



SYNC Program Structure and Details

INTRODUCTION

The SYNC program is based on **surprise**. This core element is why our approach is so powerful and practical. (See [our testimonials](#).)

There is a huge difference between knowing theoretically that the success of one's strategy depends on complex outside factors, and actually taking these factors into account in an effective way. The former means lip service to competition. The latter means true external focus.

We crystallize these effects of the modules of our program below. Keep in mind, what may seem obvious "on paper" is actually very different from the ways managers in your company behave. We bridge the gap via surprising the participants in our program, *again and again*.

That's how learning occurs, the kind of learning that leads to results. You get:

- Better strategic thinking from each and every participant.
- Better real-world strategies, immediately applicable to your business.

Expect to be pleasantly surprised.

Mark Chussil and Ben Gilad
Partners, SYNC Strategy



OVERVIEW *(full details on subsequent pages)*

This is what a three-day SYNC program looks like. We can customize it for different lengths and to emphasize different topics. Please [contact us](#) to discuss your ideal program.

Day One

Module 1: Simple decisions, world of complexity

1 hour

Leader: Mark

*Simulations.
Group activity.*

Module 2: Frameworks for assessing third parties' moves

1.5 hours

Leader: Ben

*Methodology.
Interactive lecture.*

Module 3: Why strategies fail

3-5 hours

Leaders: Ben and Mark

*Case study.
Methodology.
Interactive lecture.*

Day Two

Module 4: War-gaming the client's strategy options

1 day

Leaders: Ben and Mark

*Client-specific analysis.
Business war game.
Group activity.*

Day Three

Module 5: Quantitative stress-test of strategy options

3-4 hours

Leader: Mark

*Client-specific analysis.
Simulations.*

Module 6: What would you do differently?

1-2 hours

Leader: Ben

*Group activity.
Facilitated discussion.*

Module 7: What did you learn and what will you do?

Duration as needed

Leaders: Mark and Ben

Facilitated discussion



PHASE I: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A SYNCED STRATEGY

Module 1: Simple decisions, world of complexity

- Pricing decisions in a competitive world (simulation decisions made individually by participants).
- The complexity and surprises of a simple decision (group activity)

Duration: 1 hour

Effects

- Demonstrating through experience the essential principles of all strategic decisions.
- Surprising participants who think this is “easy.”

This segment leads to the conclusion that strategy must be synced with other parties’ assumptions, intents, and *likely behaviors* in the market to have a chance of success.

Concepts covered

Game theory, cognitive biases, inter- and intra-group decision dynamics, thinking inside and outside the box.

Leader: Mark Chussil

Module 2: The most-effective economic and behavioral frameworks for assessing third parties’ likely moves

- Industry structure and change drivers (a case study of the largest industry in the world)
- Competitors’ assessments and predictions

Duration: 1.5 hours

Effects

Giving participants the analytical power to understand third parties’ perspectives. Surprising participants with the incredible power of the basic industry framework in suggesting strategies that win.

Concepts covered

The economics of profit, industry evolutionary paths, the behavioral economic model of companies’ decisions and strategies, the essence of market pressure.

Leader: Ben Gilad



Module 3: Why strategies fail

- The main reasons strategies fail
- Cognitive biases of strategists
- The shortcomings of current corporate-planning practices
- The threat of blindspots
- Blindspots identification methodology
- HBS case study (interactive, in teams)

Duration: 3-5 hours

Effects

It may be obvious “on paper” what people should do. That’s why it’s so surprising when participants find themselves behaving very differently.

Concepts covered

State-of-the-art decision-theory findings, human biases and innumeracy, pitfalls of financial forecasts, misalignment of strategy with industry evolution, the perils of corporate myth and taboos, and the economics of market pressures.

Leaders: Ben and Mark

PHASE II. STRESS-TESTING STRATEGY

Module 4: “War-gaming” strategy options via role playing¹

We divide participants into teams (up to six). One team plays the host company, while the other teams role-play its competitors. Each team receives the same brief on the market (segment, industry) characteristics, but competitor-specific data are provided only to the team role-playing that competitor. The host team is provided with data on the host’s current or planned strategy in this segment.

Round 1

Following “rules of engagement” about the art of role-playing, and with guidance from the facilitators, each team applies the data from the brief to the frameworks taught in Module 2, using templates provided by the SYNC team. Each team then presents its analysis of three elements of competitive assessment, and makes predictions about the competitor’s likely moves

¹ Segment/market to be selected by client. Basic information to be provided by client.



in this segment over a 1-2 year horizon. The host team uses the blindspot identification methodology to suggest possible weaknesses in the host's current or planned strategy.

Effects

- Creating the “others’ perspective” as it relates to their own company’s planned strategic moves.
- Developing a deep understanding that *no strategy is executed in a vacuum*.

Round 2

Following an introduction of nine tests of effective strategy, all teams apply the first round’s competitive-dynamic predictions to propose priorities and specific action plans for the host. During presentations of these proposals, the audience reverts to role-playing competitors and attacks the moves with countermoves. A “battle” ensues in which moves are tested against likely response and competitors’ capabilities.

Effects

Surprise! It is one thing to talk about “competitive pressures.” It is entirely different to actually plan both defensively and proactively against those moves.

- Learning to “competitor-proof” one’s strategy in a safe environment
- Developing a concrete sense of what it means for a strategy to be “robust.”

Round 3

In this round, teams select their best options forward based on the “battle.” These are recorded and announced to the room.

Concepts covered

Strategy, operational tactics, priority setting, and action planning.

Duration: 1 day

Leaders: Ben and Mark

Module 5: Quantitative stress-test of strategy options

Based on the strategy options announced at the end of Module 4, each team develops a simplified set of numerical values attached to their best strategy (e.g., price, capacity, marketing budgets). The variables selected will be decided beforehand by the client and the SYNC team, so that SYNC can create a customized model of the market interaction covering moves by both the host and its competitors. Simultaneously, each team decides on corresponding values for



the competitor it role-played in Module 4 against the host's best strategies as put forward by the teams.

Those decisions are recorded and fed into the simulator. The simulator estimates performance results for each host strategy, played against the competitors' strategies. We announce and debrief those results. Priorities ("best strategies") are ranked by performance results. Results are compared to participants' forecasts of outcomes.

Time permitting, teams are asked if they want to change their decisions. The new values are fed into the simulator for a second round of simulation. The results are announced and debriefed.

Effects

A 2x4 applied to the head!

- Realizing the success of a strategy depends not just on good ideas, but on a myriad of outside developments.
- Syncing with that environment requires significant vigilance and responsiveness.
- A set of the most-robust action plans for the client emerges.

Concepts covered

Managing the competition, effects of competitive dynamics on performance.

Duration: 3-4 hours

Leader: Mark Chussil

PHASE III: WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

Module 6: What would you do differently?

Two weeks prior to the program, participants are asked to read an HBS case study centered on an entrepreneurial company's strategic options as it moves from startup stages to a market leader. They are asked to submit a set of recommendations for the company's actions, with a short rationale behind their answers.

In Module 6, participants working in teams are asked whether their original recommendations still stand, or should be modified based on the previous 2.5 days' learning. Each team then presents its set of final recommendation. In a discussion that follows, the facilitator takes the participants through a critique of their recommendations based on lessons learned throughout the program about what makes a strategy "good" and what makes strategies fail.



Effects

- “I can’t believe I did not think about that!” reaction.
- Brings home the lessons learned during the previous 2.5 days.
- The importance of understanding industry dynamics, not just competitors.
- The usefulness of thinking counter-intuitively
- The beauty of focused strategic thinking.

Duration: 1-2 hours

Concepts covered

The power of substitutes, comparative industry analysis, cost-benefit reasoning in selecting strategic options, the risk of losing focus, the perils of unmitigated rivalry.

Leader: Ben Gilad

Module 7: What did you learn and what will you do?

In this final segment, Mark and Ben take the participants through an open, interactive debriefing about the program, their own experience, what changed in their perspectives, and what lessons they can apply to the tasks they face at the company.

Duration: As needed

Leaders: Mark and Ben. Company’s executives if desired.