CARLETON UNIVERSITY — SPROTT SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Term Paper and Rubrics

BUSI 4607A — Management of Technology and Innovation — Fall 2026

Written Term Paper — Weight: 40% of the course grade. The in-class term-paper presentation is a separate 5% assessment.

Objective

The objective of the term paper is to apply the frameworks studied across this course in order to substantially improve the performance of your assigned technology platform. Your team will develop a consulting piece that builds on the platform knowledge you accumulated through the Technology Platform Tutorial in Week 5 and on the analytical frameworks learned throughout the term. Having understood the platform's patterns of innovation, its business model, and its competitive position, you will propose a course of action — an innovation, a business model change, a strategic move, a collaboration, or something else — that could produce a step change rather than an incremental one.

The work is organized in three stages: diagnose the platform as it is, build and defend a case for a specific and substantial improvement, and set out how it would be executed.

The performance target: what "10X" means, and what it does not

You are asked to propose changes capable of improving your platform's performance by roughly an order of magnitude — ten times. This wording is deliberate and is easy to misread.

It does not mean making the company ten times larger. It means naming one specific, measurable thing about the platform, establishing that a large and defensible gap exists between where that measure sits today and where it could sit, and explaining the mechanism by which your proposal would close that gap. "Grow revenue tenfold" is not a thesis. A thesis names the measure, establishes the size of the gap from the platform's own reporting, and explains why a particular change would narrow it.

Choosing which measure to build the argument on is your decision, and it is among the more consequential decisions in this paper. A measure the platform does not report leaves you unable to establish a baseline. A measure that nothing you propose actually moves leaves the argument disconnected from the recommendation.

You may conclude that a tenfold improvement is not available. A paper that rigorously demonstrates the ceiling, explains why it exists, and proposes the largest credible improvement instead can earn full marks on this dimension. What cannot earn marks is asserting a large number without the arithmetic underneath it.

Stage 1 — Diagnosis: the platform as it is

Address each of the following.

- Define and explain the strategic direction of the organization — the company — as distinct from the platform itself.

- Identify and explain the organization's core competencies and capabilities, using the tests set out in the textbook chapter on defining the organization's strategic direction. Assess the extent to which the platform, as a core product, fits those competencies. Assess rather than assert.
- Identify the complements — complementary resources, capabilities, products, or services — that the firm and the platform use to leverage the core offering, and explain why each is necessary. The textbook treats complements in the chapters on platform competition and on protecting innovation.
- Map the platform's business model using Amit and Zott's framework: the design elements (content, structure, and governance) and the design themes (novelty, lock-in, complementarities, and efficiency). Identify which design theme is the dominant source of value for this platform and justify the choice.

Competitive analysis — read this carefully

Two separate analyses are required here, and marks are lost every year for collapsing them into one.

- **Industry level.** Apply Porter's five forces to the industry in which the platform competes. Five forces is an industry-level framework: it describes the structural attractiveness of an industry, not the position of any single firm within it.
- **Firm level.** Analyze the platform's own competitive position using firm-level tools — core competencies, complementary assets, and the appropriability of its innovations. Five forces does not answer this question, and applying it here will cost marks even if it is executed well.

Evidence base

- Draw your figures from the platform's own disclosure — annual and quarterly filings, shareholder letters, investor presentations, and any performance-indicator supplements it publishes. Every number must carry a source and a date. Interpret each measure correctly, including what it does not capture.

The performance gap

- Name the one measure you have identified as the binding constraint on this platform's performance. State its current value, with source and date. State the comparable that defines the gap — a peer, another segment of the same platform, a different geography, or a theoretical ceiling you can defend. Explain why this measure rather than another. This is the hinge on which the rest of the paper turns.

Stage 2 — Proposal: the case for change

You now have sufficient knowledge of the platform to advise it. Craft a proposal, in the form of a consulting piece, that you would submit to the platform's management.

- Briefly set out at least three plausible alternative courses of action. Justify these as the plausible set rather than simply listing three options.
- State the criteria by which you are choosing among them, and ground those criteria in course theory. Explain why these are the right criteria for this decision.
- Explain the problem, threat, or opportunity your proposal addresses, in detail, and explain your proposed course of action. Include the value proposition to the customer.

The 10X case

This is the largest single component of the paper's mark. Full marks require all five of the following.

1. **Baseline.** The current value of your chosen measure, with source and date.
2. **Target.** The value you are claiming your proposal could reach, and over what period.
3. **Arithmetic.** The calculation connecting the two. Show the working, not the result.
4. **Assumptions.** Every assumption the calculation rests on, stated explicitly rather than buried in the prose.
5. **Sensitivity.** Identify the assumption your claim depends on most heavily, change it unfavourably by a material amount, and report what happens to your case.

A rigorous demonstration that a tenfold improvement is unavailable, accompanied by the largest credible alternative and the same five components applied to it, earns full marks here.

Mechanism

- Explain why your proposed change produces the improvement you are claiming, in terms of course theory — network effects, complementary assets, appropriability, switching costs, timing of entry, business model design themes, or whichever apply. An improvement asserted without a mechanism is a hope, not an argument. “More marketing” is not a mechanism.

Business model consequences

- Explain what changes in the platform's governance structure and revenue model would be required, relative to the models you mapped in Stage 1.

Second-order effects

Every change on a platform lands on more than one party. This section asks what your proposal does to everyone it touches.

- What breaks. Which parts of the existing business does your proposal damage, and by how much?
- Who loses. Which participants — one side of the platform, a partner, a supplier, an existing customer segment — are worse off, and how will they respond?
- How the other side of the market responds. If your proposal changes the terms for one side of a two-sided platform, trace the effect through to the other side.
- How competitors respond, and what remains of your advantage after they do.

Feasibility

- Assess the feasibility of your proposal using the strategy frameworks — core competence, strategic fit, resource fit, and strategic intent.

Collaboration — required only if relevant

If your proposed course of action involves a merger, an acquisition, or an alliance, identify the partner or target and apply the partner selection framework in full, along the following dimensions.

- Resource fit: how well does the partner fit the resource needs of the project, and are the resources complementary or supplementary?
- Strategic fit: does the partner have compatible objectives and styles?
- Impact on opportunities and threats: how would collaboration affect the bargaining power of customers and suppliers, the degree of rivalry, and the threat of entry or substitutes?
- Impact on internal strengths and weaknesses: would collaboration enhance strengths, overcome weaknesses, or create a competitive advantage?
- Impact on strategic direction: would collaboration help the firm achieve its strategic intent?

If your proposal does not involve collaboration, replace this section with a short paragraph explaining why collaboration was considered and set aside.

Stage 3 — Implementation

A recommendation without an implementation plan is not a recommendation.

- Set out a sequenced plan: what happens first, what depends on what, and over what timeline.
- State the resources required — capital, people, capabilities the firm does not currently have — and where they come from.
- State what the firm stops doing. Every plan of this size displaces something. Naming it is part of the plan.
- Name the leading indicators that would tell management, within roughly two quarters, whether the plan is working — before the measure you are targeting has had time to move.
- State the conditions under which you would recommend abandoning the plan.

General notes

- The paper should be no fewer than 10 and no more than 15 pages, single spaced, including references. Exhibits, financial tables, and figures do not count toward the page limit — do not cut your arithmetic to make room for prose.
- Every quantitative claim must carry a source and a date. Claims that cannot be sourced should be identified as estimates and the basis for the estimate given.
- You must use and cite at least ten references. These may include case studies, books, research articles, business magazines, news articles, company filings, or recorded interviews and presentations. Appropriate references include author, title, publication name, and publication date.
- The paper is stronger for developing one course of action fully than several partially.
- Use the analytical frameworks where they do real work, and say why each one is the right instrument for the question you are asking of it. A framework applied because it is familiar will not earn marks.
- Generative artificial intelligence may be used subject to the disclosure and responsibility conditions set out in the course outline. The analysis, the arithmetic, and the argument must be your own.
- One member of the team submits on the team's behalf to the BrightSpace Assignments folder for the term paper: the paper as a Microsoft Word document, together with the presentation slides. The deadline is 11:59 pm on Wednesday 2 December for every team, whether your team

presents on 3 December or on 10 December. The folder stays open past the deadline; submissions after it are recorded as late and deducted 20% of the mark for each day of delay. Work emailed to the instructor will not be marked.

Marking scheme

Eighty marks in total, scaled to the written paper's 40% weight in the course. The three stages carry the marks shown.

#	Dimension	What full marks require	Marks
	STAGE 1 — DIAGNOSIS		**25**
1	Strategic direction, core competencies, and platform fit	Organization's strategic direction defined. Core competencies identified against the textbook's tests. The fit between the platform as core product and those competencies assessed rather than asserted. Complements identified and their necessity explained.	**5**
2	Business model map	The platform's model mapped using Amit and Zott's design elements and design themes. The dominant source of value identified and justified.	**5**
3	Competitive analysis at the correct level	Five forces applied to the industry. A separate firm-level analysis of the platform using core competencies, complementary assets, and appropriability. Level of analysis correctly matched to framework throughout.	**5**
4	Evidence base	Figures drawn from the platform's own disclosure. Every number sourced and dated. Correct interpretation of what each measure does and does not capture.	**5**
5	The performance gap	One measure named as the binding constraint, with the comparable that defines the gap and a defence of why this measure rather than another.	**5**
	STAGE 2 — PROPOSAL		**35**
6	Alternatives and decision criteria	At least three plausible alternatives, justified as the plausible set rather than listed. Criteria for choosing among them grounded in course theory and defended.	**5**
7	The 10X case	Baseline with source and date. Target. Arithmetic shown. Assumptions stated explicitly. One sensitivity check on the assumption the claim most depends on. A rigorous demonstration that 10X is unavailable, plus the largest credible alternative, earns full marks.	**15**
8	Mechanism	Explains why the proposed change produces the claimed improvement, in terms of course theory. The causal chain is complete and each link is defended.	**10**
9	Second-order effects and business model consequences	What breaks, who loses, how the other side of the platform responds, how competitors respond. Governance and revenue model changes the proposal requires.	**5**
	STAGE 3 — IMPLEMENTATION AND CRAFT		**20**
10	Implementation plan	Sequenced and resourced. States what the firm stops doing.	**10**

		Names leading indicators that would signal within roughly two quarters whether the plan is working. States abandonment conditions.	
11	References and craft	At least ten references, properly cited, mixing course theory with primary sources. Clear structure, professional presentation, within the page limit.	**10**

Separate assessment — In-class term-paper presentation (5%)

Teams present their term papers in the final two classes of the term. Four teams present on 3 December and four on 10 December; the order is drawn in class. The presentation runs 30 minutes and is followed by a 10-minute question period. Slides are submitted with the paper by the common deadline of 11:59 pm on 2 December, whichever day your team presents. Presenting in the second week does not extend the deadline; it gives you a week to rehearse, not to write.

The presentation is marked on the clarity and structure of the argument, the quality of the evidence presented, the handling of questions, and delivery. Reading from notes is marked down. Answers that do not resolve the question asked are marked down. The question period is part of the assessment, not an appendix to it.

Full rubrics and any updates are posted on BrightSpace and take precedence over this document.