

Engineering Tripos Part IIB, 4E11: Strategic Management, 2024-25

Module Leader

[Prof Shaz Ansari](#) [1]

Timing and Structure

Lent term. 8 sessions + coursework.

Aims

The aims of the course are to:

- provide participants with an opportunity to discuss the strategic challenges facing managers in today's business environment and to develop a facility for critical strategic thinking.

Objectives

As specific objectives, by the end of the course students should be able to:

- show a critical, reflective approach to managerial concepts.
- show familiarity with some of the key models used in strategic analysis.
- show some understanding of these models' application and limitations.
- show a broad overview of managerial disciplines and their interdependency.

Content

Overview

Why are some firms more successful than others, and what, if anything, does strategy have to do with it? Because superior performance accrues to firms with a competitive advantage, this course examines how firms develop and maintain competitive advantage. Strategy is the field of management that has been developed to help general managers (as opposed to functional managers whose responsibilities focus on one particular function such as finance, production, marketing, human resources, IT etc.), make better decisions that will improve the competitive position of the organization in the long run and create value for its key stakeholders. The field of strategy is made up of all theories, concepts, methods and tools that top managers can use to ensure the profitable and long-term growth of their organizations. It divides into works on content of strategy - what activities and sectors the organization will compete in and how it will compete in those -, and process of strategy - the mechanisms by which organizations choose to compete in certain ways, activities and sectors and how they implement these choices. Both process and content approaches address issues of business and corporate-level strategy.

Course Content:

- Nature and context of strategic management
- Theories, concepts and models of strategic analysis
- Applications to strategic management practice

Learning Objectives

The fundamental focus of the strategy core course is on helping participants develop skills that will allow them to make robust strategic decisions in the face of uncertainty and complexity. By the end of the module participants will be able to synthesize the set of concepts and frameworks you have gained to address challenging strategic management problems. In particular, you will be able to:

- Analyze industry structure and environmental trends to assess industry potential
- Evaluate firms' competitive positioning and assess firm-level resources and capabilities
- Formulate business-unit and corporate strategies to achieve competitive advantage
- Evaluate and manage complex ethical and social issues facing firms in implementing strategy and organizing the firm for strategic success.

Method of Instruction

Method of Instruction:

The course will be taught through a mixture of case discussions, videos, and short lectures. There will be a variety of teaching modalities in order to keep the learning fresh and to appeal to learners with different learning styles. Each session of the course will focus on a specific subset of corporate strategic decisions. The class will mix theoretical content (with a particular focus on mastering the tools to present, frame and analyse a corporate strategy) and practical cases. Students will be invited to participate and share their thoughts on theoretical and practical considerations in relation with the content of the course. They should feel free to ask questions and discuss, especially if they want to clarify or challenge the content covered in the course. Students will be asked to present and challenge cases and other materials.

Assessment - Due March 27, 2025

Regarding the form of individual assessment, it will be 100% coursework (essay of 2,500 words):

You will prepare a complete strategic analysis of the current and prospects for a company of your choice. The paper should contain a comprehensive industry and market analysis, including a detailed analysis of relevant competitors, and conclude with strategic recommendations (including corporate and business strategies) for top management. The selection of companies for strategic analysis is entirely up to each student; however, firms in industries that are in transition or firms that are undergoing major strategic changes are potentially more interesting.

Teaching Staff

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Course Structure & Selected Readings

SESSION	DATE	TOPIC	READING
1.		What is Strategy and Strategic Management Frameworks	
2.		Generic Strategies and Competitive Advantage	
3.		Expansion Strategies and the Resource-based View	Case: Starbucks (K
4.		Acquisition of New Resources: Build, Buy, Borrow	
5.		Corporate Strategy	Case: Walt Disney C
6.		Strategic Innovation: Blue Ocean Strategy	
7.		Platform businesses and Non-Market Strategy	Case: Uber (HBS 9-
8.		Organization, Strategy and Society	

Book

Contemporary Strategy Analysis, 11th Edition

Robert M. Grant

ISBN: 978-1-119-81523-5 November 2021 544 Pages

Assignment Questions for cases

Session 3:

1. In the beginning, how was Starbucks different from other coffee options for coffee drinkers in the United States? What activities and assets did Starbucks leverage to differentiate itself from competitors? ?
2. When Starbucks was rapidly expanding its store locations in 2006–2009 it made specific changes in order to facilitate that growth. What did Starbucks gain—and give up—as a result of each change? ?
3. When Schultz returned to Starbucks as CEO in 2008, how had the competitive context changed since his first tenure running the firm? What had caused or facilitated the changes? ?
4. Why did Schultz respond the way he did to the changes he found in 2008? What was he trying to achieve? Were his responses effective or ineffective? ?
5. Did the introduction of VIA make sense in light of the market and the company's other actions? ?

Session 5:

1. Why has Disney been successful for so long?
2. What did Michael Eisner do to rejuvenate Disney? Specifically, how did he increase net income in his first four years?
3. Has Disney diversified too far in recent years?

Session 7:

1. Do you agree or disagree with Uber's surge pricing policy? What are the reasons it can be perceived as unfair? What does it mean to say that a pricing policy is exploitative? What are the risks of the policy to Uber? Given these risks, should Uber modify its policy?
2. Uber is notoriously aggressive in its business tactics. It frequently operates without getting regulatory approval and it often ignores legal concerns; as a consequence, the company has become a lightning rod for criticism. Do you agree with Uber's aggressive tactics? Is there a more diplomatic way for Uber to conduct its business? Should Uber be taking more of a "tiptoe" approach when it enters new markets? ?
3. Uber has become enormously popular among consumers in a very short period of time. How has the company accomplished this? ?
4. How well does Uber treat its drivers? From a driver's standpoint, is it better to drive for Uber or is it better to drive for a taxi/limo service? Is it economically more attractive to drive for Uber? What would you imagine are the biggest complaints drivers have about driving for Uber? What would you imagine are the most appreciated benefits? What is the profile of a typical Uber driver, and how does it compare to the profile of the typical taxi or limo driver? ?
5. How robust is Uber's operating model? Where are the weak links in its service model? Is Uber vulnerable? In what way? ?
6. In its relatively short life span, Uber has attracted a lot of media attention. Why is this? What is it about the Uber business model that is both compelling and polarizing? In addition, why has Uber managed to achieve such a high valuation? What are the pros and cons of a high valuation?

Strategic Management

The lectures will cover a range of topics that provide a basic introduction to strategic management. In each session, the lecturer will introduce a basic concept and explain its role in the strategic management process. The class will then analyse a case or discuss the situation facing some well-known firm in order to explore the application of the concept. The module will cover eight topics.

1. What is Strategy and Strategic Management Frameworks

2. Generic Strategies and Competitive Advantage

3. Expansion Strategies and the Resource-based View

4. Acquisition of New Resources: Build, Buy, Borrow

5. Corporate Strategy

6. Strategic Innovation: Blue Ocean Strategy

7. Platform businesses and Non-Market Strategy

8. Organization, Strategy and Society

Coursework

Coursework

Coursework activity: Final

You will prepare a complete strategic analysis of the current and future prospects for a company of your choice. The paper should contain a comprehensive industry and market analysis, including a detailed analysis of relevant competitors, and conclude with strategic recommendations (including corporate and business strategies) for top management. The selection of companies for strategic analysis is entirely up to each student; however, firms in industries that are in transition or firms that are undergoing major strategic changes are potentially more suitable for analysis

Learning objective:

Coursework

• To get a real life sense of strategy making and implementation by conducting a strategic analysis of an actual firm undergoing strategic challenges.

• The aim is to apply the concepts of strategic management discussed in class (both external and internal analyses) to a real life situation and achieve a better understanding of the literature through application and learning by doing.

Grading criteria:

1. How insightful is your diagnosis and solution?
2. How clearly have you articulated the key issue at hand. For instance, if you pick a company X, then articulate why it faces the challenge you have identified, and what its implications are for its future.
3. The originality and quality of your analysis. The point of the exercise is not to just cut and paste from existing articles that discuss your case. Can you bring better analytical skills to the case at hand? Can you make an original point about the nature of the challenge? Most analysis in the business press tends to be somewhat shallow. Try to rise above it using better analytical skills.
4. How well substantiated are your claims? Are your claims supported by evidence?
5. Finally, is it coherent and logical? We do not want analysis that is fragmented and contradicts itself. Try to make your essay coherent so it flows logically.

Booklists

Please refer to the Booklist for Part IIB Courses for references to this module, this can be found on the associated Moodle course.

Examination Guidelines

Please refer to [Form & conduct of the examinations](#) [3].

UK-SPEC

This syllabus contributes to the following areas of the [UK-SPEC](#) [4] standard:

[Toggle display of UK-SPEC areas.](#)

GT1

Develop transferable skills that will be of value in a wide range of situations. These are exemplified by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority Higher Level Key Skills and include problem solving, communication, and working with others, as well as the effective use of general IT facilities and information retrieval skills. They also include planning self-learning and improving performance, as the foundation for lifelong learning/CPD.

IA1

Apply appropriate quantitative science and engineering tools to the analysis of problems.

IA2

Demonstrate creative and innovative ability in the synthesis of solutions and in formulating designs.

KU1

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of essential facts, concepts, theories and principles of their engineering discipline, and its underpinning science and mathematics.

KU2

Have an appreciation of the wider multidisciplinary engineering context and its underlying principles.

S2

Extensive knowledge and understanding of management and business practices, and their limitations, and how these may be applied appropriately to strategic and tactical issues.

P3

Understanding of contexts in which engineering knowledge can be applied (e.g. operations and management, technology, development, etc).

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Links

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[2] <mailto:s.ansari@jbs.cam.ac.uk>

[3] <https://teaching25-26.eng.cam.ac.uk/content/form-conduct-examinations>

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