Building Innovation Teams and Cultures

☐ Summary

Most venture capitalists will agree that the key determinant of success in an early stage company is the management team. In an environment where formal business plans are of little help and ideation continues around the development of the right business model, management teams must be innovative, resourceful and adaptive. People, not plans, define outcomes. But attracting, coordinating, and encouraging the right co-founders and employees is incredibly tricky, even when you're not faced with scarce resources and deep uncertainty.

This five-week course explores the factors that define high-functioning teams, and offers frameworks and approaches to assembling, motivating, and coordinating effective teams in highly fluid and challenging contexts. Topics include the psychology of teams, legal aspects of team building, and how to divide responsibility, compensation, and equity among the founders. Culture is key to sustainable success in the face of evolving needs, crises, and opportunities. We leverage a powerful intent-driven framework designed to define and grow corporate cultures to create lasting value. The goal is a repeatable methodology for achieving a "flow state" of innovation bringing together founders, employees, customers, and investors to achieve extraordinary outcomes.

☐ Logistics and honorifics (or lack thereof)

Please call me Mark. If you call me Professor Achler, don't be surprised if I take a moment to realize you're addressing me.

I can be reached via email at: markachler@gmail.com
And via telephone at: 312-404-4555

I will be available on campus (or nearby) for in person chats on Monday's prior to class starting at 5pm. Please let me know in advance if you're planning to come by. I will do my best to make myself available at other times. If you'd like to schedule a time to meet or chat with me, please send me an email.

The books you will need to acquire for the course are:

- "The Founder's Dilemmas" by Noam Wasserman
- "Managing the Millennials: Discover the Core Competencies for Managing Today's Workforce" by Espinoza, Ukleja, and Rusch
- "Leadership in a Wiki World: Leveraging Collective Knowledge to Make the Leap to Extraordinary Performance" by Rod Collins

The schedule below indicates which parts of those books I would like you to focus on, and when. In addition, I will provide links to certain articles and videos that I would like you to review prior to certain classes.

☐ Assessment and grading

Grades will be based on:

> Class participation: 20%
> Insight assignment: 20%
> Take-home final: 60%

☐ Class participation

Class time offers a unique opportunity to explore and engage differing views and thoughts with your fellow classmates. You can always read the "next big business textbook," but you will have precious few opportunities to explore what it really means with a set of intelligent, engaged classmates. That means each of you will play an important role in the learning process for your fellow students (and for me).

Therefore, class participation will play an important role in your grade. Your grade will be based not on the quantity of your participation, but on its quality and thoughtfulness. Your insightful or challenging questions will add a great deal to the quality of our time together. Relating real-world stories and examples can be fantastic, and occasionally cathartic. Daring to answer tough or ambiguous questions, regardless of whether you get it right, is critical. I believe firmly in the [Socratic Method](). So please, when I ask a question to the group, or ask for a raise of hands, don't leave me hanging. Let's all get involved, and chime in.

☐ Class attendance

We will have only 15 hours together over the course of 5 weeks, before accounting for mid-class breaks. We have a lot of material to cover in that time, so please make every effort to attend each class.

Meanwhile, we are all (usually) adults, and legitimate conflicts may arise. If you cannot attend a class, please do me the courtesy of letting me know in advance. I do not need to know the reason for your absence; you alone can determine whether your absence is warranted. I trust that you will make right decision. But to be clear, I am relying on your integrity in this matter. I expect you to have what you consider an extraordinary rationale for missing the class. Don't consider the "make-up" assignment below as an easy out.

In the event you are unable to attend a class, here are my expectations:

- Do the readings for the class in question, including any optional readings
- Create and send to me prior to the following class an extra "Insight Assignment" related to the one of the topics specifically covered in the reading material
- Expect me to share your assignment with the rest of the class

My hope (and belief) is that you might maintain continuity with the overall flow of the course material (yes, there is an intended overarching flow!). Also, your assignment might serve to further the learning of your fellow students, who were likely disadvantaged by your absence in the classroom.

☐ Insight Assignment

I will distribute information about the "Insight Assignment" during class 1. As a preview, I'll be asking each of you to contribute insight and creativity to a topic covered during the course, or anything reasonably related to the subject matter (your choice). Each of your answers will be shared with the entire class (perhaps via Blackboard) after the final class session. The goal will be to contribute something to the collective pursuit of learning the subject matter. The nature of the contribution will be up to you, and the expectation (as always) will be for quality over quantity.

The assignment will be due no less than 48 hours prior to the start of the final class. During the final class period, I will request that some of you stand in front of the class to share your thoughts and ideas on your insight assignment. I will need some time to review the assignments, and to select and coordinate those who will present in the final class. Please note that there won't be an expectation for a formal presentation or deck for those presenting; simply getting in front of the class and leading a brief discussion is what I'm looking for.

☐ Take-home final

I will distribute the take-home final in the final class, and it will be due no later than the end of the standard exam period. I will provide further information during class.

☐ Schedule

Date	Time	Event	Info
Jan. 6	6:30 to 9:30pm	Class 1: Innovation in context	Innovation differs from other business activities, and requires different people, processes, and norms. Meanwhile, the rapid evolution of technology, culture, and economy has meaningful impact on how we do business–regardless of the size or nature of the enterprise. We will explore what this means for business leaders and managers, setting the stage for further exploration in subsequent weeks.

Date	Time	Event	Info
Prior to Jan. 13	up to you	Readings	"The Founder's Dilemmas" by Noam Wasserman Part II, chapters 3 through 8 will be quite pertinent to the class discussion, although if you can't find the time to read all of that, please focus on chapters 4 and 5. I will share some links to videos and articles as optional reading.
Jan. 13	6:30 to 9:30pm	Class 2: Creating a strong foundation	The first half of the class will be a guest lecture and discussion with a prominent attorney that focuses on supporting entrepreneurs. They will cover topics relating to legal formation of new ventures, both for startups and for established companies creating new divisions or initiatives. The second half of the class will be a discussion about establishing a strong base around which to build a team. We will cover issues relating to establishing and optimizing a core team (e.g., founders or business unit leaders), as well as assembling and optimizing key external resources (e.g., investors, boards)
Prior to Jan. 20	up to you	Readings	"Managing the Millennials: Discover the Core Competencies for Managing Today's Workforce" by Espinoza, Ukleja, and Rusch This is not a particularly long book, but I found it very interesting. Please read the entire book if you can. If you're pressed for time, please make sure to read Part II (chapters 5-12). I will also share some links to videos and articles as optional reading.

Date	Time	Event	Info
Jan. 20	6:30 to 9:30pm	Class 3: Growing your team	The first half of the class will be a guest lecture and discussion with a serial entrepreneur with significant experience in human resources. In particular, he will explore the importance of hiring extraordinarily talented people, and provide a framework and tools to help you do so. The second half will be a discussion about growing innovation teams, including targeting, selecting, recruiting, and on-boarding the best candidates.
Prior to Jan. 27	up to you	Readings	"Leadership in a Wiki World: Leveraging Collective Knowledge to Make the Leap to Extraordinary Performance" by Rod Collins This is a fascinating book, and I'd like you to read all of it, if you can. Worst case, start at the beginning of the book, and read as far as you can get. The initial 3 chapters form a strong basis for engaging with the material. I will also share some links to videos and articles as optional reading.
Jan. 27	6:30 to 9:30pm	Class 4: Innovation, collaboration, and culture	Discussion and experiential learning about leadership, and how to cultivate a self-sustaining culture designed to maximize the success of your innovation efforts. We will discuss many topics including collaboration, decision making, conflict resolution, and motivation.
Prior to Feb. 3	up to you	Readings	No readings required; I will share some links to videos and articles as optional reading.

Date	Time	Event	Info
Feb. 3	6:30 to 9:30pm	Class 5: Final class	Presentation by some class members related to their insight assignments. Lecture from that guy up in the front of the room about the importance of doing something that inspires and engages all stakeholders with a sense of shared purpose by addressing meaningful problems.