

## Business Strategy (MN32184/MN30817)

UNIT HANDBOOK 2025 - 2026



**Dr Kevin Ellis-Brush**

Kevin believes that life-long learning is the key to a successful and fulfilling career. Working in a broad area of sectors from finance to property, he has gained insights into leadership and management processes in multiple disciplines. He has helped companies restructure using lean production techniques and enabled them to leverage efficiencies through the application of artificial intelligence technologies. Latterly he has used these experiences to coach senior executives to improve performance, helping them to unlock the full potential of their organisation's resources and the people they lead.

In his Doctoral studies he explored the nature of the relationship between individuals and Artificial intelligent conversational robots. His findings have assisted multi-national organisations in supporting their employee's self-resilience through the pandemic. He also holds an EMBA, BSc (Hons), and numerous industry training certificates in a broad range of topics, including project management, agile working, and modern lean techniques.

Kevin has over 30 years of operational experience and transformed many organisations using agile techniques and frameworks that deliver organisational learning. He has designed a wide range of commercial and academic courses, including successful communication through digital mediums, managing with empathy – a new frontier, and how to work successfully with your robot colleague.

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## Introduction.

Business strategy module will immerse you in the key frameworks, analytic tools, and leadership decision making. We shall explore the forces that must business navigate to sustainable and maintain their competitive advantage. You'll master such tools as Porter's Five Forces, PESTEL, VRIO, and other business strategy models to think systemically about complex problems. With a blend of strategic analysis skills, leadership capabilities and case studies addressing real-world cases, you'll gain confidence and strategic thinking capabilities.

## COURSE GOALS

Our general objective is to **develop strategic analysis skills to support the development of strategy and the strategic assessment of an organisation**. You will identify strategic issues using the frameworks covered in the unit to generate inputs that informs decision-making. In particular we aim:

- To build understanding of the key frameworks used in strategy analysis and their practice in application.
- To gain an understanding of the impact of internal factors on strategic management;
- To gain an understanding of the impact of external factors, both local and global, on strategic management
- To sharpen critical thinking skills and independent problem-solving techniques relevant to the analysis of business problems and the generation of feasible strategic solutions;
- To participate in strategy analysis, development and implementation through case study work.

To achieve these goals, the course features in-class discussions of organizational and strategic problems, with case studies providing opportunities to develop, explore and evaluate strategic issues. In your careers you will need to be able to effectively communicate strategic insight and recommendations in both oral and written form.

## SKILLS EMPHASIZED

Successful managers make decisions based on a coherent understanding of how their company's **value proposition** is delivered and communicated, and how the company **creates value** and ensures **value capture**. This ability to think strategically is developed through practice and experience. However, you must push yourself to think critically and accept uncertainty, reflecting on how internal and external forces directly and indirectly influence the firm's competitive position.

There is much uncertainty within the business environment, and each of you will have different perspectives and are likely to approach problems differently. This is natural. Strategy, it should be remembered, is a creative and evolving process within which many stakeholders with different views play a part. Different views do not just exist among a firm's managers and other stakeholder. They also exist among the different academics who developed the theories we will cover. Rather than seeing this as problematic, these different views need to be valued.

Considering issues from different perspectives leads to deeper understanding and better strategic decision-making. Managers need to synthesise the insights gained from different perspectives into their decisions - not try to find some artificial synthesis of the theories and frameworks.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit students should:

- Understand how strategy develops in an organisation and how strategy concepts and frameworks support this process.
- Analyse the internal and external business environment of an organisation and understand how it impacts on strategy..
- Use theoretical tools and frameworks to make sense of complex business data in developing business and corporate strategy.
- Understand what lies behind strategy formulation and begin to think strategically.

The course focuses on the development and implementation of an organisation's strategy across a broad spectrum of business contexts. In this we are primarily concerned with the complexities of strategic decision making in pursuit of competitive advantage and meeting the needs of stakeholders. All organisations have unique strategies (or at least should have) – a holistic shared view of what the organisation will be in the future and the journey it needs to make to get there. The challenge, in a complex and often turbulent business and internal environment, is making the strategic choices necessary to develop and agree this shared view. In this unit, we critically examine how core strategy frameworks and concepts can be applied as part of the process of making strategy.

### Your contribution

I believe that management is not a subject that can be learned solely from texts and articles - it is a "live" subject and one that you need to experience not only via lectures but also via case studies, discussions, video material etc. Consequently, you should come to lectures properly prepared, be ready to participate in discussion and debate.

The class will apply a managerial focus approach to integrating the numerous business strategy activities. Class meetings will often be designed to discuss issues and approaches relevant to the topic at hand. It is for that reason that questions, comments, and discussion points are not only encouraged, but in fact are an important part of the class design. Without such discussion, the course will be less valuable and certainly less interesting for all involved. *The message: Always come to class with an open mind, **prepared** to discuss and develop the topic.*

## Teaching Approach

The module will employ:

- Interactive lecture sessions
- Practical exercises
- Discussion of case studies (including from current news events)
- Individual writing and analysis

Students are expected to complete required readings and assignments before class to facilitate meaningful participation in case study discussions. They should actively listen, ask thoughtful questions, provide relevant examples, and constructively build on others' contributions during class interactions. Students are expected to complete essential readings and assignments before class. They should actively listen, ask thoughtful questions, provide relevant examples, and constructively build on others' contributions during sessions. Delivery reflects a front-loaded, intensive teaching model, with emphasis on guided case discussion to support a summative unseen examination.

## Course - outline

Overview of course structure.

The 10-week course initiates by introducing core strategy concepts and the strategy development process, before analysing the wider PESTEL landscape to pinpoint opportunities and threats in week 2. Studies then shift to internal analysis, inspecting organizational resources, capabilities and value chains for strengths and weaknesses. Key models and frameworks are introduced in weeks 4 and 5 including VRIO, SWOT and Porter's Five Forces to assess competitiveness and guide strategic decision-making across corporate, business and international domains, covered in weeks 6 and 7. As strategy must be dynamically adapted to changing environments, weeks 8 and 9 examine incorporating entrepreneurial thinking into opportunity recognition, innovation pathways and leading organizational change. The final week consolidates knowledge through revision materials and practice exams, facilitating integration of concepts, tools and analytical approaches learned over the prior 9 weeks.

## MN32184: Business Strategy

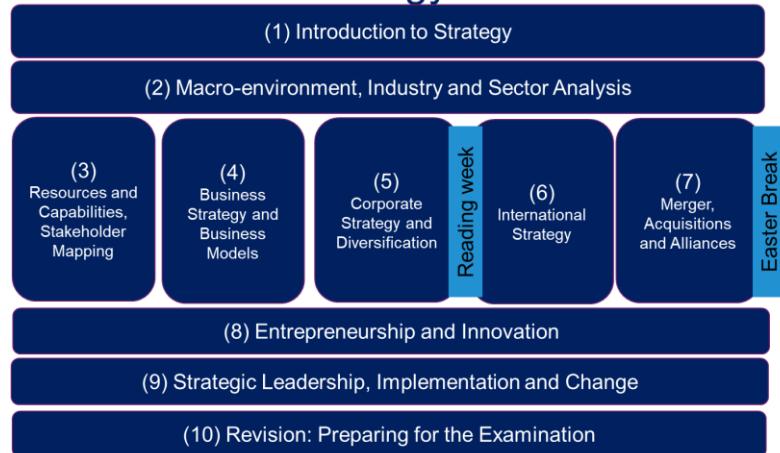


Table representation of course – lecture number in ( )'s

All lectures will be recorded and be available on Moodle for 6 days after the date of the lecture. Lectures 1-5 will be released for reading week. The entire series of lectures will be available after final lecture until the exam.

### Notional Study Hours

This 5-credit unit represents approximately 100 hours of student effort, typically comprising:

- 18 hours scheduled contact time
- 62 hours independent reading, case preparation and revision
- 20 hours assessment preparation and examination

### READINGS:

- **Essential Textbook: compulsory reading**

Whittington, R., Angwin, D., Regner, P., Johnson, G. and Scholes, K., (2023) exploring Strategy: Text and Cases (13th Ed.), Harlow: Pearson (WARJS 2023) – check whether available online. Utilise previous reversions to access principal concepts.

- **Recommended readings:** Optional text to explore more deeply the topics. There are many articles that provide useful supporting reading for the unit. Suggested further reading can be found at the end of each textbook chapter in the ‘Want to know more?’ section. In addition, further readings of value and importance will be recommended during live sessions and on Moodle.

Whenever possible, we will use Library Lists on Moodle to share relevant reading with you every week with different readings classified as ‘essential’, and ‘recommended’

### MOODLE

Moodle will be used for all essential communications, including announcements and provision of course unit materials (my lecture slides, case studies, articles).

## UNIT SCHEDULE AND REQUIRE PREPARATION

### Lecture timings and delivery content.

Lectures generally will be held on Tuesdays, online, either between 08:15 AM – 10.05 AM or 09.15 AM – 10.05 AM

Lecture	Topic	Essential "Reading"	Recommend reading
1.	Tuesday 3rd Feb 2026 (08.15-10.05)  <b>Introduction to strategy</b>	Whittington, R., Angwin, D., Regner, P., Johnson, G. and Scholes, K., (2023) exploring Strategy: Text and Cases (13th Ed.), Harlow: Pearson Chapter 1	M.E. Porter 1996: What is Strategy, Harvard Business Review Nov-Dec 1996  D.C. Hambrick and J.W. Fredrickson (2001): Are you sure you have a strategy? Academy of Management Executive, 15(4): 48-59
2.	Tuesday 10 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2026 (08.15-10.05)  <b>Macro-environment, Industry and Sector Analysis</b>	Whittington, R., Angwin, D., Regner, P., Johnson, G. and Scholes, K., (2023) exploring Strategy: Text and Cases (13th Ed.), Harlow: Pearson Chapter 2 and 3	M.E. Porter (2008). 'The five competitive forces that shape strategy.' Harvard Business Review. January: 79-93  C. Kim and R. Mauborgne (2004). 'Blue Ocean Strategy'. Harvard Business Review, October: 76-84 [find in HBR on Strategy].
3.	Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2026 (08.15-10.05)  <b>Resources and Capabilities</b>	Whittington, R., Angwin, D., Regner, P., Johnson, G. and Scholes, K., (2023) exploring Strategy: Text and Cases (13th Ed.), Harlow: Pearson Chapter 4	V. Ambrosini and C. Bowman (2009). 'What are dynamic capabilities and are they a useful construct in strategic management?' International Journal of Management Reviews, 11-1: 29-49.  Barney (1991) Firm resources and sustainable competitive advantage
4.	Tuesday 24 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2026 (9.15-10.05)  <b>Business Strategy and Business Models</b>	Whittington, R., Angwin, D., Regner, P., Johnson, G. and Scholes, K., (2023) exploring Strategy: Text and Cases (13th Ed.), Harlow: Pearson Chapter 7	Johnson, Christensen and Kagermann (2008) Reinventing your business model  Collins and Porras (1996) Building your company's vision
5.	Tuesday 3 <sup>rd</sup> Mar 2026 (08.15-10.05)	Whittington, R., Angwin, D., Regner, P., Johnson, G. and Scholes, K., (2023)	Campbell et al. 1995 'Corporate Strategy: The Quest for Parenting Advantage'

	<b>Corporate Strategy and Diversification</b>	exploring Strategy: Text and Cases (13th Ed.), Harlow: Pearson Chapter 8	M. Nippa, U. Pidun and H. Rubner (2011). 'Corporate portfolio management: Appraising four decades of academic research', Academy of Management Perspectives 25(4): 50-66.
6.	Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup> Mar 2026 (09.15-10.05)  <b>International Strategy</b>	Whittington, R., Angwin, D., Regner, P., Johnson, G. and Scholes, K., (2023) exploring Strategy: Text and Cases (13th Ed.), Harlow: Pearson Chapter 9	Rugman & Verbeke (2004) A perspective on regional and global strategies  Ghemawat (2007) Managing differences
7.	Tuesday 24 <sup>th</sup> Mar 2026 (08.15-10.05)  <b>Mergers, Acquisitions and Alliances</b>	Whittington, R., Angwin, D., Regner, P., Johnson, G. and Scholes, K., (2023) exploring Strategy: Text and Cases (13th Ed.), Harlow: Pearson Chapter 11	Kale and Singh (2009) Managing strategic alliances  C.M. Christensen, R. Alton, C. Rising and A. Waldeck (2011). 'The new M&A playbook', Harvard Business Review, 89(3): 48-57.
8.	Tuesday 14 <sup>th</sup> Apr 2026 (09.15-10.05)  <b>Entrepreneurship and Innovation</b>	Whittington, R., Angwin, D., Regner, P., Johnson, G. and Scholes, K., (2023) exploring Strategy: Text and Cases (13th Ed.), Harlow: Pearson Chapter 10	Neilson Martin and Powers (2008) and Kaplan and Norton (2007)
9.	Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup> Apr 2026 (08.15-10.05)  <b>Leadership and Strategic change</b>		Finkelstein (2003) Seven habits of spectacularly unsuccessful people  Page 25- What Leaders really do (Kotter, 2001)   Harvard Business Review Article  Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change
10.	Tuesday 28 <sup>th</sup> Apr 2026 (09.15-10.05)  <b>Exam revision</b>		

## ASSESSMENT

**Is solely based on the final examination (i.e., 100% of marks)**

The exam questions are essay-based. Examples of essay-based exam questions can be found in past exam papers (year 2018-2019 semester 2 onwards the exam paper has a similar format), **which can be accessed via the library website.**

The exam will be an “**in-person**” exam with a duration of 2 hours in total. On campus

In **Part A** you are required to answer ONE question based on a pre-circulated **full case study** (the case study is therefore pre-seen, but **not** the examination questions). *The case study will be provided 3 weeks before the date of the exam.* In **Part B** you are required to answer ONE essay question out of a choice of THREE. These questions will ask you to use examples from the case material covered during the course. Both **parts A and B** will require you to use the content of the course, including the required readings that are covered for each topic. Both questions carry equal marks.

**The lecture in final week of the unit will be a revision and exam preparation session.**

### EXAM MARKING CRITERIA Assessment criteria – general

- Depth of analysis.
- Structure and logical reasoning.
- Ability to link theory to concrete examples.
- Clarity of writing.
- Ability to address the question exactly.

#### Specific criteria – Part A

- Use of correct terminology.
- Use of appropriate frameworks/theory/concepts/models.
- Ability to draw out relevant information from the case and link it purposefully to frameworks/theory/concepts/models.
- Ability to substantiate statements using your analysis of information in the case.
- Ability to critically discuss what your analysis means for case companies.

#### Specific criteria – Part B

- Ability to provide substantiated arguments.
- Ability to demonstrate critical understanding of frameworks, theories, concepts and models and their application.
- Theoretical knowledge and understanding of the strategy literature.

A full marking grid, detailing requirements for each grade level, will be provided in the revision session. This detail will build on the expectations laid out in the School of Management’s general marking scheme. The broad descriptions of the expectations in this scheme for each grade are given below:

**70+** Excellent answer, showing a high degree of mastery of the subject matter, with a well-developed ability to analyse, synthesise and apply knowledge and concepts. The answer is well directed and relevant. There is evidence of critical reflection, and of ability to tackle questions and issues not previously encountered. Evidence of wider reading.

**60-69** A good piece of work, showing a sound and thorough grasp of the subject-matter, though lacking in the breadth and depth required for a first-class mark. A good attempt at analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge and concepts, but more limited in scope than that required for a mark of 70+. Most aspects of the task set are covered. Some evidence of critical reflection, and the ability to make a reasonable attempt at tackling questions and issues not previously encountered. Ideas are expressed with clarity, with some minor exceptions.

**50-59** A fair piece of work, showing grasp of major elements of the subject matter but with some gaps or areas of confusion. Only the basic ideas of the question set are covered. The attempt at analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge, concepts and analysis techniques is superficial. Conclusions written in clear style that can be understood by non-technical reader but with some confusion and immaturity in expression of ideas.

**40-49** Demonstrates a basic understanding of the subject matter covered in the assessment. Demonstrates some ability to identify key issues and construct an argument. Shows comprehension of the basic facts and principles but may present some notable deficiencies in knowledge and understanding. There may be some deficiencies in the presentation and the referencing of the work. Marks in this range indicate a low pass and satisfactory performance in designated learning outcomes.

**FAIL <38** Not of a passable level. A poor piece of work, showing some familiarity with the subject but with major gaps and serious misconceptions. Only some of the basic requirements of question and analyses are achieved. Difficulty in beginning to address questions and issues. Little evidence of ability to reflect critically on an argument or viewpoint or on results of data analyses. Ideas are confused, poorly expressed and structured; conclusions not written in clear style that can be understood by non-technical reader.