

IMMERSIVE TEAMWORK

Course Syllabus (Draft)

Spring 2022 | 1.5 credits

Instructors

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Course Overview

Over the course of their careers, Columbia Business School graduates will spend a substantial share of their working hours and professional effort as members, and often leaders, of teams. This course aims to help students rise to the challenges of teamwork. It does so by embracing an experiential approach, putting students in teams and leading them through a series of immersive, hands-on activities over the course of two-and-a-half days. These challenging experiences repeatedly make students choose and act, giving them an up-close look at how behaviors, from themselves and others, impact team experience and outcomes.

Class meetings begin with an intense teamwork simulation featuring changing conditions and time pressure. In groups of six, team members scramble to coordinate their actions to achieve a goal, with other teams being potential allies and adversaries. Team members occupy different roles (engineer, analyst, diplomat, etc.), receive different information, and experience different dynamics throughout the simulation. As a result, teams and leaders must deal with communication and coordination challenges that come from being dispersed and multi-functional (e.g., functional silos).

In the wake of this simulation, students reflect (individually and in teams) on what worked well and what could have gone better. The whole class collaborates in an overall debrief, drawing out lessons for individuals as well as general principles for teamwork, leadership, and communication.

The course continues with a concentrated design challenge. Teams shift from taking part in a simulation to designing one that others will complete, using the components

of the initial activity as building blocks. After reviewing ideas of experiential design and approaches to creative teamwork, teams sprint through a design process, generating and selecting ideas, developing and testing materials, and ultimately observing their design in use. In the wake of the design sprint and showcase, individuals and teams again reflect on the experience.

Surrounding these immersive team experiences are other important elements of the course. In advance of the initial class, different students read different selected profiles of real-world teams, laying the groundwork for small-group “jigsaw” discussions during class (see Readings list at the end of this syllabus). Students also complete a measure of their own working style, spurring their thinking about themselves as team members and leaders.

Based on the readings, their style report, and their own life experience, students articulate and submit a number of key “working propositions” about teamwork, leadership, and themselves. The initial class session draws these propositions out into the open, with small groups identifying noteworthy ones for ongoing consideration during the course. As the course progresses, students return repeatedly to these shared propositions, and their individual ones, reflecting on them and revising them based on their experience. In the final in-class module, each small group will present briefly to the whole class, sharing observations about their (refined) propositions and takeaways.

At the end of class day, students will complete brief analyses of their experience and provide evaluations of teammates. Within several weeks of the conclusion of class meetings, students will select and read one of the team profile readings that they did not review in advance of class meetings (see Readings list at the end of this syllabus) and write a brief reaction paper on it. In addition, within several weeks of the conclusion of class meetings, students will write and submit a paper that provides an integration and summary of their experience in the course, including their takeaways about leadership, teamwork, and themselves.

Course Objectives

The aim of the course is for students to:

- Build knowledge of effective teamwork, communication, and leadership
- Practice team, communication, and leadership skills and effective behaviors
- Generate insights into themselves as an individual, team member, and leader

Course Outline

The course takes place over two-and-a-half contiguous days (e.g., all day Monday, all day Tuesday, and the first half of Wednesday).

IN ADVANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advance readings of team case studies• Reading reflections and generation of initial propositions about teamwork• Individual style assessment, goal setting
MODULE 1 (Day 1 AM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction and initial observations about team dynamics• Large-scale immersive teamwork activity with scaffolded observations and evaluations
MODULE 2 (Day 1 PM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual and team reflections on experience; shareouts• Principles of teamwork and communication• Teamwork styles and roles
OVERNIGHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self and team analysis; teammate evaluations
MODULE 3 (Day 2 AM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primer on experiential design• Process toolkit: options for working together• Design challenge: creating novel experiential activities, with scaffolded observations and evaluations
MODULE 4 (Day 2 PM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Designs in action: Showcase of student-created experiential activities• Initial reflections and observations
OVERNIGHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self and team analysis; teammate evaluations
MODULE 5 (Day 3 AM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Team reflections on design and activity experiences• Team presentations on takeaways
POST-CLASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading reflection on team case study• Integration and summary analysis paper: Insights about leadership, teamwork, and self

Assignments and Grading

There are three graded components of the course:

- **ADVANCE WORK:** timely and quality completion of pre-course reading reflection; submission of initial hypotheses about principles of teamwork, communication and leadership; completion of individual style assessment; submission of initial personal goals [20% of grade]
- **DURING CLASS PERIOD:** attendance (on-time arrival and presence for class periods); peer evaluations of participation (Day 1 and Day 2 ratings by teammates of motivation and effort to create an effective learning environment); end-of-day analyses (submission of brief self and team analyses after Day 1 and Day 2), and team presentation on initial takeaways (evaluated by instructors and non-team classmates) [40% of grade]
- **POST-CLASS DELIVERABLES:** additional team profile reading and two-page reaction paper drawing some connection between principles of teamwork, communication, and leadership from the class and the profiled team; integration and summary analysis paper, 7-10 pages double-spaced, due two weeks after class completion, featuring analysis of self as well as reflections on principles of teamwork, communication, and leadership [40% of grade]

Connection to Other Courses and the Core

This course builds on some of the teamwork and leadership concepts introduced in the core *LEAD* course. While this course features a design activity, it differs from, and complements, other CBS electives that address design (including *Innovate Using Design Thinking* and *Think Bigger*) in that its primary emphasis is not in thoroughly training students in the design process but rather in using a focused design activity as an opportunity to practice and reflect on teamwork. This course also complements ideas and practices addressed in electives such as *Managerial Negotiations*, *Power and Influence*, and *The Leader's Voice*, giving students additional opportunities to practice relevant behaviors hands-on.

Readings

In advance of the first class meeting, students will be assigned selected readings from the list below, with different students assigned different sets of readings.

Catmull, Ed & Wallace, Amy. Establishing Pixar's Identity. Chapter 4 in *Creativity, Inc: Overcoming the Unseen Forces that Stand in the Way of True Inspiration*. Random House, 2014.

Coyle, Daniel. How to Create Cooperation in Small Groups. Chapter 10 in *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups*. Bantam, 2018.

Edmondson, Amy C., David L. Ager, Emily Harburg, and Natalie Bartlett. "Teaming at Disney Animation." Harvard Business School Case 615-023, August 2014. (Revised May 2015.)

Galinsky, Adam and Schweitzer, Maurice. When Hierarchy Wins ... and When It Loses. Chapter 3 in *Friend & Foe: When to Cooperate, When to Compete, and How to Succeed at Both*. Currency, 2015.

Hansen, Morten. Getting Collaboration Wrong . . . or Getting It Right. Chapter 1 in *Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Build Common Ground, and Reap Big Results*. Harvard Business Press: 2009.

Khurana, Rakesh, Jeffrey Polzer, Willy Shih, and Eric Baldwin. "Teaming at GE Aviation." Harvard Business School Case 413-074, November 2012.

Koehn, Nancy F., Erica Helms, and Philip Mead. "Leadership in Crisis: Ernest Shackleton and the Epic Voyage of the Endurance." Harvard Business School Case 803-127, April 2003. (Revised December 2010.)

Schreier, Jason. Destiny. Chapter 8 in *Blood, Sweat, and Pixels: The Triumphant, Turbulent Stories Behind How Video Games Are Made*. Harper Paperbacks, 2017.

Useem, Michael. Wagner Dodge Retreats in Mann Gulch. Chapter 2 in *The Leadership Moment: Nine True Stories of Triumph and Disaster and their Lessons for Us All*. Broadway Business, 1998.

Useem, Michael. The Leadership Lessons of Mount Everest. *Harvard Business Review*, 79(9), pp.51-57, 2001.