YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO GROWTH STRATEGY IN 2024–2025

2× your cashflow & 3× your profit *without any additional capital investment* — all self-funded by your business.

Original 2024 headline; illustrative ambition, not a guaranteed result.

PREPARED BY

Hassan Adnan · Author & Principal Strategy Advisor

FRAMEWORK

The Unfair Advantage Growth Framework

EDITION

Visible Authority Framework Series · first issued 2024; redesigned 2026

Who am I? *Hassan Adnan*

In 2015, I was with Coca-Cola. Those four years were incredible, diving deep into how technology creates business value.

Author & principal strategy advisor behind the Unfair Advantage growth framework.

- Craved impact beyond my secure job, inspired by strategy books and my daughter's future.
- Transitioned to consulting, facing unique client challenges in strategy and execution.
- Travelled 30,000 miles, read 200+ strategy books, and worked with 30+ clients in 7 industries.
- Led 3 company turnarounds and 20+ strategy sessions.
- Developed the Unfair Advantage System, a consulting product.
- Shares insights driven by a quest for impact and a better future.

What people are saying

"He excels in implementing innovative strategies and guiding our company towards growth. Mr. Hassan's data-driven approach and expertise in the OKR methodology have been key drivers in achieving our goals."

CEO

"My experience was truly exceptional. I feel I received a hundred-dollar answer for my strategy questions."

CEO

"A must-read for every CEO in Pakistan."

CEO

"A very good summary of the trends and how they will shape the dynamics of the business landscape."

Former Vice Chancellor

Also in the series: *7 Structural Trends & Second-Order Effects* (Framework No. 05), co-authored by Hassan Adnan — the research the last two endorsements refer to.

Generative AI

GENERATIVE AI PRODUCTIVITY IMPACT BY BUSINESS FUNCTION

FUNCTIONAL IMPACT INTENSITY

L · Low M · Moderate H · High P · Peak

Column totals show global annual value potential ($B)

INDUSTRY SECTOR	% OF IND. REVENUE	TOTAL, $ BILLION	Marketing & sales	Customer operations	Product R&D	Software engineering	Supply chain & ops	Risk & legal	Strategy & finance	Corporate IT	Talent & org.
			760–1,200	340–470	230–420	580–1,200	290–550	180–260	120–260	40–50	60–90
High tech	4.8–9.3%	240–460	H	M	M	P	L	M	L	L	L
Banking	2.8–4.7%	200–340	H	H	L	P	L	H	L	L	L
Pharma & medical products	2.6–4.5%	60–110	H	L	P	H	M	M	L	L	L
Education	2.2–4.0%	120–230	H	L	L	M	P	L	M	L	L
Telecommunications	2.3–3.7%	60–100	H	H	M	H	L	M	M	L	L
Healthcare	1.8–3.2%	150–260	H	M	L	M	H	L	M	L	L
Insurance	1.8–2.8%	50–70	H	H	L	H	L	M	L	L	L
Media & entertainment	1.8–3.1%	80–130	H	L	L	H	H	M	M	L	L
Advanced manufacturing	1.4–2.4%	170–290	H	L	H	H	M	M	L	L	L
Consumer packaged goods	1.4–2.3%	160–270	H	M	M	M	M	M	L	L	L
Electronics & semiconductors	1.3–2.3%	100–170	H	L	H	M	M	L	L	L	L

Source: McKinsey & Company, *The economic potential of generative AI* (2023); shading banded by VA.

GENERATIVE AI

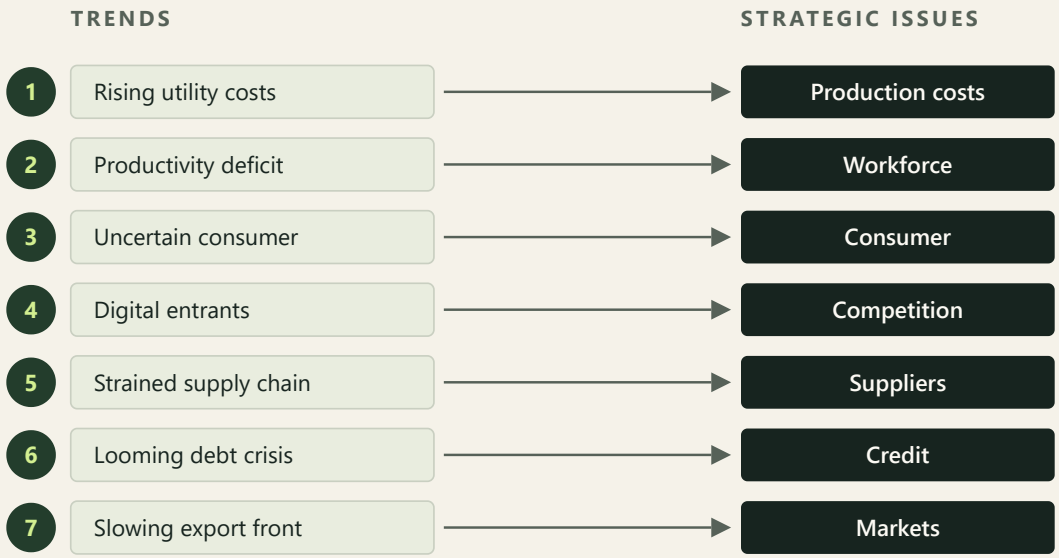
Generative AI will impact many industries and a broad set of use cases, affecting the productivity formula prevalent in each industry.

This has triggered a race for GenAI adoption across many sectors to secure a competitive edge.

According to the renowned economist **Carlota Perez**, this initiates the fifth technological revolution, which is set to bring significant changes to all industries.

Economic landscape

SEVEN TRENDS AND THE STRATEGIC ISSUES THEY TRIGGER



ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

At an economic level these trends are triggering changes that are widely shaping business dynamics—revealed most clearly as a **higher cost of doing business** and **lower revenues** altogether.

Health evaluator: *warning signs*

BUSINESS METRIC	WARNING SIGN 1	WARNING SIGN 2	WARNING SIGN 3
Revenue	Stagnant or declining sales	Reduced customer acquisition	Low repeat business or customer retention
Profit	Decreasing profit margins	High operational costs	Inability to cover fixed or variable costs
Cost	Uncontrolled expenses	Excessive overhead costs	Inefficient supply chain or inventory management
Cash	Late customer payments	High accounts receivable	Low working capital or liquidity

A rule-of-thumb financial health evaluator used with clients to pinpoint the metric taking a toll and isolate the problem.

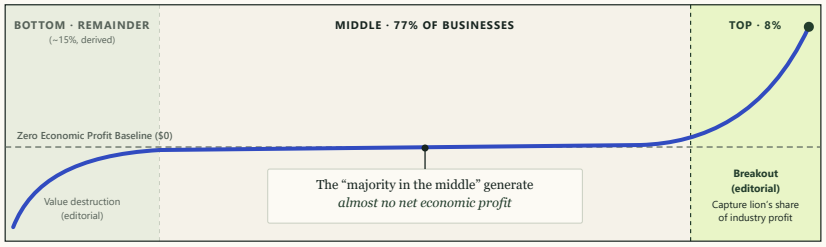


SHORTAGE OF FREE CASHFLOW

Any change in one variable affects the cash generated by the business altogether. Many businesses are big on revenue but hardly make any free cashflow to invest in their future.

Why are they *stuck?*

ECONOMIC-PROFIT DISTRIBUTION



According to a McKinsey analysis (as cited in the original deck), 77% of businesses are stuck in the middle of the hockey-stick curve of profit distribution, hardly making any profit, while most industry profits are banked by 8% of businesses.

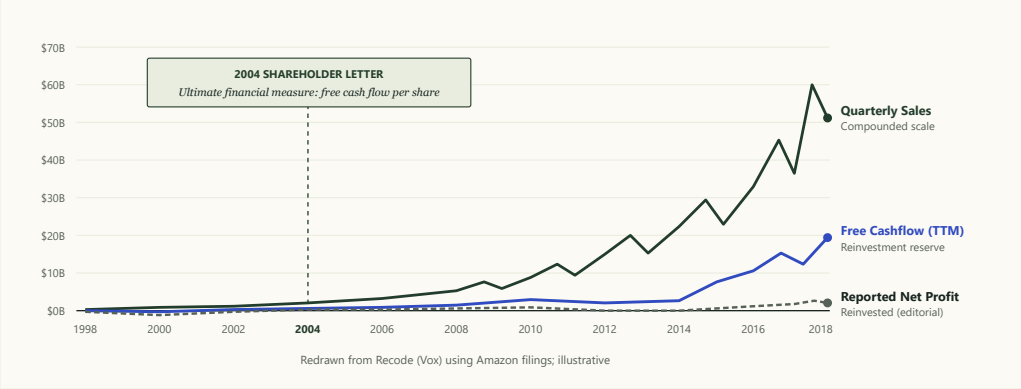
> *"Because the purpose of business is to create a customer, the business enterprise has two—and only two—basic functions: marketing and innovation. Marketing and innovation produce results; all the rest are costs."*
>
> — Peter Drucker

They are stuck because they have ignored this real function of the business: the only way to build an unfair advantage is to develop and invest in marketing and innovation capabilities. The statistics below are both a consequence and a cause of treating them as cost.

- **Small Business Trends:** 47% of small businesses spend less than $10,000 annually on digital marketing, limiting reach in a competitive digital landscape.
- **National Small Business Association:** 47% of small businesses consider lack of available capital a significant barrier to innovation, limiting investment in new technology and R&D.

On the contrary: *measure by free cashflow*

AMAZON REVENUE VS. FREE CASHFLOW VS. PROFIT



Redrawn from Recode (Vox) using Amazon filings; illustrative

> *Bezos told shareholders to judge Amazon by free cash flow per share (2004 letter).*

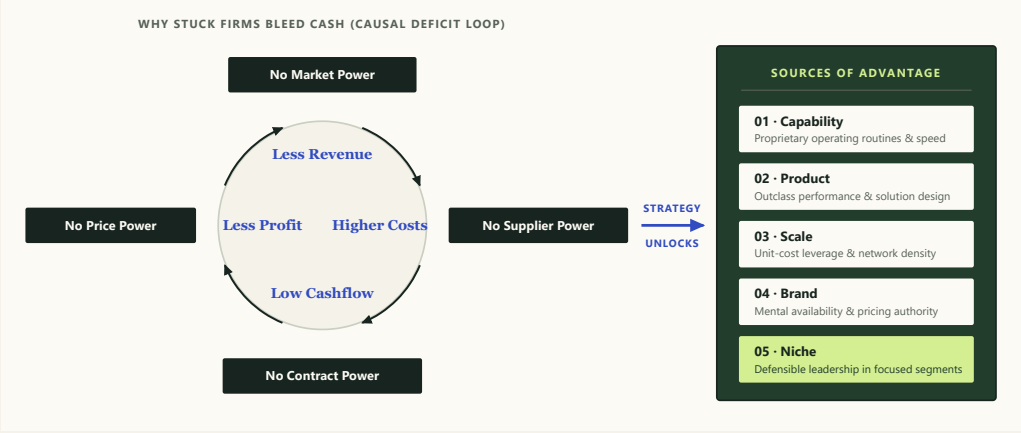
From its earliest days Amazon focused on building reserves of free cashflow that were then invested in innovation and marketing. Bezos's 2004 letter to shareholders set out this relentless focus—and the philosophy beneath it.

SIMILARLY, THE STORY OF THE HIDDEN CHAMPIONS

Professor **Hermann Simon**'s research on Hidden Champions describes small and mid-sized companies operating at global scale, hyper-focused on growth and market leadership. Their strength is a relentless focus on innovation and global marketing, spending upwards of 10% of annual revenue on these capabilities.

A growth strategy that *gets you unstuck*

LACK OF POWER VS. SOURCES OF ADVANTAGE (DESCRIPTORS EDITORIAL)



Most businesses are stuck because they have no advantage on the factors that determine financial health, specifically profitability. You need a growth strategy that gains an unfair advantage in one or a combination of these areas.

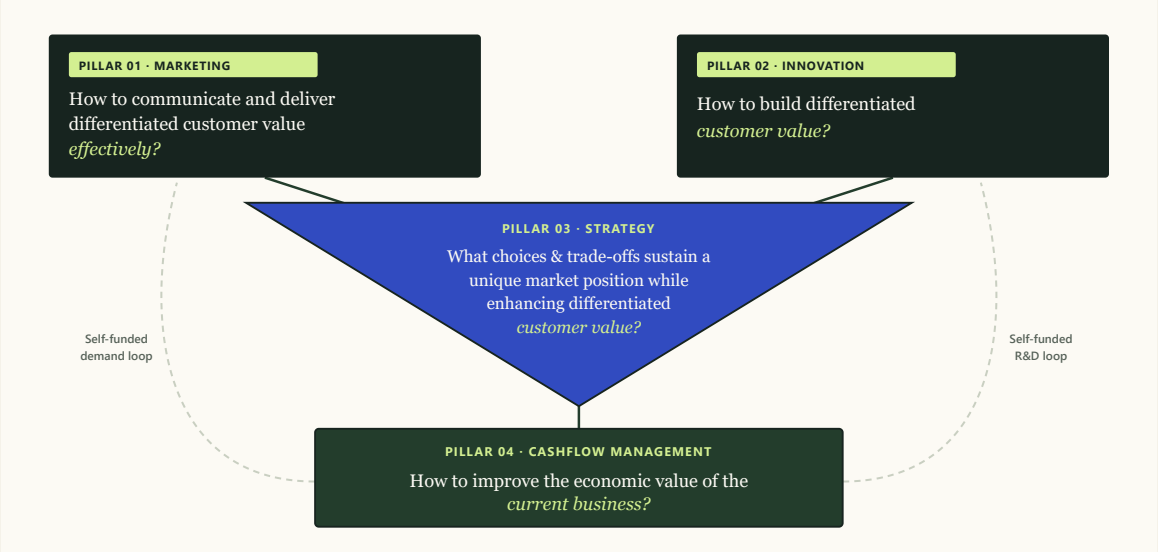
The gold standard of a good strategy: it unlocks hidden, latent potential within the firm and re-arranges existing resources to build a **capability**, develop an outclass **product**, **scale** operations, build a strong **brand**, or dominate a **niche**.

MOST BUSINESSES DON'T HAVE A STRATEGY

A plan is not a strategy. A plan extrapolates historic fact into the future; a strategy operates within the constraints of the business to unlock growth by solving hard challenges.

4 pillars of the *Unfair Advantage* framework

MARKETING · INNOVATION · STRATEGY · CASHFLOW



Pillar questions from the original 2024 edition.

INFORMED BY PUBLISHED STUDIES

The framework focuses on marketing, innovation, cashflow management and strategy—the areas that help you get unstuck. Studies cited in the original report (correlational; original studies not identified): Forrester: marketing-led executives 1.5× more likely to beat rivals' revenue growth; European Commission: innovating SMBs 2× as likely to report higher profits; Bain: +30% revenue growth with clear priorities; McKinsey: higher FCF CAGR.

Together these areas build a **cashflow-growth engine**. Once you unlock the processes and capabilities behind free cashflow, attractive marketing and unparalleled innovation, your business transforms.

After *10,000 consulting hours*

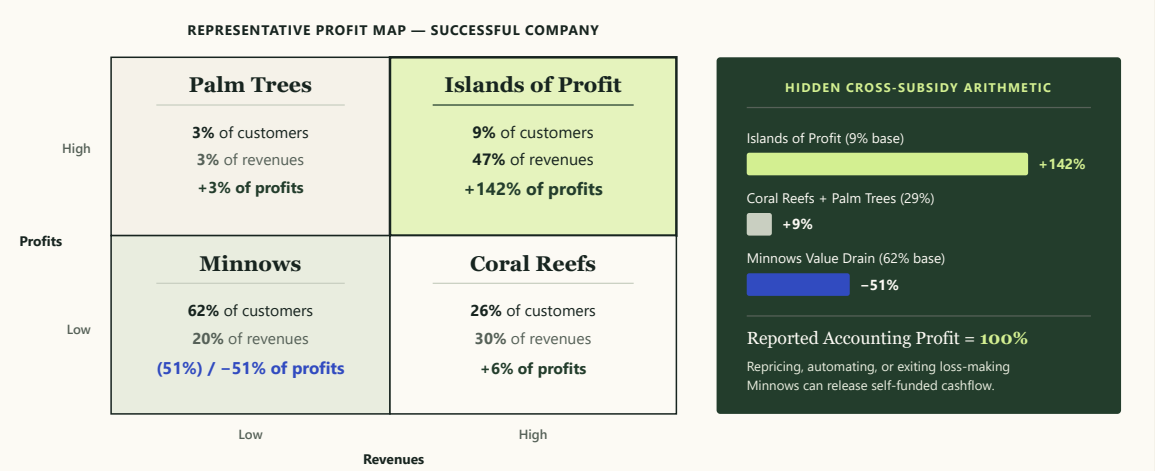
10,000	30,000	200+	1,000+	30+
consulting hours	miles journeyed	strategy books	case studies & articles	clients in 7 industries

From start-ups to giants with revenues of $1B, and from a single founder to 20 shareholders, the framework distils what worked in practice.

It cuts the fluff around marketing, strategy and innovation and focuses on the most result-oriented, practical approaches: needle-moving insights, deep understanding of consumer behaviour, systemic understanding of business drivers, and a critical-path strategy that identifies just the right things to do—and to ignore—to build an unfair advantage.

How to be in a position to *create value?*

REPRESENTATIVE PROFIT MAP · AFTER J. BYRNES, "ISLANDS OF PROFIT"



ALL PROFITS ARE NOT DISTRIBUTED EQUALLY

Accounting profit is a deceptive metric: it reveals only aggregate effects, not where profits are made—so it has limited strategic usefulness.

You need a lens that dissects the business across dimensions and pinpoints which parts of profit drive it forward. The result is often a surprising, Pareto-like distribution: in one representative profit map **9% of customers** generate **47% of revenue** and bank **142% of all profit**, while 62% of customers erode 51%.

Case study: *telecom services*

CASE STUDY 01

Telecom services turnaround

SITUATION

- The business had been loss-making consistently for the past 5 years.
- The telecom industry is stifled by price wars and customer pressure to keep reducing prices.
- Payments are delayed over 180-day cycles and often subject to performance/quality-score release.

INTERVENTION

- Analysed the 5 portfolio branches; found 2 to be profit drainers and set minimum operating criteria for branches and service investment.
- Their non-core service proved more profitable, so a centralised sales strategy scaled it across the other 4 regions.
- The bidding value proposition matched competitors'; developed a solution-oriented, suggestive approach.

REPORTED OUTCOME (AUTHOR'S ACCOUNT)

- The company became profitable in the first year after 5 years of losses.
- The company was re-energised and aligned around profitability.
- Clear decision criteria for project and branch investment, with budget-governance systems.
- The non-core business scaled across the GCC and complemented growth.
- The core business won new customers with an approach that ended the price war.

Historical engagement; not a guarantee of future results.

Position to create value: *four steps*

STEP 01

Identify the core business sustaining the business

Analyse key elements driving success, uncovering the fundamentals that make your business distinct and valuable to customers.

STEP 02

Get the story behind your financial health

Interpret financial statements and indicators, pinpointing areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

STEP 03

Demystify the current relative position

Evaluate market position and analyse KPIs, external factors and industry benchmarks to identify strategic intervention opportunities.

STEP 04

Improve profit and cashflow to fund growth

Strengthen the financial position through cost control, operational efficiency and refined pricing, funding strategic growth initiatives.

What do the *customers value?*

HIGH PROFITABILITY · SHORT-TERM

Butterflies

- Good fit between offerings and needs; high profit potential
- Aim for transactional satisfaction, not attitudinal loyalty
- Milk the accounts only while they are active
- Key challenge: cease investing soon enough

HIGH PROFITABILITY · LONG-TERM

True Friends

- Good fit between offerings and needs; highest profit potential
- Communicate consistently but not too often
- Build both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty
- Delight them to nurture, defend and retain

LOW PROFITABILITY · SHORT-TERM

Strangers

- Little fit between offerings and needs; lowest profit potential
- Make no investment in these relationships
- Make profit on every transaction

LOW PROFITABILITY · LONG-TERM

Barnacles

- Limited fit between offerings and needs; low profit potential
- Measure both size and share of wallet
- If share of wallet is low, focus on up- and cross-selling
- If size of wallet is small, impose strict cost controls

After Reinartz & Kumar (HBR, 2002).

ALL CUSTOMERS ARE NOT CREATED THE SAME

The second shift concerns customers: most businesses have adopted a lens of sameness and have no definition of their **ideal customer profile (ICP)**. The ideal customer can be charted from behaviour over time and the value associated with it (customer lifetime value).

An ICP sets a clear agenda for market growth—you choose the segment you want to attract, which gives you an unfair advantage. Over time this locks in the customer and helps you develop an associated value proposition.

Case study: *20-year agri-food group*

CASE STUDY 02

Integrated agri & food group

SITUATION

- The business had existed for more than 20 years; revenues were very high but it consistently produced little profit.
- It had integrated vertically and horizontally, but without any synergy.
- The company wanted to grow profitably.

INTERVENTION

- A product-level analysis found most profit was drained by the 80% of complementary products, often sold at a loss; only 5 products were highly profitable.
- Customer types had very different consumption requirements, so individualised sales strategies were formulated.
- Untapped indirect customers in other regions were served through a new digital platform.

REPORTED OUTCOME (AUTHOR'S ACCOUNT)

- The company scaled across the GCC, which it had struggled to penetrate through its middleman partnership.
- It tapped high-margin export markets for its mangoes and bananas after improving quality standards.
- The company became highly profitable within 18 months.

Historical engagement; not a guarantee of future results.

What customers value: *four steps*

STEP 01

Determine core customer segments

Identify the main groups your business serves to better target marketing efforts and tailor your offerings.

STEP 02

Understand the forces shaping the future

Analyse emerging trends, industry shifts and external factors to anticipate customer expectations and ensure long-term value creation.

STEP 03

Formulate an attractive brand promise

Craft a compelling, memorable statement that conveys the essence of your brand, resonates with core customers and highlights your unique selling points.

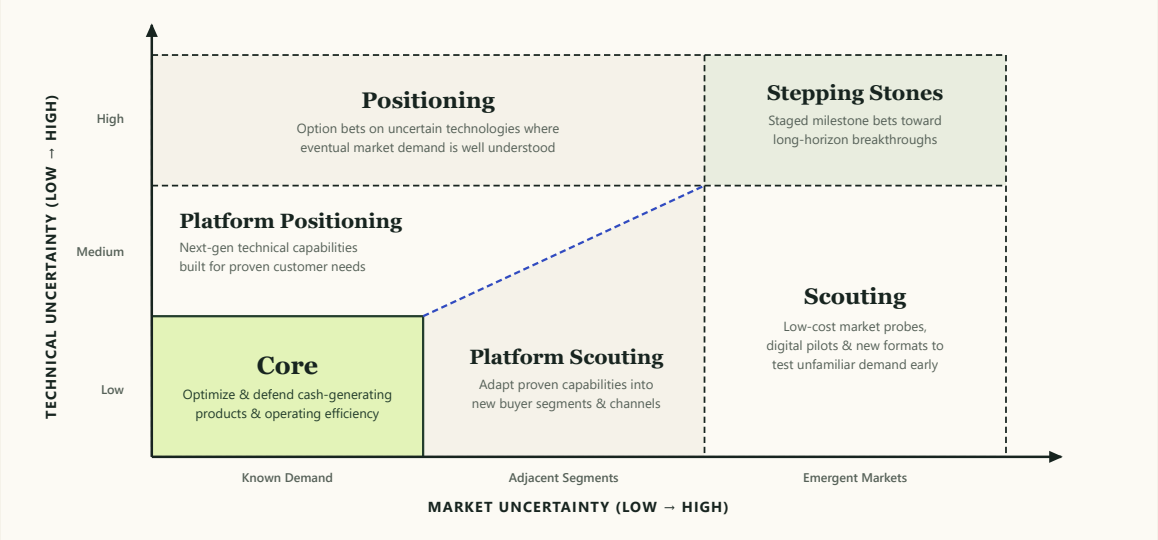
STEP 04

Channel development and marketing funnel

Identify the best channel-development opportunities, optimise your marketing funnel and outline implementation steps.

How to *create the value?*

INNOVATION PORTFOLIO MATRIX · AFTER MCGRATH & MACMILLAN; ZONE NOTES EDITORIAL



ALL INNOVATION IS NOT WORTH THE SAME

Each innovation opportunity charts differently in terms of technical uncertainty (y-axis) and market uncertainty (x-axis), and plays a unique role in the opportunity portfolio.

Which is right depends on a deep understanding of current relative position, market trends and what can deliver an unfair advantage.

Companies often pursue innovation blindly, without grasping the uncertainties, economic value and risk involved. When failure occurs, innovation altogether comes to a halt.

Case study: *corporate training & advisory firm*

CASE STUDY 03

Corporate training & advisory turnaround

SITUATION

- Significant debt and declining revenues due to strategic misalignment in corporate offerings and outdated product cycles.
- Brand-identity erosion and low employee morale affected customer trust and internal motivation.
- No systematic marketing or accounting processes, coupled with ageing product offerings.

INTERVENTION

- Used customer feedback to refresh training offerings and introduce consulting products for emerging needs, building a brand around them.
- Compiled new and refreshed offerings, including scalable online and retreat-style training.
- Introduced performance-based incentives and development opportunities for a motivated workforce.

REPORTED OUTCOME (AUTHOR'S ACCOUNT)

- **Revenue growth:** stabilised and grew revenue, with new products boosting cashflow.
- **Brand position:** rebuilt brand identity, regaining customer trust and competitive edge.
- **Employee engagement:** higher motivation and productivity through fair pay and development.

Historical engagement; not a guarantee of future results.

Create the value: *four steps*

STEP 01

Ascertain and map your business model

Analyse the fundamental structure of your business to understand how it delivers value and sustains profitability.

STEP 02

Identify new value via use-cases & JTBD

Explore innovative use-cases, tap customer needs with the Jobs-to-be-Done approach, and define actionable steps to deliver exceptional value.

STEP 03

Create a portfolio of opportunities

Assemble a diverse set of strategic opportunities, assess their potential impact and devise a decision framework to select the best.

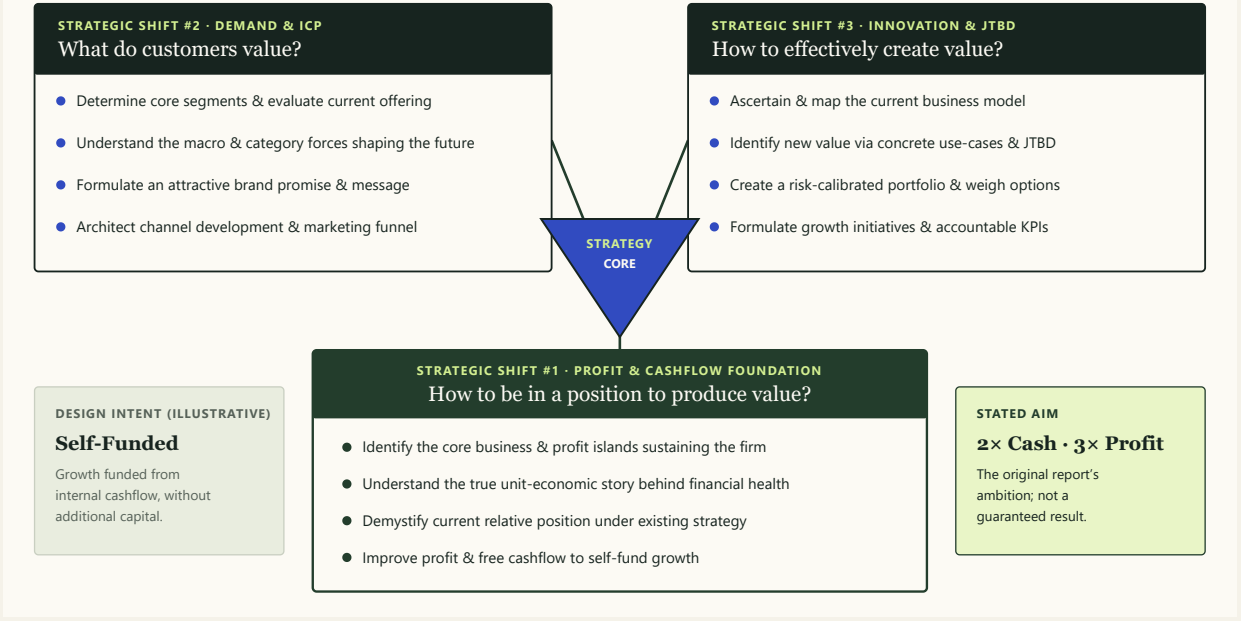
STEP 04

Formulate growth initiatives

Implement targeted initiatives that expand market reach, enhance customer satisfaction and ensure sustainable, value-driven growth.

The Unfair Advantage *framework*

THREE QUESTIONS, ONE GROWTH ENGINE



Transform your company into a profitable, cash-rich growth engine creating unparalleled market value and customer demand.

Thank you for *your time.*

The complete framework, figures and case studies are set out in the full Growth Strategy Report (Framework No. 01).

AUTHOR

Hassan Adnan · Growth Strategy 2024–2025

FRAMEWORK

The Unfair Advantage Growth Framework

EDITION

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