

Sociology 1870R: Groups in Organizations  
Tuesday: 4:00-6:20 PM, Sayles Hall 204

Brown University  
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### Groups in Organizations

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### Course Description

In the last decade, teamwork has become increasingly popular in organizations. Whether structured into the organizational makeup, or temporarily established around specific projects, teams are a critical competency of organizations. They are considered an effective performance unit, and expected to efficiently cope with the fast changes and demands of today's corporate environment. However, deriving the full benefits from teamwork requires correct management of its processes and dynamics. This course dwells on selected issues in team development, internal processes, and members' behavior, as well as management skills needed to effectively lead teams in organizations.

### Aims and Objectives

The main objective of this course is to provide you with knowledge and practical tools that will enable you to diagnose work group situations and dynamics, and to become more productive team members and leaders. This will be achieved through developing teamwork and management skills on three levels: personal, inter-personal, and group-level skills. On the personal level we will aim to broaden your awareness of your individual patterns of behavior, communication and managerial style. We will also provide tools for identifying preferred and more effective behavior, suitable for various managerial situations. On the inter-personal level we will focus on managerial communication skills (e.g. giving feedback or evaluation talks), and on the group level we will discuss teams' characteristics and stages of development, the advantages and disadvantages of teamwork in a variety of organizational situations, decision making, and problem solving processes in teams. We will learn to identify and cope with conflicts

between team members, and with frustration of individuals within the group. Management of group discussions will also be studied and practiced.

### **Course Format**

The primary teaching method of this course is experiential, therefore only about half of the course time will be devoted to standard lectures. The rest of the time will include case-study analysis, exercises, self-assessment questionnaires, and small-group simulations, with the purpose of demonstrating and practicing the various skills required to effectively manage teams in organizations. Personal and group feedback will also be used as part of the learning, as well as presentations by the students.

In order to experience team work, you will be divided into teams of 5-6 persons. These teams will work together on the different course assignments throughout the semester. Additionally, each team will be required to work on a special project of its choice, related to the themes of the course. The team will present the project to the class, and submit a written report of the project, and of the team dynamics accompanying its accomplishment (more specific information will be provided in class).

***Due to the special nature of the course you have only the first session to shop it.***

After that you must attend all sessions.

### **Course Requirements and Assessment**

- 1) Participation and contribution to class activities (**15%**)  
(Attending class is mandatory)
- 2) Midterm examination (**25%**)
- 3) Group project (**45%** - broken down below)
  - a) Presentation (15%)
  - b) Written report (15%)
  - c) Team performance report (10%)
  - d) Team feedback session (5%).
- 4) Personal progress report (**15%**, to be handed in at the last meeting).

## **Course Outline**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Session: Introduction: Groups in the workplace (Sep. 9)**

- In Class: Introduction to the course; Teams: what, why, when and which; Getting to know each other; Group exercise 1: Introduction.
- Readings: Thompson, Ch. 1 pp. 3-7, 13-19;  
Slocum & Hellriegel, Ch. 11 pp. 318-332.
- Handout: Course syllabus; self-assessment questionnaire.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Session: Experiencing teamwork (Sep. 16)**

- In Class: Group exercise 2: Product development; Process-management skills; The issue of justice.
- Readings: Thompson Ch. 8 pp. 214-216.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Session: Internal dynamics (Sep. 23)**

- In Class: Stages of team development; Advantages and disadvantages of teamwork; Individual/Group exercise 3: Group polarization; video – The Abilene Paradox, Forming groups for group assignments and explaining the final group project.
- Readings: Thompson Ch. 2 pp. 22-38; Ch. 7 pp 186-191;  
Slocum & Hellriegel, Ch. 11 pp. 332-350.
- Due: Whatever the winning group did with the money.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Session: Decision-making in teams (Sep. 30 Rosh Hashana)**

- In Class: Decision styles; Decision-analysis model; Individual/Group exercise 4: Analysis of Vroom cases.
- Readings: Thompson Ch. 11 pp 310-313; Duncan et al.; Reber et al.
- Handouts: Vroom cases for analysis and Vroom's decision tree.
- Due: Group information sheets and group preferences for the subject of final project.

**5<sup>th</sup> Session: Decision-making in teams (cont.) (Oct. 7)**

In Class: Group-analysis of Vroom cases; Groupthink (+ video)

Readings: Thompson Ch. 7 pp. 172-179; Levi, Ch. 9 pp. 153-165.

Due: Presentation of group analysis of Vroom cases.

**6<sup>th</sup> Session: Managing group discussions (Oct. 14)**

In Class: Rational Model of group decision making: developmental discussion; Group exercise 5: Presenting a problem for discussion.

Readings: Maier, Ch. 8 pp. 168-171, 177-180.

**7<sup>th</sup> Session: The role of affect in teams: Conflicts (Oct. 21)**

In Class: Conflicts: Type, dynamics, effective management, and resolution (+ Video). Group exercise if time allows.

Readings: Levi, Ch. 7 pp. 115-123, 126-128;  
Slocum & Hellriegel, Ch. 12 pp. 356-368.

Due: Conflict style inventory (.Slocum & Hellriegel, Ch. 12 pp. 384-385).

**8<sup>th</sup> Session: The role of affect in teams: Motivation vs. frustration (Oct. 28)**

In Class: Motivation vs. frustration; Behavioral characteristics and coping; Exercise 6: frustration; Active listening.

Readings: Maier, Ch. 4 pp. 68-78, 82-85.

**9<sup>th</sup> Session: Midterm examination (Nov. 4)**

In Class: Exam

**10<sup>th</sup> Session: Managerial communication (Nov. 11)**

In Class: Feedback; Defensive communication; Exercise 6: giving and receiving feedback.

Readings: Slocum & Hellriegel, Ch. 8 pp. 236-249.

**11<sup>th</sup> Session: The future of teams: Virtual teams and cross-cultural teams (Nov. 18)**

In Class: Group project presentations

**12<sup>th</sup> Session: Is it good for us? Creativity and diversity in teams (Nov. 25)**

In Class: Group project presentations

Due: Personal feedback forms.

**13<sup>th</sup> Session: Wrap-up (Dec. 2)**

In Class: Feedback sessions with the teams; final case study analysis.

Due: Groups' final written projects; personal progress report.

## **Reading**

Duncan, W.J., LaFrance, K.G., & Ginter, P.M. (2003). Leadership and decision making: A retrospective application and assessment. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 9(4), 1-20.

Levi, D. (2001). *Group dynamics for teams*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications.

Ch. 7: Managing conflict (pp. 115-123, 126-128).

Ch. 9: Decision making (pp. 153-165).

Maier, N.R.F. & Verser, G. C. (1982) *Psychology in industrial organizations*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Ch: 4: Frustration as a factor in Behavior (pp. 68-78, 82-85).

Ch. 8: Supervisory leadership (pp. 168-171, 177-180).

Reber, G., Auer-Rizzi, W., & Maly, M. (2004). The behavior of managers in Austria and the Czech Republic: An intercultural comparison based on the Vroom/Yetton Model of leadership and decision making. *Journal of East European Management Studies*, 9(4), 411-429.

Slocum, J. W. Jr, & Hellriegel, D (2007). *Fundamentals of Organizational behavior*. Mason, OH: Thomson South-Western.

Ch. 8: Fostering Interpersonal Communication in Organizations (pp. 236-249)

Ch. 11: Developing and Leading Teams (pp. 318-350)

Ch. 12: Managing Conflict and Negotiating Effectively (pp. 356-368, 384-385).

Thompson, L.L. (2007). *Making the team: A guide for managers* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education.

Ch. 1: Teams in organizations: Facts and myths (pp. 3-7, 13-19).

Ch. 2: Performance and productivity: Team performance criteria and threats to productivity (pp. 22-38).

Ch. 7: Team decision making: Pitfalls and solutions (pp. 172-179, 186-191).

Ch. 8: Conflict in teams: Leveraging differences to create opportunity (pp. 214-216).

Ch. 11: Leadership: Managing the paradox (pp. 310-313).