

The Blue Ocean Strategy; Case Study Analysis of its Implementation in 14 Different Agencies in Malaysia.

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Abstract

The Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS) hit the coast of the corporate world with a “tsunamic” force. The impact of the concept and the principles involved were given due recognition and admired. But when the tide subsided, and the practitioners surveyed the impact and began to implement the principles, few seems to work as ideal environment was not easy to achieve and a wave of disappointment began to sink in. This is a study on 14 agencies (case study approach) who dared take the plunge to join the Blue Ocean challenge. The analysis was focused on the Eliminate-Reduce-Raise-Create Grid portion of the model and discovered that the “Blue” is not that “clear” after all and the “red tide” keeps creeping in continuously. The search still goes on.

Keywords: strategic decisions, blue ocean strategy model, strategic canvas, cases

1. Introduction

The Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS) is still relatively new and had been introduced only in 2004 by W. C. Kim and R Mauborgne. Its principles are simple but its operationalisation and implementation has yet to be properly synchronized. Courses and workshops trained by licensed BOS are still going on and the number of certified BOS certified consultants has yet to be felt. Nevertheless there are already agencies that declared that they are already into the implementation of the said BOS principles. These are the research target group and perhaps to increase the number of practitioners some might have to be coerced into applying the strategies proposed.

2. Objectives of the Paper

This paper gathers information on companies that have claimed to be in the know of BOS strategy and that they are already into the implementation phase. They are also willing to share:

- a. the kinds of analysis that they did,
- b. the experience that they went through and
- c. The effectiveness of the principles used.

BOS principles are quite unique and they follow certain definitions and pathways that are explained in detail in Kim’s book. At this point in time, there is still no workbook that is available in the open market or the internet yet for would be practitioners to hold on to. According to the licensed BOS trainers both in Malaysia and Singapore, the book itself is quite clear and sufficient for any enthusiasts to read, understand and implement and of course for the licensed personnel to be engaged in some advisory work.

3. Literature review

Since this research is probably the first of its kind in trying to look at the application of BOS principles in Malaysia, literature related to it has yet to be documented in the journals. Nevertheless a brief explanation as to what BOS is all about might be in order. As in most other strategic models, the ultimate aim of strategising is that by the action, the company can be better than the competitors (Porter, 1980). Thus the SWOT, SPACE, BCG, SHELL, Big Think and many other models generate strategies from various aspects of the agency operations. But what is most common are that all the models utilise two sets of variables, namely the external and the internal variables. (David 2006, Mohamed et al 2014).

The SWOT model (Wehrich 2005) will have a set of external variables (list of opportunities and threats) being paired with the internal variables (list of strengths and weaknesses) and from which alternative strategies are generated and selected (David 2006). Similarly the SPACE model would pair two sets of internal variables (average score of Financial strengths and competitive advantage) with the external variables (average score for

the industrial attractiveness and environmental stability) and the average of all the four dimensions would give an idea of what strategic choices would best fit the agency concern (Rowe 1994, Mohamed 2014).

Then there are the portfolio models (Shell, McKinsey/GE) where various portfolios could be viewed in one chart (Allen 1979) and strategies would depend on the portfolios in their respective quadrants (Star, Cash Cow, Dog and Question Mark quadrant). Here only one external and one internal factor are chosen. BCG chose relative market share and the industrial growth rate as their dimensional variables (Grant 2005). Of course in its application in different scenarios, other variables could be used (especially for non-profit organisation, Drucker 1990). There are other models that have been applied (depending on the different levels of strategic decisions i.e., corporate, business and operations levels) such as Porter's, McKinsey's, Kotler's Schmidt's covering the likes of break-even chart, product life cycle and experience curve to mention a few (Mohamed 2014).

But in all the models prior to BOS, the variables used have always been the pairings of external and internal factors (Mohamed 2014).

But when BOS model was introduced, it is probably the first time that pairing of external and internal variables was not found to be necessary. In its graph (Kim calls it the strategy canvas), the x axis are made up of the company's/industry's factors of possible competitive value (and are discrete in nature in the form of factors and therefore considered as the internal factors) against its relative performance scores as evaluated by the market (thus external factors). As shown in the graph, it is always a comparison between the company's actual and expected scores as seen by the market against other players in the same industry on every of the discrete factors considered.

Anyway there are other BOS principles and framework that can be researched into such as:

a. The six principles proposed:

- i. Reconstruct market boundaries,
- ii. Focus on the big picture,
- iii. Reach beyond existing demand,
- iv. Get the strategic sequence right,
- v. Overcome organizational hurdles,
- vi. Build execution into strategy.

b. BOS Framework and Tools which include:

- i. Strategy Canvas: *diagnostic & action framework*
- ii. Four Actions Framework: *value innovation analysis*
- iii. Eliminate-Reduce-Raise-Create Grid
- iv. Six Paths Framework: *market reconstruction analysis*
- v. Four Steps Visual Strategies: *big picture analysis*
- vi. 3-Tier Of Non customers: *demand expansion framework*
- vii. BOS sequences
- viii. Buyer Utility Map
- ix. Buyer Experience Cycle
- x. Price Corridor of the Mass
- xi. BOS Profit Model
- xii. Blue Ocean Idea Index

This paper however will look only at the main output of the model; that of the ERRC Grid.

4. Methodology

This research was based on an exploratory as well as a case study approach. Published documentation of the process and its implementation are still scarce as the experienced gained by the practitioners are still quite new and yet to be documented. Thus trying to discover new ideas, diagnosing the processes and its impact are probably too preliminary at the time of the study and thus justify the methodology. Case study method would then assist the understanding as it is confined to within a specific boundary i.e. that of the agency (Zikmund 2003). This is an exploratory study on 14 companies (cases), who agreed to participate by sharing the BOS principles that they have used and applied in their respective agencies. On record this is a first research of its kind at least in Malaysia.

Agencies that admit that they have applied using BOS principles were sought to participate in this study. Six companies/agencies (group A) were detected and agreed to participate (out of 23 who claimed that they are

already applying the BOS principles) while another 20 wanted to participate (group B) if discussion on what BOS is all about can be organized. These 26 were then scheduled for a meeting and a full day workshop organized to get them understand and have a common understanding of what BOS is all about. Group A shared their understanding as well as the experiences. To let all of them have a common understanding, the BOS principles were simplified and a follow up was made to schedule visits to the individual companies. Some labelled this as “action research” methodology. Detail analysis commenced once data from the 16 companies were received but finally only 14 gave the green light to have the findings shared but with a promise that their names and their respective strategies are not revealed directly.

5. Data Gathered

For those who want to know more about BOS’s principles, please refer to the appendices. As far as this paper is concern, from the various BOS’s principles and framework, only the utility principles are being analysed. This is detailed out as the ERRC Grid and (personally I use ERIC as it is easier to the memory and the vocal cord!) are namely:

- a. the utilities that are being eliminated,
- b. reduced,
- c. raised (use ‘increase’ to justify the ‘I’ for ERIC) and
- d. created

All the ERRC tables of the 14 companies were gathered and a qualitative analysis then applied to understand the characteristics of data from the corresponding grids.

6. Data Analysis

Based on the 14 companies and because of the unstructured but guided nature of the probing process, domain analysis methodology was done from the raw data and are as shown in appendices A, B, and C.

The agencies were arranged according to some pattern and in this list, the academic institutions were listed first, followed by one government, three government-linked companies (GLCs) and the rest were private companies. The ERCC content were then listed out and through the domain analysis, some commonalities were derived. As the number of cases were small, the “Elimination” and “Reduce” utilities and the “Raise” and “Create” components were grouped together to get a bigger mass.

7. Findings

The following tables are derived from Appendices A, B and C.

Table 1: ERCC Grid summary of the 14 agencies

| | Eliminate | Reduce | Raise | Create |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | 6 programmes | 9 operating costs | 8 quality | 4 customer satisfaction |
| 2 | 6 product variations | 10 tangibles | 12 improving customer service | 10 new activities |
| 3 | 3 costly activities | 9 overheads and indirect | 12 more customer satisfaction | 5 closer to customers |
| 4 | 3 internal processes | 3 processes | 4 new activities | 6 governance |
| 5 | 4 operational activities | 3 reduce time taken | | 10 long duration effect |
| 6 | | | | 5 investments |

The preliminary findings of the qualitative analysis indicate that while the agencies involved (only 14) were quite diversified, their strategic actions with regard to the ERRC Grid components do show some commonalities as indicated by the following chart.

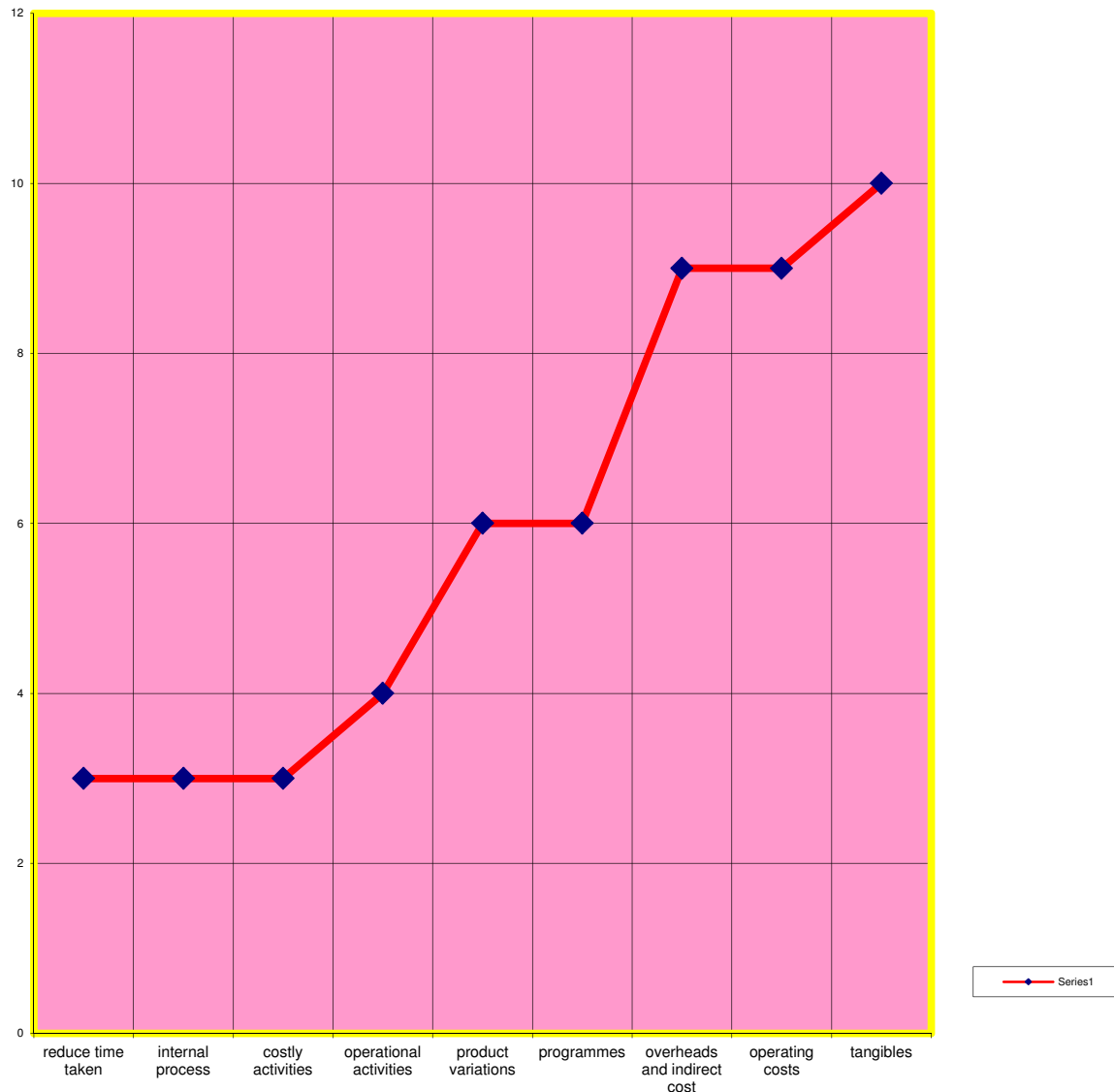


Chart 1: Eliminate and Reduce Grid of 14 Agencies

Chart 1 shows that for the agencies to “eliminate” or “reduce” some of the utilities as seen through the eyes of the customers, costs components seem to be the main focus followed by activities that are not giving good returns. This could be seen in the form of programmes for the academic institutions and product diversity and variations for the private companies.

Chart 2 on the other hand seems to be heavy on the customer satisfaction scores as well as providing new products or services to the customers.

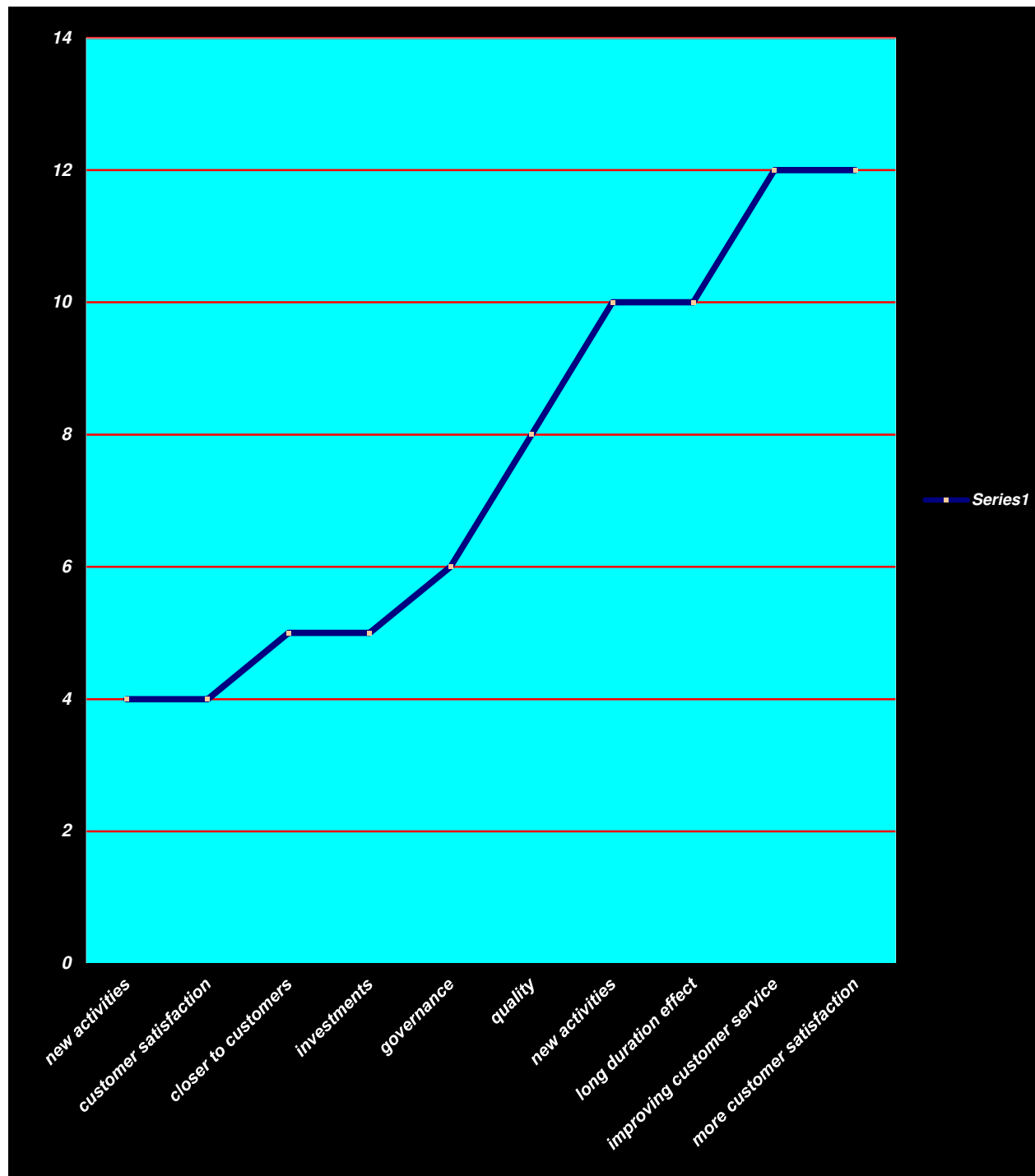


Chart 2: Raise and Create Grid of 14 Agencies

These activities are specific to the case or agency concerned and generalisation can only be made up to this point. Any further generalisation attempts might not be fair considering the number of cases analysed.

8. Conclusion

The exploratory analysis was an attempt to understand deeper the practise of BOS principles. As the BOS framework do go into details on how they are to be implemented, the data that were shared were confined only to the ERRC Grid component. It has to be assumed that they all practised and implement with full understanding of

the principles as proposed by BOS. But it was noted that nobody in the study has got any recognised BOS certified recognition. Therefore their level of understanding needs to be verified. In fact during the discussion there were differences in the understanding of the principles as all had gain the knowledge through some form of training and reading of Kim's book.

The analysis is still on-going with 11 more agencies in the pipeline. But as mentioned these data collection are all through "action research" mode, it is time consuming and each agency need to be approached differently as they are all uniquely different and thus the case study methodology.

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Appendix A: Raw Data of the 14 Cases

| | Agencies | Eliminate | reduce | raise | create |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Fibre.com | obsolete network platform | Price | coverage | new technology platform |
| | | Bureaucratic procedures | high network platform | flexible bandwidth | new market |
| 2 | Car assembler | Accessories | variance | price | customisation |
| | | | ride and handling | safety feature | |
| | | | warranty | fuel economy | |
| | | | no of dealers | reliability and durability | |
| | | | delivery time | after sales service | |
| | | | technology | | |
| | | | interior | | |
| | | | exterior | | |
| 3 | Elevator | long breakdown response time | capital outflow | increase local contents | comfort of ride |
| | | | time of designing | quality standards | customer delight |
| | | | cost of designing | | |
| 4 | private college | dip com sc | operating cost | train senior personnel | event mngt prog |
| | | mal inst of taxation | maintenance cost | | motivational prog |
| | | | lecture hours | | |
| 5 | Tenaga Nasional B subsidiary | | product range | coverage | service flexibility |
| | | | value added services | service quality | customer relationship mngt |
| | | | Price | bandwidth | |
| | | | distribution channels | | |
| 6 | Telekom subsidiary | non profitable product | reduce price of fixed phone | quality standards | market diversification |
| | | redundant product | reduce price of streamyx | reliability | new services |
| | | | | Reach ability | |
| | | | | technical expertise | |
| 7 | private intl school | Co-curriculum link to uniform | operating costs | train teachers for senior operation | paperless networking of teaching |
| | | mandarin classes after school | maintenance fee | | motivational prog. |
| | | Kindergarten | paperwork | | IT specialisation |
| | | history exam papers | | | |
| 8 | Mechanical engineering | Relationship marketing | reduce product variety | on line diagnostic facilities | train customer to solve basic problems |
| | | | cost of visit per engineer | response time | outsource spare parts market |
| | | | corporate dealers | product security | |
| | | | | ease of product use | |
| 9 | acct office | appt of staff as auditors | mngt interference on report | professionalism | without prejudice |
| | | | | timeliness | accountability |

| | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| | | | | quality | transparency |
| | | | | ethics | integrity |
| | | | | | secrecy |
| | | | | | independently |
| 10 | cosmetic product | Functional | initial pricing | quality | recycle capability |
| | | | running cost | reliability | fashionable |
| | | | technology sophistication | user friendly | safety |
| | | | | looks | DIY marketing |
| | | | | environment friendly | connectivity |
| 11 | Private college | short courses | school of bus, mngt, professional programmes | Hospitality and culinary programmes | new business |
| | | | | health sc programmes | new industry |
| | | | | | operate a restaurant |
| 12 | Electrical engineering | projects with low gross profit | operating costs | in house training in English | district cooling system |
| | | | maintenance fee | | co-generation |
| | | | overtime hours | | |
| 13 | Bank | Customer service at counter | investment in banking hall | instant loan approval | Classroom for internet banking |
| | | variety of products | long repayment of hp | internet banking | work with you |
| | | complexity of products | free credit cards | repayment flexibility | personal touch |
| | | "smile and friendly" campaign | | | |
| 14 | food product | advertisements in magazine | packaging costs | internet marketing | research and analysis locally |
| | | Magazines | | taste | Multi flavour per bottle |
| | | | | forum and discussion | local sponsorship |
| | | | | price | |

Appendix B: The 14 Agencies Grouped Accordingly

| | AGENCIES | eliminate | reduce | raise | create |
|---|--|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| A | A: Private Hospitality and Mngt School | dip com sc[AE1] | operating cost[ARe1] | ARa1: train senior personnel | Event management programme [AC1] |
| | | mal inst of taxation[AE2] | Maintenance cost [ARe2] | | Motivational programme [AC2] |
| | | | lecture hours [ARe3] | | |
| B | B: International School | Co curriculum link to uniform [BE1] | operating costs | train teachers for senior promotion | paperless networking of teaching [BC1] |
| | | Mandarin class after school [BE2] | maintenance fee | | motivational prog [BC2] |
| | | Kindergarten [BE3] | paperwork | | IT specialisation [BC3] |
| | | History examination papers [BE4] | | | |
| C | C: private college in Selangor | Short courses [CE1] | school of bus, mngt, professional programmes | hospitality and culinary programmes | new business [CC1] |
| | | | | health sc programmes | new industry [CC2] |
| | | | | | operate a restaurant [CC3] |
| D | D: govt. Off | Appointment of staff as auditors [DE1] | mngt interference on report | professionalism | without prejudice [DC1] |
| | | | | timeliness | accountability [DC2] |
| | | | | quality | transparency [DC3] |
| | | | | ethics | integrity [DC4] |
| | | | | | secrecy [DC5] |
| | | | | | independency [DC6] |
| E | E: TM mobile | | product range | coverage | service flexibility [EC1] |
| | | | value added services | service quality | customer relationship mngt [EC2] |
| | | | price | bandwidth | |
| | | | distribution channels | | |
| F | F: Telekom subsid | Functional [FE1] | reduce price of fixed phone | quality standards | market diversification [FC1] |
| | | redundant product [FE2] | reduce price of streamyx | reliability | new services [FC2] |
| | | | | Reach ability | |
| | | | | technical expertise | |
| G | G: Fibre.com | obsolete network platform [GE1] | price | coverage | new technology platform [GC1] |
| | | bureaucratic procedures [GE2] | high network platform | flexible band-width | new market [GC2] |
| H | H: Engineering | projects with low gross profit [HE1] | operating costs | in house training in English | district cooling system [HC1] |
| | | | maintenance fee | | co-generation [HC2] |
| | | | overtime hours | | |
| I | I: Car Assembler | accessories[IE1] | variance | price | customisation |

| | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| | | | ride and handling | reliability and durability | |
| | | | warranty | fuel economy | |
| | | | No of dealers | safety feature | |
| | | | delivery time | after sales service | |
| | | | technology | | |
| | | | interior | | |
| | | | exterior | | |
| J | J: MS Elevator | long breakdown response time[JE1] | capital outflow | increase local contents | comfort of ride [JC1] |
| | | | time of designing | quality standards | customer delight [JC2] |
| | | | cost of designing | | |
| K | K: electrical Engineering | relationship marketing [KE1] | reduce product variety | on line diagnostic facilities | train customer to solve basic problems [KC1] |
| | | | cost of visit per engineer | response time | outsource spare parts market [KC2] |
| | | | corporate dealers | product security | |
| | | | | ease of product use | |
| L | Cosmetic product | functional [LE1] | initial pricing | quality | recycle capability [LC1] |
| | | | running cost | reliability | fashionable [LC2] |
| | | | technology sophistication | user friendly | safety [LC3] |
| | | | | looks | DIY marketing [LC4] |
| | | | | environment friendly | connectivity [LC5] |
| M | M: food product | advertisements in magazines [ME1] | packaging costs | internet marketing | research and analysis locally MC1] |
| | | magazines [ME2] | | forum and discussion | Multi flavour per bottle [MC2] |
| | | | | taste | local sponsorship [MC3] |
| | | | | price | |
| N | N: Local bank | customer service at counter [NE1] | investment in banking hall | instant loan approval | Class room for internet banking [NC1] |
| | | variety of products [NE2] | long repayment of hp | internet banking | work with you [NC2] |
| | | complexity of products [NE3] | free credit cards | repayment flexibility | personal touch [NC3] |
| | | "smile and friendly" campaign [NE4] | | | |

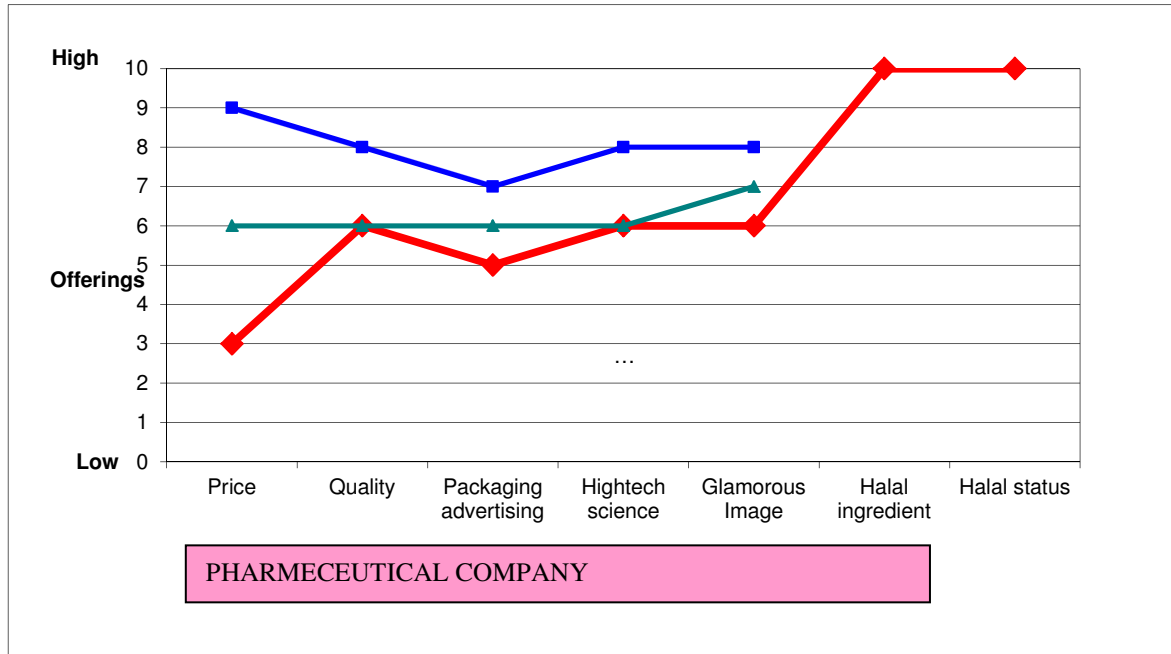
Appendix C: Grouping of Activities into the ERRC Grid

| AGENCIES | | elimnate | | reduce | | raise | | create |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------|
| A: private Hospitality and Mngt School | 1 | dip com sc[AE1] | 11 | Operating cost[ARe1] | 21 | quality [DRa3] | 41 | comfort of ride [JC1] |
| | 1 | History examination papers [BE4] | 11 | Maintenance cost [ARe2] | 21 | service quality [ERa2] | 41 | customer delight [JC2] |
| | 1 | mal inst of taxation[AE2] | 11 | operating costs [BRe1] | 21 | Quality std. [FRa1] | 41 | customisation |
| B: International School | 1 | Mandarin class after school [BE2] | 11 | operating costs [HRe1] | 21 | safety feature [IRa2] | 41 | Multi flavour per bottle [MC2] |
| | 1 | Short courses [CE1] | 11 | overtime hours [HRe3] | 21 | reliability and durability [IRa4] | 42 | new business [CC1] |
| C: private college Selangor | 1 | Co curriculum link to uniform [BE1] | 11 | cost of designing [JRe3] | 21 | quality std. [JRa2] | 42 | new industry [CC2] |
| | 2 | accessories[IE1] | 11 | cost of visit per engineer [KRe2] | 21 | quality [LRA1] | 42 | new market [GC2] |
| | 2 | redundant product [FE2] | 11 | running cost [LRe2] | 21 | product security [KRa3] | 42 | new services [FC2] |
| D: government Off | 2 | complexity of products [NE3] | 11 | packaging costs [KRe1] | 22 | professionalism [DRa1] | 42 | new technology platform [GC1] |
| | 2 | magazines [ME2] | 12 | Dist channels [ERe4] | 22 | timeliness [DRa2] | 43 | connectivity [LC5] |
| E: TM mobile | 2 | variety of products [NE2] | 12 | variance [IRe1] | 22 | reliability [FRa2] | 43 | Customer relationship mngt [EC2] |
| | 2 | Kindergarten [BE3] | 12 | ride and handling [IRe2] | 22 | Tech expertise [FRa4] | 43 | personal touch [NC3] |
| F: Telekom subsid | 3 | projects with low gross profit [HE1] | 12 | warranty [IRe3] | 22 | after sales service [IRa5] | 43 | service flexibility [EC1] |
| | 3 | advertisements in magazines [ME1] | 12 | No of dealers [IRe4] | 22 | on line diagnostic facilities [KRa1] | 43 | work with you [NC2] |
| G: Fibre.com | 3 | customer service at counter [NE1] | 12 | Technology [IRe6] | 22 | response time [KRa2] | 44 | accountability [DC2] |
| | 4 | Appt of staff as auditors [DE1] | 12 | interior [IRe7] | 22 | reliability [LRA2] | 44 | integrity [DC4] |
| H: Engineering | 4 | Bureaucratic procedures [GE2] | 12 | exterior [IRe8] | 22 | user friendly [LRA3] | 44 | safety [LC3] |
| | 4 | obsolete network platform [GE1] | 12 | reduce product variety [KRe1] | 22 | Ethics [DRa4] | 44 | secrecy [DC5] |
| | 5 | Functional [FE1] | 12 | Technology sophistication [LRe3] | 22 | in house training in English [HRa1] | 44 | transparency [DC3] |
| I: car assembler | 5 | "smile and friendly" campaign [NE4] | 13 | Maintenance fee[BRe2] | 22 | instant loan approval [NRA1] | 44 | without prejudice [DC1] |
| J: MS Elevator | 5 | functional [LE1] | 13 | value added services [ERe2] | 23 | coverage [ERa1] | 45 | classroom for internet banking [NC1] |
| | | long breakdown response time [JE1] | 13 | price [ERe3] | 23 | bandwith [ERa3] | 45 | Event mngt prog. [AC1] |
| | 5 | Relationship marketing [KE1] | 13 | Reduce price of fixed phone [FRe1] | 23 | reachability [FRa3] | 45 | motivational prog [BC2] |
| K: electrical Engineering | | | 13 | Reduce price of streamyx [FRe2] | 23 | coverage [GRa1] | 45 | Motivational prog. [AC2] |

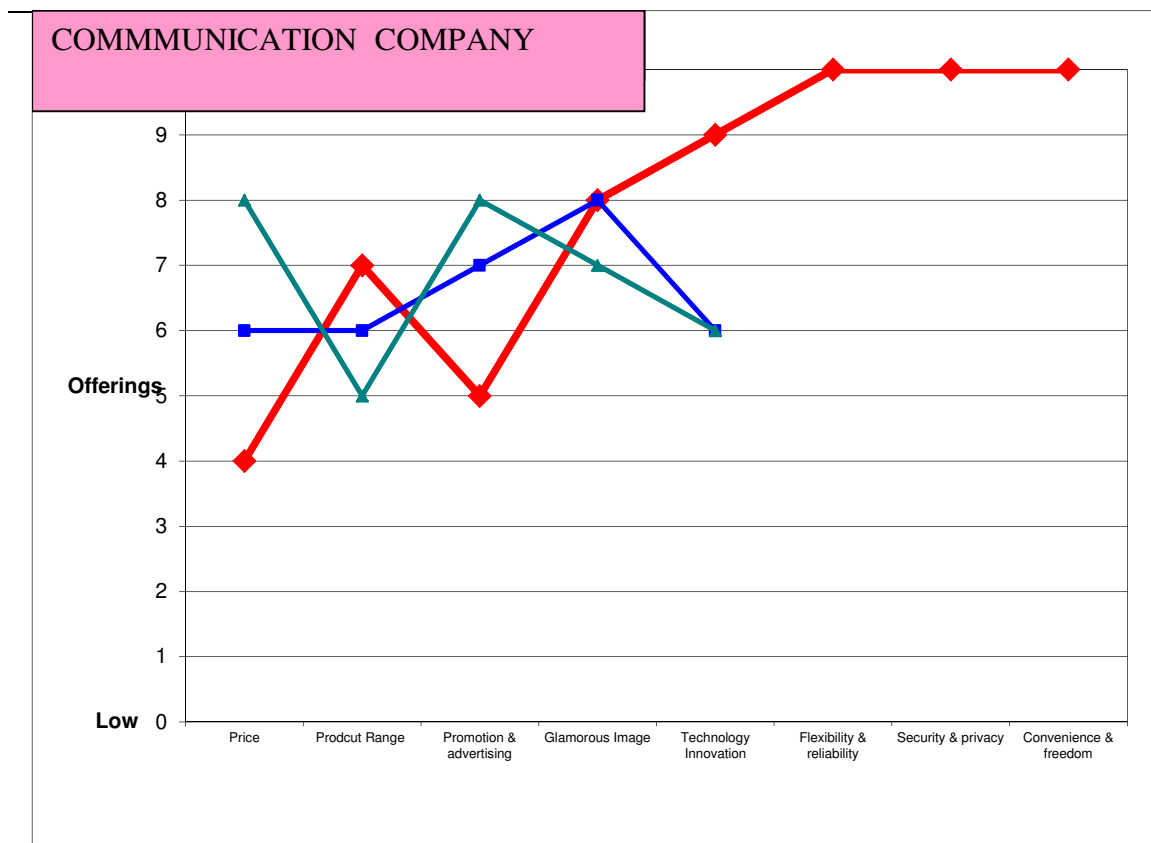
| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|--|----|--|----|--------------------------------|----|--|
| | | 13 | price [GRe1] | 23 | Flexible bandwidth [GRa2] | 45 | train customer to solve basic problems [KC1] |
| | | 13 | maintenance fee [HRe2] | 23 | fuel economy [IRa3] | 46 | district cooling system [HC1] |
| | | 13 | initial pricing [LRe1] | 23 | ease of product use [KR4] | 46 | outsource spare parts market [KC2] |
| L: CISB product | | 13 | free credit cards [NRe3] | 23 | looks [LRa4] | 46 | Paperless nwking of teaching [BC1] |
| | | 14 | Sch of bus, mngt, professional prog [CRe1] | 23 | taste [MRa2] | 46 | recycle capability [LC1] |
| | | 14 | product range [ERe1] | 23 | Forum and discussion [MRa3] | 46 | research and analysis locally MC1] |
| | | 14 | long repayment of hp [NRe2] | 23 | internet banking [NRa2] | | co-generation [HC2] |
| | | 15 | Paperwork [BRe3] | 23 | repayment flxibility [NRa3] | | DIY marketing [LC4] |
| M: food product | | 15 | delivery time [IRe5] | 24 | train senior persnl [ARa1] | | fashionble [LC2] |
| | | 15 | time of designing [JRe2] | 24 | train teachers for prom [BRa1] | | independency [DC6] |
| | | | lecture hours [ARe3] | 24 | hospty & culinary prog [CRa1] | | IT specialisation [BC3] |
| | | | mngt interference on report [DRe1] | 24 | health sc. prog. [CRa2] | | local sponsorship [MC3] |
| N: Local bank | | | high network platform [GRe2] | | price [IRa1] | | market dives [FC1] |
| | | | capital outflow [JRe1] | | increase local contents [JRa1] | | operate a restaurant [CC3] |
| | | | corporate dealers [KRe3] | | environment friendly [LRa5] | | |
| | | | Investment in banking hall [NRe1] | | Internet mktng [MRa1] | | |
| | | | | | price [MRa4] | | |

Appendix D: Illustration of Strategic Canvas of Selected Companies

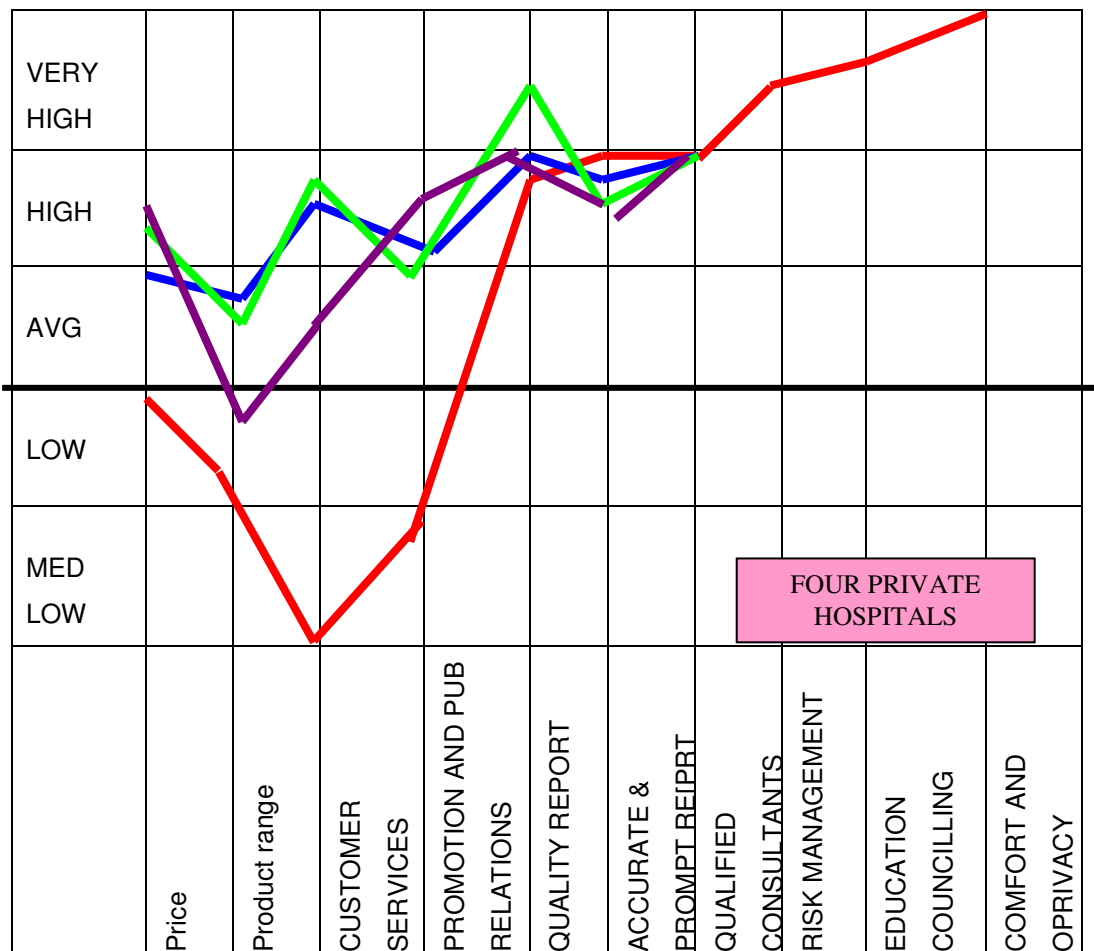
A: The Strategic Canvas of a Pharmaceutical company



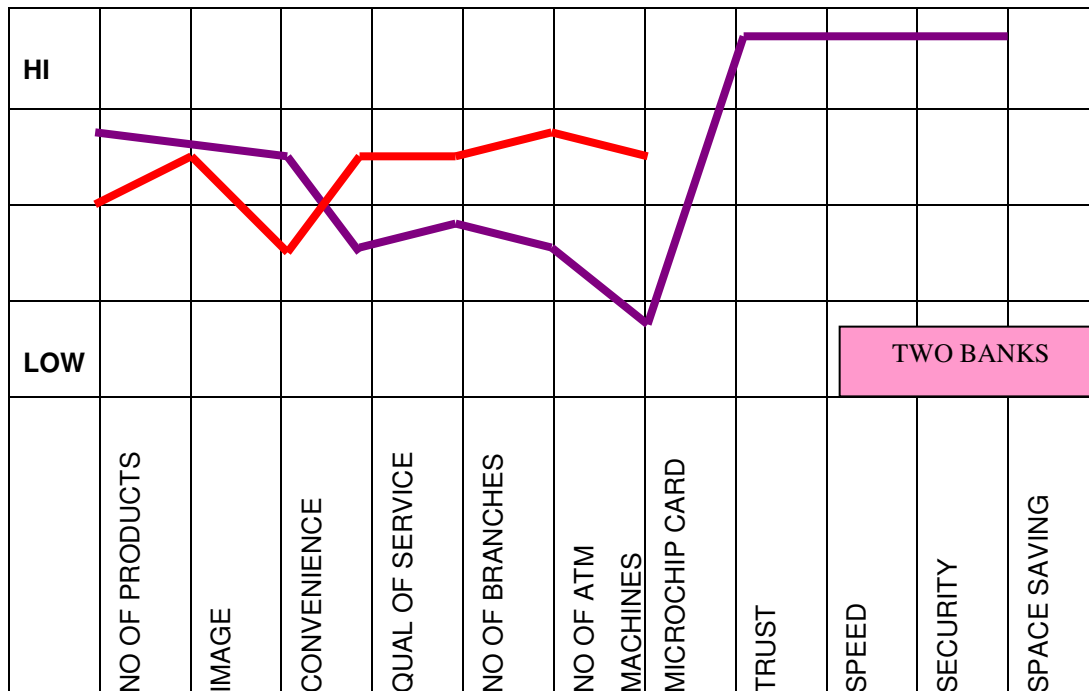
B: The Strategic Canvas of a phone company



C: The Strategic Canvas of a few Private Hospitals



D: The Strategic Canvas of a few local banks



E: The ERCC Grid of Air Asia (based on public access data)

Of the many local companies, the one that is most exposed is AirAsia. Many have even analysed the company based on the BOS methodology and its four action framework could be as follows:

