

**MGMTX 439**  
**Special Topics in Management: General Management**  
***Winter 2023***

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**In-person Class Times (classes start at 9am)**

- Sunday, January 15
- Sunday, February 12
- Sunday, March 12

**Online Video/Discussion Forum Weeks**

- In weeks where we will not meet in person, there is an assigned case to prepare. After preparing the case, students must watch a series of videos about the case, and participate in Online Discussion Forums with classmates, the Professor and the TA. Students in this course must plan to participate in these cases each week. You cannot skip weeks and “catch up” later. Continuous weekly participation is required.
- Specifically, the last page of the syllabus list a “Participation Window” for each online week. For grading purposes, only participation within that window will count.
- Videos and Discussion Forums will “open” for viewing and participation at 8am on the date listed on the last page of the syllabus. Once posted, videos will stay available for viewing until the end of the course. However, participation in the Online Discussion Forums will only be graded through the end of the “Participation Window” for that case.
- Please read the syllabus carefully for further instructions about Online Videos and Discussion Forums. In general, we do not make exceptions around participation during the assigned “Participation Window.” We also do not release videos early. Please plan on participating in this course on a weekly basis.

**Final Exam Window**

- The class has a take home, self-scheduled Final Exam that is 4 hours in length.
- Students must start the exam at a time of their choosing between Saturday, March 18 at 6pm and Tuesday, March 21 at 6pm. Once a student begins the Final Exam, they will have 4 hours to complete it. The exam must be completed in one continuous 4-hour session, starting at a time in the window above.
- Students must start the Final Exam within the window indicated above. There are no exceptions. Please plan accordingly. Internet access will be required.

**Individual/Group Project**

- Students must submit an individual project by Sunday, March 26. There are several intermediate deadlines that involve feedback to and from classmates. Please carefully read the details of this project below, as several deadlines are involved.

## INTRODUCTION

General Management is a cross-disciplinary course that draws on concepts from Strategy, Leadership, Organizational Behavior, Negotiation and other business fields. The goal of the course is to give students tools and skills that help senior managers in organizations “get important stuff done.” Management usually involves directing, coordinating with, influencing, giving feedback to, and rewarding/punishing in others in organizations, and the class has a heavy element of “managing others.” This is often but not only one’s subordinates – general managers also have to “manage” co-workers at the same level, their superiors, and oftentimes other organizational stakeholders.

A key theme of the class is “leading by managing” – the idea that leaders are remembered less for leadership traits (such as being inspiring or visionary) and more for *management* decisions such as how they allocate time, what they say to and direct others to do, how they reward good and punish bad behavior, and other similar decisions. These decisions often appear (and sometimes are!) in the weeds, day-to-day, and decidedly non-strategic. But these day-to-day management challenges often eat up the majority of a senior manager’s time. And the compilation and history of a manager’s decisions in these situations, particularly in regard to how they affect others, is often the most important contributor to an employee’s long-term success as an organizational leader.

This class is highly experiential. In almost every class session we will carry out roleplays, simulations, exercises, and/or games that mirror a problem in management. Because of this highly experiential approach, we do not videotape in-person class sessions. We also do not allow auditors.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

General managers coordinate decisions, actions and collaboration in organizations that span functional or other boundaries. Due to this coordinating role, general managers play a fundamental role in the success of organizations. General managers usually are tasked with coordinating the work of others in the organization who have deeper specialized knowledge than they do, and whose work is more siloed and less broad than the general manager herself. A general manager also must answer to at least one superior; even the CEO of a company (who is herself a general manager) must answer to a Board of Directors and owners/shareholders of the company. Senior leaders of virtually all organizations are, by definition, general managers, and employees who build strong general management capabilities even before they formally become a general manager are much more likely to become and ultimately succeed as a senior leader in an organization.

Because the fundamental job of a general manager is to coordinate across the boundaries firms

use to organize their work, acting as a general manager is fundamentally about managing tension within an organization. Other employees in an organization with whom a general manager interacts have different viewpoints, objectives, incentives, motivations and skill levels. Yet a general manager must lead, coordinate and motivate the work of those she manages. At the same time, she must communicate to, negotiate with and influence her superiors. She is also ultimately responsible for implementing the strategic vision of the unit she manages, which requires both strategic thinking and implementation knowhow.

The art of general management is in balancing tensions: the polarity between what is desired and what is possible. Good general managers are able to see a situation for what it is realistically, yet at the same time are able to envision and lead others towards something better. Successful general managers are both practical and visionary – they are not constrained by organizational inertia and constantly challenge themselves and their organizations to think bigger, but they also are able to accomplish realistic, well-defined goals given the constraints their organizations face. A skilled general manager balances the tension between individual ambition and the need for teamwork. A good general manager gives confidence to others by making the hard decisions look easy. A good general manager allows those with whom she works to “sleep easy” because all is under control, even as she stays awake at night worrying about the best course forward and how her decisions impact her colleagues and organization.

General managers must therefore be “fluent” in a number of business skills: strategy, leadership, process and systems design, managing and motivating others, negotiation, and emotional intelligence. No human being is naturally skilled in all of these areas, and a large part of a general manager’s job is to assess her performance in all required skill areas, and improve in the ones where she lacks competency.

In this course you will study the tools and skills a general manager requires in order to lead her business unit to accomplish its strategic purpose. Although organizations vastly differ in their exact strategy and purpose, all organizations must create value in order to be successful. Ultimately, then, a general manager’s role is deliver the promised value creation that stems from a company’s strategy, and this course is about tools and skills needed to deliver organizational value. We use a framework called the “Pyramid of Value Delivery” that describes at a high level the four ways that a manager leads others in the organization towards a common purpose:

# Pyramid of Value Delivery



- **Strategic Leadership** refers to using “leading by managing” tools to further the strategic aims of an organization. This means understanding the organization’s strategic vision, breaking down the steps required to achieve this vision into a number of operational steps, and – most critically – leading others in the organization towards fulfillment of these steps. General managers often “do” little in an organization beyond leading and managing others. Yet this “leading by managing” is extremely difficult. General managers must be adept at building credibility with others, and using a management style that causes others to not only want to follow the manager’s direction, but also to know *how* to best move forward. “Leading by managing” is complementary to, but looks fundamentally different than, leadership skills taught in other MBA courses on leadership. (These usually miss the “management” component, about which this course goes into significant detail.)
- **Structure and Process** refers to the formal rules by which a strategic plan is broken into manageable “chunks” of activities that employees can then work towards. Examples include designing jobs and roles within organizations, deciding on reporting lines and organizational structure, and making rules that help guide decision making. A general manager plays a critical role in designing the structures and processes that guide the actions of other employees, and monitoring employee performance on the required actions.
- **Incentives** refers to the setting of financial and non-financial rewards and punishments for others in the organization. They define how an organization rewards strong performance and punishes poor performance. Due to the power of incentives in motivating action, any

general manager must be adept at designing and managing an incentive system that governs organizational rewards and punishments. Note that “incentives” mean much more than just monetary pay, although monetary pay is an important element of most incentive systems.

- **Culture and Mental Models** refers to the informal, tacit “social order” of an organization that shapes attitudes and behaviors outside of formal structures, processes and incentive systems. Cultures implicitly design behaviors that are encouraged, discouraged, accepted and rejected within any group. General managers face a “chicken and egg” problem when considering culture within the Pyramid of Value Delivery. Any existing organization already has a culture which can constrain a manager’s ability to take or encourage certain important actions, sometimes greatly so. But adept general managers are also able to influence organizational culture in ways that are beneficial for the strategic vision of the company. Sometimes general managers must completely change organizational culture – one of the most difficult tasks in any organization.

### **COURSE FORMAT**

This course is largely case-based, and the cases draw on real management issues faced by managers in organizations. Most of the cases in the class are in business settings, but some are in other settings, including government and the military. There are a relatively large number of exercises, including in-class “games” or other short exercises, negotiation simulations where students are given a role to play, role playing exercises, and other similar activities. In short, while this class appears similar to your Strategy class in its case-based approach, it is much more interactive than the Strategy course, and we do more than simply discuss cases.

As such, attendance in the course is very critical, as is active participation in the class discussion and class activities. Students who anticipate missing more than a class or two, at most, should not take this course, as it is basically impossible to make up missed material. In this class, students will learn most by participating in the class exercises and discussions. (Please note classes are not videotaped.)

### **GRADING AND COURSE CURVE**

- **In-Person Class Participation: 18%**
- **Discussion Forum Participation (for Online Video cases): 17%**
- **Final Exam: 35%**
- **Individual Group Project: 30%**

Approximately 50% of students in the class will receive an A or an A- (with the top few students, at most, receiving an A+). Approximately 50% of students in the class will receive a B+, B or B-. Grades below B- are only given to students whose exams or class participation indicate a basic lack of preparation and/or familiarity with key course concepts.

## CLASS PARTICIPATION

Participating in class is critical to student learning. Almost every class will have elements of “putting you in the shoes of a manager” required to make on-the-spot decisions. These decisions are often difficult, but getting practice in these difficult situations is an important goal for the course. Also, the entire class will learn a lot by seeing how others react to these situations. Not performing optimally when faced with a challenge during class can therefore be “optimal” from a class participation perspective.

We will therefore not consider a student’s performance on any exercise, simulation or roleplay when grading participation. When discussing a case, we also will not consider whether a student made a statement that was “right” or “wrong.” The primary criterion by which participation is grade is: “did the participation move the class forward?” Here are some examples of participation that helps accomplish this goal:

- Statements that make new points or arguments, or that add new evidence to existing points or arguments made by others;
- Participation that shows active listening and attention, that builds on others statements, and/or that amends one’s previous statements based on others’ feedback;
- Participation in exercises that show that the student is taking the exercise seriously, is trying her best, and if necessary is trying to get outside her comfort zone.

There are also some types of participation that tend not to add value:

- Statements that move the class away from the point being discussed (for example by bringing up something off-topic, or something about a topic the class has already moved on from);
- Statements that are repetitive of others’ statements and/or that indicate that the student is not actively listening to others or is not paying attention;
- Strong expressions of opinion without corresponding facts or analysis in support;
- Participation in exercises that indicate that the student is not taking the exercise seriously or is skeptical of the value of the exercise;
- “Outlandish” or “off-the-wall” participation in exercises done merely to get attention, as a joke, or to avoid the tension inherent in the exercise;
- “Skirting the rules” of an exercise or simulation as a way to avoid the tension inherent in the exercise;
- Using phones, sending texts, checking social media, etc during class sessions

## ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS

Each of the topics in this class is taught via the case method. However, for half of these topics, the cases are taught via online videos and discussion forums. It is critical that students approach the “video”/“online” weeks similarly to how they approach the three in-person classes.

Although the video lectures and online discussion forums are an imperfect substitute for live discussion, we’ve found them to be very effective as a way to generate group discussion and build understanding. In fact, in some ways they are superior to live discussion, because they allow students to have more time to think about particularly knotty or thorny topics, and also can allow a greater degree of discussion by individual students. Your participation in these forums is very important.

The first requirement is to participate at the same time as your classmates. This means keeping to the schedule for Online Videos and Discussions Forums. In weeks where students are not coming to campus, they should plan to read and prepare that week’s case, watch a series of videos about the case (typically between 1.5 and 3 hours in total viewing time), and also participate in a series of Online Discussion Forums related to the class.

We understand that some students are attracted to the Flex/Hybrid course format because they can watch videos “on their own time.” While that is certainly true for this course to a certain extent, students must commit to “showing up” during the Participation Window for each Online Case. (See more about this in “Attendance Policy” below.) If you want a class where you can check out for two or three weeks and watch all the videos one night, this is not the right course for you.

For cases that involve online videos, there will a number of “online discussion forums” (typically 2-3 in total) to discuss a question posed at the end of each video. These “discussion forums” act much like a case discussion, except every student must answer the question posed at the end of the video.

After submitting your answer, students will be able to see other students’ answers to the same question, and can type responses, thoughts, questions, criticisms, etc. The Professor and TA will also post in these forums. Student participation in the forums will be graded every week, based on the same set of criteria used above.

One note about online participation – we have found that “quality” is more important than “quantity.” For some students, the ease of responding to all classmates means they are tempted to write a large number of responses. This can clutter the discussion board and lead to

a lot of repetition. We urge students to read a bunch of other student responses, and deciding where and how to comment to add the most value. This will usually mean just a few very careful, high impact responses per individual discussion board. Interaction is very helpful to the success of these boards – just interact in high-value, thoughtful ways!

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

We realize some students must sometimes miss class, which includes not participating in a given week's online discussion forums. However, students who will need to miss more than ONE in- person class or TWO online discussion forums should not take this class. (In reality, we very much hope you will not miss ANY of the in-person classes, as they are very critical to the class.) Any student who misses more than ONE in-person class or TWO online discussion forums should reach out to the Professor to explain why, hopefully before the next absence. Missing a significant number of class sessions is grounds for failing the class.

### **FINAL EXAM**

The Final Exam is a take home format, and must be completed in a single stretch during the 4-day exam windows listed on page 1. (There is no pausing the clock once a student has started an exam.)

The exam will be open book, but will also contain a case that you must read during the 4-hour window. Exam questions may include multiple choice questions, short answer questions, or essay questions. More information about the exam will be distributed closer to the date of the exam.

Please remember that students are required to take the exam during the indicated exam windows. There are no exceptions. Please start planning now to take the exam in the window indicated. Thank you.

### **INDIVIDUAL GROUP ASSIGNMENT**

Each student in the course will submit a 3 page "GM Action Plan" (GAP) that describes specifically what they plan to work on to succeed as a General Manager in the future. The GAP is due by 11:59pm on Sunday, March 26. The Professor will provide you with individual feedback about your final GAP. Previous students have indicated that they have used their GAP to guide their actions and decisions throughout their careers.

While the GAP is individual to you, you will also give and receive feedback from classmates on three "check points" as you build your GAP. Each checkpoint corresponds to the end of one of our three class modules. The Professor and TA will see your submission to your classmates at

each checkpoint, and may provide feedback, but the majority of the interim feedback will come from classmates. You will be asked to rate the value of the feedback you receive from your classmates – this information will only be viewed by the Professor and TA. Valuable feedback to classmates will help the classmate improve their Action Plan by, for example, pushing for deeper specifics, pointing out other issues to consider, suggesting specific actions to take, or providing other concrete ideas that are helpful.

We will provide more information about the Individual Group Assignment later, but students have the following deadlines for their GAP project:

- Module 1 Submission to Teammates: Wednesday, Feb 1
- Module 1 Feedback to Teammates: Wednesday, Feb 8
- Module 2 Submission to Teammates: Wednesday, Feb 22
- Module 2 Feedback to Teammates: Wednesday, Mar 1
- Module 3 Submission to Teammates: Thursday, Mar 16
- Module 3 Feedback to Teammates: Thursday, Mar 23
- FINAL GAP DUE TO PROFESSOR: Sunday, Mar 26

### **MODULE READINGS**

At the end of each module, the Professor will post Module Readings about the frameworks and dynamics discussed in that module (typically readings from *Harvard Business Review* or similar outlets). We post these readings only after a module is completed because the readings will have deeper meaning at that time. Doing these readings is required, and content from the readings may show up on the final exam. We also may discuss readings in later modules in the class, so students should plan to read the module readings at the end of each module. All of the readings are relatively short – students can typically read all the readings for a particular module in 60-90 minutes. (They are really great articles though!)

### **ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND ETHICS**

As a member of the UCLA Anderson academic community, the highest standards of academic behavior are expected of you. As students who are finishing their time at Anderson, we assume that these standards are already clear to you. Please feel free to speak to the Professor or TA if you have any questions about standards around plagiarism, collaboration with other students, classroom behavior, or the use of outside materials. Any evidence of cheating, disruptive classroom behavior, or disrespect for others in the UCLA Anderson community will result in penalties up to and including failing the course, and a report to the UCLA Dean of Students Office.

## COURSE TIMELINE AND ASSIGNED CASES

### Notes:

- OL means “Online.” The dates indicate the Participation Window for that case. To receive participation credit, students must watch the videos and participate in the Discussion Forums between the dates listed. Videos will post by 8am of the start of the Participation Window. While the videos will stay online after the Participation Window closes, no credit is given for participation after the closing date (at 11:59pm).
- IP means “In Person.” We will discuss these cases during the indicated in-person class.
- Cases are either available via the COURSE READER (indicated by CR), or will be posted directly to BRUIN LEARN (indicated by BL).
- Discussion Questions for each case will be posted to Bruin Learn at least one week in advance.

### **Module 1 – Strategic Leadership**

OL:	Thursday, Jan 5 – Friday, Jan 13	TANK IN THE BOG (BL)
IP:	Sunday, Jan 15	MARTHA RINALDI (CR); ECOLAB (CR)
OL:	Monday, Jan 16 – Thursday, Jan 26	YELLOWTAIL MARINE (CR)
OL:	Monday, Jan 23 – Thursday, Feb 2	IRONBOX (BL)

Note: Submit Module 1 GAP to teammates by Sun, Feb 4. Submit feedback to teammates by Sun, Feb 5.

### **Module 2 – Structure, Process and Incentives**

IP:	Sunday, Feb 12	ARCK (BL); CHUNG AND DASGUPTA (BL)
OL:	Monday, Feb 13 – Thursday, Feb 23	DELOITTE (CR); GENERAL ELECTRIC (BL)

Note: Submit Module 2 GAP to teammates by Wed, Mar 1. Submit feedback to teammates by Wed, Mar 8.

### **Module 3 – Culture**

OL:	Thursday, Feb 23 – Wednesday, Mar 8	ZURICH INSURANCE (CR); GOOGLE (CR)
IP:	Sunday, Mar 12	IBASIS (CR)

Note: Submit Module 3 GAP to teammates by Thu, Mar 16. Submit feedback to teammates by Thu, Mar 23. Submit final GAP assignment to Professor by Sunday, Mar 26 at 11:59pm

Note: Final exam is taken at home and can be started anytime between Saturday, March 18 at 6pm and Tuesday, March 21 at 6pm. Students must submit their exam answers within 4 hours of starting the exam. Students must start the exam during the indicated window. No exceptions.