

ANTIGA BIBLIOTECA ALMIRALL: THE REINVENTION OF AN OLD LIBRARY

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INSTRUCTORS' NOTES

CASE DESCRIPTION

The primary subject matter of this case is entrepreneurship in a very small firm and the real-life complexity of finding an optimal strategic path when several opportunities and challenges present themselves at the same time. Secondary issues include strategic analysis, choices, and decision-making under uncertainty in the context of a resource-constrained small business. Owing to its rich environmental context, the case has a difficulty level most appropriate for senior undergraduate to first-year graduate school level courses. The case is designed to be taught in one or several 3-hour sessions and is expected to require 4–8 hours of preparation by students, depending on the students' level and their range of disciplinary knowledge.

CASE SYNOPSIS

The case study examines how an old private library located close to the center of Barcelona is gradually renovated and reinvented as a location for celebrating special events (board and business meetings, exclusive dinners, cultural activities, etc.). The case describes how the owners develop and explore new business opportunities through a process of innovation, business modeling, prototyping, and continued dialogue with clients, partners, suppliers, and other stakeholders. The narrative illustrates both the challenges and uncertainties of developing an entrepreneurial project and the importance of combining rational decision-making with a creative stance. The complex reality of a real-life business situation with anything but perfect information is described, and the intent is to put the student in the entrepreneurs' and decision-makers' shoes. As the author played a role in the real case, it is hoped that some of the passion of "actually being there" and feeling the pressure to make decisions and follow the sometimes rough and curvy entrepreneurial path is reflected in the telling of the story. The case gives ample information about the context and the dilemmas faced by the owners. In addition, as both owners are business graduates, now with many years of experience, the case naturally illustrates how they use managerial theory and analysis, but also how decisions often are taken based on a balance between rational arguments, gut feel, and vague perceptions of business opportunities. In the context of the analysis, the case refers to tools, methods, and concepts within the fields of strategy, organization theory, and entrepreneurship.

The case also serves to illustrate an intricate entrepreneurial lifestyle where the distinctions between work and life become fuzzy and almost irrelevant. The story describes how the owners' entrepreneurial drive is founded as much on the wish for independence, strong self-belief, and the desire to make dreams come true as on making a profit or growing the business.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The case study is appropriate for business students from second year bachelor's level up to master's level. For students with other disciplinary education, an academic background at MBA level and/or relevant experience is recommended.

KEY FACTS FROM THE CASE STUDY

This is a case of a small entrepreneurial firm with a concise project representing both big challenges and real complexities, but also great opportunities. The students are invited to *perceive* both the small firm ambience and the entrepreneurial context of the case with factors common to many entrepreneurial projects (limited resources, challenge of continued innovation, risk assessment, work-family balance, entrepreneurial drive) and the need to create a new business model for the old library.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The case describes an analytical process and makes evident the relationship between management theory and practice. The story of the case introduces students to the process of gradually sharpening the business model focus based on a theoretical and practical discussion, but without providing clear answers (as they are in the process of being discovered).

The case thus illustrates how theoretical and systematic analysis may be used to organize and understand the environment and support the decision-making process, while also making it clear that an entrepreneur must function (and enjoy the journey) under a high level of uncertainty.

Specific learning objectives are:

1. Help students understand the many facets of entrepreneurial *motivation*.
2. Introduce students to the relationship between entrepreneurship and small-business management.
3. Illustrate how an entrepreneurial project may influence work-life balance.
4. Appreciate the importance of experience when starting an entrepreneurial project.
5. Become aware of how entrepreneurial projects change through adaptation (you start with one idea and may end up with a different one).
6. Understand the value of opportunity recognition and ability to "make it work" as you gradually develop business models, adapt to circumstances, and continue learning.

TEACHING PLAN

The case introduces students to common concepts in management theory and uses analytical tools to develop a new business model in three stages. Students will get insights into theory and practice by reading the case and reviewing the business models. No specific answers are given in the case, but the development of the business model is argued based on a combination of theoretical and practical evaluations. The argued models might not be the optimal ones.

1. The case describes a work-life balance very common in entrepreneurship: The students may be asked to interpret what this balance implies (positively and negatively) and to evaluate if this is a lifestyle that attracts them.
2. The case raises various dilemmas; some of them might be interpreted as risk factors (and/or uncertainties). Students may be asked how they as decision-makers would have handled this situation of complexity (many variables outside of the decision-makers' control).

3. The relaunching of the library may be seen as an example of the “sharing economy.” The owners wish to keep living on the property, but at the same time share the property’s architectural, historic, and cultural value with their clients. Students may be asked to comment on this balance between privacy and sharing.
4. The case may also be used to discuss a low-tech/”back to basics” business venture.
5. Granted all the variables and analysis of the case, what should be the owners’ next steps? Is Business Model 3 the optimal one? How should they continue to develop their business model?

Note: These teaching notes do not offer definite answers on these questions simply because the perfect answers are still unknown at the time of writing the case study. It is believed that the entrepreneurs will find their answers along a path of continued trial and error.

EPILOGUE

In November 2016, Martha and Oyvin decided to go ahead with an architectural project on the property that includes a total renovation of the first floor of Antiga Biblioteca Almirall and parts of the garden. The renovation includes a modern open kitchen appropriate for private chefs. It also includes a ramp that better connects the terrace and swimming pool with the rest of the garden. The decision to proceed with this latest project was based on the entrepreneurs’ conviction that further developing their business requires a modern kitchen, close collaboration with selected chefs, and the development of events aimed at small select groups willing to pay well for a unique experience in Barcelona.