

VERTICAL LEARNING CURVE

Organizational Strategy

Course Description & Introduction

August 27, 2007



Organizational Strategy

THIS COURSE HAS SIGNIFICANT ADVANTAGES over alternative methods for acquiring business knowledge, skills, and credentials. It has been carefully engineered by a team of qualified university professors and experienced business executives to meet the needs of busy working professionals who need maximum flexibility in a market-relevant, academically rigorous education. It is offered by a fully accredited university with a strong reputation for academic excellence and practical professional education. The university has a well-recognized track record in distance learning and a commitment to the kind of innovation that makes quality business education more affordable and accessible.

Major advantages to the course design are the Marketplace Interface (mentoring) and networking opportunities. In addition to the standard academic content, you will have the opportunity to learn from practicing professionals through required “mentoring” sessions. Using advanced technologies you will be engaged in an online community where you will network with other course participants around the world.

THIS COURSE IS NOT FOR EVERYONE. This course has little in common with classroom or traditional on-line courses with which you may be familiar. Like other forms of distance learning, it does place a significantly greater burden on the student to manage the study schedule and to master concepts, principles, practices, and tools. Self-discipline and time management are therefore essential to successful completion of this course. However, in this course your learning takes place in a **virtual reality** marketplace where you will develop your knowledge and skills “on the job.” You will be assigned to a department in a simulated (but very real) American company and will acquire and apply your skills as you interact with company executives, employees, customers, vendors and competitors. **Your preparation and performance will be continuously evaluated by company management and reported in real time to you and to the university course supervisor (see grading section below).**

THE COURSE IS FOR UPPER DIVISION AND GRADUATE LEVELS. This means that **you** are responsible for mastering the knowledge and skills required to certify your competency in this course. In some ways, this course will be **more** demanding and academically rigorous than a traditional classroom or on-line course. There are no lectures to attend. You will not “have a quiz at the end of the week.” You cannot hide in a classroom full of other students. Your professor will expect you to know the material and complete work assigned. **Even if a particular source the professor or company manager provides proves to be unavailable,** or if you lose internet access or power, you will be expected to find other sources. Just as on the job, there are no acceptable excuses for not completing an assignment on time or not being prepared for an impromptu question from your manager or professor.

THIS COURSE IS DESIGNED TO WORK ON A HIGH-TECHNOLOGY PLATFORM. Therefore, a well-equipped computer and basic computer skills are assumed. Access to “always-on” high speed internet (400 kbps or higher recommended) is essential. Your computer must be sound- and video-capable and able to open and

manipulate basic word-processing, spreadsheet, and presentation documentsⁱ (Word®, Excel®, PowerPoint®), PDF files, and to play Flash® videos (free reader and player downloads from Adobe™).

THIS COURSE TAKES PLACE IN AN AMERICAN COMPANY within the context of the American culture. The course setting is a simulated company, industry, and marketplace carefully modeled after a very real American firm. You will meet individuals with a variety of world views, educational backgrounds, races, religions, business ethics, values, and priorities; all of which are typical of what a trainee in such an American company could expect.

You will not be able to enroll in this course if you have not completed the Executive Orientation Course, available via the VLC site. Go to www.VLCglobal.com to register for and complete the Executive Orientation course.

How This Course Is Graded

Grading standards for this course are established by your university and may vary by professor of record. All grades are assigned by your university. Please note that no schedule or weights are contained within this document because your university sets these requirements. As you progress through this course, your performance will be reported to you and the university in real-time (see your student “dashboard”) in the form of your total point score out of points possible (% score). The university may modify the grading standards or may add grading criteria (assignments or tests).

The percentage (%) scores reported to the university will include the following areas:

1. A variety of assignments given at any time during the course by the virtual professor, company executives, or university professor. Evaluated for (a) completion, (b) timeliness, (c) understanding.
2. **Un-announced assessments by a variety of tests or interviews.** Evaluated for (a) preparation and (b) correct understanding of principles or practices.
3. Active Participation evaluates student response to the opportunity to ask questions or make comments (a) in the company training context and (b) in the peer blog forum.
4. Active Participation in Mentoring Center Sessions. Evaluated for (a) attendance and (b) quality of contribution to discussions.
5. Periodic Competency Hurdles (within each module of each course).
6. Final Examination.

Note that this course is composed of the several Modules described in the Course Description. **You must demonstrate professional competency in each module before you will be allowed to continue to the next.** If you fail to demonstrate competency at the high levels required, you will be required to repeat the module. You are allowed three (3) attempts to pass each module, but changes occur

ⁱ Free alternatives are available via <http://www.openoffice.org> and <http://www.google.com/google-d-s/b1.html>.

in the content along with a 20% penalty for each re-take attempt. Of course, having to repeat a module affects your performance rating, even if your performance is perfect the second or third attempt.

Example:

MODULE	POINTS POSSIBLE	1ST ATTEMPT SCORE (PASS ≥ 80%)	2ND ATTEMPT SCORE (PASS ≥ 85%)	3RD ATTEMPT SCORE (PASS ≥ 90%)	SCORE PENALTY (20%/FAILURE)	TOTAL MODULE SCORE
1	20	15/20 (fail)	18/20 (pass)	-	20%	18*.80 = 14.4
2	40	30/40 (fail)	31/40 (fail)	38/40 (pass)	40%	38*.60 = 22.8
3	25	23/25 (pass)	-	-	0%	23*1.00 = 23.0
85						60.2

TOTAL RAW SCORE FOR THIS MODULE = 60.2 POINTS SCORED / 85 POINTS POSSIBLE = 70.8%. THIS RAW SCORE IS REPORTED TO YOUR UNIVERSITY, AND IS USED ALONG WITH OTHER DATA TO ASSIGN GRADES.

This software is designed to detect all forms of cheating. All forms of cheating are taken seriously and any indications of cheating are reported immediately to the university. Penalties may be severe and may include being **permanently** expelled from the university resulting in a record that may prevent future admission to other accredited institutions. For more information, please see the [VLC policy on Academic Misconduct](#).

Learning Methods

Each course module employs pedagogical techniques of observation, application, practical guidance, and testing.

Observation – see how

Each module introduces terms and concepts which are required to understand on-the-job functions and trainees are given the opportunity to see the practical utilization of these skill sets.

Application – experience how

Each module presents scenarios and/or questions relevant to the terms and concepts and their association with the practical setting. The understanding of these situations will help to ensure that the trainee has gained an appreciation of the skill sets presented.

Practical Guidance – get advice

Each module has opportunities to present additional information or aids to clarify terms and concepts, and to increase the learning capability and confidence of the trainee. This includes information regarding common questions/mistakes of application.

Testing – confirm competence

Each module has a final competency hurdle that replicates, to the extent possible, the practical skills developed regarding the terms and concepts presented in the module. Generally, scenarios or case study conditions are introduced to measure performance which would be as close to an on-the-job situation as possible. This is designed as a required opportunity to display content mastery and confidence.

Continuous Real-Time Student Course Assessment

On an unannounced and unscheduled basis, students are asked questions by the professor, the company department manager, the personal guide, the Human Resources department, and other students about various aspect of the learning experience. **University representatives have access to student data and summary reports in real-time, on-demand.**

Course Description

This course gives attention to the knowledge and skills needed to grow and sustain performance in an organization, whether a full company, a department, a division, or other strategic business unit within an existing organization by getting the right things done through teams of people. It addresses the common management functions of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling.

This course is delivered in a professor-supervised, self-directed, virtual-reality, on-the-job (OJT) context; this course relies on observation, explanation, application, mentoring, and testing to maximize professional competencies. The student learns from classic and contemporary readings, case studies, peers, and practicing managers.

Knowledge / Skill Topics with Learning Objectives

Module #1 – Introduction to the Course and the Learning Context

- Learn How to Use the Course Materials
- Learn the Course Contents
- Pre-Test
- Learn the History of Strategy Thought
- Learn Why CEO's Fail
- Learn the Contemporary Strategy Paradox
- Learn to Answer “Who Determines What it Means to Win?”
- Learn to Decide What You Mean by “Win”
- Learn that He Who Thinks Wins
- Learn from Case Studies
- Competency Hurdle

Module #2 - The Foundations of Organization Strategy

- Learn the Steps in the Strategy Process
- Learn to Use a Rolling
- Learn the Standard “Shelf” Strategies
- Learn How to Use Vision to Guide Strategic Choice
- Learn How to Get Employees to Internalize the Vision
- Competency Hurdle

Module #3 – The Role of Forecasting in Strategic Planning

- Learn to Learn from the Experts
- Learn to Learn from Past Patterns – Time Series Analysis
- Learn to Learn from Potential Predictors
- Learn to Learn from Causal Forces
- Learn to Manage an Uncertain Future
- Learn from Case Studies
- Competency Hurdle

Module #4 – External Analysis

- Learn to Question Unstated Assumptions
- Learn to Focus Environmental Scanning

- Learn to Identify Key Success and Failure Factors
- Learn to Use External Analysis Resources
- Learn to Use Life Cycle Analysis
- Learn to Use the GE Matrix Analysis
- Learn to Use Porter's Five Forces Analysis
- Learn to Identify Opportunities and Threats
- Learn from Case Studies
- Competency Hurdle

Module #5 – Internal Analysis

- Learn When CEO's Refuse to Hear
- Learn to Identify Your Organization's Core Competencies
- Learn to Identify Your Organization's Vulnerabilities
- Competency Hurdle

Module #6 – Competitive Analysis

- Learn to Prepare vs. Compare
- Learn to Avoid Focusing on the Wrong Things
- Learn to Evaluate Best Practices (Benchmarking)
- Learn to Use Competitive Analysis Resources
- Learn the Advantages & Disadvantages of Copy-Cat Strategies
- Competency Hurdle

Module #7 – Formulating Strategic Alternatives

- Learn When to Use Low Cost Leadership
- Learn When to Use Innovation
- Learn When to Use Operational Strategies
- Learn When to Use Concentrated Growth
- Learn When to Use Product Development
- Learn When to Use Market Development
- Learn When to Use Horizontal Integration
- Learn When to Use Vertical Integration
- Learn When to Use Conglomerate Diversification
- Learn When to Use Concentric Diversification
- Learn When to Use Strategic Alliance
- Learn When to Use Turn Around
- Learn When to Use Divestiture
- Learn When to Use Liquidation
- Competency Hurdle

Module #8 – The Challenges of Execution

- Learn How to Relate Structure to Objectives and Programs
- Learn How the Human Resource Department Serves Management
- Learn How to Get the Right People in the Right Jobs
- Competency Hurdle

Module # 9 – Strategic Monitors and Control

- Learn the Fundamentals of Decision Making
- Learn How to Apply Statistics
- Learn How to Use Break Even Analysis
- Learn How to Use Inventory Management Methods
- Learn How to Apply Linear Programming
- Learn How to Use Pro Forma Financial Statements
- Competency Hurdle

Module #10 - Simulation Preparation**Module #11 - Simulation Competition****Module #12 - Comprehensive Course Overview and Practice Exam****REQUIRED & SUGGESTED READINGS FOR THIS COURSE**

(Many available via Online Library - <http://www.questia.com/Index.jsp> and The Free Management Library - <http://www.managementhelp.org/> , <http://www.managementfirst.com/strategy/articles/articles.htm>, University on-line library. Some requiring student initiated research)

1. Selected Readings from the HBS Institute for Strategy & Competitiveness
2. Selected Readings from Deloitte Resources
3. Selected Readings from Wharton School of Business
4. Selected Readings from the McKinsey Quarterly
6. Selected Readings from the Harvard Business Review
7. Selected Readings from the Wall Street Journal
8. Selected Readings and Videos from Business Week
9. Selected Readings and Video from Fortune Magazine
10. Selected Readings from Boston Consulting Group
11. Selected Programs from Bizzer Professional Training
12. Selected Readings from the Economist
13. Selected Readings from the Economist Intelligence Unit
14. Selected Readings from the Academy of Management Journal
15. Selected Readings from the Academy of Management Review
16. Selected Readings from the Journal of Business Strategy
17. Selected Readings from the Mercer Management Journal
18. Strategy – Albany University, NY

REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF RESOURCES

A comprehensive Business Glossary for students in this course -
(<http://management.about.com/cs/beginntomanage/1/blglossary.htm>)

Resources

<http://www.brint.com/links/>
<http://www.managementfirst.com/strategy/articles/articles.htm>
http://www.tutor2u.net/business/strategy/what_is_strategy.htm
<http://www.albany.edu/faculty/pm157/teaching/stratman/stratman.html>
<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=1594&CFID=5209334&CFTOKEN=98720683>
<http://www.12manage.com/issues.html>
<http://pf.fastcompany.com/magazine/44/porter.html>
<http://www.shsu.edu/~coba/jbs/vol20no1index.htm>
<http://www.atkearney.com/main.taf?p=5,1>
<http://www.mercermc.com/defaultFLASH.asp?section=Perspectives&path=Journal/&tier=>

The Conference Board
 The U.S. Federal Reserve Bank
 Thomas Register
 Dunn & Bradstreet
 Industrial & Trade Associations
 Hoovers
 Edgar
 Spredgar
 Reverse Auctions
 Dow Jones Sustainability Index
 Competitor Tracking Services
 Quick MBA
 MBA Net
 National Trade Data Base
 Securities Exchange Commission
 United Nations
 World Economic Forum

World Bank
 U.S. Industrial Outlook
 CIA Factbook
 Writings of Sun Tze
 Bible
 Quran
 SOS Math
 Fortune Magazine
 Business Week Online - Captains of Industry
 U.S. News and World Report
 McKinsey Quarterly
 ValueLine
 Business History Net
 STAT USA
 Report Gallery
 I-Metrix