

REPORT GUIDELINES

Your final report should be the culmination of your experiences in the Seminar. You are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the organization you have targeted as well as its processes. Furthermore, you should be able to provide what immediate steps the organization should take and how it should go about implementing your recommendations. Your report will address at least one of the following situations:

1. Starting up a company or development of new products, services or processes in an existing organization.
2. Improving upon existing products, services or processes to strengthen the organization's position.
3. Identifying the set of corrective actions to counter the challenges or threats the organization might be facing including but not limited to eliminating an existing set of products, services or processes.

Throughout the next two years you may need to reformulate the problem and/or revise certain sections substantially based on the additional knowledge and skills you have acquired, and/or based on the changes occurring in the organization, however the structure as stated below for your report will remain the same.

Report Format

1. Title
2. Executive Summary
3. Table of Contents
4. Introduction
5. Organization Description
6. Strategy Analysis
7. Problem Statement
8. Proposed Alternatives
9. Analysis
10. Results
11. Limitations
12. Recommendations
13. Appendices
14. References

The format provided above is a suggested format. As long as the pertinent information is provided for each item, you need not have an isolated section addressing it (except for items 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 13 and 14). Details for each section are provided below.

1. Title

This heading summarizes the main idea of the business report. It is fully explanatory and informs readers about the report.

2. Executive Summary

This is the reader's first contact with the report. It is a brief, comprehensive summary of the **entire** contents of the paper, including what will be accomplished, how it is accomplished, and what the results are, in an orderly manner.

3. Table of Contents

You should list the sections and subsections and their corresponding page numbers in the report.

4. Introduction

This section provides a brief background on the organization. It also informs the reader regarding the development and evolution of its industry and the organization's place within this industry. It summarizes its processes, products and services and the environment the organization competes in including its competitors.

5. Organization description

Demonstrate your deep knowledge of the organization by providing a complete description of it. You should state its vision, mission and strategic objectives and goals. You should also discuss in detail, for instance, the organizational structure, the organization's current performance, its target markets, its customer service capabilities, and its distribution channels.

6. Strategy Analysis

This section should provide industry, external and internal analyses. You should make use of the VRIO framework for internal analysis as well. The analysis should be followed by a list of SWOT elements and/or a Driving Forces Map (see Christensen, 1997). Where necessary the description should be augmented by process flow charts of the work that is done in the organization. Your description and flow chart(s) should facilitate the problem statement in the next section.

7. Problem Statement

Using the illustration(s) developed in the prior section, present a single, specific problem under study in the organization. The background behind the problem, where it is observed in the organization, the process of understanding it, and efforts to correct it should be discussed. For instance, suppose the company's problem is the lack of an integrated operations strategy. This section would identify the inefficiencies that arose due to this lack of an integrated strategy, explain how the problem developed, estimate the extent of the problem (i.e. costs), describe your organization's existing efforts to correct the problem (if any), and discuss how other companies in the industry have approached, and perhaps addressed the problem (best practices).

8. Alternatives 5/15

List, and discuss, three to five viable alternatives to remedy the problem raised in the previous section. These are actions that the organization can take or the policies that can be developed to address the problem you described in the Problem Statement section. Note that these alternatives must be rational and reasonable, and cannot be easily dismissed.

8. Analysis

Here, you shall use management science methods to develop further and/or analyze your proposed alternatives. You may introduce an optimization, decision analysis, simulation or a forecasting model to address the problem you have identified.

You should also assess the impact of the proposed alternatives. The following questions may help you during this assessment: Which alternative(s) simultaneously addresses the organization's most important SWOT elements best? Which alternative(s) would fit best with the 5 forces that face the organization?

You could analyze your alternatives in two steps. Step 1: Suppose only one of your alternatives were to be implemented – what would be the benefits to the organization? In other words, score each alternative using a quantitative method, such as projected sales volume, breakeven point, time to positive cash flow, cost reduction, ROI, or one used by this organization. Step 2: Relate your results to some strategic significance. In other words, explain how your measure leads to your organization's attainment of (or at least progress toward) competitive advantage. What else would need to occur to attain or improve competitive advantage?

9. Results

Discuss the results of the model(s) you solved. In this section you can also provide your what-if analysis. The result of your analysis is the prioritization of the alternatives. Discuss your highest-scoring alternatives as highest-priority alternatives. Do these results make sense strategically? Explain.

10. Limitations

Critique your analysis. What are its weaknesses? What would need to be done to strengthen your analysis? Explain how your analysis is still valid despite the weaknesses you describe.

11. Recommendations

This section identifies what is to be done and why. Recommend a course of action, a near-term to-do list that would be needed to carry out your recommendations. Suppose your recommendations were to be implemented:

- (1) How could each function/activity in the organization help to implement the recommendations? Using each recommendation as a column in the table on p. 153 of Christensen (1997), develop an 'Implementation Matrix'.
- (2) What obstacles do you anticipate encountering, and how might you overcome them?
- (3) Suppose your recommendations cannot be implemented at all due to unforeseen circumstances. What is your alternative plan, or 'Plan B'?

Be sure to illustrate every implementation plan with relevant timelines for the tasks that will be carried out.

12. Appendices

This section includes all the materials used to create the business report: tables, charts, diagrams, interview transcripts, and other types of documentation that is related to creating the business report. Each Appendix item must be explicitly discussed in the body of the report. Appendix items shall occur in the order they are discussed: Appendix A is discussed, and cited, in the body of the report first, then Appendix B, etc.

13. References

This section documents the sources used in the research and presentation of the report. It may also include sources used for understanding the background of the problem situation studied, and for future reading. For instance, it may be listed in alphabetical order in APA style. Each reference shall be explicitly cited in the body of the report.

Christensen, C. M. 1997. Making Strategy: Learning By Doing. Harvard Business Review, November-December, pp. 141-156.