

Internal and External Strategic Analysis

ICARIS Ltd



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Executive Summary

Strategy is a set of plans or decisions made in an effort to help organizations achieve their objectives (Miller & Dess, 1996).

According to Gerry Johnson and Kevan Scholes, authors of "Exploring Corporate Strategy," (8th addition 2018) say that strategy determines the direction and scope of an organization over the long term, and they say that it should determine how resources should be configured to meet the needs of markets and stakeholders.

ICARIS Ltd is a software development company, providing software and hosting services to not-for-profit organisations across the UK. The company was founded in 2001 by its current owner as JA Computer Solutions Ltd. It became a limited company in 2002 and changed its name 21 May 2013.

ICARIS Sentinel was incorporated on 17 December 2016 as part of the ICARIS Group, providing data protection services to businesses in the UK. Concentrating on GDPR compliance and security issues, including penetration testing.

ICARIS Ltd and ICARIS Sentinel are owned by solely by oner person, with 2 other directors.

Both organisations utilise the same members of staff and customer care team within the same building.

The company has grown in past years and is highly respected within the not-for-profit sector. It operates in a niche market, providing software for grant making charities, fundraising, helplines, and animal shelters. ICARIS Sentinel allowed the organisation to move into the business to business environment.

Operating in an ever-changing technological environment, the organisation continues to evolve with cloud-based solutions providing the platform for their systems.

In this paper, I will perform an external and internal analysis to discover a new way forward for delivering innovative customer care, ensuring future resilience and sustainable competitive advantage against the backdrop of a pandemic.

Introduction

This paper focuses on customer care against a backdrop of the pandemic affecting the whole world. It will provide a strategic look at innovative customer care options to ensure future resilience and sustainable competitive advantage.

ICARIS Ltd currently provide customer care via telephone and email. Telephone support is available 9am until 5pm Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays). A 24/7 emergency support line is also provided to customers at an extra cost. Email support is available 9am until 5pm, with an emergency 'System Down' email for instant support.

ICARIS Ltd are a small, dedicated team, with 2 customer care representatives. The 24/7 telephone support line is manned on a rota system, with the calls shared between 4 members of staff on a rota.

This paper concentrates on the customer care department within ICARIS Ltd but includes analysis of the whole organisation.

A PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal factors) analysis used in collaboration with a SWOT analysis, Porter's Five Forces, Resourced Based Value (RBV), Porters Value Chain and Bowman's Strategy Clock have been used to give a clear understanding of the situation and related internal and external factors.

ICARIS find themselves having to adapt to the ever-changing technological environment. (McGrath and MacMillan 1995) stated that strategy is about "rapidly responding to ever-evolving competitive and market changes". The nature of business

is that the competitive landscape is ever changing, and organisations have to be agile and adapt their strategy to suit". ICARIS have done this successfully in the past.

Main Findings

Current Solution

All customer care calls are logged into a central system which is updated by the customer care team. Telephone calls and emails received are logged against customers and all communications (calls, emails, and letters) are generated by the system and logged to ensure that the issue is resolved.

This system has been developed in-house by the current development department. The telephone and email solution works well and provides updates to clients and historical data analysis to ensure future problems can be resolved quickly and easily.

The software provided to clients is written in the same language as the customer care solution, so integrating the customer care into the client solution would be the preferred option. (Johnson et al. 2008/2011)

Effects on other aspects of the organisation

ICARIS is split into different departments (Appendix D). The core departments are:

Finance (Customer invoicing, HMRC reporting, VAT, contracts)

Development (Development of all new ICARIS solutions)

Customer Care (Support and customer enquiries)

Sales & Marketing (Digital platforms, Marketing literature, sales demonstrations)

The new customer care solution has an impact on all departments within ICARIS, the new strategy of self-service solutions built into the software will require the following from each department:

Finance – new contracts will need to be established to amend SLA's (Service Level Agreements). It is not envisaged that any extra cost will be incurred by any clients and that the solution proposed will be implemented into the current solution as an extra strand to the customer care. (Appendix E)

Development – the current solutions need to amend to integrate the existing customer care solution used by the customer care department. This will involve the developers linking the internal systems to the customer solutions to enable clients to log calls themselves, with a full history of calls logged.

Customer Care – the new strategy needs to be implemented by the customer care team, so that any automated calls are dealt with alongside the current telephone and email solution. The team will need to ensure that they integrate the solution and deal with the calls without any degradation to the level of support that is currently provided

to the clients. Clients need to be made aware of the new solution and how it can be used to their advantage.

Sales & Marketing – existing literature regarding customer care needs to be amended and all new clients shown the enhanced customer care solutions, adding value to any current or future sales.

PESTEL Analysis

The Pestel Analysis is used as a tool of situational analysis for business evaluation purposes. (Perera 2017).

Industry Driving Force Analysis

Software companies have been greatly affected by technological changes and the implementation of cloud-based solutions, accessible from any internet enabled device from any location. Being able to access solutions securely from home, during the pandemic has been of a great advantage for ICARIS clients. The shift to home working with access to systems has enabled clients to continue to provide charitable services, without the need to travel to the head office.

Key Success Factors

ICARIS has grown since it is inception and provides high quality software and services and has a very good reputation within the software industry. As a small company cost management is extremely important to ICARIS. As a small team, ICARIS has always invested heavily in their employees, utilising apprenticeships, and encouraging development and internal promotion.

ICARIS has invested heavily in the server architecture for their cloud-based systems choosing a leading UK provider (UKFAST) whose Corporate Social Responsibility to eco-friendly servers using green energy was a major factor when they were chosen to provide the backbone of the ICARIS systems.

Creating partnerships with organisations such as Microsoft, UKFast and Alpha Anywhere has proved extremely successful. This strategy to utilise established partners in the industry has increased the customer base.

Political

Political forces in ICARIS's business environment mainly consist of government policies which affect Charity business. Reacting to political changes such as Gift Aid and SORP reporting. Political changes within the UK Charity Commission have an impact on development responsibilities to meet legal requirements.

Economic

The economic climate plays a major factor due to sector that ICARIS operates in. The not-for-profit sector is greatly affected by the economic climate, many charities rely on donations to implement software solutions, without this income, new solutions and systems are not implemented. The Pandemic has greatly affected charitable income, with many events cancelled, greatly affecting the income received.

Social

Social forces affecting ICARIS are mainly the working week, many clients of the ICARIS systems work 24/7 utilising the helpline and animal management software produced. The customer care provided by ICARIS Ltd must reflect the diversities of the services provided by the clients. Reacting to need of the clients is essential for any innovative customer care solution.

Technological

The pandemic has changed the world in relation to technology. Video meetings and access to systems via home broadband. ICARIS already provide cloud-based solutions for their clients, with access from any Internet browser. Increasing the automation for logging support calls to allow clients to contact the customer care team within the software is a prime requirement as these self-service solutions are becoming more common place with other providers.

Environmental

Environment forces affecting ICARIS are concerns from customers that the hosting solutions provided are eco-friendly and carbon neutral. Investment into server environments which are using sustainable & renewable energy is now a requirement from clients.

Legal

ICARIS is affected by laws and regulations. As a limited company, they are registered with Companies House and are required to provide audited accounts. Any changes to charity legislation which affect the solutions provided must be implemented to ensure that the software continues to offer compliance with the latest legal requirements.

Stakeholder Mapping

The objectives of an organisation will be governed by its key stakeholders. These key stakeholders will be determined using stakeholder mapping. Mendelow's matrix is a popular method for performing stakeholder mapping (Mendelow, AL 1981). How interested the stakeholder is to impress their expectations on the organisation's choice of strategies, i.e. how likely is the stakeholder to exercise power? To what extent the stakeholder has power to impose its wants?

Using the Mendelow matrix (Appendix A), the stakeholders have been identified as:

A – Microsoft, Alpha Anywhere, Office Landlord

B – ICARIS Employees

C – UKFAST – server infrastructure, Clients

D – Owner & Managing Director

Porters Five Forces

Porters Five Forces (Porter, M 1979) are: threat of new entrants, threat of substitutes, bargaining power of customers, bargaining power of suppliers and competitive rivalry.

ICARIS is a leading provider within their niche market. There are several external factors in the environment that ICARIS operates in that the company must address which could affect the position of ICARIS.

Due to the niche market and specialist sector that ICARIS operates in, the threat of substitutes is not relevant.

Competitive rivalry within the marketplace is a major factor for ICARIS, many larger suppliers have entered the marketplace in recent years. ICARIS have always promoted themselves as a family-based business, who build long term relationships with their clients. ICARIS have used this to their advantage, with the longest client using ICARIS services for over 25 years. Any new customer care offering must provide this high level of personal service.

ICARIS has faced the threat of new entrants many times during its existence, however, multi-national, billion-dollar companies have entered the marketplace, offering low cost solutions. These solutions, however, do not offer the personal care that ICARIS does.

ICARIS utilise three main suppliers, Microsoft, Alpha Anywhere and UKFAST. ICARIS utilise their long-term relationships with these suppliers to negotiate long term contracts giving value for money and providing a high level of commitment for their clients. These relationships are essential for the continued success of ICARIS, their solutions rely on these three suppliers to deliver the services the clients require.

Due to the pandemic, the charity sector is experiencing a downturn in income and services are being cut, new contracts for new solutions are being postponed or cancelled. The bargaining power of customers is now at the highest level that ICARIS has experienced. However, existing clients are investing in the current systems to meet different demands of the pandemic. Some grant making organisations have seen the demand for their service increase 60%, The National Domestic Abuse Helpline saw an increase in call volume of 300%.

Customer care and retention of the current client base is now a priority for ICARIS, to ensure that the company continues to provide a high level of service.

Strategic Analysis

ICARIS has always adopted a cooperative strategy to their solutions, developing long term partnerships with the three main suppliers to ensure that the clients receive the high level of customer care that they have become accustomed to.

ICARIS has built their reputation to deliver projects on time and within fixed budgets.

ICARIS has not diversified the market that it currently operates in, but it has diversified the software solutions, offering grant management, fundraising, animal management and helpline solutions, as well as their Data Protection services. These solutions are well defined, and the online environment is well established. However, the new solution will need a new strategy to ensure the return on investment of the development. The new customer care solution will be the centre of this offering to ensure that no matter how large or small the client, the care remains the same at a high standard.

ICARIS acquired AK Consultancies Ltd in 2007, expanding the customer base. This acquisition is the only one in their history. The current owner has received offers to sell the business but has resisted any offers. Preferring to partner with key suppliers and deliver tailored solutions to key clients.

Based on Porters Generic Strategies (Porter, M. E. 1980) ICARIS strategy is Differentiation Focus & Cost Focus. ICARIS operates within a narrow sector in the cloud-based software industry. Their products are designed specifically for a charitable purposes. As a smaller company, cost always must be part of the focus. (Appendix B)

ICARIS has used the differentiation strategy to make ICARIS products and services different from and more attractive to their competitors. Features, functionality, support, and brand image are all part of their strategy.

ICARIS have made use of this strategy and made it a success by:

- Undertaking good research, development, and innovation
- Delivering high-quality products and services
- Utilising effective sales and marketing

This has enabled the company to stay agile with all new product development.

Internal vs External

For the customer care solution, ICARIS must consider the use of external agencies for customer care. Outsourcing of solutions which are already established in the marketplace that provide solutions need to be addressed. Before any solution can be identified, the stakeholders with high power and high interest need to be consulted as to the direction that the company wants to take.

ICARIS has never outsourced any part of their business to an external agency to provide customer care, instead relying on internal solutions and staff to deliver. This preferred method of supply of services has ensured that the level of care provided to clients is extremely high. All employees of ICARIS are trained to a very high standard to ensure that the customer experience is consistent no matter which employee is delivering the support.

One major factor in delivering any solution is cost. ICARIS are a small company with limited resources and investment funds.

RBV

ICARIS has always taken the Resource Based View (RBV) approach to strategic planning, the organisation is a smaller medium enterprise (SME) with specific product lines, based on the same technological platform. (Madhani, P 2010)

The Infinite Regress argument does not apply to ICARIS, the management are not seeking higher-order capabilities, they are ensuring that the products meet the needs of the client with no down time, whilst still making a profit, the quest for higher order values is not something that is undertaken.

ICARIS have a unique product range and service levels for their market, which is complemented by the expertise of the team, whilst they are a small team, they do aim to have a competitive advantage over their competitors.

ICARIS has organisational leading built into the framework of the organisation, when working in the technology sector you must be able to adapt quickly to emerging technologies else you will be left behind.

By utilising the RBV on specific projects the team has been able to ensure that they maintain the competitive advantage. They only have limited resources, so these need to be defined very carefully and used to their maximum potential.

Resources

ICARIS has a limited set of resources in which to operate, the main factor which must be taken into consideration is the funds available to implement this new strategy. ICARIS have setup partnerships to deliver solutions but have never used any external strategy consultants. The owner of ICARIS still oversees all aspects of the business and is very hands on and as the only shareholder in the business has complete control over any change in direction or new strategy. The owner is fully on board with the implementation of a new customer care strategy as the pandemic has forced the change which will ensure that the new product that was in development will be further enhanced.

ICARIS are keen to utilise any systems they already have, to implement a new solution.

Creating Value

Using Porters Value Chain (Porter, M 1985) to understand how ICARIS creates value, we can break down the value chain. (Appendix C)

The Primary Activity of ICARIS is to create software using purchased development tools and hosted servers. This product is created, sold, maintained, and supported in-house by the ICARIS employees.

Direct activities create value, ICARIS have a well-established Sales & Marketing department, which has several sub activities which include sales calls, advertising, and online sales. The new customer care solution will create extra value to the overall solution and needs to be incorporated in Sales & Marketing of the solutions.

There are many cross-functional activities which the customer care strategy affects, the development department will be involved in the integration of the internal current customer care. The customer care department will be involved in informing the current clients and the ensuring that the solution is correctly communicated to the client base.

It is envisaged that the new customer care solution will add to an already valuable product and enhance the solution.

The Strategy Clock

The ICARIS client base is small with high profile charities who require tailored software to meet their exact requirements and are prepared to pay a premium for the highly specialised service that ICARIS provide. (Appendix G)

The Strategic Clock (Faulkner & Bowman 1995) is a model that explores the options for strategic positioning – i.e. how a product should be positioned to give it the most competitive position in the market.

The purpose of Bowman's Strategic clock is to illustrate that a business will have a variety of options of how to position a product based on two dimensions – price and perceived value.

ICARIS are already well positioned in the marketplace, but an opportunity to utilise the new customer care solution will increase the perceived value of the solution being provided.

We would currently place ICARIS as between 4 or 5 on the strategy clock, nearer the 5.

The new customer care solution will increase the perceived value. The implication of the new offering is that the company is seen to be enhancing their customer experience for all clients, the increase in customer care without any detriment to any service or the current options needs to be seen as increasing the level of customer care.

There is no threat to the current clients or to any new clients, the new solution will ensure that ICARIS will be able to support the increased number of clients that is perceived from the new product being offered in 2021.

SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis (Sarsby A 2016) of the Customer Care department was carried out to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. (Appendix F)

Strengths

The customer care department has a lot of strengths, the clients have a personalised solution in which the telephone is always answered by a customer representative. Emails are replied to within the Service Level Agreements. Client satisfaction is at the forefront of the ICARIS philosophy.

Clients have their issues resolved within agreed timeframes and a very good relationship exists between ICARIS and their existing clients. Client satisfaction is very high.

Weaknesses

The main weakness is the lack of any self-service solution. Clients cannot contact the customer care team within the software solution, there is no easy route to contact the team. Many competitors have this functionality built into their solutions and ICARIS are behind in the marketplace with this facility. Many competitors have a Live Chat or automated solution. This lack of functionality means that ICARIS is not leading the market in their customer care.

Opportunities / Threats

ICARIS is expanding into a different segment of the not-for-profit sector, offering a new solution which will provide a low cost non-tailored solution to a higher volume of clients.

This new solution was due for release in Q3 2020, but due to the pandemic, it has been moved to Q2 2021.

This new solution will potentially increase the client base from 100 clients to 1,000 a ten-fold increase. The customer care solution must be able to cope with demand and any strategy for changing the solution because of the pandemic, must be scalable and flexible to cope with the increased demand.

An opportunity to embed a customer care solution within the software is an option which would allow a self-service solution to clients logging issues and support calls without leaving the solution. New telephony solutions have already been implemented to ensure that the telephones can be diverted to any location to ensure that no client cannot contact the customer care line.

ICARIS may need to employ further staff to ensure that their current level of customer care is maintained, should their new product offering meet the sales expectations.

Increased competition within the marketplace for their highly tailored solutions has led to the shift towards a low-cost standard solution which is available across the marketplace. This will include changes to the billing process and an increased online presence across all digital platforms.

Kotter's 8 Step Change Model

Using Kotter's 8 Step Change Model (Kotter, J 2012) states that you should: Create a sense of urgency, recruit powerful change leaders, build a vision and effectively communicate it, remove obstacles, create quick wins, and build on your momentum.

The pandemic has created the sense of urgency within the organisation, the customer care department understand the need for change. Utilising the owner to build a vision for the future of customer care and to communicate it with the staff is essential. The owner is a change leader, empowering others to see his vision of the company.

Communication of the change to the clients is essential, this step is one of the most important change factors for ICARIS. Clients need to be on board with the change, this is a new way of logging calls with ICARIS which has never been attempted before. Using the Marketing team to communicate it to clients as an enhancement to the solution that is currently being offered.

The owner can also play a major part in this communication strategy, it is essential that the clients utilise the new solution. If the clients do not utilise the system, then the investment into the solution will be worthless.

The ICARIS team have been involved in this decision making and the customer care department have raised no obstacles to the implementation. If clients utilise the self-service option, the time taken on the telephone and answering emails will be reduced. This strategy is seen to be a positive step for the team, which will enhance the offering and reduce time taken on administrative tasks.

The quick win is for the customer care team to automate their workflows and for the clients to automate their call logging from within the solution, without having to construct emails or remember the telephone number to call. Instant communication and automation will be a quicker solution.

By enhancing the offering, the sales team can build on the momentum generated by this enhancement to the service. Existing and new clients can utilise the new service which eventually will become the 'norm'.

If this 8-step process is followed correctly, there will be no envisaged obstacles to the new solution from the employees or the clients. Engagement of clients is a key factor to the success of this strategy.

Conclusions

ICARIS need to enhance their customer care strategy not only because of the global pandemic, but to ensure that continue to meet the demand of their clients and offer solutions which are on a par or greater than the solutions offered by their competitors.

On analysing the Internal and External strategy of ICARIS, various methods were used, these included a PESTEL analysis, Mendelow's matrix, Porters Five Forces, Resourced Based Value (RBV), Porters Value Chain and Bowman's Strategy Clock. These analysis methods proved to be very useful in analysing the whole business and how this new customer care strategy will ensure that the business will benefit from the new strategy and how the client experience will be enhanced.

The strategy of a self-service solution incorporated within the software environment to allow for increased client involvement in the solution will not only enhance the solution but will allow the Sales team to enhance their marketing plan.

The investment of the solution will be cost effective, the main development of the solution has already been completed, the changes needed to implement it into the client solution are low cost as the development can be achieved in-house.

Key stakeholders demand a high standard of personalised care and this solution will increase the overall customer care package that is currently offered. ICARIS Clients are very used to high levels of customer care, by offering a third strand to the package, they can take advantage of instant calls within the package.

Pestel analysis shows that ICARIS have a good reputation and are well established and are well known within the marketplace. The current owner is well known within the

sector and has provided systems to hundreds of not-for-profit organisations across the world. Many sales have been won due to the current owner's involvement in the sales pitch.

Within this current economic climate, the not-for-profit sector has seen a decline in income and the need for new systems is decreasing. However, existing clients need to be retained and if new clients are sought by the sales team, the emphasis on customer care must be a priority.

Customer care standards cannot lower with any new solution, the very high levels that are currently achieved must be retained. The standards of customer care are a selling point of ICARIS solutions, the client must be felt to be part of the ICARIS family. Autonomous customer care solutions may impact the personal touch offered by ICARIS and the new solution must be monitored, metrics and analysis of the new solution must be undertaken to ensure that it is performing as expected. The strategy must be reviewed and the metrics of how the solution is progressing will need to be analysed to ensure continuous improvement.

Investment in current staff and new staff members to ensure that the increased demand is met to the same standard will be essential to the success of the project. No obstacles from the employees have been identified as the new solution helps their day to day tasks.

ICARIS will continue along their independent path, partnering with key suppliers to provide the infrastructure needed to continue to offer their solutions, the customer care strategy will fall into the current structure without a high level of investment with no new partnerships needed as cost is a major factor in this strategy.

ICARIS know their competitors and the marketplace extremely well, however through the external analysis, their marketplace is becoming more competitive with large multi-national companies entering the arena. Customer care needs to be at the centre of any offering as the differentiation focus of ICARIS has always been one of customer relationships.

Recommendations

Based on the strategic analysis of the report, the following recommendations are made:

1. ICARIS should invest in the current development team to provide an in-house self-service solution embedded within their software solution. This solution will integrate fully into their existing software solution, allowing clients to log any issues directly. The solution will provide updates through the current software which is used by the ICARIS customer care team to log issue and problems.
2. Based on the SWOT analysis ICARIS already provide a high level of customer care. This self-service option must be treated in the same way as the other sources of customer requests.
3. ICARIS need to invest in their customer care department with new staff employed and trained to a high standard so that the new solution that is offered in 2021 can be supported to the level currently achieved.
4. The tenfold increase of clients from 100 to 1,000 in 2021 brings with it other challenges for the business. This is a new strategy which ICARIS has never undertaken before. Investing in current and new employees will ensure that the business can survive and continue to grow.
5. The current team work well together and are very familiar with the current clients and their demands. ICARIS must ensure that the employees (and any new ones) continue to consider themselves part of a team.
6. External providers of customer care solutions do not provide the integration into the current software that the clients demand. The current clients have become

used to the telephone being answered and emails responded to within 2 hours, this must continue to ensure that the client's needs are met, even under self-service.

7. ICARIS have been very successful with strategic partnerships for hardware and software development environments, however partnering with an external source to provide customer care is not something the key stakeholders should implement.
8. ICARIS will utilise the owner's standing within the sector to communicate the new strategy to the clients and within organisation. Each client will be personally contacted by the owner to explain the new solution.
9. Continuous monitoring of the customer care team, with key metrics on how well the new solution is being implemented, with analysis and continuous improvements if required.
10. The new customer care strategy is utilised within the Sales & Marketing department to enhance the product offering and generate new sales.

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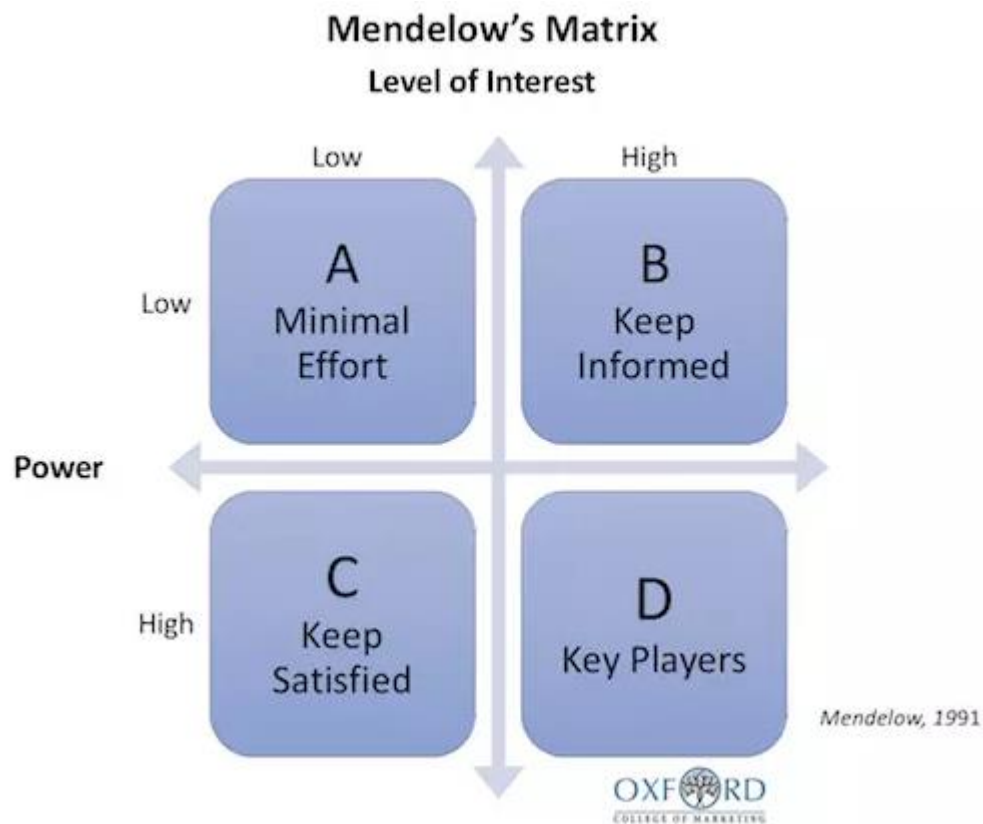
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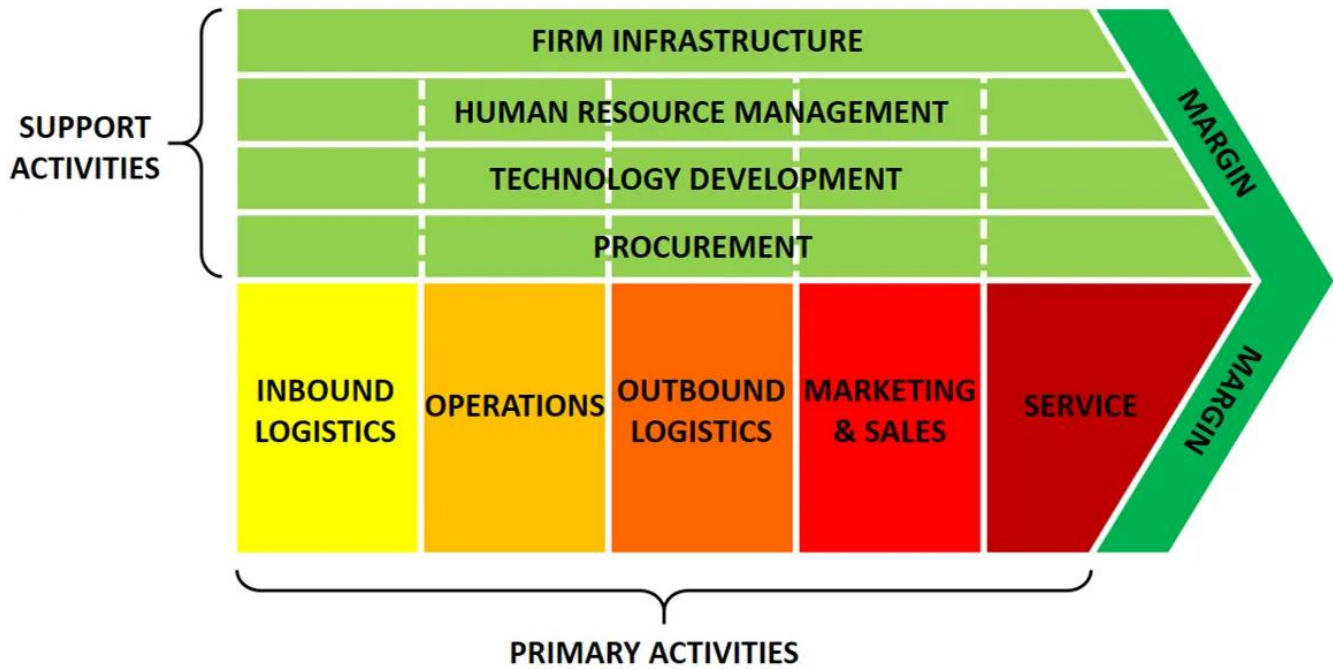
- **Appendix A – Mendelow's Matrix**



Appendix B – Porters Generic Strategy

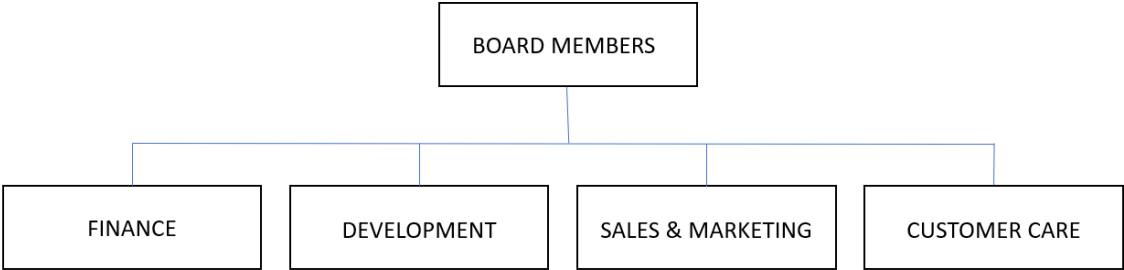
<i>Target Scope</i>	<i>Advantage</i>	
	Low Cost	Product Uniqueness
Broad (Industry Wide)	Cost Leadership Strategy	Differentiation Strategy
Narrow (Market Segment)	Focus Strategy (low cost)	Focus Strategy (differentiation)

Appendix C – Porters Value Chain



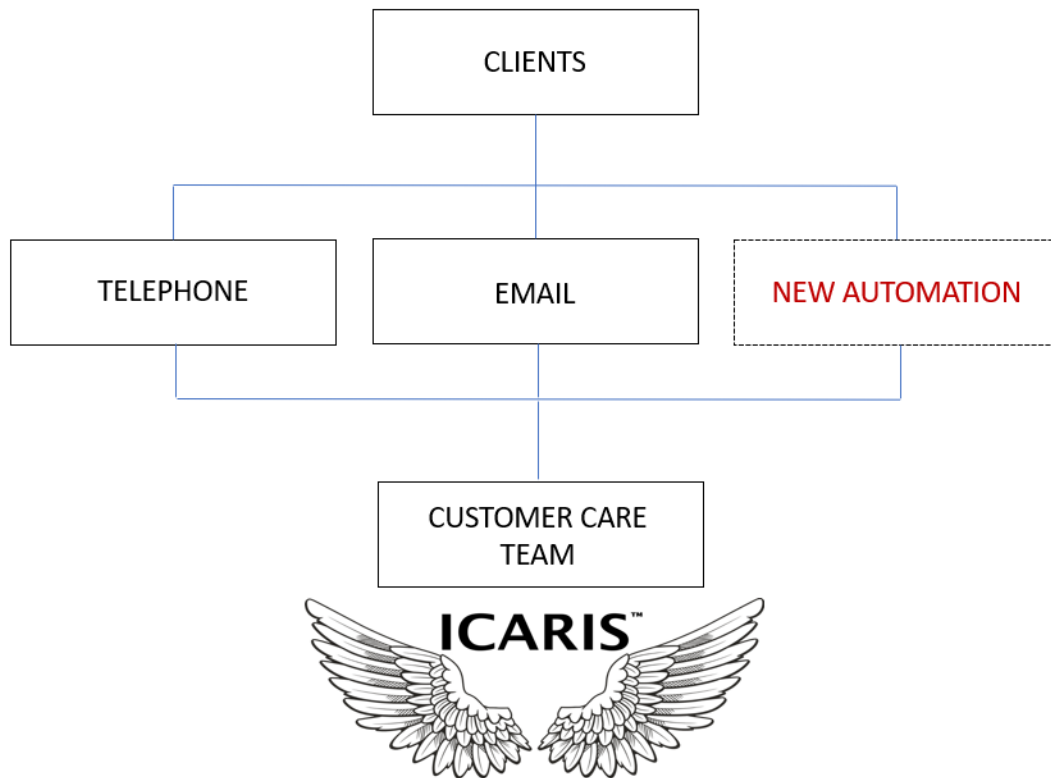
Appendix D – ICARIS Departments

ICARIS DEPARTMENT STRUCTURE



Appendix E - Strands of Customer Care

ICARIS CUSTOMER CARE STRANDS



Appendix F – SWOT Analysis

S STRENGTHS	W WEAKNESSES	O OPPORTUNITIES	T THREATS
Personalised solution Service Level Agreements exceeded Client relationship at the forefront of ICARIS philosophy High Client Satisfaction	No Self-Service Solution No instant easy access Falling behind other competitor offerings.	New low-cost solution being offered. Enhances existing and new products New employee opportunities Existing employee training & development	Competition from competitors who already have automated solutions Online digital platform will need enhancement

Appendix G – Strategy Clock

