

BBUS 544
Strategic Management in High Technology Firms

MBA Program
University of Washington Bothell
Spring 2007

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VIII. Individual assignments: portfolio Updated April 9, 2007

The portfolio will consist of [i] weekly short (1 page) papers in which you reflect upon the readings and discussion and how these fit into the overall subject of the class, [ii] a mid-term overview, and [iii] a concluding/final overview.

For each of these assignments, the implicit purpose is to address the “great question(s)” for the course: “How do you explain why different organizations are more or less successful than others?” and “How do you manage to make a particular organization successful?” More specifically, I want each submission to indicate how the current course material informs your thinking about the great question, what are the different perspectives offered, what new questions arise, etc.

I have two reasons for assigning the portfolio this way. First, research on learning indicates that adults do not effectively answer any question they have not asked for themselves. Therefore I hope you do not treat this as a “here is a question that the professor knows the answer to and I have to figure out what s/he wants” assignment. It is not. You are graduate students at a great university and you should be creators of knowledge; this begins by asking questions. Second, for everyone I know, ideas that seemed clear when you were reading or thinking are much harder to express in writing. This is not true for facts, but facts are the easy part. I refer here to models, frameworks, and theories, the relationships among variables, and the search for explanation (cf. Christensen & Raynor, 2003).

Weekly papers. Due each Monday beginning the second week (April 2). No paper due Monday April 30 or Monday May 28. [Submit hard copy at beginning of class; retain electronic copy. One single-spaced page for weekly paper.] I would like each paper to be both retrospective (prior week’s readings and discussion and prospective (readings/cases that you have prepared to discuss the Monday the paper is due). For example, for the first paper, address what we covered in the first week and the readings for the class Monday April 2. (If you also have prepared to discuss the readings for the Wednesday class, please bring these in to what you write as well.)

Mid-term overview. Due Wednesday May 2. [Submit (a) a hard copy of the overview and (b) via email a single file that has this overview and the previous weekly papers. Please include your name in the file name. Limit: three pages, not including references, tables or figures.] The specific focus of the mid-term overview will be on business (in contrast to corporate) strategy. (Chapters 1-6 and the associated readings and cases address business strategy.)

Concluding/final overview. Due Wednesday May 30. [Submit (a) a hard copy of the final overview and (b) via email a single file that has the final overview, the mid-term overview, and all the weekly papers. Please include your name in the file name. Limit: three pages, not including references, tables or figures.] The final overview will address the course as a whole, the “great question(s)”, and how what we have learned here fits with (or perhaps conflicts with) what you have learned in other courses in the program. As part of this overview, please go back to what you wrote for the “What explains why some firms are more successful than others?” assignment. Specifically, critique what you wrote in that assignment.

I will grade the portfolio as a whole two times, when you submit the overviews (i.e., the weekly papers will not be separately graded). However, I will read the weekly papers and if I feel you are “off track” I will let you know immediately.

Guidelines for individual (and all) assignments

1. Please do not settle for generalizations, particularly when you use terms in common use like “leadership” or “operational efficiency.” Be very precise in defining terms such as these. Make sure you clearly state how firms accomplish the elements you write about.
2. Avoid tautologies (defining terms so that the definition is the same as the term defined). For example, I conceivably could define leadership as “the influence necessary for the success of a organization.” Then, if I ask, “what leads to success?” leadership is not a very useful answer because, *by definition*, leadership leads to success. To avoid this tautology, I would have to define leadership in a way that does not include success.
3. Pay attention to the calculus (the functional form of the relationship between variables: linear, curvilinear, etc.) and contingencies (the boundary conditions for a relationship between variables).
4. Do not rely on preconceived notions. Challenge your assumptions. You must back up your ideas with facts and citations. That “it makes sense” is not sufficient.
5. Citations: All ideas you present in the paper should be carefully referenced using a consistent standard style.