Business Acumen Training Course for Senior Managers: Economics, Markets and Value Decisions

23 – 27 August 2027
Cape town

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Programme Summary

Business acumen is the subject of this one-week training course for senior managers and heads of function who need to read the whole business, ending in a value case for one decision in their own area. Specialists are often promoted on technical strength, then asked to judge trade-offs involving profit, cash, customers and competitors that their training never covered. The programme builds commercial judgement step by step, from how the organisation earns its money to the market it competes in, applied to cases from several sectors. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this programme on business acumen to mixed-organisation cohorts.

The Business Case

Decisions made without a view of economics tend to protect a function rather than the organisation. Managers who can trace how revenue becomes profit and cash, who know where competitors are strongest and who can state the value of a proposal in terms the finance team accepts are heard earlier and challenged less. This shortens approval cycles and reduces the number of proposals returned for rework.

- Proposal Approval Rate: Improves as business cases state value, cost and risk in a shared format.
- Cost of Misjudged Decisions: Falls as managers test assumptions against unit economics before committing resources.
- Cross-Function Alignment: Strengthens as leaders use one view of how the organisation earns and competes.

Principles and Evidence Base

- Financial Statement Analysis: Provider course content treats reading financial statements as the core of business acumen, and Sessions 2 and 3 apply it to profit, cash and balance sheet strength.
- Unit Economics: The logic of what one customer, product or transaction earns and costs underpins the profitability work in Session 2.
- Competitor and Market Analysis: Market and competitor awareness, a standard element of strategic awareness content, structures the external scan in Session 4.
- Value Creation Logic: The link from function decisions to strategy and value guides the case building in Sessions 1 and 5.

Intended Participants

- Senior managers who must justify proposals to finance and executive committees.
- Heads of function who are moving from technical leadership to whole-business responsibility.
- Programme and portfolio leaders who weigh competing investments.
- Managers who prepare budgets, business cases or commercial reviews for their unit.
- Leaders of shared services who must show the value they add to the business.

Typical sectors include banking, energy, healthcare and government agencies.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to construct a map of how the organisation earns its money, from customer to cash.
2. Participants will be able to evaluate profit, cash flow and balance sheet strength from financial statements.
3. Participants will be able to diagnose the unit economics of a product, customer segment or service line.
4. Participants will be able to assess market position and competitor moves using structured evidence.
5. Participants will be able to prioritise options in their own function by their contribution to strategy and value.
6. Participants will be able to justify a proposal to executives using agreed financial and strategic measures.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Business Acumen Foundations

How does this organisation make money, and where does value leak?

- Business Model Canvas
- Revenue to Cash Flow Map
- Value Chain Review
- Stakeholder Value Expectations
- Function Contribution Statement

Day 2: Reading the Numbers

What do the income statement, balance sheet and cash flow statement each reveal?

- Income Statement Walkthrough
- Balance Sheet Strength Test
- Cash Flow Statement Reading
- Margin and Return Ratios
- Unit Economics Worksheet

Day 3: Cost, Investment and Working Capital

Which choices raise profit, and which tie up cash?

- Fixed and Variable Cost Split
- Break-Even Analysis
- Payback and Return Screen
- Working Capital Cycle Review
- Budget Trade-Off Table

Day 4: Market and Competitor Awareness

Where does the organisation stand against customers, rivals and change in its market?

- Customer Segment Profile
- Competitor Position Grid
- Five Forces Review
- Trend and Signal Scan
- Strategic Awareness Brief

Day 5: Applying the Tools to One Decision

Do the economic, market and strategy tools support one defensible value case?

- Applying the Day 1 Function Contribution Statement
- Using the Day 2 Unit Economics Worksheet
- Testing the Day 3 Payback and Return Screen
- Checking the Day 4 Competitor Position Grid
- Completing the Decision Value Case

Methodology

The programme uses case analysis on anonymised financial statements, product and customer data, competitor profiles and approval papers from banking, energy and healthcare settings. Participants work in mixed-function teams on a shared case, challenge each other's assumptions and present their value case to a panel acting as an executive committee. Facilitators give written feedback on each exercise so that numeracy and argument improve across the five sessions.

- Suggested activity: Reading three years of statements to explain a fall in cash.
- Suggested activity: Comparing the unit economics of two customer segments.
- Suggested activity: Defending a budget request to a sceptical finance panel.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a value case for one decision in their own function. It holds a business model summary, a financial reading of the unit, a unit economics check, a competitor and market note, a payback view and a recommendation. The case is used at work as the basis of a budget request or a proposal to the executive committee.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is business acumen training suitable for managers without a finance background?

Yes. Business acumen training starts from how an organisation earns and spends money and assumes management experience, not accounting knowledge, so numbers are built up from simple examples.

Which models does business acumen rest on?

Business acumen rests on financial statement analysis, unit economics, competitor and market analysis and the link from decisions to value, each applied in a dedicated session.

How is the value case from business acumen used at work?

You use the value case as the basis of a budget request or proposal, and as a template for presenting future decisions to the executive committee.

How does business acumen differ from financial management training?

Business acumen links finance with market and strategy to support judgement, while financial management training concentrates on planning, controlling and reporting an organisation's funds.