BUS 558 - Operations and Information Consultancy

GBS 201, Tuesday, Thursday 1:00 – 2:15

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1 Course Overview

The Management Practice (MP) curriculum at the Goizueta Business School has evolved over the past few years, and this course has as well. The initial focus of the class was project management principles used for professional certification (Project Management Professional (PMP)). Projects can be thought of as something that meets a specific need or unique purpose in the organization, that generally consists of tasks that fall outside the realm of “business as usual”, and that has to be delivered within the constraints of time and cost.

While the course will still touch on these topics, the scope of the course has broadened to one of “consultancy”. This aligns the course more clearly with the other MP electives in that the focus of the class will be about the actual delivery of a project, rather than on the techniques firms use to plan and control projects.

The other MP electives will follow a similar structure and build upon the structured problem solving tools, but each is related to particular domain. The marketing MP courses focus on the connection between the firm and its customers. In finance, the MP exercise revolves around valuation, and there are other courses with very specific domains, like health care or social entrepreneurship. In this course we will be aware of the customers of the firm and how the value of the firm can be increased, but the projects look into the firm to see how the operations and information systems support the firm’s competitive advantage.

For example, suppose that the firm deals with large products that can be easily damaged while being delivered to the customer. A consultancy project here would examine the entire process for ways to prevent damage, but there will be limits to the amount invested in prevention. So another aspect would be to consider ways to mitigate the effect on the customer when there is a situation with damage. There are also issues in how the damage is accounted for, so the information system needs to be examined for the incentives it presents to decision makers in the process. And since damage occurs along a broad scale, some damage might be acceptable (or even preferred) by customers.

Most major consulting practices naturally look at their engagements partly through the lens of project management. We will discuss the general framework for accomplishing consultancy work, and how different firms develop more specialized expertise in certain problem solving domains. For example, consultants are often engaged with process improvement
or technology implementation. The appropriate tools for those projects could be different than the tools for a more unstructured new business startup engagements. In this course, we will treat the projects as if they were consulting engagements, although we will not consider the pricing or billing aspects of consultancy.

The course will be divided into two parts:

**Frameworks and tools.** In this part of the course, we will develop an understanding of the methods used to effectively plan and control projects. There are a variety of tools created to solve particular kinds of project management instances, and we will only be able to cover a sampling of these. As much as possible, the selection of topics to discuss in class will support the particular needs of the companies that are sponsoring projects.

**Management Practice Projects.** Everyone in the class will be part of a project team, working on a project with a sponsor organization during the semester. During the first half of the semester, teams will structure the problem to be solved and define those aspects that are (and are not) part of the scope for the semester. Then the teams will collect and analyze data to better understand the problem and come up with recommendations. These projects will culminate in presentations to the project sponsor.

### 2 Teaching methods

I will lecture on some of the material associated with the class, and we will also explore topics in the context of case study discussions. For these sessions my expectation is that you are active participants in the class and not passive observers.

The majority of the class time will be dedicated to the projects. Each group is expected to schedule weekly meetings with me after the projects are launched (tollgates). There will also be presentations to the sponsors before the midsemester break, and final presentations during the last week of classes.

I am also arranging for some company executives to come to class, to talk about their specific experiences. There may be material to prepare in advance of these visits, but you
should also come to these sessions prepared to engage the speakers and to learn from their experience.

3 Course Materials

At this time I am not anticipating a required textbook for the class, but I will be providing reading material specific to the needs of each project team. I will create the bibliography on BLACKBOARD. If you want something to read to get started, this small book by a McKinsey consultant is actually quite good:

*Problem Solving 101*

Ken Watanabe

We will use Microsoft Project 2010/2013 for one case, to introduce you to project planning activities. (Both versions are available, but I will use whatever is currently installed on the classroom computers.) This software can be downloaded for free through the Microsoft DreamSpark for Academic Institutions at:

HTTPS://WWW.DREAMSPARK.COM/

The tutorial that comes with the software and the notes that I will provide should be a sufficient resource for most people in the class, but if you want additional reading material, there are two good references on BLACKBOARD for those interested in this tool.

A small number of cases for the course are available on WWW.STUDY.NET, and you will need to purchase these materials.

In order to facilitate collaboration (to include me), I will be setting up resources via Office365 for each team. When appropriate, the weekly meetings can be done via Lync and on-line documents (and avoid the room reservation issues). If your team wants to use other tools for collaboration, let me know and we can set them up (I might be interested in learning new tools if you have experience with cool apps).
4 Course Requirements and Grading

Grades for the course will be based on the following:

Class participation (30%). I will assess your participation during class sessions. Higher evaluations will go to those who contribute constructively to our discussions, not just for how much you contribute. This can be in the form of providing clear insights for the rest of the class (you got the answer), but also in posing questions that indicate an attempt to more clearly understand the decision at hand. These “I don't understand” contributions should always include a description of why you have the question and what the answer to the question will provide. I will provide regular feedback about this part of the class, but feel free to contact me if you have concerns or questions.

I will also assess your participation in the project part of the class. This will include our meetings together to work on your project, and also your contributions during your team's presentation.

Project participation (20%). I will be working with all the groups and will assess the participation of each member of each group. This will include the regular meetings we will have and also interactions with the project sponsor.

Project engagement (50%). We will divide into teams (four or five is probably best) and each will have a partner company project to work on. In some cases there will be one team assigned to the sponsor, but in other cases there will be two teams working in parallel (but independently). The teams will be responsible for documenting the progress of the team and delivering two presentations. The first will be a “project scope” presentation that will take place prior to the midsemester break. The final presentation will occur during the last week of classes or during exam week (if the team needs extra time or the sponsor has scheduling preferences).

Please note that a minimum (i.e., passing) level of performance on each of these components is required in order to receive a passing grade for the class. Also recognize that the MBA program at Goizueta has an official grading policy that limits the number of the highest grades. There will be sufficient work to allow me to implement this policy and I will
clearly communicate during the class where in the grade distribution you are located. If you have any questions or concerns about this policy, please feel free to contact me at any time during the class.

5 The Honor Code at Goizueta

Academic misconduct of any sort will not be tolerated and everyone should understand that I take this issue quite seriously. I will pursue violations of the honor code according to University policies, and all students in this class must comply with the Goizueta Honor Code. Please make time to talk with me or someone in the MBA office if you are unsure about these policies.

Also understand that a student who knowingly assists another student in committing an act of academic misconduct will be equally accountable for the violation and will be subject to sanctions.

6 Class Schedule

I have reorganized the class completely from the previous version of the course. The dates and schedule here are pretty firm, but I will revise the dates and assignments if necessary. Those updates will be clearly posted on BLACKBOARD.

Dates below that are boxed are sessions that will meet in our assigned room and I expect everyone to attend. The other dates are meant to give you a sense of what progress your team should be making during the semester on your project. I will come to the classroom on those days to meet with teams, and I also expect that there will be meetings at other times to accommodate the sponsor or team needs.

6.1 Introduction

January 13: Introduction We will introduce the course and topics to be covered. There will be time to start to organize into case groups and some discussion of software
issues.

**January 15: Project team launch** We will talk about each of the projects and determine who is interested in each. I will then work after class to set up the teams and assign each to the sponsors. We will also review the structured problem solving model from BUS500 and discuss how the project work will be scheduled during the semester.

### 6.2 Project Definition and Scope

**January 20: Ti-Tech(A) (HBS case 508-095)** This is a rich case that requires some careful strategic analysis in order to resolve the broad issue for the company. We could think about this overall problem (faced by Tim Stanley), but instead we are going to focus on the problem as viewed at a lower level in the organization, by Rob Wakefield in operations and Amy Meredith in marketing.

- These two managers have been asked to evaluate some new orders, and the case describes four of them. For this assignment, we are going to ignore the fourth (Chemco) and just look at the first three: Hendrick Construction, Stone-Parker and Northern Paper.
- How would Rob and Amy define the key question facing them?
- What kind of issue tree are each thinking of? Are their issue trees complete?
- What kinds of hypotheses will arise from those trees for each of the orders (so there will be six sets)?
- How would you use the issue trees and hypotheses to help Amy and Rob come to a decision about the orders?

**January 22: Team charters** I will schedule times with each team to start each project and engage the team with the sponsor. We may meet briefly together during the class time.

**January 27: Initial company visits and problem definition** Each team should be able to meet with the sponsor and begin the process of focusing on the key question they will address and start thinking about the scope of the project.
January 29: **Company visit** Details will be provided prior to the visit, but we will have some visitors from one of the consulting companies that recruit at Goizueta and they will describe some of the tools and frameworks they use to manage their engagements.

### 6.3 Project Modeling

February 3: **Rancho Shopping Center game** This is my own case, and so it is not on STUDY.NET. Questions for you to prepare are in the case. The class will break into groups and try to plan and execute the project using the software provided. After the game we will discuss the kinds of tools required to support project scheduling decisions.

February 5: **Project team meetings - project scope** The teams will review the structured problem solving approaches from the fall term and continue to work with the project sponsor to determine the scope of the work to be done on the project. The team should start to develop issue trees and hypotheses.

February 10: **Software for projects** Software solutions for managing projects are quite common and we will investigate the structure of some of the most common tools. We will spend a fair amount of time with Microsoft Project. We will also discuss optimization and simulation tools as they relate to project management decision making.

February 12: **Project issues and hypotheses** Company meetings should be scheduled and preliminary data collection should start. Issue trees and hypothesis generation should be well underway.

### 6.4 Project Launch

February 17: **Project plan draft** Each team will meet with me to discuss their draft plans, prior to meeting with the sponsors.

February 19: **Sponsor presentation** Each team should present the project plan for the sponsor. Other members of the sponsor's management team will attend and the team may have to adjust the final project scope based on the presentation. If there is data that
the sponsor will need to assemble for the team, this will give them the midsemester break to work with me and prepare material for when you return.

Midsemester break

6.5 Project Execution

March 17: Project execution We will review the project execution aspects of the structure problem solving model. Each team will start to plan the data analysis and recommendation phase of the project.

March 19: Project work with sponsor This week should include a company visit and the start of the analysis part of the project. After the break, it will be important to get started quickly in this phase.

March 24: Company visit Another consulting company that recruits at Goizueta will come to class to discuss how they manage the analysis and recommendation aspects of their engagements.

March 26: Project tollgates There will be detailed meetings with me this week to identify the status of the project and any adjustments that need to be made in order to finish the semester with a strong recommendation.

6.6 Project Software

March 31: Microsoft Project We will continue the discussion of tools for managing projects, using Microsoft Project as an example.

April 2: Project hypothesis testing Teams should be at the point now where the data and models can be used to determine which hypotheses can be used to determine recommendations for the sponsor. Evidence should be starting to take the form that can be used in the final presentation.
April 7: A&D High Tech (A) (KEL156) The CIO of A&D High Tech needs to determine whether the proposed online store project can be completed in time for the holiday shopping season. A new project manager has taken over the project and he needs to integrate all of the components of the plan and determine the feasibility of the project and also identify the critical risks.

- What is the projected completion date? (Assume there are no holidays adn ignore the sunk cost of the planning team’s effort.)
- What is the total cost? How much of the total costs are labor costs? Capital costs?
- What is the critical path(s) in the project? How would you assess the level of risk in the project?
- What is your opinion on the potential for the project to be completed on time?

April 9: Project presentation preparations Teams will organize story boards for the work being done. Recommendations and justifications should now be taking shape.

6.7 Project Completion

April 14: Final tollgates Each team will meet with me to assess the status of the project and plan for the presentations that will occur during the last week of classes.

April 16: Conclusion of analysis and recommendations Teams can work with the sponsors to finish up any last tasks to prepare for presentations.

April 21: Project presentations We will schedule presentations for the sponsors of the project. Each member of the class will be required to attend at least one other presentation and write a short critique of the presentation.

April 23: Course wrap-up