Strategic Business Leader is ACCA's case study examination at Strategic Professional and from September 2023 is examined as a closed book exam of 3 hours and 15 minutes, including reading, planning and reflection time which can be used flexibly within the examination.

Pre-seen information for the Strategic Business Leader exam will be released two weeks before the exam sitting. The pre-seen information contains background and contextual details in order for candidates to familiarise themselves with the fictitious organisation that they will be examined on and the industry in which it operates.

The Strategic Business Leader exam will contain new information in the form of exhibits and candidates are required to complete several tasks. All questions are compulsory and each examination will contain a total of 80 technical marks and 20 professional skills marks.

As SBL is a closed book exam, the pre-seen information is also available within the examination. The Syllabus consists of 10 core areas as follows:

Section A - Apply excellent leadership and ethical skills to set the 'tone from the top' and promote a positive culture within the organisation, adopting a whole organisation perspective in managing performance and value creation.

As a leader, it is essential to set the "tone from the top" and promote a positive culture within the organization. Leadership and ethical skills play a critical role in shaping organizational culture and driving value creation. Here are some strategies to adopt a whole organization perspective in managing performance and value creation.

1. Lead by Example: As a leader, it is important to lead by example and set the tone for ethical behaviour. Organizations are more likely to adopt ethical standards when they see leaders modelling these behaviours. Leading by example and promoting ethical behaviour demonstrates the organization's commitment at the highest level.

2. Define and Communicate Values: A strong ethical culture starts with defining and communicating clear values. Leaders must clearly articulate the organization's values and expectations for behaviour. This helps to ensure that everyone in the organization understands what is expected of them and hold themselves and others accountable.

3. Provide Training: Organizations should provide ethical training and resources to employees at all levels. Leaders should ensure that employees receive the necessary training and support to understand ethical behaviours and feel comfortable reporting unethical behaviour.

4. Foster an Open-Door Policy: Leaders should create an environment where employees feel comfortable reporting concerns without fear of retaliation. An open-door policy encourages employees to report ethical concerns, which helps prevent unethical behaviours.

5. Reward Ethical Behaviour: Organizations should actively recognize and reward ethical behaviour and performance. When employees see that ethical behaviour is valued and recognized, they are more likely to engage in those behaviours.

In summary, as a leader, adopting a whole organization perspective in managing performance and value creation requires a focus on ethical behaviour and positive culture. By promoting ethical leadership, defining values, providing training and resources, fostering an open-door policy and rewarding ethical behaviour, leaders can create a positive culture that drives success and value creation.

Section B - Evaluate the effectiveness of the governance and agency system of an organisation and recognise the responsibility of the board or other agents towards their stakeholders, including the organisation's social responsibilities and the reporting implications.

The effectiveness of the governance and agency system of an organization is critical in ensuring that the organization is able to achieve its objectives while also meeting its responsibilities towards its stakeholders. Here are some ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the governance and agency system of an organization:

1. Evaluate the Board Structure: The board plays a critical role in overseeing the activities of the organization. An effective board structure should have a clear separation between the board and management, with independent directors providing oversight.

2. Assess Board Composition: The composition of the board is also critical in ensuring that the organization's interests are protected. An effective board should comprise of individuals with diverse experiences, knowledge, and expertise.

3. Review Board Processes: The board's processes should be transparent, with clear lines of communication and decision-making. The board should also have access to accurate and timely information to make informed decisions.

4. Evaluate Stakeholder Engagement: Organizations should have a clear understanding of their stakeholders, including their needs and expectations. An effective governance system should involve regular engagement with stakeholders to ensure that their interests are represented.

5. Review Social Responsibilities: Organizations have a responsibility to operate in a socially responsible manner. An effective governance system should consider the social impact of the organization's activities and take steps to manage its social responsibilities.

6. Assess Reporting Implications: An effective governance system should ensure that the organization's reporting is transparent and accurate. The organization should have robust reporting processes in place and should disclose relevant information to stakeholders.

In conclusion, evaluating the effectiveness of the governance and agency system of an organization involves assessing the board structure, composition, processes, stakeholder engagement, social responsibilities, and reporting implications. An effective governance system should ensure that the organization's interests are protected while also meeting its responsibilities towards its stakeholders.

Section C - Evaluate the strategic position of the organisation against the external environment and the availability of internal resources, to identify feasible strategic options.

Evaluating the strategic position of an organization against the external environment and the availability of internal resources is crucial in identifying feasible strategic options. Here are some steps to evaluate the strategic position of an organization:

1. Conduct a SWOT Analysis: Conduct a comprehensive SWOT analysis to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the organization. This analysis should consider internal and external factors that may impact the organization's ability to achieve its objectives.

2. Analyse the External Environment: Analyse the external environment to understand the organization's relationship with its market, customers, suppliers, competitors, and other stakeholders. Use PESTEL analysis to identify relevant political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors.

3. Analyse the Internal Environment: Analyse the internal environment of the organization to identify the availability of resources such as human capital, financial resources, technological resources, organizational culture, and infrastructure.

4. Identify Strategic Options: Based on the findings from the external and internal analyses, identify feasible strategic options that can help the organization achieve its objectives. This might involve identifying new markets, developing new products or services, entering strategic alliances or partnerships with other organizations, restructuring the organization or implementing cost-cutting measures.

5. Conduct Risk Assessment: Evaluate the potential risks associated with each strategic option and assess the organization's ability to manage the risks. This will help to identify the most feasible options for the organization to pursue.

6. Develop an Action Plan: Once feasible strategic options have been identified, develop an action plan that outlines the steps required to implement these strategies. This should include a timeline, budget, and success metrics.

In summary, evaluating the strategic position of an organization involves a comprehensive analysis of the external and internal environment, identifying strategic options, conducting a risk assessment, and developing an action plan. By taking a systematic approach to evaluating the strategic position of an organization, leaders can identify feasible strategic options that enable the organization to achieve its objectives.

Section D – Analyse the risk profile of the organisation and of any strategic options identified, within a culture of responsible risk management.

Analysing the risk profile of an organization and of any strategic options identified within a culture of responsible risk management is a critical step for an organization. It helps in identifying potential risks and developing plans to mitigate them while promoting a culture of responsible risk management. Here are some steps to analyze the risk profile of an organization and of any strategic options identified:

1. Identify Risks: Conduct a risk assessment to identify potential risks to the organization. This includes assessing the external environment and the organization's internal processes to identify specific risks such as financial, operational, legal, reputational, and strategic risks.

2. Assess Risk Exposure: Once risks are identified, assess the potential impact of these risks on the organization and its stakeholders, and determine the level of risk exposure of the organization.

3. Develop Mitigation Strategies: Develop mitigation strategies to address the potential risks identified. This involves developing policies and procedures to manage the risks, developing contingency plans, and establishing appropriate risk management structures in the organization.

4. Evaluate Feasibility of Options: When identifying strategic options, assess the potential risks associated with each option. Evaluate how each strategic option might affect the organization's risk profile and develop plans to mitigate any potential risk.

5. Implement Risk Monitoring and Reporting: Once risk mitigation strategies are developed, implement a framework for monitoring and reporting on risk. This includes developing risk management indicators, regular monitoring and assessment of risk and reporting on progress.

6. Promote a Culture of Responsible Risk Management: Promote a culture of responsible risk management by developing appropriate training and communication programs, to ensure that risk management policies and procedures are understood and followed.

In conclusion, analysing the risk profile of an organization and any strategic options identified is a critical step in developing an effective risk management framework. By identifying potential risks, assessing risk exposure, developing mitigation strategies, evaluating feasibility, implementing risk monitoring and reporting, and promoting a culture of responsible risk management, organizations can effectively manage risks and prepare the organization for future uncertainties.

Section E – Select and apply appropriate information technologies and data analytics, to analyse factors affecting the organisation's value chain to identify strategic opportunities and implement strategic options within a framework of robust IT security controls.

Selecting and applying appropriate information technologies and data analytics to analyse factors affecting the organization's value chain to identify strategic opportunities and implement strategic options within a framework of robust IT security controls is crucial to attaining a competitive advantage. Here are some steps to follow:

1. Identify Critical Processes: Identify the critical processes within the organization's value chain and determine the data inputs and outputs for each process.

2. Develop Data Analytics Plan: Develop a data analytics plan that utilizes appropriate technologies to gather and analyze data from the identified processes to provide insights into the factors that affect the value chain.

3. Implement Effective Data Management Systems: Implement efficient and effective data management systems that ensure data accuracy, consistency, and data security controls to protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of data.

4. Use Data Analytics to Identify Opportunities: Use data analytics to identify opportunities for improvement in processes that affect the value chain, such as supply chain management, inventory management, and product development.

5. Develop Strategic Options: Develop strategic options based on the opportunities identified and the risk management strategy of the organization.

6. Implement Strategic Options: Implement the strategic options identified, taking into account the appropriate IT security controls, and measure their effectiveness.

7. Continuously Monitor and Improve: Continuously monitor and improve the value chain processes and the IT systems to ensure the organization remains competitive and secure in the increasingly complex and fast-paced business environment.

In conclusion, selecting and applying the appropriate information technologies and data analytics to analyze factors affecting the organization's value chain is essential for identifying and implementing strategic options. Utilizing IT security controls is critical in mitigating security risks that can lead to significant financial and reputational losses to the organization. By following the steps outlined above, organizations can identify opportunities and perform the necessary steps to achieve a competitive advantage within a framework of robust IT security controls.

Section F – Evaluate management reporting and internal control and audit systems to ensure compliance and the achievement of organisation's objectives and the safeguarding of organisational assets.

Evaluating the management reporting and internal control and audit systems is crucial to ensure compliance and the achievement of organization's objectives while safeguarding organizational assets. Here are some steps to evaluate the management reporting and internal control and audit systems:

1. Evaluate Reporting Systems: Review management reporting systems to ensure they are accurate and timely and provide the required information to support the organization's decision-making process.

2. Review Internal Control Systems: Review the organization's internal control systems to ensure that the control environment is effective and that controls are appropriately designed and operating effectively. This includes identifying weaknesses in the system and ensuring appropriate measures are taken to mitigate these risks.

3. Assess Internal Audit Systems: Assess the effectiveness of the internal audit system to ensure that it is providing reasonable assurance that the organization's risk management, control, and governance processes are effective and contributing to the achievement of organizational objectives.

4. Evaluate Compliance Systems: Evaluate the organization's compliance systems to ensure that the organization complies with legal and regulatory requirements and that procedures are in place to detect and address non-compliance issues.

5. Identify Areas for Improvement: Identify areas for improvement in the management reporting and internal control and audit systems and develop strategies to address these areas.

6. Develop Action Plan: Develop an action plan to address any identified weaknesses and areas for improvement, which includes timelines, roles and responsibilities, and success metrics.

7. Monitor Progress: Monitor progress on the implementation of action plans and report regularly to senior management and the Board.

In conclusion, evaluating the management reporting and internal control and audit systems is essential to ensure compliance and achieve organizational objectives, and safeguard organizational assets. By reviewing the reporting systems, internal control systems, internal audit systems, compliance systems, and identifying areas of improvement, an organization can develop an action plan to address these areas and continuously monitor progress towards achieving objectives. This ensures that organization's resources are safeguarded and that the organization operates in a compliant and controlled manner.

Section G - Apply high level financial techniques from the ACCA Applied Skills exams in the planning, implementation and evaluation of strategic options and actions.

Applying high-level financial techniques from the ACCA Applied Skills exams is essential in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of strategic options and actions. Here are some techniques that can be applied:

1. Financial Ratio Analysis: Analyse the organization's financial performance using financial ratios such as liquidity ratios, profitability ratios, and leverage ratios. This can provide insights into the organization's financial health and aid in identifying areas for improvement.

2. Capital Budgeting Techniques: Use capital budgeting techniques such as net present value (NPV), internal rate of return (IRR), and payback period to evaluate potential investment opportunities and identify the most viable options.

3. Cost-Volume-Profit Analysis: Use cost-volume-profit analysis to determine the relationship between sales volume, costs, and profits. This can help in determining the break-even point and inform the organization's pricing and production decisions.

4. Sensitivity Analysis: Conduct sensitivity analysis to evaluate the level of risk associated with a particular decision or strategy. This can help in identifying potential risks and developing risk mitigation strategies.

5. Variance Analysis: Analyse variances between actual and budgeted results to identify areas where performance can be improved, such as cost overruns, sales shortfalls, and operating inefficiencies.

6. Discounted Cash Flow Analysis: Use discounted cash flow analysis to evaluate the present value of future cash flows. This can help in determining the value of a particular investment opportunity and aid in investment decisions.

In conclusion, applying high-level financial techniques from the ACCA Applied Skills exams can aid in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of strategic options and actions. Techniques such as financial ratio analysis, capital budgeting techniques, cost-volume-profit analysis, sensitivity analysis, variance analysis, and discounted cash flow analysis can provide valuable insights into the organization's financial health, potential investment opportunities, risk management, and performance evaluation. By utilizing these techniques, organizations can make informed strategic decisions and evaluate their effectiveness.

Section H - Enable success through innovative thinking, applying best in class strategies and disruptive technologies in the management of change; initiating, leading and organising projects, while effectively managing talent and other business resources.

Enabling success through innovative thinking, best-in-class strategies and disruptive technologies, effective management of change, and project management while effectively managing talent and other business resources is crucial for organizations to remain competitive and achieve their objectives. Here are some strategies to leverage innovative thinking, strategies, and technologies while effectively managing resources:

1. Foster a Culture of Innovation: Foster a culture of innovation within the organization by encouraging creativity, problem-solving, and experimentation. Encourage employees to think outside the box and provide opportunities for them to work on projects that drive innovation.

2. Embrace Disruptive Technologies: Embrace disruptive technologies that can drive business growth, improve efficiency, and enhance customer experience. Organizations should be open to new technologies and invest in research and development to stay ahead of the competition.

3. Implement Best-in-Class Strategies: Implement best-in-class strategies that align with the organization's objectives and values. This includes focusing on customer needs and preferences, operational efficiency, strategic partnerships, and developing a competitive advantage.

4. Manage Change Effectively: Manage change effectively by developing a change management plan that includes communication, stakeholder engagement, and training. Organizations should focus on the benefits of change and address any resistance effectively.

5. Lead and Organize Projects Effectively: Lead and organize projects effectively by setting clear objectives, timelines, and roles and responsibilities. Communication and stakeholder engagement should be top priorities throughout the project's lifecycle.

6. Manage Talent and Business Resources Effectively: Manage talent and business resources effectively by developing and implementing talent management strategies that align with the organization's objectives. This includes recruiting, developing, and retaining talent, ensuring diversity and inclusion, and managing costs and budgets.

In summary, enabling success through innovative thinking, best-in-class strategies and disruptive technologies, effective management of change, project management, and effective management of talent and business resources requires a focus on fostering a culture of innovation, embracing disruptive technologies, implementing best-in-class strategies, managing change effectively, leading and organizing projects effectively, and managing talent and business resources effectively. By leveraging these strategies, organizations can drive success, remain competitive, and achieve their objectives.

Section I - Apply a range of professional skills in addressing requirements within the Strategic Business Leader examination and in preparation for, or to support, current work experience.

There are a range of professional skills required to address requirements within the Strategic Business Leader examination and to support work experience. Here are some skills that can be crucial:

1. Analytical Thinking: Analytical thinking involves breaking down complex business situations and problems into smaller components and then analyzing their impact. This skill is essential in the SBL exam and in the workplace.

2. Decision-making: Decision-making involves the ability to analyze data, identify alternatives, and make choices based on a thorough evaluation of available

options. This skill is essential when facing real-world business situations and is also critical in the SBL exam.

3. Leadership: Leadership is crucial in the workplace, as it involves the ability to inspire, motivate, and guide others towards achieving a common goal. In the SBL exam, you may be required to demonstrate your ability to lead and manage teams towards achieving objectives.

4. Communication: Effective communication is essential in the workplace and in the SBL exam. It involves the ability to convey ideas clearly and succinctly, both orally and in writing. Effective communication skills are also a requirement in the SBL exam to communicate your solutions and recommendations to stakeholders.

5. Strategic Planning: Strategic planning is critical in the SBL exam and the workplace. It requires the ability to identify long-term business objectives, develop strategies to achieve them, and implement those strategies.

6. Time Management: Time management is crucial in the SBL exam and the workplace. It involves prioritizing tasks and setting realistic deadlines.

7. Financial acumen: The ability to understand financial statements and make informed decisions based on financial data.

8. Project management: The ability to plan, organize, and manage projects, resources, and timelines effectively.

9. Change management: The ability to manage change and build resilience in teams and organizations.

10. Commercial awareness: The ability to understand market dynamics, customer needs, and the competitive landscape in which the organization operates.

11. Ethics and professional standards: The ability to apply ethical and professional standards in all aspects of work.

12. Innovation and creativity: The ability to develop and implement new ideas, products, and services that add value to an organization.

In conclusion, to succeed in the Strategic Business Leader examination and in one's work experience, a range of professional skills are essential. These skills include strategic thinking, leadership, communication, analytical skills, financial acumen, project management, change management, commercial awareness, ethics, and professional standards, and innovation and creativity. Individuals who are proficient in these skills are more likely to be successful in various professional contexts.

Section J - Demonstrate other employability and digital skills in preparing for and taking the Strategic Business Leader examination.

In addition to the professional skills mentioned earlier, there are several other employability and digital skills that are crucial for preparing for and taking the Strategic Business Leader examination. Some of these skills include:

1. Time management: The ability to manage time effectively and efficiently, prioritize tasks, and meet deadlines.

2. Research skills: The ability to locate and evaluate information from multiple sources, and use it to inform decision-making.

3. Attention to detail: The ability to pay attention to details, identify errors and inconsistencies, and maintain accuracy and precision.

4. Critical thinking: The ability to analyze, evaluate, and interpret information, and to solve problems using logic and reasoning.

5. Computer literacy: The ability to use digital tools and technologies, such as spreadsheets, databases, and presentation software, effectively.

6. Social media proficiency: Understanding how to use social media effectively, such as LinkedIn, to build professional networks and showcase skills and accomplishments.

7. Presentation skills: The ability to create and deliver professional presentations using appropriate visual aids and delivery techniques.

8. Writing skills: The ability to write effectively, using appropriate style, tone, and language, and to structure ideas in a clear and concise manner.

9. Adaptability: The ability to adapt to changing circumstances and environments, and to learn new skills and tools as required.

10. Teamwork: The ability to collaborate effectively with others, listen actively, contribute constructively, and resolve conflicts.

In summary, employability and digital skills such as time management, research skills, attention to detail, critical thinking, computer literacy, social media proficiency, presentation skills, writing skills, adaptability, and teamwork are essential for success in both the Strategic Business Leader examination and in the workplace. By demonstrating proficiency in these skills, individuals are better equipped to meet the challenges of the digital age and succeed in their professional pursuits.
