MGMT 464 – Teamwork and Interpersonal Skills

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Course Description

This course will provide you with concepts and tools to help you understand and manage human behavior in teams and work groups. The knowledge and skills you develop in this course will be critical to you as you manage your relationships with co-workers, bosses, and subordinates; manage, design and change the teams or groups you belong to; and work to achieve your goals in complex and dynamic organizational settings. Ultimately, the knowledge and skills you develop in this course can help you to become a more effective contributor in any team, group or organization that you join.

Course Objectives

This course has three objectives:

1. To help students become familiar with contemporary theories and research findings about teams, their function and their management.

2. To give students experience in applying these different theories and frameworks in order to diagnose and propose solutions to complex and ill-defined problems related to the function and management of teams.

3. To help students more effectively communicate observations and recommendations about teams and teamwork in both oral and written form.
Required Reading Materials

Course Expectations
Experience has shown that the teamwork skills are best learned through a combination of cognitive and experiential learning. By reading and studying the assigned material for each class period, students will accomplish the cognitive objective; that is, they will become familiar with the latest thinking on organizations and the people in them. And by participating in classroom exercises, team projects, and case analyses, students will gain experience in putting these theories to work in observing, interpreting, diagnosing, and solving complex problems in teams.

The following course requirements are designed to integrate cognitive and experiential learning:

**Individual Work (40%)**
- Process Paper ......................................................... 30%
- Midterm ................................................................. 10%

**Team Work (60%)**
- Team Case Analyses (2 x 10%) ................................. 20%
- Team Paper ............................................................ 20%
- Team Presentation .................................................... 10%
- Team Teaching ....................................................... 10%

- Participation & Professionalism (bonus) .................... 5%

Please note: All assignments must be turned in by the due date. Late assignments will not be graded, and will receive zero points.

**Individual Work**
*Process Paper (30%).* During your time in this course, you will be assigned to a team in order to complete different course requirements (discussed below). Your team will provide a laboratory within which you can apply many of the theories and frameworks discussed in class. On the last day of class, you will submit a paper (8-10 double-spaced pages) in which you analyze your team's functioning, integrating different theories and frameworks from class into your analysis. Your paper should: (1) **identify insights** about working in teams that were illustrated through your team’s experience this semester (e.g., “it is critical to confront a perceived slacker early in the semester”), (2) **describe what happened** in your team that led to each insight (be specific and detailed), and (3) **make recommendations** for improving team work based on the insights you identified.

Your ability to write this paper will be significantly enhanced if you keep a journal of your team's activities. *(This is not a requirement, merely a suggestion).* Take some time after each team meeting to record what took place during the meeting. Also, record ways in which theories or frameworks from class help to explain what you are observing. The following questions can help you focus your team observations and journal entries:

1. How do member styles/perspectives differ? How does the team deal with those differences?
2. How do team member motivations differ? How does this affect the process?
3. What roles are assigned to individuals? What roles do they ultimately perform?
4. How does the team make decisions?
5. Who emerges as a leader at various points? What is their style? The result?
6. How does the team structure the task? Who did what? Was this efficient?
7. Describe the team's culture. How did it emerge and how was it reinforced?
8. Did the team share norms for high performance? For learning?
9. How could the team have done better?

Midterm (10%). A midterm provides a motivation to review/synthesize the material learned in class. It also provide important feedback (to you and the instructor) about what is being learned. A midterm will therefore be given during the semester to assess your knowledge and understanding of the material covered in the readings, cases, and class presentations. It will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions.

Team Work

Team Case Analyses (20%). With your team, you will write two case analyses (thus each case will account for 10% of your grade). Case analyses should be 4 double-spaced pages (in 12-point font and 1” margins) and are due at the beginning of class on the day the case is discussed. Instructions for analyzing each case are included in this syllabus, along with suggestions for writing good case analyses.

Team Paper (20%). With your team, you will write a 15-20 (double-spaced) page paper, exploring the use of a particular type of team in real-world, organizational settings. The purpose of the paper is to identify a type of team (examples could range from manufacturing teams, to firefighting teams, temporary consulting teams, surgical teams, service teams, or teams in the military, etc.), and to explore why such teams are used, and how they function. This paper should have a section that discusses the teams in terms of concepts used in class (at a more conceptual/theoretical level), as well as a section that provides examples of these teams in action, and explores how they actually work – and what potential problems might arise in practice.

Team Presentation (10%). Each team will be required to present a summary of their paper on the final day of class. Each team will have 10-12 minutes to present their paper, providing not only an opportunity to impress me with a polished presentation, but also to inform their fellow classmates about different types of teams and how they work.

Team Teaching (10%). Each team will be responsible for one (or two) chapters in the text books, and will be required to “teach” the material in-class on the designated days. It is not necessary to cover every single topic in the textbook; your team can pick and choose what you believe to be particularly important or interesting. The use of exercise or other engaging techniques is encouraged.

Bonus

Participation & Professionalism (5%). Given our emphasis on learning by experience, a great deal of our in-class time will be spent doing activities that require the participation and professionalism of each student (discussions, team exercises, simulations, etc.). The success of these activities will depend on your active involvement. Five additional percent of your grade can therefore be earned based on your professionalism and contributions you make to the quality of our classroom discussions and activities. Evidence that you are not professional: i.e. absence,
tardiness, lack of preparation, disruption of the class, or other behaviors that indicate a lack of a professional and responsible attitude towards the class or assignments, will obviously result in zero points.

**A Note on Team Grades and Free Ridership.** All team members will get the same grade on each of the above team assignments unless a majority of the team decides to change to a peer performance appraisal system. Under such a system, members will rate one another's contribution to each of the team assignments and individual grades will be adjusted (both upward and downward) based on these ratings. If you decide to go with the peer performance appraisal system, prepare a document to that effect signed by a majority of your team to be submitted with the team assignment(s), and then I will contact you for your evaluation of your fellow team members’ contributions.

**Some Guidelines and Recommendations**

*Appealing Grades.* Every effort will be made to ensure that your assignments and quizzes are graded fairly and accurately. If, however, you disagree with the way you were graded on a particular assignment or quiz, the following steps should help to both resolve your concern as well as promote your learning:

1. Prepare and document your reasons for requesting a grade revision.
2. Present your case (in writing) to me. I will either agree with you (and change your grade) or will attempt to explain why the original grade was appropriate.
3. If you still feel that your grade is incorrect, or you were unfairly treated, you should pursue appeals beyond the classroom – probably to the Dean of the undergraduate program.

*Grading Note:* I will not accept 'retroactive excuses' by students. By this I mean bringing up ameliorating circumstances at the end of the semester as a basis for requesting a better grade. If unique or unusual circumstances occur that might prevent you from doing as well as you normally would (such as illness, a learning disability, unavoidable family commitments, etc.), let me know at the beginning of the semester, or at least as soon as possible. I make no guarantees as to what is acceptable and what is not but I encourage you to communicate any problems that you want taken into account to me sooner rather than later, so that we can work something out.
Academic Integrity. The Honor System and Code adopted by George Mason University will be enforced for this class. For a full description of this code please refer to (http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/acadpol.html). In adherence with III. Responsibility of the Faculty, a delineation of Honor Code Violations for this class is provided below.

III.A. Group participation is permissible during in-class small group exercises and while studying for Exams. Homework assignments in preparation for the following class period may also be discussed among classmates. Discussion with classmates in other groups with regard to the group project should be limited to format and structure and not include content. No discussion will be permitted while taking Exams.

III.B. Study aids, memoranda, books, data, and other information is not permissible to use while taking the Exams.

III.C. When using material from the textbook or other sources (including the internet), non-original thoughts, concepts, etc. should be cited in accordance with standard academic guidelines (e.g., APA or MLA).

Cheating and other violations of academic integrity in this course will be dealt with swiftly following the procedures outlined in the George Mason University policies. (Furthermore, a random sampling of papers will be randomly scanned by the Turnitin.com service for possible plagiarism). If I am faced with anything that I interpret to be a possible violation, I will immediately refer it to the appropriate authority. This policy does not presume any innocence or guilt – it is formulated to avoid any confusion or gray areas.
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INSTRUCTIONS AND HINTS FOR CASE ANALYSES

For both cases, the critical underlying questions that need to be answered are:

a) What went wrong? What could/should have been done differently

b) What should be done now?

Before you hand in your paper, be sure that the answers to those questions are clear.

As you approach each analysis, the questions below may help you write the analysis – but these are just ideas to help you think about the case, not necessarily specific questions to be answered in your write-up.

1. **David Fletcher:** Some large questions include: (1) Why has Fletcher had difficulties realizing his goal of an effective and highly-functioning investment research team? And (2) What can he do to improve the effectiveness of his team? Some issues you might want to consider in your analysis include: (a) How have individual differences in background, personality, motivation, organizational position, and/or incentives contributed to the problems?, (b) How has Fletcher’s approach to selecting, training, rewarding, motivating, and coordinating his team members contributed to the problems?, (c) How have conflicts been resolved within the team?, (d) Is there anything about the nature of the team’s work that might impact how the team has functioned/should function?

2. **Aston Blair:** Large questions include: (1) What could Michael Bacon have done differently that might have avoided his present difficulties? and (2) What should he do now to resolve those difficulties? In answering these questions, you may want to consider the following: (a) What can Bacon learn from this experience about confidentiality, coalition-building, presenting politically-sensitive information, and managing meetings?, (b) Who has a stake in the outcome of Bacon’s work on the task force and how could his work potentially be an opportunity or threat to them?, (c) Who needs to buy in to Bacon’s recommendations and how might they be persuaded to buy in?, and (d) How can Bacon use his personal networks and sources of power to build coalitions that will help him overcome problems and implement his agenda?
SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING TEAM CASE ANALYSES AND TEAM PROCESS PAPERS

TEAM CASE ANALYSES

1. Executive Summary. A good executive summary provides a one-paragraph description of your report and convinces the reader of its importance. It should include the following:
   a. Concise statement of purpose, e.g., "This report addresses the current problems with inter-group coordination at ABC Corporation, particularly . . . ."
   b. The major points in your analysis, e.g., "We suggest that these problems are primarily due to . . . ."
   c. Your recommendations, e.g., "We are recommending that management address these problems by . . . ." (You may choose to use a bullet format for recommendations or major points.)

2. Analysis.
   a. 1st Paragraph.
      • State the conclusions you will be drawing from your analysis, e.g., "This section argues that the inter-group coordination problems at ABC derive from three sources: 1) weak leadership,"
      • Briefly anticipate the arguments you will present to support those conclusions, e.g., "We arrived at these conclusions by applying leader-member exchange theory to . . . ."
      • Describe the sub-sections that follow, e.g., "Our discussion is organized as follows: . . . ."
   b. Body of the Analysis. Present specific arguments and evidence to support each of the conclusions you introduced in the first paragraph, e.g., "Weak Leadership. An analysis of Joe's leadership style using leader-member exchange theory suggests that . . . ."
   c. Additional Hints.
      • Use appropriate concepts from class to sharpen and integrate your analysis.
      • Assume that the reader is already familiar with the facts of the case.

3. Recommendations
   a. 1st Paragraph. State the recommendations you will be making, e.g., "We propose 3 solutions . . . ."
   b. Body. Give your rationale for each recommendation, including an in-depth discussion of benefits and barriers. For each recommendation, identify specific action steps that must be taken. Explain what will be done, who should be involved, when it should take place, etc.
   c. Look forward. Whereas your analysis was based on the past, your recommendations should look to the future. Don't tell management what they should have done. Focus on what to do now.

TEAM PROCESS PAPERS

Group process papers will be evaluated based on the following three criteria:

1) Structure and Organization: Was the paper clearly written and well-organized?
   ➢ Specifics: clear thesis statement, outline of key points, spelling and grammar, etc.

2) Rigor of Analysis: Was each conclusion about team process backed up with detailed evidence from the team experience?

3) Depth of Insight: Did the paper demonstrate a sincere effort to develop personal insights about how teams work and about how you individually work in teams? (Or was it an attempt to please the instructor by writing what you thought he wanted to hear.)
SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATING A HIGH-PERFORMING TEAM

The following suggestions can help make the difference between a frustrating, ineffective team experience and a fulfilling, effective team experience.

1. **Work to Develop Positive Norms.** During your first few team meetings, you will be developing norms for how your team will operate, e.g., norms for learning, performance, sharing ideas, dealing with conflict, attending meetings, respect for one another, etc. Once established, team norms can be difficult to change so it is critical that you work to develop positive team norms from your first meeting and challenge any negative norms that seem to be emerging.

2. **Discuss Your Goals for the Team.** Many teams do not have an initial discussion about what they want to accomplish. Rather, they become very task-oriented and don't keep the big picture in mind. Take the time to outline your expectations and remind yourselves of those expectations from time to time.

3. **Dividing Labor and Integrating Work.** In attempting to involve all team members equally in a given project, teams will often make one of two mistakes: (1) they try to involve every member in every aspect of every project or (2) they divide a project up into pieces without ensuring that these pieces can and will be integrated into a coherent whole. Both approaches are recipes for failure and frustration. Effective teams are explicit about assigning different project tasks to different individuals (or pairs of individuals) and then deciding how those different portions will be integrated into one coherent product. This may involve the assignment of different roles which change from project to project (e.g., “project integrator”, “task coordinator”).

4. **Discuss Your Schedules Early.** An early discussion of your outside commitments can help the team to plan meetings as well as assign workloads. For example, if you know that you will be busy during a particular project, you may decide to take a heavier load on a subsequent project with the advance approval of the team.

5. **Embrace Differences.** One of the biggest misconceptions that people have when they first begin team work is that disagreements are to be avoided and that conflict is bad. Nothing could be further from the truth. Your team will disagree about how to analyze cases, how to proceed with assignments, or even whether someone is contributing as much as he/she should. If you ignore these points of difference or expect the instructor to resolve them you will sacrifice much of the learning that team work affords and your team performance will suffer as a consequence. The key is to approach differences with candidness, respect, and common courtesy.

6. **Choose Your Performance Appraisal System Carefully.** In this course, you have the option of a peer performance appraisal system. If you choose the peer performance appraisal system, think carefully about the criteria you will use to evaluate one another's performance, e.g., attendance at meetings, time spent on projects, intellectual leadership, etc.

7. **Anonymity in the Team Process Paper.** Your grade will not be adjusted based on what others in your team say about you in their process paper. However, team members may decide that they are uncomfortable having their real names used in the team process papers. You may want to discuss this issue as a team.

8. **Have Fun!** Working in a team can be energizing and fun. Be creative and take advantage of this excellent opportunity to learn from one another and to learn about teams.