B8701 – Management Consulting Lab: Midsize Firms in Africa

Spring 2022
Professors Stephan Meier and Joe Timko
Office hours: by appointment only

Consulting Coaches: TBD
Senior Consulting Coaches: TBD

By Application Only!
This class is by application only. In order to apply, send:
1) Your updated resume!
2) A short letter (300-500 words) explaining why you would like to take this class and to strengthen your consulting skills. Please emphasize past consulting experience, relevant CBS electives that you have taken and/or other relevant skills.

Applications will continue to be accepted throughout the course match process.
APPLICATION IS AVAILABLE AT THIS LINK.

OVERVIEW

This lab course, leverages your expertise and strengthens your consulting skills by working on a project with a company from Africa. The lab is part of the Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness in Africa (EC-Africa) program which is a program at Columbia Business School that equips entrepreneurs from mid-sized African companies with the skills, tools, and contacts to professionalize and grow their businesses in today’s global environment. Each company enrolls a team of two or three senior staff — CEO, founder, managing director, CFO, COO, or other leaders. The companies are all beyond the start-up stage and are looking to scale. Each company is unique in industry and size, ranging from $200K to $230M in annual revenue, 22-3800 employees, and 3-88 years in business. To learn more about the EC-Africa program and the enrolled companies, check out the program website and the company profiles.

The consulting projects are an integral part of the EC-Africa program and students will help the company reach key milestone goals. Sessions at the beginning, throughout the semester and at the end with faculty and coaches allow inputs and reflections, so that students sharpen their consulting skills and generate value for the companies. The class is valuable not only for students who are going to work in management consulting after their MBA, but for everybody who wants to apply their
learning from the MBA to the benefit of a company and wants to deepen consulting skills that will be valuable in every company and industry.

The projects with companies from EC Africa, will also provide insights into opportunities and challenges for firms in Africa. Africa is the world’s second-fastest growing region – after emerging Asia – according to the African Development Bank Report. 1.3 billion people live in Africa and according to the United Nations, the population is expected to increase to 2.5 billion by 2050. The working-class population in Africa is growing by 2.7 percent each year (compared to 1.3 percent in Latin America and 1.2 percent in Southeast Asia). McKinsey projects that by 2025 two-thirds of the estimated 303 million African households will have discretionary income and consumer spending will reach $2.1 trillion.¹ Not surprisingly, many firms and investors are viewing Africa as having a lot of potential – but there are also unique challenges that make building a business in Africa difficult. Working with a company in Africa allows students to get unique insights into what it means to have a business in Africa.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

This course is part of the “Management Consulting Lab (MCL)” series. MCL is designed to be beneficial for companies and for students. Through MCL, companies get access to CBS MBA students to work on a critical project. In return, MBA students experience a structured approach to learn 1) project management skills, 2) client interactions, and 3) applications of knowledge and skills learned in their coursework. The structure of the MCL courses are very different than a normal class. They are a full-semester class and require around 9 hours/week of work. The class is application-based and students are matched depending on their expertise into teams of two. MCL are structured in the following way:

- Compressed upfront kick-off of project (one Saturday + evening) with lectures on project management, consulting skills, project scoping and a short introduction into the Think Bigger Methodology which company leaders learn to apply.
- Throughout the semester, a number of class sessions will be scheduled to provide reflection and inputs to the relevant stages of the project.
- Weekly 30-minutes check-in per team with consulting coach. The consulting coach is an MBA Course Assistant with substantial consulting and project management experience who helps in guiding the process and the reflections. Teams will keep minutes of the meetings which track the progress in the project and the ‘billable’ hours. Those minutes will be shared with Senior Consulting Coaches
- Bi-weekly 90-minutes meeting in affinity groups (i.e. pods) with Senior Consulting Coach. This is a senior partner at a consulting firm who reflects with the groups on project and client management challenges.
- Effective team-client communication. Throughout the class, there are sessions to help students improve their communication skills in a consultant-client interaction. A mock presentation of the final deliverable is videotaped and will get feedback from pod team member.
- Presentation day. Full day with presentation of projects.

NOTE ON TRAVEL

Ideally, the teams would travel to the company’s home market to interact directly with the firm and/or their customers. The structure of the class allows teams to use the Spring break as a travel period. Given the various University travel restrictions and health and safety recommendations in place and the unpredictable levels risk across the countries involved, students will not be traveling for this course in the Spring of 2022.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Requirements for the course are to prepare for, attend class and participate in discussions. Attend and structure discussion with technical advisors and consulting coaches. Even more important is the engagement in the project with the partner company and the final output.

Deliverables and Expectations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Deliverable”</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Active participation in class | Individual | - Attendance and lateness  
- Engagement in case discussion |
| 2. Engagement with   | Team   | - Organization of meetings  
- Structure of meetings |
| a. Consulting Coach  |        |                                                                             |
| b. Senior Consulting Coach |        |                                                                             |
| 3. Meeting notes     | Team   | - Prepare weekly notes for coached with project description and topics covered in the previous week  
- Create minutes of meetings with action plan |
| 4. Track progress    | Team   | - Track progress of the project  
- Report their time in a weekly activity log |
| 5. Final project deliverable | Team | - Company feedback  
- Peer evaluation of final deliverable  
- Peer evaluation of team member contributions |

Details about deliverable:

1. **Participation**: Active participation in class sessions is very important for individual learning. We expect active engagement and thoughtful questions that increase our knowledge. Missing classes will affect the grade substantially.

2. **Engagement with coaches**: An important part is to engage and discuss progress of the project with the course assistants and senior consulting coaches. The time with both of those are limited and need to be structured in the most effective way. Feedback from both will be solicited regarding the preparation and the effectiveness of the meetings.

3. **Final Project deliverable**: The projects are scoped in collaboration with the company. The insights from the work have to be digested into a presentation for the firm with resulting recommendations. In order to evaluate the merit of the project, we will get feedback from:  
   a. Company regarding the interaction and usefulness of the insights
b. *Peers* on relative strengths of each group project.

c. *Group members:* every student has to give a grade to each member of the team, including themselves. The total score of the team should equal 100.

**METHOD OF EVALUATION**

Class preparation, Attendance and Participation 20%
Expert and Coach Feedback 20%
Project work 60%

**WORKLOAD AND TRACKING OF HOURS**

This is an experiential learning class for which students are expected to spend around 108 hours (~36 hours in class sessions or coaching meetings and around 72 hours of out-of-class project work).

Students track their hours in a weekly activity log.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Whole Class?</th>
<th>Class Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Whole Class - Saturday, Jan 29th 9:00am – 4:00pm</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>- Consulting 101</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Project Management</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Think Bigger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Whole Class - Wednesday, Feb 2nd 5:40pm – 8:55pm</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>- Cross-cultural communication</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teams with Coach Pods with Senior Coach</td>
<td></td>
<td>- African Economic and Regulatory Context</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Teams with Coach Pods with Senior Coach</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Deliverable: Final project plan (agreed by team and company)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Teams with Coach</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Teams with Coach Pods with Senior Coach</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Whole Class - Wednesday, March 2nd 5:40pm – 8:55pm</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>- Change Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Time to visit company in country</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Whole Class - Wednesday, March 30th 5:40pm – 8:55pm</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Consultant’s Voice: The Art of Communicating Advice</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teams with Coach Pods with Senior Coach</td>
<td></td>
<td>Data visualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Teams with Coach Pods with Senior Coach</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Teams with Coach</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Teams with Coach Pod Meeting</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Feedback on Videotaped Mock Presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 12</td>
<td>Whole Class – Saturday, April 30th 9:00am – 4:00pm</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Presentations &amp; Dinner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>