

Case Analysis – Sierra Club

The Sierra Club is the largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The organization was founded in 1892 in San Francisco, California by conservationist John Muir. The Sierra Club operates as a non-profit organization, focusing primarily on protecting land in the United States but they have shown concern for the environment of the world as well. Its mission is: “To explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these objectives” (Sierra Club).

The a Sierra Club strategic plan that was adopted in May of 2015 lists the organizational goals for the coming decades, which include:

- Achieve Ambitious and Just Climate Solutions
- Explore, Enjoy, and Protect Our Nation’s Lands, Waters, Air, and Wildlife
- Engage and Support a Broad, Diverse, Inclusive, and Powerful Movement
- Become an Ever Stronger, High-Performance Organization
- Ensure our Financial Strength and Sustainability.

In our text, *Strategic Management in Action (6th ed.)*, Coulter describes an external analysis as a process that includes examining and assessing the external environment of an organization. This is a process used by strategic managers to determine the specific treats and opportunities of their organization (Coulter 2013, p. 56). Coulter goes on to explain that organizations operate as open systems; “they interact with and respond to their environment” (Coulter 2013, p. 57).

There are many factors of the external environment that need to be evaluated in order to accurately identify possible threats and opportunities. The external environment is divided into two major sections, the specific environment and the general environment. “The specific environment includes customers, competitors, suppliers, and other industry competitive variables” (Coulter 2013, p. 60). As a non-profit organization advocating for environmental protection, competitors of the Sierra Club are mainly companies that pollute the environment and fight against their efforts. There are a few other grassroots environmental advocacy organizations such as: Seven Twenty Strategies, DDC Advocacy, and Changents, that could be considered competitors of the Sierra Club (datafox.com) but I would assume that any organization working to protect the environment would be considered a partner as opposed to a competitor. Competition takes a different form when an organization isn’t competing for a certain percentage of the market. While evaluating various aspects of the specific environment is critical, it is equally important to assess factors of the general environment as well.

“The general environment includes the economic, demographic, sociocultural, political-legal, and technological sectors” (Coulter 2013, p. 68). Even though the Sierra Club is a non-profit organization they need to be aware of the impact the economy still has on their organization. The Sierra Club supports economic incentives in the form of tax incentives and price structures that promote the conservation of fuels and of energy, and contribute to the continued development of facilities that are more efficient and environmentally friendly (Sierraclub.org). Changes in tax incentives could have a negative impact on their purpose. Understanding demographics are also an important area of the general environment that should be considered. Analyzing trends in organizational involvement gives the leaders an idea of where to focus their energies. Understanding what types of people are most supportive of your cause, allows for careful placement of recruitment and campaigning. Sociocultural factors and changes in trends have a profound impact on the Sierra Club and their cause. The increased popularity of energy conservation and green living, contributes to the over all organizational goals of the Sierra Club. Current trends support the

initiatives and goals of the Sierra Club. Staying up to date on the latest technology will only provide them with a larger toolbox to protect the environment. Being part of a non-profit organization, the Sierra Club needs to stay up to date on changes in political policies that could effect their organization, and/or their cause. Negative external changes and trends have the possibility of disrupting an organizations performance, these are considered organizational threats. Positive changes in the environment that have the probability of improving an organizations performance are referred to as opportunities. Increased focus on conservation and “going green” creates growth opportunities for the Sierra Club, it also contributes in a positive way to the overall success and purpose of the organization. The more people that view the world through their eyes, the better chance they have of achieving any real change. The most significant threat of the external environment on the Sierra club is the possibility that a new law or regulation will be passed, or not passed, which disrupt current favorable tax laws or important regulations that protect the organization and the environment.

In addition to an external analysis, organizations must conduct a thorough internal analysis. An internal analysis focuses on the organization’s, resources, capabilities, and core competencies. Coulter describes organizational capabilities as various procedures and practices that convert inputs into outputs (Coulter 2013, p. 94). Furthermore, dynamic capabilities are, “an organizations ability to build, integrate, and reconfigure capabilities to address rapidly changing environment” (Coulter 2013, p. 94). Dynamic capabilities are critical to any organizations success; the complexities of today’s environment require constant reevaluation and flexibility. Various functional areas that should be included as part of an internal audit are: production—operations, marketing, research and development, financial and accounting, management, and information systems—information technology (Coulter 2013, p. 104). Strategic managers, organizational structure and organizational culture should also be assessed.

The Sierra Cub is governed by a board of directors consisting of fifteen members, the Board’s Executive Committee of five members stands for election every year (Sierraclub.org). According to guidestar.com the Sierra club is approximately forty percent male and 60 percent women. Even more surprising

is the lack of racial diversity amongst the part time staff, but even more importantly the board members; ninety-two percent of the board members are white. The lack of diversity and varied opinion and perspectives ultimately presents itself as an overall threat to the organization. The organizational structure consisting of Board Members, full time staff, part time staff, senior staff and volunteers seems to work very well of the Sierra Club ([guidestar.com](http://www.guidestar.com)).

According to the Center for Immigration Studies, one strategic issue the Sierra Club faces is a result of their distortions on border and immigration policy which are ultimately undermining their environmental legacy ([cis.org](http://www.cis.org)). The environmental legacy of the Sierra club is what gives the organization its credibility. Undermining their legacy is dangerous. The Sierra Club must be sure they have ALL the facts right, from the more creditable sources so that all of the campaigns and efforts are working in their favor.

While the Sierra Club has its challenges; lacking diversity amongst its leadership team and supporting policies that don't support their common purpose, ultimately the organization is collectively working toward a good cause. Preserving our environment and protecting land is honorable.

REFERENCES

- Coulter, M. (2013). *Strategic management in action (6th ed.)* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Kammer, J. (2009). Strategic Negligence: how the sierra club's distortions on border and immigration policy are undermining its environmental legacy. Retrieved from: cis.org