawn from the experiment that the company's implementation effect of strategic CSR is remarkable and provides a sustainable competitive advantage for it. G company takes innovation of

environment-friendly organosilicon materials as major impetus to fulfill CSR, and then explores ways to integrate CSR into corporate strategy, ultimately forming strategic CSR. In the process, to achieve a combination of economic and social benefits, G company has formed the concept of social responsibility with practical significance, and has been sticking to it for so long. Finally, G company attains the CSCA. Other companies can learn from G company's successful experience in fulfilling social responsibility and apply it to their CSR activities, which may gain better results.

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