

# TOWARDS DEVELOPING A CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY MODEL FOR AUTOMOTIVE BUSINESS: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF ADOPTION OF AXIATA FOUR PILLARS FOR KN2

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## Abstract

This paper explores the adoption of Axiata Four Pillars; a Corporate Social Responsibility model on automotive business using a case study approach on KN2, a service and distribution centre of a popular automotive company in Malaysia. As CSR plays a significant role in many industries, its impact would be important for the organizations to maintain their businesses. In automotive industry, CSR is one of the elements in making sure that organizations contribute to excellence in the automotive ecosystem. An organization that practices CSR does not only give positive impact to the industry, but also benefits profitably when it provides community CSR services to its close customers. Case study method was chosen to meet the objective of this study to understand the nature and contributions of CSR practices in the automotive industry particularly in the service and distribution center. Information related to CSR programmes or activities conducted by KN2 were collected through an interview with the Manager and Service Operation Executive as experts in KN2 operations. The information were then documented and analyzed against the four pillars using the reflective stance approach. Findings show that KN2 has some similar practices with Axiata that can fall under the four pillars. However, the full adoption is not feasible to be concluded, as the nature of business is different from Axiata. Some recommendations to modify the model to suit the business environment and operations of an automotive servicing and distribution centres like KN2 were made based on CSR practices related to the business operation of KN2. This new model, the Automotive Sustainable Model that consists of three separate but interrelated elements namely types of economy, customers and society, and automotive business environment are more suitable for such business operations and environment to be further examined in future research.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is one of the ways in which business can sustain whether voluntary or by virtue of statute in discharging socio-economic obligations to society (Rühmkorf, 2015). The evolution of CSR has progressed rapidly since introduction in the year 2000 and implemented in Malaysia. It was pioneered by the Non-Governmental Organizations

such as the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association, Consumers Association of Penang and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) of Malaysia (Nur Nazifa & Putri Rozita, 2019). While the concept emerged in the 1950s, the primary focus on business was still on the responsibilities towards society and doing good deeds only. This continued until early 1960s with the revolution of social changes that was significant to the emerging concept of CSR during this

decade. By 1980s, business and social interest became a priority and CSR became almost universally approved by 1990. In 2000s, CSR finally became an important business strategic issue (Jellinek, 2018).

Automotive industry is one of the largest industries in Malaysia and the impact of this industry is very important. With more than 600 million population in the ASEAN region relying on public and private transportation, the automotive industry will need to sustain. Since the Malaysian automotive industry is the third largest in Southeast Asia, it provides many opportunities for automotive ecosystems for the global communities.

Malaysia has built a real image of the national car manufacturer within the global automotive industry over the last two decades (A.Talib, Munisamy, & Ahmed, 2013). Because Malaysia is the only country in Southeast Asia that has its own car brands, this industry produces continuous holistic growth. As such, CSR practices are appropriate to be included in the industry as a strategic issue for the sustainability of business.

In terms of CSR generally, and regardless of industry, there is considerable academic research into the practices and recognition of CSR through evidence of CSR awards for Malaysian Companies namely, Malaysian Environmental and Reporting Awards (MESRA), which was introduced in 2002 by the association of Chartered Accountants (ACCA). The name was subsequently changed to Malaysia Sustainability Reporting Awards (MaSRA) in line with the changes in the international CSR development from responsibility to sustainability (Hamid, Ruhaya, & Md Saleh, 2014). However, the award criteria are limited to the purpose and the mission of the awarding bodies.

In the Malaysian automotive industry, there is also considerable academic research on CSR in the last decade. Although significantly important, they are only limited to reviewing the structural relationship between CSR practices and CSR performance (Zamri, Habidin, Desa, Hibadullah, & Fuzi, 2012), reviewing structural analysis of standards like the ISO26000 efforts in improving CSR performance in Malaysian automotive industry (Zamri, Habidin, Desa, Fuzi, & Hibadullah, 2014). There is also a research that is only focused on examining existing and sustainable measures using confirmatory analysis on variables confined to those proposed by the researcher on the industry as a whole (Habidin, Mohd Zubir, Mohd Fuzi, Md Latip, & Azman, 2015).

In view of the different direction and perspective of existing research, the objective of this paper is to explore whether CSR activities are practiced in automotive company and whether there exist a CSR standard. This paper will also examine if an existing CSR model by an award winning company Axiata can be adopted by other companies. This study is significant as it would further justify and provide indications if there exist any relationship for CSR

activities and automotive business operations or performance. According to Jamali (2008), CSR refers to a concept that has attracted the world-wide attention and acquired a new image in the global economy. CSR as a set of management practices enables companies to maximize the positive impact of operations on society (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007). Moreover, most organizations utilize it as an instrument to strategize, construct corporate reputations and get more loyal clients, which can contribute towards large fulfillment of organizational goals.

According to (Bird, Casavecchia, & Reggiani, 2006), they found that there is an indication of a relationship between CSR activities and organization performance. Because there also exist no specific measurement of CSR standards for companies to refer to from existing research in respect to CSR generally and in the automotive industry specifically, this paper focuses on exploring the Axiata Four Pillars as practical guidelines for successful implementation of CSR practices in the automotive service and distribution center.

As automotive industry is one of the largest in Malaysia, this study would be able to significantly contribute to academic research in the automotive industry. The scope of study is confined to the service and distribution centre of the Malaysian automotive industry as the researchers used the case study method to study one particular area in the automotive industry. It is worth noting that such scope is suitable for novice researchers consisting of primarily final year undergraduate students who have gained an understanding of the automotive ecosystem.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Many definitions have been proposed for "Corporate Social Responsibility". However, as Branco and Rodrigues (2006) stated, a much-cited definition of CSR includes a strong pledge to add to supportable financial advancement, working with representatives, their families and society everywhere so as to improve the quality of life. This definition simultaneously integrates economic growth, environmental protection and societal equity aspects with special reference to sustainability (Branco & Rodrigues, 2006).

The stakeholder theory states that the meaning of stakeholder is the connection between the business organization and any single individual or gathering of individuals or utilitarian bodies that are engaged with the way toward accomplishing organization's goals. Stakeholders can also be defined as any group or individual that can affect or be affected by the process of achieving business objectives (Freeman, 1984). To concludes, the corporate performance is estimated by the manner in which an organization fulfills its stakeholders. Generally, everyone can claim

to become the stakeholder to a firm when they can contribute towards the organization.

Maignan and Ferrell (2000) state that business organization is a social institution responsible to both internal and external bodies. CSR practices are based on the stakeholders value oriented system (Clarkson, 1995). Besides, the foundation of every CSR policy should target stakeholders' rights and their perspective of CSR practice (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). Mitchell et.al (1997) proposed that the stakeholder's theory broadens the objectives of business from profit maximization to satisfaction of stakeholders needs as objective of business organization.

## 2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility in Automotive Industry

Over the decades, future business assessments should view CSR in the global market perspective (Habidin et al., 2015). CSR is the conception that businesses must consider the sociable and environmental impacts of their practices and meet certain societal prospects regarding all of the impacts. CSR concept can be applied in every industry and one of the industries that is close to customers and communities where CSR can be practiced is automotive.

In Malaysia, CSR is one of the important components of culture in automotive ecosystem. Automotive ecosystem is the industry that requires the involvement of many parties in the design, development, manufacturing, marketing, and selling of motor vehicles. In Malaysia, automotive industry is the most important manufacturing sector (Zamri et al., 2012). Since 1998, the Malaysian national car dominance in ASEAN has become a key driver in the development of the automotive industry to grow over time (Zamri et al., 2014). The importance of the automobile industry is also evident from its substantial contribution to the government bursary on direct and indirect taxes.

In the automotive sector, CSR is important because it is able to fulfill the stakeholders' mission to create corporate benefits through implementation of the corporate responsibility. CSR activities not only improve the efficiency of companies' internal operation by reducing waste and cost, motivating employees, stimulating product innovation, but can also attract external investors by building good brand image, mitigating potential operational risk, and engaging stakeholders (Mcpeak & Guo, 2014). According to IBISWorld (2013), increasing gasoline prices and consumers' awareness of environmental issues has reshaped consumers' preferences from "fuel-guzzling pickup trucks to smaller, more fuel-efficient cars". This is where, solution to this problem starts with automotive industry having to mass-produce types of car that are eco-friendly like the hybrid car. According to Lyon and Maxwell (2008)

reduce environmental cost, improve green products, increase the value of the company environmental are variables representing CSR based on environment performance. Thus, an effective environmental performance assists the company to create environmental awareness in order to increase the profit and enhance the quality of production in automotive industry (Zamri et al., 2014).

## 2.3 The Axiata Four Pillars

According to (Nur Nazifa & Putri Rozita, 2019), business organizations can create their own practical guidelines for successful implementation. This is evidenced from presentation of findings that the Axiata Four Pillars can be a good model that can act as a standard or basis for other companies to develop with a new CSR guidelines or model to suit their business operations and environment.

There are four pillars that Axiata practices to ensure business sustainability as indicated in Figure 1 (Nur Nazifa & Putri Rozita, 2019).



**Figure 1: The Axiata Four Pillars**

Source: (Nur Nazifa & Putri Rozita, 2019)

### 2.3.1 Beyond Short-term Profit

Axiata commits to long-term business development in the countries in which it operates and ensures that its investments create long-term value. These investments, involving large-scale infrastructure development projects, not only contribute to the economic development of these countries, but also provide essential connectivity services that improve living standards. Axiata's long-term commitment also extends to the development of digital ecosystems on its markets and to the world's leading mobile industry developments (Axiata Group Berhad, 2016). These investments represent the meaning behind beyond short-term profits by Axiata Group.

### 2.3.2 Nurturing People

Nurturing people is a training programme that helps its employees achieve personal growth and professional development creating a team, which has the potential to provide leadership not just in their operating country, but also throughout the region. Axiata delivers talent development initiatives both internally and externally. The internal initiatives are

designed to help the employees achieve their full potential through extensive development programmes, both in their personal and professional lives. These programs give employees the skills they need to succeed in Axiata and become the Group's future leaders. Axiata also targets a different group in which it focuses its efforts on external talent development through the Axiata Young Talent Program (AYTP). AYTP is a unique learning opportunity aimed at encouraging and developing future CEOs and youth leaders in Malaysia (Axiata Group Berhad, 2016). Through its sponsorship, the selected students and youth are being developed from their early teens in academic excellence and leadership trainings.

### 2.3.3 Process Excellence and Governance

Axiata has established common standards of best practice throughout the group to ensure that its entire value chain complies with the sustainability standards. Axiata takes measures to ensure that it meets the sustainability requirements of the processes, including direct engagement with vendors, retailers and business partners. Axiata also takes its customer commitment process seriously and tracks the level of customer experience through a set of Key Performance Indexes (KPIs). Axiata continues to work on introducing digitization and automation to improve their internal and external processes (Axiata Group Berhad, 2016).

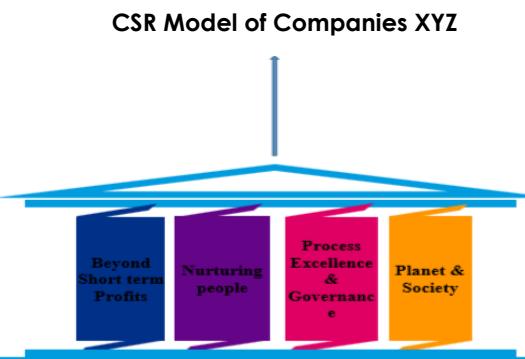
### 2.3.3 Planet and Society

In mitigating the environmental impact of its business, edotco, the infrastructure company of Axiata, focuses on green technology and on reducing the carbon footprint of the group. edotco works towards the goal of reducing its passive network infrastructure's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 40% from the 2013 baseline year. At the same time, their OpCos delivers corporate responsibility (CR) initiatives to empower and enrich the communities and societies in which it operates. (Axiata Group Berhad, 2013). In phase 2 of their sustainability journey, it began to standardize its CR efforts, which included all OpCos in three core CR initiatives, education, green initiatives and disaster management and disaster response.

Using Axiata's case and Axiata Four Pillars as a reference benchmark or a CSR model will aid companies achieve stability and sustainability. Since many companies in Malaysia still do not have guidelines in conducting CSR, the Axiata model is a good example for similar companies to find ways to develop their own CSR guidelines to ensure they achieve their own CSR goal.

Since other companies operate within their own business environment, strategies and different economic settings and background, they can explore to adopt this model to fit their own business

environment, industry or goals. As such, Figure 2.0 below shows how the new CSR model can be adopted using Axiata Four Pillars as a basis of a new model to other companies.



**Figure 2: Bases of CSR Model Using Axiata Four Pillars**

Source : Authors, 2019

This model explores how other companies shown as Companies XYZ above can adopt the Axiata Four Pillars in servicing its customers and sustaining the business.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

A case study approach was chosen to meet the objective of this study as the scope is confined to a particular business operation. The goal of case study in the context of this paper is to conduct an analysis of an issue with a view to understand the issue from the perspective of the participants (Merriam, 2009; Simons, 2009; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). The researchers use this approach as a form of qualitative research to explore, understand and present the participants perspectives and while developing closeness with them in their natural setting (Creswell, 2013). This enable interaction between researchers and participants to generate data, which represents an indication of researchers level of connection to the field investigated. The researchers' perceptions and interpretations become part of the research and therefore resulting a subjective and interpretive orientation flows throughout the enquiry (Creswell, 2014). A reflective stance such as memoing and journaling that supports this stance is taken to support subjectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Miles et al., 2014, Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014).

Since the scope of this case study is to help the automotive industry understand and explore the adoption of the four pillars of CSR in sustaining the business, this paper focused on one of the service centres of a popular automotive company in Kuantan, which the researchers termed as KN2.

First, relevant literature, publications and studies were reviewed to obtain detailed information on the CSR in general. In addition to that, some specific

information on the CSR on automotive industry was reviewed. Second, a site visit and an interview session were conducted at the premises of KN2 to gain the information regarding the CSR activities by KN2.

The interview was conducted with the Manager and his assistant who is the Operation Executive in KN2. The two interviewees who are also the top two personnel at KN2 are sufficient to be considered as experts as there is insufficient empirical evidence to judge the answers pertaining to the business operations (Herman & Raybould, 2014).

The willingness to respond to the interview questions helps in obtaining some qualitative information. Questions pertaining to the history and CSR activities were given to ascertain if the Axiata Four Pillars can be applied to KN2. The first part of the interview revolved around the history of KN2, and the second part of the interview revolved around CSR activities carried out by KN2. This interview method helped the researcher understand the history of KN2 and determined whether KN2 could apply the Axiata Four Pillars as a base for its CRS model.

Finally, the reflective stance was taken as the information obtained from the interviewees involved was analyzed and processed to support the subjectivity of this exploratory paper. It is worth noting that, because this research is done primarily by novice researchers, information is granted based on the assurance of confidentiality and subject to constraints imposed by the human subjects as the informants or interviewees. As such, a combination of interview information is summarized and presented as discussion of results.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the background of KN2 as the case study and discusses the analysis of results of the CSR practices of KN2 against the Axiata Four Pillars presented in the exploratory model.

### 4.1 Background of KN2

KN2 is a prime branch of a popular car distributor's company in Malaysia. Located in the state of Pahang, this branch was established in 2005 after the success of KN1. The increase of its customers based resulted in the company's commitment to provide more branches and better services to its increasing customer database.

KN2 provides 2S services namely Service and Spare part selling. On top of that, this branch also provides other services such as predictive maintenance and insurance claim production to KN2 customers' base.

#### 4.1.1 KN2 and Beyond Short term Profit

From the information gathered, KN2 is able to sustain its business because of its commitment to the automotive company's focus on its main priority that

is customer satisfaction beyond profit. As maintaining customer satisfaction is a core duty at the branch, KN2 commits to long-term business development by maintaining the relationship through regular updates on new promotions to the customers. In addition, after the service, one of the staff will conduct customer evaluation to obtain information on customers' satisfaction towards services given by KN2. KN2 also ensures there is a few staff that will always welcome and invite customers to complete the customer registration process. The staffs at the front counter are also trained by the company's learning department to help them become more efficient in their work in welcoming the customers. The company's long-term commitment also extends to the development of social media engagement where the staffs are encouraged to use social media such as Facebook and SMS to get the feedback from the customers or anyone in the society who has access to its social media channels. This has helped KN2 to have constant social contact and engagement with the customers and society, thus improving the business relationship.

#### 4.1.2 KN2 and Process Excellence and Governance and Planet and Society

KN2 adheres to the company's established mission to be a world-class automobile company renowned for excellent quality and reliability. To achieve this, KN2 practices professionalism in its service operations. This includes efficiency in utilizing technologies and available resources, resilience in meeting the challenges, optimizing benefits to the customers and stakeholders. It also practices engagement with their business suppliers and vendors that provide augmentations to its core product. Its dedication towards social responsibility to community, the environment and development of competent workforce, uniqueness in their products and the aspiration to glorify the name of the company shows KN2 seriousness in minimizing the environmental impact of its business on society.

#### 4.1.3 KN2 and Nurturing People

From the mission presented in 4.1, it clearly shows that the company is very determined to provide the best services and products for their customers. One of the practices by the company also shows that it focuses on CSR that consists of responsibility towards community and development of their employees. The company itself has done several CSR activities in sustaining the business. The Technical Employee Scheme (TES) for junior technical entry-level employees was developed to fulfill the need of having competent employees with basic automotive knowledge approved by a local qualification agency.

The company also developed a youth training program where participants comprise of those who

finished secondary school with Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia who are recruited and trained until they pass Technical Level 1. This programme, also known as "Apprentice Mechanics", recruits about 30 people a year. The company collaborates with Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) and vocational groups under the GIATMARA programme in which activities are carried out annually as part of the company's initiative to support the society by nurturing the young people in gaining valuable knowledge and skills for them to enter the workforce.

This automotive company that owns KN2 also actively gives to charity and gives supports towards the community development in Malaysia. Supports in terms of goods, cash and moral supports are given to underprivileged children. The company is well known as one of the companies that are fast in taking actions when there are natural disasters. It has donated substantial amount of money for the flood victims in Malaysia. Apart from that, the company also contributes 50 cars to a state's Fire and Rescue Department (Bomba) and 25 higher learning institutions (HLI) in 2018. The company also provides complimentary community services for every festival celebration in Malaysia and on school holidays. The activities that are conducted regularly includes free inspection of vehicles on chosen highways and complimentary refreshments to drivers. In 2018, a team of volunteers from the company visited the Women and Children Hospital on Fridays, bearing gifts for the child patients as well as equipment and supplies for the hospital, in celebration of the Kaamatan season and to usher in the holy month of Ramadan.

## 5.0 RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The above discussion showed that KN2 or its automotive company does not have any company specific CSR guidelines to follow other than what the automotive company required. KN2 also does not develop any model in conducting the CSR activities, as there exist no company specific standard guidelines for the automotive service and distribution center. Nevertheless, this paper showed some evidence of similar practices practiced by KN2 that fall within the four pillars.

Firstly, KN2 enhances the value of its customer relationship experience beyond its short term profit through engagement with customers, product and service knowledge and commit to long term value with the customers while nurturing them on the opportunities to develop talents in automotive servicing. Through its main distribution company, KN2 is also able to maintain the service standards that would benefit the value chain by reviewing the sustainability requirements of each value chain member. Issues that may arise out of the review process can be used as agenda for further discussion on the environmental impact that each value chain member may contribute to the automotive business.

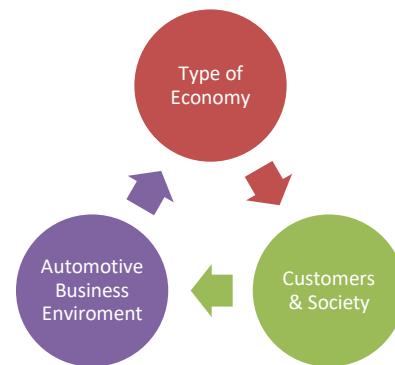
Even though, the Axiata Four Pillars Model cannot be fully adopted by KN2, the similarities in the output of activities conducted have similar values.

The result is expected as KN2 exist in a very different environment with different sets of products, customers and its operations are subject to the nature of its business operations. It is interesting to note that, even though KN2 did not have any established company CSR standard to conform like Axiata has, it still follows the specifications needed to achieve the general International Standard certificates for any companies regardless of type, size or place

The ISO 26000 is a guideline for social responsibility that enables companies to meet predetermined standards that promote the implementation of social responsibility among stakeholders. This is the recommended guidelines for the KN2 to improve its CSR programmes in the future. It is indicated in the past research that ISO 26000 helps companies to perform well in their social duty to society. Furthermore, a practice used in the efforts of ISO 26000 is successful in preventing negative activities such as environmental pollution, toxic waste and the abuse of rights of workers.

From the above discussion, this paper concludes that other companies can adopt the Axiata Four Pillar as a basis to examine its own CSR practices. Nevertheless, each company that wants to adopt must modify and examine carefully on whether the pillars can be implemented in each of its business environment or industry it exist.

From the results summarized by the researchers on the CSR practices, this paper also recommends to examine a proposed sustainability model for car servicing and distribution companies like KN2. Figure 3 below shows a proposed Automotive Sustainability Model (ASM) to be examined as guidelines for the establishment of standard CSR practices for all automotive servicing and distribution companies.



**Figure 3: Automotive Sustainability Model**

Source: Authors

The model focuses on three separate but interrelated elements relevant to the automotive business environment and industry particularly for car servicing and distribution companies. The three

elements are type of economy in which the business operates, customers and society and automotive business environment.

The first element is the type of economy in which future research can emphasize on any economic activities that combines with CSR that contribute to the economic side of company. One example of economic activities combined with CSR activities practiced by KN2 or its automotive company is where the company provides machines for an engineering faculty in a local university for the research and development.

Second element that focuses on customer and society *includes* excellence in sustaining it business by providing good before and after sale customer service before and after sale service to its unique customer segment.

The third element which is automotive business environment can be applied in which companies can be involved in activities related to mitigating environmental impacts through creation of innovative products like producing fully Energy Efficient Vehicle (EEV) or autonomous cars. EEV are vehicles that bring minimal harmful impacts to the environment in terms of carbon emission level (g/km) and fuel consumption (l/100km) compared to normal internal combustion engine vehicles (Mansor, 2018).

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