The Strategist
MGMT-GB.2113.20 and 2113.30
Spring 2019
Meeting time: Thursdays, 1:30pm-4:20pm or 6:00pm-9:00pm
Instructor: Adam Brandenburger

Course Overview
Business success requires being different. To succeed, a business needs to stand out from the competition. This is what business strategy courses teach, and they are right. But finding a way to be different is harder than just knowing that it is important to be different. This is the fundamental challenge facing the business strategist. It is the challenge of looking at an existing organization and coming up with ways to make its position in the marketplace more distinctive. Or, it is the challenge of looking at the potential of a new business and creating a distinct position for it. The strategist is equally important in the worlds of existing enterprise and of entrepreneurship.

The challenge of being different is considerable. Much of the time, everyone has access to more or less the same knowledge base. This is likely even more the case today, in a globally interconnected world, relative to the past. In this environment, the key to being different becomes one’s ability to think differently. Of course, one has to think both differently and better, and come up with not just a different but a superior business proposition. Out-thinking others in this way is the job of the business strategist.

In this course, we will develop a four-way framework to help us think differently and better and become better business strategists. The four components of the framework (4 C’s) are:

- Strategy from Contrast
- Strategy from Combination
- Strategy from Constraint
- Strategy from Context

We will examine many examples of great business strategies of each of these four types, and we will also use this framework to help us generate entirely new strategies.

The course will ask for a spirit of adventure and experimentation on the part of everyone present.

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1 This syllabus has benefitted greatly from research assistance by Andrew Lewicki and from the commitment to learning made by the students who have taken earlier versions of the course. Discussions of concepts and creators in the classroom and beyond, and suggestions and ideas offered even after the course had ended, were extremely valuable and are gratefully acknowledged. Please note that some real-time adjustments may be made as the course progresses.
Course Policies
Default policies for Stern courses can be found at http://www.stern.nyu.edu/portal-partners/academic-affairs-advising/policies-procedures/default-policies-stern-courses.

In this course, please bring your laptops to class so that you can do real-time research in preparing in-class presentations.

Course Resources
NYU is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for students with disabilities.

The Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) determines qualified disability status and assists students in obtaining appropriate accommodations and services. CSD operates according to an Independent Living Philosophy and strives in its policies and practices to empower each student to become as independent as possible. Their services are designed to encourage independence, backed by a strong system of supports.

Any student who needs a reasonable accommodation based on a qualified disability is required to register with the CSD for assistance.

Course Schedule

Class #1: The Strategist as Creative Radical
Please prepare:


Assignment: In preparation for our first class, please read through the syllabus, which will give you the overall picture of how the course will unfold.

In class, we will do self-introductions and share our motivations for going on this journey to think about business strategy together. So, please give some thought in advance to how you want to introduce yourself.

The article “Strategy Needs Creativity” presents the framework we will follow in this course. Please go through the article and formulate your own views about what creativity in strategy can mean.

In the excerpt from Only the Paranoid Survive, the author (Andrew Grove, one of the founders of Intel Corporation) presents his Six Forces Diagram as a map of the business landscape. In the article “Strategy as a Creative Act: Making Space for Radical Ideas,” the author says that
strategy frameworks kill radical ideas. Do you see these two pieces of writing as in tension with each other, or complementary? Come to class ready to share your thinking on this.

Additional reading:


After class: You will each choose a creator, whom you will study during the course. Choose someone from business — or from another field such as the arts, sciences, or technology. Think about choosing someone who is not necessarily extremely famous. Likely, the person you choose will have some special meaning for you (e.g., as a role model). Be sure to have some personal investment in your choice, so that this work takes on real significance for you.

Class #2: Strategy from Contrast

Please prepare:


b. Jonah Sachs, Unsafe Thinking: How to be Creative and Bold When You Need It Most, Random House, 2018, Chapter 5 (“The Explorer's Edge”).


Assignment: This week, we will look at strategy based on the first of our 4 C’s, namely, strategy from contrast. There will be discussion and an in-class exercise with presentations.

The article “The New Psychology of Strategic Leadership” can be understood as saying that strategy from contrast comes from making a shift in one’s mental model of the business landscape. What kinds of shift does the author talk about? What players does he say have to buy into such shifts?

In the reading from Unsafe Thinking, the author discusses an inverted U-shaped relationship between expertise and creativity. What reasons does he give for why creativity might fall off beyond a certain level of expertise? What suggestions does he make for transcending this tradeoff?
In the excerpt from *Originals*, the author mentions a number of attitudes and behaviors which he argues work against our ability to be an original (which he defines as a creative person who takes action). List the attitudes and behaviors of this kind which are mentioned.

Additional reading:


**Class #3: Strategy from Combination**

Please submit:

One page on examples of how your creator may be said to have practiced strategy from contrast.

Please prepare:


Assignment: This week, we will look at strategy based on the second of our 4 C’s, namely, strategy from combination. There will be discussion and an in-class exercise with presentations.

The excerpt from *Co-opetition* defines a non-traditional set of players in the game of business which it calls “complementors.” What is the connection between complementors and strategy from combination?

The blog post “Daimler & BMW: A New Partnership Starts, Rivalry Stays” announces a high-profile partnership between the two German automakers. Come up with your own examples of
new combinations of businesses being formed with the rise of new technologies such as electric vehicles, AI, blockchain, or other.

The article “Why ‘Many-Model Thinkers’ Make Better Decisions” argues for the advantages of making decisions based on the combination of several models of the situation in question rather than on one model. Come up with your own examples of situations where multiple models are deliberately employed.

For the reading from Steal Like an Artist, list the various techniques the author suggests for arriving at the “mashups” and “remixes” which he considers the essence of new ideas.

Additional reading:


g. Go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcfGVlXv4YQ&sns=em to see an analysis of the combinatorial creativity underlying the construction of the battle scene in the HBO series Game of Thrones (Season 7, Episode 4).

Class #4: Strategy from Constraint

Please submit:

One page on examples of how your creator may be said to have practiced strategy from combination.

Please prepare:


Assignment: This week, we will look at strategy based on the third of our 4 C’s, namely, strategy from constraint. There will be discussion and an in-class exercise with presentations.

The excerpt from A Beautiful Constraint talks about several different types of creativity-enhancing constraint. Create a classification of the different such types you can find there.

The article “Break Free from the Product Life Cycle” proposes three types of product strategies: reverse positioning, breakaway positioning, and stealth positioning. What is the relationship between each of these three product strategies and the idea of strategy from constraint?
Additional reading:


d. Matthew Schneps, “Dyslexia Can Deliver Benefits,” *Scientific American*, December 2014, at [https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/dyslexia-can-deliver-benefits/](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/dyslexia-can-deliver-benefits/). This article describes recent research which suggests that people with dyslexia may possess particular strengths in the area of global visual awareness --- an instance of the idea that there can be strengths as well as challenges associated with different ways of being and operating.

Class #5: Strategy from Context

Please submit:

One page on examples of how your creator may be said to have practiced strategy from constraint.

Please prepare:


Assignment: This week, we will look at strategy based on the fourth of our 4 C’s, namely, strategy from context. There will be discussion and an in-class exercise with presentations.

In the article “How Strategists Really Think,” the authors talk about three types of reasoning about strategy: deduction, trial and error, and analogical reasoning. They say that deduction is well suited to information-rich, familiar, and modular environments (e.g., operating in a stable industry), that trial and error is well suited to ambiguous and novel environments (e.g., launching a radically new product), and that analogical reasoning works well in many other cases. What do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of this mapping between different types of reasoning and different environments?

The article “Discovery Through Doing” describes how techniques from the worlds of craftspeople and performers (e.g., glass-making and puppetry) have been imported into the world of medicine to improve practices there. Come up with examples of where ideas from one area of business have been imported into a quite different area of business.

Additional reading:

c. Go to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biomimetics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biomimetics) to read about the field of biomimetics, which looks to nature for solutions (evolved via natural selection) to analogs to human engineering problems, and then adapts these solutions to our (human) world.

Class #6: The Strategist is Me
In this final session, we will share our individual projects and also personal manifestos titled “The Strategist is Me.”

Please submit:

a. One page on examples of how your creator may be said to have practiced strategy from context.

b. A two-page personal manifesto, titled “The Strategist is Me,” and covering: (i) the notion you had, prior to the course, of what it means to be a strategist; (ii) the notion of being a strategist you now have; (iii) how you plan put this notion into practice after the course ends; and (iv) how you plan to keep refining and developing your notion of a strategist.

**Deliverables and Grading**
The course will be graded on a pass/fail basis. A passing grade requires: (a) regular class attendance; (b) participation in class discussions that indicates careful preparation of readings prior to class; (c) thoughtful engagement in class exercises and presentations; (d) submission of each of the four one-page assignments that constitute your individual project, where each submission makes use of course concepts and is organized, clearly written, and original; (e) submission of the final two-page personal manifesto, where this submission again makes use of course concepts and is organized, clearly written, and original.