



STRATEGIC CHANGE AND ORGANISATIONS (LCDB7005)

Assignment-2



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3) Assuming you are the executive director of a major trans-national corporation; discuss how would you develop implement “Strategic Action Plan” to sustain the core business of your organization.

Amazon.Com, Inc is a trans-national corporation operating in several continents, such as North America, Europe, Asia, etc. It is the 2nd biggest retailer in the world in terms of revenue (Forbes, 2020). At the end of FY2019, Amazon generated a net revenue of £70.23 billion (Amazon, 2020). Amazon.com was started in 1994 as an e-commerce destination with an aim of selling everything that a buyer can look for to buy online (Amazon, 2020).

As an executive director, my strategic action plan will be influenced by the current Covid-19 pandemic situation. According to the experts, the current pandemic situation and its impact on the fall of economic will linger for a long time (The Guardian, 2020; Telegraph, 2020). As, vaccination and medications are still not available for this deadly virus, lockdown all over the world may continue longer (BBC, 2020). In such a scenario, when social distancing, staying at home and work from home is practised (GOV.UK), people are increasingly relying on online stores more than they ever did (Forbes, 2020). As various businesses are already crushing down, Amazon will strategically plan itself for three years keeping coronavirus in mind.

While designing strategic action plan, vision and mission need to be prioritised. Vision helps to understand the future position the organization want to achieve and mission indicates the long-term purposes the organization has (Pearce & John, 1987). It helps to understand the aspiration of the organization in long term (Pearce & John, 1987).

Amazon’s vision statement consists of three key components: global reach, customer prioritization and diverse range of products. Its mission statement can also be dissected into three key components: lowest prices, best selection and utmost convenience (Amazon, 2020).

Once, the vision and mission purpose of the organization is clear, the next step is to understand the strategic position of the organization by doing an internal and external analysis of the organization. The common tool used to do such analysis is known as SWOT. It helps to identify the strength & weakness of the organization and the possible threats and opportunities it may have in its competitive market environment (Carlsen & Anderson, 2011). SWOT analysis

helps in recognizing organization's resources and capabilities, its deficiencies, possible market opportunities and external future threats (Carlsen & Anderson, 2011).

SWOT analysis of Amazon

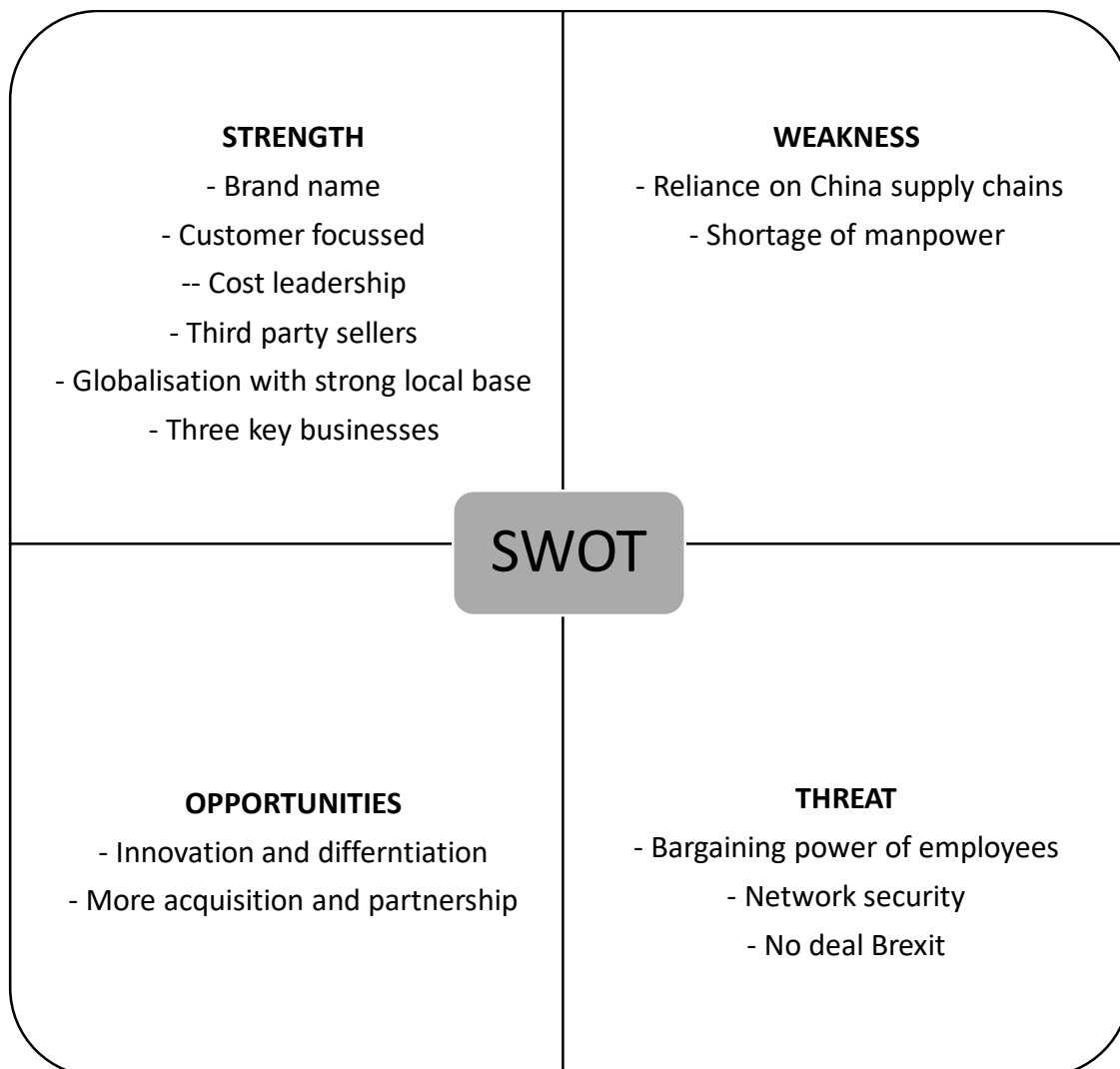


Figure: SWOT analysis of Amazon. Com, Inc

Strength:

i.Brand name:

Amazon has a strong brand image as a global e-commerce giant. Its brand value helped Amazon to capture the 3rd position just after Apple and Google (Interbrand's Global Brand Ranking, 2019).

ii.Customer focussed:

Amazon is highly customer focused, with various features in its website to suit everyday's needs of all kinds of its customers, including premium and budget friendly buyers (Amazon, 2020).

iii. Cost leadership:

As Amazon do not have physical retail stores and sells everything only on its virtual online store, it helps Amazon to cut its expenses (Amazon, 2019). Amazon has efficient cost control and low inventory replenishing time. Its various strategic alliances with numerous companies such as Evi technologies, Thalmic labs, Shoefitr, Orange chef, etc. assist in strengthening its value chain system and to be a low-cost structure (Amazon, 2019).

iv. Third party sellers:

Amazon not necessarily sell everything by itself. Third-party sellers help Amazon to maintain a diverse range of customers by offering more than 2 billion items to sell on Amazon (Amazon, 2019). In addition to it, its huge third-party sellers base helps in revenue generation through referrals and commission (Amazon, 2020).

v. Globalisation with strong local base:

Amazon is operating in more than 100 countries (Amazon, 2020). To efficiently compete against the domestic e-commerce rivals Amazon has partnered with local supply chain companies (Amazon, 2019). It helps Amazon in understanding the local needs and their culture, which in turn supports Amazon to customize their services/products accordingly (Pacione, 1997).

vi. Three key businesses:

Amazon has three key distinctive businesses- Amazon Marketplace (including Amazon Fresh), Amazon Web Services (AWS) and Amazon Prime, which operate and support each other, leading to generation of increased revenues (Amazon, 2020). As people are now legally obligated to stay at home, Amazon key businesses exactly matches with the current needs of people- media entertainment streaming, whole foods & daily essentials and innovative technology to combat with COVID-19. As a result of it, just in the first quarter of this year, net sales has got increased by 26% to £61.17 billion compared to the first quarter of FY 2019 (Amazon, 2020)

Weakness:

i.Reliance on China for supply-chains:

Huge dependence of Amazon and its sellers on China is now affecting the Amazon's supply chain. The outbreak of coronavirus first starts in China (WHO, 2020) which lead to temporary halt in its production. As a result, Amazon sellers are struggling to cope up with the supply and demand. 49% of sellers are struggling as the imports have slowed down, 32% are struggling as many suppliers are closed in China, 31% of sellers are struggling to contact with their suppliers (Haren & Simchi-Levi, 2020).

ii.Shortage of manpower:

With the increase of coronavirus cases, hundreds of employees are calling for sick and employee turnover rate has increased drastically (Financial Times, 2020). As the marketplace is totally dependent on ground level staffs for home deliveries and warehouse management, Amazon is in massive shortage of staffs (Financial Times, 2020).

Opportunities:

i.Innovation and differentiation:

Amazon can invest in its R&D to come up with innovative technology which can help it to differentiate its products from others to gain competitive advantage (Amazon, 2017).

ii.More acquisitions and partnership:

Instead of relying on Amazon sellers and on its own production & brands, Amazon can more effectively handle supply and demand pressure by merging and partnering with other companies (Amazon, 2017). It will reduce its reliance on Amazon sellers and will increase its market share.

Threats:

i.Bargaining power of employees:

Huge dependence on front-line employees and shortage of man power along with hundreds of walk-outs and sick calls due to COVID-19 have a potential to disrupt the operational activities of Amazon (The Guardian, 2020; Financial Times, 2020). Although in response to huge employee turnover rate, Amazon

has added 175000 more employees, it is evident that it is increasing the bargaining power of employees, leading to protests to increase their pay and benefits (The Guardian, 2020; Financial Times, 2020).

ii. Network security:

Due to the pandemic, mostly all businesses and people have shifted to online transactions. It can create heavy traffic and servers may crash down due to the overwhelming customers' buying activities (TechUK, 2020). Also, online transactions can be exposed to more cybercrimes which can affect the network security of the company (TechUK, 2020).

iii. No deal Brexit:

79% of food is imported in the UK from EU (BBC, 2019). Amazon fresh food is highly relied on EU farms and supply chains. Although UK is hoping to come up with a trade deal with EU before the end of its transition period, but a no deal Brexit can cause a strain in the supply chain and will add on import duties (BBC, 2019). It may also lead to shortage of labourers and increase in price of gas and electricity (BBC, 2019), leading to increase in the operational cost of Amazon.

In SWOT analysis, one may argue that it does not prioritise the issues neither it gives an alternative solution to its issues (Carlsen & Anderson, 2011). It does not even consider its competitors while analysing (Carlsen & Anderson, 2011). Thus, the factors considered as strength for the organization may not be strength at all if the competitors are ahead of those strength factors.

SWOT analysis cannot operate independently without PESTLE analysis, as the external environmental analysis done in SWOT (Threats and Opportunities) is generated from the PEST analysis (Ratko & Bojan, 2012). The framework of PEST allows to do an in-depth macro-environmental analysis which can impact the future decisions of strategic action plan (Tapera, 2014). PEST analysis critically looks at all the external factors such as political, economic, social and technology factors that can impact the organizational performance. PEST analysis can only be helpful if it is conducted regularly as the market environment conditions is volatile and always changing (Sreeramana, 2015). Moreover, PEST only helps to identify the issues not in finding solutions and it is totally subjective in nature depending on what organization considers as its opportunities and threat (Sreeramana, 2015). For instance, advancement in technology may be a strength for software companies, but it is a threat for hardware companies if they do not

have resources to adapt accordingly. A detailed PEST analysis of Amazon is done below:

PEST Analysis of Amazon:

i. Political condition:

At this particular time of pandemic, the dependence of various first world countries over the third world countries for their smooth operations of supply chains is getting highlighted (Haren & Simchi-Levi, 2020). The severe lockdowns across the globe and giving importance to PPE, health equipment and other health related staff, causing partial or whole disruption in production of non-essential items (The Telegraph, 2020).

ii. Economic condition:

One of the major impact of coronavirus after a thousand of deaths is the diminishing financial condition of the countries due to the poor market performance, such as in USA and China. It is expected that this deep scars on market health can lead to a serious economic crisis causing a multi-year recession as investors are now pulling off their investments from the traditional financial instruments due to the volatile nature of the market (The Guardian, 2020; Independent, 2020). Moreover, the paradoxical situation of asking people to stay at home causing workers to stay at home resulting in labour gap, which in turn makes the companies and government to look for labourers to prevent the businesses from halting makes the market condition more uncertain (The Guardian, 2020; Independent, 2020).

iii. Social condition:

During the initial stage of the coronavirus outbreak, there was a sudden panic worldwide which lead people to buy essentials such as food, water, fuel, etc. in bulk and stock it up as an anticipatory measure of lockdown (BBC, 2020). Such unpredicted panic buying behaviour temporarily damaged many supply chains all over the world (BBC, 2020).

As many countries are going through partial/full lockdown and travelling is banned, so to keep business activities running, Amazon had to change its mode

of work to make it suitable to work from home (CNBC, 2020), which does not only involve major changes in the operational work and in technology, but also involves initial setup expenses, like buying webcams, desktops, antivirus software and other official staff, so that employees can work effectively from home (Larson, Vroman & Makarius, 2020).

iv. Technology:

Amazon need to constantly update its technology to able to satisfy the need of its customers. Major tech conferences which were cancelled to prevent the spread of coronavirus (The Verge, 2020), resulted Amazon to miss several possible partnership opportunities with other tech giants. Although online conferences were organized as an alternative, but still for the time being innovation will stifle due to the limited networking opportunities through online events.

SWOT and PEST analysis helps in understanding the micro and macro environmental situation of the organization, but does not help in doing a competitive position analysis (Boonyarat, 2019). If the organization cannot determine the competitive intensity and attractiveness of the market, it may fail to reflect upon its actual strength and weaknesses (Grundy, 2006). Porter's five forces is a tool that helps in identifying the central position of power in a business environment (Dobbs, 2014). This tool not only helps to identify organization's strength in comparison to its competitors but also helps to recognize the organizational growth needed to stay ahead of its competitors (Dobbs, 2014).

Porter's five forces analysis of Amazon:

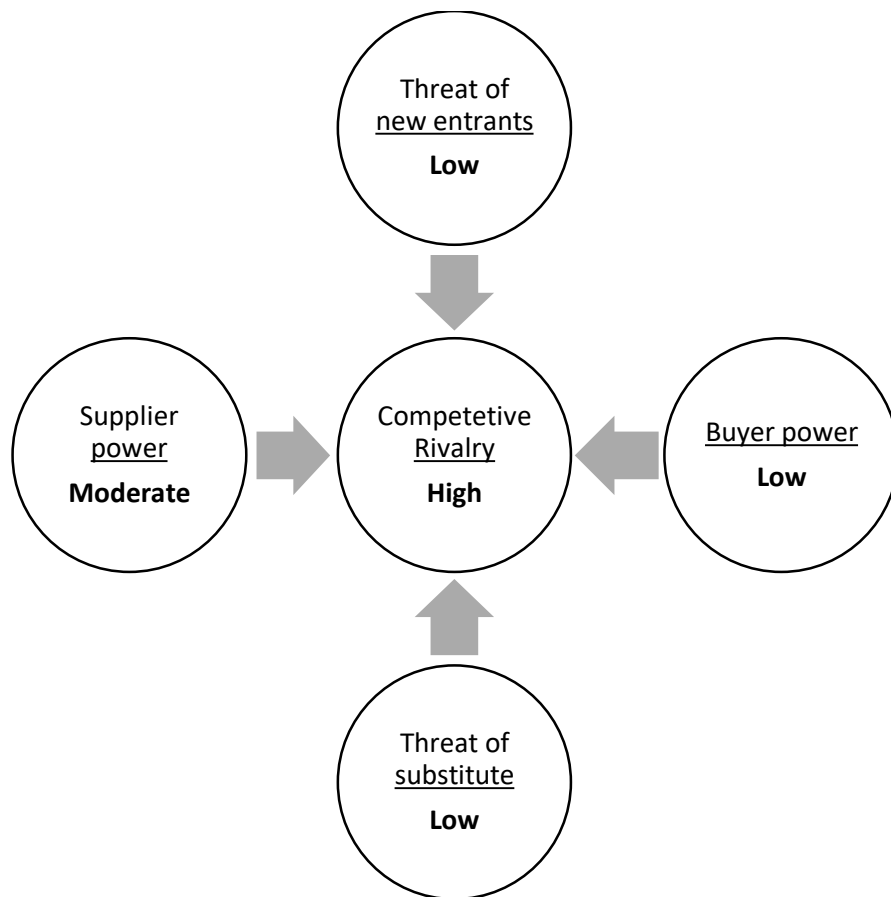


Figure: Porters' Five Forces analysis of Amazon.Com, Inc

i.Competitive rivalry:

In the e-commerce industry, Amazon have many tough competitors. eBay one of its biggest rivals with the biggest online auction have subsequently increased their market shares (Amazon, 2019). Although eBay's business model is different from Amazon, but the products on offer and its targeted customer base is overlapping with Amazon. In addition to it, physical retailers such as Wal-Mart, Tesco, etc. are also getting popular for selling its products online.

ii.Supplier power:

Although, in normal scenario Amazon has a huge number of distributors, publishers and manufacturers (Amazon, 2019), but due to the pandemic, the supplier power is moderate to high because many suppliers are closed or hard to contact as productions are delayed due to staff shortage and lockdowns (BBC, 2020). Therefore, currently suppliers have more power on Amazon and its key

providers individually or as a group can start their own businesses and sell directly to Amazon's customers by becoming a competitor.

iii. Buyer power:

Amazon is one of the largest e-commerce and shopping company in the world (Forbes, 2019). It has more contacts and networks with its suppliers than its rivals, with a diverse variety of products to offer to its customers at a reasonable price. Its brand name also acts as an advantage to rely on its online shopping platform (Forbes, 2019). Thus, the buyer power of Amazon is relatively low.

iv. Threat of new entrants:

Amazon invests heavily on its research and development (R&D) to come up with the best technology in order to give the best experience to its customers (Amazon, 2019). Moreover, with its brand name Amazon already has a large loyal customer base. Thus, new entrants with similar business model and identical products may find it extremely challenging to get over the Amazon's loyal customers.

v. Threat of substitute:

Few of the major substitutes of Amazon are bookshops, e-shops, physical stores, local-corner shops, etc. A major limitation of online shopping is it is not effective when customers want the product immediately at that very moment. However, one simply cannot ignore the huge advantage of online shopping which is available 24/7 and is only one click away, without the need of travelling anywhere (Limayem, Khalifa & Frini, 2000), along with the brand name of Amazon which comes with trust. Therefore, the threat of Amazon's substitute is low.

It needs to be noted that Porter's five forces analysis is only relevant to short-term analysis and does not consider the impact of globalization (Dobbs, 2014). Moreover, it does not include complex situations when a company straddles in several industries, rather it tends to apply five forces of an individual organization versus a broad industry (Dobbs, 2014).

Triple Bottom Line (3BL)

Considering the current position and competitive strength of the organization, strategic action plan need to be developed based on its strengths to address the possible opportunities and mitigate the future threats and weaknesses simultaneously (Balogun, Hope, Johnson & Scholes, 2008). Various strategy can be used to design the strategic action plan, but in this case 3BL strategy will be used which is based on '3P's- people, profit and planet. The reason for specifically using this framework is it encourages sustainability by evaluating organization's social, environmental and economic impact by focusing on the positive and negative impact the organisation on the '3P's (Coffman & Makena, 2010). The strategic action plan will be designed with the best interest for the people (stakeholders), planet (environmental-friendly) and profit (growth of the organization). However, one may argue that it has no specific guidelines to measure the impacts of the organization on those '3P's and lacks in accountability and practicality (Janet & Gary, 2017). Therefore, with no specific universal standards, an organization willing to follow 3BL strategy for sustainable growth may actually lose its way (Janet & Gary, 2017).

Stakeholder mapping

To use 3BL, the 'people', one of the important stakeholders first need to be identified. Based on the stakeholder theory, an organization can be considered successful if it can provide value to its majority of stakeholders, which implies evaluating profit is not the only means to measure success (Wagner, Helena & Mario, 2011). An organization can have a number of stakeholders classified into internal and external stakeholders. Generally, employees, managers and owners are considered as internal stakeholders who are directly related with the organization. Based on the intensity of power and interest of its stakeholder on the organization's activities, the organization need to map accordingly to understand whom to prioritise more and how to manage them (Wagner, Helena & Mario, 2011). In the X-axis the stakeholders are arranged with respect to their interest on the organization and in the Y-axis the stakeholders are arranged with respect to their power on the organization, and based on the location of the stakeholders in the graph, they need to be communicated accordingly (Wagner, Helena & Mario, 2011), as shown in the below figure.

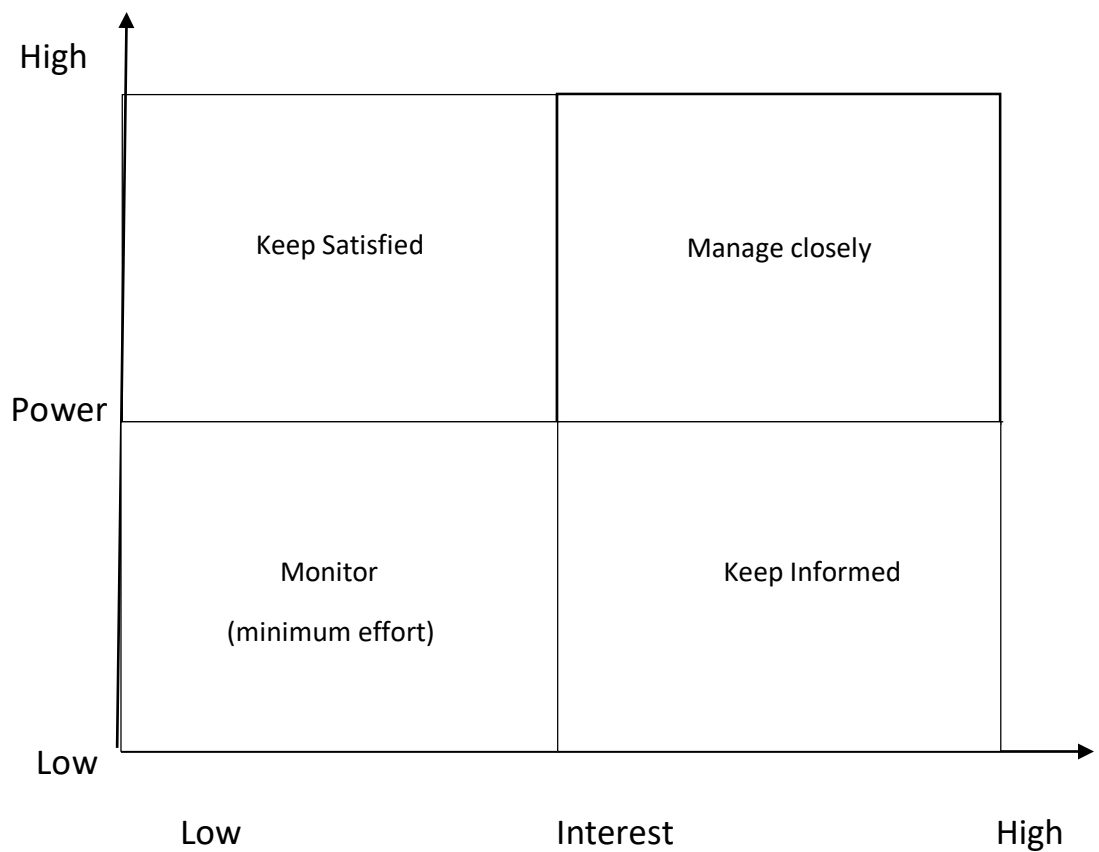


Figure: Stakeholder mapping

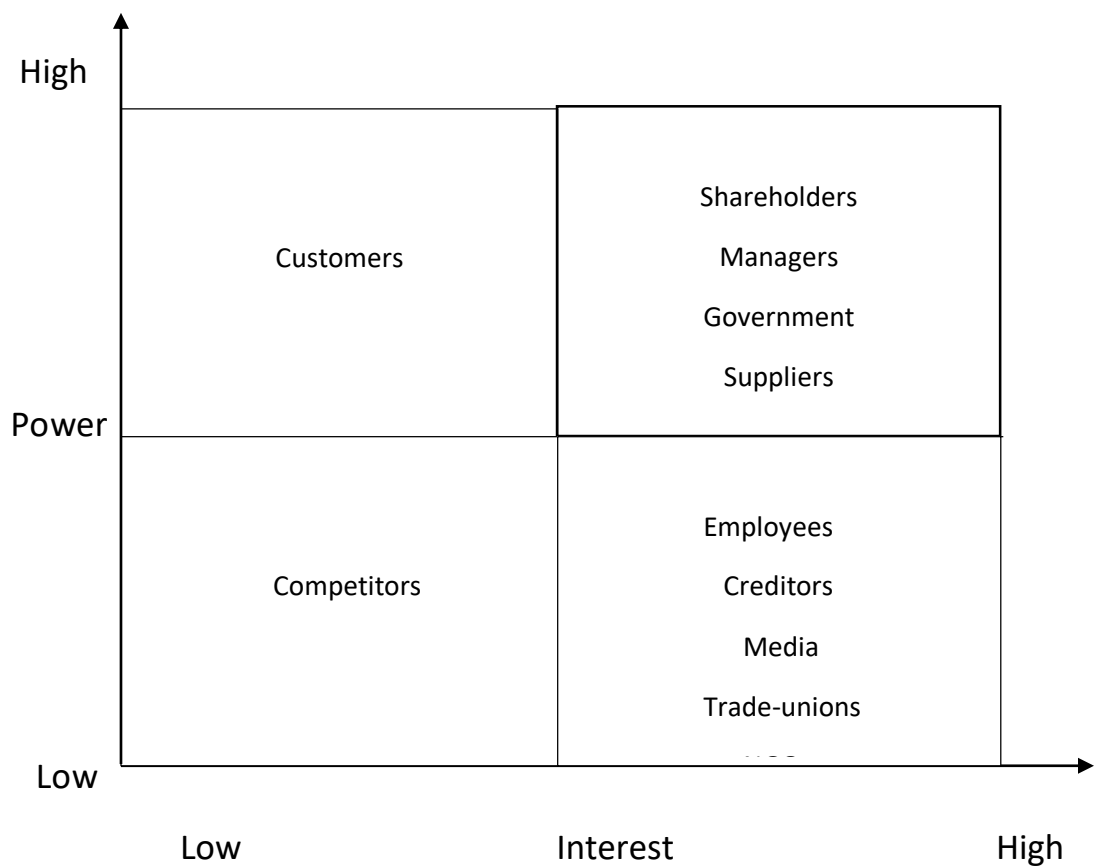


Figure: Stakeholder mapping of Amazon

According to the above figure, the stakeholders who have high power and high interest such as shareholders, government, etc. need to be managed closely, customers have high power but low interest need to be kept satisfied, ones who have low power but high interest such as employees, creditors, etc. need to be constantly informed and competitors having low power and low interest just need to be monitored (Wagner, Helena & Mario, 2011; Jones, Harrison & Felps, 2018). Stakeholder mapping helps to identify the key power holders which leads to better decision making process (Wagner, Helena & Mario, 2011). It also assists in finding the right communication means with its stakeholders. If the strategic planning is not made according to the power and interest of the stakeholders, the organization may lose its people and some stakeholders such as competitors can take advantage of it (Jones, Harrison & Felps, 2018).

Strategic Action Plan

Based on the above discussed 3BL, the strategic action planned is designed-

i. People

ia. Employee:

The frontline employees are most vulnerable to this virus. Thus to reward their hard work the minimum wage and overtime salary of frontline employees will be increased (Amazon, 2020). Amazon will also support employees financially who need to quarantine themselves. In addition to it, Amazon will establish a relief fund in order to support the independent delivery service partners and their drivers and temporary employees who are experiencing financial distress. Although it will increase the expenses of Amazon drastically, but it will help in retention of staffs under this pandemic situation. Along with it, Amazon will continue mass recruitment of ground staffs, to combat with increased employee turnover rate (Amazon, 2020).

Along with it, Amazon will constantly scrutinize the workplace culture, work environment and employment package to keep its employee turnover rate low to be able to maintain the standards of the customer services provided even during the pandemic (Amazon, 2020).

ib.Customer:

Due to huge disruption in supply chains and taking advantage of this crisis many sellers have increased its prices. However, Amazon to stay aligned with its mission of providing the lowest prices, by implementing fair-pricing policies can keep the bad sellers out of the its marketplace. Amazon will constantly keep checking the information about sellers and the suspected sellers who are engaged in price-gouging of products (Amazon, 2020). Amazon will create a special communication channel for state attorney general to speed up the response of customers' complaints to Amazon, thus protecting its customers from all sorts of bad actors and keeping its price low in the market.

ic.Learning & growing:

Amazon will also invest in its training programs, in high demanding fields such as healthcare, cloud computing and machine learning. Amazon will give partial or full scholarship to encourage its employees to gain more skills and knowledge required to lead in a technology-driven economy (Amazon, 2020). Amazon will increase its funds in its Amazon Future Engineer program, started last year to help bright minds from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue technology careers and be a part of Amazon's future innovative minds (Amazon, 2020).

ii.Profit:

ii.a.Innovation:

In the current digital age every company is competing for the best technology to provide the best and unique service to its customers. With the invention of new technology, organization needs to make strategic choice between sustaining path or disruptive path. Sustaining innovations implies improvement of the previous technology with more features and efficiency, whereas disruptive innovation means something which is totally new and original (Li, Porter & Suominen, 2018). To avoid risks, organizations generally prefers sustaining path as it already has a targeted market with established client base, whereas in disrupted innovation it is still new to customers, have a risk of failing to attract the customers resulting in low profit margins (Li, Porter & Suominen, 2018). Amazon Web Service (AWS)'s is highly scalable and dependable with high secure computing power. It has a successful customer base and high profit margins. Thus, currently Amazon will mainly focus on sustaining innovations.

Amazon will shift to teleconferencing to be able to work remotely from home and will use effective teleconferencing tools, such as 5G connection in order to have an uninterrupted real time communication which lacks in the traditional wired connections. In addition to it, Amazon will also work upon virtual reality (VR) tools to deliver employee training from the convenience of their homes (Amazon, 2020). VR and other extended reality tools to imitate the real-life training scenario is getting popular within other organizations. To cope up with its competitors, Amazon need to adopt itself with the upcoming technologies to effectively share complex ideas; as proper communication and team collaborations are considered as the biggest challenges while working remotely from home (Forbes, 2020).

Amazon's advanced cloud technologies and technical expertise in collaboration with World Health Organization can help to detect the outbreak of the virus and ways to effectively contain it. Amazon's cloud technology can assist in developing large-scale data lakes by collecting epidemiological country data and by translating medical training videos into different languages to be able to support global healthcare workers and combat this virus collaboratively (Amazon, 2020). Amazon will invest in its cloud technology to build a separate public AWS COVID-19 database and an AWS Diagnostic Program from where experts can get access to updated information related to virus and analyse accordingly to find better diagnostic solutions. Amazon will keep funding for diagnostic research projects to stay ahead of other major outbreaks of infectious diseases in future (Amazon, 2020).

lib.Acquisition & partnership:

Acquisition is a process of acquiring another company/multiple-companies. It immediately gives a boost in the share market and assists in gaining competitive advantage by acquiring market synergies (Jensen, 1988; White, 2004). Acquisition will allow Amazon to use the skills and resources of the acquired company it does not hold onto. Thus without wasting any time and resources to build in the required skills within the Amazon's employees, it can immediately use those skills from the acquired company to quickly adapt with the changing market without halting the growth of the organization (Jensen, 1988; White, 2004). However, acquisition comes with certain risks, such as causing confusion in management after the acquisition/partnership, especially if it takes place between two companies operating in different kind of industries, having no past knowledge of each other's functionalities (Carnall, 2007).

iic.Shifting supply chains:

Due to the disruption of supply chains in China, many sellers are pushed to increase their prices (Haren & Simchi-Levi, 2020). As a result, Amazon will look for its supply chains in different countries with cheap labour costs, such as India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, etc. to keep its pricing low and customers satisfied.

iii.Planet:

iiia.Reducing carbon foot print:

To cut off the operational costs and achieve net zero carbon emission some major operational changes need to be done. Other than purchasing electric vehicles for deliveries, investment will be done on R&D to develop new technologies which will not only help Amazon but other companies as well to produce less carbon foot-prints (Amazon, 2020). In addition to it, Amazon will further switch to renewable energy by introducing more solar and wind projects. Amazon will keep investing in its Free Packaging program to come up with more creative ideas which can eliminate the need of excessive packaging materials (Amazon, 2020). AWS is a very efficient high-tech data centre with higher server utilization rates and multi-tenant usage patterns. Amazon with more investment in its renewable energy projects will target to make it produce 100% less carbon foot-prints in comparison with other tradition data-centres in U.S. (Amazon, 2020).

Balance score card and Key performance indicators (KPIs):

A good strategic action plan will lead to effective KPIs to effectively manage and guide their progress. It is used as a tool to evaluate the performance of the organizational growth aligned with the mission and vision of the organization (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2007). KPIs should be well defined & quantifiable and properly communicated throughout the organization. KPIs can be formulated using various techniques, but in this case Balanced Scorecard will be used (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2007). KPI balanced scorecard evaluates the organizational performance from four different perspectives-financial perspective to track the progress of financial performance, customer perspective that evaluates customer satisfaction, their attitudes towards the organization, internal process perspective looks after the organization's internal

operational targets which need to be achieved to fulfil customer's objectives and the learning & growth or innovation perspective which tackles with the intangible factors responsible for future growth such as employee satisfaction, work culture, organizational capital, training, etc. (Kaplan & Norton, 2007).

These four perspectives are interdependent and hierarchal, i.e., an organization with innovation and learning culture will enhance the internal operational processes, which in turn enhance the customer satisfaction leading to financial growth (Kaplan & Norton, 2007). If at any point, the performance under any sector falls down beyond the threshold point, the strategic plan which lead to formulation of those KPIs need to be revisited and subsequent changes need to be further done in order to achieve the desired result (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2007).

However balanced score card system requires cost investment as it is based on long-term strategy (Kaplan & Norton, 2007). As, the four factors are highly dependent on each other it requires training to clearly communicate it to all the employees (Kaplan & Norton, 2007). Because of its complexities, sometimes external consultants need to be hired if internally no one has the required skills. Due to this expensive process, many a times stakeholders tries to avoid it (Kaplan & Norton, 2007).

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