Introduction
The Blue Ocean Strategy 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 graduates has yet to be felt. Nevertheless there are already agencies that declared that they are already in the midst of applying the said BOS principles. These are the target group of this research and perhaps to increase the number of practitioners some might have to be coerced into applying the strategies proposed.

BOS Application
There are companies that admit the use of the BOS strategy and applied its principles. They were also willing to share what they have done and this paper focussed only on these three aspects of their experience:

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. Until at the point of this paper there is still no workbook that is available in the market or the internet for would be practitioners to refer to. According to the licensed BOS trainer in Singapore, the book itself is quite clear and sufficient for any enthusiasts to read, understand and implement.

Any remaining errors or omissions rest solely with the author(s) of this paper.
**Literature Review**

Since this is more on applied research and probably the first of its kind in trying to look at the operationalisation of BOS, literature on its application 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 would be at an advantage over the competitors. Thus the two general models such as the Strength-Weaknesses-Opportunities and Threats (SWOT), and Strategic Positioning and Action Evaluation (SPACE) are done differently than the portfolio models of Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and SHELL/GE. But they all generate strategies for the agencies. And what is common to all, are that they utilise and consider two sets of variables, namely the external and the internal variables before the various strategic choices are generated.

The SWOT model 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 (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 (Mintzberg 2003).

Then there are the portfolio models (BCG, Shell, GE) where various portfolios could be viewed in one chart 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).

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

But when BOS model was documented, it is the first time that direct pairing of external and internal variables was not done. In its graph (authors call it the strategic canvas), the x-axis are made up of the industry’s significant factors of competition (and are discrete in nature) whilst the y-axis are its relative performance scores or values as perceived by the customers. As shown in the graph, it is always a comparison between the company’s relative score 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 namely:**
   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
This paper will only look at the main output of the model; that of the ERRC Grid. It will be an exploratory research as there is limited experience or research documentation on the subject. When there is a need to discover new ideas, the real application of BOS has not been diagnosed yet and there need to be some kind of concept testing and screening process, then exploratory research would fit well in such a scenario. 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).

Methodology:
This is a case study approach as well as an exploratory analysis of 14 companies 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.

Those that claimed that they have applied 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 half 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 individual company visit. Some labelled this as “action research” methodology. To date only 16 companies have their experience and data made available for the research (of which 14 are used in the analysis) but with a promise that their names and their respective strategies not revealed.

Data Gathered
For those who want to know more about BOS’s principles, please refer to the appropriate references. As far as this paper is concern, only the utility principles are being analysed. This is detailed out as the ERRC Grid and they are namely:

a. the utilities that are being eliminated,
b. reduced,
c. raised and
d. created.

All the ERRC tables of the 14 companies were gathered and a qualitative analysis then applied to understand the characteristics of these variables. (See Table 1)

Data Analysis
At this point in time the software “ethnograph 5.07 version” is not applicable yet as the number of companies participating is still too small. Thus a manual analysis was done from the raw data.

The agencies were arranged according to some pattern and in this list, the academic agencies were listed first, followed by one government, three GLCs and the rest were private companies. The ERCC content were then listed out and some commonalities were attempted to derive some pattern. 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. (See Table 1)
Table 1: ERCC Grid summary of the 14 agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm grouping</th>
<th>Eliminate</th>
<th>Reduce</th>
<th>Raise</th>
<th>Create</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Programmes(6)</td>
<td>operating costs (9)</td>
<td>Quality (8)</td>
<td>customer satisfaction (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>product variations (6)</td>
<td>Tangibles (10)</td>
<td>Improving customer service (12)</td>
<td>10 new activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>costly activities (3)</td>
<td>overheads and indirect (9)</td>
<td>more customer satisfaction (12)</td>
<td>closer to customers (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>internal processes (3)</td>
<td>new activities (4)</td>
<td>Governance (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>operational activities (4)</td>
<td>reduce time taken (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>long duration effects (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Investments (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings
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 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.

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.
INTEGRATION & DISSEMINATION

Chart 1: Eliminate and Reduce Grid of 14 Agencies

reduce time taken  internal process  costly activities  operational activities  product variations  programmes  overheads and indirect cost  operating costs  tangibles

Chart 1: Eliminate and Reduce Grid of 14 Agencies
Chart 2: Raise and Create Grid of 14 Agencies
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 need to be verified. In fact during the discussion there were difference in the understanding of the principles as all had gain the knowledge through 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 different and thus the case study methodology.

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