

Syllabus: Solving Business Problems

The purpose of this course is exposing MBA FT students at ESADE to complex business problems that senior managers face. Consequently students work in teams combining their experience, expertise and what they learn in the MBA to analyze an specific real decision-making situation. They work under the supervision and guidance of the faculty of the class and the Senior Manager who had or has to make that decision. The exercise is about bridging theory and practice.

Also students engage actively with senior managers very early in the MBA program. The course will certainly generate learnings, network, and new questions that students will be able to address as they advance in their MBA studies. It is as much about answering questions as it is about opening new relevant and important questions.

Course Format and Methodological Approach

To achieve the objectives of the course we will use an action-learning approach. Each session will be a self-contained business situation. Students will be provided in advance with key words that better describe the main topics relevant to solve the specific business problem. Students should use those keywords to review what they know on those topics, what they covered in classes, and do a bit of research on what is known on those topics.

In class the Senior Manager will present the problem and raise the questions you need to answer. Then teams will move to the breakout rooms to analyze the situation and write a one-page executive summary on what would they do to solve the problem, and why. During the team work the Senior Manager and faculty will be available to answer questions and provide insights at the request of teams.

Students will come back to classroom and appoint one representative to sit on the table with the senior manager for a business meeting. Each session the group will have to appoint a different representative. The Senior Manager will meet with the representatives of all teams to get their recommendations and come with final decision. Students will observe the process and content in the conversation.

Finally, following the gap analysis methodology, we will know how the senior manager and the company faced or is facing the situation, we will compare the decisions and learn from the similarities and differences. We will end with a Fireside-Chat for final Q&As.

Assessment

40%	Attendance & Class participation (8% each session)
50%	Executive Summaries for each SBP session (10% each)
10%	Peer Evaluation on the team contribution

There are three components to the requirements for this course, explained and weighted as follows.

Attendance & Class Participation (40%)

Much of your work in this course—as well as a significant portion of your grade—requires participation in class discussions of major concepts and business cases. You can't participate if you don't attend.

You are expected to arrive at each class prepared to discuss concepts and major issues and challenges and to make recommendations.

We recognize that, in large classes, it is impossible for each student to hold the floor for significant periods of time during each class. This is not our expectation and we emphasize that class participation is not a competition for air time. Good contributions, as you all know, may sometimes involve presenting a detailed case analysis or arguing for a particular recommendation. Obviously, such contributions require significant preparation. Students may also contribute importantly, however, by actively engaging a discussion, e.g., by asking questions that move the discussion to a new plane, by presenting arguments that counter the prevailing view, or by describing real-world experiences that have bearing on the issue at hand. Such contributions also require significant preparation. Contribution is expected in teams discussions and plenary sessions.

Grading class participation is necessarily subjective. However, we try to make it as “objective as possible”. Some of the criteria for evaluating effective class participation include:

- 1 Is the participant prepared? Do comments show evidence of understanding of the problem? Do comments add to our understanding of the situation? Does the participant go beyond simple repetition? Do comments show an understanding of theories, concepts, and analytical devices?
- 2 Is the participant a good listener? Are the points made relevant to the discussion? Are they linked to the comments of others? Is the participant willing to interact with other class members?
- 3 Is the participant an effective communicator? Are concepts presented in a concise and convincing way?

Executive Summaries (50%)

Students will have to write a one page executive summary for each session before coming back to the plenary class discussion, this is right at the end of the team work in breakout rooms. The executive summary should be prepared during the team work. Please bring a printed copy (or handwritten copy) and hand it out at the beginning of the class.

Executive Summaries will be classified in three categories according to the soundness of the solution to address the problem, the quality, consistency and coherence of their analysis and arguments. Classification will be done jointly by the Senior Manager and the faculty.

Peer Evaluation (10%)

At the end of the term, each team member will indicate, for him or herself and for every other member, the extent of contribution to the team work. The peer evaluation will have 10% weight on the final grade.

Typical day of Class

The format of each session may be adapted to better fit the learning objectives and profit from the experience and reach of Senior Managers. But typically sessions will be:

- Before class general individual and team preparation assembling the teams collective knowledge on the Keywords provided by the Senior Manager and Faculty.
- Begin the class with a 15-minute Problem presentation by the Senior Manager and clarification questions.
- Team work in breakout room for 60 minutes to analyze the problem and propose a decision and plan of action in a one-page executive summary.
- Coffee Break for 15 minutes.
- Meeting of the representatives of each team with the senior manager for up to 60 minutes. Students observe on fish-bowl setting.
- Gap Analysis comparing the analysis and decisions of the class with Management Team approach for up to 45 minutes.
- Final wrap-up and Q&A around 15 minutes.

Faculty

Prof. Pedro Parada

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Dr. Pedro Parada is Director and Professor of the ESADE Strategy and General Management Department. He served as Academic Director and Professor for the Global Executive MBA offered jointly with Georgetown University. He has been a Visiting Professor at the HEC School of Management in Paris and SDA Bocconi in Milan. In addition, he has coordinated and taught courses within the International Electives offered at Babson College. He has written articles, case studies and book chapters in English, Spanish, Catalan, French, German, Chinese and Portuguese. Dr. Parada holds a PhD in Management, a Master's in Public Policy and Management and an undergraduate degree in Economics.

Prof. Carmen Martínez Nebot

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Carmen Martínez Nebot has wide experience in Corporate Development with a history of working in the retail sector and the banking industry, where at the moment she is part of the M&A and Corporate Development team reporting directly to the CEO. Skilled in Negotiation, Business Planning, Strategic Negotiations and Management. Carmen Martínez Nebot graduated from Univesitat Autònoma de Barcelona and Université Libre de Bruxelles in Political Science, specialization in International Relations and is also an Executive MBA Graduate from Esade Business & Law School. She collaborates with the Department of Strategy and General Management in Esade.

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