

IDEO 

Designing Strategy

Course Syllabus



Designing Strategy

Course Syllabus

Learn a distinct and actionable process for designing a strategy. This process will help you create and take action on a strategy for your business, team, or organization. You'll follow repeatable steps that are both human-centered and business-focused. Gain tools that will help you design a strategy by combining rigor and creativity—to both analyze the world as it is, and imagine how it could be better.

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Your Instructors, Teaching Team & Community

A wide range of individuals are stakeholders in your success in learning design thinking. As a learner, you'll interact with:

INSTRUCTORS

IDEO U courses are taught by experts and IDEO practitioners who have honed their skills over many years in the field bringing new ideas to market. They bring real-world case studies and examples into their recorded video lessons.

TEACHING TEAM

Receive support from a team of design thinking practitioners with teaching and facilitation expertise. These experienced professionals are present to guide discussions, foster peer connection, and provide feedback on your assignments.

COURSE COMMUNITY

Learn alongside a cohort of hundreds of passionate professionals from around the world seeking to bring innovation and creativity to their work. The IDEO U community spans 120 countries and countless professions and industries. Build your professional network by making valuable connections in each course.

Meet Your Instructors



Roger Martin

Strategy Advisor & former Dean of the Rotman School of Management

Roger Martin is a trusted strategy advisor who's worked with CEOs of companies worldwide, including Procter & Gamble, Lego, and Ford Motor Company. In 2017, he was named the world's #1 management thinker by Thinkers50, a biannual ranking of the most influential global business gurus.

He has published 11 books including *Creating Great Choices* co-authored with Jennifer Riel, *The Design of Business*, and *Playing to Win* written with A.G. Lafley, former CEO of Procter & Gamble.

Roger is Professor Emeritus and former Dean of the Rotman School of Management. A Canadian from Wallenstein, Ontario, he received his AB from Harvard College and his MBA from Harvard Business School.

Jennifer Riel

Global Director of Strategy at IDEO



Jennifer has led strategy processes at large public and private sector organizations around the world. She also serves as a strategy and innovation advisor to senior leaders at several Fortune 100 companies. She is an adjunct professor at the Rotman School of Management, where she teaches strategy, innovation, and integrative thinking.

She co-authored *Creating Great Choices* with Roger Martin. She has published articles in the *Harvard Business Review*, the *Globe and Mail*, *Businessweek*, and *Strategy Magazine*.

Jennifer received her MBA from the Rotman School of Management. Her undergraduate degree is in English Literature and History, from Queen's University.



Planning for a Successful Learning Experience

The IDEO U learning experience centers on four key ways of engaging, all designed to help you understand and retain new knowledge. In each lesson you have the opportunity to see, try, share, and reflect. This isn't a passive experience—to get the most out of each course, we recommend that you plan to engage with your fellow learners and practice your new skills with others in real-world settings.

To be successful in a course, we recommend planning for a minimum of 4 hours of work per week, including time to watch videos and read articles, complete assignments, and engage in discussion and reflection.



SCHEDULE TIME FOR ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments are required to earn your certificate of completion. Plan time in advance for executing assignments, especially those that may require you to engage with others. Recommended due dates within the course are suggestions to keep you on pace, but the only hard deadline is the day your course closes. Find more information on assignments and activities in the lesson breakdowns in this syllabus.

PARTICIPATE IN VIRTUAL VIDEO CALLS

These optional sessions offer the chance to engage with your peers, dive deeper into course concepts, and broaden your perspective. If you can't attend each week, try to participate in at least one of these video chats.

GIVE FEEDBACK

We believe that asking for and giving feedback play crucial roles in learning. Use our in-course feedback guide to give constructive feedback and make valuable connections with your peers and the Teaching Team.

STAY IN TOUCH

Your learning isn't over when the course closes. Tune in to hear from today's leading innovation experts and change makers on the [IDEO U Creative Confidence Podcast](#), get access to our LinkedIn alumni group, and consider guiding others through their IDEO U learning experience as an Alumni Coach.



Designing Strategy

5-week Cohort Course

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Identify a strategic problem that your organization faces, frame it as a question, and brainstorm possibilities to solve it.
- Surface and pick the conditions that would need to be true to make the possibility a winning strategy.
- Build and conduct different types of tests to help you choose among your possibilities.
- Set your team up to be able to take action on the strategic choices you make.

TIME COMMITMENT

We recommend a minimum of 4 hours per week.

<i>Week 1</i>	LESSON 0 <i>Introduction</i>	Learn a process for designing a strategy that will enable you to take action.
<i>Week 2</i>	LESSON 01 <i>From Problems to Possibilities</i>	Define a strategy problem that you're facing, frame a question around your problem, and generate new strategic possibilities.
<i>Week 3</i>	LESSON 02 <i>What Would Have to Be True?</i>	Review the strategic possibilities you brainstormed and surface the conditions that are necessary to make a possibility a success.
<i>Week 4</i>	LESSON 03 <i>Test to Learn</i>	Learn how to test barriers to improve your odds of creating a winning strategy.
<i>Week 5</i>	CONCLUSION <i>Make a Choice</i>	After you've conducted tests for your barriers, you'll make sense of the results and use that information to make a strategic choice.

WEEK 1

Lesson 0: Introduction

In this lesson, you will:

- Get an overview of the process for designing a strategy that can be used in organizations of all sizes and types.
- Think about a strategy for your own team, business, or organization.
- Build an understanding of how to visualize and share essential components of strategy.

VIDEO

*Making Choices—
An introduction to strategy*

Learn how to think about strategy in a new way: what it is, why it's important, and who is responsible for it.

VIDEO

*The Strategy Process Map—
A framework for
navigating strategy*

Too often, strategy is about “thinking” more than “doing.” Learn how to use the Strategy Process Map as a guide to help you design a strategy.

VIDEO

*The Strategy Choice Cascade—
A way to articulate strategy*

The Strategy Choice Cascade is way to articulate any strategy or strategic possibility in more detail. You can use elements from this framework throughout the strategy process to help you think about, express, and choose from strategic possibilities.

AUDIO

*The Strategy Choice Cascade
at WestRock*

Hear how the Strategy Choice Cascade is used throughout different levels of an organization. This framework gives WestRock, a multi-billion dollar paper and packaging company, a common language for strategy across their corporate, divisional, and plant teams.

ARTICLE

Strategy “In Real Life”

Get grounded in how to take these lessons and begin to apply them to the strategy work that you do outside of the course.

ACTIVITY

An Introduction to Strategy

Learn more about the hypothetical case study that you'll work on throughout the course, and practice using the Strategy Choice Cascade to articulate different elements of different organizations.

ASSIGNMENT

*Relate, Reflect, Remember —
Identify the problem and frame
a strategic question*

Outline the current Strategy Choice Cascade for your organization, describe the strategy problem that you're facing, and craft a “How might we” question to articulate the problem.

PEER FEEDBACK

Provide feedback on the work of at least two of your peers' assignments.

EXPLORE MORE

Get an overview of other popular strategic frameworks.

VIDEO

*Strategy is a Creative Act
For Everyone*

Hear more from Roger Martin about who can “do” the work of strategy, and why he believes it's more than just an act of analytics and data.

WEEK 2

Lesson 01: Problems to Possibilities

In this lesson, you will:

- Define a strategy problem that will be the focus of your strategy work and frame a question around it.
- Generate strategic possibilities to push past obvious ideas and get to new possibilities.
- Apply rigor to your possibilities using elements of the Strategy Choice Cascade to make them specific, concrete, and actionable.

VIDEO

Setting the Stage for Strategy — Define a Problem and Frame a Strategic Question

Define a strategy problem that you're facing by surfacing and then clustering the most pressing problems you face as an organization. Then, frame a question around your problem to help you prepare to generate new strategic possibilities.

ARTICLE

How to Define a Problem and Frame a Strategic Question

Learn more about how to collaboratively define a strategic problem, and then frame a "How might we" question around it.

VIDEO

Framing a "How might we..." Question

Justin Massa, Executive Portfolio Director at IDEO, shares one way he thinks about framing a "how might we..." question in strategy.

VIDEO

Invent the Future—Generate strategic possibilities

Spark new ideas for strategic possibilities that answer your "How might we" question. This is a time to be generative and go for radical new possibilities.

VIDEO

Shape Strategic Possibilities—Apply "Where to Play" and "How to Win"

Use two elements from the Strategy Choice Cascade, "Where to Play" and "How to Win," to apply a bit of rigor to the possibilities that you brainstormed.

ARTICLE

How to Generate Strategic Possibilities and Apply "Where to Play" and "How to Win"

Learn more about how to use "Where to Play" and "How to Win" to ensure that the strategic possibilities you brainstormed also keep the needs of your organization squarely in focus.

ACTIVITY

Generate Possibilities

Practice generating new strategic possibilities for the organization in the case study.

ACTIVITY

Using "Where to Play" and "How to Win"

Use "Where to Play" and "How to Win" to better articulate the possibilities in the case study.

ASSIGNMENT

Relate, Reflect, Remember — Generate possibilities

Push your thinking to brainstorm new strategic possibilities that answer the question you framed for your organization. Articulate those possibilities in more detail using the elements "Where to Play?" and "How to Win?" from the Strategy Choice Cascade.

PEER FEEDBACK

Provide feedback on the work of at least two of your peers' assignments.

EXPLORE MORE

Read more on how to properly define the problem to solve and how to frame "how might we" questions.

WEEK 3

Lesson 02: What Would Have to Be True?

In this lesson, you will:

- Understand why “What would have to be true?” is such a powerful question in strategy.
- Learn how to evaluate your strategic possibilities by answering “What would have to be true?” for each, and surfacing the conditions that are necessary for their success.
- Identify barriers—the things that are really stopping you from choosing a strategic possibility.

VIDEO

What Would Have to be True?—The most important question in strategy

Hear the origin story for the question “What would have to be true?” and understand why it’s so powerful when used in strategy.

VIDEO

Surfacing Conditions—Ask “What would have to be true?”

Through the early story of the competition between Netflix and Blockbuster, we’ll show you how to apply “What would have to be true?” to a real business scenario.

ARTICLE

How to Ask “What Would Have to Be True?”

Learn how to apply “What would have to be true?” for each of the possibilities in the case study. Use three lenses—customers, company, and competition – to make sure you surface all of the essential conditions that would need to be true to make each possibility a success.

VIDEO

Identifying Barriers—Choose what to test

Out of all of your conditions, identify the ones that you’re most worried aren’t true, or that you know the least about—these are your barriers.

ARTICLE

How to Identify Barriers

Learn tips on how to identify which conditions are barriers.

ACTIVITY

Apply “What Would Have to be True?”

Use the question “What would have to be true?” and its corresponding three lenses to think more deeply about each of the case study’s possibilities.

ACTIVITY

Identify Barriers

Knowing what you know about the case study, as well as what you believe to be true about the industry as a whole, choose which conditions you believe to be barriers.

ASSIGNMENT

Relate, Reflect, Remember – What would have to be true and barriers

Think about the “What would have to be true?” conditions for each of your strategic possibilities, then identify your early hunches about which ones might be barriers.

PEER FEEDBACK

Provide feedback on the work of at least two of your peers’ assignments.

EXPLORE MORE

Read more about why questions like “How might we…” are so powerful.

WEEK 4

Lesson 03: Test to Learn

In this lesson, you will:

- Learn how to test barriers to ultimately shorten your odds of creating a winning strategy.
- Think expansively about how you define what a test is, and carefully specify what type of test and level of confidence is needed to move forward.
- Understand how to design and conduct tests based on their size and scope.

VIDEO

Prove It—Two words that can kill innovation

No new thing in this world has ever been proven in advance analytically. Hear more about how to think about testing the barriers for your strategic possibilities.

VIDEO

Test for the Future—Design and conduct strategy tests

Strategic tests fall into three categories: guerrilla, indicative, and high-fidelity. Learn more about when each one makes sense, and how to conduct them.

VIDEO

Testing in Strategy

Rebecca Hornbuckle, Executive Portfolio Director at IDEO, shares her perspective on testing in strategy.

ARTICLE

How to Design and Conduct Strategy Tests

Learn more about how to conduct strategic tests and what types of tests make sense for different barriers. Dive deeper into different guerrilla tests you can design and conduct to understand more about a barrier without a lot of time and money.

VIDEO

One Example of a Guerilla Test

How about some inspiration for guerrilla tests? Justin Massa, Executive Portfolio Director at IDEO, shares one test that he was a part of, which helped move an idea forward.

ACTIVITY

Design and Conduct Tests

Explore different options for guerrilla tests for the case study, and plan and design a test to learn more about one of the barriers.

ASSIGNMENT

Relate, Reflect, Remember – Test to learn

Design and plan out strategic tests that you can conduct to learn more about the barriers you identified as part of the strategy process.

PEER FEEDBACK

Provide feedback on the work of at least two of your peers' assignments.

EXPLORE MORE

Learn more about how to build scrappy prototypes as a way to learn, and see an example of a high-fidelity prototype in action.

WEEK 5

Conclusion: Make a Choice

In this lesson, you will:

- Learn how to make sense of your strategic test results and make a choice.
- Think more about the next phase of strategy work, building capabilities and management systems that are necessary to bring your new strategy to life.
- See strategy as a journey that is continuous and ever-evolving.

VIDEO

*Making a Strategic Choice—
Define the way forward*

After you've learned more about the barriers that you face, it's time to make a choice. Learn how to look across the strategic possibilities in front of you, choose a direction to move forward on, and begin to think about how to bring this new strategy to life in your organization.

VIDEO

Make a Real Choice

When faced with making a strategic choice, maybe you're thinking "what if we do some of all of the possibilities?" Jennifer Riel explains why it's good practice to make a real choice, and what to do if you just can't.

VIDEO

*Look to the Future—The
enduring work of strategy*

Though you don't revisit strategy on a schedule, it should be something that you continuously work on, monitor, and adapt to changes in your organization, your customers, and your industry.

VIDEO

Telling the Story of Strategy

How do you start to think about telling the story of your strategy? Chris Domina, partner at IDEO, provides some simple, quick tips to begin to take your strategy beyond words on a page.

ARTICLE

*How to Make a Strategic
Choice and Move Forward*

Learn more about how to make a strategic choice, and the steps that follow after you do.

ACTIVITY

Make a Choice

With all the work that you've done, it's time to make a strategic choice for the case study business. Once you do, begin a new Strategy Choice Cascade that captures the elements of your new strategy.

ASSIGNMENT

*Relate, Reflect, Remember —
Decide*


Look back across the entire strategy process and take stock of some of the big takeaways from the course, and think about how will you continue to practice strategy after the course is complete.

PEER FEEDBACK

Provide feedback on the work of at least two of your peers' assignments.

EXPLORE MORE

See recommendations for more books to deepen your studies on strategy.



“If you’re creative and rigorous, you can give yourself the possibility of creating something that’s strategically wonderful and new.”

ROGER MARTIN

Strategy Advisor & former Dean of the Rotman School of Management

Learn more about the IDEO U *Designing Strategy* online course at [ideo.com/designingstrategy](https://www.ideo.com/designingstrategy).

For any questions, reach out to us at hello@ideo.com

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