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**BUSINESS IN PRACTICE:
NAVIGATING STRATEGIC TRANSFORMATION IN THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY –
ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION.**

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I. Abstract

The automotive industry plays a pivotal role in combating climate change and adapting to evolving regulations. This thesis explores the strategic transformation of an exemplary car manufacturer towards electro-mobility, employing a change management simulation. It integrates a comprehensive performance analysis of the virtual firm with the author's introspective evaluation of interpersonal capabilities concerning team effectiveness. First, three relevant parts of the business and its interconnection are being examined. Then, focus is placed on two defining incidents in terms of personal development. Conclusions are drawn on the requirements for successfully transforming an established company toward a more sustainable future.

Keywords

Business simulation, Business strategy, Managing a business, Sustainability, Team dynamics, Innovation and corporate entrepreneurship, Strategic transformation, Reflective practice, Integrated business functions, Working in teams

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II. Firm analysis: Navigating Car Cavelos' strategic transformation

1. Introduction

In 2015, more than 190 countries settled on a legally binding international treaty called “The Paris Agreement” at the UN Climate Change Conference, which documents the joint goal to keep the global temperature rise beneath 2 degrees (United Nations 2015). The Paris Agreement includes a declaration on electro-mobility stating that to achieve this goal, it will be necessary for 20% of all transportation by road to be electric by 2030 (United Nations Environment Programme 2015). In 2019, the European Union presented “The European Green Deal”, which consists of several policies that are all aimed at the central goal of Europe being the first climate-neutral continent before 2050 (European Commission 2021).

The growing importance of sustainable alternatives in all areas of our lives does, consequently, not spare the automotive industry. Motorized transport remains not only dependent on internal combustion engines but is also accountable for more than one-third of CO₂ emissions (International Energy Agency 2023).

Regulations, consumer behavior, and technology represent the main drivers for change towards electrification in the automotive industry: Emission targets and penalties are introduced by governments all around the world. Sustainable mobility solutions grow in acceptance amongst consumers and technology innovation is being accelerated to push electrification (McKinsey Insights 2021). All these developments present a unique opportunity for transformation and simultaneously a necessity of change if the above-stated goals are planned to be reached.

This change was to be managed through “The Global Automanufacturing Simulation”, by guiding our virtual car company “Car Cavelos” through the complexities of transforming a traditional car manufacturer towards a more sustainable and innovative business (IndustryMasters 2023).

Through the simulation of six consecutive years, the management team consisting of directors of marketing, finance, human resources, operations, and innovation had to determine a strategic direction, evaluate major decisions, and lead Car Cavelos past challenging times. In the following, the areas of strategy, innovation, and marketing will be discussed in depth and analyzed based on the approach taken with our virtual company Car Cavelos. The interdependence of these areas will be shown and conclusions drawn reflecting the decisions taken and challenges faced during the simulation practice.

2. Review function 1: Strategy

a. What does it mean to have a strategy?

In order to align a company's objectives, decision-making, and business activities, it is necessary to develop a thought-out strategy that provides direction and represents a guide to follow. Despite it being seemingly straightforward, a strategy does not only align several business functions but can also be seen as a way of shaping its future.

The complexity of defining and implementing a strategy is governed by multiple processes and activities that it outlines within a business, which is also why several different views of the concept of strategy exist ("Mastering Strategic Management" 2012). Mintzberg summarized this complexity by defining the "Five Ps For Strategy", which are all interrelated and cannot be seen as an explanation of the concept purely in isolation: Strategy is a plan (the steps that a firm intends to follow to be successful), a pattern (the degree of consistency), a position (in relation to competitors), a ploy (how to outrun a competitor), and a perspective (how the environment is being interpreted) (1987b). A strategy can not only provide direction, focus efforts and attention and keep a business moving, but it can also impede a business of its ability to adapt and change according to its macro environment (Mintzberg 1987a), which we had to experience with Car Cavelos. A careful examination of the external environment provides a starting point for the strategy development process. Supplier and buyer strength, the likelihood of new entrants, the

possible appearance of substitutions as well as the competitive atmosphere constitute the five forces that help understand the profitability and competitiveness in any industry and determine a reference for a company's potential (Porter 2008). In essence, developing a strategy means constructing a unique position that is based on a combination of activities that complement each other (Porter 1996).

Based on the previously mentioned changes in the political landscape in terms of sustainability and regulations, it is not surprising that today, electric vehicles (EVs) are almost as well-liked as traditional vehicles. The lower cost of ownership, given the rising living costs and current inflation, as well as the improved driving experience and its eco-friendliness, are considered the main reasons for customers choosing an EV (Simon Kucher 2023), and provided the starting point of Car Cavelos' strategic change.

b. The importance of mission, vision and strategic direction

Based on the given macro environment, identifying the mission and vision set the tone for defining the strategic direction of Car Cavelos, which guided our prospective decision-making in every area of the business simulation. Knowing what an organization aspires to achieve in the future (the vision), paired with a reflection of its "why" and the role it plays in society (the mission), provides necessary ambitions and unambiguous goals ("Mastering Strategic Management" 2012).

This requires an internal perspective and analysis of the business, also known as "the resource-based view" (RBV), by understanding both the businesses' main qualities as well as their weaker and, therefore, hindering aspects (Bhandari, Ranta, and Salo 2022). In the case of the simulation, we were managing an already existing business that had products on the market and, therefore, a previous strategic direction. Our focus was on leading the transformation towards a more sustainable car manufacturer with an innovative fleet. Given the increasing customer awareness and governmental focus on sustainability, it has become clear that non-environmentally friendly

resources are not only of little worth for businesses, but active managerial rethinking towards ESG-favouring objectives is required for sustained success (Bhandari, Ranta, and Salo 2022), which was to be experienced through the simulation.

Car Cavelos' mission was to lead the automotive industry's transformation towards sustainability by developing and producing high-quality, affordable everyday cars. By prioritizing our core values of reliability, affordability, and sustainability, we were committed to providing environmentally conscious vehicles that empower individuals in their daily challenges by delivering reliable transportation solutions to a global market. We envisioned Car Cavelos to become the biggest car manufacturer in the world by serving people, the planet, and profit. We were driving the transition to a low-carbon future through reliable and affordable transportation solutions by exceeding customer expectations in terms of performance, design, and affordability.

Based on this mission and vision, we identified three strategic pillars that we measured each decision against: Affordability – we are developing cars for everyone, available through green financing, by taking advantage of economies of scale. Sustainability – we are driving electrification investments to continuously reduce our CO2 emissions and prioritize sustainable operations that affect our company as a whole. Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) act as our decisioning framework. Reliability – we are launching well-developed electronic vehicles with better and more advanced technology than our competitors, to ensure reliability for the everyday challenges of our customers.

c. Car Cavelos' strategic challenges

i. The failure of hybrid cars

Being rigid and structured with our approach, we continuously invested in the development of electrification but deferred from being the first mover, which we associated with lower risk. Our goal was to launch well-developed electric vehicles with better and more advanced technology. The main priority remained the sustainability of our operations since these would affect any of

our product lines, no matter if gasoline, hybrid, or EVs. Nevertheless, we agreed on a complete discontinuation of diesel but opted for a slow phase-out of conventional vehicles as those were still profitable (and already developed). We were planning on bridging the time between the decline of conventional vehicles to well-developed EVs through a mainly hybrid fleet.

Thinking to be set for successful six years, the market proved to completely reject hybrid cars, leaving us with losses and a steep decline in value-added (Appendix 1). When comparing our simulation results to reality, it was not only us who made an incorrect prediction: In 2008, IBM predicted that by 2020 all cars would be hybrid (IBM Automotive 2008). This prediction was not only slightly off, but proved to be entirely wrong. In fact, only 970,000 hybrid vehicles were sold worldwide in 2020 (Statista 2023b) in comparison to the 63.8mn total car sales (Statista 2023a). Favourable to maintaining a competitive market position is rather a progressive adoption of electric vehicles (so-called “frontrunner”) and will ensure a sizeable market share (Deloitte 2023a), which we had to learn through the simulation results.

ii. Strategic rigidity: A well-intended mistake

Despite the strategy being intended to provide long-term direction, a proactive rather than reactive approach to adapting to the non-favourable market conditions would have most likely helped Car Cavelos to recover faster, since short-term developments need to continuously be taken into account. Instead, we remained true to our initially set strategy, hoping that the market would eventually adapt to our favour.

It became clear that the competitive environment in the automotive industry, which was somewhat replicated through the simulation, did not help in deciding on a more drastic approach. Knowing that our slow phase-out of conventional cars was still going to make some profits certainly influenced our strategic decision-making and kept us from proactively making a radical decision in that regard.

iii. Why a strategic change proposes challenges in established companies

The alignment of the “three dimensions of strategic flexibility”, customer, process, and product, prove to be specifically challenging in the automotive industry given the volatility in changing customer needs and expectations. This is why a certain modular structure in the organizational framework can guarantee flexibility in those crucial aspects (Hoeft 2022). Having said this, with certain organizational processes already given, conventional and diesel cars readily developed and on the market, as well as electrification not yet started can slow down this process quite severely. This can be proven by Tesla’s success in the industry: Not being guided by settled routines that constrain product development and require architectural innovation leads to a higher willingness for trial and error and, therefore, an advantageous position (Thomas and Maine 2019).

iv. Drawing comparisons to the real world

When comparing Car Cavelos to real-world car manufacturers, the strategic direction and perhaps even our strategic dilemma (having a well-thought-out strategy but ultimately reacting too slowly to the electric vehicle demand) can in certain aspects be found in Toyota’s development. Toyota has, in essence, a very similar positioning as Car Cavelos: high-quality cars, affordably placed in the middle-income category, and reliability as one of their main values. Similarly, Toyota chose to first launch hybrid vehicles, placing importance on sustainability, which covers every aspect of the business (start.io 2022). Nevertheless, Toyota seems to have taken its time recognizing that a fully electric fleet will prospectively be the winning strategy and has recently faced what many other manufacturers had understood sooner: the high manufacturing costs of a shared platform with fuel engine, hybrid, and electric cars (Daniel Bleakey 2023). The heavy focus on a hybrid fleet made it easy for Toyota to cope with CO2 emission standards in the past, but due to the increasing restrictions, it will be impossible to not face expensive fines without a mainly electric fleet and not risk their sustainability reputation

(Sugiura and Campbell 2022), which Car Cavelos experienced as well through rising penalties caused by slow transitioning (Appendix 2).

3. Review function 2: Innovation

Aiming to achieve the mission and vision of Car Cavelos and becoming the biggest sustainable car manufacturer in the world, the innovation role became one of the driving forces behind this strategic change.

a. Innovation, intrapreneurship, and corporate entrepreneurship

Innovation definitions vary, but, in essence, they all touch upon the idea of creating and improving what can be offered to sustain a competitive advantage and survive in the market. This is why innovation is so closely associated with growth and why it does not exclusively apply to new high-technology ventures, but likewise to incumbent firms (Tidd and Bessant 2020). Central to innovation is the ability to recognize opportunities in problems and use change to develop new and better products or services, commonly utilized by entrepreneurs (Drucker and Maciariello 2014). These assessments provide an explanation of the importance of innovation. However, the success of a firm is not only reflected in its ability to innovate but to do so faster than its competition. Since high rates of change can only be achieved by timely execution of the innovation that is driving the change, if the pace of a company remains too slow, it can easily be surprised by industrial changes instead of being a driving force (Stalk and Hout 1990). Because innovation is essential for competitiveness, it can not only be attributed to entrepreneurship in the sense of establishing new businesses but is also a specific instrument for intrapreneurship and corporate entrepreneurship. Both terms tend to be used interchangeably but differ in their approach, despite their shared dimensions of both innovation and strategic renewal. Intrapreneurship (also referred to as corporate venturing), follows a bottom-up approach driven by employees that is focused on creating novel businesses that are then integrated into the established company (Narayanan, Yang, and Zahra 2009). Corporate entrepreneurship, on the

other hand, is initiated and driven by the company's management and their encouragement of employees. Ownership, definition of results, and evaluation consequently differ in both approaches; intrapreneurship is rather a tool for employees, whereas corporate entrepreneurship is a strategic approach (Amo 2010).

In the specific case of the business simulation, Car Cavelos represents an example of corporate entrepreneurship as innovation and strategic transformation are driven by the company's management, hence the innovation director, which I represented over the course of the simulation.

b. The innovation approach of Car Cavelos

As discussed previously, existing companies face certain architectural hurdles for innovation, which makes it essential for them to build on their strengths. Successful corporate entrepreneurship is most likely a combination of entrepreneurial and systematic management, short- and long-term approaches, as well as both new and mature processes. In reality, a strategy will likely have to be developed through trial and error and the ideal solution is neither black nor white but somewhere in the middle (Garvin and Levesque 2006). Trying to put this into practice, Car Cavelos' "grey" was our strategy to heavily rely on hybrid cars.

Basing our approach on what we had defined in our values and strategic direction, to offer "cars for everyone" that are useful for the challenges of everyday life, we decided to limit our product portfolio to Compact and Executive models. Our intention to slowly phase out gasoline cars and to only offer limited options of those, whilst placing priority on the product development of hybrid vehicles to meet the needs in functionality and reliability as well as a reduction in CO2 emissions, aligned with our strategy. Consequently, instead of launching our first e-car as quickly as possible, we intended to achieve a higher range, and invest in high-power-charging first to launch well-developed EVs instead of "prototypes". Improving features as well as heavily investing in sustainable operations seemed to be the right choice for Car Cavelos. To achieve

our goal of becoming the biggest car manufacturer in the world, we refrained from pushing innovation investments too strongly and invested in building factories.

c. Making wrong strategic innovation choices is part of the game

The market for hybrid cars – even after several quarters – did not develop as expected. We realized that we needed to start pushing electrification stronger than before, which evidently became difficult given our financial constraints that were caused by the non-performing hybrid fleet. Knowing what we know now, choosing an incremental rather than a rapid approach and intending to launch more sophisticated EVs rather than “short range, low connectivity” right away, was simply not the right choice. As stated before, corporate innovation also includes making the wrong decisions and having to change course, however, our rigidity in strategic orientation and patient approach – hoping the hybrid fleet would eventually perform – should have been replaced by more flexibility and earlier insight. And as stated before, innovation in itself will not be successful, if not being done faster than the competition.

Because of how closely the two areas of strategy and innovation are intertwined, the general innovation decisions were almost pre-determined and agreed upon through our initial vision and value discussion. As an innovation director, I was somewhat responsible for making sure the investments were being committed to accordingly and acted as supervisor and judge to guide the managerial team through our strategic change.

d. CO2 guidelines as an innovation driver?

In addition to the fleet turnaround towards hybrid and then a fully electric fleet, one of the drivers was the continuously decreasing CO2 allowance and, thus, increasing penalty, which also had a financial effect (Appendix 2). In reality, the internationally stricter environmental regulations do reduce uncertainties that are often connected to sustainable business strategies and give the automotive industry the push that it needs to drive electrification. This may be expensive in the near future, through penalties and high investments, but acts as a guide for companies’

technological development (Li and Nam 2022). What we experienced at Car Cavelos, the impossibility of innovative transformation without noticeable investments, is not far from the truth. Heavy investments in the entire value chain that needs to be built around electrification will be absolutely necessary if the goal is to achieve a net-zero future; despite it involving negative financial effects in the short term (Deloitte 2023a). Understanding that the deciding factor to achieve greater profits, competitiveness, and productivity in the automotive industry will be pushing electrification, digitalization and, therefore, innovation will only be possible through major investments that may not show immediate payoff (Llopis-Albert, Rubio, and Valero 2021). However, the industrial policy's focus on competition impedes the industry's transformation by hindering disruption – not focusing on absolute emission reduction and keeping internal combustion engines profitable (Pichler et al. 2021), which was represented by the relatively long profitability of conventional cars and the manageable CO2 emission penalty that certainly influenced our innovation approach as well.

4. Review function 3: Marketing

a. Marketing as a driver of innovation

A change of strategic direction and the development of an innovative fleet could only be successful through a supportive marketing approach. In fact, the function of marketing does not only have to be in sync with all other functions of the business but can be considered the responsible actor for accelerating innovation by driving businesses to rethink their current approaches through competition and focus on customer satisfaction (McCarthy 1993). Independent of a company's specific strategy, marketing can best be described as a function responsible for managing connections between the customer and the business itself, its implementation being the obligation of every other function and its success an important contributor to the financial performance (Moorman and Rust 1999). To achieve that, a proper marketing strategy needs to be adapted, most commonly described through the marketing mix

of the 4 Ps (product, place promotion, and price) that is then applied to the target market (McCarthy 1993).

In the following, insights into selected elements of Car Cavelos' marketing approach will be provided. Due to limitations within the simulation, not all components will be discussed, whilst some may not be exhaustive.

b. Insights into Car Cavelos' marketing strategy

i. Product decisions

In the case of the simulation, the product variable of the marketing mix meant determining if launching a vehicle line was appropriate and when to do so. Specific decisions were made in close collaboration with the insights of the innovation director by deciding about product features and specific cars – based on the market preferences and different car's performance on the market.

For instance, based on our values and company strategy to offer “cars for everyone”, we had certain car types set to be our flagships (i.e. the Compact and Executive models), which features and specifications were then chosen based on the market research available within the simulation. On top of being in line with market preferences, our idea was to first develop hybrid models to meet the needs in functionality and reliability of the virtual market that aligned with our company values (given that electric vehicles were initially only available in short ranges). That means the goal was to launch well-developed EVs, instead of launching them as quickly as possible.

ii. The non-performance of products: A marketing issue?

Despite us being very rigid with our strategy and product portfolio, the non-performance of our mainly hybrid fleet in years two and three made us question the choices we made in terms of products. Since gasoline cars still had not ceased to make profits and electronic cars were clearly on the rise, an extension back to gasoline cars or other models was discussed. This is just one

example of how closely the three functions of strategy, innovation, and marketing are connected and how a decision in one aspect affects both of the other functions. Both strategically and from the innovation perspective, this idea did not make much sense and was, therefore, discarded. From a research point of view, extending the product portfolio can be an effective marketing strategy to meet customer needs, although it is important to pay attention to not lose market focus. Specifically in the automotive industry, this is also only true if innovativeness is considered as well (Kirca et al. 2020), a criterion that gasoline cars would have most certainly not met.

Changing customer preferences in the first few quarters of the simulation towards electrification should have brought our attention earlier to the type of cars that would most likely perform well. However, our realization set in too late, resulting in steep losses over years three and four. On our way to recovering from those years, we ended up building a fully electric fleet, offering our flagships in both simple as well as sophisticated options and completing our product portfolio with electric cars closely aligned with market preference (Appendix 3).

iii. The pricing of our fleet

Affordability being one of Car Cavelos' strategic pillars, we carefully paid attention to settle our pricing mid-range. We had specifically decided to not be the most cost-efficient company on the market and refrained from any luxury segments. Instead, we were aiming for a classic middle-class car that should be known for affordability and reliability. Realistically, it proved to be difficult to be persistent in this part of the simulation. Wanting to maximize our margins and trying to drive our sales, the performance issues of our hybrid fleet meant also trying to lower prices and increase promotion on models to achieve better sales numbers. This reaction, however, did not take into account that sometimes the market for a car is simply not there and an adaptation in pricing will not change that. Specifically in the financially more challenging years of the simulation, it was almost tempting to be reactive and easily influenced. Reports

show that, indeed, the pricing of electric vehicles is more important than the environmental concern, which is represented in their top reasons for choice: the lower cost of ownership as well as getting a good deal (Deloitte 2023b).

iv. How do we choose the correct promotion?

Selecting marketing strategies and spending levels, and choosing specific campaigns are part of the promotion choices. Interestingly, relevant for the purchasing decision for electric vehicles is the service element with considerable importance (Cherubini, Iasevoli, and Michelini 2015). This is a factor Car Cavelos aimed to include when setting our promotion strategy. Despite the information being rather limited in the simulation as to what exactly each promotion strategy entailed, we tended to opt for the customer promotion/POS and the training and service category. The latter became particularly relevant once we started to launch EVs.

When purchasing an electric vehicle the physical interaction (for instance a test drive) as well as having the option to gain support after the purchase in the form of service support are some of the most important aspects for customers of the purchasing experience (Deloitte 2023b). It can be assumed that prejudices and misconceptions that still surround electric vehicles and the perception that adequate information that is publicly available continues to be scarce offer an explanation (Zaunbrecher, Beul-Leusmann, and Ziefle 2015).

However, we needed to understand that marketing costs can easily become very high without achieving the intended effect. The graphics in Appendix 4 perfectly illustrate the difference between the sales numbers and marketing expenses of a well-performing and a non-performing car: Ideally, marketing costs should be lowered over time, whilst sales remain stable as opposed to steep declines in sales without continuous marketing. In the end, high expenses in marketing through promotion and a lower price cannot make a car meet customer preferences but only reduces its margin on the already low sales numbers.

5. Conclusion

“The Global Automanufacturing Simulation” represented an opportunity to develop a better understanding of the complexities and challenges of transforming an international car manufacturer by managing our virtual company “Car Cavelos” for six consecutive years. Understanding that no business area can make standalone decisions and that there is no such thing as “the most important function” was one of the key learnings the simulation provided. It was not only the general strategic direction that our team needed to jointly agree on but the fact that many decisions affected other functions and implications that needed to be considered in different areas of the business that continuously emphasized the importance of communication and keeping each other in the loop.

Interestingly, CO2 emission restrictions were a factor, but not central to our decision-making, despite the penalties and bonuses. What drove our quarterly decisions were the competitiveness and financial performance in terms of profits and sales – always measured against the strategic direction we had set for ourselves. Ultimately, this shows that policies are only a guiding factor for industrial change and that a fundamental transformation of an incumbent company is multilayered and governed by competitiveness and key performance indicators as much as in any other company. Pichler et al. add an interesting explanation to this behavior, showing that the EU policies, specifically in the automotive industry, are set to boost economic growth and competitiveness, which is why they are somewhat conserving unsustainable structures and refrain from pushing innovative disruption (2021).

Knowing that environmental consciousness is ultimately not the reason for most consumers to adopt a more sustainable product (Zaunbrecher, Beul-Leusmann, and Ziefle 2015), it becomes clear that the fundamental transformation of an industry is very much based on well-thought-out communication, the provision of necessary support services and the realization that

misconceptions need to be actively removed – paired with a radical approach that paints a clear picture of the positioning of a company.

III. Personal Reflection: An opportunity for learning

1. Introduction

The Business in Practice simulation represented three weeks of intense teamwork, academic learning, and challenges – individually and as a team. Closely working together in a cross-cultural team and navigating through an exercise that none of us had experienced before provides excellent conditions for conflict and personal challenges.

The following chapters will focus on my personal development during the business simulation. The experiences I had working together with six other people, taking on management positions, and navigating a virtual car manufacturer through a major transformation required me to reflect on my behavior and interactions, feelings, and expectations. I will reflect on two incidents that I identified as lightbulb moments: Situations that helped me understand better who I am and who I aspire to be in a professional environment.

The first incident focuses on the absence of conflict and the ability to have difficult conversations and address behavior that I feel is not fair within a team. The second incident discusses the perceived importance of how I am seen by others and how possible judgment occasionally hinders me from showing my true personality traits. I will also touch upon placing (unrealistic) expectations on my peers and the issue of comparison, as well as the importance of team conflict. A reflection and analysis will draw conclusions and learnings from the experiences of personal behavior that I plan to focus on in the future.

2. Incident 1

a. The setting

In a team of 7 people who are strangers to each other, it is almost inevitable to encounter difficult

situations, conflict, or stumble across some other member's personality traits. Before the start of the program, my team and I met virtually for the first time to have a few initial discussions and explore some parts of the simulation. I was quite happy with my team and felt like it could become a good constellation for the work ahead of us. Having said this, my first impression of some team members was a bit vague, since two of them had not shared much during our initial call and were generally quite reserved. Knowing that a first, specifically virtual, meeting does not always paint the right picture, I did not think much of it and expected these members to open up and be more proactive once we got to know each other in person. For one of the team members, this assumption was true and my first impression was purely due to a generally calmer and less extroverted personality – which did not influence the quality of work and preparation. For the other team member, however, it was not true.

b. The incident

The mentioned team member was one of our two finance directors. From the beginning, it seemed like the program was not one of the member's main priorities. The assumed disinterest showed in mostly “non-actions”: not actively taking part in discussions, not giving financial perspective and advice, and generally not communicating. It got so far that I sometimes even forgot this member was part of our team and I only ever tried to get financial information from the other finance director, feeling that maybe a lack of expertise was the cause for the non-participation.

c. What happened next?

The ignorance and free rider behavior was not only my perception. In our very first week together, the other finance director approached me and shared that he had been analyzing the financial perspective of the simulation on his own so far and that it was almost impossible to start a discussion or share insights with his counterpart. Despite his description verifying my impression, we agreed to observe the behavior through the first few quarters and then discuss it

within the group, if necessary. What happened instead was, unfortunately, nothing. With the end of the simulation approaching fast, it was a known fact within the group that the second finance director was not showing much interest and would certainly never have an opinion to share. Yet, none of us took the initiative and spoke up or openly communicated this unfair behavior.

d. Personal reflection

i. An issue of personal accountability

When thinking back to these weeks of the simulation, I still wonder why none of us tried to change anything and just “let the member be”. On the one hand, I can admit that I occasionally did not feel like I had the energy to be proactive and did not feel personally responsible. Having a second finance director I could turn to made me feel like I was less affected and, therefore, did not place much priority on changing the situation. Having said this, I am well aware of how wrong this perspective is: Typically, successful teams retain certain behaviors that are relevant for effective work. For example, individual success is contingent upon the success of the other group members. This is called positive interdependence (Johnson, Heimann, and O’Neill 2000). This fact alone shows that any member’s performance should have the same priority and influences the entire work as a team, even if it felt like a situation that could be neglected as two people were filling the position. Additionally, it is essential within a team to hold each other accountable for doing the assigned job and, consequently, learn from one another. This is strongly connected to the concept of “promotive interaction”: a cooperative and collaborative form of enhancing each other’s work and development, which is achieved through sharing thoughts and continuous and open communication (Johnson, Heimann, and O’Neill 2000). Judging my inaction from this perspective, I can see how each of us had the same responsibility in making sure we were working together effectively, which included addressing issues like the one described.

When reflecting on the reasons for what happened in our team, I am, therefore, well aware that

I cannot blame any other member of our group more than I can blame myself – and not having the second finance position did not make me less responsible for making sure the team dynamics were right.

ii. The avoidance of conflict

In addition to that, I have to admit to myself that I was simply avoiding a difficult conversation and, possibly, a team conflict. Waiting for the situation to get worse (but then failing to do something about it) was seemingly the easier way to go. However, letting frustrations accumulate and waiting to address misbehavior is not the best approach as negative impressions about someone's behavior will make it more difficult to reverse those judgments (Toegel and Barsoux 2016) and is, consequently, only easier at first glance. Silence is often considered the safer reaction, and not surprisingly frequently chosen by individuals, rather than speaking up and sharing viewpoints and thoughts (Workman-Stark 2022).

In this case, I strongly felt like I wanted to conserve the generally positive team dynamic, by not addressing a behavior I was in reality not agreeing with. I enjoyed the calmness and fun environment we had in comparison to many other groups and had found myself wondering if I wanted to give that up “just because” one person was practically invisible. Having said this, I do accept conflict as an essential part of any successful team. According to Joosr, the impression of having a nicer environment through the avoidance of necessary team conflict can greatly hurt productivity. Conflict tends to be associated with personal attacks, even though healthy conflict does not mean destructive arguments or insulting each other's personalities, but rather the ability to challenge each other's ideas and principles (2015). Whilst it is difficult to judge at this point in time, an open and respectful discussion would likely have improved our teamwork, specifically since it affected the very complex role of the finance director.

iii. Does my personality type affect my behavior?

When analyzing my personality type, which is the “fiery red”, I noticed that one of the fears of

this type is the fear of losing control. Being quite aligned with the typical characteristics of having a competitive, outspoken, and straightforward “getting things done” approach, I had questioned myself as to why I was such avoidant of confrontation at times like in the described matter, despite my rather extroverted and action-oriented traits (The Insights Group 2009). I now realize that in essence, a conflict always presents a possibility for team dynamics to shift radically, and for the general mood in the team that I valued so much to fundamentally change: to get out of control, which is why I unconsciously dreaded the conversation we needed to have. This ties back to the earlier mentioned viewpoint of the avoidance of conflict being seen as the “safer option”; in my particular case, it meant being able to have control over the team dynamics and not risking an irreversible argument.

e. Learnings for the future

Upon analyzing the incident and reflecting on my thoughts and behaviors I can conclude that I will certainly have to accept unpleasant conversations and the possibility of team dynamics to temporarily shift, in order to enhance the entire team’s performance and productivity. In fact, a conflict within a team can lead to a better and more productive work environment that leads to better outcomes (Toegel and Barsoux 2016). I could even go so far as to understand that addressing situations like the one described, means being in control of how and when the conversation happens and being somewhat able to actively navigate it. De-prioritizing one member should never be the fallback option. Instead, open and honest conversations and addressing such issues promptly. I believe that by better understanding my personality type, I will be able to acknowledge behavior that hinders rather than improves collaboration and find strategies to change that in the future. And finally, being a fully participating team member does not only mean my contributions in terms of doing my share of work but also includes actively improving the relationships with one another that will have a positive effect on the entire team (West 2012).

3. Incident 2

a. The setting

During the business in practice program, the simulation and hands-on teamwork were accompanied by academic sessions and business skills workshops to accelerate our learning and contribute to the experience. Two of the business skills sessions were held in the sales context, one of them specifically regarding the sales process, and the other one regarding client retention. Both of them included a role play, which results would have a direct influence on our simulation performance. The idea of the role plays was to put into practice what we had learned in the theoretical session. For each role play, the entire team would prepare the approach and strategy, but only three team members would do the role play, no one was allowed to do both, and one person would perform the pitch itself (or being the leader of the conversation for client retention, respectively). Having worked in Sales and Business Development for almost three years prior to my Master's, I was not only familiar with the concepts and strategies that a sales pitch requires but also count communication as one of my strong suits. The first sales pitch, which was acquiring a new customer, fell, therefore, exactly into my expertise.

b. The incident

I knew I would be able to deliver a strong pitch, specifically since the performance would make a relevant contribution to our numbers. When discussing with our team who would volunteer to deliver the pitch, me and two other members mentioned that we would be open to doing it, however, none of us pushed for it. Despite my professional background, I did not share too openly the sales training I had had in the past, nor did I clearly state right away that I would like to take the initiative. During our discussion, I noticed how strong my desire to pitch was; after all, I had liked my job and missed the excitement of sales. I almost had to force myself to tell my team that I really would like to do it, which none of them was unhappy about. We ended up receiving one of the highest scores of all teams and got personal recognition from the professor

afterward.

By the time the second sales pitch was approaching, I could have used the opportunity to offer my teammates support in preparing for the client retention conversation, since relationship management and being the key contact person for partners was part of my previous job as well. Trust in our team was high and, once again, the result of the role play had an impact on our (at this time very bad) numbers.

Yet, once again I could not bring myself to speak up and share my professional experience. At no moment did I doubt my sales skills, but rather questioned if my teammates even wanted to listen to one of their members lecture them on the task we were about to perform. Not only did I not speak up and confidently share tips and tricks that I had picked up along the way, but we ended up receiving one of the lowest scores in the role play, just good enough to not lose money.

c. Personal reflection

i. Initial reaction and thoughts

My first reaction was to blame it on the members of my team and their preparation, thinking that their calmer personalities were simply incapable of having a difficult client-facing conversation. This thought, however, is unfair to the time they spent preparing for the conversation and carries a certain degree of toxicity since it does not allow for mistakes or failure. My second feeling was how unrealistic the role play was set up to be and that it was not their fault for how badly we performed. Instead, the reason is probably that it simply did not go well and that other teams handled the role play better than we did. It is certainly not the fault of an individual team member, nor the performance of the former students who led the role play – but it is also not my failure of not stepping forward and supporting the way I could have.

Upon reflecting on these thoughts and the feelings I had during that time, I noticed two important character traits of mine that heavily influenced the way I was thinking, judging, and behaving.

ii. The expectations I place on myself

Firstly, I tend to place very high expectations on myself. I am quite unaccepting of personal failure and underperformance, always thinking that I could do better. Moreover, because I commonly have very high expectations of myself, I carry these over to the expectations I have of other people. That means I do believe everyone else to have the same aspirations that I do, and am quite intolerant of missteps and multiple individual definitions of success. This is particularly critical regarding team performance since a diversity of abilities, viewpoints, and strengths make up high-performing teams and emphasizes balanced assessments and approaches (Haas and Mortensen 2016). By expecting everyone else to have the same priorities, the same strengths, and similar viewpoints as I do, I am not only hindering healthy discussion but also the potential of being part of a high-performing team. It is certainly fair to be disappointed by a result, but blaming my team members, the role-play, or even myself will not have any value in the future.

iii. The importance of the judgment of others – a woman's issue?

Secondly, I had to realize that the opinion other people have about me plays a more important role than I would like it to. The fact that, despite my knowledge, years of work experience, and success in the first sales pitch, I refused to share insights with my team members simply because I did not want to be perceived as arrogant or too confident is a perfect example of letting my fear of not being liked influence my action. Dreading to be labeled as a “know it all” who thinks she is better than anyone else was bigger than the reality of sales having been the job I got promoted in twice before. However, specialized knowledge that is not being shared cannot provide any value to the team, and is, consequently, not existing (Haas and Mortensen 2016). The idea of teamwork is essentially to create a space of collaboration, so that it can be taken advantage of the joint knowledge and talents of its members and, consequently, goals can be reached that would otherwise not be possible. That means participation also includes sharing knowledge and ideas openly, so that room for discussion is being made and assignments can be completed

effectively (West 2012).

Why is it then, that my confidence is too low to step forward and own the abilities that I have? Carlin et al. argue the existence of a so-called confidence gap between men and women, which is rather the norm than an exception (2018). It has been proven that women possess significantly lower confidence than men – which is not only a Western phenomenon but can be observed in cultures all around the world (Bleidorn et al. 2016). One explanation is the fact that women tend to believe that they are being looked down on for any type of self-promotion (Huston 2016).

Whilst I cannot speak for other women, I can certainly confirm these ideas from my perspective: I have more than once noticed the differences in confidence and self-promotion between myself and my male counterparts and how much more people's judgments mattered to me. When looking at the peer evaluation I received in comparison to my self-assessment, this provides clear proof of the mentioned tendencies: In four out of five categories, I have evaluated myself lower than my peers have (Appendix 5). In line with the facts mentioned prior, the biggest difference appears to be in the category of keeping the team on track. Whilst I thought I did not do that too greatly (evaluation of 2), my team thought I did (evaluation of almost 4.5). Similarly, I did not feel like I had too much relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities (2.5), whilst my team gave me a 3.5 for. This is clearly a hindering personality trait that influences my experiences by placing too much importance on the idea of being looked down on, but also on my performance.

d. Learnings for the future

I can draw several learnings about myself and my behavior from these reflections. Going forward, I will have to better differentiate between the expectations I place on myself and the expectations that other people may have. My viewpoint and priorities do not automatically equal those of potential team members. Clear communication will help manage these expectations and will perhaps even provide further benefits by gaining a more realistic perspective from my team member's point of view.

It will, furthermore, continue to be a relevant issue for me to acknowledge how I deal with possible judgments, the way I am perceived, and if I want to let my self-esteem be influenced by my likeability. Learning that sharing ideas and knowledge is essential to be able to utilize the team's full potential has certainly helped shift my understanding of that matter. Whilst it is important to reflect on one's actions and be conscious about the way one is communicating, the fear of being judged or labeled should not be the deciding factor in that matter.

4. Conclusion

Working closely and intensively together with 6 other students, whom I hadn't met before, provided not only perfect conditions for things to go wrong but also a great opportunity for learning and reflecting on my behavior and way of thinking. Knowing my weaknesses in terms of soft skills within a team helped me analyze my behavior, but it certainly did not take away the difficult moments of questioning myself, doubting my abilities, and occasionally being unfair toward other team members.

The incidents described were two of many situations that helped me understand my natural tendencies and hindering characteristics that kept me thinking even weeks after the simulation had concluded. After all, these incidents brought out character traits that I had encountered several times before but never managed to recognize their influences like I have now. They helped me understand the reasons why I did (or did not) have the discussion, spoke up, or trusted in my abilities – and put my thought processes into a different perspective. And finally, they helped me learn what it truly means to work in a well-functioning and effective team.

As West describes it: “The whole basis of teamwork is communication, coordination, cooperation and transfer of information in the richest possible form” (2012, 124).

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V. Appendices

Appendix 1

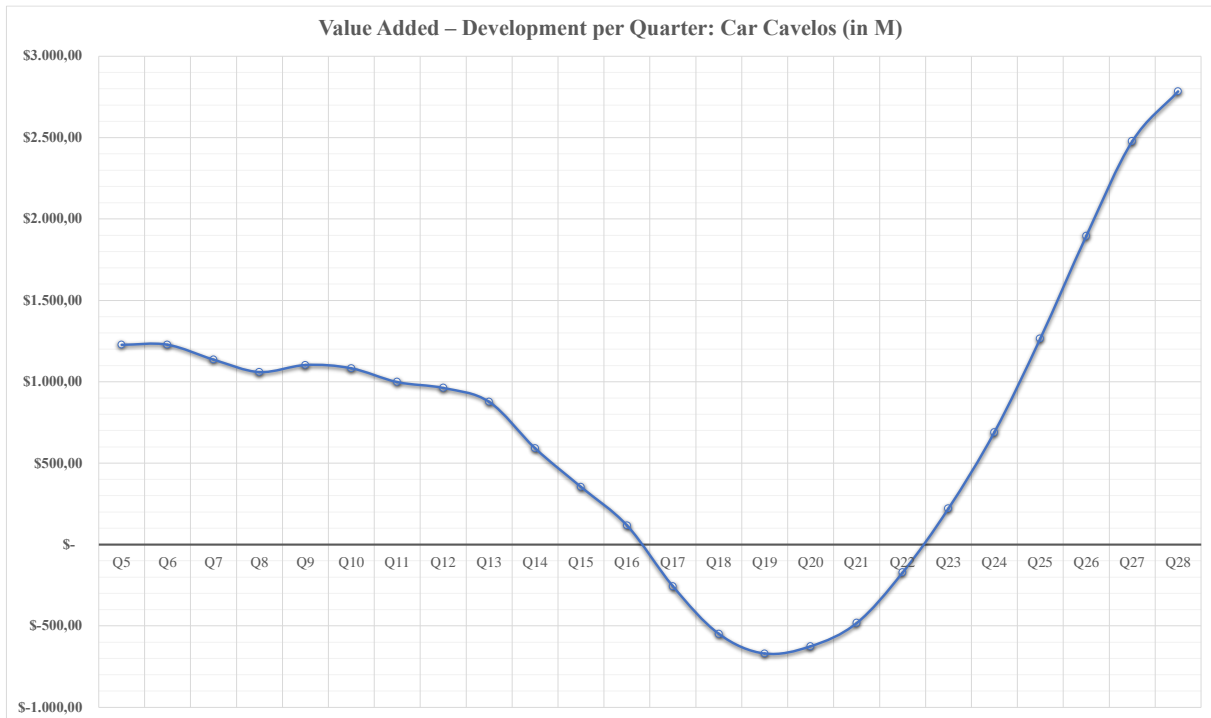


Figure 1: Development of Value Added through six consecutive years. Steep decline and recovery through the implementation of first hybrid cars (not successful), and later electric cars (successful).

Appendix 2

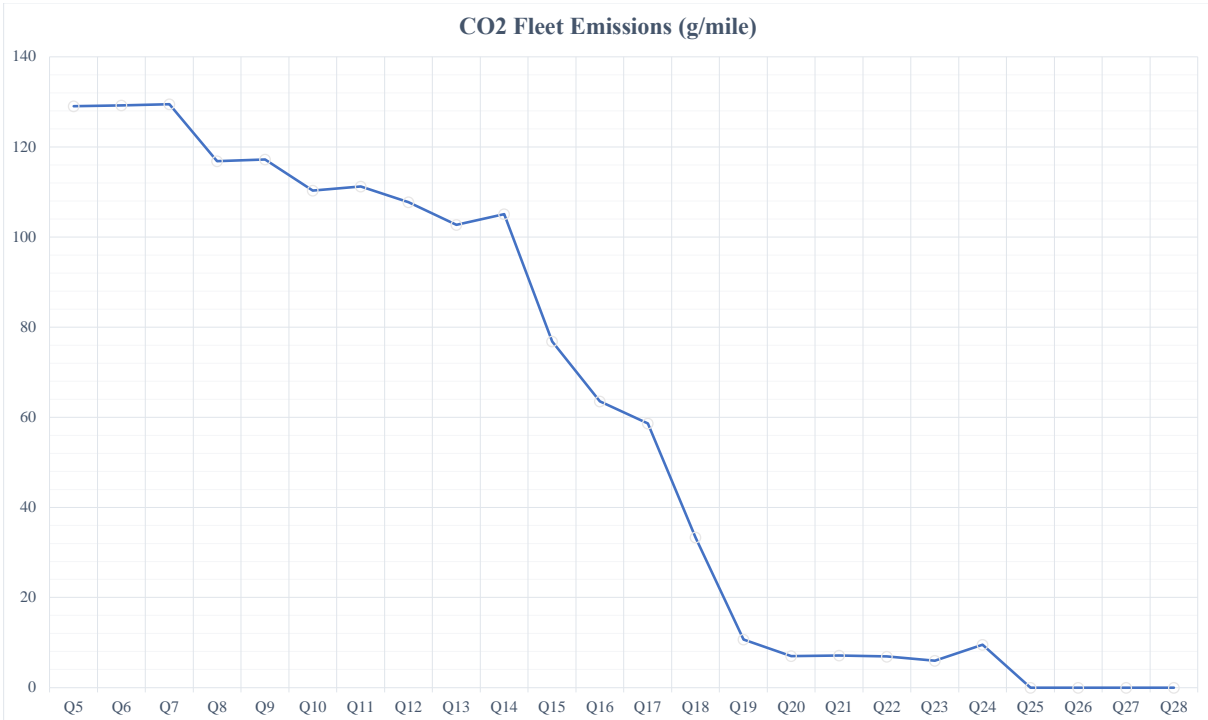


Figure 2: Continuous decline of CO2 emissions through the simulation, particularly with the introduction of electronic vehicles.

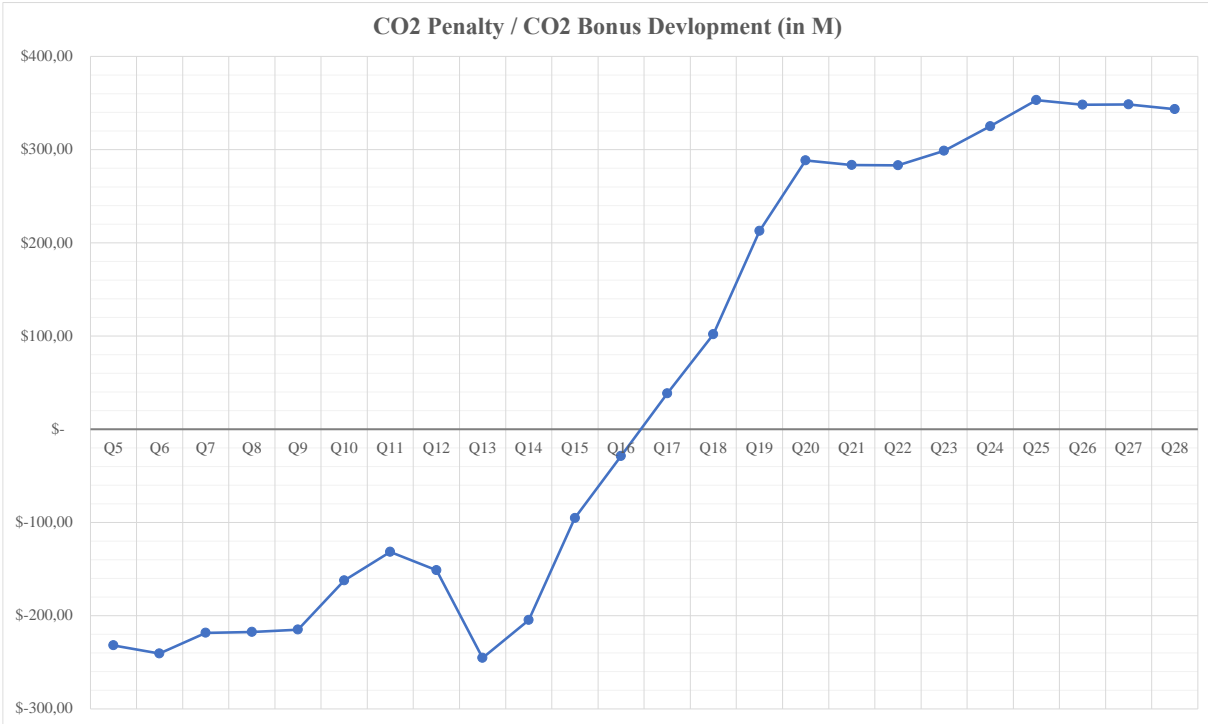


Figure 3: Development of CO2 penalty and bonus, in line with the reduction of our CO2 emissions.

Appendix 3

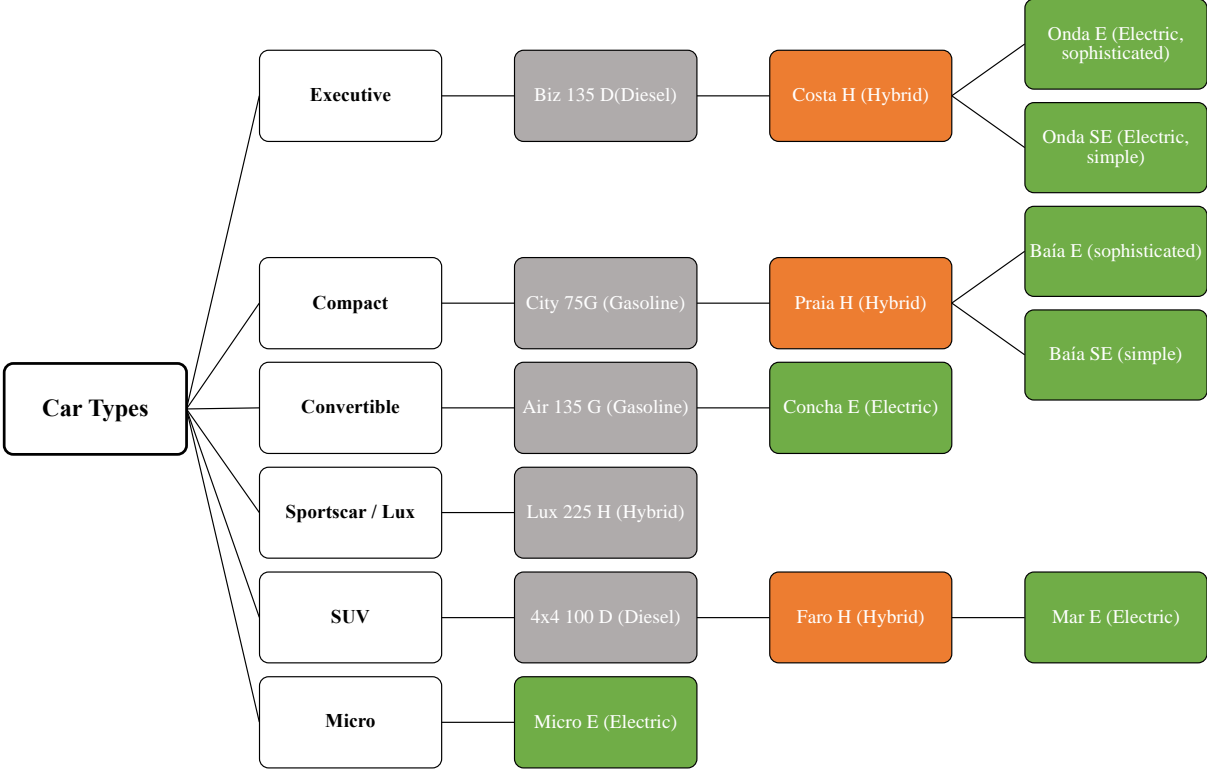


Figure 4: The development of Car Cavelos' product portfolio. Early and complete discontinuation of Diesel and Gasoline cars. Development of Hybrid (orange) and later electric vehicles (green); the latter of which remain successful and represent Car Cavelos' entire fleet. The flagship classes Executive and Compact are available in both a sophisticated and more simple option in terms of feature development.

Appendix 4

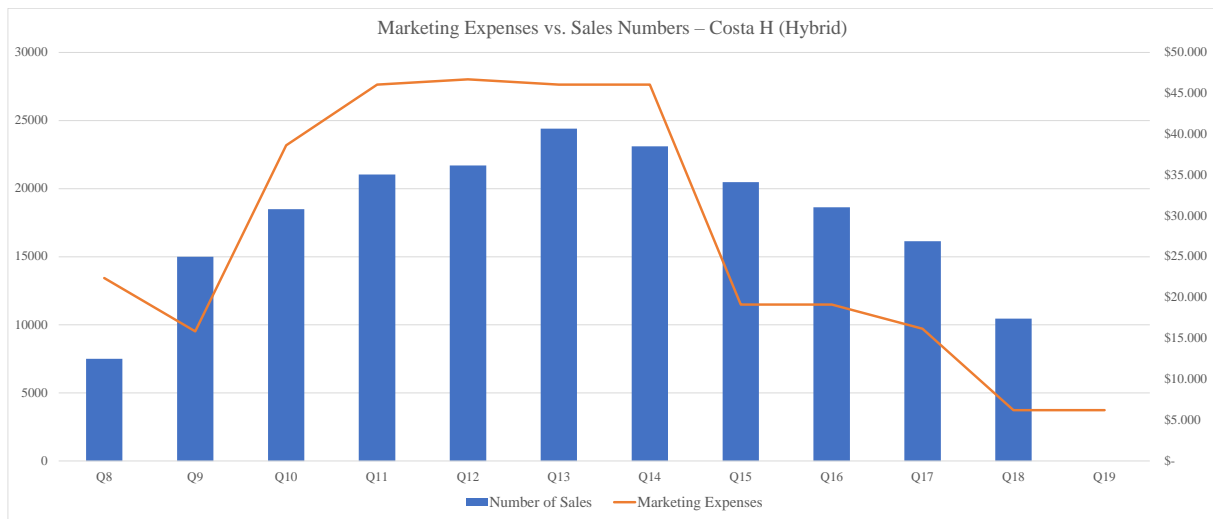


Figure 5: Failure of hybrid, represented through Costa H (Executive Hybrid). Very volatile sales number and reactive to marketing pricing. Decline in marketing expenses equals decline in sales, or even no sales despite marketing expenses (Q19).

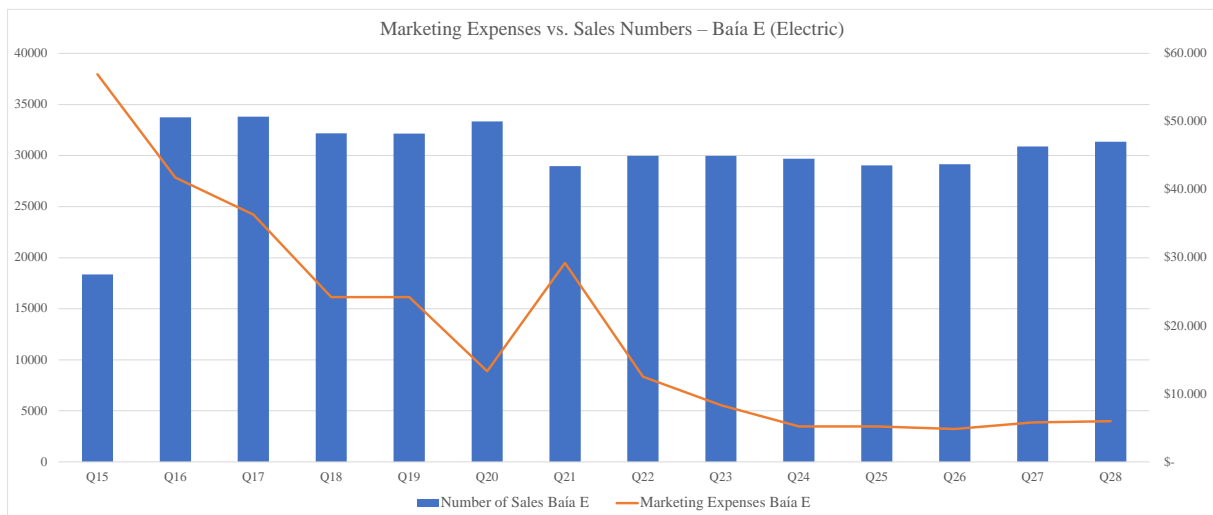


Figure 6: Successful case of electric vehicle launch. Product is accepted in the market after initially high marketing expenses. A decline in marketing expenses does not highly influence its sales, which positively influences the car's margin.

Appendix 5

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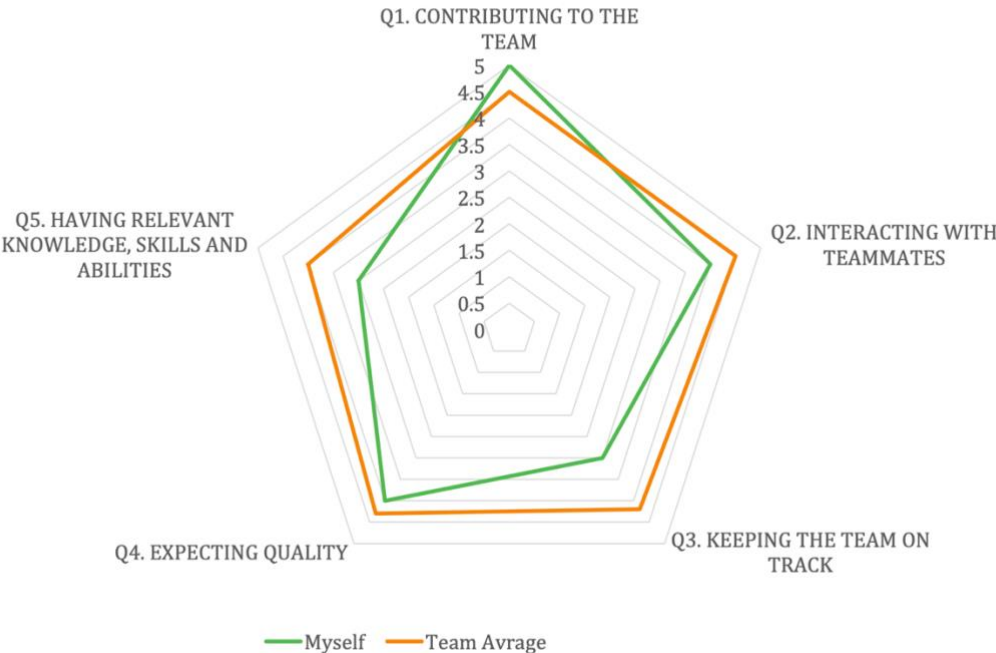


Figure 7: Peer evaluation vs. self-evaluation.