

B8592: IMMERSIVE TEAMWORK

August 28–30, 2022 | Kravis 680

For Bidding Purposes Only

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COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Throughout your career, you'll spend a substantial share of your professional time and effort as a member and/or leader of teams. This course helps you get ready to harness the potential of teams and to thrive as a team member and leader. The course relies heavily on game playing and game (re)design as avenues for understanding team dynamics.

Across the course, you will not be a passive audience member, copying down someone else's generic recipe for team success. Instead, you'll be an active co-creator of your own individualized experience, crafting and refining your personal playbook for what yields great teamwork and deepening your understanding of yourself as a team member and leader. These are our objectives:

UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF, including refining answers to questions such as:

- What distinctive things (capabilities, skills, motivations, and so forth) do I, and can I, bring to a team? How can my teams and I get the most from that?
- What do I, and can I, bring out from my teammates (e.g., in terms of attitudes, ideas, effort, etc.)? How can I leverage and/or refine that?
- What do I most/least appreciate and enjoy about teamwork and team leadership? What does that mean for me and my teammates?

UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICING TEAMWORK, including refining answers to questions such as:

- What factors are important for team success? What can undermine it?
- What can team leaders do to support team effectiveness?
- How do team dynamics and success factors vary by context, such as task?
- How do functional and occupational differences within a team matter? What implications does that hold?
- How can I enact effective teamwork and team leadership behaviors?

COURSE ACTIVITIES

The half-credit course will take place over two-and-a-half days (e.g., all Monday, all Tuesday, half of Wednesday). Class sessions will feature some traditional lecture and commentary but most of our time together will be in team-based experiences, working with groups of classmates on a variety of tasks.

This course relies heavily on games (playing them and re-designing them) as tools for understanding teamwork and oneself. You should be prepared for an intense, hands-on experience, featuring different kinds of tasks (analysis, execution, idea generation, etc.), often under time pressure. There will be repeated episodes for self-reflection as well as giving and receiving candid feedback to teammates. Students who give their full attention and energy to this class, and who show a commitment to helping their classmates learn, will be rewarded with new insights into themselves and teamwork.

Our first day will feature an intense teamwork simulation (a large-scale game) with shifting 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 will reflect (individually and in teams) on what worked well and what could have gone better. The whole class will collaborate in an overall debrief, drawing out observations about teamwork, leadership, and communication as well as individual insights (e.g., awareness of one's own style, contributions, impact on others, etc.).

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 a brief introduction to experiential design and creative teamwork, teams sprint through a design process, generating and selecting ideas, developing and testing materials, and ultimately showcasing their design (i.e., other classmates taking part in each team's simulation). 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, students read selected profiles of real-world teams, laying the groundwork for small-group discussions. Prior to class, will students also reflect and report on their experience with, and attitudes about, teamwork (including themselves as team members and leaders).

In the wake of our in-person class time, students will complete a final assessment of fellow teammates, read additional cases and resources on teamwork, and write brief reflections on them. Students will also take stock of themselves and their experience in the classroom. Building on the feedback and reflections captured during class time, each student will write a paper (due several weeks after class completion) featuring analysis of themselves, reflections on principles of teamwork and leadership, and good practices for their own future reference.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

There are three graded areas of the course:

- **ADVANCE WORK** [20% of grade]:
 - Timely and quality completion of pre-course survey, including self-reflections and prior experiences with teamwork
 - One required reading reflection (on required reading)
 - One optional reading reflection (on optional reading)
- **DURING CLASS ACTIVITIES** [40% of grade]:
 - Attendance (on-time arrival and presence throughout class periods)
 - Submission of constructive self-reflections and constructive peer feedback during multiple reflection points during the class
 - Teammates' evaluations of each student's contribution to the learning environment
- **POST-CLASS DELIVERABLES** [40% of grade]:
 - Timely and quality completion of post-course survey, including ratings of teammates
 - One required reading reflection (from readings menu)
 - Two optional reading reflections (from readings menu)
 - Required final paper featuring self-reflections, observations on team dynamics, and takeaway good practices. See the later section in this syllabus for further details on the final paper.

To earn an “H,” you must earn excellent marks in all of the required and optional components of the course, including Advance Work, During Class Activities, and Post-Class Deliverables. Due to the School’s grading curve policy, completing all

of these assignments is not a guarantee of an “H,” but you cannot earn an “H” without completing the optional assignments.

Students may be able to earn an “HP” with excellent marks in the course’s required components, without submitting optional reading reflection assignments.

In-person attendance in all sessions is mandatory. There is no option to join sessions remotely (e.g., via Zoom) or to make up sessions (e.g., by watching recordings). Students who miss a class meeting will be dropped from the course.

CONNECTION TO OTHER COURSES AND THE CORE

This course builds on selected 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 on 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 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.

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

- Pre-course survey, including reflections on self and past experience with teamwork
- Advance required reading and reflection paper
- Advance optional reading and reflection paper

DAY 1 / AUG 28 9:00-5:30

- Introductory comments on team dynamics
- Small-group discussions and team activities
- Large-scale hands-on immersive teamwork activity
- Multiple reflection points, recording self-reflections and peer feedback
- Individual and team reflections on experience; shareouts

DAY 2 / AUG 29 9:00-5:30

- Experiential design tutorial
- Small-group discussions and team activities
- Extended design challenge: modding an immersive teamwork activity
- Multiple reflection points, recording self-reflections and peer feedback

DAY 3 / AUG 30 8:30-1:00

- Showcase of student-created immersive teamwork activities
- Reflections and observations
- Wrap-up

POST-CLASS

- Post-class survey
- Additional reflection paper(s) analyzing real-world teams
- Final paper: Insights about teamwork and self, takeaways

READINGS AND READING REFLECTIONS

Readings will be available in Canvas under Files | Readings.

Reading reflections should be submitted to relevant Canvas assignments on time. Reflections should be 1-2 double-spaced pages, PDF-format, 1-inch margins, 12-point font, with your name on the top of the first page. They should demonstrate an understanding of some key points in the reading but are not meant to be a summary of the reading. **Showcase your own reactions**, such as connecting an idea from the reading to a past situation you've encountered or to a future situation you'll face ... or to another reading or case study. You might write about why you agree or disagree with some claim in the reading, how you might apply some recommendation, and/or discuss boundaries to good practices or implications (e.g., conditions when or where a principle may be more or less true). You're encouraged to offer any kind of personal reaction. For post-class reflections, you might note connections to your experience in the class.

/// ADVANCE READINGS ///

REQUIRED: In advance of the first class meeting, you should complete the following required reading:

Duhigg, Charles. Teams: Psychological Safety at Google and Saturday Night Live, Chapter 2 in *Smarter Faster Better: The Secrets of Being Productive in Life and Business*. Random House, 2016.

The required reading reflection is due to Canvas by **August 26, 5 pm**.

OPTIONAL: In addition, students will be assigned (by email via Canvas) **ONE** of the following two **optional** pre-course readings. Completion of the optional reading is necessary to earn an "H." If you do an optional reading, please focus on the one assigned by email in advance of the course, either Catmull & Wallace or McChrystal et al.. The other reading will be available to you as part of the post-class reading menu.

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.

McChrystal, Stanley, Collins, Tatum, Silverman, David & Fussell, Chris. From Command to Team, Chapter 5 in *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*. Penguin Random House, 2015.

The optional reading reflection is due to Canvas by **August 26, 5 pm**.

/// POST-CLASS READINGS ///

After the class, you are required to do at least one additional reading from the menu below (or an approved alternative) and submit a reading reflection on it. To be eligible for an “H,” you must also do two additional readings and reflections (three total). These two additional readings/reflections are optional, but required for an “H.” You're welcome to choose from the readings below. If you'd like to submit a reflection on a different reading (e.g., another article, chapter, podcast episode, or case with which you are familiar), please contact Professor Ames to explain your proposed alternative. Alternatives will be considered if they serve the learning goals for the course, but should not be pursued for expediency (e.g., writing a reflection on a case you've already read for another course).

How should you choose which reading(s) to do? Be guided by your interests and your experience in the class and the questions it raised for you. In addition, consider the situations and challenges you'll face in the future—and which readings might help you develop your thinking and readiness in those directions.

See the prior section for details on submissions (length, etc.). All post-class reading reflections (required and optional) are due **September 13, 5 pm**. Note that the final paper has the same deadline. Please pace your work accordingly.

Readings will be available in Canvas under Files | Readings.

If you did not submit a reading reflection on one or either of these pre-class optional readings, they can be part of your post-class reading menu:

- **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.**

This chapter from a co-founder of Pixar focuses on the animation studio's scramble to produce the sequel Toy Story 2. The experience—including conflicts, firings, and major creative reversals—took a steep psychological and physical toll on the company's people. The company's leadership learned several lessons from the episode, including the notion that a great team can fix (or discard) a mediocre idea but a mediocre team will often screw up even a great idea ... and the importance of caring for team members' welfare.

- **McChrystal, Stanley, Collins, Tantom, Silverman, David & Fussell, Chris. From Command to Team, Chapter 5 in *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*. Penguin Random House, 2015.**

This chapter discusses the value in shifting from a top-down command style to a more fluid, adaptive team process, using examples from airplane crews (including both a tragic crash as well as several cases of life-saving coordination) and the now widely-used aviation practice known as “Crew Resource Management.” The authors weave in other examples to illustrate their points about nimble teams that communicate and adapt effectively, ranging from medical doctors to Navy SEALs.

Other readings in the post-class reading menu include:

- **Alliger, George M., Cerasoli, Christopher P., Tannenbaum, Scott I., & Vessey, William B. Team resilience: How teams flourish under pressure. *Organizational Dynamics*, 44, 176–184, 2015**

The researchers writing this article don’t showcase an extended case study or example, but instead focus on the general nature of team resilience, a capacity some teams have to sustain performance in challenging environments, from time pressure to crises to lack of resources. They note that a group of resilient individuals doesn’t automatically make a resilient team. They describe good practices revealed by their research, including minimizing (mitigating challenges in advance), managing (coping with difficult circumstances), and mending (recovering from challenges, learning from them, sustaining relationships, etc.).

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

This chapter looks at teamwork from the point of view of Dave Cooper, a Navy SEAL trainer. Cooper’s history of compliance with, and resistance to, his commanders’ orders offers lessons on collective intelligence. This chapter also includes a helpful discussion of After Action Reviews (AARs), team debriefings that set aside hierarchy and extract lessons that the team can use in future operations.

- **Edmondson, Amy C., & Smith, Diane M. Too hot to handle? How to manage relationship conflict. *California Management Review*, 49(1), 6–31, 2006.**

These researchers explore “hot” (unproductive, escalating) team conflict through an anonymized (but real) case study of a senior leadership team. Drawing on the case, the authors call out dysfunctional conflict dynamics, including conflict becoming

personal and interrupting effective decision making. They then lay out effective practices for “cool” conflict, including managing self (reflecting and reframing), managing conversations (excavating the logic behind different views), and managing relationships (building trust, investing in key relationships).

- **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.**

This chapter doesn't focus on the dynamics within small teams but rather examines the connections (or lack thereof) across teams and units within an organization. The dynamics are highlighted by the case of Sony's failure to catch up with Apple's iPod, due in part to Sony's inability (compared to Apple) to collaborate effectively across subunits. Hansen discusses causes of non-collaboration and describes paths to “disciplined collaboration,” including removing motivational and ability barriers

- **Rigby, Darrell, Elk, Sarah, & Berez, Steve. How Agile Really Works. Chapter 1 in Doing Agile Right. Harvard Business Review Press, 2020.**

Starting with a composite (fictionalized) case study based on their extensive experience, these consultants illustrate what an “agile” team and process is. Done well, these small, nimble teams can often achieve dramatic and rapid progress on innovation initiatives compared to ordinary operations in large organizations. The authors note some of the history of the approach, growing in part from software development featuring practices such as “scrums” (small, multi-functional, self-led teams that meet frequently and briefly) and sprints of work tied into rapid cycles of prototyping and feedback gathering. Not all teams or organizations are, or need to be, agile, but contemporary leaders are well served to have at least some familiarity with the methods and mindsets involved.

- **Thompson, Leigh. Virtual Teamwork. Chapter 12 in Making the Team. Pearson, 2018.**

Teamwork scholar Leigh Thompson distills research on virtual teams to describe their dynamics and behavior as well as their potential and risks. She reviews good practices for building and operating effective virtual teams.

- **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.**

A riveting story of a team tragedy in 1949, when over a dozen “smoke jumper” firefighters died in the Mann Gulch fire. This chapter recounts the fateful decisions that the leader and team members made, with Useem drawing out lessons on topics including communication, receptivity, trust, and stress.

FINAL PAPER

The final paper is a tool for you to synthesize and deepen your understanding of yourself and teamwork ... and to create a resource of good practices that could have value for you in the future. You will presumably draw on your experience in this class in writing this paper. But you are encouraged to go beyond it if doing so will add to the value of this activity for you. Feel free to draw on your experience in MBA groups and teams, feedback you’ve received and other experiences you’ve had at CBS, and your personal and professional life beyond and before Columbia.

You have two options for the paper: a **STANDARD** final paper (5–7 pages long) or an **EXTENDED** final paper (8–10 pages). To be eligible for an “H,” you must complete a high-quality, compelling extended final paper. This does not guarantee an H, but is required, along with other requirements noted elsewhere.

All papers should be submitted to Canvas, double-spaced, PDF-format, 1-inch margins, 12-point font, with your name on the top of the first page. Please do not add extended padding or spacing around headings, bullet-point lists, etc. The final paper is due **September 13, 5 pm**. Note that the reading reflections have the same deadline. Please pace your work accordingly.

Regardless of length (standard or extended), all papers should address the following three components:

- **Reflections on self.** Think about yourself as a teammate and a team leader. You might consider things such as what you have learned about your own strengths and style, what you bring to a team and/or what you bring out to others, and what you enjoy most and least about teamwork (and how/why that matters). You might draw on your own **self-reflections** during (and beyond) the course. You might draw on the **peer feedback** you received during team discussions and through the peer feedback survey results. You may also find great value in **talking further** with one or more classmates about the experience and yourselves as team members and leaders. You might also consider how these observations fit with, or depart from, the

strengths and weaknesses you identified in the **pre-course survey**.

- **Reflections on teamwork and team leadership.** Beyond yourself, think about what matters to (in)effective teamwork and team leadership. You might consider things we discussed in class related to Core Functions (Climate, Communication, Conflict), Operating Functions (Creativity, Choice, Coordination) as well as team Inputs (Composition, Context, Compass). You could reflect on what factors matter most (especially for the kinds of situations you may face in your future) and how and why they can help or hurt a team.
- **Takeaways and good practices.** Your paper should also showcase practical implications that you are taking that can guide you in your future teamwork and leadership. You could use this as a chance to write your own “teamwork manual” or “cheat sheet,” something you might refer back to and get value from in the years ahead. This could include good practices (things to do), pitfalls (things to avoid), principles, processes, commandments, etc. ... whatever could have meaning and value to you.

You have flexibility in how, and at what length, you address these components. Creativity is encouraged. Your paper might end up being 10% reflections on self, 15% reflections on teamwork, and 75% “teamwork manual.” Or it could be 80% reflections on self, including a personal development plan, with 10% on teamwork and 10% on other takeaways. Any combination is allowed, so dig deeper on where you think the value is for you. Other structures are also welcome: the paper does not need to be three separate sections, but could be organized in other ways (e.g., good practices interspersed in the self and teamwork sections). Take an approach that you think is going to have lasting value for you.

If you have questions about the paper, don’t hesitate to ask.

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS AND DEADLINES

Assignment	Type	Deadline
Pre-course survey	Required	August 26, 5 pm
Pre-course required reading reflection (Duhigg)	Required	August 26, 5 pm
Pre-course optional reading reflection (as assigned)	Optional (required for “H”)	August 26, 5 pm
Class attendance, including self-reflections and peer feedback	Required	August 28–30
Post-class survey	Required	Sept 2, 5 pm
Post-class required reading reflection	Required	September 13, 5 pm
Post-class optional reading reflection (1 of 2)	Optional (required for “H”)	September 13, 5 pm
Post-class optional reading reflection (2 of 2)	Optional (required for “H”)	September 13, 5 pm
Final paper	Required (length expectations greater for “H”)	September 13, 5 pm