



Trinity College Dublin

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Rethinking Boundaries

A Reflective Essay based on readings, discussions and learnings on the topic

Analysing industry structure and dynamics

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Rethinking Boundaries

Last year, while preparing for my PMP¹ exam, I spent substantial time understanding the importance of ‘*defining project scope*’ to avoid ‘*scope creep*’—a key concept in project management. This focus on defining boundaries naturally extends beyond projects to organizations and industries (PMI, 2021). While discussing the Essilor-Luxottica case during the class discussion with Timothy, I quickly defined that Luxottica belongs to the *eyewear Industry* and was borderline overconfident about it as I came fully prepared, thinking I had figured it all out. I also studied Porter’s 5 forces diligently. I had very clear definitions of the strategy keywords and concepts like ‘vertical integration’ and how Luxottica’s strategic acquisitions helped them strengthen their market position by ensuring control over the supply chain and distribution, relating the insights from the course book, ‘*Exploring Strategy*’ (Whittington et al., 2020) and the case study.

However, my confidence quickly shifted, when different groups shared their perspective and Neil talked about Meta’s AR technology as part of the eyewear industry’s future, followed by Catherine’s remark, ‘*Boundaries change*,’ their insights made me realize how rigidly I had defined industry boundaries, which for me acted like horse blinders—focusing my attention but limiting my vision of broader, dynamic shifts (Class Discussions, 2024). This shift in perspective underscored the critical role of strategic adaptability in the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world we exist, where failing to adapt can lead to irrelevance. This connection between project scope and strategic adaptability reshaped my thinking on both fronts.

I now realize that industry boundaries should neither be too broad nor too narrow. Too broad, and you risk diluting focus. Too narrow, and you limit growth potential and miss opportunities. This concept became even clearer during the Fujifilm vs. Kodak case discussion in the next lecture. Fujifilm’s diversification, aligned with core competencies, allowed it to thrive, whereas Kodak, failing to look beyond film, missed the digital revolution and collapsed. It taught me that pushing boundaries should be strategic and aligned with core strengths. In the future, just like I understand that projects must be carefully aligned with an organization’s core competencies to avoid overextension, I’ll focus on ensuring that Industry boundary expansion if necessary, is always aligned with the organization’s core strengths.

I was also quick to learn when discussing Porter’s 5 Forces, I had an instinctive question: Why only FIVE? (Porter, 2008) and at the same moment, Catherine raised a similar point, affirming that I was thinking along the right lines. In today’s world, customer perception and technological disruption cannot simply be categorized as “buyer power” or “substitutes.” With companies like Tupperware collapsing, possibly due to shifting consumer trends, I began to wonder—are we overlooking the growing power of

¹ The Project Management Professional (PMP)® certification is a globally recognized project management certification conducted by the Project Management Institute (PMI) that tests a candidate’s ability to manage people, processes, and business priorities.

customer perception and social media's influence on driving behavior? Sustainability, digital engagement, and even nationalism can shift industry dynamics. Netflix, for example, disrupted the entertainment industry by using technology not as a substitute, but as a core driver (Teece et al., 2020). This demonstrates that while Porter's 5 Forces remains a useful starting point, future strategic analyses must incorporate factors beyond these five forces.

Also, recognizing the importance of value chain analysis helped me see how vertical integration can optimize operations and secure competitive advantages. This is crucial for long-term success, both in projects and industry strategy, as it allows organizations to align their operations more effectively with market needs and internal strengths. Similarly, Just as we assess risks in project management, I now understand that industry risks—from technology to consumer power—must be evaluated to adapt effectively. This class made me realize the importance of flexibility and risk management both in projects and strategy.

In my lessons learned from the readings, classroom discussions, and this reflection exercise itself, I realize that this shift in my thinking goes beyond just strategy and project management—it's about embracing the impermanence and fluidity that govern not just industries, or well-defined frameworks like the Porter's forces, but life itself. The notion that boundaries are not fixed, but ever-moving, is a powerful reminder that holding onto fixed ideas can blind us to opportunities for growth, while openness allows us to continually redefine our boundaries, pushing beyond what we thought was possible. By questioning my assumptions and remaining open to new perspectives, I aim to cultivate a mindset that thrives in uncertainty—one that sees boundaries, definitions, and frameworks not as limitations, but as invitations to explore what lies beyond them.

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