**NOTES ON PREPARING WRITTEN AND VERBAL CASE ANALYSES**

**STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

**SPRING 2013**

**I) What is a Strategic- Management Case?**

**A Strategic Management Case** describes an organization’s external environment, (MBV) internal (RBV) and organizational (OBV) conditions and raises issues concerning the organization's mission, objectives, strategies and policies. Most of the information in a case is established fact, but some information may be opinions, judgments and beliefs.

**A Strategic Management Case** is simply a story about a company and the strategic issues its strategic decisions makers face. In order to identify and address those issues, you put yourself in the position of being one of those decision-makers (i.e. Consultant, Managing Director, and Member of the Board or Chairman Etc). You analyze the information that is provided about the company in the case. Based on your analysis of this information, you should be able to identify the major *strategic issues* facing the company and formulate *strategic alternatives* you think would best address those issues. **Strategic Management Cases** are more comprehensive than those you may have studied in other courses. They generally include a description of related management, marketing, finance, HRM, procurement, production/ operations, OB, information systems and economics. A strategic management case puts the reader on the scene of the action by describing a company's situation at some point in time. **Strategic Management Cases** are written to give you practices applying **strategic management** *theories, concepts and frameworks*.

**II) Guidelines for Preparing Case Analyses**

**The Need for Practicality:**

There is no such thing as a complete case, and no case ever gives you all information you need to conduct analyses and make recommendations. Likewise, in business world, strategists never have all information they need to make decisions: information may be unavailable or too costly to obtain, or it may take too much time to obtain. So in preparing strategic-management-cases, do what strategists do every day - **make reasonable assumptions about unknowns, state assumptions clearly, perform appropriate analyses and make decisions**. **Be Practical.**

**The Need for Justification**

The most important part of analyzing cases is not what strategies you recommend, but rather how you support your decisions and how you propose that they be implemented. Justify your answers by relating them to the analyses you conduct. **There is no single best solution or one right answers to a case, so give ample justification for your answers and recommendations by using theories, concepts, frameworks of Strategic Management**.

**The Need for Realism**

Avoid recommending strategies or course of actions beyond a company's means**. Be realistic.** No company can possibly pursue all the strategies that could potentially benefit the company. **Make sure your recommendations are suitable, feasible and acceptable by the key stakeholders. Estimate how much capital will be required to implement what you recommended.** Do not prepare a case analysis that omits all arguments and information not supportive of your recommendations. Try not to exaggerate, stereotype, prejudge or over dramatize. Strive to demonstrate that your interpretation of the evidence is reasonable and objective.

**The Need for Specificity**

Do not make broad generalizations such as "The Company should pursue a market penetration strategy"". **Be specific by telling what, why, when, how, where and who.** Conducting comprehensive and appropriate external, internal, organizational, international, corporate analyses would help to specify your recommendations Failure to use specifics are the single major shortcoming of most verbal and written case analyses. In real world businesspeople dislike generalities and vagueness.

**The Need for Originality**

Do not necessarily recommend a course of action that the company plans to take or actually undertook, even if those strategies resulted in improved revenues and earnings. The aim of the case analysis is for you to consider all the facts and information relevant to the company at the time (case date), to generate appropriate alternative strategies to choose among those alternatives, and to defend your recommendations. Put yourself back in time to the point when strategic decisions were being made by the company's strategists. Based on the information available then, what would you have done? **Support your position with charts, graphs, rational analyses and frameworks, and the like-not a revelation from the library. You can become a good strategist by thinking situations, making management assessments, and proposing plans yourself. Be original.** Compare and contrast what you recommend versus what the company plans to do or did.

**The Need to Contribute**

In real world, strategy analysis, strategy formulation and recommendation are commonly made by a group of individuals rather than by a single person. Members of your group may differ on their aversion to risk their concern for short run-versus long-run benefits, their interpretation of internal, external organizational, international factors affecting the company etc. There are no perfect people, so there are no perfect strategies. **Be open minded to others' views in your group. Be a good listener and a good contributor to the verbal and written presentations.**

**CASE STUDY VERBAL PRESENTATION- Key Points**

**I) Objectives:**

During the course of your business career it is very likely that you will be called on to prepare and give a number of verbal presentations. For this reason, it is a common practice in strategy related courses to assign cases for verbal presentation to the whole class. Such assignments give you an opportunity to hone your presentation skills for the real world.

**II) Verbal Presentation Criteria for Marking**

**Verbal presentations will be graded on two criteria: *Content and Delivery.* Verbal presentation will constitute 20% of the total mark awarded for the assignment. (80% on written report)**. Each member of the group will be awarded the same mark as the group mark. *Content criteria* refers to the quality, quantity, correctness and appropriateness of analyses, issues and recommendations presented, including such dimensions as logical flow through presentation, coverage of major strategic issues, use of specifics, avoidance of generalities, absence of mistakes and appropriateness of recommendations.

*Delivery criteria* include such dimensions as audience attentiveness, clarity of visual aids, persuasiveness of arguments, tone of voice, eye contact, and posture.

**You need to hand in a one page summary of your verbal presentation to the moderators , immediately after the presentation, stating who presented which section- This should not exceed more than size A4 page.**

**III) The Structure of Verbal Presentations**

* Your group will make one verbal presentation on an assigned case and write a report on that same case
* Your group will be acting as **Consultancy Group** reporting to the **Board** of the company ( the classroom participants ) about your analysis of the strategic situation (as of the case date) and your recommendations

**CASE STUDY SESSIONS WILL BE FOR ONE HOUR AND WILL FOLLOW THE GENERAL PATTERN:**

**Presentation on the Case by the "Consultancy" Group** 25 minutes

**Break** for the (appointed) "Board of Directors" (another group)

to consider their reply and for the others to formulate their

own verbal responses 5 minutes

**Reply by the Board of Directors (Critique Group**) 15 minutes

**Remainder** - General discussion on the case and feedback by the moderator.

**IV) Some Suggestions on Verbal Presentations: Content and Delivery**

The preparation of a verbal presentation has much in common with that of a written presentation on a case analysis. Both require identification of the key strategic issues and problems confronting the company, analysis of the situation from External analysis/MBV, RBV, OBV, corporate (if it is a corporate case) and international perspectives, and the development of strategic recommendations and well –thought- out action plan.

The substance of your analysis and the quality of your recommendations in a verbal presentation should not be different than a written report. As with a written report, you will need to demonstrate command of the relative strategic management concepts and tools of analysis, and your recommendations should contain sufficient detail to provide clear direction for the management. The main difference between a verbal presentation and a written one is the delivery format and time frame. Verbal presentations rely principally on verbalizing your analysis, diagnosis of strategic issues and recommendations and visually enhancing and supporting your verbal discussion with slides. However, the main difference is the time frame. For verbal presentation, you N**EED TO DELIVER THESE CLEARLY AROUND TWENTY FIVE MINUTES**

For verbal presentation, you are at complete liberty to choose the range of strategic issues the company is facing in the case. This can be as identification of number of issues and the relevant recommendations or identification of one key issue (sometimes it is very well hidden in the case-you may need to apply extensive analysis to dig it out) and a detailed recommendation. You can conduct more detailed analysis or use more slides and analytical tools for your written presentation if you wish, - (can put all those in appendix section) - however the objective of the verbal presentation is not to conduct all the analyses, dig out all the strategic issues and all recommendations but to put your message across **clearly around twenty five minutes**

Your group members should carefully plan and rehearse your slide show – You only have 25 minutes to put your message across, and that 25 minutes go so fast when you are presenting! .Please plan your time, slides and your presentation beforehand. Your slide show should include all of the things necessary to garner the attention of the class, but not so much that it distracts from the content of what group members are saying to the class. You should remember that the role of slides is to help you communicate your points to the class. Too many graphs and slides may divert attention from what is being said or disrupt the flow of presentation. Please also keep in mind that **lecturing** and **presentations** are **not** the same thing, both require different approaches and techniques. The following suggestions may be useful for effective delivery

* An opening slide covering the “title “ of the presentation and names of the group members
* A slide showing an outline of the presentation ( perhaps with presenters’ names by each topic covered
* A series of slides covering various of your analyses that leads to issue identification
* One or few slides showing the key strategic issues the management need to address ( derived from your analyses above )
* Few slides containing your supporting arguments and reasoning why those issues need to be addressed by the top management has a lot of merit

**Organizing the Presentation**

Begin your presentation by introducing yourself and giving clear outline of topics to be covered. Specify the sequence of speakers in your group and the areas each person will address. Be sure the setting of your presentation is well organized, with chairs, flip charts, a transparency projector, and whatever else you plan to use.

**Controlling Your Voice**

An effective rate of speaking ranges from 100 to 125 words per minute. Practice your presentation a loud to determine if you are going fast. Breathe deeply before and during presentation to help you slow down. Avoid a monotone by placing emphasis on different words and sentences. Speak loudly and clearly. Silence can be used effectively to break a monotone voice. Stop the end of each sentence.

**Managing Body Language**

Be sure not to fold your arms, lean on podium, put your hands in your pockets, or put your hands behind you. Do not turn back to the audience. Never block the audience's view of visual aids. Maintain good eye contact throughout presentation. This is the best way to persuade your audience. A presentation should never be dull!

**Speaking from Notes**

Be sure not to read to your audience, because reading puts people to sleep. Practice using notes unobtrusively. Make sure your notes are written clearly so you will not flounder when trying to read your own writing. Include only main ideas on your note cards.

**Constructing Visual Aids**

Make sure your visual aids are legible to individuals in the back of the room. Avoid putting complete sentences on visual aids; rather use short phrases and then elaborate on issues orally as you make presentation. Use clear headings and subheadings. Be careful about spelling and grammar. Transparencies and handouts are excellent aids; however, be careful not to use many handouts or your audience may concentrate on them instead of you during the presentation.

**Answering Questions from other Groups Acting as BODs**

During the question -and - answer period; be polite, confident, and courteous. Avoid verbose responses. Do not get defensive with your answers, even if a hostile or confrontational question is asked. Staying calm during potentially disruptive situations reflects self-confidence, maturity, poise and command of the particular company. Stand up throughout the question and answer period.

Please also refer to the section below on “tips for success in case analyses “.



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**CASE STUDY WRITTEN REPORTS- Key Points**

**Guidelines for a Case Study Report- (Written Presentations)**

Preparing a written case study report is similar to preparing a case for verbal presentation, except written reports are generally more structured and more detailed. There is no ironclad procedure for preparing a written case report because cases differ in focus; type, size, and complexity of the company/industry being analyzed also vary. In **general a**round **5000** words, excluding appendix and references, is the typical length of the report. You may exceed this limit by around 20% if you think such extension reduction is appropriate and justified. *Written report will count 80 % of the total assignment mark. The remaining 20% is for the verbal presentation.*

You will first want to read the case to familiarize yourself with the company and the situation. Then, go back through the case and start noting certain statements and whether they describe internal, external, corporate, international and organizational factors. Keep in mind that not every piece of information included in the written case is going to be relevant/ important for your analysis. However, you will not be able to determine that unless you have studied the case by reading through it more than once. To get the most educational benefits from doing case analysis, you have to arm yourself with the information the company's strategic decision-makers would have had and address the case under those conditions. Most of the cases refer to recent situations. Nevertheless, no matter how up to date they are at the time of the reading, by the time book reaches the reader they will be history. This involves loss of both immediacy and uncertainty.

*You can also update the case information by finding extra information from library or the Internet etc if you wish, however this is only optional*. Our recommendation however, is that stay within the same period as the case. For instance, if your case ends in 2008, you could not use news events that happened in 2009, because those events would not have happened yet. In such situation, the only available information (usually not complete) is the one that is in the case, at the case date, and what we testing is to assess how as a strategist, can you use your *intuition, judgment, strategic management principles and experience* to dig out strategic issues and recommend future strategic options to address those issues from limited information.

When writing your report, avoid using jargon, vague or redundant works and do not duplicate case information. Watch your spelling. Use short sentences, paragraphs and simple words and phrases. Use quite a few subheadings. Your case study report could be presented in a combination of paragraphs and bulleted item format. If you have used information from other source, you will need to cite that information. Arrange strategic issues from the most important to the least important. Arrange future recommendations from the least controversial to the most controversial. You should also include a table of contents to your report .You may include charts, figures, frameworks and other kind of exhibits that may help to communicate important points and ideas. Appendix section of your report is useful to include those exhibits.

**Case Study Report Outline**

The written case study report requires you to apply the strategic management theories, analytical tools and frameworks as well as concepts that we have covered in the first term to the particular organization that you are assigned to analyze

The BODs of the company in question has asked you, as consultant group, to conduct a strategic audit of the company, to identify issues and recommend solutions. The following notes are for guidelines only. You are free to write the contents of subheadings as you wish, based on your past experience and knowledge on report writing. The following guidelines are aimed at contributing to more structured report writing; however creativity is always essential part of report writing.

**REPORT STRUCTURE**

Executive Summary

1. Strategic Analysis

* Historical Analysis
* External Analysis and Market Based View
* Internal Analysis and Resource Based View
* Organizational Analysis and Organisation Based View
* Corporate Analysis ( if it is a Corporate Case )
* Internationalisation Analysis

1. Identification of Strategic Issues
2. Future Strategic Options
3. Strategy Evaluation and Selection
4. Future Recommendations
5. Appendix and References
6. **STRATEGIC ANALYSIS**

The purpose of **strategic analysis** is not to provide answers but help to understand and to identify **strategic issues**. Many of the *analytical tools , theories and frameworks* introduced in lectures under **external analysis/MBV, RBV ,** **OBV, Corporate and International perspectives**  are to identify , classify and understand the principle **strategic issues** that effect the competitive position of firms and that influence strategic decisions. Each of the analytical *tools, theories and frameworks* assist to answer key questions under External analysis/MBV, RBV OBV, corporate, international and to dig out **strategic issues** faced by the firms in question. For example in identifying the key strategic issues you need answers for following questions by using following analytical *tools, theories and frameworks* under external environment analysis/MBV,RBV,OBV, international and corporate perspectives .

.In your report you need to show how using each **relevant** analytical *tool, theory or framework* lead to the strategic issue you identified. (These are **the strategic issues** hidden in the case and can only be detected by using the **relevant** *analytical tool, theory or framework of strategic management).*

**For Example:**

For external analysis, answering the following questions (**if relevant for the case**) should lead to strategic issue identification under external analysis

1. **What competitive forces are at work in the industry and how strong are they?**
2. **Which companies are in the strongest / weakest competitive positions?**
3. **Who is likely to make what competitive moves next?**
4. **What key factors will determine competitive success or failure?**
5. **Who are the key customer groups what market segments are they to serve?**
6. **How attractive is the industry/ market segments in terms of its prospects for above-average profitability?**

**The following and relevant analytical** *tools, theories and frameworks* would help to answer questions above

* **INDUSTRY STRUCTURE**
  + **5 forces model of competition**
* **INDUSTRY DYNAMICS AND DRIVERS OF CHANGE**
  + **PESTEL forces**
* **COMPETITORS**
  + **Strategic Groups**
  + **Individual competitor assessment**
  + **Future strategic moves**
* **KEY SUCCESS FACTORS**
  + **Static**
  + **Dynamic**
* **CUSTOMERS AND MARKET SEGMENTATION** 
  + **Customer analysis**
  + **Market segment analysis**

For RBV analysis, answering the following questions (**if relevant for the case**) should lead to strategic issue identification under RBV.

1. **How well is the present strategy working?**
2. **What are the company’s resource strength and weaknesses?**
3. **What are the company’s strategic assets and core competences**
4. **What are the company’s resource deficiencies?**
5. **Are the company’s prices and costs competitive?**
6. **How strong is the company’s *competitive position?***

**The following and relevant analytical** *tools, theories and frameworks* would help to answer questions above

* **RESOURCES AND CAPABILITIES**
  + **Threshold R&Cs**
  + **Strategic R&Cs**
  + **VRIO analysis**
* **VALUE CHAIN ANALYSIS**

For OBV analysis, answering the following questions (**if relevant for the case)** should lead to strategic issue identification under OBV

1. **What are the company’s vision/ mission/ short and long term objectives?**
2. **Are the stated “above “in line with stakeholder expectations?**
3. **What is the relative importance of stakeholders?**
4. **What is the company’s relationship with its stakeholders?**
5. **A re there any corporate governance issues?**
6. **What are the key ethical and CSR issues?**
7. **What is the company’s overall stance with regard to business ethics and CSR?**
8. **Is the organization’s cultural style fit with the proposed or current strategy?**

**The following and relevant analytical** *tools, theories and frameworks* would help to answer questions above

* **STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS**
  + **Power / Interest matrix**
  + **Stakeholder mapping**
  + **Political strategies**
* **CORPORATE GOVERNANCE MODELS**
* **VISION/ MISSION/ OBJECTIVES ANALYSIS**
  + **Short/ long term objectives**
  + **Conflicting objectives**
  + **Mission criteria**
* **BUSINESS ETHICS AND CSR**
  + **Grand strategy for business ethics**
  + **CSR at functional/ individual level**
* **ORGANIZATION CULTURE** 
  + **Types of culture**
  + **Culture- Strategy link**
  + **Cultural web**

1. **LIST OF STRATEGIC ISSUES**

**(Some) Definitions of Strategic Issues**

* Strategic issues are the *critical weaknesses* that need to be corrected
* Strategic issues are the *opportunities* that the company wants to take the advantage of with its distinctive capabilities
* Strategic issues are the possible *threats* the company wants to steer away from or buffer against
* Strategic issues are the *barriers* to formulate and implement current strategies successfully
* Strategic issues are the market based, resource based organisation based, corporate and international based *current and forthcoming developments* which will impact the *competitive position of the company*

1. **Identify Strategic Issues** :Strategic issues are previously identified under strategic analysis section by using frameworks , concepts and theories of business strategy from External analysis, RBV ,OBV
2. **Develop an *understanding* about why an issue is strategic*:*** After (strategic) issues are identified, you can check whether the issue is strategic or not. If they are strategic, that should indicate that, solving/ or not solving issue(s) could have an impact on the competitive positioning and the sources of competitive advantage. This discussion will help to separate strategic issues from other problems.
3. **Consolidate overlapping or related strategic issues*:*** At this point, a large number of strategic issues may have been identified. To provide a manageable focus for generating future strategic options, strategic issues should be consolidated to a limited number of discrete non-overlapping issues. To do this, examine all the issues identified previously from your analyses. How are they related? Do they share causes or influences that make them strategic? What are the consequences of not addressing them? Can strategic issues be combined without losing a key perspective? - Please also refer to following paragraph.
4. **Arrange issues into an ordered list*:*** ordering strategic issues can help reveal how they relate to each other and may be useful for generating future strategic options. Strategic issues can be ordered in various ways: For example;
   * 1. Logical order — Present issues in the sequence in which they should be addressed. This is useful where the resolution of one issue is contingent on resolution of another. ( most important/ least important )
     2. Impact order — how strategic is an issue? How complex is an issue? (highest impact on competitive positioning / lowest impact )
     3. Temporal order — Resolve issues according to a timeline or urgency , ( high priority/ low priority )
     4. Perspective order –resolving issues according to the perspectives or functions they are presented , ( External analysis/ RBV/OBV, etc.

You can present the list of strategic issues in a *table* form (optional) by taking into account the points in a-d paragraphs

1. **GENERATING FUTURE STRATEGIC OPTIONS**

Develop a logical series of mutually exclusive future strategic options (alternatives) that evolve form your previous analyses to resolve the issues presented above. Develop various strategic options from each level

* **Broad Level** : Business, Corporate, ( if it is a corporate case ), International
* **Strategic Direction (Which** ) : Growth level I ; Growth level II , Disinvestment
* **Strategic Methods (How )**
* **Supporting Functional Strategies ( external environment-based; resource- based; organisation –based strategic choices )**

1. **STRATEGY EVALUATION AND SELECTION**

Evaluate each of the future strategic options in the light of external environment, RBV and OBV, Corporate (if applicable) analyses you conducted previously. Discuss pros and cons of each option .The following guidelines may be useful:

1. You can use various criteria (suitability, feasibility, acceptability etc) to assess the viability of future strategic options**.**
2. Conflicting conclusions can arise from the application of criteria; however you have to rely on your judgment on the best strategy (ies) to recommend.
3. In deciding which strategies to recommend, please bear in mind that there needs to be *consistency* between different levels (Broad level; Strategic Direction and Strategic Methods, Supporting Functional Strategies) of strategy, and whether all the component parts work as a whole package.
4. You can present your evaluation in a *table* form (optional) by stating *why/ why* *not* a particular strategy is suitable/ feasible / acceptable etc. A well-designed table or matrix is an excellent way of summarizing data .Sometimes, the very process of putting facts side by side in a table will expose important similarities or differences that you had previously overlooked. It may also alert you to gaps in your data or analysis.
5. In the table, **justify clearly which strategic options you would recommend for future implementation.** Such justification should stem from your external environment analysis, RBV, OBV, International, Corporate level (if applicable) analyses.
6. **FUTURE STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS:**

This section should state which of the strategic alternatives you evaluated in the previous section should be implemented by the company. The key is to choose the most favorable alternatives in hierarchical order (from corporate to business to strategic direction to strategic methods to functional supporting strategies from external environment/MBV, RBV, and OBV. The following format can be used:

1. **Overall Business Strategy**
2. **Strategic Direction**
3. **Strategic Method**
4. **Supporting Functional Strategies ( market-based; resource-based; organisation-based strategies )**
5. **Recommended Actions to Improve Company Performance**

* **Immediate**
* **Long term**

Please also consider the following points:

* Recommendations are directed at solving (most) of strategic issues the company is facing and improving its future performance
* Your recommendations should be in line with your previous external environment analysis,RBV,OBV, International , Corporate Analyses so that the recommendations fit together and move logically from one section to the next
* Make sure that your recommendations are clearly stated (i.e. not just implied) in the report.

* Make sure that, in developing recommendations:
  + You have considered all the strategic alternatives. There is hardly ever just one, single "obvious" response to a strategic problem. And bear in mind that, if there is, all the company’s competitors will have thought of it, too!
* You have made it clear why the recommendation you have chosen is the best of the available alternatives. That means showing what is wrong with the others!
* You have looked at the downside of your proposed recommendations. Try to avoid proposals that would bankrupt the company if they failed, or which can be easily copied by the competition
* And finally, be *detailed,* *specific,* and *comprehensive* in your recommendations. For example if you choose market development as your recommended strategy, explain **why** do you choose that strategic option**, how** and **when** it should be implemented, **what** are the expected outcomes, **who** could disagree with that particular strategy etc. If you have conducted comprehensive analyses and have evaluated strategic alternatives, then being specific on your recommendations would not be difficult.

1. **APPENDIX AND REFERENCES**

Appendices are there to *supplement* the points you make in the main body of your report. They contain information that is evidential, reinforcing your points in your report. The analyses you have conducted previously and charts, tables and figures you used during your verbal presentations are generally relevant and they may substantiate the subsections of your report or they may discuss subsidiary points that are relevant and demonstrate the depth and breadth of your thinking. Please use them generously, but watch out for following points:

* The reader should not *have* to look at appendices in order to understand your conclusions and the reasons that you have reached them in each subsection– the main body of the report should contain all the key points and essential supporting evidence. The appendices are there only to reinforce your conclusions in each subsection.
* If you do put something into an appendix, it is vital to include, at an appropriate point, a *reference* to it (e.g. " see Appendix 1" or "Appendix 2. If you don’t ask people to look at something, don’t be surprised if they don't bother!
* If you use a figure, graph or a framework make sure that its message is clear - or add some narrative to bring out the point
* Do not include any material in the appendix section for the sake of it! Please only include material that is relevant and that is clearly contributing to the points you are making in your report. Irrelevant appendix material results in deduction of marks.
* Same arguments above apply for references

**STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT REPORT MARKING CRITERIA**

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| --- | --- |
| **CONTENT** | **DELIVERY** |
| 1. **STRATEGIC ANALYSIS** | **1.EFFECTIVE ANALYSIS** |
| 1. **LIST OF STRATEGIC ISSUES** | **2. QUALITY AND CLARITY OF WRITING AND PRESENTATION** |
| 1. **GENERATING FUTURE STRATEGIC OPTIONS** | **3. COHESIVENESS AND CONSISTENCY AMONG SUBSECTIONS AND ANALYSES** |
| 1. **STRATEGY EVALUATION AND SELECTION** |  |
| 1. **FUTURE STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS** |  |
| 1. **APPENDIX AND REFERENCES** |  |
|  |  |

**Please also refer to Appendix I (**Guidance on the assessment criteria for students’ work) **and Appendix II (**Framework for UG student assessment feedback) **for guidance on the marking and assessment criteria**

**GROUP WORK PROTOCOL AND FREE RIDER ISSUE**

Group work is an important part of the student experience in the School, because of its

role in developing team working skills, which are vital for work in the professions as well as being transferable to work in other areas. However, difficulties can sometimes arise when working in groups, and there is a need to ensure, as far as possible, fairness in: the sharing of work; how contributions to group work are recognized; and the effects this may have on individual performance.

**Working in groups**

Effective group work depends on all group members playing a role and taking collective responsibility for the tasks to be undertaken. Time spent at the outset in thinking about how the group will operate and be managed will help develop a strong group dynamic and give all group members’ confidence to participate.

**Protocol**

At the outset of any group work, there must be agreement between all the participating

students about a protocol for behaviour within the group work situation. The protocol should cover matters such as:

 attendance at group meetings;

 timekeeping;

 meeting responsibilities to the group;

 equity in workload;

 the importance of delivering work attributed to individuals on time and to a

good standard;

 steps to be taken in the event of failure to adhere to the protocol.

**Protocol for working in groups**

* 1. At the beginning of the project all group members will agree the roles and responsibilities that each person will take on during the project.
  2. Each group must decide who is group co-coordinator whose role will be to ensure the project is submitted successfully. If the group is to have such a leader/coordinator all members must agree on the way in which this person will be identified (for example by democratic election, or requests for a volunteer, or on a rotating basis).

3 In dividing up the work to be carried out between the members of the group every effort will be made to make sure that workload is evenly shared.

4. When discussing the way in which the group will work, members must make clear any constraints that will arise from personal circumstances such as commitments, to paid employment and the group must discuss how they will organize their work to accommodate this.

5 Timing of meetings between group members, and timetables for completion of parts of the work, must be agreed between everyone concerned. Once dates and times are agreed all group members must do everything they can to be on time both in attending meetings and in completing work. If for any reason an individual group member cannot be present at a meeting or cannot finish a piece of work on time it is their responsibility to ensure that they let the other members know in advance and give them as much notice as possible.

6 Recognizing that all members of the group will normally receive the same mark for their efforts, every group member will work to the best of their ability to produce work to a high standard within the time available.

7. If at any time any member of the group feels that another member is not responding to the agreed protocol (for example if someone is not carrying out their share of the work satisfactorily or is not attending meetings, or is creating difficulties of any other sort) they must feel free to raise their concerns with the group as a whole. (SEE BELOW)

**GROUP WORK AND THE “FREE RIDER ISSUE"**

**The Issue**

The Strategic Management Team use Group Work (both at under and post graduate level- MSc, B.Eng. and MBA and similar) as an integral part of the learning agenda. The Group Wok assignment (in which all members obtain the same mark unless a FRI claim is upheld) constitutes 25% of the module marks with 75% available from a three hour written examination).

Group work delivers clear learning benefits if managed properly. These learning benefits include analysis, exchange and evaluation of co-participants' ideas, work delegation and scheduling, dealing with team dynamics and performance, conflict resolution.

Occasionally, a frequency of about once every two academic years, a "Free Rider Issue "(FRI) is raised .This is where some members of the Group consider others to not contributing sufficiently to the group.

**Our Procedure**

We treat this seriously and have clear procedures to deal with this issue, once it has not been resolved by the group without reference to the module leader

1. The members of the group claiming a FRI contact the module leader and raise the issue identifying the claimed free rider.
2. The module leader discussed the issue and process with the claiming group members and asks them to try to resolve the FRI with the individual concerned advising the claimed free rider that the Module Leader has been aware of the problem.
3. The claiming group returns to the module leader and advises i) that the claim is withdrawn as the issue has been resolved or ii) the FRI claim is to go ahead.
4. If ii) then the module leader requires a written claim of FRI from the claiming members and has detailed discussion with the student identified as the potential free rider
5. The Module Leader attempts to arbitrate and if unsuccessful makes a judgment on the reduction of marks to the now proved free rider
6. The module Leader seeks ratification from the Programme Director and Exam Board at which stage any Mitigations are considered

**APPENDIX I – Guidance on the assessment criteria for students’ work**

Individual feedback on your essays is provided on the feedback forms attached to your essays. These forms consist of four sections. Firstly, there is a section where you will receive your *provisional* mark. This is the mark that you receive after your script has been through the School’s internal marking process (i.e. it has been first marked and internally moderated), but before the external examiners have checked the marking across the module and indicated that they are happy with it, and before the final mark has been confirmed by the Board of Examiners. Secondly, there is a section where your tutor will provide general comments on your work. Thirdly, there is a section where your tutor will identify some key areas for improvement. Finally, there is a tick-box section. This section will be completed using the criteria listed below, and includes things like whether or not you actually answered the question, whether your answer possessed a clear and logical argument (which was backed up by supporting evidence), how well the essay communicated your ideas and whether or not it followed the accepted academic conventions on style and referencing. The purpose of the tick box section is to provide you with a quick at-a-glance overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the essay*. It is important to note that it isn't used to calculate the mark*. The relative weighting that your tutors give to a particular indicator will depend on what they are trying to test with the assignment. What your tutors expect from you will also change with your level. In terms of critical thought and originality, your tutors will expect more from you if you are a final year undergraduate or a masters student than they will if you are a first year, just starting out on your academic career. In addition to the criteria listed, there may also be other subject- (or even topic-) specific outcomes that your tutors are looking for from your work. They should be able to advise you of these when they set your assignment.

**This essay addressed the question that was set**

The first and most basic requirement of an assignment is that it answers the question that has been set; not the question that you would have liked to have been asked or indeed have prepared an answer to. A great essay is not a great answer unless it actually addresses the question, no matter how well it is written. If a question asks you to describe *x*, you need to describe *x*, not *y* or *z*; if it asks you to critically evaluate *y*, then you need to critically evaluate *y*, not just describe *y*. Furthermore, this needs to be the chief focus of what you write. If, for example, your tutor asks you to compare and contrast two approaches to understanding organisational behaviour, this may require you to describe the two approaches first. However, most of the marks will come from undertaking the comparison. Don’t expect top marks for writing a lot of description but only supplying a little bit of the value-added for which you have been asked. The other thing to keep in mind is that at degree level there may not be a right or wrong answer. Different people looking at the same problem, under the same set of circumstances, can quite legitimately arrive at completely different conclusions. A key part of being a student involves reviewing what other people have to say about a subject and forming your own judgment. In short you are being tested not so much on what you think but rather on the quality of your reasoning and your ability to marshal evidence to back up your position.

**This essay possessed a clear argument**

It logically follows from the above, that your argument plays a key role in determining the quality of your answer. To an academic, an argument consists of a set of propositions (or premises), which, when taken together, give rise to a logical conclusion. For example, in response to the question, ‘why is it so difficult for organizations to plan effectively?’ one argument might be: organizations often find it so difficult to plan effectively because effective planning requires individuals to be operating in an environment which is to some extent predictable, however in the era of globalization business markets are just not like that’. Whether or not this is a good argument rests on a number of things. One thing to consider is whether or not the premises and conclusion logically flow on from each other i.e. whether the argument is deductively sound. If your argument is full of inconsistencies then it is not a good argument. If, in one breath, you are attempting to argue that organizations find it difficult to plan because of a lack of predictability in the environment in which they operate, while in the next you suggest that most business environments exhibit a high degree of stability then there is a basic flaw in what you are trying to say. You also need to consider the evidence. What evidence is there for the idea that effective planning requires a stable environment or that business environments in a globalised world are actually unstable? Another thing to keep in mind in relation to your argument is what place it has in your answer. Ideally, your argument should take centre stage, driving the structure and content of your essay. What it should not be is an afterthought. It is not enough to describe the various approaches to a problem before waiting to the conclusion to say, ‘ … oh and by the way, on balance I think *x*’. At the same time, when composing your answer it is also important to remember to give alternative explanations and approaches the consideration that they deserve. Part of writing an effective paper can involve explaining why it is that approach *x* is a more plausible explanation of a phenomenon than approach *y*.

**This essay covered the key issues**

While there may be no right or wrong answer to a particular question, there is a general expectation that in arriving at your conclusions, you consider all of the pertinent issues. Your tutor will have covered certain key themes in the module. He or she may have drawn your attention to certain key authors. While you are strongly encouraged to explore the literature and make use of alternative sources to the ones that you have studied, some attempt should be made to include the material covered on the module. The other thing to keep in mind is emphasis. A frequent weakness in students’ work is that they attempt to cover everything, and in a level of detail that is unnecessary. In developing your answer you are expected to edit. The question that you need to be asking yourself is, given the question that has been set, where do I need to place my emphasis? What you want to avoid is dedicating a lot of space to an issue that is peripheral to the problem (or your argument) simply because you happen to have done some reading on it or because you happen to find it interesting. Similarly, you shouldn’t skirt over issues and themes that are clearly pivotal just because you don’t happen to have done much reading on them, or because you find them difficult or uninteresting.

**This essay was factually accurate**

Being accurate is important when putting together an academic piece of work. Accuracy includes attention to detail for basic facts like names, places and dates. It also includes things like evidence. If you claim that a study by a particular author establishes x, when it clearly does no such thing, you are not accurately reporting what the author has attempted to establish. The same goes for describing an author’s opinions or what they have to say about the work of others. Essays that are full of errors suggest that you have not been particularly diligent in carrying out your research or given much thought to the final product.

**This essay made good use of the evidence**

Warranting your claims is an important part of making your argument. It’s important to have an opinion, after all that’s what developing an argument is all about. At the same time it is essential that this opinion is backed up by some evidence. I might believe that all bankers make a lot of money, but is there evidence for this assumption? Does the amount of money that someone makes in banking vary with their role, seniority, which organisation they work for, or the prevailing economic conditions? The form of the evidence that you need to use will vary according to what you are trying to establish. It may take the form of hard data i.e. x% of all new small businesses go bankrupt within three years of setting up. Alternatively, it may take the form of reporting studies undertaken by researchers. For example, it is perfectly reasonable to write sentences like, ‘in attempting to establish the impact of national culture on organisational behaviour, Hofstede found that ….’ Again, the issue of emphasis is important. Evidence should be used to back up the key points you are trying to make. There is no point devoting a lot of space to establishing a point that is of little or no relevance to the argument that you are trying to make/test. Instead, try to put the effort into those points which are most central to your case.

**This essay made good use of statistical/mathematical support**

For most essays that you write, this category will not be applicable. However sometimes (for example in some Economics modules) you will be taught material that has a mathematical or statistical element and might need to include such material in your essay. When this is the case, remember that the maths is not a substitute for words; any statistical or mathematical element is likely to be a minor part of your essay and you need to explain in words what any mathematical content means and how it relates to the narrative.

**This essay made good use of diagrams/illustrations**

Diagrams (and illustrations) can play a useful role in helping you to get your message across, particularly when the argument that you are trying to make, or the model that you are trying to explain, is very detailed or complex. However, when using diagrams there are a couple of things that you need to keep in mind. Firstly, diagrams are not a substitute for narrative. Occasionally when reviewing a student’s script, a marker comes across an essay that consists of little more than a set of diagrams that have been put together with little or no explanation as to why they have been selected, what purpose they serve or how they are supposed to link together. As a general rule it makes sense to keep the use of diagrams to a minimum, although sometimes (as with many Economics topics) diagrams are central to the analysis and essential to a good essay. Use them only when they are essential to making a point. The second thing to remember is that when you do use a diagram you need to explain what it means or shows, as well as how it fits into the narrative.

**This essay showed evidence of critical/independent thinking**

Demonstrating originality is probably one of the more difficult things to do in an essay. It is a skill that only tends to emerge over time, as you gain an understanding of your subject, confidence in your opinions and experience in writing essays. It can take a number of forms. It can take the form of offering a completely new way of looking at an existing problem. Alternatively, it can take the form of combining existing approaches in a novel way. Your tutors don’t expect students to be able to demonstrate originality in their thinking right from the start. However, as you progress through your academic career you should start to move beyond simply receiving and regurgitating the opinions of others, to the point where you are questioning and even criticizing them. It is alright to say that I think that the work of a particular author is incorrect or incomplete as long as you can back up your position. By the time you reach your final year your tutors will look for evidence that you are able to take an independent line in your work. And they will probably actively penalize work that shows a lack of ambition. In the very best work, your tutors will also start to look for some evidence of originality.

**This essay was well structured**

Properly structuring your essay is an essential part of communicating your ideas. The key thing to remember is simplicity. Work out what it is you are trying to say and organize your essay in a way that gets your argument across clearly. In general terms, it often makes sense to think in terms of a beginning (the introduction), a middle (the body of the essay) and an end (the conclusion). The importance of the introduction is often overlooked by students. However, it is the part of the essay which lets the reader know what they can expect. Use it to introduce the subject, summarize what the literature has to say on it, précis your position and indicate how you intend to progress your argument. At this point you might also provide some guidance on your design choices. If you intend to give the material a statistical treatment, why so? Similarly, if you wish to back your argument with case material, why use case material? Not only does a well-structured introduction help the reader make sense of what follows, but as an author it should help keep you on track when you are composing your work. In the main body of the essay it is important to link the material in a coherent narrative. Each section should lead logically from the previous and link logically onto the next. Where appropriate, provide clear signposts to your reader by using headings and sub-headings. Even at the level of the individual paragraph ask yourself,’ how does this next paragraph help to propel the argument forward?; how does it fit within the over-arching narrative? A useful tip is to work out what it is that you are trying to say before you put ‘finger to keyboard’. It is usually pretty obvious from reading an essay which students knew what they were trying to say and which did not.

**The essay was well written**

It is important that you are able to write well. Therefore, when marking your work, your tutors will check it for things like grammar, syntax and spelling. Your tutor should at least be able to make sense of what it is that you are trying to say even if they do not agree with you. Therefore, before submitting your work first proof-read it and satisfy yourself that your English is of an appropriate standard. Failing to use full stops or commas, or inserting random capital letters (or else missing them out altogether) is really not acceptable. Sentences that are nine lines in length, with no punctuation, also have no place in an essay. Your computer has spell check and grammar check facilities – use them! (Although make sure that their suggestions are sensible, don’t just blindly accept the first recommended replacement for a misspelt word). Another thing to keep in mind is your narrative style. Your tutors will expect to see a particular type of narrative style in an academic piece of work. The use of slang or colloquial expressions are frowned upon, as is a tendency towards exaggeration and hyperbole. At the same time try to keep technical jargon to a minimum. Use technical terms where appropriate. You will be expected to be familiar with (and make use of) the standard terms in the discipline. However, there are no marks for using long words unnecessarily or, worse still, inappropriately. If you are unsure about what is expected of you, try reading some journal articles as a guide to the kind of language that is required.

**This essay made appropriate use of the literature**

Making appropriate use of the literature encompasses a number of things. Firstly, it involves the type of things that you read. As a first year undergraduate, writing your first assignment, you will probably turn to introductory texts as your initial port of call. As you gain in confidence, however, you will start to make a more extensive use of research monographs, working papers and academic journal articles. While the internet can also be a useful source of information, it needs to be treated with caution. Much of what can be obtained online is of highly variable quality and will have gone through few, if any, quality checks. One very popular online source is *Wikipedia*. Many students love it. Your tutors, however, are less keen. Don’t be surprised if they mark you down heavily if you try to make extensive use of it. The other thing that you need to think about is how widely you need to read. Your module reading list will provide you with a starting point. Many tutors divide their reading lists into core texts and additional sources. The core texts are what they expect you to read if you wish to acquire even a basic understanding of the subject. The additional sources will help to flesh out some of the issues that might only be touched upon by the core texts. However, the University possesses a large library and an extensive range of on-line journal databases like *EBSCO*, *Proquest* and *Jstor*. In preparing your essays you are strongly advised to make full use of the resources that the University has available. When reviewing your work, your tutors will be actively looking for evidence that you have read widely and independently.

**This essay was correctly referenced**

The University recommends that when referencing you use the *Harvard Referencing System*. This involves you making a short note of your source at the appropriate point in the text e.g. (Porter, 1980 pp.45-9), before providing the full details at the end of the assignment e.g. Porter, M. (1980) *Competitive Strategy,* New York, The Free Press. Correct referencing requires you to acknowledge your source wherever you make use of someone else’s ideas or data. Failing to acknowledge your intellectual debts is considered to be poor academic practice and is likely to result in your work being marked down. When writing your essay, it is not enough to do the reading. You also need to be quite specific about how you have made use of your sources. It is important to note that poor or inadequate referencing may constitute *plagiarism*. Plagiarism involves the unattributed (or improperly attributed) use of someone else’s ideas or word-for-word reproduction of someone else’s work. Where you make direct use of someone else’s words you are expected to put the copied text in quotation marks. It is not enough simply to reference the work. This gives the impression that you are acknowledging an intellectual debt, not that you have directly lifted someone else’s words. If your tutor suspects that you have plagiarized all or part of your work, they will not deduct marks. Instead they will pass the work onto the School for investigation. Where, after investigating a case, it is determined that an offence has been committed, the School is likely to impose a penalty. This can range from having a few marks deducted to having your work marked at zero in more serious cases. In the most serious cases offending students may even have their cases referred up to the College for a Misconduct Hearing.