

Entrepreneurship in Analytics and AI – 2025/2026

Due Week 5 – March 2 at 11:00

Zipcar Case

In week 5's lecture we will focus on business planning and business model analysis for startups to determine their “attractiveness”. To do so, we will apply two techniques: (1) a top-down assessment using the so-called POCD framework discussed in the Sahlman (1997) paper; and (2) a bottom-up “fishbone technique” to analyze business model architectures and test key underlying assumptions – in line with the Camuffo et al. (2020) paper.

To prepare for class, first read the Zipcar case study (downloadable from Canvas):

Zipcar: Refining the business model (HBS case No. 9-803-096)

Synopsis of the case

The Zipcar case was developed to permit you to closely track the development and evolution of a company's business model in the very early stages of its life. The case describes the development of Zipcar, a car-sharing service located in Boston, but with national ambitions. The case includes the very first version of a financial model for the business, a version that was developed after significantly more research and which served as the basis for funding and actually starting the business; and finally, the case provides data from the first few months of operations which must then be played back against this articulation of the business model to determine how the company is faring.

Assignment question

For this write-up, read the Camuffo et al. (2020) paper to answer the following question:

“What is your evaluation of the way Robin Chase has developed Zipcar’s business model when viewed against Camuffo et al.’s (2020) research findings?”

Please note that two versions of Zipcar’s business model were developed: the initial model (December 1999, discussed on page 5 of the case and summarized in Exhibit 3) and the revised version (May 2000, discussed on pages 7-8 of the case and summarized in Exhibit 5).

References (downloadable from Canvas)

Sahlman, W. (1997). How to write a great business plan. *Harvard Business Review*, 27(4): 98-108.

Camuffo, A., Cordova, A., Gambardella, A., & Spina, C. (2020). A scientific approach to entrepreneurial decision making: Evidence from a randomized control trial. *Management Science*, 66(2), 564-586.