

15.969 Dynamic Leadership: Using Improvisation in Business

Fall 2005 H2

6 Credits

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Tues/Thurs 4:00–5:30pm

Room E51-315

Overview

Leadership is a dynamic process. While everyone can be prepared for the ups and downs of business, there are very few ways of preparing how to ‘react’ to situations. Improvisation can be a powerful tool for business leaders to learn how to do exactly this: to read and ‘react’ to unexpected situations with confidence and flair. In this course, we will attempt to learn this skill of improvisation and understand how improvisation can help us in leadership situations. The first two weeks will be an overview of performing improvisation with introductory and advanced exercises in the techniques of improvisation. The final four weeks will be applying these concepts in business situations to practice and master these improvisation tools in leadership learning.

Class 1 - Tuesday November 1

Introduction and Overview: Fundamentals of improvisation

- Overview of course
 - o Requirements & Guidelines
 - o What is Improvisation
 - History
 - Methods
 - Preview of Primary Colors reading – how the skill of ‘reading an audience’ separates ‘Leaders’ from ‘Managers’ How improvisation will help you with this understanding
- Course Objectives
 - o Not to be funny
 - o Understand and experience leadership as *reacting*
 - o Learn what we are like in leadership situations
 - What works, what’s less effective, what are our personal warning signals – when do we *not* react well?
 - o Take risks: Only people that take risks can become true leaders.
 - o Lose your sensitivity – learn how to openly share feedback

- Methodology
 - o “10 Rules of Improv”
 - o Why these rules exist and how we *must* follow them to master reacting
 - o understanding how improvisation works
 - o teamwork implications – how business = working together

Paper Assignment #1 handed out – Due in class Tuesday November 8

After class: Read Primary Colors, “Improvisation for the Theater” and “Truth in Comedy”

Class 2 - Thursday November 3

Improvisation methodology continued.

Journal exercise (during or after class): Write a short paragraph on what you hope to learn this in this course. Why you think learning to improvise may help you in your business career.

After class: Read “What Makes A Leader” and “Leadership in the Age of Uncertainty”

Class 3 - Tuesday November 8 - Paper Assignment #1 Due in Class

Learning Fundamentals of Improvisation + Leadership Discussion

- What is leadership? How to learn it?
- Begin understanding how to read your audience + win people over
- Learning about yourself – Leader’s ‘EQ’ (Goldman article)
 - o What have you learned about yourself
 - pitfalls, goals, etc
 - what you need to develop or manage in yourself.

After class: Read “Listening to People”

Class 4 - Thursday November 10

Introduction of Leadership Learning from Improvisation

- Not new ideas – “Listening to People” article
- Applying Improvisation to MBA Life

Paper Assignment #2 handed out – Due in class November 17, 2005

Journal exercise (during or after class): Write a short paragraph on what areas you have identified in yourself that need ‘improvisational’ improvement. Think about areas in business school courses or interactions where you ‘wish you had said or done that.’

After class: Read “Experiential Learning: An Analysis and Review” and various newspaper articles by Yorton, Tom; Quintanilla, Carl; Lublin, Joann

Class 5 - Tuesday November 15

Workplace Scenarios and ‘Being the Leader’ in Creativity, Management, etc.

- Why improvisation tools create a path to gaining skills and attributes of leadership
- Leadership and Improvisation Exploration
- Creativity
 - o How to manage a creative process using improvisation – and learn why it’s effective.
 - o Conducting a team – supportive leadership vs. controlling leadership

After class: Read “Improvise to Innovate”

Class 6 – Thursday November 17 – Paper Assignment #2 Due

Please bring a current version of your resume to class

Improvisational Understanding – Showcasing your Best Self

- *The Leader and Controlling the Situation*
 - o Saying what you want – and *how* to say what you want
 - Authenticity
 - Focus
 - o Interviewing – learning the influence of ‘who has the power’ in situations and how you deal with it.
 - o Expert Q & A – furthering the expert talker concept to deliver your message regardless of the questions you face and unknown ideas that you may come across.

Journal exercise (during or after class): Write a short paragraph on interviews or one-on-one interactions you have had where following the improvisation rules could have helped. Think about how you left the interaction – what kind of relationship did you build, etc.’

After class: Read “Strategy as Improvisational Theater”

Class 7 – Tuesday November 22

Public Speaking & Networking Exploration – Part 1

- *The Leader as the Expert*
 - o Reading audiences: welcome audience vs. hostile audience
 - o Expert Talker – exploring how to ‘act’ as if you are the expert; utilizing confidence and your own expertise to carry you through difficult situations.
 - o Dealing with employees – ‘being’ the expert

Paper Assignment #3 handed out – Due in class November 29, 2005

After class: Read “Blink”

Class 8 - Tuesday November 29 – Paper Assignment #3 Due

Networking + People Skills in Leadership – Part 2

- *The Leader as Effective Networker*
 - o Networking Scenarios “The Dating Game” - learning to read body language, and how to win people over quickly
 - o Cocktail Party 101 – rules of networking – applying them in difficult or challenging situations
- *The Leader as a Salesperson*
 - o How to ‘react’ – various welcome vs. unwelcome characters and how to read them and handle them appropriately, always moving towards achieving your personal goals.

After class: Read “Tobacco Negotiations”

Class 9 – Thursday December 1

Leadership, Improvisation and Negotiation

- Understanding how negotiation is improvisation
 - o Managing in the moment, seizing opportunities, crafting creative solutions
 - o Again, learning to listen in negotiation

Journal exercise (during or after class): Write a short paragraph on any area we have covered thus far in class that particularly resonated for you – positively or negatively. For example, do you find thoughts for your own leadership style from class concepts?

Final Paper Assignment #4 handed out – Due in class December 13, 2005

After class: Read “Laughing all the Way to the Bank” and “Oprah”

Class 10 – Tuesday December 6

Business Leadership – Key Abilities

- *The Leader as a Salesperson*
 - o How to ‘react’ – various welcome vs. unwelcome characters and how to read them and handle them appropriately, always moving towards achieving your personal goals.
- *The Leader as Approachable*
 - o Stand-up Comedy 101...- the art of telling a joke, when and where to use? Why is this type of persona and skill helpful for leadership situations? When is it not?

After class: Read “How Entrepreneurs Craft Strategies That Work”

Class 11 – Thursday December 8

Group Presentations: Final presentations and review.

You, the Leader, The Improviser...

Understanding of not only how to do things but who you are

Learning to develop who and what you to project in any situation

Takeaways of how to implement the image you want to convey.

Class 12 – Tuesday December 13 - Paper Assignment #4 (final paper) Due

Wrapping it up: understanding how use this framework for improvisation in leadership at MIT Sloan and beyond.