

CRAFTING



YOUR EDGE



FOR TODAY'S



JOB MARKET



Using the *BE-EDGE Method* for Consulting
Cases and Capstone Projects



JULIA IVY

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MARKET

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Using the BE-EDGE Method
for Consulting Cases and
Capstone Projects

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*PhD in Psychology
(Reflection of Significant Choices)*

*PhD in Management
(Strategic Relationships in a Low-Trust vs
High-Trust Environment)*



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

In memory of Alex who was always there for me.

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This book took root in countless conversations with Joan Winn, a legendary case writer, reviewer, and editor. After meeting Joan and hearing her talk at case writing association conferences, I began to envision a role case writing might play beyond the traditional boundaries of the methodology, i.e., the preparation of teaching or research cases. I found myself passionately arguing that many of our students who might not be interested in teaching or research could deploy case writing methodology as a powerful tool for distinguishing their professional voices and crafting a space for themselves in the job market. Joan was the one who immediately supported this notion and volunteered to help. She became the brain behind the Consulting Case Writing Competition that we launched in 2013 at Northeastern University for students in the Masters in Professional Studies program. She served as the competition's first coach for faculty and students and its reviewer and judge and stepped into any role as needed to make this idea work.

Kelly Otter, Dee Masiello, Leslie Hitch, and Mary Thompson-Jones stood behind me and next to me while I claimed that, instead of solving company cases for entities that might not even be aware of the value that our students were generating for them, our students should write cases for companies of their choosing, so that their work might assist

them in shaping a professional space within a sector of the job market aligned with their career objectives. Because of these colleagues, and because of the support of the college of professional studies, the BE-EDGE method had a chance to reach students from 12 masters programs who generated value for organizations in more than 20 countries.

Liz Dodd, my long-term editor, made this book readable. She did not just edit the flow of my English-as-a-second-language writing but also helped me sharpen ideas and polish the message.

Finally, and most importantly, I owe this book to my students and clients – those who believed in the BE-EDGE method as a vehicle to connect our amazing and multidimensional job candidates with opportunities in relevant sectors of the market, where they could endeavor to shape a space for themselves and gain a personal, social, and professional edge within that space.

INTRODUCTION

Laura's Example

In April 2018, Laura B, a student in Masters of International Management at Northeastern University had to make a decision as to which avenue she would pursue for her final capstone project. She wanted to choose a topic that would be meaningful to her but still manageable enough to garner a strong grade.

She thought that her first option would be to investigate an interesting topic – like culture-sensitive women in leadership – and dig deep into the literature on the issue. At the end of the day, Laura was a young woman with a global mindset who aspired to become a leader, so such a project would make sense.

Another option would be to undertake a research project with practical implications. Laura considered conducting interviews with small business owners from her hometown in Colombia on the issue of globalization's impact on their businesses, and, hopefully, deliver useful recommendations. Such a project would be relevant and meaningful, and might even be publishable.

But when, at the beginning of the final semester, Laura's professor asked her to describe an image of how she saw

herself in 7 to 10 years after graduation, Laura envisioned herself on an intercontinental flight. She was getting ready for a meeting related to her international business having to do with introducing high-end organic products from Colombia to European and North American markets. In this vision, Laura brought together her multidimensional abilities and interests – her bicultural background, her passion for healthy lifestyle, her education in foreign trade and global management, her work experience in the field of cultural care, her knowledge of local organic products in Latin America, and her network in Europe.

To become meaningful from this perspective, the project that she would choose should introduce her to this very industry and its players and let her prove that she was worthy of their consideration. It should be some form of internship in problem-solving that would gain her access to decision-makers, connect to a real-life company, and provide her with an opportunity to prove that she could add value in solving a problem that the company works on. This option was undoubtedly the scariest...

If you were in Laura's shoes and had your last semester of university ahead of you, which option would you choose to proceed with for your final project for the MS in International Management? The one based on an in-depth literature review on the topic of women in leadership, the one based on research concerning globalization's impact on small businesses in Colombia, or the one of problem-solving in an area that you envisioned yourself one day working in?

Laura chose the third option and used her final project as a stepping stone on the path to her own vision of her professional future. She chose to make a consulting case for a real-life company in the industry of her interest – with a goal

of investing the personal, social, and professional capital that she would accumulate in this process in crafting her edge in the market. If you, like Laura and many other of my former students and clients, decide to be proactive in shaping your space within an industry in which you feel genuinely passionate about working, this book is for you.

This method will be powerful for you if you fit two criteria – (1) you have *personal readiness* in that you are motivated to take ownership of your future and shaping a space that fits you instead of you trying to fit into any tolerable available position and (2) you have *professional readiness* in a strong education, training, or intensive experience that you believe will add value to the company of your interests. If this is you, now, at the moment of completing one stage of your life and becoming ready for the next one, you need a step-by-step method that will guide you through the process of elucidating your professional core, connect you with the industry you envision crafting your space in, and provide you with a tool that allows you to prove that you can generate real value. This method is BE-EDGE.

The BE-EDGE method is built on the conceptual foundation of my two PhDs – one in Psychology with a specialization in reflection of significant choices and one in Management (Strategy, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation) with a specialization in strategic relationships in low-trust versus high-trust environments. Bringing together these two lines of my research studies, I, together with many graduates, practitioners, and employers, have developed BE-EDGE as a proactive step-by-step approach for utilizing personal, social, and professional capital accumulated within a consultancy case project for crafting a personal job strategy. Challenging old notions of “getting in on the ground floor and working your way up,” you will follow the BE-EDGE method to entry at a level and in an arena well matched to your

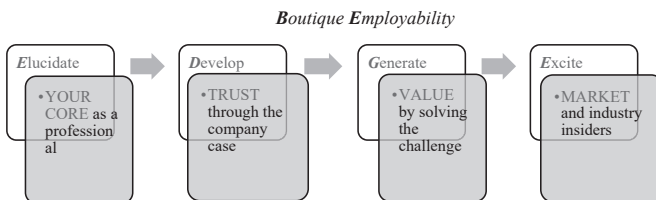
multidimensional profile. Rather than fighting an uphill battle to make your value known to hiring executives who often do not match you in gender or age and do not yet trust or understand your multidimensional qualifications, you need to create opportunities *to make your case to shape your space*.

THE BE-EDGE STEPS AND DELIVERABLES

The BE-EDGE acronym outlines the craft of enhancing your *Boutique Employability* by following four *E-D-G-E* steps described below (Fig. I.1).

E – Elucidate Your Professional CORE: Your Focus

This method begins at a place of introspection, as the workbook guides you through a series of exercises, templates, and examples designed to help you *Elucidate* clearly, first to yourself and later to market insiders, your *Professional Core* (i.e., the precise contours of your professional aspirations). It will allow you to define a center for your multidimensional profile, clearly communicate it, and identify the kind of workplace that will satisfy your professional desires – the space in the market that best fits your vision, strengths, and



Source: Developed by the author.

Fig. I.1. The BE-EDGE Steps.

interests. This is how you will invest your *personal capital* of self-awareness, focus, and maturity.

This step is a prerequisite to identifying the kind of company you would genuinely want to develop a case for and the kind of business challenges you genuinely desire to work on for your capstone project, internship, or case writing competition. At the end of the *E* stage, you will be ready to be proactive in contacting employers of your choice with a strong message on your core in order to find YOUR case to work on.

D – Develop TRUST: Your Case

Once equipped with a well-defined professional core and a list of companies and the scope of projects that fit your core, you will proceed to the *D* stage of the model by getting involved in the work of a target company and industry and telling a company's story. In the process of making a *company case*, you will *Develop Trust* in relationships with key insiders by demonstrating your genuine interest and understanding of the company's vision, challenges, and circumstances. You will act as an industry- and company-centered researcher and biographer, collecting market and industry data for the company and sharing the story of the company's trials and successes in overcoming challenges it has faced. This role of company biographer, the data you collected on industry, and your focus on the company and its surroundings will build insiders' trust in you, garnering for you a "one of us" sense of belonging and an opportunity to invest your *social capital* within the industry.

G – Generate VALUE: Your Consulting Report

After you have gained the personal and professional trust of industry insiders, you will move to the *G* stage of the

project, where, through templates and examples, you learn how to *Generate Value* for the company. You will prepare a *consulting report* wherein you will analyze a challenge that the company faces, sorting out information collected for the company case while applying your knowledge and experience, and then present recommendations for how best to resolve the situation. You prove your ability to generate value and deal with real-life challenges in the industry you target, thereby investing your *professional capital*.

E – Excite the MARKET and Industry Insiders: Your Edge

Finally, you will deliver the case brief and your BE-EDGE portfolio to industry insiders in a way that demonstrates your maturity and focus, and your understanding of the industry and the company's goals and challenges. You will have shaped your own space in the market and, in the process, built your own career momentum. Sharpening your voice based on who you are, developing trust and connecting on personal and professional levels with insiders in a way that allows you to *show*, not just tell about it, your clear sense of professional direction, your willingness to take the initiative, and your suitability for a company that fits your skills and interests makes you an owner of the edge you craft and will *Excite the market* that needs people like you.

The Outcome: **BE** – Your Boutique Employability

As an outcome of completing the E-D-G-E process, your enhanced BE comes from the three forms of capital you will acquire in the process of working on this project: your

personal capital of clarity, focus, and self-awareness (E-stage), your *social capital* as “one of us” in the company and your understanding of the rules of the game in the industry (D-stage), your *professional capital* of demonstrated ability to find ways of addressing real-life challenges (G-stage), and your ability to deliver the message (E-stage). Having acquired these three forms of capital in the customized context of the industry you have targeted will set you apart from other applicants, most of whom are trying to impress a wide range of employers with a catchall résumé.

Time Required and Deliverables

There are four deliverables in the process, each of which relate to the E-D-G-E stages. As illustrated in [Table I.1](#), these are (1) the case proposal, where you define your choice of companies and cases that fit your professional “core as a pro” strategy; (2) the company case, where you connect to the company; (3) the consulting report, wherein you prove your value; and (4) the message to employers about your work and how it fits your professional core. Each of the deliverables can be done as a professionally written document, as a social media story line, as a video blog, as a PowerPoint presentation, as a computer simulation, or in any other form and length that fit your style and your industry’s style. If you are a student, you will consult with your project or internship instructor; if you are in the process of changing your career, you might consult a recruitment agency, assessment center, or potential employer to determine the best format and style you should proceed with. Regardless of the form they take, these deliverables will have the same structure and logic, which you will learn through this book’s coaching sessions, templates, and examples.

Table I.1. BE-EDGE Steps and Deliverables.

Steps	Gaining the EDGE in Today's Job Market	Deliverables
<i>Process</i>		
E	Elucidate your professional CORE	Case proposal – your focus
D	Develop TRUST	Company case – your connection
G	Generate VALUE	Consulting report – your solution
E	Excite the MARKET and industry insiders	Message to the market
<i>Outcomes</i>		
BE	Boutique Employability	A package that demonstrates your personal, social, and professional capital

Source: Developed by the author.

As with any investment in a highly valuable asset, your case must be treated with respect for the time and effort required to accrue the necessary capital. Your situation, your motivation, your preparedness, and any deadlines set by your instructor or industry will define the timeframe in which you will complete your BE-EDGE deliverables. When my master's students worked on cases for a consulting case writing competition, it took six weeks for them to complete their entire project. When the consulting case was to be the product of a capstone, it took 12 weeks to complete the semester-long project. However, when I worked with highly accomplished and highly motivated professionals who used the BE-EDGE method to get their foot in the door of a new industry or advance to a new level in a company, it took one to three weeks for them to complete a consulting case as a stand-alone project. [Table I.2](#) is a template for you to fill in with projected start and end days for working on each of the stages.