MGP 295-1: Teams and Technology  
Spring 2006  
Graduate School of Management  
University of California, Davis  

Professor Beth Bechky  
AOB IV rm. 147  
Phone: 752-0911  
E-mail: babechky@ucdavis.edu  
Office hours: Tuesday 3-5 pm  

Course Objectives  

MGP 295-1 is a course on the theory and practice of managing groups and teams. It has three primary goals. The first goal is to provide conceptual guidelines for analyzing and diagnosing group dynamics and determining one’s strategic options as a manager. The second goal is to understand how technological change affects team processes in organizations. Finally, this course will impart practical interpersonal skills for implementing effective strategies for group situations. The course is intended for students who seek greater understanding of teams and who wish to increase their competence in managing and working effectively in these contexts.  

Although effective managers have always relied on influence and consensus building, management theory has often portrayed the executive as a solitary planner, removed from the fray, whose directions are automatically followed by subordinates. Management education has therefore emphasized topics such as individual decision-making. Although a competence in these topics remains essential, contemporary organizations increasingly put managers in roles that require a different set of competencies. Managers increasingly find themselves working in and with groups, teams, and networks, sometimes without a clear chain of command or a stable leader. In these more fluid and dynamic management roles, effective performance requires frameworks for analyzing collaborative (as opposed to individual) decision making and facilitating successful informal relationships (as opposed to formal organizational structures).  

The primary goal of MGP 295-1 is to provide a model of managing groups and teams that complements more traditional models of management. To this end, we will be developing frameworks for analyzing groups’ goals and options. This involves determining how to choose group members, how to structure decision-making teams, and how to manage the conflict that sometimes arises in group contexts.  

A second goal of MGP 295-1 entails understanding the effects of technology on teamwork and managing teams. In the past several years, new communication
technologies have enabled new forms of working and organizing – virtual worlds that seem significantly different from traditional forms of doing business. However, at the core of these new forms are the people who use the technologies and the contexts in which they are using them. We will explore how teams, and their members, are influenced and constrained by such new technologies.

Finally, the approach of the course is based on the belief that a conceptual understanding of optimal management strategies is of little use without the behavioral skills required to implement these strategies. To this end, I have designed MGP 295-1 with an emphasis on cases and exercises that afford the opportunity to apply the concepts concretely. You will analyze cases that illustrate dynamic social interaction processes that can either facilitate or impede success. Furthermore, you will participate in several in-class exercises that simulate challenging problems, followed by class discussions of how your experiences reflect relevant theoretical constructs. These exercises are designed to provide a forum in which to hone one’s team skills and management abilities.

**Course Format**

The course is designed to provide you with a thorough understanding of the dynamics of team-based work settings and their effects on group performance. As a result, students will be assigned to groups in the second class that will exist throughout the quarter and will provide a context for experiencing and learning about the effects of group membership first hand. Group discussion periods, written assignments, and activities will provide many opportunities for students to discuss, reflect on, and explain their group's functioning. In addition, each group will collaborate on a final group project described below. The primary teaching method in this course is inductive, experiential, and case-based. Relatively little class time will be devoted to standard lectures.

**Required readings:**

- **Course packet:** The course packet will be available through Study.net. (*Abbreviated CP throughout syllabus*)

**Grading:**

- Class participation 25%
- Personal reflection memo 10%
- Group ORTF case analysis 15%
- Virtual Group case analysis 10%
- Final group project/presentation 40%
(1) Class participation (25% of final grade):
Class participation is an essential part of the learning process in this course. You must attend on the first day to be enrolled in the class. Attendance is critical for your learning in this class, particularly on days when exercises are scheduled. If you cannot attend class, make sure to notify me at least 24 hours in advance via e-mail. If you are absent more than two times, you will fail the class. If you anticipate missing more than two classes due to other demands on your time, please do not enroll in the course.

Because individual differences in perspective are a crucial component of the course material, contributing your perspective in this class is necessary, not only for your own learning but also for that of your classmates. However, it is possible to distinguish comments that greatly contribute to a discussion from those that do not. Quality comments possess one or more of the following attributes:
• They offer a unique and relevant perspective on the issue.
• They are timely; they contribute to moving the discussion and analysis forward.
• They are constructive; they build on rather than dismiss previous comments.

Please note that participation in this class is unlike that in any other class you take at the GSM. This is a TEAMS class, which means I expect you to work INTERDEPENDENTLY with your assigned team members! Thus, you will be required to meet frequently as a team outside of class, including face-to-face meetings. If you are not willing or able to work interdependently with your team members outside of class meetings, please do not enroll in the course.

(2) Personal Reflection Memo (10% of final grade)
As an individual, write a memo (no more than three pages) describing (1) your most effective and (2) your most ineffective group experience. This memo should incorporate your own team experiences with theoretical insights from the readings. Therefore the memo should use concepts from the readings to explain on what dimensions you feel the group was effective or ineffective (e.g., performance relative to external standards, group satisfaction, individual growth, or organizational gains). Why was the effective group successful? What could have been done to make the ineffective group more successful?

Due: May 9th

(3) Group ORTF Case Analysis (15% of final grade)
As a group, write a 5-page paper that answers the following questions: Given ORTF's composition and purpose, what should Williams expect at the first meeting of the task force? How should he prepare for that meeting, and how, specifically, should the first meeting be conducted? What, if any, discussion format or procedures should be implemented? Be sure to justify your answers using concepts from this week's readings.

Due: May 16th
(4) Virtual group case analysis: (10% of final grade)
Given the rise of information technology in the workplace, many teams work on a virtual basis some or all of the time. This assignment will provide you with an opportunity to compare and contrast a virtual and a face-to-face group experience. Professor Gerardo Okhuysen at the University of Utah and I will assign you to a virtual group on May 16th that will consist of members of his teams class and members of both of my 295 sections.

Your virtual group will meet to discuss the case, “Will this open space work” (the case can be found in the course pack for the May 16th session). Acting as a consulting team to Fritz, the CEO in the case, you will develop a PowerPoint presentation to answer the following question: “What should the project team decide about the company’s new plans, and how should it implement that decision?”

You will come to class on May 30th prepared to present and discuss your recommendations. Your virtual group is encouraged to use any combination of information technologies you like to complete the assignment: teleconference, e-mail, online chat, or video meeting (Web cameras are available from our Computer Support department).

Due: May 30th

(5) Final group book chapter (25% of final grade)
Together with Professor Okhuysen, our classes will be building a textbook on Wikibooks “A problem-driven manual for managing groups and teams.” Each class group will be responsible for writing a specific chapter in the textbook (group assignments will be given on the second day of class). In the first week of class, we will work to develop a set of practical problems that face groups. Then, your task as a group will be to pick a problem, research the organizational theory that addresses the problem and write a chapter that uses this theory and what you’ve learned in class to suggest practical solutions to the problem. These chapters will be written as a Wiki book, which will also give you experience using a new groupware technology. Be sure to cite appropriately. I am happy to meet with you to discuss your book chapter topics.

The chapter will be evaluated on the following criteria:

Theory/application: How well do you understand and apply the concepts learned in the course and the readings? How well have you integrated material you’ve researched outside of class?

Analysis: How clear and insightful is your analysis of the problem? How well do you integrate theory and practical suggestions to create a coherent and logical argument?

Organization: How clearly written and organized is the chapter? Be sure to check spelling and grammar.

Peer evaluation: How do the other members of your group evaluate your contributions to the group’s performance? Evaluation forms will be distributed the last day of class (this evaluation will be factored into your class participation grade).
**Final Group Presentation** (15% of final grade)
In class, as a group you will give a brief professional presentation of your findings.

**Both Due: June 6th**

**Note!** For all written assignments:
1. I do not accept late papers.
2. Please adhere to all page limits, using 12 point font size and a minimum line spacing of space and a half (and no fiddling with margins, either!). Otherwise the paper will lose half a letter grade.
3. Remember to cite appropriately, even when drawing on the readings I’ve assigned. Otherwise, how will the reader know what reading you are referring to?
4. A good paper:
   - Is clear and effective at getting your point across
   - Directly demonstrates that you have learned something from the class:
     - Specifically refers to course concepts
     - References appropriately
     - Provides specific, detailed evidence to support your points

**Academic Integrity:** All students who take this course are governed by the University of California's standards of ethical conduct for students, in particular, the sections on academic conduct and integrity. These sections set forth the responsibilities of students and faculty to maintain a spirit of academic honesty and integrity at U.C. Davis. It is essential that you are aware of this code of conduct and the disciplinary actions that may be taken in the event of a violation. A copy of the Code of Academic Conduct may be found in your student handbook or at: http://sja.ucdavis.edu/pdf/CAC.pdf. Further details may be obtained from the GSM Associate Dean or the Office of Judicial Affairs.
CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

1st Session: Introduction to teams and team building (Thursday, May 4)

Readings: LL: Introduction and Chapter 1
In Class: Introduction to the course
Handout: E-mail is so five minutes ago

2nd Session: Group Performance and Creativity (Tuesday, May 9)

Readings: CP: HBS CASE: A note for analyzing work groups (Merit Case)
LL: Chapters 2 & 3

In Class: Case discussion: Merit Corporation

How effective is the NPD group at the end of Part IV of the case?
What factors contributed to its effectiveness? How did the effectiveness change at the end of Part V? What might account for these changes?

Cardboard box and INSITE! Creativity Exercise

Handout: Team contract

Due: Personal reflection memo

3rd Session: Creativity and conflict (Thursday, May 11)


LL: Chapters 4, 5, & 6

In class: Debrief of creativity exercise
Case discussion: The team that wasn’t
4th Session: Managing Meetings and Information Sharing (Tuesday, May 16)

Readings: CP: HBS CASE: The Overhead Reduction Task Force (ORTF)
Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman

In class: Case discussion: The Overhead Reduction Task Force
Murder Mystery Exercise

Handout: Words in Sentences instructions

Due: Group ORTF Case analysis

Also in course pack today:

5th Session: Group Design (Thursday, May 18)

LL: Chapters 7 & 8
Words in Sentences Instructions (handed out last week)

In class: Words in Sentences Production Exercise

Handout: Leadership Assessment Questionnaire

6th Session: Leading in the Team Environment (Tuesday, May 23)

LL: Chapters 9 & 10
In class: Tanagram Production Exercise

7th Session: Virtual Teams: Trust and Organizational Issues (Thursday, May 25)


In class: Case discussion: How do you manage an off-site team?

8th Session: Intergroup Relations: Group Loyalty and Organizational Politics (Tuesday, May 30)

Auletta, K. The fall of Lehman Brothers: Part II: The Men, the Money, the Merger.” The New York Times Magazine, February 24, 1985

In class: Discussion of virtual group case analysis
Case discussion: Group conflict at Lehman Brothers

Handout: Qualitative feedback exercise

Due: Virtual group case presentation
9th Session: Building a team-based organization (Thursday, June 1)

Readings: CP: HBS CASE: TRW: The Gainesville Plant

In class: Case discussion: Building a team-based organization: TRW

This case involves the establishment of a team-based plant from the ground up. Five critical design decisions are made regarding (1) top management team composition, (2) task requirements, (3) reward structures, (4) leadership, and (5) training. What are the consequences of these decisions? Given what you now know about designing effective group work, how would you advise Freeman about what to do next?

Qualitative Feedback exercise

Final Session: Wrap-up (Tuesday, June 6)

Readings: NONE!

In class: Group Project Final Presentations

Due: Final group paper