



Your Strategy Needs a Strategy

Educators' Resources: Illustrative Uses for Teaching

1 Book Synopsis

Executives are bombarded with best-selling ideas and best practices for achieving competitive advantage, but it is often unclear which framework should be applied when or in combination with which others. Should you aim to be big or fast? Should you employ a blue-ocean strategy, be adaptive, play to win—or forget about a sustainable competitive advantage altogether? In a business environment that is changing faster and becoming more uncertain and complex, it's never been more important—or more difficult—to choose the right approach to strategy.

So how can business leaders make sense of it all? Of the many approaches that can be effective under various scenarios, how can they know which one to apply to which part of their business and at which time?

In this book, The Boston Consulting Group's Martin Reeves, Knut Haanæs, and Janmejaya Sinha offer a proven method to determine the strategy approach that is best for your business. They start by helping you assess your business environment—how unpredictable it is, how much power you have to change it, and how harsh it is. All of these are critical components in getting the strategy right. They show how existing strategy approaches sort into five categories—*Be Big*, *Be Fast*, *Be First*, *Be the Orchestrator*, and *Be Viable*—depending on the degree of predictability, malleability, and harshness. In-depth explanations of each of these approaches provide critical insight to help you match your approach to strategy to your environment, determine when and how to execute each one, and avoid a potentially fatal mismatch.

Instead of designing and offering yet another approach, *Your Strategy Needs a Strategy* helps practitioners and students of business alike determine what's the right move for them: How to

choose the right approach to strategy at the right time, putting their business in the best position to compete and win in the global marketplace.

As a result, *Your Strategy Needs a Strategy* is the perfect complement to any business class—providing an engaging blend of real cases and situations with opportunities for analysis, review, and application.

2 Key Reasons to Include *Your Strategy Needs a Strategy* in Your Curriculum

- The book is built on recent case studies and rich with quotes from C-level executives that make the content tangible. It helps students gain an in-depth understanding of the relevant strategic practices of companies as diverse as Alibaba, AIG, and Mahindra & Mahindra.
- It teaches your students a meta-level view of strategy—not a one-size-fits-all solution, but a framework to apply to a wide range of business contexts.
- The framework can be applied to current business events such as Google’s shift to Alphabet or the new Apple TV, helping students consider how they might interpret and gain lessons from today’s news.
- The book comes with an advanced Strategy Game that runs on Apple (iPads and iPhones) and Android devices and adds an interactive and immersive element to your teaching.
- *Your Strategy Needs a Strategy* can be flexibly used in your curriculum, as either a multisession or a onetime class to enrich a particular strategy lesson.

3 Classroom Target Audience

Written for practitioners and students alike, the book’s key target audience is actual or aspiring decision makers.

In a classroom setting, *Your Strategy Needs a Strategy* targets learners across undergraduate, MBA, master’s, and executive education programs. The book is particularly valuable for students interested in corporate strategy, growth and transformation, management, and innovation.

4 Course Use

Your Strategy Needs a Strategy is appropriate for a range of business classes, including:

Strategy Core Course: The Strategy Palette as the choice model for strategic approaches in different circumstances can be seen as the “meta strategy” that connects and integrates a number of different approaches (from classical, which focuses on scale and costs, to visionary, which stresses being first



in developing a market). Students can learn about various strategies and improve their thinking on which to apply and under what circumstances.

Elective Strategy Course: Each of the five approaches to strategy—classical, shaping, adaptive, visionary and renewal—can be taught in great detail. Short case studies are available for all of them.

Specialized Strategy Courses (for Example, Strategy and Organizations, Sustainable Strategy, Strategic Decision Making, Strategic Management, Innovation Strategy): *Your Strategy Needs a Strategy* can be taught for specialized business school courses and adapted flexibly to different requirements.

5 Available Materials

Your Strategy Needs a Strategy comes with broad variety of didactic material. The material can be used to teach skills on a case-by-case basis as suggested in the module outline below.

- [The book on Amazon](#)
- [TED talk](#)
- [iPad game](#)
- [Strategy Palette video](#)
- [Your Strategy Needs a Strategy HBR article](#)
- [The Book's Homepage](#)
- Slide decks to accompany different modules (on demand—please e-mail BHI@bcg.com)

6 Suggested Formats for Teaching *Your Strategy Needs a Strategy*

Use Case	Name	Description
1	Single class	45 to 90 minutes: Only module A (see below), or one of the other modules if it fits
2	Three classes	Set of three classes: module A plus two others
3	Full course	All modules, deeper on content of module B

If schedule and conditions allow, the authors are willing to help you with your teaching plan and offer a guest lecture.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to BHI@bcg.com for your inquiries.

7 Modules

- **Module A: Introduction, the Strategy Palette**

Main topics covered:

- The change in business environments (volatility, diversity)
- Why one size doesn't fit all
- Why the gap between winners and losers among U.S. companies increases
- The Strategy Palette
- The five Strategy Archetypes
- Applying the Strategy Palette

Discussion questions:

- What aspects of today's global economy make strategy more important than previous periods?
- Describe the five strategy archetypes, and give an example of a company that represents each one.
- Identify various companies in the news today. Which of the five strategy archetypes did they apply and why?
- What are some traps in attempting to apply the right approach to strategy according to the environment? How can things go wrong?

Required reading:

- *Your Strategy Needs a Strategy*, Ch. 1; Reeves, Loves, Tillmanns: "Your Strategy Needs a Strategy," HBR, September 2012 issue

Optional reading:

- Alphabet Is Google's Approach to Ambidexterity
- [Apple's Big Announcement: What Companies Should Be Paying Attention To](#)

- **Module B: The Five Approaches to Strategy**

Main topics covered:

- Be Big: How to identify a classical environment and how to apply the classical approach to it.
- Be Fast: The Adaptive approach: Why unpredictability of returns has risen, how to find out if you are in an adaptive business environment, how to segment sources of uncertainty. How to manage a portfolio of experiments.
- Be First: How to identify an opportunity and formulate and communicate your vision.
- Be the Orchestrator: How to build an ecosystem. What does the shaping approach mean in practice?

- Be Viable: How to renew oneself. When to apply the renewal approach.

Discussion questions:

- What are some companies that have practiced one of these approaches to strategy?
- What factors might inspire a company to change its approach to strategy?
- What are examples of organizations switching strategies over time?
- What are some that are truly ambidextrous, i.e., applying multiple different strategies at the same time?

Required reading:

- *Your Strategy Needs a Strategy*, Ch. 2–Ch. 6

Optional reading:

- [Google Couldn't Survive with One Strategy](#)
- [Apple's Big Announcement: What Companies Should Be Paying Attention To](#)

- **Module C: Ambidexterity**

Main topics covered:

- What does ambidexterity mean?
- The four approaches to ambidexterity.

Discussion questions:

- In what situations does it not make sense to act ambidextrously?
- What are the organizational requirements to execute an ambidextrous strategy?
- Why are so few firms successfully ambidextrous?
- How do managers know in which business unit, when, and for how long to switch approaches?

Required reading:

- *Your Strategy Needs a Strategy*, Ch. 7

Optional reading:

- [Google Couldn't Survive with One Strategy](#)
- [Apple's Big Announcement: What Companies Should Be Paying Attention To](#)

- **Module D: Leadership and Managing Yourself**

Main topics covered:

- The eight roles a manager needs to play.
- How to apply the palette to business and life.
- What are some practical pieces of advice to translate the learnings of the strategy palette into one's own repertoire of skills and capabilities?

Discussion questions:

- Which business leaders today would you characterize as fulfilling which of the “Eight Roles of Leaders” and why?
- What are key tips for success for leaders in navigating diverse and changing strategic environments?
- What are key traps for leaders in navigating diverse and changing strategic environments?
- Which leadership type comes most naturally to you and why?

Required reading:

- *Your Strategy Needs a Strategy*, Ch. 8, Epilogue (last chapter)

Optional reading:

- [Why leaders need to be animators](#)
- [Is Jon Stewart the Perfect CEO?](#)
- [Strategy Lessons: Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Andy Grove](#)