

# **Attaining Market Competitiveness through the Judo Strategy: The Success Case of the Easy Coach Bus Company in Kenya**

<sup>1</sup>L. Okoth-Odollo, <sup>1</sup>Deborah Muchilwa and <sup>2</sup>J.Kuria Thuo

<sup>1</sup> School of Business and Economics, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kakamega, Kenya (lodollo@yahoo.com;debramwanika@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup> School of Business, Greta University, Thika, Kenya (thuokuria@yahoo.com)

## **Abstract**

The judo strategy provides business managers with the techniques to beat stronger opponents- a key challenge faced by businesses of all ages and sizes, ranging from tiny start-ups to established giants seeking to expand beyond their operational bases. Hence, the judo strategy helps an underdog firm that would otherwise be pessimistic with the presence of stronger competitors to perceive their competitors' inherent advantages as strategic liabilities and thus compete more effectively by employing creativity in movement, balance and leverage in ways that prevent giants from taking full advantage of their superior strengths. This study examines how a relatively small market entrant in the public transport sector in Kenya, Easy Coach, effectively utilized the judo strategy and ultimately outsmarted an entrenched and much stronger market competitor- the Akamba Bus Company. The results of the qualitative research offer invaluable insights to business managers on the effective implementation of judo strategy to attain market competitiveness. Finally, propositions for further research are suggested.

**Key Words:** Judo Strategy, Market Competitiveness, Public Transport Services

## **1. Introduction**

Public transport services play a major role in the provision of public transport world-wide. These services can take many forms, varying in distance covered and types of vehicle used, and can operate with fixed or flexible routes and schedules. Services may be operated by public or private companies, and be provided using bus fleets of various sizes. Kenya has an extensive network of paved and unpaved roads that links the nation's towns and as well as connecting Kenya with her neighboring countries in the region.

For a long time, the public transport bus services sector in Kenya was dominated by a number of entrenched market players who have been in business for decades such as Coast Bus and the Akamba Public Road Services bus company. Coast Bus, the oldest bus operator in Kenya, runs a high class day and night service between Nairobi and the coastal city of Mombasa. On the other hand, the Akamba Public Road Services, operated day and night passenger and courier services to a number of destinations in Western Kenya, Rift Valley, Mombasa and East African towns of Kampala, Mwanza and Kigali. Other reputable but recent bus companies in Kenya include Modern Coast, Nyamira Express, Otange, Mash and

Crown Bus but there are a number of other companies which offer inter-city services such as Eldoret Express, Mbukinya, The Guardian, Kalita Coaches and Palmdam.

Akamba Public Road Services is an experienced long distance passenger bus transport and courier company that had been in operation for over 55 years in the East Africa region. Though the firm has its headquarters in the City of Nairobi, it started its operations in Machakos town with a handful of buses. At its business peak, the firm was the biggest intercity transport company in East Africa with more than 100 fleet size and serving more than 50 destinations within Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

The long standing heritage and corporate image of reliability, consistence, competence and professionalism differentiated Akamba Bus Company from the competition and helped the firm attain the preferred choice in long distance travel in the region. The firm commanded immense wealth of assets and business experience. This made it regarded as the market leader in Kenya and the region.

In December of the year 2003, the Easy Coach Bus Company, opened its doors in Nairobi. The business idea was mooted by an individual, who before then, worked for Akamba Bus Services. The company started with only three buses operating on Nairobi- Nakuru – Kisumu route, with a total of thirty employees.

By the end of 2008, however, it was clear that Easy coach was a dominant market player. The company went from strength to strength. Akambas' fight to retain its dominant market share in the western Kenya circuit failed and Easy Coach Company's western Kenya's share market is close to 70%. Easy Coach has its eyes squarely focused on its strategic objectives of offering high class transport and courier services, anchored on comfort and time value.

## **1.2 Statement of the Research Problem**

The public transport bus services industry has become one of the fastest growing and competitive service industries in Kenya. The intense competition has seen such state supported public transport bus service provider Stage Coach Bus Services collapse as has been the case with Akamba Road Services Limited which had been in operation for over 55 years. The demise of dominant and entrenched market players has been as a result of the entry of more competitive market players who engage more appropriate strategies. The aim of this study is to demonstrate the extent of the application of judo strategy by the Easy Coach to achieve market competitiveness in public transport business in Kenya and in particular against the Akamba Bus Company leading to the latter's exit from the market.

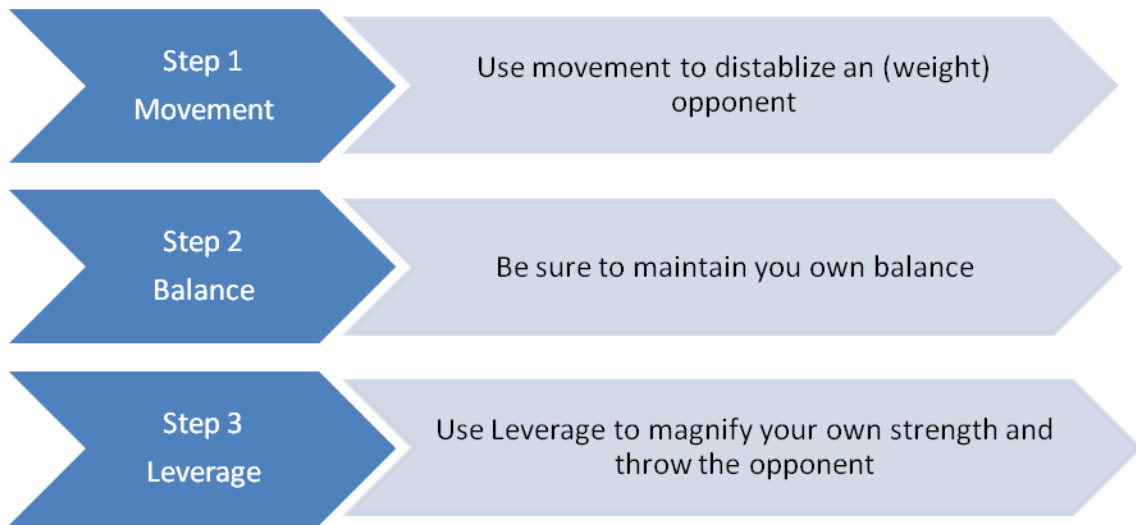
## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

According to Yoffie and Kwak (2002), judo strategy is a multilayered concept. Judo strategists employ three principles: movement, balance, and leverage. Each principle provides a different piece of the strategy puzzle. Movement throws a competitor off balance and neutralizes its initial advantages. Balance helps engage with the competition and survive an attack. And leverage enables the challenger to bring down the opponent. When used together, these three principles will help defeat rivals of any size. Judo strategy puts premium on three essential principles that help companies to enter new markets, and defeat stronger opponents. By developing rapid movement, flexibility, and innovation, new players can lay claim to contest ground and turn dominant players' strength against them. Judo strategy has particular resonance in periods of rapid change. Judo strategists, avoid head-to-head competition that naturally favours the large and the strong. They rely on speed, skills agility, and creative thinking in crafting strategies that make it difficult for powerful rivals to compete.

Drucker (1985) regards the judo strategy as "entrepreneurial judo" since a challenger must find smarter ways to compete. Should the challenger try to capture the entire market, the incumbent will fight back – and, using cost advantage, probably wins. The challenger can induce the incumbent to accommodate his entry by targeting a small sub-set of the market. Drucker (1985) further argues that entrepreneurial judo aims at securing a "beach head" and one which the established leader either does not defend at all or defends only "halfheartedly." Once the newcomer has an adequate market and adequate revenue stream, (s) he then moves on to the rest of the "beach", and finally to the whole "island".

Judo teaches how to use an opponents' weight against him, to turn his strength into weakness. It invokes three steps that must be taken Adam (2009). These steps are in tandem with the principles as outlined by Yoffie and Kwak (2001) and are depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Core Principles of Judo**



Adopted from Adam (2006)

Depending on the nature of competition, firms may combine and implement movement, balance and leverage in different ways. One of the major aspects of judo is to use the size of the opponent against him. As a business strategy, it is designed to give smaller companies an advantage by using the perceived advantages of a larger competitor - namely size - against the competitor. Thus, the incumbent inherently suffers vulnerability to new entrants as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. The Fate of the Incumbent**

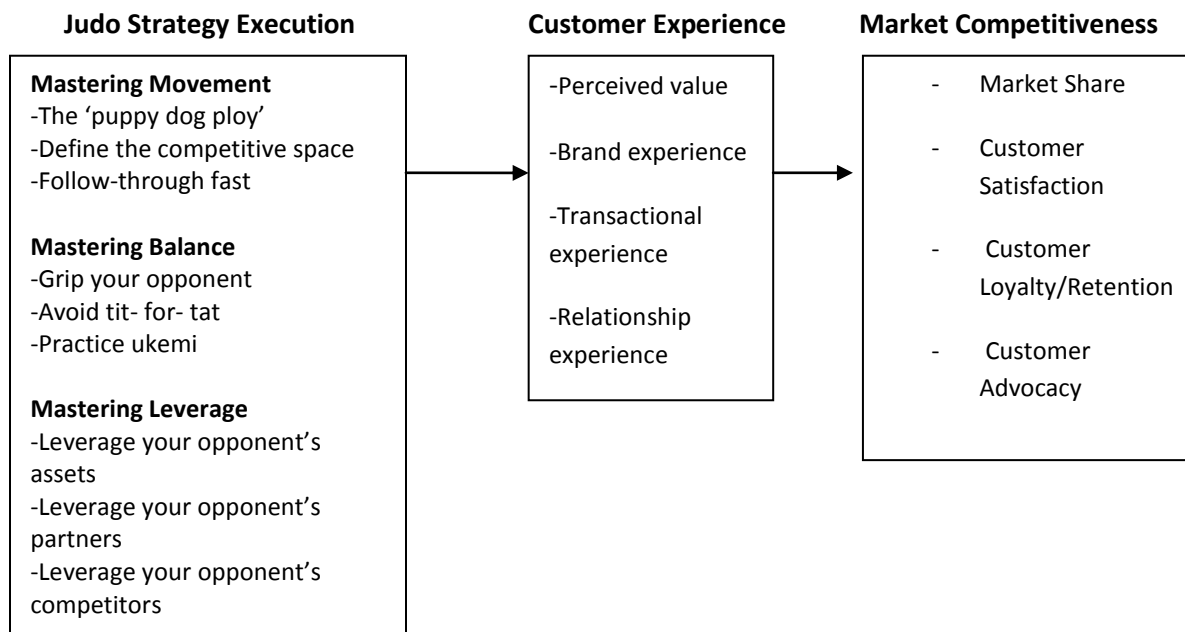
What it is	How it works
Judo Strategy	The challenger finds a way to turn the incumbents' assets into liabilities.
Incumbents' irrationality	Incumbent fails to act in their own best interest.

Adopted from Adam (2006)

### 3. Conceptual Framework

This study is based on the premise that effective implementation of judo strategy enhances customer experience and ultimately ensures market competitiveness for a business organization. The conceptual framework of this relationship is highlighted in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Conceptual Framework of judo strategy implementation, customer experience and market competitiveness**



### 4 Research Methodology

#### 4.1 Research Design

This was a qualitative research that was employed as an exploratory survey case study. Churchill (1991) notes that exploratory research can be used when the objective of the research is to gain insight and ideas as well as for clarifying concepts. The case study design was adopted in order to allow for depth interviews on the application of the judo strategy that was necessary for an exploratory research design. According to Malhotra (2007) a qualitative research is an unstructured, exploratory research methodology based on small samples that provide insights and understanding of the problem setting.

## **4.2 Population of study**

This being a case study, the study unit was Easy Coach Bus Company.

## **4.3 Data Collection and research Instrument**

A direct approach research procedure was utilized in which as advised by Malhotra (2007) the purpose of the study was disclosed to the respondents and was obvious given the nature of the interview. Data collection was effected through depth interviews administered by the researchers to key informants using an interview schedule. The interview schedule was composed of measures obtained from an extensive review of relevant extant literature. The study respondents were senior branch officers of the Easy Coach Bus Company in Kakamega, Majengo and Kisumu in Western Kenya. Since the branch managers are responsible for executing the strategy of their firm, they were deemed as sufficient key informants in possession of information required for the study. To supplement the primary data collected through interviews, secondary data was obtained from the company's publications for cross-validation.

## **4.4 Data Analysis**

Compared to quantitative research where numbers and what they stand for are the units of analysis, qualitative data analysis uses words as the units of analysis and is guided by fewer universal rules and standard procedures. Consequently, in order to decipher, examine and interpret meaningful patterns or themes that emerged out of the study as guided by Malhotra (2007) data was analyzed in the following three steps:

1. Data reduction: The researchers determined aspects of the data to be emphasized, minimized and set aside for the study.
2. Conclusion drawing and verification: The researchers considered meaning of collected data and assessed their implication for the research at hand.

# **5 Results and Discussion**

The following sections present the findings on the implementation of the judo strategy by the easy coach bus company.

## **5.1 Movement**

Using the smaller size to act quickly and neutralize a larger competitor's advantages. Movement serves both offensive and defensive goals, often at the same time. The goal is to weaken the opponents' position, getting him off balance and taking away his edge.

Managers can seize the lead and make the most of their initial advantage. This principle includes keeping low profile, defining a competitive space, and moving quickly.

In mastering movement, competitors use their quickness and agility to move into position of relative strength while evading attack. By taking advantage of speed and agility, the challenger can cut opponents ability to compete based on size and strength.

Easy Coach Bus took the advantage of its small size when it hit the market, to make fluid decisions that enable it be flexible enough to rapidly respond to the market requirements.

## **5.2 Balance**

This acts to absorb and counter the competitor's moves. By maintaining balance, they can successfully engage with opponents and respond to rivals' attacks. Balance serves both offensive and defensive goals, often at the same time. Easy Coach Bus Company used the same routes that Akamba Company used.

## **5.3 Leverage**

This implies that the challenger uses the competitor's strengths against it. By exploiting leverage, firms can transform their competitor's strength into strategic liabilities. This principle dictates that it is necessary for the challenger to leverage the incumbent's barrier to change, leverage the incumbent's partners, and leverage incumbent's competitor. Easy Coach Bus Company has taken advantage of Akamba's big size, to beat it since its small size enables it is flexible enough to rapidly make and execute decisions.

As a newcomer into public transport sector, Easy Coach faced many disadvantages. They lacked proven products, brands, loyal customers, service provision experience, relationships with suppliers, and clients. Hence as a challenger Easy Coach needed to device methods and means to avoid face-to-face competition. By mastering movement, the challenger improves its chances of building a strong initial position, and getting ahead of competitors before they respond. The techniques of balance, in turn, allow the challenging firm to engage bigger or stronger rivals without being knocked down flat. In some cases, in making the most of these two principles, the challenger can build and consolidate an insurmountable lead. In most cases, however, the challenger will need leverage in order to score a win. As an old Judo master said "one does not fall in a bout means that one is not beaten; it doesn't mean that one has won" (Yoffie, Kwak 2002). By avoiding a fall, the challenger hangs on for another round or another day in the competitions' market, as a battle field.

In Judo strategy, the opponents' body becomes a lever in the challenger's hands. In Judo strategy, a competitor's assets, partners and rivals can all play a similar role. A company's greatest assets can often become its greatest liabilities. By leveraging opponent's assets the challenger can transform a competitor's strength into weakness.

When Easy Coach Company entered the market, apart from keeping its activities low, it invested in its buses, in order to define its market and build a name for itself. Their services soon attracted the right clientele who have maintained their loyalty, at least for now, and soon it developed a household brand

name. Judo strategy advocates for use skill to defeat size. Easy Coach Company took the advantage of Akamba's big size, and when Akamba failed to read the signs early, it took over the market.

Fighting and conquering in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting. On entry of the Kenya market by Easy Coach Company, Akamba bus service embarked on aggressive marketing campaign so as to win over the clients who had found a better option. This move did little to warrant Easy Coach's retaliation.

For almost 50 years Akamba public transport service monopolized long distance public transport within and without the Kenyan market. Despite its decades-old reputations for public transport service, Easy Coach Company entered the market and surmounted it in the domestic market. Five years after its launch, Easy coach's name became a household name in transport industry. Easy coach possessed the fewest assets for launching a successful long distance bus transport. In 2003, within the arena of transport, Easy coach was indeed a small brand. Given this supposed handicap, the proprietor had the audacity to launch the service. Easy coach took a highly low profile approach that leveraged the incumbent's supposed strengths into weaknesses. Without actually using such derogatory language, Easy Coach positioned its brand as a "scrappy underdog" and a much needed antidote to not only Akamba, but the alleged "elite" mainstream of the transport system.

Akamba has differentiated its busses into three categories, with the Economy Class category, which is a 56-seater, plying the same route as Easy Coach, operating within the country. Since Easy Coach Company initially had only three buses, against Akamba's 100 fleet size, it could not match this muscle. Easy Coach Company therefore, had to rethink, avoiding "copying" of Akamba. Hence the company decided to design its buses to a 38-seater capacity. These superior model buses had their seating configurations designed to give maximum comfort to passengers, from ample seats and legroom to superior fabric. This top notch service, compounded by efficient work-force attracted the right clientele, the kind of customer base that appreciates comfort. Consequently, the right niche was defined.

According to the management, the seats are customized by Easy coach experts. Purchases are done directly from the distributors. Additionally, the company imports the bus chassis only. Parts of buses are imported and assembled locally. The company has integrated backwards, owning an assembly line, complete with mechanics and relevant technicians. These specialists are equally spaced in other stations along other major routes country-wide. Most of them are located in Nakuru, Kisumu, Kakamega, and Busia for western routes. Inclusive is Kisii area for Nyanza South routes, while the coastal town of Mombasa serves as a central place for the region. According to the management, owning this line is much cheaper due to higher rates of tear and wears due to poor roads network in the country. This has seen a tremendous reduction of the cost of operations.



When Easy Coach Company entered the transport market, the one-person start-up found that the road to victory lie in the comfort. This was a contest that only resource-rich could win. But by redefining customer expectations, Easy Coach Company was able to rise to the top. Initially the company did not try to match Akambas' buses in number. Instead, it focused on a short list of customer preferences such as spacious leg-room, comfortable seats, friendly work-force, time – keeping, security, and less crowd. All these competencies gave its customers convenience and the much needed comfort, which was lacking with the other competitors. Travelers flocked to use Easy Coach services, while the previous market leader remained locked in the “more is better” mind-set and Easy Coach vaulted into first place.

By investing in its own unique core strengths, the company developed its own areas of excellence. This has given the company a head start, a perfect way to stay on top. The company realized that the best way to outdo its competitors is to invest in its work force. Unlike Akamba bus Service Company, Easy Coach Company employs young and energetic university or graduates of institutions of higher learning and trains them to do what the management want done. The company tends to go for young, energetic, but creative employees who have little commitment out of work, so they can put in more time at work than older people. Chinese proverb says that when you don't know anything, ask the youth.

The company tries to cut down some of the associated costs of operations. Given the high number of drivers, the company is likely to incur high wages in terms of allowances of the drivers. Consequently, the company only pays the drivers for the time they are on duty. During low seasons, some of the drivers who are normally contracted on temporary basis are not paid the allowances unless they are on duty.

Easy Coach Company strives to give its customers the best possible service. They were the pioneers to have invested in spacious, well ventilated Waiting Lounge facilities for transit and local customers. These lounges are fitted with TV sets and are feature clean and have well maintained basic amenities.

Instead of being a jack of all trades, the company outsources some non-core services, rather than spend the scarce time and resources in developing these capabilities in-house. Such services include hiring and training of its workforce, cleaning both the buses and premises, and security. This gives the company ample time to concentrate on the core activity, which is offering value services to its clients. This is the cardinal competence on which the company focuses. Many companies are ultimately decided on the basis of public opinion and mass market consumer perceptions. In business, perception is reality.

## 5.4 Kept a Low Profile

Over aggressiveness can kill a company early on. By keeping low profile and staying out of view, an aggressor is not seen as a threat to bigger rivals that could easily crush the smaller businesses, if the incumbents devoted their resources to taking the challenger head on.

This strategy goes against the grain in business field. In an overcrowded market place, it is always advisable to ‘shout to be heard.’ This implies that the intruding company needs to be aggressive in order to win customers, and gain value. This means the small and inexperienced competitor attacks the giant(s) head-on but Yoffie and Kwak advice against this move. They say that attracting attention may only best suit business – to - business (B2B) markets and in sectors where network effects are strong. In the service industry, where factors influencing the choice borders subjectivity, the goal can be accomplished without provoking a full frontal attack.

Judo strategists employ the “puppy –doggy-ploy” (a term borrowed from economist Drew Fudenberg and Jean Tirole), steadily building market momentum, while cultivating unthreatening image not to illicit an attack. They move quickly to define their competitive space, challenging their competitors to compete by new and unfamiliar rules. Challengers keep low profile and avoid head - to - head battle that they are too weak to win. It is purely defensive.

In its inception stages, the challenger should keep low profile, and avoid pronounced, grand entry. Easy coach company, in its initial stages, remained “extremely confidential”, by avoiding its service announcements and other publicities, infavour of direct marketing campaigns, making it difficult for its competitors to imitate the targeted service. And to use catchment words of Sun Tzu in war (business)... “let your object be victory, not lengthy campaigns.” Tzu says that the challenger to attack the incumbent where he is unprepared, while appearing where he is not expected.

Easy Coach Company opened its doors for operations in December holidays. During this time, the demand for the public transport service is high. Consequently, the incumbents could not feel its impact. The massive Akamba has the financial muscle to counter Easy coach launch through aggressive promotions that would have prevented its market penetration. Consequently, the company faced little direct retaliation by the incumbents in the market routes pioneered. This helped it develop a strong profitable business before Akamba realized that a new powerhouse has been born. In his own words Sun Tzu says, “When able to attack, we must seem unable, when using forces, we must seem inactive, when we are near, and we must make the enemy believe we are far away...”

The challenger finds a way to play off the links between the business it is targeting and the incumbent's existing business. Easy Coach Bus did not stir up the fog by tactfully hiding high prices through preserved image of quality, there by frustrating comparison shoppers.

### **5.5 Defined its Competitive Space**

While the “puppy dog ploy” is by large defensive, this strategy is largely offensive. Here, the company rise and excel at a few key skills e.g. cutting costs. Competing with a champion at what he is best at is a losing game. But every champion has a weakness, because he is invested heavily in his core strength. The challenger can take advantage of the weak points to define a game it can win.

Skilled Judo strategists like Dubinsky (Yoffie and Kwak 2002) understand that in corporate world, speed is a means, not an end. While moving quickly, companies remain wary of becoming overextended and creating an opening for competition. It is important to realize that speed should never be an obsession to the point where it excludes other critical concerns, such as service quality, customer satisfaction, and long—run profitability. This is the basis on which Easy Coach operates. The company's management realized that even as domestic market share increases, it needs to concentrate on delivering the value to its clients locally, expanding its operations locally slowly, but with surety.

### **5.6 Followed Through Fast**

By combining the first two movement techniques, a company opens a window of opportunity. Next, the challenger uses this opening to strengthening her position through continuous attack, before the competitor(s) sees through ‘puppy-dog-ploy’ and rises to the challenges of a new competitive space, and seeks to bring the advantage of superior size and strength into play. Following through fast can make the incumbent postpone the day of retaliation, and make the most its early lead. The challenger needs to learn how to engage with opponents in order to win. This is where balance comes to play. Rather that oppose strength for strength, judo strategists suggest that the challenger should learn to conserve their resources and maintain their balance by first giving way. Then they use their opponent's momentum to help bring them down.

By concentrating on its key competence – comfort and convenience - Easy Coach Company defined its own niche, serving a particular market. To maintain this image and to stay a head of the competitor and its allies, Easy Coach Company concentrates on buying new buses at least ones a year. Additionally, some key practices helped the company outrun its competitors.

Firstly, unlike its competitor, Easy Coach Company avoids ‘rocket science’ and lengthy wish lists that could delay its operations. Given its humble financial base, the company purchases its buses one by one

every year. This is to make sure that it has the most modern buses, which deliver the much preferred values to its clients.

Secondly, the company also includes its experts in seating designs from the beginning, to make sure that the seating arrangements are customized. Given that the company designs the buses interiors by itself, it is able to follow the hearts of its clients, which is the 'most important asset' it has, as intoned one operation manager.

Having set the competition momentum in the transport market, Easy Coach company 'tuned' in and uses this momentum to bring them down. Easy Coach Company has used its core competencies to influence the future course of action in this industry. Today, Easy Coach Company is the market leader, setting the pace with every twist in the market.

This technique has helped Easy Coach control the future of transport industry in the country, even in the face of stiff competition. This helps the company keep an upper hand in encounters with its more powerful competitors.

The company has focused on time value and comfort. The buses depart and arrive in time, as per the schedule, with some acceptable level margin of accuracy. Unlike most players in this market that wait for their buses to fill-up, Easy Coach Company operates within a tight time schedule. "This has made it possible to plan with the service provider", one passenger says. "I am a busy lady. I criss-cross this country for business, and I wouldn't want to use any transport that waits for no one." The company has streamlined the market by pioneering the value speed. It focuses on the critical mass by starting with comfortable buses, which improves with time, and operating on fixed traveling schedules down to the book rules. This value-delivery has helped push Easy Coach Company towards a market share of 70% of western Kenya market in less than four years.

### **5.7 Mastering the Balance:**

Rather than oppose its competitors strength for strength, Easy Coach Bus Company has learnt to effectively and efficiently use its resources, and maintain its balance by, first letting the pioneer have its way. Easy Coach Bus Company for sometime operated as the market follower, by letting Akamba have its way, before following in its footsteps. The Easy Coach Bus has mastered the technique of engaging with its opponents in order to win. This is what has kept it above board in this highly competitive public transport business.

## **5.8 Avoided Tit – For - Tat**

Through gripping, a challenger can sometimes alter a competitor's incentives sufficiently to head off a battle. Eventually, the incumbent will decide to attack. Should this happen, keeping the balance is a challenge. Never match his or her moves. Study the rival before deciding which move to counter. "Go to school on your competitor" as Intuit founder Scott Cook likes to say. Find out what works and what is just a "marketing flash in the pan". Separate the truly compelling propositions from the chaff to be ignored. Figure out which moves you can match without getting dragged out your depth and craft counter attacks that play to your strengths when you cannot afford to respond in kind. This is to say, among others: Meet the competition on your own terms and stepping up grass root marketing and promotions

Matching an opponent's move makes sense in some situations: when the challenger can match without provoking an escalatory response, for example, or in a case where you can easily neutralize the opponent's advantage and recapture the lead. But if matching would mean getting dragged into a war of attrition, or a pure trial of strength, then resist the temptation to fight tit-for-tat, and strike back only at your own terms instead. Strategically, the last thing a company wants is to be locked into a tit-for-tat struggle or a war of attrition, as a tit-for-tat often becomes.

This is the message that Akamba ought to have heeded. Angered by the ability of Easy Coach Company to command a bigger share of the market, Akamba Bus Company released all its fleet, as a way of countering Easy Coach Company's' move. This was the mistake they made. Their buses are old, and they rarely keep time of departure, as much as their rule-books say so. Most of their work-force, especially the transport crew is equally aged.

Instead of taking Akamba head on by, for example, equally increasing its fleet on the road, Easy Coach Company focused on comfort, and developed this core competence o give it a competitive advantage over other competitors equally.

The company has stepped up its marketing strategies. It runs travelling offers to its customers during certain periods of the year, especially during off-season, so as to attract more travelers to its service. Additionally, the company makes such offers to its customers on board as provision of drinking water, calendars, and biscuits. This strategy has helped drive up its ticket sales.

## **5.9 Used Akamba's Force for its Advantage**

Gripping the rival and avoiding tit-for-tat helps minimize the impacts of a competitor's attack. In Push when pulled, you go one step further by using your opponent's momentum to your advantage. By incorporating a competitor's product, or service, or technique into your attack, you can through him off balance and confront him with painful choice: whether to abandon his initial strategy or to watch it fail.

Akamba bus service has a wide network within and without the country. Easy Coach Company took advantage of this in its operations (see appendix 1). While launching its service, Easy Coach Company plies the same routes as Akamba. Majorly, the company uses western Kenya routes which coincidentally, are among the busiest Kenyan routes, with higher demand for public transport due to the regions' high population. This made the company match Akamba effortlessly. Akamba was unable to notice its threatening competitor due to the guaranteed demand for the service.

Additionally, Easy Coach Company poaches Akambas' employees, and offer them better package. These employees have undergone training by the larger incumbent, which has the necessary capacity to train. Hence, Easy Coach Company does not incur a lot of costs in training and development of its workforce.

### **5.10 Accepted the Inevitable Losses and minimized them**

Ukemi is the technique of falling safely and with minimum loss of advantage in order to return more effectively to the fight. This implies that even in partial or temporary defeat, you should give in to your opponent's momentum, rather than resist and risk losing control. Irrespective of how good a business is, it can never win in every skirmish against all its rivals. But losing a battle need to lead to losing the war. By beating a strategic retreat, the challenger can conserve its resources, and re-group in a better position for the confrontation ahead, and re-build momentum.

Ukemi is more critical for smaller firms facing determined opponents. Prime questions may include, but not limited to the following: which privileges can be withdrawn?

Any possibilities of cutting down some unnecessary expenses, and if so, by how much? Such considerations may be painful for a company, but it has a far reaching benefit in the long run. Larger companies like Akamba, of course, have both the organizational and financial resources necessary to absorb a temporary loss, unlike a small start-up like Easy Coach Bus.

During post-election violence of the year 2007, it was reported in the Kenyan media that Easy Coach Bus Company lost three buses around Kericho area. The buses were hijacked and vandalized by rogue demonstrators who had no regard for law. This of course was a greater loss to the company, and being a small timer in this competitive industry; this was a great setback.

The company has partnered with Kenya police and other private security firms to offer security to its buses, its clients and their luggage in transit. This was done as a precautionary measure to minimise the losses in future.

When Easy Coach Bus failed to seize Nairobi – Arusha route, the amount of investment it had put in place – physical, time, and monetary – it had to swallow the bitter pill and learn its lessons the hard way.

Consequently, it retreated, probably for strategic planning. After a while, today, the company has opened Nairobi – Kampala route to serve the neighbouring country Uganda’s market. This was done after a careful evaluation of the past mistakes that it had made plying the Kenya – Tanzania route.

Leverage can make it more difficult for a competitor to complete effectively, even after he has made a decision to match an attack.

Akamba Bus Service has the advantage of size. This is its main undoing. The size is a limitation to change. Easy Coach Company, being smaller in size, is able to make changes in its operations depending on the reigning circumstances. For example, the company makes special offers to special groups like students, giving them discounted rates. This is done during peak times as when schools close or is opening. This kind of fluid decision can only be made by smaller firms like Easy Coach with less strict procedures, rules, and policies compounded by red tape by its management.

Easy Coach has developed a brand name that has become a house hold name in the public transport industry. This is a strong asset that the company relies on to drive its competitiveness.

Easy Coach Company has developed the necessary brand name in transport industry. The company though is still tailing Akamba Company as far as this intangible asset is concerned. In its humble size, the company has embarked on technological innovations, i.e. electronic ticketing in some of its major outlets, CCTV in its waiting lounges; radio calls in communication with its officers in the field and other towns. This has enabled it benchmark effectively with Akamba. Akamba tries to match Easy Coach Company’s fares on major routes, but only at the cost of cannibalizing its own sales. Moreover, even if Akamba were willing to make this sacrifice, Akamba is at a permanent disadvantage in competing head-to-head. They could never match Easy coaches’ profitability if they charged the same prices due to the cost of maintaining the assets – the large number of permanent employees, fleets, big city terminals- that had originally underwritten their strength.

### **5.11 Leveraged Akamba’s Partners**

By leveraging opponent’s partners the challenger can turn opponent’s allies into breaks on his ability to respond. In addition to investing in valuable assets, many powerful competitors have built up networks of suppliers, distributors, “complementors”, who are a significant source of strength. By exploiting differences among them, the challenger can turn rivals’ partners into false friends. Using this old tactic of divide and conquer rule, saw dissension within the opponent’s camp. The challenger can set old allies at odds by creating situations where their interests are no longer aligned. Even the most solid-looking block is likely to yield up a fissure to be exploited. This can be done through: offering more products or service at the same price and offering premium.

During its initial operations, Easy Coach Company had no capacity offer value services to its clients owing to its small size then. It became inevitable to form strategic alliance with other firms, especially to offer non-core services that were crucial to its functions e.g security, insurance, training of workforce, and cleaning services. The firms offering such services are the same ones offering the same services to its competitor, Akamba. They include St. Johns Ambulance (for first aid education) and KK and JRS (to offer security services).

Technological firms offering the necessary soft wares and hardware are key sources of strength to Easy Coach Company, just as well as to its competitors. These firms will be able not only to update the company on the latest technology of operations, but also make such offers at subsidized costs. Depending on the level of operations, such companies should be treated with high level of respect and honour that they deserve. This should be done in order to make Easy Coach Bus Company be their preferred number one choice in these provisions.

Business environment, just like Judo sport, is highly fluid and unpredictable. Therefore, it is impossible for the challenger to predict the reaction of the incumbent. Some judo strategies may not work in some business environments.

Public transport industry is highly subjective, especially in customer preference; hence these ten judo techniques may not equally work. However, the use of following judo techniques have been noted to missing, yet are still equally useful, though it is not easy to employ.

## **5.12 Gripped Akamba**

By gripping an opponent early, the challenger may succeed in pre-empting competition. The challenger makes it unnecessary to fight by building positive relationships with larger rivals. This will create less incentive for them to fight back. Build relationships with current and future rivals that limit their room for maneuver, or allow it to benefit at their expense. For example,

- Form partnerships e.g. both Akamba bus and Easy Coach companies partnered with Kenya police to offer securities at their offices country wide. This means that the two must equally co-exist mutually since they are being served by same service providers.
- Acquisitions: In its initial stages, Easy Coach Company would acquire its buses from the same distributor as Akamba, and use the same personnel to customize the buses.

These may seem like a win-win situation for both companies, when it's really a way to defend your position in the industry. Equally, Easy Coach offered its services along the same routes. This tactic called



“co-opetition.” Competing and co-operating with the rival at the same time. This is mainly done to reduce the opponents’ incentives to develop its own capabilities.

### **5.13 Leveraged Akamba’s Competitors**

In this strategy, the rivals’ competitor is used to wear him down, as the old adage goes “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” By leveraging opponent’s competitor, the challenger can confront a rival with a double challenge that will be difficult to match: First, deciding to co-operate with his competitors, and secondly, convincing them to co-operate with him. There are many ways to leverage an opponent’s competitor, and as Yoffie and Kwak suggest, this can be done by:

- Adding value on top of the competitor’s product or service

Easy Coach Company decided to use new buses that it buys annually, to complement its value and comfort image it has built. Equally, Easy Coach Company donates pure mineral drinking water to passengers at no additional cost. This has enables the company builds and maintains its image as caring and sensitive to its clients. Both companies specialize in long distance transport business, both day and night. Offering these items especially in the day goes a long way in helping the passengers during their ‘safari.’

- Building coalitions with the competitor

The kind of co-opetition seen between the two companies is in the way their non-core services are provided. Easy Coach Company uses the same service providers used by Akamba to provide such services such as but not limited to security, insurance, cleaning, and technological. This enables Easy Coach company leverage Akamba’s service, so as to maintain the service provision. Such co-opetition emphasizes the spirit of coexistence.

## **6 Limitations of the Study and Directions for Further Research**

This qualitative exploratory study had the following limitations:

- a) The reliance on a few branch managers of the two bus companies conveniently sampled. There is need to have a more exhaustive set of managers to interview to enhance the credibility of data collection
- b) Selection of the bus customers interviewed was skewed towards only 3 destinations of the buses network destinations. There is need to explore customers in other destinations as location could influence customer perceptions

- c) The utilization of a qualitative research limited the level of quantitative analysis and interpretation that could be employed on the research. Future studies may employ quantitative research frameworks to enhance statistical rigor.

However, the study advances the following propositions for further conceptual and empirical research:

**Proposition 1:** Judo strategy implementation enhances organizational market competitiveness.

**Proposition 2:** Judo strategy implementation improves customer experience.

**Proposition 3:** Customer experience affects organizational market competitiveness.

## 7 Managerial and Theoretical Implications of the Study

The findings of the study and the suggestions for future research proposed are expected to contribute significantly to knowledge that could be used by the management of public transport sector to enhance their market competitiveness in particular and the general comprehension of implementation of the judo strategy by business executives and scholars.

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## Appendices

Appendix 1: Road Network in the East African Region Covered by Akamba Bus and Easy Coach

