

Writing a Strategic IT Case Study for Your Term Project

Your term project is writing the story of an organization as a strategic IT case study of an actual organization of your own choosing. It can be a for-profit or non-profit organization, in the service or manufacturing sector, it can be an organization you are employed by, one you own, or one that will benefit you in meeting your career goals.

Deliverables

You should write a case study that is 20-24 pages double spaced (including charts, graphs, photos and so on) to develop your organizational story or narrative. You should choose one or more case analysis methods we are learning in class to complete your analysis. Please make it clear what method or methods you are using: standard IT case analysis, dramatism, 7Cs of ecommerce and so on. You can use the format style used in your text as a way to format, or use the *APA* (American Psychological Association) *Style Guide* if you prefer.

You will need to post an electronic version of your paper on Sakai (the university will provide use of a scanner if you need one) and deliver a hard copy of your case to class on the due date found in the syllabus. Since there is no final exam for the course, your term project *is* your final exam.

Please follow the outline given below, using it as a checklist to make sure that your case is complete. Number all of your pages consecutively, except for the Title Page and Executive Summary, which are unnumbered.

Outline

Title Page (including your name, course number, and an interesting case title)

Executive Summary (written last; placed on an unnumbered page.)

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Discussion of the Organization Using Rich Description**
- 3. Problems and Opportunities Relating to Strategic Use of IT**
- 4. Case Analysis and Interpretation**
- 5. Recommendations to Improve, Enhance, or Change IT Strategy**
- 6. Barriers to Implementation of IT Strategy Recommendations**
- 7. Conclusion and Lessons Learned**
- 8. References**

The next few pages elaborate on what you should include in each section.

The Case Study Write Up

Title Page

(1 separate page) Make the title interesting by including the organization or type of organization and the IT issue you are relaying a story about.

Executive Summary

(1 separate page) 250-500 words summarizing the organization studied, analysis methods used, the IT strategic problems addressed, and recommendations.

1. Introduction

(1-2 pages) This includes your relationship to the case study organization, the case methods you used, and a brief introduction of the company.

2. Discussion of the Organization Using Rich Description

(4-5 pages) This section should be a rich description that builds up a vivid picture of the case study organization. In addition to your written narrative, include some screen captures of their Web site, diagrams, photos and so on that provides a context for the study. Describe the main features of the organization. Include the type of industry it is part of, the main business models it is operating with, the country where it is headquartered, how large it is, what IT (personnel, hardware, software, infrastructure, and policies) are present, and the principal players, including internal and external people, units, and departments.

Include a discussion of their current IT strategy as it relates to their current strategic goals for the organization. Go into depth about each item. Use narrative, diagrams, graphs, charts, and so on to make the organization come alive for the reader.

Briefly compare and contrast it to other organizations in the same industry. What distinguishes it from them? In this section you are laying the ground work for the upcoming list of problems and opportunities. Start providing some important clues for your reader here.

3. Problems and Opportunities Relating to Strategic Use of IT

(2-3 pages) In this section you should separately list and then describe the problems and opportunities you have identified through your case study that relate directly or indirectly to the strategic use of IT. Tie these into the previous section, so that you are bringing the reader along in identifying problems and opportunities in what has been revealed thus far.

4. Case Analysis and Interpretation

(4-6 pages) Using a variety of analytical tools and techniques including qualitative and quantitative approaches learned in class (for example, Porter's Competitive Forces model, the strategic grid, the balanced scorecard approach, value chain analysis, metaphor analysis, and so on) you should analyze the data that you have presented in the foregoing sections. Remember to state what tools and techniques you applying, and why you have chosen them .The writing you do at this point will be descriptive, analytical, and interpretive, taking the form of "In my interview, Mr. Smith stated that they have no IT strategy, they are just putting out brush fires. Using metaphorical analysis I examined this statement along with others from our interview, and found that he was alluding to the fact that their energy was focused on reacting to problems rather than taking a long-term or proactive view."

Notice that you need all three components: the description, the analysis, and the interpretation helping the reader make sense of the analysis being done. Interpretation is an essential step, so be sure to include it here.

5. Recommendations to Improve, Enhance, or Change IT Strategy

(3 pages) Based on your analysis of all of the case evidence gathered, you need to make recommendations for strategic decisions and actions that the relevant participants should take regarding the IT as it exists in their organization. This must follow logically from the case material you have presented. You should justify clearly why you are making these recommendations, and the relevant people or departments who should make them.

6. Anticipated Difficulties to Implementation

(2 pages) In this section, you should identify any potential difficulties you anticipate that can hinder, alter or stop implementation of the strategic IT actions you are proposing. Examine their technological, operational, and economic aspects, as well as any impediments that arise from the organization's culture, history, or its position in the industry.

7. Conclusion, Future Research, and Lessons Learned

(2 pages) In this section, provide a conclusion that mirrors your introduction, but which is briefer. Attempt to resolve the major issues you raised. In addition, include a paragraph or two stating what future research should be conducted to resolve any outstanding issues and recommend a methodology for doing that research.

In the "Lessons Learned" portion of this section, convey the strategic IT lessons learned that are important and that can be generalized to other organizations. These should be relevant beyond the specific organization you are studying.

8. References

(1 page) Number and list alphabetically by author any journals, trade publications, lectures, handouts, Web sites, and so on that formed your thinking for the case study. Also include a list of any interviews conducted. You can use APA format or the format from your text to cite references. Just be consistent. For citing interviews, please use the format: Last name, First Initial of person you interviewed. Their organizational title, Organization, location of interview, date, and beginning and ending time. For example: "Kendall, J. Professor, Rutgers University, Camden, February 29, 2008, 4:30-5:30 PM."

Processes Used in Researching the Case Study

Secondary Research Methods

For your research phase you can use the online Rutgers Library system for trade journals and academic articles. The database called Business Source Premier is especially helpful to view scholarly articles *in MIS Quarterly, Communications of the ACM, Decision Sciences, Management Science, Information Systems Research, Academy of Management Review* that may help you recognize and solve the strategic IT problems your organization is facing. You can also go to www.isworld.org which is the premier Web site for IS academics for more references to in-depth research on IT strategy. You can use Internet research to get an understanding of the industry, view your case study organization's Web site and so on.

Data Collection Methods

There are several ways for you to gather information to complete your case study (Benbasat, Goldstein, & Mead, 1987 and Yin, 1984). Typically, getting information from more than one source listed will help you strengthen your understanding of the organization. Yin (1984, p.78) lists these methods:

1. Documentation-written material ranging from memoranda to newspaper clippings to formal reports.
2. Archival records-Organization charts; service, personnel or financial records.
3. Interviews-These many be open-ended or focused.
4. Direct observation-Absorbing and noting details, actions, or subtleties of the field environments.
5. Physical artifacts-Devices, outputs, tools. The goal is to obtain a rich set of data surrounding the specific research issues, as well as capturing the contextual complexity.

You are required to use an interview and complete direct observation in your case study organization. You should choose other methods as necessary to make a comprehensive study.

Annotated References for this Handout

1. Benbasat, I., Goldstein, D.K., and Mead, M. (1987). The Case Research Strategy in Studies of Information Systems, *MIS Quarterly*, September, pp. 339-386. This assignment is based in part on material found in this article.
2. www.gttp.org/docs/HowToWriteAGoodCase.pdf. This assignment is based in part on material found in this article.
3. www.isworld.org. There are several interesting references to research in IT Strategy that can be found at the main academic IS Web site.
4. www.qual.auckland.ac.nz/case.htm You can also go directly to sections of the above Web site that are devoted to references on case study research.
5. Yin, R. K. (1984). *Case Study Research, Design and Methods*. Sage Publications, Beverly Hills: CA. This assignment is based in part on material found in this article.