MECE Framework

Idea In Short

MECE is a problem-structuring framework used widely in management consulting. It helps analysts organize information into clear, non-overlapping categories that together cover every aspect of a problem.

MECE, pronounced me see, is an analytical framework developed to help you distill your business problem down into it's key components. MECE stands for mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive. What this means is that when faced with a business scenario for which you need to build a strategy, you must first break down the problem into its constituent parts. MECE is particularly useful for grouping and organizing information into meaningful systems based on the Pyramid Principle. It's a framework that allows you to create order out of chaos.

Mutually Exclusive

The first thing to consider is how do I separate the problem out into sensible, distinct categories for analysis. The aim is to reduce the complexity by avoiding overlaps. You need to make sure that the possible solutions or groups are not accidentally considered twice. Proving exclusiveness forces you to carefully look at each option, consequently leading you to a much deeper understanding of the issue. Try to think of ‘buckets' that do not have overlaps in which to place your data. Thinking in a MECE way can help eliminate ambiguities in your thought process.

Collectively Exhaustive

The second question to ask yourself when using this framework is whether your list is collectively exhaustive? In other words, do the analytical categories that you have proposed cover all the significant aspects of the problem? Have you covered all the bases? Has any influential factor been forgotten? Collectively Exhaustive aims at ensuring a comprehensive collection without leaving alternatives. Exhaustive means that all possible options have been

considered. The trick is to divide a problem into categories with a finite number of general groups. For example, if you need to make "means of transportation" MECE, don't start just collecting "per foot, train, plane, bicycle, etc." Try to find categories, because this practice will prevent you from forgetting important options, such as wheels vs. no wheels / air vs. water vs. land, etc. There is a good reason why MECE is considered to be part of the McKinsey Way1 and The McKinsey Mind2. It's a very helpful tool that can help ensure that you do not neglect any aspect of a problem. It also helps to enforce clarity of thinking and can dispel ambiguity. When dealing with clients or a senior figure the ability to think in a MECE manner demonstrates that you are able to think logically and constructively. It also makes it more likely that the foundations of your business analysis are sound, thus hopefully giving you a better platform on which to build your strategy. MECE thinking is perhaps the most important concept in problem solving and is the basis on which most consultants build their solutions. MECE thinking enables one to look at the big picture while being aware of the finer details at the same time.

Summary

Applying MECE thinking consistently can improve the clarity and completeness of business analysis, making it easier to communicate findings and build well-founded strategies.