

## **THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF PT. AURORA EXECUTIVE PLACEMENT CONSULTANT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**Armaan Arora<sup>1)</sup>, Jacob Donald Tan<sup>2\*)</sup>**

<sup>102)</sup>*Universitas Pelita Harapan, Tangerang*

**Email: Jacob.tan@uph.edu**

### **ABSTRACT**

In a country of 273.8 million people, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the job market in Indonesia. The pandemic has caused a slowdown in economic activity and disrupted supply chains, leading to job losses, reduced hiring and retaining talent. These skill shortages have had a significant impact on the economy and businesses, as they struggle to find skilled workers to meet their demands. With the shortage in hiring PT. Aurora Executive Placement Consultant a human resource, Recruitment Company is still serving in the market because of their competitive advantage in the market as other companies in the market have failed. This research uses qualitative methods with interviews and questionnaire as the main data collection method with subjects ranging from various levels of employees, executives, and clients of PT. Aurora Executive Placement Consultant. Dynamic Database, Taylor Made For Clients, Digital Transformation, Talent Matching From Social Networking, Aggressive Direct Marketing, Communication, Industry Expertise, Pay Cut Reimbursement, and Health Protocols, Trust In Owners Integrity & Knowledgeability and Assessment Tools are some of the most impactful competitive advantages of PT. Aurora Executive Placement Consultant compared to its competitor in executive search. I would recommend for future study on executive search firms experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** recruitment, competitive advantage, COVID-19, case study

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Executive search is a specialised type of recruitment aimed at attracting highly skilled senior management talent to an organisation. It is typically used to fill strategically important roles, including CEO, CFO, COO, Head of Departments, and GMs. Also known as head-hunters, such firms play a crucial role in the recruitment process for companies around the world. Head-hunters specialize in sourcing, identifying, assessing, and recruiting top talent for specific roles, often at senior and executive levels. By utilizing their expertise, networks, and resources, companies can save time and effort in finding the right candidates at the right time for their open positions. The head-hunting industry has continued to evolve and grow. Head-hunters provide valuable insights and market intelligence to companies. They have a deep understanding of the job market, industry trends, and the qualifications and skills that are in high demand.

The Executive Search Firms also had to make changes & work remotely because of COVID – 19. Most of the research, filtering short-listing and selection processes had to be done remotely. With in-person interviews no longer possible, recruiters had to shift to virtual recruitment processes. Most enterprises had stopped hiring for a while. This severely

affected ES Firms revenue. With focus on digitization, the demand for tech roles increased and job requirement for regular roles changed during the pandemic. A Business Development Manager had to be tech-savvy and reach out to target clients digitally, rather than depending on off-line meetings. The Executive Search Firms had to re-design and re-engineer their processes and product-mix & service offering to stay competitive.

PT. Aurora Executive Placement Consultant (PT Aurora) was established in 2009. Aurora EPC is a placement consulting firm that helps companies identify and hire top executive talent. The firm provides executive search, recruitment, and staffing services to clients in a variety of industries. They work with clients to understand their specific needs and then use their network and expertise to identify and attract top executive candidates. They provide support throughout the hiring process, from initial candidate screening to final negotiations and onboarding.

However, because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, PT. Aurora's revenues and placements each year have decreased. Financial data regarding PT. Aurora is shown in Figure 4. We can see that PT. Aurora completed 302 placements for the year 2013 and 418 placements for the year 2014, resulting in a 35% increase in revenue during this time. With 486 people placed in 2015, Aurora EPC had a 22% rise in revenue over 2014. In 2016, Aurora EPC placed 573 people, a 47.2% increase over the previous year. 786 people were placed by Aurora EPC in 2017, a 17.86% increase from the previous year. 2018 had a 32.05% growth over 2017 with 1109 people placed by PT. Aurora. Aurora EPC increased its revenue by 27.85% and completed 1802 deployments in 2019. In 2020, Aurora EPC had 285 deployments and -82.3% less income than in 2019. In 2021, Aurora EPC had 314 placements and increased its revenue by 62.1% over the previous year. In 2022, Aurora EPC had 818 placements and increased income by 144.7% over the previous year.

PT. Aurora experienced a significant decline during the pandemic. Despite of this, it continues to experience a year-over-year rise in the number of orders, even though the revenues level and placement has not reached the numbers of the pre-pandemic. Thus, this study investigated the competitive advantage of PT Aurora during the pandemic how it can sustain in the midst of rivalry. Based on the research problem, the followings are the research questions:

1. What strategic factors contribute to the competitive advantage Of PT. Aurora during pandemic COVID-19?
2. How did PT. Aurora implement or execute the strategic factors that contribute to its competitive advantage during the pandemic COVID-19?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Head-hunter & Recruitment**

A head-hunter is a business or person that conducts job recruitment on behalf of an employer. Companies use head-hunters to uncover talent and find people who fit specific job needs. Executive recruiters, head-hunters, and executive search are all terms used to describe the work that they do. Head-hunters may have a pool of candidates for positions, or they may be aggressive in their search for talent by examining the staff of rival companies. When there is a need for speed and they are unable to identify the ideal candidate on their

own, employers frequently turn to head-hunters. The hiring manager and other participants in the recruiting process support recruitment, which is an important aspect of human resource (HR) management. A company's bottom line may be significantly impacted by effective recruitment activities that make it stand out and more desirable to prospective employees.

### **Competitive Advantage**

Competitive advantage means businesses should seek policies that result in the production of premium items that can be sold in the market for high prices. Porter emphasized productivity growth as the focus of national strategies. For PT. Aurora in the executive search industry, where firms have an advantage in both market competition and efforts to seize its target market. Challenges are frequently the fundamental root of a reason that forms and determines the competitiveness of the competitive advantage of the industry while generating competitive advantage. Every company that competes has a competitive advantage in every field. A competitive advantage that is strong or well-qualified will almost certainly last longer than that of its rivals. Depending on the challenges or issues that each competitor wants to address, the competitive advantage also frequently varies between competitors.

### **VRIO Framework**

A framework called VRIO is used to assess an organization's resources and capabilities. Resources are defined as collections of prospective goods or services, and a corporation can only employ such resources effectively if it knows how to do so. As a result, even while some resources might have the potential to provide a useful good or service, the outcome won't become apparent until the organization can use the resources well. The VRIO framework can be used to determine whether a company's resources and competencies are a strength or a weakness. Value, Rarity, Inimitable, Organization, or VRIO framework, is an acronym made up of the first letters of each of its element names. A company's resources can be examined using the VRIO framework to produce a high-quality analysis that could give it a long-lasting competitive edge to them.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The type of data collected is primary data which is obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with AURORA'S management. The type of interview used will be with open and close-ended questions. Using interviews as the method of the research is to achieve a more in-depth understanding of the competitive advantages of one of the surviving recruitment companies in Indonesia and how they have positioned themselves in the market against the competitors during COVID-19.

The sampled profile of the research (Table 1) will be PT Aurora's management ranging from staff levels to managerial levels to assess its competitive advantage from various points of view in the market. The triangulation of informants and data collection methods are utilized to ensure the validity of data. The data were analysed utilizing thematic

data analysis and patterns to identify emerging notions reinforcing PT. Aurora's competitive advantage.

*Table 1, List of Informants*

Name	Position	Age	Details
Mukesh Arora (I-1)	Founder, CEO	57-60	Mr. Mukesh is the CEO and founder of PT. Aurora. He is a person who started and leads the company. Mr. Mukesh is responsible for making strategic decisions, managing resources, and ensuring the success and growth of the business.
Kamna Arora (I-2)	Director	27-30	Miss Kamna is the director of PT. Aurora. She is responsible for overseeing the company's management, providing strategic guidance, and ensuring that the company is operating in the best interest of its shareholders.
Astrid Anastasia (I-3)	Head Recruiter	30-35	Ms. Astrid is a Head Recruiter in PT. Aurora. She is responsible for managing a company's recruitment efforts, developing recruitment strategies, sourcing, and identifying potential candidates, conducting interviews, and hiring employees that fit the customer's organizations culture and needs.
Salwa Filsa Salsabil (I-4)	Associate Consultant	26-28	Mrs. Salwa is an Associate Consultant in PT. Aurora. She assists in delivering services to clients by conducting research, analysing data, and supporting the development of recommendations to help clients solve business problems with the help of the right talent.
Prima Ekayana (I-5)	Admin Head	40-45	Mrs. Eka is the Admin Head of PT. Aurora. she is responsible for managing the administrative operations of the company, including overseeing support staff, developing, and implementing policies and procedures, and ensuring the efficient and effective functioning of the company. She is also one of the key people in the company.
Nadhifa Laras Hapsari (I-6)	Associate Consultant	21-25	Miss. Laras is an Associate Consultant in PT. Aurora. She is in an entry-level consulting position that supports senior consultants in analysing data, developing recommendations, and delivering solutions to clients in a specific industry or functional area.
Nusey L. Hanum (I-7)	Client	33-38	Mrs. Nusey is the HR Personnel & General Affair Manager in ICS Compute. ICS Compute is a quality-driven cloud consulting and cloud system integration company that aids businesses in resolving operational

			issues and creating the computing infrastructure of the future.
Abhishek Mehta (I-8)	Client	46-50	Mr. Abhishek Mehta is the President Director of Voith Hydro Indonesia. One of the most important commercial partners for owners of power plants is Voith Hydro. Energy storage systems and the production of hydropower are included in this. As a systems supplier, Voith Hydro offers a wide variety of products, including pumps, turbines, and measuring and control technology.

#### 4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

A business can gain a competitive advantage by utilizing its resources and unique qualities to expand its market and outperform rivals in terms of performance. The following propositions are the factors that contribute to the competitive advantage of PT. Aurora:

##### **Proposition (P1). Dynamic Database (V1) Contributes To The Competitive Advantage (V12)**

The management of PT. Aurora realizes the importance of having a dynamic database in the executive search industry. Executive search firms should have their own database. It was admitted by their executives that they have a 4.5 million candidate database.

*" We have a dynamic database of about 4.5 million candidates which is constantly updated with the change in career progression of candidates." Mr. Mukesh (I-1)*

*" Have a database of over 4.5 million profiles & our own private expansive networks which allow us access to candidates that others do not ." Miss Kamna (I-2)*

For these reasons, it gives the recruiters a platform to quickly search and sort through this data to find the applicants who are best suited for job openings.

##### **Proposition (P2) Tailor Made for Clients (V2) Contributes To The Competitive Advantage (V12)**

Tailor-made approach is very important as per and PT. Aurora understands that tailoring the executive search strategy and the services to the specific roles and requirements of each client.

*“We have a client focused approach, We try to determine what exact challenges each client is trying to overcome by hiring for this role.” Mr. Mukesh (I-1)*

*“Personalize as per Client’s needs, which ensures we get them exactly what they want.” “The understanding that a client does not want to go through a thousand profiles to select a candidate.” “what the client wants and then proposing the 3 best candidates that suit those criteria.” Miss Kamna (I-2)*

For these reasons, it's very important to have tailor-made approach to have a competitive edge in the market.

### **Proposition (P3). Digital Transformation (V3) Contributes To The Competitive Advantage (V12)**

The process of using digital technology and tools to enhance and streamline the search process, increase the quality of candidate matches, and improve the candidate experience is known as "digital transformation" in executive search. To increase the effectiveness and precision of the search process, this may entail the use of online platforms, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and other digital tools.

*“ Digital Transformation of most of our functions and processes. Marking attendance via WhatsApp every morning at 8.30 AM and Daily Report via all team members of what was worked upon and what achieved during the day. Change in Invoicing and payments via soft copies instead of hard copies.” “Almost all our activities in the work flow process have been enabled to be executed digitally, from any location from any PC, tablet or hand held devices. ”Mr. Mukesh (I-1)*

*“Digitalization: digitized ourselves & added it is a priority when interviewing potential candidates”*

Overall for these reasons, PT. Aurora is undergoing a digital transition to give clients quicker and more accurate results while also enhancing the candidate and client experience.

### **Proposition (P4). Talent Matching via Social Networking (V4) Contributes To The Competitive Advantage (V12)**

The technique of finding and contacting possible applicants for executive roles via social networking sites is known as talent matching from social networking in executive search.

*“Increased use of tech and such to reach a bigger audience. LinkedIn helps” Miss Kamna (I-2)*

*“LinkedIn. Because some of the positions I hold have certain qualifications, and special requests from the client such company Industries, education, ethics, etc. and through LinkedIn I can find candidates who fit these qualifications.” Ms. Astrid (I-3)*

*“I think the company techniques that we use for prospecting are Websites/online databases (like LinkedIn) and Candidate replies to job postings (like Job street, jobs DB, email replies).”*

From this, we can see that PT. Aurora, use talent matching from social networking utilizing social media sites like LinkedIn to find and screen suitable candidates according to their credentials, competencies, and experience during the pandemic. To connect with individuals who might not be actively looking for new positions but who would be interested in exploring new responsibilities. This was a way PT. Aurora compete with competitors during the pandemic

### **Proposition (P5). Aggressive Direct Marketing (V5) Contributes To The Competitive Advantage (V12)**

The market that PT. Aurora is in his executive search. They achieve this by forging a powerful brand identity, which entails developing a unique brand name, logo, and expertise. Creating social media profiles, building a strong online presence, and consistently providing top-notch material that highlights the company's knowledge and experience are all part of this process.

*"I've found out about PT. Aurora by searching it on the internet (Google)" "Yes, sure " Mrs. Nusey(I-7)*

*"I got reference of PT Aurora Executive Placement Consultant from a Senior Executive known to me from the industry who was working with Indian Multinational and stationed in Jakarta. His company had used PT Aurora services. " Mr. Abhishek Mehta (I-8)*

### **Proposition (P6). Digital Communication (V6) Contributes To The Competitive Advantage (V12)**

Communication for PT. Aurora refers to the exchange of information between a firm, clients, and candidates during the search process. Effective communication is crucial for establishing and maintaining relationships, setting clear expectations, and keeping all parties informed throughout the search process. As per the statement below.

*" We communicated regularly & digitally (WhatsApp & zoom). Talked to dormant clients as well so that when they are ready to start hiring again, they immediately come to us. " Miss Kamna (I-2)*

*"If I was to rate it I would give PT. Aurora a rating of 8 from 10" Mrs. Nusey(I-7)*

*"Communication is swift, professional and purposeful. Through set of SOPs, PT Aurora manages the communication between Hiring Company and candidates in a very professional manner which saves time and effort." Mr. Abhishek Mehta (I-8)*

**Proposition (P7). Industry Expertise (V7) Contributes To The Competitive Advantage (V12)**

Expertise in the industry is a crucial skill for PT. Aurora because it enables them to add value to their clients by locating and luring top talent with the required knowledge and experience in each field and by offering insightful commentary on problems and trends unique to that field. As per the following statements:

*"We have a dedicated team our consulting team has an average experience of 12+ years. Candidates are more open to talk when a professional is reaching out to them. "* Mukesh (I-1)

*"We have so far used 3 agencies and overall we are very satisfied with PT Aurora and we do hope to continue doing business in future with PT Aurora " Mr. Abhishek Mehta (I-8)*

**Proposition (P8). Pay-Cut Reimbursement (V8) Contributes To The Competitive Advantage (V12)**

Another motivating factor for employees of PT. Aurora to continue to be loyal and responsible at work is employee compensation. So far, employees of PT. Aurora is satisfied with the compensation that has been given by the company. Satisfying compensation is any form of payment from the organization to employees for their contribution to doing their job. There are two types of compensation; direct financial (including wages, salaries, incentives, commissions, and bonuses) and indirect financial (benefits such as insurance, vacations, and child/family benefits). PT. Aurora employees have so far received compensation in the form of salaries, employee guarantees such as BPJS guarantees, employee incentives such as THR, and so on. The following is a statement is from Mr. Mukesh.

*"To remain lean all our teams collaborated and took a temporary pay cut. Ranging from 5% to 25%. The CXOs worked without pay for a few months & at 50% salary cut for the next few months till the business stabilised" "Subsequently the pay deduction amounts were reimbursed to all employees. Resource allocation was done on the basis of priority to those giving maximum output." Mr. Mukesh (I-1)*

**Proposition (P9) Uncompromising Health Protocols (V9) Contributes To The Competitive Advantage (V12)**

Health precautions are more crucial than ever for executive search companies. PT. Aurora to reduce the hazards connected with in-person interactions considering the COVID-19 epidemic.

*" We have developed new processes and acquired technologies, by using the same it allows the SOPs to be followed in any scenario: WFH, WFO or Hybrid. " " We are blessed with a committed & dedicated support team who took care of this challenge. Preemptive planning and timely execution were key to our success in this area. We were amongst the first companies to start social distancing and WFH at the start of the Pandemic. Hardware,*



*software and systems were set up in record time to avoid disruption & continuity at work.”  
Mr. Mukesh (I-1)*

PT. Aurora was one of the first few companies in Indonesia who started the WFH ( Work From Home) so that staff would not get affected with the COVID-19. This also helped PT. Aurora because they were ahead of the competition to put the online systems in place so nobody gets affected.

### **Proposition (P10). Trust in Owner Integrity & Knowledgeability (V10) Contributes To The Competitive Advantage (V12)**

Trust in the integrity and knowledgeability of the owner plays an important role for PT. Aurora, where felt by the clients directly. First, the owner feels the importance of maintaining and not breaking the trust in the integrity of the owner that has been built for a long time because this trust can help the company to continue to compete with competitors also the country knowledge he’s build over time helps PT. Aurora compete with competitors.

*The Executives of PT. Aurora shows me the importance of keeping up to date with latest News, Market trends & Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) labour laws. Mr Mukesh always emphasise that every day you must keep learning his favourite quote is ‘If we make something one percent better every day, we make it 365 percent better in a year. So we must keep learning every day. Because I keep learning one percent my knowledge is ahead of the competitors.’ (Field Note 2)*

*“PT Aurora provides budget headhunting solutions and its owner Mr Mukesh Arora has a deep understanding of Indian and Indonesian Business practices along with cultural nuances. This helps in better matchmaking of employees skills and company’s requirement of suitable manpower.” Mr. Abhishek Mehta (I-8)*

This is felt by the client. One of the factors that the client know is to have a loyal and strong relationship with PT. Aurora is because of the integrity and knowledgeability of Mr. Mukesh and this is shown from the statement of Mr. Abhishek Mehta.

### **Proposition (P11). Assessment Tools (V11) Contributes To The Competitive Advantage (V12)**

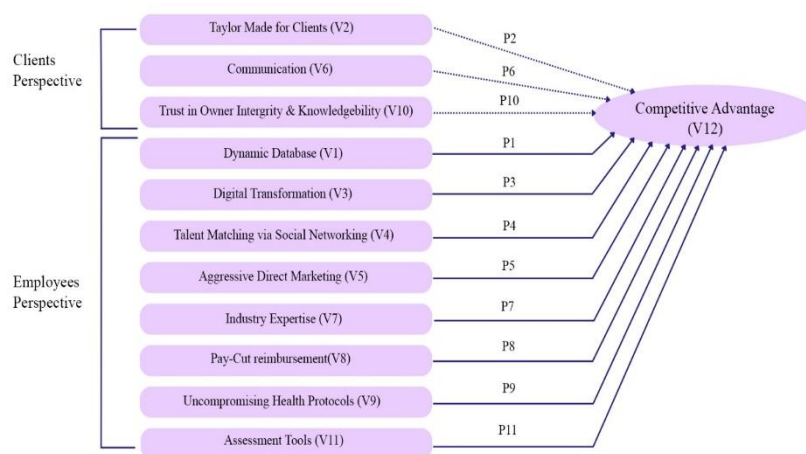
Executive search firms examine and test the skills, abilities, personality traits, and potential of executive candidates using assessment tools. These resources assist executive search firms in selecting the best applicant for a given position by assisting them in making more informed selections. the assessment tools used by PT. Aurora are as shown:

*" We have developed a range of assessment tools and techniques which cover a wide range of soft skills (leadership, teamwork, sales aptitude, employee reliability test etc) and hard skills (coding, marketing concepts, accounting, engineering tests). We also regularly establish candidate’s proficieny in languages, logic and math by way of specific tailor-made tests.” " Mr. Mukesh (I-1)*

*" PT Aurora performed the background check and helped to ascertain the candidate had issues in the past company on similar counts. This helped in taking a decision to find suitable replacement without further deterioration of situation. " Mr. Abhishek Mehta (I-8)*

## 5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher concluded after analysing the collected data that several characteristics or variables are essential for PT. Aurora's competitive advantage during the epidemic. Ten related propositions were created because of the analysis's discovery of ten latent variables, which were previously described in the findings that were addressed. The following is a presentation of the mini-model theory, which illustrates the connections between the discovered variables.



*Figure1: Mini Model Theory of Factors That Affect The Competitive Advantage of PT. Aurora During The Pandemic*

### Implications

Academicians might utilize the data and latent variables that the researcher collected and assessed as a new perspective when producing a further study on a related topic regarding a company's competitive advantage in a certain field. The researcher advises conducting more investigation into the topic and obtaining information from executive search firms about candidate and client perspectives, as these viewpoints are crucial in determining a company's competitive edge. It is also advised that the following researcher be able to learn more about the key rivals to establish a baseline for competitive advantage. Using these qualitative data, researchers can also do quantitative research.

The researcher hoped that the result of the research serve as a constructed writing on understanding the competitive advantage of PT. Aurora to add to the knowledge base of the management. As it is important to know your strength to be able to utilize them correctly. This knowledge can better serve to provide further insights for the executive search industry.

The theory constructed in this study enables PT. Aurora management to consider enhancing the elements that contribute essentially to the competitive advantage of the firm.

### Limitations & Recommendations

When conducting this research, there were several limitations. First, several interviews were shortened since some informants had important matters to attend to, which led to less productive interview sessions. More interviews with these sources could be conducted later. Second, certain information pertaining to the trade secrets of the company cannot be revealed in this study. Third, when an interview transcribed is translated, the meaning of the respondents may be lost. Fourth, information gathered from employees should be used as additional information to improve the data collection instruments. Fifth, to hire more interns from the company's clients and applicants To get deeper insights, additional research on the competitive advantage executive search firms experienced during the pandemic can be applied to other instances in this sector.

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