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## Client Success Story

# TURNING NUMBERS INTO NARRATIVES

How a Chartered Accountant Built  
a Compelling MBA Application



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# INTRODUCTION

This case study follows a Chartered Accountant with a strong professional background entering the MBA application process.

On paper, his profile was competitive, with solid experience and strong analytical skills. However, his application lacked clarity around motivation and direction.

His resume focused on responsibilities rather than impact, and his essays described experiences without reflection or depth. While competent, the application did not fully convey his personality or potential.

Our work focused on helping him reflect on his journey, uncover meaningful stories, and build a consistent, cohesive narrative across the application.



## TAKEAWAY

“Strong candidates are often rejected not because of weak profiles but because their experiences that are presented without a coherent narrative. The MBA application process requires transforming achievements into a story that explains motivation, growth, and future ambition.”

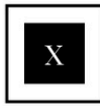


# CANDIDATE BACKGROUND

The candidate began his academic journey with a Bachelor of Commerce before pursuing the Chartered Accountancy qualification. Completing the CA required years of disciplined preparation, technical rigor, and consistent performance.

- **Professional Identity:** Chartered Accountant with early exposure to high-stakes financial and business environments.
- **Work Experience:** ~3 years across a Big 4 firm in audit.
- **Academic Background:** Commerce graduate from a Tier-2 institution with a minor academic inconsistency
- **Test Score:** GMAT 635
- **Career Stage:** Early-career professional transitioning from execution-focused roles toward strategic responsibilities
- **Target Schools & Geography:** Primarily European MBA programs across R1 and R2
- **Pre-MBA Positioning Challenge:** Strong technical foundation but unclear career direction across consulting, impact, and strategy





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# STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

At the beginning of the engagement, several factors created uncertainty around the overall application strategy.

## Application Timing and GMAT Dilemma

The biggest early challenge was deciding whether to apply immediately or retake the GMAT.

With a score of 635, he was below the average for several target schools. This created two options: delay and retake the exam, or apply with the current score and strengthen the rest of the application.

After evaluating timelines and overall profile strength, we chose to move forward with the existing score and focus on essays, resume, and narrative. Due to time constraints, the GMAT retake was eventually dropped.





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## Additional Profile Concerns

Beyond the GMAT score, several other concerns needed to be addressed:

- undergraduate institution with limited international recognition
- one academic backlog during undergraduate studies
- a short career gap that required explanation
- evolving career goals that needed clearer articulation

At the beginning of the process, the key challenge was therefore not simply fixing weaknesses but positioning the profile confidently.

## TAKEAWAY

"Admissions challenges rarely exist in isolation. They require a strategic approach that balances timing, narrative strength, and profile positioning."





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# STRATEGIC SCHOOL SELECTION

Once we clarified the key profile challenges, the next step involved building a structured school selection strategy.

## MOVING BEYOND RANKINGS

Initially, the candidate evaluated schools largely based on rankings and general reputation. Our goal was to move toward a more strategic approach that considered several factors:

- program culture
- teaching style and curriculum
- career outcomes
- compatibility with the candidate's professional background





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## ALIGNING WITH PROGRAM CULTURE

We also focused on identifying programs that valued:

- diverse professional backgrounds
- analytical thinking
- reflective leadership development

This approach allowed the candidate to apply strategically rather than relying solely on rankings.

## BUILDING THE SCHOOL PORTFOLIO

We categorized schools into three groups:

### Ambitious Schools

Programs where admission would be highly competitive but still possible with strong narrative positioning.

### Moderate Schools

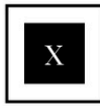
Programs where his profile aligned reasonably well with the class profile.

### Safer Schools

Programs where his professional background and narrative would likely be viewed favorably.

## TAKEAWAY

“Successful school selection requires alignment between the candidate’s story and the program’s culture rather than simply targeting the highest ranked institutions.”



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# STORY MINING AND NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT

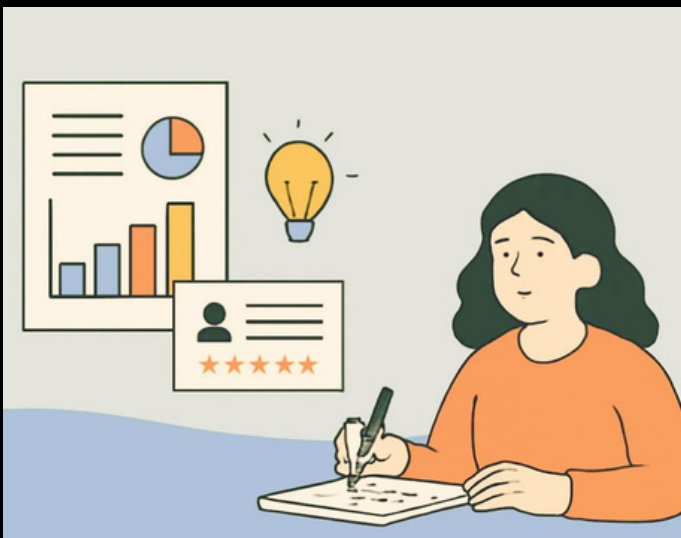
Before drafting essays or refining the resume, we focused on uncovering the deeper stories behind the candidate's experiences.

## The Initial Problem

During the first review, many examples were presented as brief factual summaries. These examples described what happened but did not reveal:

- the decisions involved
- the challenges faced
- the lessons learned

As a result, the narrative lacked emotional depth and personal reflection.





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## **Structured Story Discovery**

To address this, we conducted structured reflection discussions across several areas:

### **Professional Experiences**

Moments where he took ownership of decisions or responsibilities.

### **Leadership Situations**

Instances where he influenced colleagues or contributed to team outcomes.

### **Challenges and Setbacks**

Situations that tested his resilience or required adaptation.

### **Personal Experiences**

Events outside work that shaped his values or perspective.

## **External Feedback**

An important part of this process involved gathering feedback from colleagues, mentors, and friends.

They consistently described him as:

- dependable
- analytical
- thoughtful in decision making
- empathetic toward colleagues

These observations helped identify themes that eventually shaped the leadership narrative in the application.

## **TAKEAWAY**

“Strong stories emerge through reflection and feedback. The goal is not simply to describe experiences but to understand the motivations and lessons behind them.”



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# ESSAY DEVELOPMENT

Once the narrative themes were established, the next step involved translating those insights into application materials.

The essay development process unfolded in several stages.

## STAGE 1: STORY SELECTION

We first identified experiences that best illustrated:

- leadership potential
- professional growth
- motivation for pursuing an MBA

## STAGE 2: FIRST DRAFTS

Early drafts included several different stories. While individually meaningful, the overall narrative felt scattered.

## STAGE 3: NARRATIVE REFINEMENT

Through multiple rounds of revision, we narrowed the focus to a smaller set of experiences that clearly reflected his journey.

Each essay was then refined to emphasize:

- context of the experience
- decisions taken
- lessons learned
- connection to future goals

# RESUME TRANSFORMATION

The resume required a similar transformation.  
Earlier versions focused heavily on responsibilities rather than outcomes.

We restructured each bullet point to highlight:

- actions taken
- problems addressed
- measurable impact
- collaboration or leadership moments

By the final iteration, the resume communicated professional ownership rather than simply listing tasks.

## TAKEAWAY

“Strong application materials prioritize clarity and reflection. A focused narrative is far more effective than attempting to include every possible achievement.”



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# RECOMMENDATION STRATEGY

We identified individuals who had observed the candidate's professional development closely.

## Choosing the Recommenders

One recommender had supervised him earlier in his career and could describe his analytical ability and work ethic.

Another recommender had worked with him more recently and could highlight his collaboration skills and leadership growth.

## Aligning the Narrative

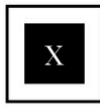
We encouraged the candidate to discuss his MBA goals with both recommenders so they understood the broader narrative of the application.

This helped ensure that the recommendation letters reinforced the same themes while providing independent perspectives.

## TAKEAWAY



"Recommendation letters are most effective when they validate the candidate's narrative through concrete examples of impact and leadership."



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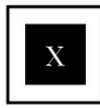
# INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Interview preparation involved several mock sessions designed to refine both the content and delivery of responses.

## IDENTIFYING EARLY GAPS

During the first few sessions, we noticed that his responses focused heavily on technical details. While this demonstrated expertise, it sometimes obscured the broader significance of his experiences.





## STRUCTURING STRONG RESPONSES

We therefore worked on structuring responses around a clear framework:

- context of the situation
- actions taken
- results achieved
- lessons learned

## PRESENTATION BASED INTERVIEW

For one of the interviews requiring a short presentation, the candidate chose to discuss a childhood experience of bullying and how it shaped his empathy toward others.

The presentation was refined to highlight reflection and authenticity while keeping the visual elements simple.

By the final stage of preparation, he was able to discuss his experiences naturally and confidently.

### TAKEAWAY

“Interview preparation is most effective when candidates develop clarity about their own story rather than memorizing rehearsed answers.”



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# APPLICATION TRANSFORMATION

Over the course of the engagement, the most significant change occurred in how the candidate understood his own journey.

Initially, his application materials presented isolated achievements. Through reflection and narrative development, those experiences gradually formed a coherent story.

The final application reflected this transformation:

- the resume highlighted measurable impact
- the essays explained motivations and growth
- the recommendations reinforced the same themes
- interview responses communicated the narrative clearly

Together, these elements created a consistent and credible application.

## TAKEAWAY

“The strongest MBA applications are those where every component communicates the same underlying story.”



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# OUTCOME

The final application presented both professional capability and thoughtful self reflection.

The candidate approached interviews with greater clarity about his goals and the experiences that shaped them.

He ultimately secured admission to **HEC Paris**.

Beyond the admission outcome, the most valuable result was the clarity he developed about his professional identity and long term aspirations.

## TAKEAWAY

“Securing an admit was not straightforward given the profile constraints, including a 635 GMAT and an academic backlog. It required deliberate strategy, early application timing, and multiple iterations across stories and positioning. Applying in Round 1 and focusing on narrative clarity played a critical role in strengthening the overall application. This outcome reflects the impact of structured effort and thoughtful storytelling.”