QUT BlueShift
Business Case Competition
Workbook

Contents

Workbook

Welcome to BlueShift

BlueShift is an international business case competition for high school students, hosted by QUT Business School. It gives students the opportunity to work on a real business problem, for a real business, and present to industry experts. The BlueShift competition launched in 2014.

The term "blueshift" describes a decrease in wavelength, with corresponding increase in frequency of an electromagnetic wave, shifting the colour from the red end to the blue end of the spectrum. Inspired by this concept, the BlueShift case competition encourages high school students to shift their thinking and approach to become emerging business leaders, thinking with business minds.

About QUT Business School and international case competitions

Since 2007, undergraduate students from QUT Business School have competed in international business case competitions. Working in teams of four, the students compete against leading business schools from around the world to develop and present solutions to complex business problems. Students build international networks with other students, and leaders from business and industry. QUT Business School international case competition team is one of the most successful in the world.

Figure 1: QUT Business School Case Competition Students

How to use this workbook

This workbook is designed to support teams participating in BlueShift business case competition for high school students. The BlueShift video featuring tips and advice from QUT Business School international case competition students is another handy resource. Teams should draw on the knowledge and skills developed through subjects at school, and range of resources available online.

Special thanks to the QUT Business School international case competition team for assistance in developing this workbook. Special thanks to students Joel Adsett, Nicholas Di Savia, Isabelle Kalaja, and Kate Morris who appear in the BlueShift video, which supports this workbook.

People and Pace

This section of the workbook focuses on how to work as a team (People) and how to make best use of your time (Pace). In the accompanying section of the video, Joel shares some of his top tips and insights.

Working effectively with other people as a team is the most fundamental skill to have in the business world. Team work is also critically important to solving and presenting in case competitions.

Outlined below are four suggested steps to understanding what's involved in great teamwork. Use these steps to start a discussion with your team about your common goals, how you like to work, your diverse strengths and ways you can support each other. It's always good to document what you agree on.

Steps to great teamwork:

1. Establish common goals and a team focus. What does your team want to achieve? How much time and energy can each of the team members commit to?

2. Agree on ways of working. How do you all like to work? How will schedule and spend time working as a team, and working alone? Who in the team will keep us on track? How do we deal with conflict and disagreements?

3. Leverage team strengths and abilities. What are the strengths and abilities of each team member? What are the pressure points and areas to work on for each team member? What can each team member contribute?

4. Build a supportive environment. Discuss how you will support and encourage one another. Agree to an environment that is open for feedback and collaboration.

The most effective teams are often comprised of very different individuals, who share a focus on the task and outcomes to be achieved. It can be useful to assign functional roles for some meetings to make the meetings most effective and use time efficiently. In QUT Business School teams, we rotate the roles, so that all team members get the opportunity to be responsible for each role and build skills and experience. Some of the roles that your team can consider are:

Team leader – particularly in a new team, it is useful to assign one person who will be responsible for leading the team and making sure the team completes all tasks to deadlines.

Team scribe – a team member who is responsible for documenting ideas and discussion from brainstorming sessions and meetings.

Team creativity coach – while it is important to stay focused and on task, it's also important to generate ideas which are beyond the most obvious and immediate. The creativity coach can use

techniques to help reveal 'out of the box' ideas or be endorsed to throw the craziest ideas into the mix.

Team Negative Nancy or Donny Downer – it's important to identify the shortcomings or gaps in the recommendations and solutions. Negative Nancy or Donny Downer have the task of being negative, and putting doubt around your recommendations and solutions. This approach will help you address any flaws, and in some cases, move to an alternative solution.

Team Time Keeper – in this role, the team member is responsible for keeping the team on track and working to deadlines. This role is also useful to ensure all team members get the opportunity to share their ideas, using a 'pass the baton' technique like a relay race. When a team member has the baton, he or she has open and uninterrupted set period of time to share ideas.

Pacing and planning time over the period of the competition is one of the most important tools in any case competition particpant's toolbox. Teams from QUT Business School competing in international case competitions adapt to the conditions of different competitions, with anywhere between three and forty hours to read, analyse, and prepare a solution for the written case. For BlueShift, teams have around six weeks to prepare the written submission, and if the team is selected for finals, another two weeks to translate the written submission to a boardroom style presentation for the finals round.

If you really want to experience some of the intensity of a case competition at university level, your team could set aside a weekend to develop your written submission to the case, and then plan blocks of time later on to review, check, and finalise your analysis and recommendations.

Regardless of the time allocated, a team should always carefully plan the time, and work to deadlines. Your team will be juggling schoolwork and a range of other commitments, so planning your time will help you keep a balance.

As a guide, in an international competition with 24 hours working time, a QUT Business School team would start with allocating time as follows:

Table 1: 24 hour timeline

Activity	Time allocated	Time elapsed
Read the case individually – quick scan read, and then closer read highlighting interesting and useful points, making notes of questions, research and ideas	1 hour	1 hour
Analyse and discuss the case as a team – share ideas and thoughts from individual reading, then using analysis tools and frameworks to track your analysis. Note the specific questions asked in the case, and key issues that you've identified.	2 hours	3 hours
Research and brainstorming solutions – during the reading, analysis and discussion, you will have made notes of research you need to undertake. You should look at the company, the industry, other case studies and examples you might be able to adapt to the allocated case. Allocate areas of research to individual team members. Come back together regularly as a team to brainstorm and discuss ideas.	3 hours	6 hours
Discussion of research findings, analysis, potential strategies, and tactical ideas – discuss potential solutions and constructively critique every idea. You need to be constructive but brutal in your critique – just like the judges will be. Agree on a solution, including strategy and key tactics.	2 hours	8 hours
Building the solution – work out the details of your solution. Find other case studies and examples to back your solution, continue research to build support. Start tracking information you'll need to build budget and consider finances.	4 hours	12 hours
Regroup and regenerate – 15 minutes for timeout (QUT teams often listen to very loud music and dance, go for a run/walk, practice yoga poses. Come back together to check in on how everyone is progressing and feeling, address differences or conflict, revisit and adjust timeline if needed.	1 hour	13 hours
Storyboarding – work together to discuss how you will present your solution. For a written submission, you can work to headings. For a PowerPoint presentation you can 'ghostpack' your PowerPoint deck, planning the purpose and layout of each slide.	1 hour	14 hours
Finances and building presentation – the finance specialist in your team can work on budgets and financial implications of your team's solution and recommendations, while others in your team can build your presentation (either drafting a written submission or building a PowerPoint deck). You should be checking in regularly across the team.	4 hours	18 hours
Review to perfect the solution – review your presentation through the eyes of the judging panel. Is everything clear? Does it tell a compelling and persuasive story? Are all the ideas you've presented fully supported with data and examples? Does your analysis link to your solution?	2 hours	20 hours
Final adjustments	1 hour	21 hours
Practise, practise, practise – have as many individual and team practices as possible. Make sure your team is presenting a strong story, the transitions between speakers are smooth, and the whole team understands all elements	3 hours	24 hours

of the solution. Think about questions the judging panel may ask and how you will respond as a team.		
Reflect and celebrate – when the allocated time has passed, it's good to schedule time to reflect on what you have achieved as a team, including what worked and what didn't.	30 minutes	

Preparation and Problem Solving

This section of the workbook focuses on getting ready and the first steps of cracking a case (Preparation), along with analysis tools and frameworks you can use (Problem Solving). In the accompanying section of the video, Isabella (Izzie) shares some of her top tips and insights.

Reading a case takes a planned and strategic approach. It's best to individually read a case first. This is generally a scan read, looking for key facts and starting to think about the key issues and challenges in the case. Most cases will have specific questions your team will need to respond to, so it's often useful to find these questions as part of your initial read. Sometimes the questions will be set out clearly at the end, while other times the questions are embedded within the case.

After reading individually, you should discuss the case as a team. This will help you to identify key issues and challenges in more depth, and share questions and ideas you already have. You should then return to the case, and read with more purpose and more closely. The approach you take to the second reading will vary for each case. Sometimes, you might have each team member focus on reading the case with the view to uncovering the information that can be used in one of the analysis tools or frameworks. You might have another team member read with the purpose of identifying the research your team will need to undertake.

Your team should also develop a plan for research after reading the case. Make sure you allocate research across team members, to maximise the use of your time and draw on the skills of various team members. When the research is completed, come back together as a team and share your findings. It's likely you'll continue to research across the case solving period. Libraries are a great place to start your research, and access information.

In the international case competitions that QUT Business School teams compete in, the cases will vary in length from a few pages, to 50 or more pages, with accompanying links and digital files. Some cases will have detailed financial data, while others will have very limited financial data. No two cases are the same!

There are a range of analysis tools and frameworks your team can use to analyse a case, and structure your thinking and discussion. The analysis tools and frameworks most commonly used include:

- 5Cs framework
- PESTEL analysis
- Porter's 5 Forces
- SWOT
- Financial and data analysis tools

You may not use all the information you generate from these analysis tools and frameworks, and in some cases there may be elements of the analysis tools that are less relevant. These analysis tools and frameworks provide a structure for your team to sort information, research and ideas. The analysis and research are the first steps - your solutions and recommendations must add insights and creativity to show your team's best business thinking.

5Cs framework

The 5Cs framework helps to structure the analysis of:

1. Context
2. Company
3. Collaborators
4. Customers
5. Competitors

Think about the case company and industry around the 5Cs, and use some of the questions and ideas below to guide your discussion.

Table 2: Context questions and ideas

1. Context	Factor – what is changing and/or significant for the case company?
Demographic *Age, family structure, ethnicity, social class, gender, income, education, geographical location*	
Socio-cultural *Lifestyle trends, consumer attitudes and opinions, media views, law changes affecting social factors, brand, company, technology image, consumer buying patterns, fashion and role models, major events and influences, buying access and trends, advertising and publicity, ethical issues*	
Economic *Home economy situation, home economy trends, overseas economies and trends, general taxation issues, taxation specific to product/services, seasonality/weather issues, market and trade cycles, specific industry factors, market routes and distribution trends, customer/end-user drivers, interest and exchange rates, international trade/monetary issues*	
Technological *Competing technology development, research funding, associated/dependent technologies, replacement technology/solutions, maturity of technology, manufacturing maturity and capacity, information and communications, consumer buying mechanisms/technology, technology*	

legislation, innovation potential, technology access, licencing, patents, intellectual property issues, global communications	
Political and Regulatory *Current legislation home market, future legislation, international legislation, regulatory bodies, government policies, government change, trading policies, funding, grants and initiatives, home market lobbying/pressure groups, wars and conflicts*	
Natural Environment *Ecological issues, regulation, technology to save energy, green friendly products*	

Table 3: Company analysis

2. Company	
Product or service offering *What is the key value of product or service offered by the case company*	
Image in the market *How is the case company positioned in the market?*	
Technology and experience *Are there any technological or experiential factors which provide the case company with an advantage?*	
Culture *What is the organisational culture of the case company?*	
Goals *Where does the case company see itself in the future?*	

For each potential collaborator, consider:

Table 4: Collaborators

3. Collaborators	Suppliers, Distributors, Alliances, Key Influencers	
What is their product/service and when do case company use them?	*Strengths*	*Weaknesses*
	How could case company and this collaborator work together?	

Plot the insights and understanding about consumers:

Table 5: Consumers

4. Consumers	Understanding the case company consumer
WHO is buying and consuming?	
WHAT are their choice criteria?	
WHEN do they buy/use case company product?	
WHY do they buy/use case company product?	
WHERE do they buy?	
HOW do they use case company product?	

Remember, there are direct competitors and indirect competitors, so think broadly. For each competitor, consider:

Table 6: Competitors

5. Competitors	Understanding case company competitors
Competitor	*Is this business an actual or a potential competitor?*
	Is this business a direct or indirect competitor?
	What products does this business offer?
	How is this business positioned in the market?
	What are the strengths of this business?
	What are the weaknesses of this business?

Decide the key factors and issues from the analysis, and summarise in a few sentences to complete your team's 5Cs analysis.

Table 7: Summarise

5Cs	Summary statement
Context	
Company	
Collaborators	
Consumers	
Competitors	

PESTEL analysis

The PESTEL (sometimes listed as PESTLE) analysis considers broad factors that impact the case company and the industry it operates in.

Table 8: PESTEL analysis factors

Factors	How they influence case company
Political Factors *Government policy, political stability/instability in overseas markets, foreign trade policy, tax policy, trade restrictions*	
Economic Factors *Economic growth, interest rates, exchange rates, inflation, disposable income, demand and supply,*	
Social Factors *Population growth, age distribution, health consciousness, cultural trends.*	
Technological Factors *New technologies, maturing technology, new distribution methods, new production technology, new communication technologies.*	
Environmental Factors *Sustainability, global changes in climate, environmental offsets, geographical location, environmental laws, consumer attitudes.*	
Legal Factors *Consumer laws, advertising laws, health and safety laws, product labelling and product safety.*	

Porter's Five Forces

Porter's Five Forces is a framework that analyses the level of competition within an industry, and supports business strategy development. The framework was developed by Professor Michael E Porter at Harvard Business School.

Figure 2: Porter's Five Forces Framework
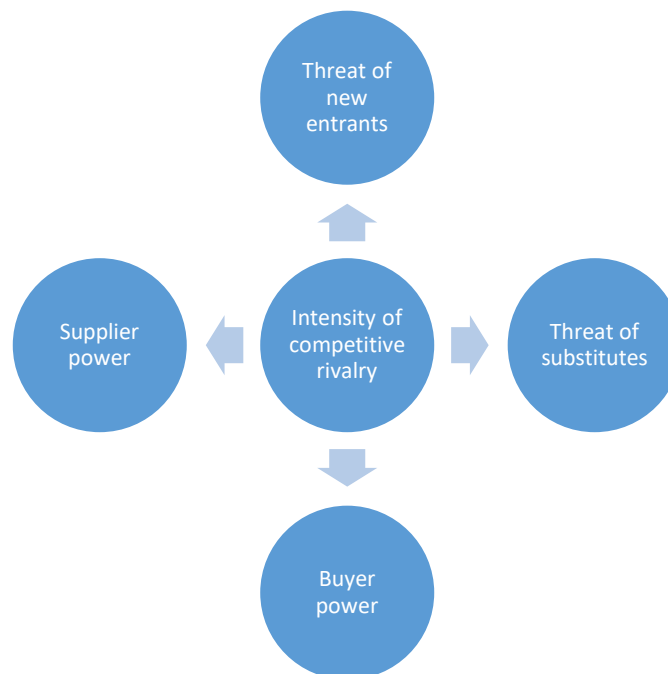
Brainstorming ideas:

Threat of new entrants – barriers to entry, economies of scale, brand equity, switching costs, capital requirements, access to distribution, customer loyalty to established brands, absolute cost, industry profitability.

Threat of Substitutes – buyer inclination to substitute, price performance of substitute, buyer switching costs, perceived level of product differentiation, number of substitutes available, ease of substitution.

Supplier Power – supplier switching costs, impact of inputs on cost or differentiation, presence of substitute inputs, strength of distribution channel, supplier concentration, supplier competition.
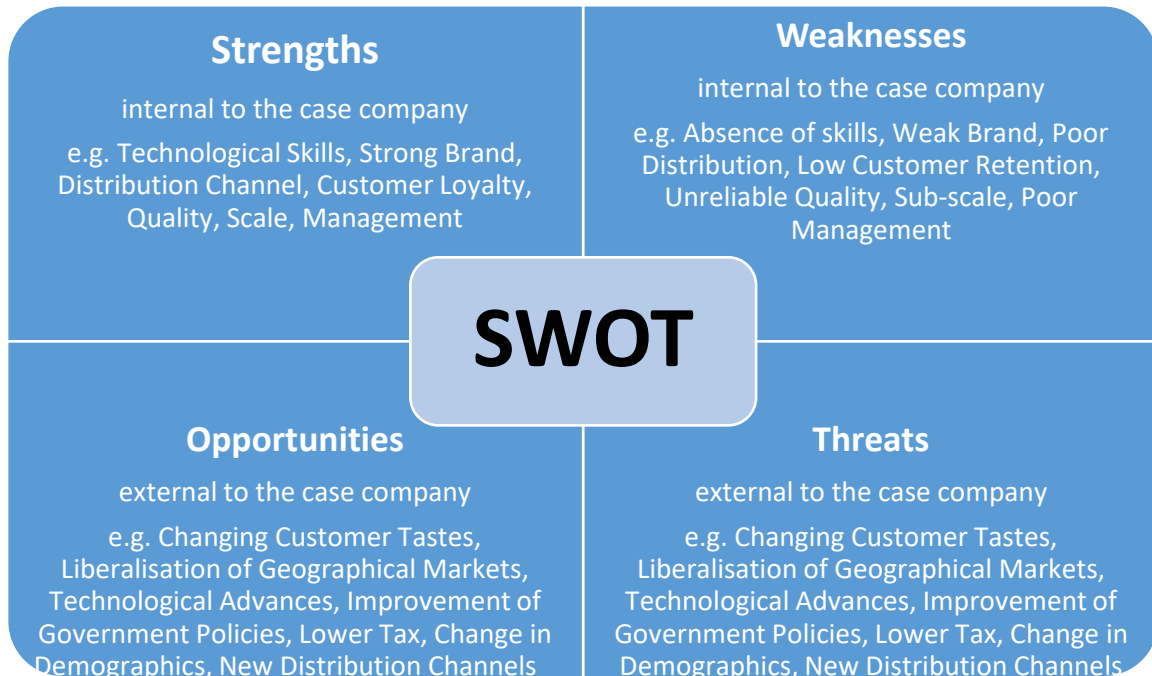
Buyer Power – bargaining leverage, buyer volume, availability of existing substitute products, buyer price sensitivity, product differentiation, brand identity, buyers' incentives.

Competitive Rivalry – Industry concentration, sustainable competitive advantage through innovation, industry growth, product differences, switching costs, diversity of rivals, corporate stakes.

SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis considers the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats relevant to the case company and the industry.

Figure 3: SWOT Analysis

Strengths

internal to the case company

e.g. Technological Skills, Strong Brand, Distribution Channel, Customer Loyalty, Quality, Scale, Management

Weaknesses

internal to the case company

e.g. Absence of skills, Weak Brand, Poor Distribution, Low Customer Retention, Unreliable Quality, Sub-scale, Poor Management

SWOT

Opportunities

external to the case company

e.g. Changing Customer Tastes, Liberalisation of Geographical Markets, Technological Advances, Improvement of Government Policies, Lower Tax, Change in Demographics, New Distribution Channels

Threats

external to the case company

e.g. Changing Customer Tastes, Liberalisation of Geographical Markets, Technological Advances, Improvement of Government Policies, Lower Tax, Change in Demographics, New Distribution Channels

The Plan

This section of the workbook focuses on finalising your team's solution, and presenting as a written submission. In the accompanying section of the video, Nicholas (Nick) shares some of his top tips and insights.

For the first stage of the BlueShift case competition, each team will prepare a written submission in response to the provided case. In the international case competitions QUT Business School teams compete in, there is generally no written submission. Rather, teams go straight to the presentation stage, presenting their solution to a panel of judges. Many competitions have multiple cases across the week of competition.

If your team has done a great job of Preparation and Problem Solving, pulling together the written submission as The Plan should be relatively simple.

When you get to the stage of preparing your written submission, it's good practice to do a final check. Has your team identified the real issues of the case? Is your team answering all the questions and challenges presented by the case? You may need to return to brainstorming and discussion to refine the content of your written submission.

Has your team supported your recommendations and solutions with sufficient analysis and research? You may need to find some other data and examples to bring support to your written submission.

One of the biggest challenges for all teams in BlueShift is presenting the information clearly and concisely. In business, being able to present your ideas and solutions in a compelling way, balancing brevity with enough detail is essential. The page limits set for BlueShift written submission reflect the length of a report you might see in a real world business setting. Think about how you might use a table or diagram to present complex information in a simpler, and more easily understood way.

The written submission will contain tactics and a timeline, which are generally part of the team's response to questions within the case. Make sure your timeline gives a complete picture of activities and milestones, and your team has considered how these are spread over the time allocated or recommended. The written submission should also include a budget, and consider financial and other benefits for the case company. The written submission should provide realistic budget figures based on publicly accessible material. Sometimes, this information is not provided in the case and may not be accessible through research. For these cases, your written submission should include the budget items that would need to be considered, and indicate detailed budget would need to be developed if your consulting team was appointed by the case company. Similarly, you may need to use industry wide figures that are publicly accessible to build some financial forecasting and benchmarks, particularly for private companies.

Presenting persuasively

This section of the workbook focuses on presenting your team's solution, both as written submission and as live presentation with PowerPoint for those teams in finals. In the accompanying section of the video, Kate shares some of her top tips and insights.

Become an expert in as many applications (including Word, PowerPoint, Excel and project management tools) as possible. There are lots of great online tutorials, so make some time to refine your skills if you're not already a guru! Most people use these applications to very limited levels, so unlock all the potential.

Kate's Top 5 tips written reports

1. Draft, edit and proofread – your team must factor in time to do this.
2. Use Word to its full potential – this will help your team to make the written submission as appealing as possible, and help with edits and updates.
3. Guide your reader – use headings and other tools to guide the reader through your written submission.
4. Use a single style or voice – teams may delegate each member of a team with writing a section of the written submission. Find out who is the strongest writer and editor in your team, and set them the task of the final edit and proofread.
5. Visually appealing – mix text, images, and diagrams in the written submission. Make sure it's presented to a professional visual standard.

Kate's Top 5 tips for PowerPoint

1. Don't just cut and paste – think of your team's PowerPoint deck as a very different tool than your written submission.
2. Use PowerPoint to support, not dominate – people listen to people. Your team should be telling the story and persuading the judges. The PowerPoint deck is a support.
3. Use colours, shapes, icons – minimise the text on PowerPoint slides, and think about other approaches to present your ideas clearly
4. Keep it simple – your team will be very familiar with the content and ideas, but remember the judges are hearing it for the first time. Keep it clear and simple, but bring enough depth and detail to convince them.
5. Use features of PowerPoint – animations and transitions are good ways to build slide decks. But don't make it distracting by going overboard!

Kate's Top 5 tips for presenting

1. Don't use palm cards – in a professional business setting, the team will know content in detail, and won't need notes or palm cards.

2. Know your content, don't memorise – use PowerPoint to structure and set up your presentation, and then talk to the key points and ideas. Don't memorise or recite – it won't convince the judges.
3. Tell a story to engage your audience – people want to hear about people, so tell stories of the customer, the company, your ideas.
4. Get feedback during practice by filming your presentation – this is a great technique for you to reflect on your own presentation skills and style, and get feedback from others to improve before finals day.
5. Practice and pre-empt questions from judges – always practice as a team, as well as individuals. Think about the questions that judges might ask, and how you will respond to them.