



Grant Thornton

EXCELLENCE: FIND A BETTER WAY EVERY TIME!

Strategic Review Report

Names: Liam Cummins,
Abbie Paige Cassidy,
Adam O'Beirnes, Adam O'Brien,
Michelle Bowes, Rebecca Stone.

Word count: 6395

BAA 1019 - Business Strategy

Group: BSI 21

Audit | Tax | Advisory

<https://www.grantthornton.ie>

March, 2025

Declaration on Plagiarism

I declare that this material, which I now submit for assessment, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. I understand that plagiarism, collusion, and copying is a grave and serious offence in the university and accept the penalties that would be imposed should I engage in plagiarism, collusion, or copying. I have read and understood the Assignment Regulations set out in the module documentation. I have identified and included the source of all facts, ideas, opinions, viewpoints of others in the assignment references. Direct quotations from books, journal articles, internet sources, module text, or any other source whatsoever are acknowledged, and the source cited are identified in the assignment references.

I have not copied or paraphrased an extract of any length from any source without identifying the source and using quotation marks as appropriate. Any images, audio recordings, video or other materials have likewise been originated and produced by me or are fully acknowledged and identified. This assignment, or any part of it, has not been previously submitted by me or any other person for assessment on this or any other course of study. I have read and understood the referencing guidelines found at <http://www.library.dcu.ie/citing&refguide08.pdf> and/or recommended in the assignment guidelines.

I understand that I may be required to discuss with the module lecturer/s the contents of this submission. I/me/my incorporates we/us/our in the case of group work, which is signed by all of us.

Signed:

Abbie Paige Cassidy (22525916)
Adam O'Brien (22512756)
Adam O'Beirnes (22768015)
Liam Cummins (22111611)
Michelle Bowes (2277201)
Rebecca Stone (20335951)

Date:

06/03/25
06/03/25
06/03/25
06/03/25
06/03/25
06/03/25

Table of Contents

Executive Summary:.....	2
Orientation Stage	4
1.1 Key Strategic Issues.....	4
1.2 Terms of Reference Discussion	5
1.3 Preliminary Literature Reviewed	6
1.4 Preliminary Client Case Introduction	6
1.5 Organisational Purpose Discussion (Value Capture)	6
Diagnostics Stage	8

Macro-Environmental Analysis	8
2.2 Industry Analysis.....	11
2.3 Internal Analysis: VRIO Framework	12
2.4 Relevant Literature Reviewed	14
2.5 Diagnosis of Strategic Challenges and Trade-Offs.....	14
Intervention Stage.....	15
3.1 Identifying choices made to support current Strategy.....	16
3.2 Culture, Structure & Strategic fit	17
3.3 Process of Engagement	19
Evaluation Stage	21
4.2 Grant Thornton's Current Strategy	21
4.3 Industry Trends vs. Grant Thornton's Strategic Positioning	22
4.4 Conceptualising Findings	23
4.5 Alignment of findings to relevant literature:	25
4.6 Recommendations for Strategic Growth, Creativity & Change.....	26
4.7 Reflections on the role of strategy consultants	27
Bibliography:	28
Appendix:	33

Executive Summary:

This report analyses Grant Thornton's strategic position in the financial and professional services sector. By examining its competitive environment, technological adoption, talent retention initiatives, and ESG practices, our team aims to boost operational efficiency, reinforce Grant Thornton's market differentiation, and strengthen the firm's position in an increasingly competitive marketplace through our strategy and recommendations.

Our thorough analysis was conducted through a structured four-stage approach: Orientation, Diagnostics, Intervention, and Evaluation. The application of frameworks including PESTLE, Porter's five forces and VRIO highlighted external opportunities and pressures, internal

strengths, and areas for development for Grant Thornton. Our consulting strategy was further guided using methodologies like Porter's Generic Strategies. To assess the firm's strategic growth, innovation, and adaptability to market changes, we used the 7 Dimensions of Transformation consulting framework.

Fundamentally, our insights-driven strategy aims to assist Grant Thornton in addressing industry challenges proactively, advance its digital and advisory expertise, and nurture the resilience needed to sustain a competitive edge in the rapidly evolving professional services environment.

Orientation Stage

1.1 Key Strategic Issues

Market Differentiation and Competitive Advantage

Grant Thornton is a globally recognised professional services firm operating within the financial industry, boasting a stellar reputation for innovation and expertise. Although not being a part of the “Big Four” firms, currently made up of KPMG, EY, Deloitte and PwC, Grant Thornton finds itself in a position where they can offer more than both these bigger firms and other mid-market competition.

1. **Specialised services** – Grant Thornton can focus on and become leaders in niche markets, such as ESG counselling.
2. **Client-focused advisory services** – Grant Thornton can tailor personalised services towards SMEs and other fast-growing businesses, diversifying away from large enterprises. (Hinge Marketing)

Advancements in Technology

Technology is an ever-changing disruption which reshapes our world, which can be leveraged by businesses to help improve upon the efficiency and accuracy of services they provide to their customers. Failure to keep up with rising trends in technology can lead to Grant Thornton being victims of digital Darwinism, as failing to adapt will leave the company behind in terms of competitiveness and relevance.

New technological advancements Grant Thornton can leverage is AI, which can be used to complete automated tasks which would be categorised as repetitive and time consuming, freeing up resources which can then be allocated elsewhere. Further developments to cybersecurity and risk management systems can aid in the mitigation of security breaches and cyber-attacks, which is crucial to the company’s public image and trust.

Workforce

Due to the competitiveness of the finance industry, acquiring and retaining talent remains a key challenge for Grant Thornton. Improvement on company branding to attract top talent may be key to addressing this issue, however doubt and uncertainty over job security due to

technological innovations may disrupt and negatively impact work culture, leading to loss of staff. Potential solutions may include continuous learning and development through training programs that can create transparency between staff and management, ultimately enhancing trust and boosting morale, increasing staff retention statistics.

Sustainability

ESG responsibilities for Grant Thornton pose unique challenges to address, as being a leader in this area can address both market differentiation and expectations from clients, governments, and the public. Sustainable directives, such as the EU's CRSD mandates stricter reporting on ESG practices, disclosing detailed sustainability data, which paves a pathway of demand for ESG consulting services, which may give Grant Thornton the opportunity to be a leader in this field by both assisting clients in navigating these services, but integrating these principles into their own operations, showcasing responsibility.

1.2 Terms of Reference Discussion

Within our terms of reference, we established that the best choice for our client was Grant Thornton due to their market position and the relationship the company shared with one of our group members. Along with this, we were impressed by Grant Thornton's performances with their external service quality and internal working culture which poses as both a current strength for the company and provides a platform for future opportunities to grow, which would be key to our strategic directions. With this, we then had a foundation from which we could develop a detailed plan for our business strategy, focusing on project directions, deadlines, and our expected outcomes.

Each member of our group agreed on hard deadlines and assessing each other's progress to ensure the quality of our project was reaching our desired standard and to accommodate unforeseen circumstances which may pose a threat to our future progress. We agreed to set meetings on a regular basis to conduct and manage these agreements, using frameworks such as SMART to help guide our progress to achievable goals. Along with this, we constructed a work breakdown sheet to help visualise and delegate workload, giving each team member an equally weighted sense of responsibility for the project.

1.3 Preliminary Literature Reviewed

The intended research for this company project aims to provide a solid foundation for key elements which ultimately develop our business strategy formation for professional service firms such as Grant Thornton. We based our sources on the relevance to our intended business strategy, which include theoretical frameworks, empirical research along with practical insights which build a well-rounded and comprehensive business strategy, balancing key areas such as competitive positioning, protecting and engaging workforce, creating digital innovation and optimising value capture and creation in order to sustainably grow the company within its industry.

1.4 Preliminary Client Case Introduction

Established over a century ago, Grant Thornton is a leader in mid-market professional services which focus on auditing, taxation and advising. Being a globally recognised brand, Grant Thornton has a world-class client portfolio which they provide expertise to, whom of which are prioritised by Grant Thornton's client-centric approach, benefited from the companies approach to innovative solutions and commitment to high quality solutions.

As previously mentioned, Grant Thornton is not identified as one of the “Big 4”, however uses this to the company's advantage, generating higher levels of personalisation for clients who seek high quality services without the complexity which are present within the big 4. This gives Grant Thornton a strengthened market position, which is compounded by Grant Thornton's global presence. Grant Thornton, like any other company, faces challenges throughout various areas within the company. Competition from the big 4 and other mid-market companies can hinder Grant Thornton's operations, as larger corporate clients may prefer working with larger accounting firms, stunting further growth. This competition can also take top talent away from Grant Thornton, with the company finding attracting and retaining talent to be a struggle due to having less career advancement opportunities as compared to the big 4.

1.5 Organisational Purpose Discussion (Value Capture)

Grant Thorntons value capture transcends both from the company along with their clients, created strategically through their operations, client relationships and positioning within the market.

Value Creation for Clients

Given Grant Thorntons market position, the firm has a heavy emphasis on providing personalised solutions aimed towards sustained growth for clients, which is achieved through a variety of keyways. Industry knowledge, which aims to guide clients through regulatory and financial challenges, is a crucial aspect of how personalisation can greatly impact clients of Grant Thornton, highlighted by their long-term partnership approach. This approach allows for trust to be built, which benefits both parties which benefit from Grant Thorntons strategic insights into client industries based on this approach. Along with this, clients may gain value creation from Grant Thornton's innovation, as seen with CompliAI, an AI developed in collaboration with Microsoft (Grant Thornton).

Value Creation for Grant Thornton

Profitability and market positioning remain at the forefront of prioritisation for Grant Thornton, which is done so through the alignment of both value creation and value capture, an important aspect for business model innovation (Sjödin *et al.*, 2019). Methods which Grant Thornton apply to this model to further grow their business can be done through diversification. This can involve offering expanded services in areas in rising demand, such as ESG consultation and digital advisory. Strengthening market positioning is crucial for sustaining industry leadership, which can be achieved through strengthening partnerships with current and future clients. Continued personalisation and expansion into new in demand areas of consultation can continue sustained market strength. Along with this, investing in talent training and leadership programs is crucial to talent retention and development, necessary for boasting a high-quality workforce.

Grant Thornton's long-term value capture is based on the performances of their client impact, financial performances, and market innovation. Continuous alignment with global trends, developments in technology and sustained organisational working culture will be key to ensuring this sustainability is maximised.

Diagnostics Stage

For our Diagnostics stage, we will examine Grant Thornton's strategic position in the marketplace by examining its internal and external environment. By applying strategic frameworks to better assess the key areas, being industry, competitive advantages, and potential challenges, thus building a foundation for future recommendations.

Macro-Environmental Analysis

To aid Grant Thornton's strategic decision making, the PESTLE framework was executed. It is underpinned by six environmental factors: political, economic, social, technological, ecological, and legal (Whittington *et al.*, 2021, pp. 23). Below are the key findings, see *Appendix 4* for the breakdown.

Political

Ongoing geopolitical tensions will continue to impact Grant Thornton's operations with the 15th sanctions package against Russia (European Council, 2024) and the new European Banking Authorities guidelines on sanctions compliance, taking effect in December 2025 (MHC, 2025). EU businesses must now ensure controlled high priority goods do not reach Russia, including through their foreign subsidiaries. Being a professional services firm operating across multiple industries and jurisdictions, Grant Thornton must be ready to support EU-based clients (and their subsidiaries) in establishing robust internal controls that meet new due diligence standards.

European Banking Authority (EBA) published sanctions guidelines in 2024 that establish common standards for financial institutions to comply with (European Banking Authority, 2024). Demand for sanctions compliance will likely increase, creating a larger need for Grant Thornton to strengthen internal processes and risk assessments. This may also influence their service offerings.

Economic

The European Central Bank is to lower the interest rate to 2.75% by the end of 2025 (European Central Bank, 2025). This may lead to an overall increase in business activity like Mergers and Acquisitions, borrowing etc, but Grant Thornton should be prepared to advise on shifting credit and investment conditions, as firms will be adjusting their monetary policies (Deloitte, 2024). This will likely increase demand for financial advisory services,

Technological

Advancements in AI can reduce operational costs in financial services by an average of 22-25% (Bernzweig, 2023). This poses an opportunity for Grant Thornton to simplify and speed up business processes and reduce overheads through automation.

Social

Bernzweig (2023) also reported that implementation of AI in the financial sector has rapidly grown from 45% in 2022 to an estimated 85% by 2025. Grant Thornton can leverage these technological trends by enhancing their client advisory services in digital transformation but must conduct adequate staff training covering emerging technologies so they can advise clients on AI best practices.

This also creates a competitive pressure for Grant Thornton to achieve high levels of AI implementation quickly to match others in the market. (Deloitte, 2024) says firms must adjust promptly as “new technologies available may lead to stark contrasts in results between firms that deploy them quickly and effectively, compared to those that lag”. Ongoing investments in data analytics, staff training, and digital systems are essential to keep up with emerging technologies and to remain competitive.

Legal

There is increased focus on environmental and social governance that financial services firms like Grant Thornton will have to take into consideration. Auditors must broaden the scope of their work as ESG is increasingly under careful examination from stakeholders and investors. (Reuters, 2025) reported that the need to respond to ESG is crucial as it can impact supplier selection, grants, and funding.

For example, The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) was adopted into Irish jurisdiction in July 2024. The previous reporting standards that companies were to abide by have now been amended (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2024). As regulations become more complex, Grant Thornton must regularly monitor regulatory shifts, government publications, and industry reports to ensure resources are reallocated and organisational changes are made promptly. Grant Thornton's Auditors and consultants require ongoing training beyond financial expertise as the span of ESG reporting increases, and to accurately analyse data regarding carbon emissions, ethical labour, and supply chains.

Environmental

Investor demand for ESG is on the rise, with 42% of global investors prioritising client expectations and reputation when making ESG decisions (Vena Solutions, 2024). Grant Thornton can increase assurance and advisory services specialising in risk assessment, reporting, governance. ESG initiatives at the core of Grant Thornton must also be improved to attract investors.

Additionally, there are rising concerns about the energy required to power AI data centres. To keep up with the accelerated adoption of AI in the US, Ireland's data centre power is expected to roughly triple by 2030 (MHC, 2025). This will impact Ireland's capabilities in meeting goals for the Climate Action Plan. If increasing AI usage, Grant Thornton must follow the national data centre guidelines to align with policy and limit negative environmental impacts (MHC, 2025).

2.2 Industry Analysis

Introduction

Financial services are an extremely competitive industry, with firms operating across audit, tax, consulting, and advisory services. To assess the accounting industry's competitiveness, Porter's Five Forces framework has been applied. This framework evaluates the buyer's power, supplier power, threat of substitutes barriers to entry, and industry rivalry, providing insights into the key external pressures shaping Grant Thornton's strategic positioning (Siegemund, 2008).

1. Buyer's Power (High)

As buyers, Clients have significant power over financial services, especially big multinational clients who can bargain prices and demand tailored services. (Yunna and Yisheng, 2014) With numerous firms offering similar services, clients often don't use the same firm again. To mitigate this, Grant Thornton differentiates itself through personalized client relationships and mid-market expertise, reducing the risk of price-based competition.

2. Supplier powers (Low to Moderate)

The power of suppliers is low to moderate, as firms can recruit from a large talent pool. However, securing and retaining top professionals remains a challenge, given competition from the Big Four and other firms. Investments in training and employee development can help Grant Thornton attract and retain skilled professionals.

3. Threat of Substitutes (Moderate to High)

AI-driven financial tools, automated accounting software, and internal corporate finance services, challenge traditional financial firms. Grant Thornton should focus on digital transformation and increase investment in ESG advisory to differentiate from alternative and traditional services.

4. Barriers to entry (Moderate)

Barriers to entry in the professional services industry are moderate. While established brand preference, government policy, and economies of scale create barriers for new entrants, smaller firms and boutique consultancies continue to enter the market. (Warner, 2010) However, Grant

Thornton benefits from its global presence, reputation, and mid-market specialization, making it hard for new entrants to compete on equal ground.

5. Industry Rivalry (High)

The financial services industry is one of intense rivalries, particularly with competition from the Big Four and other mid-tier firms, meaning rivalry is driven by price competition, service differentiation, and brand reputation. (Warner, 2010) Grant Thornton competes by emphasizing mid-market specialization and personalized client services, carving out a niche distinct from both large multinational firms and smaller advisory practices.

2.3 Internal Analysis: VRIO Framework

Introduction

To assess Grant Thornton's internal capabilities, we utilized the VRIO framework. This strategic tool evaluates a firm's resources and capabilities based on four key dimensions: Value, Rarity, Imitability, and Organization. (Barney, JB, & Clark, 2007) Resources that meet all four criteria provide a sustainable competitive advantage, while those that fail to capitalize on these dimensions may only hold temporary strengths and vulnerabilities. (Barney, JB, & Clark, 2007)

This analysis focuses on four key areas that define Grant Thornton's strategic positioning: Mid-Market Specialization, Personalized Client Services, Training & Upskilling, and ESG & Sustainability Services.

Competitive Strength - Mid-Market Specialization

Grant Thornton's focus on mid-market clients is a core strength. Many larger competitors, especially the big four, primarily target multinational companies, leaving an area open for mid-sized businesses. Grant Thornton fills a gap in the mid-market segment, offering specialized financial services.

This specialization is valuable as it offers tailored financial, audit, and advisory services to mid-sized businesses that require expertise not focused on by other firms, making it rare. (Bishop, 2014). While competitors can attempt to enter this market, the barriers to imitation

such as loyalty, industry relationships, and brand credibility make it difficult to replicate in the short term.

Competitive Strength - Personalized Client Services

Personalized client relationships are another key strength of Grant Thornton, as finance firms become more standardized and artificial with the implementation of AI chatbots taking away personal connections. The company emphasizes tailored advisory solutions, close client interactions, and a deep understanding of client needs. This approach adds value by fostering trust and long-term loyalty. While many firms claim to provide personalized services, Grant Thornton's well-established client management systems and customized service delivery model create a relatively rare and well-integrated advantage. The imitability of personalized services is moderate; other firms can adopt similar strategies, but building deep, trusted client relationships takes years.

Challenges & Limitations - Training & Upskilling

Grant Thornton invests significantly in employee training and professional development, ensuring its workforce remains highly skilled in financial regulations, advisory practices, and industry trends. This resource is valuable, as expertise is crucial for Grant Thornton to set themselves apart. However, it is not rare, as it is similar to other competitor training programs. Additionally, while their training can be imitated, larger firms have better training programs that there is little need for, thus failing to differentiate and compete. To sustain its edge, Grant Thornton must continuously refine and expand its learning programs.

ESG & Sustainability Services

ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) consulting is an emerging area of focus in the finance industry. With the prevalence of sustainability mindsets, firms increasingly seek ESG compliance and advisory services. Grant Thornton's growing ESG and sustainable service line position it competitively in the market, adding value for clients. However, many competitors also offer and follow ESG services, with the big four having more expansive service line compared to Grant Thornton, making it less rare and simple to imitate, making this advantage not sustainable. To remain ahead, Grant Thornton must continuously innovate and integrate ESG principles into broader service offerings.

2.4 Relevant Literature Reviewed

Strategic management literature provides the foundation for analysing firms' competitive positions. (Barney, JB, & Clark. 2007) introduced the VRIO framework, which evaluates a firm's internal resources/capabilities based on Value, Rarity, Imitability, and Organization. This framework is critical in identifying whether Grant Thornton's resources and capabilities create a sustainable competitive advantage or are potentially disadvantaged compared to their competition.

Additionally, Warner (2010) emphasized the importance of industry structure in shaping competition, with the use of the Porter's Five Forces framework. The framework helps to analyse competitive pressures facing the finance industry, such as rivalry from the big four, threats of new entries and substitute services.

2.5 Diagnosis of Strategic Challenges and Trade-Offs

Grant Thornton, like other professional services firms, faces key strategic challenges that require careful decision-making and trade-offs. These challenges arise from balancing competitive positioning, resource allocation, and market demands. This section examines three major trade-offs that influence the firm's long-term success:

1. Investing in ESG and Sustainability Services vs. Immediate Profitability

Investments in ESG services is a long-term process, however delaying ESG commitments risks losing clients to more sustainably focused competitors.

Strategic Choice

Grant Thornton needs to find an equal balance with short- term financial performance, with long term ESG commitments to ensure investments do not sabotage their profitability

2. Digital Transformation vs Human connection

AI, automation, and data analytics are reshaping the Finance industry, forcing Grant Thornton to determine how to utilize innovative technologies without taking away human centric services.

Failure to not keep up with new technology advancements can lead to Grant Thornton falling behind in their industry. However, overuse of AI and automation can diminish Grant Thorntons key strength of personalized client services.

Strategic Choice

Grant Thornton needs to incorporate a hybrid approach so that technology enhances client interactions rather than diminishes, while also staying aware of new innovations to support development within the firm.

3. Specialization vs Market Expansion

Grant Thornton's mid-market specialization is a strong differentiator against competitors, as it offers tailored services to mid-sized businesses. However, a pure focus approach could limit expansion opportunities into new emerging markets. While specialization strengthens brand identity, total focus weakens them if mid-market demand declines. Expanding into new sectors could build new industry knowledge and increase revenue, it should not dilute Grant Thornton's core strengths.

Strategic Choice

Grant Thornton should consider expansion into new high growth sectors to create service lines for, while maintaining their mid-market identity.

Intervention Stage

For our intervention stage, we shall investigate Grant Thornton's current strategic positioning using Porter's Generic Strategies framework, evaluating how the firm employs Focus,

Differentiation, and Cost Leadership to maintain its competitive edge. We will then assess strategic fit, examining how ESG initiatives, employee upskilling, and digital transformation can enhance alignment with the firm's culture and structure. Finally, we outline a structured engagement process, ensuring effective strategy development, implementation, and continuous adaptation.

3.1 Identifying choices made to support current Strategy

Porter's (1980) Generic Strategies framework outlines three strategies businesses can use to gain competitive advantages: Cost Leadership, Differentiation, and Focus Strategy. Grant Thornton, as a leading global professional services firm, strategically employs elements from all three approaches, with emphasis on Focus and Differentiation Strategies. Below is an analysis of Grant Thornton's strategic choices under each category.

1. Focus Strategy

The Focus Strategy involves targeting a specific market segment, tailoring services to meet the unique needs of that segment better than competitors (Porter, 1985). Grant Thornton applies this strategy by concentrating on the mid-market segment, which comprises dynamic, growing businesses that require high-quality professional services but may lack the resources to engage the Big Four accounting firms.

Strategic Choices

Mid-Market Specialization

Unlike the Big Four, who focus on large multinational clients, Grant Thornton prioritizes mid-sized businesses, offering tailored audit, tax, and advisory services. This niche approach strengthens its value proposition and aligns with Porter's strategies (Campbell-Hunt, 2000).

Personalized Service Delivery

By fostering close client relationships and providing customized solutions, Grant Thornton differentiates itself from firms that adopt a standardized service model with increased focus & leading to superior performance (Parnell, 2013).

Regional Autonomy with Global Reach

The firm balances global expertise with local market understanding, empowering regional offices to cater to specific client needs while leveraging its international network (Grant Thornton, n.d).

2. Differentiation Strategy

A Differentiation Strategy entails providing unique and high-value services that distinguish a firm from its competitors, allowing it to charge a premium price (Porter, 1996). Grant Thornton emphasizes differentiation through its commitment to innovation, industry expertise, and client-centric solutions.

Strategic Choices

Technology-Driven Advisory & Audit Services

Investments in AI, data analytics, and automation enable enhanced audit accuracy, risk management, and compliance solutions and technological change as a whole directly impacts a firm's competitive environment, requiring a consistent wide market view (Grant, 2016).

3. Cost Leadership Strategy

A Cost Leadership Strategy focuses on achieving operational efficiency to provide services at competitive prices while maintaining profitability (Porter, 1980). Although Grant Thornton integrates cost-effective measures to enhance service value, they do not primarily compete on cost, which establishes Differentiation Focus as their primary strategy, which we aim to develop as opposed to entirely restructure due to the benefits this current strategy has granted the organisation.

3.2 Culture, Structure & Strategic fit

Strategic fit is achieved when an organization's strategy aligns with its internal culture and structure, ensuring that new initiatives complement existing capabilities and market positioning (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2017). Grant Thornton's mid-market specialization has been a key driver of its competitive differentiation, but as the industry evolves, the firm can further enhance its strategic fit by increasing its focus on ESG and sustainability, improving employee training and upskilling, and prioritizing technological advancement. These suggestions can be

seen to integrate well with Grant Thornton's various ongoing operations/activities and their relationship with the core elements of Grant Thornton's value proposition, as outlined in the activity system map (See Appendix 6), but they must also align with the company's culture and structure to maximize effectiveness.

1. ESG & Sustainability Push

With growing regulatory requirements and stakeholder demand for corporate responsibility, enhancing ESG and sustainability initiatives presents an opportunity for Grant Thornton to differentiate itself further. Porter and Kramer (2011) argue that businesses can utilize a shared value perspective to capitalize on value created by other firms. By aligning sustainability efforts with competitive strategy & Integrating ESG advisory services into Grant Thornton's core offerings would strengthen its value proposition to mid-market clients who increasingly seek guidance on sustainable business practices. However, for this to succeed, Grant Thornton's culture must foster a strong commitment to sustainability at all organizational levels, ensuring buy-in from leadership and employees.

2. Employee Training & Upskilling

A key component of strategic fit is ensuring that the workforce possesses the necessary skills to execute the firm's evolving strategy. The consulting industry is highly dependent on intellectual capital, making continuous employee development critical. Firms should always analyse their competitive environment to insure they have the resources needed to complete a given strategy (Barney, 1991). Expanding training programs in emerging areas such as ESG compliance, digital finance, and data analytics would empower employees to deliver enhanced advisory services. Additionally, integrating upskilling initiatives within Grant Thornton's decentralized partnership structure ensures that training efforts remain tailored to regional and sector-specific needs, reinforcing the firm's culture of professional development.

3. Technological Change & Digital Transformation

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, automation, and data-driven decision-making is reshaping the professional services sector (Deloitte, n.d). Grant Thornton must embrace these changes by enhancing its digital capabilities, streamlining service delivery, and improving operational efficiency. A key consideration is ensuring that the firm's partnership-based

structure can support these technological advancements, with decision-making autonomy at the local level balanced against centralized digital strategy implementation.

By integrating these strategic initiatives—ESG, employee upskilling, and digital transformation—within Grant Thornton’s existing culture and structure, the firm can maintain strategic coherence while adapting to industry shifts. This approach ensures that new strategic priorities reinforce the firm’s competitive advantage rather than disrupting its established positioning.

3.3 Process of Engagement

As a business consultant, developing an adapted business strategy for Grant Thornton requires a structured engagement process. This ensures alignment between strategic recommendations and the firm’s existing capabilities, market positioning, and long-term objectives.

1. Initial Consultation and Objective Setting

The engagement begins with an in-depth consultation with Grant Thornton’s key stakeholders to establish the scope and objectives of the strategy revision. Rumelt (2012) argues that the initial phase of strategy formulation must focus on diagnosing the core issues and establishing a guiding policy before determining actionable steps. This stage includes:

- Identifying core challenges and opportunities in the current business model.
- Understanding leadership’s vision and strategic priorities.
- Conducting stakeholder interviews to capture perspectives from executives, partners, and regional offices.

2. External and Internal Environment Analysis

Thorough strategic analyses are conducted & presented to the client using established business tools such as SWOT, PESTLE & Porter’s Five Forces. When presented with our findings, the client is expected to provide further internal strategic information so a preliminary organizational fit assessment can be developed upon.

3. Strategy Formulation and Adaptation

Based on insights from prior analysis, strategic options are developed and refined in collaboration with Grant Thornton's leadership. Mintzberg (1994) emphasizes the balance between deliberate strategy formulation and the ability to understand and respond appropriately to market changes. For our consultancy with Grant Thornton, key steps include:

- Application of Porter's Generic Strategies: Determining whether Grant Thornton should reinforce its differentiation, strengthen its focus strategy, or integrate elements of cost leadership for efficiency gains.
- Development of an Activity System Map: Mapping out key strategic activities and their interdependencies.
- Development of a Strategic Roadmap: Creating a phased approach to implementation, detailing short-, medium-, and long-term actions.

4. Continuous Monitoring and Strategic Review

Strategy execution requires ongoing evaluation and adaptation through regular strategic review, trend & KPI monitoring, & adjustments based on feedback, which shall lead us to the Evaluation Stage of this document.

Conclusion

Grant Thornton's strategic positioning is firmly rooted in its mid-market specialization, leveraging a Focus and Differentiation Strategy to distinguish itself from competitors. The firm's commitment to personalized service, regional autonomy, and sector-specific expertise provides a strong competitive advantage. However, to sustain growth and remain adaptive to evolving industry demands, an enhanced focus on ESG initiatives, employee upskilling, and digital transformation is necessary. These initiatives align with the firm's culture and decentralized structure, ensuring strategic fit while reinforcing its value proposition.

Through a structured consultancy process, Grant Thornton can effectively implement these strategic refinements while maintaining agility in a dynamic market and the firm can fortify its differentiation strategy, provide greater value to clients, and sustain long-term competitive

advantage. The next stage of the strategic review will focus on evaluating implementation success and refining the strategy to ensure sustained impact.

Evaluation Stage

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess Grant Thornton's current strategic position in the financial industry. We analysed the alignment of the firm's current strategies and industry trends to determine strategic continuity. Based on this study, informed recommendations have been provided to enhance the company's competitive advantage and market relevance. To achieve this, we delved into Grant Thornton's current strategy, their alignment with industry trends by conducting a strategic analysis using the 7 dimensions of transformation consulting framework, and providing recommendations for strategic growth, creativity, and change.

4.2 Grant Thornton's Current Strategy

Grant Thornton has been taking a strong growth, innovation, and competitiveness strategy, particularly against the Big Four accounting companies. Some of the key elements of this strategy are:

Private Equity Ventures

Grant Thornton's recent engagement with private equity, such as the U.S arm's majority stake sale to New Mountain Capital, reflects a broader trend in the professional services industry. This strategy aims to enhance competitiveness through capital infusion. According to

Beuselinck et al (2023), private equity-backed companies often exhibit improved financial transparency and performance due to active investor involvement (Beuselinck et al., 2021).

Technological Advancements & AI

Grant Thornton's strategic emphasis on investing in technology and AI aligns with industry-wide shifts towards digital transformation. Technology readiness significantly impacts the acceptance and integration of AI-based systems in accounting practices (Damerji and Salimi, 2021).

ESG & Sustainability Consulting

The firm's development of ESG advisory services addresses the growing demand for sustainable business practices that align with value creation for clients as corporate social responsibility initiatives can lead to reduced stock, return volatility, and a lower cost of capital.

4.3 Industry Trends vs. Grant Thornton's Strategic Positioning

Digital Transformation & AI

Grant Thornton's Response to this industry trend- Investing in AI-powered audits and blockchain technology. Competitive positioning- Needs to expand AI applications further to stay competitive.

ESG & Sustainability Consulting

Response- Developing ESG compliance services for mid-market firms. Competitive positioning- An emerging player, but expansion is necessary.

Private Equity & M&A Growth

Response- High focus on mid-market transactions and cross-border deals. Competitive positioning- well-positioned but could increase global deal advisory.

Global Expansion & Market Reach

Present in 156+ countries. Competitive positioning- well-aligned, but leadership development is needed.

4.4 Conceptualising Findings

Conceptualising findings is a crucial component of the consulting, advisory, and auditing processes regarding Grant Thornton. By gathering and observing raw data, the **7 Dimensions of Transformation** consulting framework aligns challenges with client goals and ensures relevant/practical outcomes. Given the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous business environment, organisations must adopt adaptive strategies to progress and succeed by taking proactive steps to redefine industry structures and making small investments to keep options open (Day and Schoemaker, 2016).

According to the *Vision & Strategy* dimension, although Grant Thornton emphasises private equity ventures & global expansion, which aligns with industry trends, they lack clearly defined KPI's. This limits the ability to track success. Research suggests that clearly defined KPI's achieve effective strategic execution by enhancing organisational alignment, driving competitive advantage, and improving communication and decision making (Micheli and Mura, 2017).

Recommendations

Expand their global advisory services to strengthen relationships with key private equity firms, this would allow for market share expansion and capture a broader range of transactions rather than focusing on only mid-market transactions. Grant Thornton does not publicise their KPI's, defining clear KPI's for market expansion can enhance both vision and strategy.

Challenges

Targeting bigger deals may outstretch the firm's resources resulting in a decline in their competitive position in the mid-market. However, focusing solely on mid-market limits potential revenue from larger deals. Finding balance between growing private equity advisory services and maintaining their niche position is crucial.

Regarding *Technology & Data*, Grant Thornton has made strides in this direction but not enough to keep up with competitors. According to research, AI-driven solutions enhance financial performance, portfolio quality, and risk management (Shen, 2024).

Recommendations

Expand the use of AI applications further across client-facing functions, providing AI enhancements to personalised advisory services to improve real-time client insights. This can enhance decision making and streamline the reporting process.

Challenges

Over-investment in AI may lead to dilution of client relationships, while underinvestment could cause a competitive disadvantage.

According to the *People & Culture* dimension, there is emphasis on employee concern and job security due to digital transformation and ESG.

Recommendations

Expanding their ESG services to full-scale sustainability consulting, climate risk advisory, and ESG-focused audit services could help Grant Thornton stay ahead of competition within the mid-market, ensuring their offerings remain relevant and valuable. As ESG transformation requires internal cultural alignment, regular training and upskilling programs are essential in addressing any employee concerns.

Challenges

Long-term profitability of ESG consulting may take some time to develop while investment in developing ESG expertise may result in an expense with short-term financial gains. Therefore, finding balance between the firm's overall financial health and investment in ESG consulting is vital.

In conclusion, Grant Thornton's strategic approaches align with industry trends. However, to hold a strong competitive advantage, addressing and defining clear KPI's, enhancing ESG services, and expanding AI applications is crucial. Ensuring there is balance between resources, employee engagement, and the above initiatives is important to maintain market positioning and to allow for sustainable growth.

4.5 Alignment of findings to relevant literature:

Grant Thornton's strategic insights support the company's long-term viability and competitive position as it aligns with many important academic frameworks. The most relatable framework is Porter's competitive strategy, 1980. Porter's method of differentiation, which stresses gaining a competitive edge throughout the cost of management and exclusive emphasis aligns with Grant Thornton's mid-market focus and individualised services by providing customised solutions to mid-size enterprises.

Porter's generic strategies align with Grant Thornton's operational strategy, cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. By employing focused and distinguished employees, a firm can establish a solid mid-market position and incorporate Porter's (1980) (Miller and Friesen, 2016). The firm focuses on offering customised client services to mid-sized companies with a focus on knowledgeable adaptability and client-centred methodology. According to Porter's differentiation strategy, businesses should provide distinctive value to differentiate themselves to stay relevant in the ever-changing market (Miller and Friessen, 2016). Grant Thornton strengthens its competitive edge by funding digital transformations and the ESG projects by leveraging extensive industry expertise, service offerings, and solid client relationships. Within an environment of collaborating, professional growth, and inclusive decision-making, including employees in decision-making is essential for Grant Thornton employee engagement and innovation strategy (Braiden, 2009). Utilising upskilling and mentoring services from the professional department for all employees would aid in the scaling of ESG and digital transformation, along with the flexible work culture with hybrid practices.

The second framework that we identified within Grant Thornton is the internal sustainability program, and environmental, social and governance. The ESG guidance services incorporate the CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive) into its operations by providing experience and sustainable reporting risk assessments, and legislation alignment. (Liu *et al.*, 2006) The firm assists customers in navigating through the CSRD compliance. Grant Thornton uses the CSRD through their advisory services, helping companies comply with the CSRD regulations by enhancing data collection, transparency and the ESG disclosures (Liu *et al.*, 2006). Secondly, through their internal governance by coordinating their sustainability activities with the CSRD requirements.

4.6 Recommendations for Strategic Growth, Creativity & Change

By promoting creativity, strategic growth, and welcoming organisational transformation, Grant Thornton can continue to excel in the mid-market sector. The following suggestions can help the company grow while preserving their basic principles and competitive advantages.

Strategic Growth

Concentrate on growing/development of service offerings and improving client development strategies to maintain their market leading position.

Seek New Clientele: Extend market expansion by taking an aggressive strategic approach to attract IT corporations, start-ups, and sustainable orientation businesses. This will allow Grant Thornton to offer clients specialised support through their financial consulting expertise.

Developing Industry Knowledge: Due to Grant Thornton's market presence, there are significant opportunities to enhance knowledge and strategic capabilities by growing sectors with rapid growth rates, i.e., health care, banking, and insurance industries. Developing industry-specific insights and solutions will help to improve their client integration.

Creativity

Utilising technology and employee-driven projects to differentiate themselves.

Updates: Eliminate manual financial analysis tasks using AI, specialists can increase productivity and focus on the strategic advancing workload.

Client Solutions: Customise financial services to meet the client's needs by utilising data-driven insights and statistical analysis, this will increase client loyalty and fulfilment.

Encouraging Employee Innovation: Incentivised systems can boost employee morale, productivity, and overall success.

Changes

Adjust to the changing business environments by reinforcing its corporate culture, by increasing workplace flexibility and investing in digital skills.

Digital Skills: Giving staff members enhanced training in cyber security, AI, and data analytics will help the company stay competitive in the tech-driven financial sector.

Enhancing Remote Collaborations: Reinforcing hybrid working models with improved networking and communication advancements can increase productivity and teamwork.

Clear Communication: Transparency and trust increase when clients and staff are informed about new tactics, technology advancement and market trends.

4.7 Reflections on the role of strategy consultants

Our team served as strategy consultants for the duration of this project, examining Grant Thornton's competitive marketplace, market position, and future potential. Using strategic frameworks and competitive positioning analysis, we could evaluate our analysis based on value creation models, looking at differentiation strategies, and using a PEST analysis to analyse external threats.

This strategy improved our understanding of industry trends and real-world company difficulties. It was crucial to strike a balance between qualitative and quantitative insights, therefore we considered the human element like organisational culture and talent retention while utilising market trends and financial data, e.g. AI lowering cost by 22 to 25%. One of the main challenges was navigating trade-offs, striking a balance between market differences and compliance standards to innovate and maintain cost efficiency, while considering employee concerns around technology implementation.

To guarantee accountability, we delegated tasks fairly, set smart goals and conducted frequent check-ins. Discussing relevant topics and aligning recommendations was crucial to compile strategies that support Grant Thornton's long-term objectives. Utilising our analytical, collaborative, and critical thinking abilities to highlight culture flexibility, decision-making,

and to balance internal and external difficulties while ensuring Grant Thornton remains competitive within the market. This assessment was an extremely effective learning experience due to the consulting process that provided insightful information that we may use within future professional environments.

Bibliography:

Barney, J.B. and Clark, D.N. (2007) "Resource-Based Theory: Creating and Sustaining Competitive Advantage", Oxford University Press: Oxford, pp 69-72. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central [10 February 2025].

Barney, J. (1991) Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), 99-120.

Bernzweig, M. (2023) 'The Accelerating Integration of AI in Financial Services: Trends & Statistics', *Software Oasis*. Available at: <https://softwareoasis.com/rise-of-ai-in-financial-services-trends-stats/> [Accessed: 25 February 2025].

Beuselinck, C., Elfers, F., Gassen, J. and Pierk, J. (2021) Private firm accounting: the European reporting environment, data and research perspectives. *Accounting and Business Research*, 50(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00014788.2021.1982670>.

Bishop, R. (2014). *Mid-market businesses look past slowdown and plan for growth*. [online] Grant Thornton International Ltd. Home. Available at: <https://www.grantthornton.global/en/insights/international-business/mid-market-businesses-look-past-slowdown-and-plan-for-growth/>. [Accessed 20 Jan. 2025].

Braiden, E. (2009) Case Study of Grant Thornton. *Talent Management*, 4(4), pp.66-77. doi:https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230233522_6.

Campbell-Hunt, C. (2000) 'What Have We Learned About Generic Competitive Strategy? A Meta-Analysis', *Strategic Management Journal*, 21(2), 127-154.

Damerji, H. and Salimi, A. (2021). Mediating effect of use perceptions on technology readiness and adoption of artificial intelligence in accounting. *Accounting Education*, 30(2), pp.107–130. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2021.1872035>.

Day, G. and Schoemaker, P. (2016) Adapting to Fast-Changing Markets and Technologies. *CALIFORNIA MANAGEMENT REVIEW*, 58(4). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2016.58.4.59>.

Deloitte, (n.d) *Artificial Intelligence and AI* Available at: <https://www.deloitte.com/ie/en/services/consulting/services/artificial-intelligence-and-data.html> [Accessed 3 March 2025].

Deloitte (2024) '2025 banking and capital markets outlook', *Deloitte Center for Financial Services*. Available at: [2025 banking industry outlook | Deloitte Insights](#) [Accessed: 25 February 2025].

Deloitte (2024) '2025 investment management outlook: Navigating fast-paced change, elevated risk, and outsized opportunity', *Deloitte Center for Financial Services*. Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/financial-services/financial-services-industry-outlooks/investment-management-industry-outlook.html> [Accessed: 25 February 2025].

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2024) *Corporate Sustainability Reporting Regulations*. Available at: <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/what-we-do/the-business-environment/corporate-sustainability-reporting/> [Accessed: 23 February 2025].

European Central Bank (2025) *Monetary policy decisions*, 30 January. Available at: <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/pr/date/2025/html/ecb.mp250130~530b29e622.en.html> [Accessed 20 February 2025].

European Council (2024) 'Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts 15th package of restrictive measures', *Council of the European Union*. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/12/16/russia-s-war-of-aggression-against-ukraine-eu-adopts-15th-package-of-restrictive-measures/> [Accessed: 23 February 2025].

Gambier, W. (2016) *Policy information*. Available at: https://willisgambieroutlet.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/WG_Data_Protection_2018.pdf [Accessed 24 Feb. 2025].

Grant, R. M. (2016) *Contemporary Strategy Analysis: Text and Cases Edition*. John Wiley & Sons.

Grant Thornton (n.d) *Global Scale and Agility*. Available at: <https://www.grantthornton.ie/about/> [Accessed: 1 March 2023].

Grant Thornton (n.d.) *Private Client Services: Protecting your financial future*. Available at: <https://www.grantthornton.ie/globalassets/1.-member->

[firms/ireland/insights/publications/grant-thornton---private-client-services.pdf](#) [Accessed 10 Feb 2025].

Grant Thornton Ireland. (2019) *Industries*. Available at:
<https://www.grantthornton.ie/industries/> [Accessed 20 Jan. 2025].

Johnson, G., Scholes, K., & Whittington, R. (2017) *Exploring Corporate Strategy: Text and Cases*. Pearson Education.

Maurer, M. (2024) *Accounting Firms Rethink Their Ownership Structure*. Available at:
<https://koltin.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Accounting-Firms-Rethink-Their-Ownership-Structure-WSJ-4-5-24.pdf> [Accessed 23 Feb. 2025].

MHC (2025) 'Financial Services Sector Update', *Mayson Hayes & Curran*. Available at:
<https://www.mhc.ie/latest/news/financial-services-sector-update> [Accessed: 22 February 2025].

Micheli, P. and Mura, M. (2017) Executing strategy through comprehensive performance measurement systems. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 37(4), pp.423–443. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/ijopm-08-2015-0472>.

Miller, D. (1988) Relating Porter's Business Strategies to Environment and Structure: Analysis and Performance Implications. *Academy of Management Journal*, 31(2), pp.280–308. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5465/256549>

Miller, D. and Friesen, P.H. (2016). Porter's (1980) Generic Strategies and Performance: An Empirical Examination with American Data. *Organization Studies*, [online] 7(1), pp.55. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/017084068600700103>.

Mintzberg, H. (1994) The Fall and Rise of Strategic Planning. *Harvard Business Review*, 72(1), 107-114.

Parnell, J. A. (2013) Uncertainty, Generic Strategy, Strategic Clarity, and Performance of Retail SMEs in Peru, Argentina, and the United States. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 51(2), 215-234.

Porter, M. E. (1985) *Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*. Free Press: New York

Porter, M. E. (1980) *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors*. Free Press: New York

Porter, M. E. (1996) What is Strategy? *Harvard Business Review*, 74(6), 61-78.

Porter, M. E., & Kramer, M. R. (2011) Creating Shared Value. *Harvard Business Review*, 89(1/2), 62-77.

Rumelt, R. (2012) "Good Strategy/Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters", *Strategic Direction*, Vol. 28 No. 8. <https://doi.org/10.1108/sd.2012.05628haa.002>

Shen, Q. (2024) AI-driven financial risk management systems: Enhancing predictive capabilities and operational efficiency. *Applied and Computational Engineering*, 69(1), pp.134–139. doi:<https://doi.org/10.54254/2755-2721/69/20241494>.

Siegemund, C. (2008) Blue Ocean Strategy for small and mid-sized companies in Germany : Development of a consulting approach, Diplomica Verlag, Hamburg, pp28-68. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central [13 February 2025].

Sjödin, D., Parida, V., Jovanovic, M. and Visnjic, I. (2019) Value creation and value capture alignment in the shift to open business models. In *Academy of Management Proceedings* (Vol. 2019, No. 1, p. 11432). Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510: Academy of Management. [Accessed: 25 February 2025].

The European Banking Authority (2024) *The EBA issues final guidance on internal policies, procedures and controls to ensure the implementation of Union and national sanctions*, EBA. Available at: <https://www.eba.europa.eu/publications-and-media/press-releases/eba-issues-final-guidance-internal-policies-procedures-and-controls-ensure-implementation-union-and> [Accessed: 22 February 2025].

Thompson Reuters (2025) *Challenges and changes within the audit industry*, Thompson Reuters Tax and Accounting. Available at: [Challenges in the audit industry and how to overcome them](#) [Accessed: 25 February 2025].

Vena Solutions (2024) *ESG Statistics To Leverage for Business Growth in 2024*, 21 June. Available at: [38 ESG Statistics To Leverage for Business Growth in 2024 - Vena](#) [Accessed: 27 February 2025].

Warner, AG. (2010) *Strategic Analysis and Choice: A Structured Approach*, Business Expert Press, New York. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central. [Accessed: 13 February 2025].

Whittington, R., Regnér, P., Angwin, D., Johnson, G. and Scholes, K. (2021) *Fundamentals of Strategy*. Fifth Edition. Harlow: Pearson.

Yunna, W. and Yisheng, Y. (2014) The competition situation analysis of shale gas industry in China: Applying Porter's five forces and scenario model. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 40, pp.798-805. [Accessed: 20 February 2025].


Appendix:

Appendix 1: Interview consent form for Grant Thornton FAAS employee

Yours faithfully Liam Cummins

Certificate of Consent I have read the foregoing information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and I understand that I can withdraw from the interview at any time without any impact on my job position.

Print Name of Participant: Kledi Qarraj

Signature of Participant: 

Date: 17th February 2025

Questions:

1. Why would you prefer to work with the Big Four?

They are the pinnacle of the industry and seen as the best.

2. How did you find training?

There was specially assigned training for each client, usually taking the whole month and can be in person, however once it's over there is very little upskilling.

3. What did you like about working for Grant Thornton?

The work culture was incredibly friendly, and I got a lot of experience.

4. How do you feel about their use of new digital technology?

They seem to slowly integrate it with their work environment to help complete tasks.

5. What is something Grant Thornton could do to entice you to work for them instead of the big four?

More investment into continuous upskilling prospects.

Appendix 2: VRIO Framework

Resource/ Capability	Value	Rarity	Imitability	Organized	Result
Mid-Market Specialization	✓	✓	✓	✓	Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Personalized Client Services	✓	✓	✓	✓	Sustainable Competitive Advantage
Employee training and Upskilling	✓	✗	✗	✗	Competitive Disadvantage
ESG and Sustainable Services	✓	✗	✗	✓	Partially Competitive

- Both Mid-Market Specialization and Personalized Client Services are specific key strengths of Grant Thornton as they capture all four criteria for the VRIO framework, making them a sustainable competitive advantage.
- Employee Training & Upskilling is valuable but lacks rarity, imitability, and organization, resulting in a competitive disadvantage.

- ESG & Sustainable Services capture value and are well-organized within Grant Thornton, however the firm lacks rarity in conducting ESG & Sustainable Services and are easy to imitate or even outdone by competitors, making them partially competitive rather than a long-term advantage.

Appendix 3: Porter's five forces

Force	Level of Impact	Explanation
Threat of New Entrants	Moderate	Strong established brand loyalty and client expertise create significant barriers for new firms to enter the market.
Bargaining Power of Buyers	High	Clients have significant power over choosing a firm for finance services. Large multinationals are important enough to negotiate aspects such as price and tailored services.
Bargaining Power of Suppliers	Low to Moderate	There is a large talent pool for potential employees, however retention of staff can be a challenge, due to competition from the big four offering enticing incentives such as higher salary, benefits in kind, etc.
Threat of Substitutes	Moderate to High	Disruptions to the market, such as in house corporate finance teams and Revolut challenge traditional financial services and going forward need to consider investments in digital transformation.

- Industry rivalry and buyer power are the most significant pressures; however, Grant Thornton differentiate through mid-market specialization and personalized services.

- The firm must embrace digital transformation and stronger commitment to ESG services to mitigate threats of substitution.
- Supplier power remains low- moderate, and while finance professionals are plentiful, keeping them is crucial to have a competitive advantage.

Appendix 4: PESTLE Analysis

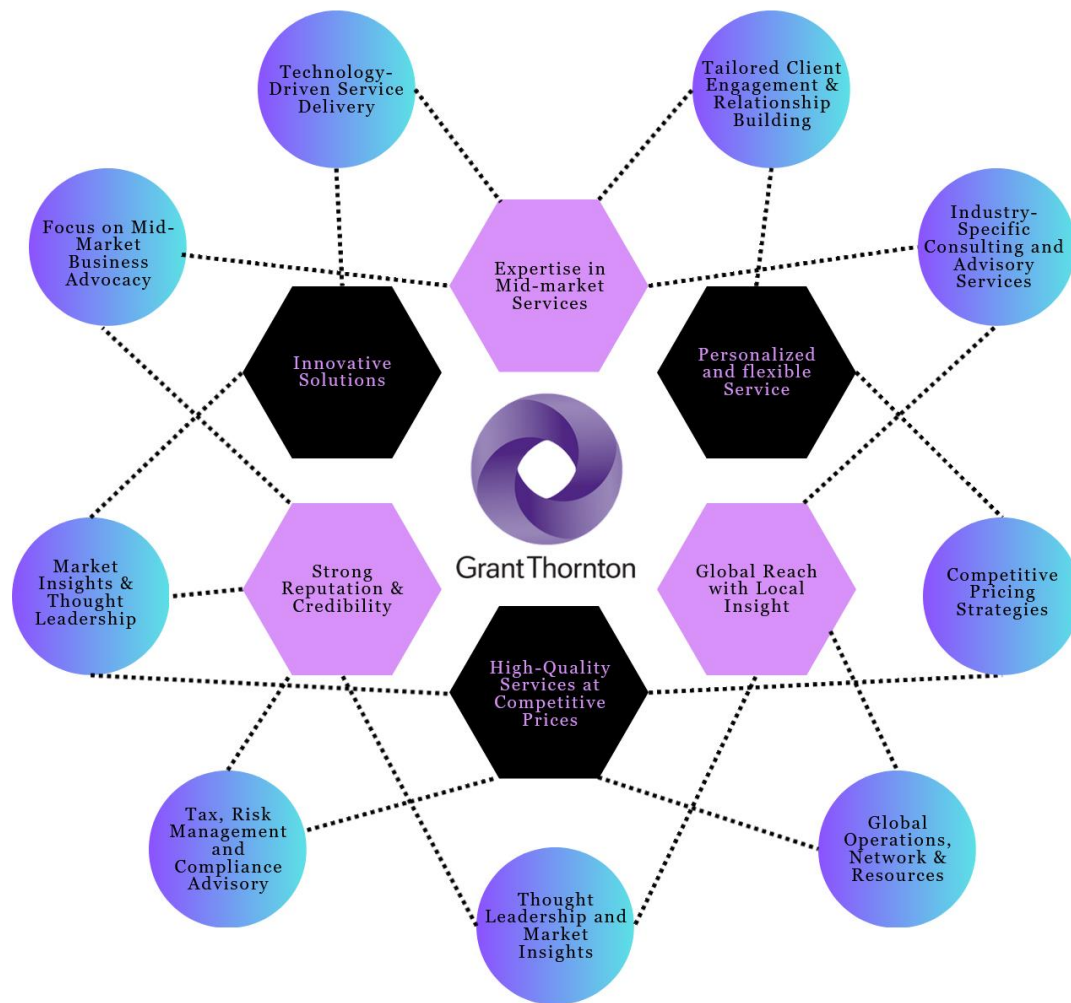
	PESTLE Analysis		
		Impact on GT	Impact Rank (1 = low, 5 = High)
Political	<p>Ongoing geopolitical tensions with tighter EU sanctions compliance requirements taking effect in Dec 2025.</p> <p>(European Council, 2024)</p>	Must advise clients on due diligence for controlled goods and subsidiaries' compliance.	5
Economic	<p>ECB lowering interest rates to 2.75%</p> <p>(European Central Bank, 2025)</p>	Potential rise in Mergers and Acquisitions, borrowing and overall business activity, increasing client demand for advisory services	3
Social	<p>Rapid AI adoption</p> <p>Finance industry AI usage projected to rise from 45% (2022) to 85% (2025).</p> <p>(Bernzweig, 2023)</p>	Competitive pressure to implement AI capabilities quickly, need to ensure staff are trained in emerging technologies and can advise clients on AI best practices.	4
Technological	<p>AI efficiencies & cost reduction</p> <p>Automation can cut operational costs in finance by 22–25%</p> <p>(Bernzweig, 2023) and (Deloitte, 2024)</p>	Opportunity to streamline internal processes, reduce overheads and enhance client offerings.	5
Legal	<p>ESG & larger reporting scope</p> <p>New Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)</p> <p>(Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2024)</p>	Must broaden assurance scope, advance staff training beyond financial expertise, continuously monitor legal updates and mitigate risks of reputational damage if ESG disclosures are inaccurate.	5
Environmental	<p>Rising ESG & climate considerations</p> <p>42% of global investors prioritise ESG; data-centre energy use projected to triple by 2030, raising sustainability and capacity concerns.</p> <p>(Vena Solutions, 2024) and (MHC, 2025)</p>	Growing client demand for sustainable practices provides opportunity to assist alignment with Climate Action Plan advice and reporting, but ongoing concerns about data-centre power usage need addressing.	3

Appendix 5: The 7 Dimensions of Transformation Consulting Framework

Category	Findings	Recommendations
Vision and Strategy	-Insufficient focus on market expansion	-Define clear KPIs for market expansion
Operating Model	-Lack of scalability	-Introduce cross-functional teams
Processes and Controls	-Inefficient legacy processes- manual workflows slow down operations	-Introduce robotic process automation (RPA) to eliminate repetitive tasks and speed up processes
People and Culture	-Employee concern about job security regarding transformation -Lack of employee training and Upskilling	-Address employee concerns with clear communication, elaborating on new opportunities -Introduce regular training and upskilling programs
Technology and Data	-Limited use of analytics for decision-making	-Upgrade and implement advanced data analytics to support strategic decisions
Stakeholder Alignment	-Key stakeholders are not actively engaged during the decision-making process	-Establish stakeholder committees to align priorities
Program Governance	-Lack of clear accountability for program deliverables	-Implement regular reviews to analyse progress

- By gathering and observing raw data, **the 7 Dimensions of Transformation** consulting framework aligns challenges with client goals and ensures relevant/practical outcomes.
- The 3 highlighted dimensions, Vision and Strategy, People and Controls, and Technology and Data, align the most with our main findings.
- The *Vision & Strategy* dimension emphasises there is a lack of clear KPI's, which is essential to track success.
- The *People & Culture* dimension suggests there is employee concern due to digital transformation and ESG.
- The *Technology & Data* dimension suggests that Grant Thornton should expand their AI applications to enhance performance.

Appendix 6: Activity Map



TEAM CONTRACT

Team Name Grant Thornton

Team # BSI 21

Team Members:

- 1) Liam Cummins
- 2) Abbie Paige Cassidy
- 3) Michelle Bowes
- 4) Adam O'Brian
- 5) Adam O'Beirnes
- 6) Rebecca Stone

Team Procedures

1. Day, time, and place for regular team meetings:
We met together every Thursday from 12pm - 2pm. We mainly booked a study room. If a member couldn't be there we would join via zoom.
2. Preferred method of communication (e.g., e-mail, mobile, landline, Blackboard Discussion Board, Zoom (or other online platform), face-to-face) in order to inform each other of team meetings, announcement, updates, reminders, problems:
 - *WhatsApp group chat*
 - *Email*
 - *Zoom calls*
 - *Whiteboard in study room*
3. Decision-making policy (by consensus? by majority vote?):
Majority vote.

4. Method for setting and following meeting **agendas** (Who will set each agenda? When? How will team members be notified/reminded? Who will be responsible for the team following the agenda during a team meeting? What will be done to keep the team on track during a meeting?):

Team leader → Liam Cummins, set agenda for meetings.

We all worked together to remind each other on tasks etc.

(→ Team work)

5. Method of **record keeping** (Who will be responsible for recording & disseminating minutes? How & when will the minutes be disseminated? Where will all agendas & minutes be kept?):

We kept a list together written out on paper.

We will keep agenda & minutes on a word Doc.

Team Expectations

Work Quality

1. **Project standards** (What is a realistic level of quality for team presentations, collaborative writing, individual research, preparation of drafts, peer reviews, etc.):

We found as a team, good Collaboration & Communication were a given.

We made sure to listen to each other, help read through teams work & help guide others.

2. Strategies to fulfill these standards:

Teamwork → using others Strengths to balance out weaknesses.

Team Participation

1. Strategies to ensure cooperation and equal distribution of tasks:

Team leader → Liam kept an eye on equal distribution of our tasks.

2. Strategies for encouraging/including ideas from all team members (team maintenance):

Communication → during meeting giving all members a chance to speak, and give each person encouragement.

3. Strategies for keeping on task (task maintenance):

Team lead → Liam & help from Abbie to keep on track.

4. Preferences for leadership (informal, formal, individual, shared):

all of the above.

Personal Accountability

1. Expected individual attendance, punctuality, and participation at all team meetings:

all team members , were always puntual & attended.

2. Expected level of responsibility for fulfilling team assignments, timelines, and deadlines:

all team members were responsible for fulfilling their own part of the assignment, with team Leader checking in for deadlines.

3. Expected level of communication with other team members:

High Level of Communication.

4. Expected level of commitment to team decisions and tasks.

High Level of Commitment.

Consequences for Failing to Follow Procedures and Fulfill Expectations

1. Describe, as a group, how you would handle infractions of any of the obligations of this team contract:

Call a group meeting to discuss infractions, if Escalated we would Contact teacher assistant for guideness.

2. Describe what your team will do if the infractions continue:

Contact teacher assistant For guideness.

- a) I participated in formulating the standards, roles, and procedures as stated in this contract. ✓
b) I understand that I am obligated to abide by these terms and conditions. ✓

c) I understand that if I do not abide by these terms and conditions, I will suffer the consequences as stated in this contract.

- 1) Abbie Paige Cassidy (225 25916) date 06/03/2025
- 2) Liam Cummings (22111611) date 06/03/2025
- 3) Michelle Bowes (2277201) date 06/03/2025
- 4) Rebecca Stone (20335951) date 06/03/25
- 5) Adam a Bejones (22768015) date 06/03/2025
- 6) Adam O'Brien (22512756) date 06/03/25