

Course Syllabus Problem Solving in Business

The mission of ZSEM is to transfer values, knowledge, and skills that students need for long-term success in a globalised business world undergoing constant technological and market transformations.
Misija ZŠEM-a je prenijeti vrijednosti, znanja i vještine potrebne studentima za dugoročan uspjeh u globaliziranom poslovnom svijetu izloženom stalnim tehnološkim i tržišnim promjenama.

LECTURER

Lecturers Luka Lučić, MBA
Contact luka.lucic@zsem.hr

LECTURE HOURS

Lectures	8
Lecture length (hours)	3
Total	24

COURSE PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES

Consider the following questions:

What is the market size of chewing gum in Croatia?

How many pigs are there in China?

What is the best way to answer them – with no internet access?

In today's fast-paced, volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) business environment, managers and professionals are increasingly confronted with ill-defined problems, incomplete information, and high-stakes decisions. The sheer volume of data and possible analyses often leads to analysis paralysis, hindering effective decision-making.

This course addresses that challenge by developing two essential management capabilities: strategic thinking and structured problem solving. Drawing on methodologies mastered by leading management consulting and strategy firms, students learn how to approach complex problems in a disciplined, pre-planned way. By applying structured frameworks, participants learn to break down ambiguity into manageable components, formulate sound assumptions, and derive insight-driven answers—even in the absence of perfect information, as illustrated by the opening questions.

Teaching is highly interactive and practice-oriented, combining lectures, real-world case studies, and group workshops. Through hands-on application to international business contexts, students develop the ability not only

to solve complex problems, but to do so rigorously, efficiently, and with executive-level clarity.

GENERAL GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

	General goals	Learning outcomes
1.	Students will understand and apply existing problem-solving frameworks	Students will gain knowledge of widely-used frameworks in management consulting and will be equipped to apply these methodologies effectively to various business scenarios. This includes learning through case studies and practical exercises.
2.	Students will adapt existing problem-solving frameworks and be able to develop their own	Students will have the capacity to tailor existing problem-solving frameworks, as well as develop their own, to be able to meet the demands of a wide range of business challenges, no matter the specific industry or sector.
3.	Students will cultivate a structured, analytical mindset	Students will be able to approach business problems using a systematic and analytical thought process. The course will focus on teaching students to dissect complex issues, identify key elements, and evaluate solutions in a logical and methodical manner, enhancing their analytical capabilities for professional applications.

COURSE CONTENTS (subject to change)

- **Lecture 1**
 - Introduction – VUCA world, cognitive biases, importance of structured problem solving
 - Brief overview of how management consultants do what they do
 - Demonstrative case study
- **Lecture 2**
 - Brief history of the rise of strategy in the world of business
 - Issue trees and hypothesis-driven problem solving
 - MECE principle: importance and common pitfalls
 - Hands-on exercises: building issue trees
- **Lecture 3**
 - Learning how to tackle qualitative vs quantitative problems
 - Introduction to profitability framework
 - Introduction to market sizing framework
 - How to gather data, and use data for insight generation
- **Lecture 4**
 - Brief history of the importance of portfolio management
 - Introduction to the BCG Matrix
 - Introduction to executive communication – how to present findings
- **Lecture 5**
 - Explaining the 3C & business situation framework
 - Applying the 3C & business situation through case studies
 - Practicing the 3Cs framework – group activity
 - Root-cause tools and systems mapping for complex, interconnected problems
- **Lecture 6**
 - Competitive and Business Strategy
 - Introduction to Porter's Five Forces, generic strategies, Blue Ocean Strategy
 - Long-term planning tools; scenario matrix development
- **Lecture 7**
 - Explaining the design thinking approach to problem solving
 - Applying the design thinking approach – group activity
- **Lecture 8**
 - Student satisfaction survey
 - Written exam

GRADING

The course grade is based on the following:

Grade elements	Percentage
Written exam	100%

The final grade is determined in accordance with the following table:

Achieved points	Final grade
90 - 100	Excellent (5)
78– 89	Very good (4)
65– 77	Good (3)
50 – 64	Pass (2)
< 50	Fail (1)

LITERATURE

Main literature:

- Kiechel, W. The Lords of Strategy: The Secret Intellectual History of the New Corporate World. Harvard Business Press (2010)
- Minto, B. The Pyramid Principle: Logic in Writing and Thinking. Financial Times (2010)
- Rasiel, E. The McKinsey Way. McGraw Hill Professional (1999)
- Watanabe, K. Problem Solving 101. The Penguin Group (2009)

Additional literature:

- Cosentino, M. Case in point: complete case interview preparation. Burgee Press (2011)