Fundamentals of Governance—Syllabus

B8575, Winter
Thursday, 9:00-12:15
Warren 311

FOR BIDDING PURPOSES ONLY

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Course Description

Topics: The Public Firm, Stewardship, Social Impact and Social Ratings, Gender and Boards, Political Contributions, Blockchain Trading Platforms.

Organizations and firms, and how well they are governed, drive the wealth and happiness of a society. The standard view of corporate governance is to posit that governance seeks to make organizations more efficient. This has been the case for the shareholder model of governance. Yet there is more than just efficiency. Governance is also always about power as much as it is sometimes about efficiency and effective leadership. We will study different forms of governance structures to understand how they function and how well they express power and achieve – sometimes – efficient outcomes. To this, we also join the question of whether the exercise of power is fair and just.

A typical presumption has been that governance by the public corporation represents a standard with which to understand the potential of good governance. But the public corporation is besieged—stock exchanges show net de-listings, raiders are challenging venerable corporations, regulatory requirements impose heavy costs on IPOs. Is it true that the public firm, and in particular the American varietal, joins both a just distribution of power and an efficient form of governance?

These questions are lodged in a larger, often political, debate. Are public or private firms delivering an economic performance that rewards the many stakeholders: shareholders, employees, society? Whom do corporations serve? What is their performance? Are they betraying national interests by outsourcing, by employing immigrants, or by locating overseas, sometimes by inversions for primarily tax benefits?

As this course is short and quick, we focus on the United States and compare across the types of governance, e.g. the public firm, the private firm, the ESOP, the sports league, and the non-profit. The primary institutions discussed will be the board, the shareholders, institutional investors, the stakeholders, and management. However, there will also be plenty of moments to think about the dynamics and personalities of families, CEOs, and directors.
There are a variety of perspectives from which questions of governance can be formulated and addressed but it has been economic analysis that has largely dominated contemporary discussions of the subject. Most theories of governance are preoccupied with the relationship between institutions of governance and economic performance. We expand this perspective to ask ultimately, are there forms of governance that are competitors to the public corporation? Would they satisfy stakeholders, and the wider public, more than the shareholder governance that is so much under assault today?

It may help you also to understand what the course is not about. Because we are looking comparatively, we will not attempt to ‘go deep’, instead we ‘go wide.’ This means, we will not look deeply at the issues of corporate governance, the relevance of law and regulation, and the functioning of governance at particular junctures, such as bankruptcy, acquisition, or in a proxy contest. These issues are handled more in depth in other specialized classes.

This time, though, I have put more emphasis on both the public firm and on social impact. ESG rated companies and sustainability goals are often in the news and in investment reports. These markets consist of green bonds, social funds, and impact investing. Recently, the largest private equity funds have created specialized funds for impact investing. This includes Apollo, Carlyle, TPG, and KKR. Goldman Sachs has launched a Social Impact ETF through a partnership with Just Capital to provide the indexing. This is a new and fast-moving space, and I’ve allocated two sessions to it.

We will have a session on blockchain platforms and their governance. This is new territory for everyone, from investors to the SEC. Let’s rise to the challenge and see what we can figure out on how these platforms should be governed, if they can be governed. Teaching should be on the edge of what we know and have us think about evolutions that may or may not happen. Be open to forward-looking discussions. Not everything is looking backward through a case study....

Your instructor: Bruce Kogut

Taught in many places around the world, lived many years in Europe (primarily France but also Sweden and Germany), was chaired full professor at Wharton, INSEAD, before coming to CBS in 2007. I have served on corporate and non-profit boards primarily outside the US, including 3i Infotech India, the advisory board to chief economist at the EBRD, academic boards to IFMR (Chennai), Skema (France), and Skolkovo (Russia), an NGO in India, and the International School of Paris. I am currently on the advisory board to the Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin. I also founded Insead’s Social Enterprise Program, and have run centers for research and curriculum at Wharton and Columbia Business school. I work currently on impact investing and social capital markets, data analytics and performance of firms and micro-finance organizations, among other things including...governance. You can also find a clip of me on the John Stewart Show (John Oliver), trying to explain what ethics is about for MBAs. The Bernstein Center has also produced a film on financial innovation, starring Bruce Greenwald, Robert Solow, Blythe Masters, Peter Stringham, David Abrams, Barney Frank, Edward Conard, Alicia Glen, Wilson Ervin, and others. I encourage you to read some articles that I have written for the more popular press such as HBR, 2010, on social enterprise; and 538, Kogut, on political influence in economic research. Just google the above along with my name. Have a look.

What is expected of you?

I expect that you read the cases before the class starts and the required readings too. The class will fail if you do not read the material, so don’t free ride. We need your participation.
All written assignments for prepping for each class should be submitted by sending your responses to me and the TA by 9 pm the night before. Your work for the class day assignment can be done in teams of 4. Make sure to email us in time. These are meant to be short responses, but longer than poll responses.

Polls

You will be asked to answer poll questions for each day, due by 9 pm the night before. These are done individually. The TA reads these polls, and I review ones that are good, provocative, or solar systemic.

Some Heads-Up

Before the start of the first class, you are required to go on to this page, ISS Quick Governance Score, click on Search Governance Quality Score (see blue banner), and then find the score of a company of your choice. Be prepared to explain if you agree with the score. You may have to register the site to gather the data.

The third session (February 7) is a mock simulation of the decision to redesign the governance system after the resignation of Travis Kalanick as CEO and his unexpected placement of two new directors on the board. You will be assigned randomly to new groups and you will need to access this from Canvas the week before. It is a disaster if you don’t come prepared, with case read, and the background chapters too.

We discuss questions that are about governance but are controversial. These conversations are open and give a chance to explore different views and experiences on questions of our times. These discussions are very much appreciated by participants, and I continue this tradition though it bears the risk that you will hear an opinion you don’t like, or you may not agree with me in taking, or not taking, a perspective. Be tolerant.

For example, we discuss if you think there should be quotas mandating minimal percentage of women on boards? You will disagree. You may feel you know more about this than others. The point is to learn from each other. Who knows —your influence may be felt after class, so don’t be disappointed if others don’t agree, yet.

Final Paper

The final exam is a take-home essay answering a specified question that is related to the course materials. A hard copy must be sent to me and the TA before 12:00 pm (midnight) on March 11. Late submissions will not be accepted.

I will read and grade all papers.

Course Grade

Class attendance and assignments are mandatory.

50% of your grade will be the paper.
25% is participation.
25% are the assignments (e.g. polls) to prep for the classes.

A frank discussion. I have a super high opinion of the ethics among MBAs and for that reason, I have a very harsh policy on any infraction.
First, remember that citations and references to all quoted and used material are mandatory. Please do not overlook this requirement.

Second, you can’t miss class without writing me ahead of time (at least the day before). I accept only urgent family matters (sickness and death), babies delivered (photo required). Weddings, parties of any sort, or anything else are not excused absences.

Finally, I will submit a random selection of all written work to be checked algorithmically. Cheating is not CBS compliant: don’t do it.

Course Outline

January 31

Session #1: Introduction to Governance

Topic: Overview of Governance

Assignment: See the Assignment for evaluating a company using the ISS Governance Score on page 3. Reading: Tricker, chapters 1 & 2 (this is a big print easy read that you will like)


Session #2:

Topic: Strategy and Governance

Case Reading: The Uber Board Deliberates: Is Good Governance Worth the Firing of an Entrepreneurial Founder?, Columbia CaseWorks, ID #000000
(This is a new case –glad to know about typos, clarity, etc.)

Questions:

1. How far should the board extend governance into the decisions of management for a private firm?
2. Were there violations of good governance?
3. As a board member, did you have enough information to make a decision regarding the future of Kalanick? What you have liked to know more?

February 7

Session #3:

Topic: Group Behavior and Board Decision-Making

Group assignment:
Prepare for possible selection to be the “Uber Board” in session #3. I would like short written answers to the questions at the end of the case. Don’t forget to include your names. One or 2 pages.

Prepare alone your possible role in a reenactment of the Uber board meeting what to do. Each person is assigned one of the key participants in the Uber case: we will email you your role and you don’t share your role with others on your team. Two teams will play these roles during the class.

- Attention: You will have to prep especially for this class, so READ the material.
  - The Uber case.
  - Read the private information about your character that will be emailed/given to you the day before the case
  - Prep questions for your role:
    - If you were a member of that board, what would you do?
    - What actions should the board have taken to arrive at the best decision?

Session #4:

Topic: Why not keep it private?

Guest Speaker: Alan Jones, Managing Director and Head of Global Private Equity, Morgan Stanley

Reading: Morgan Stanley Dean Witter. The Aftermath of the Merger (read pages 9-22)

1. What changes when a partnership becomes a public corporation?
2. Why not reverse the decision and take the firm private?
3. Why would anyone work for a public firm if they could work for a private firm in the same industry?
4. Bonus question: are activist investors in the interest of shareholders and long-term value of the firm?

Bio: Alan Jones was Chairman of Morgan Stanley’s Global Private Equity Investment Committee and also served as a member of the Investment Committees for Morgan Stanley Private Equity Asia, Morgan Stanley Expansion Capital, Morgan Stanley Infrastructure Partners, and Morgan Stanley Credit Partners, and as a member of the Merchant Banking Department Executive Committee and Risk Committee. He currently serves as a Director of HBF, CoAdvantage, Access Cash, and ReachOut Healthcare America. He has previously served as a Director of McKechnie Aerospace, EmployBridge, Creative Circle and Zenith (UK).

February 14

Session #5:

Topic: Rating Companies for their Social Impact

Guest:

Martin Whittaker
CEO, Just Capital

Reading: Tricker, chapter 9, “Social Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability”

Assignment: Please go on-line and check out the social ratings of the top 100 firms evaluated by Just Capital. You may do this in a group. Please meet.

Question -Discuss in a group: Why is S in ESG so hard to evaluate, how does Just Capital evaluate it, and what do you propose?

Session 6:

Guest: Ray A. Cameron, Managing Director, is the Head of BlackRock's Investment Stewardship team for the Americas region based in New York. In this role, Ray leads a team of specialists responsible for engagement and proxy voting activities in relation to the companies in which BlackRock invests on behalf of clients. Through direct engagement with companies, the team encourages corporate governance practices that support sustainable financial performance over the long-term.

Prior to joining BlackRock, Ray most recently managed the corporate access engagement practice at several investment banking firms, including Stifel and Cowen. In these capacities, he oversaw teams that established and enhanced constructive dialogue with hundreds of portfolio companies' boards and management teams.

Ray started his Wall Street career at Morgan Stanley on the institutional equity sales desk. After spending several years as a generalist, he became a technology specialist. Ray is credited for creating and managing the first fully integrated corporate access team on Wall Street. He was subsequently recruited to re-engineer the corporate access engagement practice at Lehman Brothers. There he successfully maintained the entire team through the Lehman bankruptcy filing and the eventual acquisition of equity assets by Barclays.

Ray earned his Masters of Business Administration degree from Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas and his Bachelors of Business Administration degree from The University of Texas at Austin.

Reading:

Larry Fink, CEO Blackrock, Annual letter to CEOs, “A Sense of Purpose”

Review, Tricker, chapter 2, pages 65-7, on stewardship

Question to prepare in a team: What exactly does this mean for the selection of portfolio companies and evaluating mutual fund performance?

February 21

Session 7:

Discussion Topic: Governance and Diversity
Readings: These are short editorials or pop reports -please read.

- The California Mandated Quota for Woman Directors
- Do quotas for corporate boards help women advance?
- Kogut, Bruce: Do Boards Need Mandated Quotas?

Session 8:

Topic: Governing the Purpose-Driven Firm

Guest Speaker:

Donnel Baird, CEO, BlocPower
Video: see Tedx, Jay Coen Gilbert, co-founder of B Corp, minutes 10 to 19.

Case Reading:

BlocPower. Energizing Urban Neighborhoods

Readings:

Bob Tricker, Corporate Governance: Principles, Policies, and Practices, Ch 9

Preparation: Please review the material on the above web sites.

Questions:

1. Who are the owners and stakeholders of BlocPower?
2. Should debt have a voice?
3. What should be the governance structure of BlocPower for the point of view of investors?
4. Is this in the long-term interest of BlocPower?
5. Does the B-Corp form lead to a better governance structure?

February 28

Session 9:

Topic: Should firms have first amendment rights to finance public advertising?

Reading: Ten things You Should Know about Campaign Finance (Make sure to read #9)
The 10 Things They Won't Tell You About Money-in-Politics


Questions:
1. Should firms have first amendment rights to finance public advertising?
2. What is the corporate governance objection to corporate political contributions?
3. What should be the system to regulate campaign contributions by firms?

Session 10:

Topic: Who Governs Bitcoin and ICOs

Guests:
Vanessa Grellet, Consensys

Readings:
The Brooklyn Project
Blockchain for Social Impact

In case you want to see the Satoshi original manifesto:

Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System

Question to be prepared in team: What are the principles by which you think the governance of a cryptocurrency community should be governed? One page.

Extension: How would you extend this to the governance of Facebook? Optional as write-up.

March 7

Session 11:

Topic: Governing of Professional Sports Leagues: Soccer

Guest Speaker:
Sunil Gulati, Professor of Economics, Columbia; President, United States Soccer Federation

Reading: US Soccer Association Governance

Background reading: Governance: How Fifa Works

Questions:

1. What are the challenges of governance for professional sports?
2. For whom should the sports league be governed?
3. Why are there ethical challenges in sports and can good governance help?
4. Should the USSA offer women soccer pays equal pay to the men? What is the argument against this position?

Session 12:
Topic: Future of Governance

Five Challenges of Governance

1. Sustainability of Private Property
2. Inclusiveness in an Inegalitarian World
3. Corruption
4. State Capitalism
5. MBAs

Required/Recommended Sources for the Course


This book presents the classic law and economics approach to governance of many kinds of enterprises and organizations. The argument relies upon a principle of finding the right governance form that most efficiently organizes the activities of the governed entity.


This book is a broad textbook, informed by comparison between countries and by different ideas of how to govern. While less analytical than the Hansmann book, it is also less dogmatic in favoring a single logic to determine the best governance choice.


This book was financed by the World Economic Forum, Wharton, and INSEAD, and presented in a day-long series of panels and discussions at the annual meeting in 2002. The book was written just following the passing of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act and the Act was already having an impact on governance around the world. The chapters are written by academics, industry, and government leaders.