

# Introduction

A playbook in sports helps the general manager, coaches, and players map out how they intend to achieve excellence, respond to challenges, and reach for a collective goal. Playbooks in sports identify primary intended strategies to win, details on how to execute any number of unique individual plays that support the strategy, and also include plays and alternative strategies that anticipate what opponents might do to counter, or make the playbook irrelevant.

Take a look at some specific “plays” that you might see in a soccer/football, American football, or ice hockey playbook. In these examples, each play diagram reflects a way to execute a “re-direct” kind of strategy, where the one team seizes an opportunity to take the play towards the “side” of action, then back into primary scoring (goal) areas—seeking to spread out the opposing defense.

## In soccer, such a play might look like this:

In this instance, the center half back (CHB) notices that a gap has opened towards the “side” of action” where the right winger (RW) is in a position to receive a pass “wide right”. The center half back (1), and puts a lead pass out to the right (2). At the same time, the center sees this and moves, not to the first pass out “wide right”, but in an anticipatory move right into the center of the defense, hoping to find a small gap where he or she could receive a pass from the right wing (3) and make an attempt at goal (shot).

## A conceptually very similar play in American football might look like this

Notice how each person in the offense has a task here, to help create a “gap” on the right side that the full-back could drive through if it appears (via blocking). Notice too, that the fullback has an option to pitch to the half-back if the gap is opening late—and, the quarterback has the option of faking the handoff to the fullback and going with a short slant pass to the left tight end, who is moving to support either option.

## Finally, a similar play in ice hockey might look like this:

In this power play (*the defense in this case has one player off-ice in the penalty box and is playing a person short*), the left wing is the key. As they have the puck and appear to be driving to the net, they pass backwards and away to the left defense (1), to redirect the flow (and likely allow the center to “hide” behind the net). The left defense then rapidly passes to the right, while the left wing looks for a pass (just like the soccer variation above). When the left wing gets the puck again, however, rather than trying to beat the right defense, he or she passes to the center, who has essentially been “hiding” behind the net, and who comes out to the net to take a shot or re-direct a shot.

*So, what does this have to do with business strategy you might ask? More than you might think!*

For one, unless you already know the details and rules of each sport, you may have struggled to figure out the play diagrams, and that they lacked some meaning—especially without some explanation. In business strategy it is the same: there are certain types questions and analyses that senior leadership must ask and perform if it is going to develop a coherent “strategy playbook” for a company.

Second, the big goal in most sports and business are the same—to better your competition in a fair competition. Sports teams compete to win games. Similarly, businesses compete for customer's purchases. If a sports team wins enough games they can continue on to play in the playoffs, in most sports. If a business earns enough customer purchases, it can continue serving its mission as a business. It is rare that championship teams win without an overall strategy. After all, “to win” is a just a goal—it is not a strategy. A championship team or a successful business will likely have an overall strategy that takes both internal and external factors into consideration—including the acquisition and training of talent.

Third, in order to win, businesses and sports teams must rely on adaptive, real-time execution of skills, competencies and capabilities to “make things happen” in ways that are consistent with, and supportive of, the organization’s mission and purpose for existing. As such, business organizations must be VERY knowledgeable about what they are capable of doing, what customers really want (or might want/need), and they must understand the competitive landscape very well.

Fourth, sometimes plays, actions, and strategies are “off-direction.” In the plays above, each situation required the team to move the action in a direction other straight at the goal. Each play used off-direction strategies to create openings that would allow them the chance to score. These types of strategies are often the most complex and difficult to execute. It is difficult to coordinate the efforts of different player to take advantage of future opportunities. It takes healthy, fully-functioning teams to “sell” and “execute” complex strategies. Sometimes such complexity is needed, sometimes it is not.

Finally, everyone on the team, from the owners, general managers, coaches, players and support staff, must understand the strategies, philosophies, and ambitions of the team. This unity of vision supports the organization so it can execute plays and, if the need arises, change strategy as the competition evolves in real time.

In this course, you are going to develop a *Strategy Playbook to get to Exceptional Results*, which you will create as part of your MBA Capstone experience. This strategy playbook has the same purpose as a playbook for a sports team—it is where you can put your entire MBA education to use and build a roadmap that can help a current, publicly-traded organization achieve exceptional results. The organization you choose for this exercise could be an organization that you have worked for, or one you hope to work with in the future.

#### What Kind of Organization will you Create Your Playbook for?

You will develop a Strategy Playbook for a publicly traded company (with more than 100 employees).

#### What will the Playbook Focus On?

You will write the playbook throughout the course, from the perspective of a consultant. The “plays” you will develop will be responses, based on analysis, to the core questions that any solid business strategy must ask and answer :

- ***What is your winning aspiration?*** (What to you stand for and believe deeply in?)

- **Where will you play?** (Who will you serve, and who will either help or compete against you?)
- **How will you win?** (How will you create unique value?)
- **Which capabilities must be in place (to win)?** (What skills, competencies and capabilities do you need now, and in the future?)
- **What management systems are required?** (Do you have a supporting culture, structure, systems, and appropriate measures to implement a strategy?)

The final compilation of your "Strategy Playbook for Exceptional Results" will be tangible evidence that you can put your MBA education to use and it will provide you a template for how you can help your current organization, or one you hope to work with in the future, achieve exceptional results.

How will I Develop the Playbook?

Your playbook will be written and developed throughout the entire course—not all in one week! The process for building your playbook is the same each week, although the content of analysis will vary week-to-week. Each week you will examine and analyze a given case study, and you will then identify key insights from your analysis, and apply lessons from the case study, the week’s required readings, and readings you identify from the MBA Program Capstone Bibliography, into your Playbook entry for the week.

The table below provides an overview of what you will be analyzing each week:

Strategy Playbook Elements

Week	Playbook Analysis	Completed?
One	Evaluate candidate companies to study and select a publicly-traded company	
Two	Evaluate the stated <b>mission, vision, and values</b> , within the context-level of analysis, of your chosen company.	
Three	Apply insights from <b>internal strategy analysis tools</b> and concepts towards the development of relevant portions of your strategy playbook.	
Four	Apply key insights from <b>P.E.S.T. and Stakeholder strategy analysis tools</b> and concepts towards the development of relevant portions of your strategy playbook.	

Five	Apply key insights from <b>competitive strategy analysis</b> tools and concepts towards the development of relevant portions of your strategy playbook.	
Six	Apply key insights from <b>Key Success Factor strategy analysis</b> tools and concepts towards the development of relevant portions of your strategy playbook.	
Seven	Explicitly <b>identify, provide a name for, explain the basics of, and evaluate, a preliminary company-wide strategy</b> that you recommend for your company.	
Eight	<p><b>Synthesize</b> all prior entries into a single document, so that it aligns with your identified strategy.</p> <p>Write an <b>executive summary</b> that explains your proposed strategy and how the playbook can help you analyze it further.</p> <p>Develop a <b>Strategy Playbook Diagram</b> or table that summaries your playbook elements.</p>	

What Will be in the Final Draft of the Playbook?

In week eight you will put together all of the week-by-week analysis elements into a single appendix. Then you will extract out the core – most important and interesting elements and recommendations from those analyses. From that core, you will write an Executive Summary and develop a Strategy Playbook diagram. These will be the two primary components of the Playbook, followed by the analysis appendix and all your references.

So, the Playbook will consist of:

- A **cover page**. This should include a title for your strategy (which becomes the title of your playbook), your name, the date, and the course number and section and name of the faculty member.
- A written **Executive Summary** that Provides Key Highlights of your Playbook.
- A **Strategy Map or other Playbook Summary Diagram**.
- An **Analysis Appendix**: This will be comprised of your synthesized, integrated work from your previous Playbook entries.

What Purpose Does the Executive Summary for the Playbook Serve?

The Executive Summary for your Playbook is where you, in a single page (of single-spaced writing), explain to your audience (senior executives at the company you are studying) what you have found in your analysis that is most interesting, and what it means in terms of what the future goals, strategies and initiatives for the company should be. This is very difficult writing, and it should relate directly to both your appendix information, and your Strategy Playbook Diagram or Table.

Do I just Re-use or Cut/Paste my Prior Playbook Entries into the Final Playbook?

No, the appendix should be an integrated, improved version of all the entries you have made during the course. Since strategic thinking is an iterative (it repeats itself), non-linear way of thinking (what you do at the end might mean you re-evaluate and revise, analyses you made earlier), your playbook entries in the appendix should all align with one another and reflect all improvements you have made based on peer and faculty feedback. It would not be good to just do simple cut and paste from your original drafts, as then the appendix would not flow as if it was all written as one piece of analysis—which it should be.

What will the Format of the Final Playbook be?

GENERAL FORMAT: all sections should be single spaced. Start with a cover page and then start page numbering with the Executive Summary. Continue page numbering through the very end, including the appendix. References should be included after the appendix and follow APA 6th format.

*Note: Your paper should have a cover page with a title for the recommended strategy that describes the strategy, like "Maru-C" ("Encircle Caterpillar"), which was a large scale strategy that Komatsu strove for in the 1980's.*

- Lafley, A.G., Martin, R., Riel, J. (2013). A Playbook for Strategy: The five essential questions at the heart of any winning strategy. *Rotman Magazine*, Winter, pp. 5-9.