

MANA 590 – Strategic Management (Fall 2009)

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Course Description

This course is about how an organization achieves and sustains a high level of success and the role the general manager plays in this process. A strategy is an integrated set of choices about how an organization will achieve its mission and objectives. It requires both analysis and action. The images and concepts of the course take the total enterprise as the unit of analysis and the general manager as the key actor.

Instead of focusing on a particular functional area (e.g. finance, operations, marketing, accounting, etc.), this course provides you with a process for problem-solving and decision-making that requires you to build on, integrate, and apply the knowledge gained from those disciplines in order to develop an overall general management perspective. Because strategic issues are characterized by ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty, this course is as much about asking the right questions as it is about having the “right” answers. We will reach consensus on some issues, yet many among you will have differing interpretations on the most appropriate course of action. Such is the nature of strategy issues. Those of you with the need to reach the “right” answer may find yourself frustrated by the lack of definitive answers and multitude of reasonable courses of action. This is a reflection of the real world!

Ultimately strategic choices represent a tension between what an organization needs to do given its competitive and market environment, what it can do given its resources and capabilities, and what it wants to do given the values and preferences of key stakeholders.

Course Objectives

1. To understand the factors which affect an organization’s overall competitive position.
2. To learn how to formulate and implement strategies aimed at achieving and sustaining superior competitive performance over the long term.
3. To think critically and communicate solutions effectively.
4. To have fun, learn something new, and develop a network of classmates and friends.

Exams

Exams will consist of short-answer/essay type questions. Exams will be taken in class, so please make every effort to be there. Typically, an exam will consist of about 10 questions for you to choose from. Students will choose only 7 questions to answer. You should answer the 7 questions that give you the best chance of making an A!

Participation

It is expected that you will be present and prepared for every session and share your views in the classroom discussion. I will feel free to call on any individual at any time. Since so much of the learning from this course occurs in the classroom, class attendance and participation is critical.

Every student is important to the class discussion. It is equally important that we listen to one another and attempt to build upon or constructively critique prior comments. Some of the things that will have an impact on effective participation and on which you will be evaluated include:

- Are you a good listener?
- Have you done the assigned readings for that week?
- Are your contributions relevant to the discussion? Do your comments relate to the comments of others and to the themes that the class is exploring together?
- Do your comments add to our understanding of the situation? Are you incisive? Do you cut to the core of the problem?
- Are you willing to challenge the ideas that are being expressed?
- Do you integrate material from past classes and discussions where appropriate? Do your comments reflect cumulative learning over the course and the entire curriculum?

Plagiarism

Students must write their reports and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. All required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system.

Required Text

Morgan, Gareth. *Images of Organization*. Sage Publications, 2006 (ISBN: 978-1-4129-3979-9)

Supplemental readings (typically Harvard Business Review articles) will be uploaded to Blackboard as we progress throughout the semester.

Course Evaluation

Exam 1	20%
Exam 2	20%
Proposal	10%
Final Paper	30%
Participation	20%

Important Dates

Exam 1 – October 7
Exam 2 – November 18
Proposal – October 28
Presentations/Workshop – December 2
Final Paper – December 9

GUIDELINES FOR THE PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to create an opportunity to apply the ideas and concepts discussed in class and the readings in the analysis of a real organizational situation. The situation may be drawn from your own experience or from some public event on which information is readily available in newspapers, reports, etc. Your choice of situation will be an important one, and will call for considerable judgment and discretion on your part in deciding whether it is feasible to use it for the purposes of the project.

In essence, the assignment invites you to do the following:

- 1) Identify an organizational situation/issue that appears to be amenable to some form of analysis: the situation must be sufficiently complex to generate enough material for the writing of a paper that meets the specifications described below.
- 2) Consider the images, concepts and general ideas discussed in class, and see which, if any, help to make sense of the situation being described.
- 3) Engage in research activity that allows you to test the relevance of the different ideas through the accumulation of relevant information and data.
- 4) Write up the assignment in a way that relates evidence to theory to provide an appropriate analysis and explanation of the situation described.

Successful organizational analysis rests in an ability to examine any given organizational situation so that its fundamental characteristics are made clear. It is not simply a question of spotting problems and applying appropriate solutions. Rather, it hinges on questions such as:

- What is going on in the situation that you are analyzing?
- How can you account for its characteristics and the way they are changing?
- How can you make sense of the situation and arrive at an interpretation that allows you to say something concrete about it?

Organizational analysis involves a process of thinking about a situation, constructing and reconstructing it in different ways that seem consistent with its nature so that you can say something about it that may provide a basis for intelligent action. If the analysis has been done well, then the course of action that is appropriate for managing or changing the situation will become apparent.

In this course, you will examine a number of different ways of viewing organizations. Each way provides a lens that highlights different aspects of organization. These different lenses may be applied with varying effect to the situation you are studying – just as a particular set of spectacles may allow you to see a situation in a way that makes more sense than others do.

Your task is to attempt to view through the different lenses and decide which, if any, are appropriate for making sense of the situation with which you are dealing.

The first few weeks of the course will involve learning to see through the different lenses and gaining familiarity with the organization you are studying. Next will come the task of making some determination of the relevance of these different perspectives for explaining the situation. Third will come the task of writing the results of your analysis, in a way that allows the reader to see and understand the nature of the situation you have been studying.

FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

1. The Proposal

The aim of this assignment is to get you started on the paper at an early stage, and to get you into a frame of mind which is analytical in the sense that it is constantly attempting to create a diagnostic reading relating theory and practice, taking the ideas discussed in the class and applying them to the situation being studied. This report should be no more than 2 single-spaced typewritten pages.

The proposal is a brief account of the situation being investigated, providing sufficient information for the reader to understand the nature of the organization/issue and its context. This should include relevant background information as well as a clear statement of the focus of your case study.

The proposal should offer a clear, concise statement of the problem, issue, or situation you will be examining as a focus for your case study. This is a critical dimension of your paper that cannot be overemphasized. Recall that our objective in this course is always to demonstrate the relevance of sound theory to practical organizational issues. In order to assure that both your initial and final writings are firmly rooted in a specific situation or series of events, it is essential for you to explicitly identify this at the onset of your analysis. This will enable your reader to distinguish the direction and purpose of your analysis. In addition, it will provide you with a useful point of reference for determining what information about your organization should be included in your final paper.

Make sure that the report is written in a professional manner. It will be judged according to the quality of analysis and presentation, in accordance with the criteria listed later in this set of guidelines.

2. The Final Paper

The final paper (hard copy due in class on December 9) should not exceed 15 double-spaced typewritten pages.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING THE REPORTS

The following criteria will be used to evaluate the preliminary and final reports:

- The professionalism with which the report is presented
- The comprehensiveness and care with which the organization/issue being analyzed is described
- The demonstrated understanding of relevant theories and concepts.
- The rigor and soundness of your discussion, research, analysis and general conclusions
- The appropriate use of citations and references.