

MBA 599 – Strategic Management Case Project

This capstone course requires each student to construct a detailed and well-thought-out analysis of a business employing all the relevant strategic analysis tools studied in the course. This project will take the full term to complete. It is our sincere hope that you will find this project to be the most rewarding effort in your educational career.

Project Overview

This course is designed to help you develop strategic skills that can be used in management. The process of strategic planning is an iterative cycle of research and analysis, ending with a series of choices about what will be attempted and how it will be approached. The most *tangible* output is the strategic planning document. The most *important* output is the increased understanding that the participants acquire. Accordingly, the assessment of the final project will be heavily dependent on the quality of the strategic thinking inside that polished report. Students that focus on the expeditious completion of the steps may find that they have shortchanged the important and time-consuming exploration and thinking that is necessary to create a quality strategic case. Since not all tools can tell the planner which factors and alternatives are important to consider, the planner should pull in as much diverse information and perspectives as possible. Additionally, you should put yourselves in the competitor's shoes and consider how the "game" will play out. Your homework and subsequent improvements are intended to become a primary basis for the exploration and questioning that drives your strategic understanding and creative ideas. In addition, it is important to test your strategic thinking and your use of analytical tools in preparation for your final project.

Tips for Selecting an Organization

As you select an organization for your class project, it is important that you select one that is interesting, possibly useful to you in your career, industry, or interests, and allows you to explore strategic challenges in a meaningful way. If you select the industry in which you currently work, you must address two critical issues: (1) integrating and clearly citing existing information. (You will need to delineate work you've contributed as opposed to pre-existing information), and (2) succinctly presenting existing information while adding new insight, analysis, and plans that substantially add to strategy development, implementation, and/or assessment of the organization. An organization or industry you are interested in should give you better access to information although you need to pay careful attention to the points made above.

Do not underestimate the degree to which you will need to be an expert in the selected industry and related areas. It is impossible to create a strategy without understanding the terms, technologies, market changes, and so forth in great depth. As soon as you select a topic, you should establish (or monitor) news feeds from several major sources of business news to keep abreast of actions in your industry.

Public companies are preferred for these plans as SEC filings and investment analyses are available through research. Some of the firm's main competitors will likely be public so that you can research them as well. Large, diversified, companies can be difficult for purposes of this course (unless their diversification is relatively narrow, and largely in one "solutions space"). Large organizations (e.g. GE) may file consolidated reports, and you may not have access to dis-aggregated information on the division that you are analyzing. Additionally, it's better to select a company/industry under "duress" or at least struggling. The reason is it's very difficult to add new strategic ideas for a company that is doing well.

You may select any form of organization including profit, non-profit, and government organizations. However, please take into consideration that within these various organizations, the strategic thinking can be quite different and some can pose challenges for the planner. Most organizations have some type of customer base and opportunities for improvement. Charitable organizations compete against other nonprofits for time and money. Educational organizations compete for students. Regulated utilities compete for customers among themselves (e.g., gas versus electric) and in conjunction with governments

to attract new industry. Units of governmental entities may be the most difficult, but even those organizations have customers who can choose to live in a different locality or elect government officials willing to change the status quo. If you are undecided, medium or small-size competitive, profit-oriented organizations may provide the best platform for applying course concepts.

Project Deliverables

Phase 1 – Modules 1-3 (Outline for Strategic Management Case)

- Introduction of the company (limit to a maximum of three single-spaced pages).
 - Description of the firm and its products
 - Company history (brief history, critical events, competitors, leadership), including strategic elements of its history
 - Vision and mission statement ◦ Assessment of mission and vision
- External assessment ◦ EFE and CPM with strategic implications
 - Analysis of competitive position, opportunities, and threats
- Internal assessment ◦ IFE with strategic implications ◦ Financial ratio analysis with key conclusions and implications for strategic choice ◦ Overall analysis of internal capabilities and implications for your strategic decisions

Module 1: Select company and secure instructor approval. Once approved, create plan outline, insert current mission and vision.

Module 2: Complete an EFE and CPM for your company (including analysis and conclusions) and insert in your working draft which you will hold until you submit Phase 1 during Module 3. .

Module 3: Complete an IFE and calculate financial ratios (including analysis and conclusions) for your company and insert in your plan to submit at the end of Module 3.

Submit all of Phase 1 to the Dropbox **no later than Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EST of Module 3.** (This Dropbox basket is linked to Turnitin.)

Phase 2 – Modules 4-6 (includes revisions to Phase 1 based on the instructor's feedback)

- Internal assessment (continued from Phase 1—include IFE and financial ratios) ◦
 - Current strategy (brief description of the firm's current strategies), including current use of technology
 - SWOT matrix with strategic implications for the company ◦ BCG matrix with strategic implications for the company ◦ Space or other matrices with strategic implications for the company ◦ Possible strategic alternatives
 - Evaluation of current organizational structure
 - Recommendation changes (if needed) to the structure, culture (including values), processes, rewards, or technology

Module 4: Integrate instructor feedback from Phase 1.

Module 5: Develop SWOT, BCG, SPACE, and IE matrices with strategic implications for the company.

Module 6: Develop alternative strategies for your company with strengths and weaknesses of each.

Submit all of Phase 2 to the Dropbox **no later than Sunday 11:59 PM EST/EST of Module 6.** (This Dropbox basket is linked to Turnitin.)

Phase 3 – Modules 7-8 (includes revisions to Phase 2 based on the instructor's feedback)

□ Strategic analysis, choices, impact, and measurement ○

Product-positioning map

- Evaluation of strategies and objectives to achieve most favorable market position ○
 - Description of how you would implement your strategies ○ Milestones (steps for each major initiative with their timelines)
- Specific results you want to achieve including market, financial, and product or service goals
 - Financial projection (minimum three years) ○ Presentation with audio – see below
- Executive summary – see below

Presentation with audio

The final submission for your project includes developing a PowerPoint presentation with embedded audio files. Each slide must contain an audio file in which you offer insight to the material in the slide and key points the professor should take away from the visual information in the PowerPoint. You should minimize repeating points made in the slide other than emphasizing important components. To put this simply, please do not read the slides verbatim but make sure to add value to what is presented on the slide to improve the understanding of your work. The presentation with audio is a significant component of the final submission, so please make sure to offer your best work, speak clearly, emphasize the strategic implications of your work, and engage the viewer.

Executive summary (compiled with concise and critical elements from the detailed work)

While done as a last step, this goes in front of the report, after the index. A final and all-encompassing analysis is presented, along with the recommendations that you would make to the firm's board of directors. This includes identifying what you recommend, and briefly outlining alternatives considered, key implementation steps, and the impact of the implementation on the company's performance and competitive position.

Module 7: Develop a product-positioning map with strategic implications for the company.

Conduct final evaluation of alternative strategies and detailed description of selected strategy.

Module 8: Develop detailed implementation and assessment plan.

Complete financial projections.

Create presentation with audio.

Complete the executive summary and insert into the plan.

Complete all editing, verification, and citing of all sources, and insert graphs and illustrations.

Submit all of Phase 3 to **Chalk and Wire** no later than **Thursday 11:59 PM EST/EST** using the link in the Module 8 folder. **Students that do not submit the assignment to Chalk and Wire will receive a zero.** This is a key program assessment; the results are used to ensure students are meeting program goals. Video and PDF instructions can be found on the course home page. PDF instructions are also located in the Start Here folder. **(Chalk and Wire is linked to turnitin).**

Project Submission

Please do not jeopardize completing your MBA! Before you begin, read the plagiarism policy in the syllabus and catalogue. There is zero tolerance for plagiarism in this course. Any case of plagiarism will be taken seriously. All assignments will be submitted to Turnitin and be subject to additional validation by the professor. Work from prior classes cannot be used in this course without prior, written permission from the professor.

Project Evaluation

All sections of the plan are evaluated based on:

1. Correctness and completeness: models/matrices used in the case are reasonably sound/accurate and thorough.
2. Strategic analysis and conclusions: points made are insightful and clear with relative importance distinguished (not just a “rehash” of the facts).
3. Logical sequence and continuity of writing: the reader can seamlessly move from paragraph to paragraph or section without losing his or her train of thought.
4. Grammar, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure are at the graduate level.
5. External sources: the ability to integrate and interpret external sources of information. As a capstone class, the external research is extensive, relevant, and informative to the company's direction, its competition, industry, and choices.
6. Language: the effective use of standard business terms especially those emphasized in the David text and prior business courses.

See the full grading rubric in the Start Here folder.

Tips for Completing the Project

You should expect to build up a large mass of analyses before you can put together a coherent case. In the end, a great case will always look “simple” relative to the countless hours going down many different paths in order to build understanding. The volume of material generated can distract from the creative part of the process. The following suggestions are designed to serve as a reminder for things not identified distinctly in the assignments, the syllabus, or the textbook Plan preparation guidelines.

1. Company and industry background

Use your own judgment to determine the amount of background to include. Over-detailed company history is usually irrelevant and rarely improves the report. On the other hand, a history of strategic moves and competitive reactions might be very illustrative. Decide what to include based on whether that information is important to understanding the future environment and strategic choices. Market share, financial strength, brand image, and the like are always relevant strategically.

2. Address uncertainty

In your strategic analysis, make sure to state any assumptions related to your business. If you believe there is going to be high risk, describe contingency plans or alternate scenarios.

3. Discuss the things that create organizational culture and behavior necessary to support the strategy

- a. What operational and motivational processes create the culture (acting your way into a new way of thinking, identity orientation, incentives, etc.)?
- b. What organizational structure fits the mission/vision, the operational approach, and the need for adaptability or stability?
- c. Make sure to delineate your ethics standards including values the company lives by.

4. Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and internal/external (IE) matrices

Some of you may think that the BCG and IE matrices are not relevant to your project since your organization only reports one business segment. First, these exhibits are important to think through and are required even if they only have one product line. Second, there are often more segments in any organization than meets the eye. The reason to break up the business into component parts is to shed some light on the strategic positioning and future potential. Ask yourself, are there segments that behave differently (different customers, competitors, growth rates, success factors, etc.)? You can be sure that Wal-Mart is looking at grocery, clothing,

pharmacy, electronics, toys, garden, and automotive all separately, and possibly even separating seasonal items. For purposes of this class, approximations can be used whenever necessary to separate a subunit. Pushing the analysis down to a more detailed level forces you to recognize what you know and what you do not know. I am more concerned with strategic thinking than with availability of detailed data. You can put estimated numbers in your plans as long as a note is added explaining the basis, reasoning, and level of uncertainty.

5. **Implementation**

Your implementation strategy must show how it is aligned with your strategic objectives. The strategic-level implementation questions are mainly resource-related (where the money/people come from) and timing issues (when are initiatives expected to happen). In addition, if there is something specific mentioned in the analysis (e.g., a trend, a weakness, concerns about the competitive response) that affects implementation, then you need to include the relevant part of the implementation approach mentioned as part of the strategy. If there is not anything notable in these kinds of areas, then specific content is not required in the report.

6. **Overall assessment of the strategy**

As you prepare your strategies, it will be helpful to review Rumelt's four criteria: a.

Consistency

- i. Strategy should not present inconsistent goals and policies.
- ii. All of the pieces of your overall strategic approach should be aligned.

b. Consonance

- i. Strategy should examine sets of trends.

c. Feasibility

d. Advantage

- i. Strategy should include creation or maintenance of competitive advantage.

7. **Sources**

Follow APA style guide to write the case. Cite within the body of your case and include a reference list. This is particularly true for any source data that will come from financial reports and corporate websites.

Project Grading

Eighty percent (80%) of the course grade will be determined based on the Strategic Management Case as distributed below:

1. Phase 1: Proposal and initial analysis (20% of course grade)
2. Phase 2: Substantive draft (20% of course grade)
3. Phase 3: Final Case (40% of course grade)

Example Outline and Structure for the Strategic Plan (Headings)

The outline below is an example and should be modified to adapt to your company. The primary headings are good ways to organize your work into logical sections (e.g., internal analysis, external analysis, etc.).

Cover Page

Index

Executive Overview

Introduction of the Company

Description of the firm

Company history

- Vision and mission statement
- Strategic elements of the history
- Overall assessment

External Assessment

- EFE and CPM
- Analysis of competitive position, opportunities, and threats

Internal Assessment

- Financial ratio analysis
- IFE
- Analysis of internal capabilities and implications for your strategic decisions to follow
- Current strategy, including current use of technology
- Possible alternatives
- SWOT matrix
- BCG matrix
- Space or other matrices
- Description of core values you would use to create the desired culture
- Evaluation of current organizational structure
- Recommendation changes (if needed) to the structure, processes, rewards, or technology

Strategic Analysis, Choices, Impact, and Measurement

- Product-positioning map
- Evaluation of strategies and objectives to achieve most favorable market position
- Description of how you would implement your strategies
- Milestones (steps for each major initiative with their timelines)
- Specific results you want to achieve including market, financial, and product or service goals, and how and when they will be measured
- Financial projection (minimum three years)
- Presentation with audio