

## BEYOND THE DICHOTOMY OF THE BUSINESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT: INTERNAL TRANSCENDENCE AND EXTERNAL ASSIMILATION

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### Abstract

*The traditional dichotomic view of internal and external factors influencing businesses has long been a cornerstone of strategic management frameworks. However, this static view fails to capture the dynamic and reciprocal nature of modern business-environment interactions. This article introduces the Dynamics of Business-Environment Exchange (DBEE) framework, which moves beyond the conventional internal-external divide by acknowledging two additional categories: Internal Forces Acting Externally (IFAE) and External Forces Acting Internally (EFAI). The IFAE concept recognizes that businesses can leverage internal resources to shape and influence the external environment, while EFAI acknowledges that external changes can permeate and influence internal operations, fostering adaptability and resilience. By considering the reciprocal influence between businesses and their surroundings, the DBEE framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between organizations and their environments. This article explores the relevance of the DBEE framework in strategic planning, decision-making, and risk management. It challenges readers to reconsider the traditional perception of business-environment interactions, offering a paradigm shift that redefines business strategy in an increasingly complex and dynamic landscape.*

**Key words:** Business strategy' environmental dynamics; internal-external interactions; organizational resilience; strategic management frameworks.

**JEL Classification :** M2, D4, L5

### I.INTRODUCTION

*"The boundaries which divide life from death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?" - Edgar Allan Poe*

In the realm of business, the relationship between organizations and their environments is intricate and ever-changing. Traditional strategic models have typically divided factors influencing businesses into two main categories: internal and external. Internal factors encompass elements like organizational structure, resources, and culture, while external factors involve market dynamics, competition, and regulatory frameworks (Filho *et al.*, 2021). These factors are commonly assessed using tools such as SWOT analysis, which aids in understanding an organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

However, this conventional dichotomy offers a somewhat static perspective of business-environment interactions, failing to capture the complexity and fluidity of modern business dynamics (Akaka *et al.*, 2013; Tan & Meyer, 2010; Rooney, 2023). In reality, the boundaries between internal and external factors are often blurred, with interactions shaping both the organization and its surroundings. Contemporary businesses are not merely reactive to external influences; they actively mold their external environments. Similarly, external forces do not just impact businesses externally; they can permeate and influence internal operations (Roberts *et al.*, 2012).

Given the rapid advancements in technology, globalization, and increasing stakeholder expectations, there is a call for a more sophisticated strategic framework. This necessity has led us to the introduction of the Dynamics of Business-Environment Exchange (DBEE) framework. The approach that we propose acknowledges the traditional Internal Forces Acting Internally (IFAI) and External Forces Acting Externally (EFAE) but also introduces two additional categories: Internal Forces Acting Externally (IFAE) and External Forces Acting Internally (EFAI). The concept of Internal Forces Acting Externally (IFAE) within the DBEE framework recognizes that businesses can utilize internal resources to influence and shape the external environment. On the other hand, External Forces Acting Internally (EFAI) acknowledges that external changes can be integrated into a company's internal operations, fostering adaptability and resilience within the organization.

This new framework moves beyond the traditional static view of business-environment interactions, emphasizing the dynamic and reciprocal nature of these relationships. By considering not only how internal factors impact internal operations and how external factors influence external environments but also how internal factors can influence external environments and vice versa, the DBEE framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between businesses and their surroundings. In this article, we examine deeper into the DBEE framework, illustrating its relevance through real-world examples and demonstrating its application for improved strategic planning, decision-making, and risk management.

Reconsidering the way we perceive the interaction between businesses and their environments is a shift that holds the potential to redefine business strategy as we know it.

## II. DEFINING INTERNAL TRANSCENDENCE AND EXTERNAL ASSIMILATION

In the context of the DBEE framework, IFAE and EFAI represent distinct types of interactions between a business and its environment. Internal Transcendence, or IFAE, occurs when internal factors of an organization extend beyond its boundaries to influence the external environment. This phenomenon involves leveraging internal strengths, capabilities, or resources to shape market trends, influence stakeholders, or disrupt industry norms (Awa & Ojiabo, 2016; Linnenluecke, 2015). Essentially, Internal Transcendence refers to how an organization's internal elements transcend their conventional confines and bring about changes externally.

On the other hand, External Assimilation, or EFAI, signifies situations where external factors infiltrate the internal workings of an organization and modify its structure, operations, or strategy. This process involves integrating market trends, stakeholder expectations, regulatory changes, or technological advancements into the company's business model, corporate culture, or operational processes (You & Williams, 2023; Vegt *et al.*, 2015). External Assimilation essentially refers to how an organization assimilates external forces, allowing the external environment to influence internal operations.

Both Internal Transcendence and External Assimilation highlight the dynamic and permeable boundaries between a business and its environment, offering a deeper understanding of strategic management by capturing the complexity of these interactions. By acknowledging these nuanced interactions, the DBEE framework provides a comprehensive view of how businesses interact with and adapt to their external environments, emphasizing the reciprocal nature of these relationships.

## III. FRAMING THE DYNAMICS OF BUSINESS-ENVIRONMENT EXCHANGE (DBEE)

The DBEE framework that we propose categorizes the forces that influence a business into four quadrants based on their origin (internal or external) and their mode of operation (acting internally or externally).

1. Internal Forces Acting Internally (IFAI): These are the factors that originate within the organization and have an impact on its internal functioning. Examples include employee skills, organizational culture, managerial decisions, business strategies, etc. These forces are typically under the direct control of the business.

2. External Forces Acting Externally (EFAE): These are the forces that originate outside the organization and directly affect its external interface. They include market competition, industry trends, regulatory environment, macroeconomic conditions, etc. Businesses often have little control over these but must strategically respond to them.

3. External Forces Acting Internally (EFAI): These are external forces that are so thoroughly incorporated into a business's operations that they influence its internal functioning. Examples could include compliance with regulatory standards that shape internal policies, market trends influencing product development, and customer feedback impacting service quality.

4. Internal Forces Acting Externally (IFAE): These are elements originating within the organization that exert influence beyond its boundaries. Examples could be a company's culture impacting its brand image, or business strategy guiding its competitive positioning and responses to market dynamics.

The framework is summarized in table 1.

**Table 1. The DBEE Framework**

Originating	Acting	Nomenclature	Examples
Internally	Internally	Internal Forces Acting Internally (IFAI)	Organizational culture, employee skills, business strategies
Externally	Internally	External Forces Acting Internally (EFAI)	Regulatory compliance shaping internal policies, market trends influencing product development
Internally	Externally	Internal Forces Acting Externally (IFAE)	Company culture impacting brand image, business strategy guiding competitive positioning
Externally	Externally	External Forces Acting Externally (EFAE)	Market competition, industry trends, macroeconomic conditions

The DBEE framework offers a comprehensive view of the forces that influence a business's performance and outcomes. Understanding and managing these different forces are key to effective strategic planning and

operational success in any organization. This model helps managers identify where forces are coming from and how they operate, facilitating better control and strategic responses to ensure organizational resilience and growth.

Below, we will provide two examples each for Internal Transcendence and External Assimilation and how these resolve the internal versus external environment dichotomy:

*Internal Transcendence: Apple and Tesla*

Apple has leveraged its internal strengths, such as design and innovation capabilities, to transcend its boundaries and shape the external environment in various industries. For instance, Apple's development of the iOS operating system and the App Store ecosystem has significantly influenced the mobile app industry, setting standards and shaping consumer expectations. Additionally, the company's expertise in user experience and interface design has influenced design trends across various sectors, from consumer electronics to automotive interfaces.

Another example is Tesla's impact on the automotive industry. Tesla's internal capabilities in electric vehicle technology, battery development, and software engineering have enabled the company to disrupt the traditional automotive industry. By pushing the boundaries of electric vehicle performance and establishing a direct-to-consumer sales model, Tesla has reshaped consumer expectations and influenced industry standards, prompting other automakers to accelerate their electric vehicle development efforts.

*External Assimilation (EFAI): Starbucks*

Starbucks is an excellent example of a company that has effectively assimilated external forces into its internal operations. In response to growing consumer demands for sustainable and ethical practices, Starbucks has implemented various initiatives, such as:

1. Sourcing: Starbucks has committed to sourcing 100% of its coffee from ethical and sustainable sources by 2030, integrating environmental and social standards into its supply chain.
2. Packaging: The company has transitioned to more eco-friendly packaging materials, including strawless lids and recyclable cups, in response to concerns about plastic waste.
3. Operations: Starbucks has set targets to reduce its environmental footprint by improving energy efficiency, water conservation, and waste management practices in its stores.
4. Workforce: The company has implemented programs to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in its workforce, responding to societal expectations for more inclusive corporate cultures.

By assimilating these external forces related to sustainability, ethics, and social responsibility, Starbucks has reshaped its internal operations, supply chain, and corporate culture, allowing it to stay relevant and aligned with evolving consumer values and societal expectations.

These real-world examples demonstrate how companies like Apple, Tesla, and Starbucks have leveraged internal strengths to influence external environments (Internal Transcendence) or assimilated external forces into their internal operations (External Assimilation), highlighting the dynamic interplay between businesses and their environments beyond the traditional internal-external dichotomy.

#### **IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGY**

The addition of Internal Forces Acting Externally (IFAE) and External Forces Acting Internally (EFAI) to the business and strategic literature enriches our understanding of how organizations interact with and influence their environments, and vice versa.

The traditional view of business strategy often focused on managing internal factors and responding to external circumstances. By introducing IFAE and EFAI into the equation, the DBEE framework provides a more nuanced understanding of these interactions.

- ✓ **Strategy Formulation:** The identification of IFAE/Internal Transcendence forces highlights the potential of a company's internal resources and capabilities to influence not just internal operations, but also the external environment. It underscores the need for businesses to create strategies that leverage these unique internal assets to shape market dynamics, influence stakeholders, and create competitive advantage.

For example, consider a tech company that has developed a unique, proprietary software platform. The platform, an internal resource, can be leveraged to influence the external market, potentially creating a new standard for similar industry software (IFAE/Internal Transcendence). By formulating a strategy that promotes its platform as an industry standard, the company can shape the market to its advantage.

- ✓ **Strategic Adaptability:** Recognizing EFAI/External Assimilation forces emphasizes how external changes can infiltrate a company's internal operations. Understanding this infiltration can help businesses develop strategies that are adaptable, resilient, and responsive to shifts in external factors such as market trends, regulatory changes, or cultural shifts.

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- ✓ Proactive vs Reactive Strategy: The DBEE framework encourages a more proactive approach to strategy. Rather than just reacting to external forces (EFAE) or controlling internal ones (IFAI), businesses are encouraged to proactively shape their external environment (IFAE) and integrate valuable external influences into their operations (EFAI).

A company using a proactive approach could be a pharmaceutical firm that invests in in-house R&D to develop new drugs. These internally developed products (IFAE) could not only shape treatment trends but also create new market segments, allowing the company to proactively influence its external environment.

- ✓ Risk Management: By providing a more comprehensive view of the forces that impact a business, the DBEE framework can improve risk management. Businesses can identify risks and opportunities not only from traditional external threats and internal weaknesses but also from the interaction of internal forces with the external environment and vice versa.

Let's consider this example: A bank, aware of the increasing external regulatory scrutiny on data privacy (EFAI), could proactively integrate strict data privacy standards into its internal operations. By anticipating and assimilating this external change internally, the bank can manage the risk of regulatory non-compliance and potential fines.

- ✓ Innovation and Competitive Advantage: IFAE/Internal Transcendence and EFAI/External Assimilation can be sources of innovation and competitive advantage. Businesses that effectively leverage their unique internal resources to shape the external environment or adapt beneficial external changes into their internal operations can differentiate themselves in the market.

Apple Inc. is an example of a company that leverages IFAE/Internal Transcendence for competitive advantage. By creating innovative, user-friendly products based on its unique design and technology capabilities, Apple has not only differentiated itself but also shaped consumer expectations and industry standards in the technology market.

Each of these examples given above underscores the potential impact of the Internal Transcendence and External Assimilation factors in enhancing business strategy, adaptability, risk management, and competitive advantage. Generally speaking, by incorporating these additional perspectives into the study of the firm and the practice of strategy, the DBEE framework can enhance strategic planning, decision-making, and overall business performance.

## V. A REVISED SWOT ANALYSIS

In the realm of strategic planning, the traditional Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis has long been a fundamental tool for assessing a company's strategic position. This method simplifies the evaluation by categorizing internal Strengths and Weaknesses alongside external Opportunities and Threats (Ghazinoory *et al.*, 2011). The SWOT framework's simplicity lies in its ability to distill complex strategic considerations into these four categories, aiding in decision-making and strategy formulation.

However, the conventional SWOT analysis offers a static view of businesses, drawing clear lines between internal and external factors. In the dynamic and intricate landscape of modern business, the interactions between organizations and their environments are far more complex. This complexity necessitates a reevaluation of the traditional SWOT analysis to incorporate the nuances of the DBEE framework. The DBEE framework introduces a more sophisticated approach to strategic analysis by recognizing the dynamic interplay between internal and external forces (Zhao *et al.*, 2021). By integrating the concepts of Internal Transcendence (IFAE) and External Assimilation (EFAI), the DBEE framework acknowledges that internal factors can extend beyond organizational boundaries to influence the external environment, while external factors can infiltrate and impact internal operations (McMillan & Overall, 2016).

Internal Transcendence refers to instances where internal strengths, capabilities, or resources are leveraged to shape market trends, influence stakeholders, or disrupt industry norms (Elbashir *et al.*, 2021). This concept highlights how internal elements of an organization can transcend traditional boundaries and drive external change. On the other hand, External Assimilation involves external factors infiltrating internal operations, modifying structures, operations, or strategies within the organization (Chen *et al.*, 2022). This process allows external forces to influence internal dynamics, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between a business and its environment.

By incorporating the principles of Internal Transcendence and External Assimilation into strategic analysis, organizations can gain a more holistic understanding of their strategic position. This revised approach to strategic planning not only considers internal and external factors but also recognizes the dynamic interactions

that shape both the organization and its environment, leading to more informed decision-making and adaptive strategies.

The SWOT analysis could be reinvented using the DBEE lens as follows:

- ✓ **Strengths:** While Strengths traditionally focus on internal resources, capabilities, and advantages, the DBEE framework prompts us to consider how these internal strengths can also influence the external environment. This is the Internal Forces Acting Externally (IFAE) quadrant or Internal Transcendence.
- ✓ **Weaknesses:** Like Strengths, Weaknesses typically focus on internal factors. However, through the DBEE lens, we should also consider how these internal weaknesses might affect our external standing or influence.
- ✓ **Opportunities:** In the context of DBEE, Opportunities shouldn't only be viewed as external factors that a company can leverage. We should also consider how external forces or changes can be assimilated into the organization to create opportunities, reflecting the External Forces Acting Internally (EFAI) quadrant or External Assimilation.
- ✓ **Threats:** As with Opportunities, Threats typically focus on external factors. However, through the DBEE framework, we can also identify internal elements that could become threats in the external environment.

The revised SWOT analysis is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Revised SWOT analysis template**

	<b>Internal Factors (IFAI and IFAE)</b>	<b>External Factors (EFAI and EFAE)</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	Traditional internal strengths (IFAI)	Strengths used to influence external environment (IFAE)
<b>Weaknesses</b>	Traditional internal weaknesses (IFAI)	Weaknesses that impact external standing (IFAE)
<b>Opportunities</b>	External changes assimilated to create internal opportunities (EFAI)	Traditional external opportunities (EFAE)
<b>Threats</b>	External threats that become internal threats (EFAI)	Traditional external threats (EFAE)

The revised SWOT-DBEE matrix can be used to capture a more nuanced and complete picture of an organization's strategic landscape. In table 3, representative examples are given for each of the combinations.

**Table 3. The revised SWOT-DBEE matrix with examples**

	<b>Internal Factors (IFAI and IFAE)</b>	<b>External Factors (EFAI and EFAE)</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	A software company has an internal strength of a highly skilled development team (IFAI).	The same company leverages this team's expertise to shape the external environment by setting industry standards for new technologies (IFAE).
<b>Weaknesses</b>	An e-commerce company suffers from a high employee turnover rate (IFAI).	This high turnover rate may weaken the company's standing in the job market, making it harder to attract talented professionals (IFAE).
<b>Opportunities</b>	A healthcare organization sees a growing trend in telemedicine and decides to assimilate this external change into their operations by investing in a new telehealth platform (EFAI).	The same organization identifies a new market segment that is underserved, which represents a traditional external opportunity (EFAE).
<b>Threats</b>	A manufacturing firm identifies potential supply chain disruptions due to geopolitical tensions as an external threat that could become an internal	The same firm recognizes increased competition in their industry as a traditional external threat (EFAE).

problem if not properly managed (EFAI).

VI. DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis thus far, we would like to present a framework interlinking the different factors influencing interactions in the business environment (See figure 1):

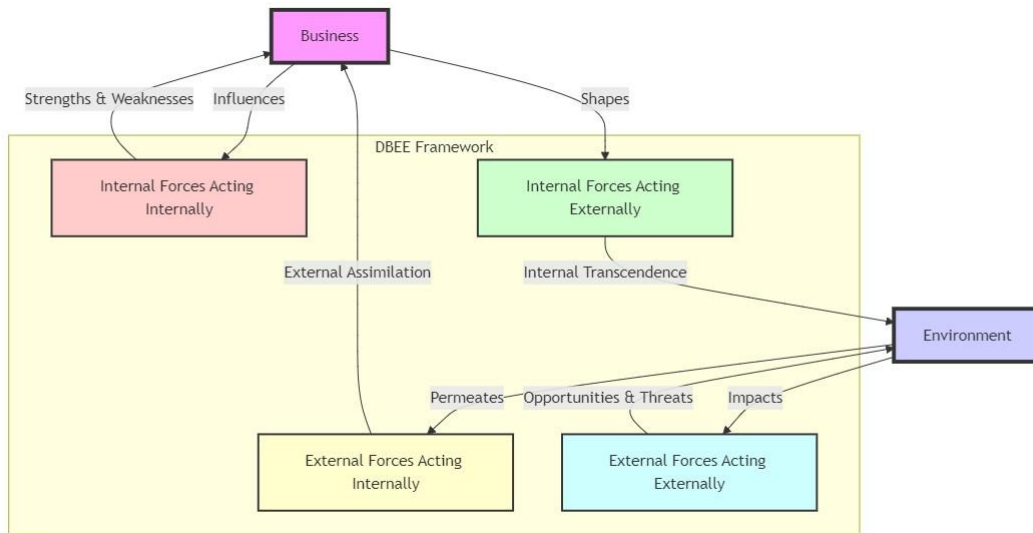


Figure 1: The Dynamics of Business-Environment Exchange (DBEE) framework

While the DBEE framework offers a more nuanced perspective on business strategy, it is also likely to present some challenges for implementation and interpretation. A few potential challenges that we anticipate are the complexity of categorization, as determining whether a force is acting internally or externally, or if it's originating internally or externally, may not always be straightforward. The boundaries between internal and external can be blurry, especially in complex, globalized businesses, and misclassification could lead to inappropriate strategy formulation.

Businesses may lack the expertise or knowledge to effectively identify and manage IFAE and EFAI forces, limiting the effective implementation of the DBEE framework. Business environments are constantly changing, and a force that is currently acting internally may shift to acting externally (and vice versa), complicating the strategy execution process and necessitating continuous monitoring and quick adaptation. There's also a risk that businesses could overemphasize one category of forces at the expense of the others, leading to an imbalance in strategic efforts. Also, we do not hide that the DBEE framework requires a thorough analysis of a broad range of forces, making it resource-intensive and requiring significant time, manpower, and financial resources. Smaller companies, in particular, may struggle to allocate the necessary resources. There may also be conflicts between the strategies developed to handle different categories of forces. For example, an internal force aimed at external influence might contradict the assimilation of an external force. Finally, like any new strategy or framework, the DBEE approach could face resistance from employees or other stakeholders who are comfortable with traditional ways of thinking and operating.

Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of a more nuanced and holistic approach to strategy formulation that the DBEE framework offers are substantial. With careful implementation, ongoing monitoring, and the flexibility to adapt as needed, these challenges can be managed.

Following a streamlined and systematic implementation process can help overcome some of the aforementioned challenges. Implementing the DBEE framework in business strategy may follow the steps given below:

Step 1: Understand the Framework: Before implementation, stakeholders should fully understand the DBEE framework, its four categories of forces, and their implications. This might involve workshops, reading materials, or presentations.

Step 2: Identify Your Forces: In this step, the organization identifies and lists the internal and external forces affecting their business. Using the DBEE framework, categorize each force as either an Internal Force

Acting Internally (IFAI), Internal Force Acting Externally (IFAE), External Force Acting Internally (EFAI), or External Force Acting Externally (EFAE).

Step 3: Analyze the Impact: Analyze the impact of each force on the organization's operations, strategic decisions, and overall performance. What kind of influence does each force have? This will help the organization understand how to best manage these forces.

Step 4: Develop Strategies for Each Quadrant: Develop specific strategies for each category of forces. This may involve leveraging strengths, addressing weaknesses, and finding opportunities for Internal Transcendence and External Assimilation.

Step 5: Create a Plan for Implementation: Develop a detailed plan for how these strategies will be implemented. This might include assigning roles and responsibilities, setting timelines, and outlining processes for monitoring and evaluation.

Step 6: Implement the Strategies: Put the strategies into action according to the plan. This stage might also involve training staff, allocating resources, and communicating the changes to all relevant stakeholders.

Step 7: Monitor and Evaluate: Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies. Are the strategies influencing the forces as intended? Are they achieving the desired outcomes? This step is essential for ongoing adjustments and improvements.

Step 8: Review and Adapt: Review the strategies at regular intervals and adapt as necessary. The business environment is dynamic, and the strategies may need to be tweaked or overhauled based on changing internal or external circumstances.

While following the steps above, it is important to consider that each organization is unique and may need to adapt this guide based on its specific context and needs.

The DBEE framework introduces a nuanced perspective on business strategy, offering a wide range of potential future research directions. However, it needs to be thoroughly rooted in literature and managerial practice. In this regard, some of the next steps include real-world case studies that would provide a practical evaluation of the DBEE framework. Researchers could examine how companies have effectively or ineffectively applied elements of the framework, whether knowingly or unknowingly, which would help demonstrate the framework's real-world applicability and provide insights for its further refinement.

Quantitative studies could be undertaken to measure the impact of Internal Transcendence and External Assimilation on business performance, involving the development of metrics or indicators to measure these forces and assessing their correlation with various performance outcomes. The DBEE framework could be studied in the context of specific industries, as different industries might have varying dynamics when it comes to the interplay of internal and external forces, potentially leading to industry-specific modifications or adaptations.

Comparative studies examining how companies of different sizes, stages of development, or cultural contexts apply the principles of the DBEE framework could offer valuable insights. Future research could focus on the development of practical tools and techniques for applying the DBEE framework, such as revised forms of other strategic tools (like PESTLE analysis), methods for identifying and measuring IFAE and EFAI, or models for managing these forces.

The DBEE framework could be studied in combination with other theories or frameworks, such as the resource-based view of the firm, Porter's Five Forces, or stakeholder theory, helping to situate the DBEE within the broader landscape of strategic management theory and potentially leading to the development of integrated frameworks. Long-term longitudinal studies could examine how the importance of IFAE and EFAI changes over time and in response to different environmental conditions or business challenges. These efforts would enhance our understanding of the DBEE framework, evaluate its effectiveness, and refine its application in diverse business contexts.

## VII. CONCLUSION

As we navigate the intricate and dynamic world of business in the 21st century, it is increasingly clear that our strategic tools need to adapt and evolve alongside the environments they aim to interpret (Литвин & Naumenko, 2023). The DBEE framework offers us an opportunity to embrace this complexity and fluidity, allowing for a richer, more nuanced approach to strategic planning.

Through this exploration, we have sought to redefine the interaction between businesses and their environments. We have introduced Internal Transcendence (IFAE) and External Assimilation (EFAI) as critical categories of forces in the strategic planning process. By acknowledging that internal forces can shape the external environment (IFAE), and external forces can permeate internal operations (EFAI), the DBEE framework challenges the traditional reactive mindset that views businesses as mere responders to external changes. Instead, the DBEE framework empowers organizations to adopt a more proactive stance, leveraging their internal strengths, resources, and capabilities to actively influence and drive change in the external

landscape. This proactive approach fosters innovation, disruption, and the potential to shape market dynamics, stakeholder expectations, and industry standards, rather than simply reacting to them.

We have reimagined the traditional SWOT analysis, augmenting it with the insights provided by the DBEE framework, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the strategic landscape and the dynamic interplay between internal and external forces. This more holistic approach to strategic analysis holds the potential to generate substantial benefits for organizations. By understanding and leveraging the interplay of internal and external forces, businesses can better anticipate and respond to changes, exploit opportunities, mitigate threats, and ultimately, achieve sustainable success in an ever-changing business landscape. The DBEE framework encourages a balanced strategy that combines reactive elements with proactive elements, empowering organizations to not only respond to changes but also actively shape the future of their industries. It's important to note, however, that while the DBEE framework and the revised SWOT analysis offer a more nuanced perspective, they also present challenges in terms of implementation, interpretation, and continuous adaptation. Overcoming these challenges will require a commitment to learning, agility, and a willingness to embrace complexity. Effective implementation of the DBEE framework may necessitate organizational culture shifts, new skill sets, and a mindset that is open to exploring uncharted territories.

We strongly believe that the DBEE framework can become a vital tool for businesses seeking to navigate the complexities of the modern world. By embracing a proactive approach and recognizing the dynamic interplay between internal and external forces, organizations can unlock new avenues for growth, innovation, and competitive advantage (Grant, 2003). As we continue to push the boundaries of strategic thinking, the DBEE framework equips us to thrive in a world of relentless change. This, we believe, is the future of strategic planning – a future that demands a proactive, adaptable, and holistic approach to strategy formulation and execution.

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