

C122 Understanding General Management

COURSE OVERVIEW

How do general managers - those running a business - bring their influence to bear on the world within and beyond their organisations? How can they do so, in a way which gives full expression to what they stand for, personally and professionally?

Despite its importance, the profession of management stands out as the ungainly stepchild among professions. The goal of law is justice, the goal of medicine health. Management, in contrast, lacks a clear ideal. As a result, few people understand the role general managers play or how they add value. Since they do not understand general managers' crucial role, employees, politicians, and the popular press often criticise executives' large compensation packages and decry corporate greed.

This course offers an introduction to the MBA Programme and to the role of general management in business. Business has arguably replaced government, religion, and in many cases the family as the social institution with the greatest influence on people's lives. General management, therefore, plays a pivotal role in promoting economic and social progress. Many of you will be joining the ranks of general management in business organisations. This six-session core course will highlight the professional challenges and responsibilities, which you will face, and create a road map by which you can navigate the twists and turns of the MBA Programme content, over the next two years. For those whose future calling is to advise general managers as consultants or corporate financiers, or who may seek to shape their behaviour as regulators, this course will illuminate the nature of the jobs of business managers with whom you will be working.

The course has three objectives. First, it will explore the excitement and challenges provided by a career in general management. Second, it will attempt to illuminate the role general managers play in organisations. Finally, this course provides you with a framework around which you will be able to integrate your learning across the MBA Programme.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Case discussions constitute the backbone of this course. These case discussions will provide you with an opportunity to analyse qualitative and quantitative information, develop and evaluate alternative points of view, and build coherent arguments to support your recommendations.

To gain the most from the discussions, you should prepare for each class by reading and analysing the assigned materials: preparation of which takes about three hours. "Class discussion preparation questions" are provided below as a guide to help you in preparing for each session. Each of you will be expected to actively participate in the case discussions. Please let the lecturer know if you feel you have not had the opportunity to contribute fully. Lecture notes will be posted on the Portal at the end of each class session, along with any additional readings that may complement the session.

In addition to these case discussions you will be asked to write and hand in two brief assignments. The course will be graded pass/fail.

Please prepare the Honda (A) case for Session 1. Nothing else need be prepared prior to the start of the course.

INDIVIDUAL CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Session 1: Introduction to General Management

Case: Honda (A)

Class discussion preparation questions:

1. Why was Honda so successful in invading the US motorcycle market?
2. Based on the case, how do you think that Soichiro Honda spent his time? How did he add value? What kind of person was he?
3. What messages does the Boston Consulting Group's report on Honda (from which this case study is extracted) send to top managers?

Session 2: Building Commitments

Case: Apple Computer

Class discussion preparation questions:

1. What factors explain IBM and Apple's different fortunes in the PC sector up to 1990?
2. Why did John Sculley fail to halt Apple's "glide-path to history"?
3. What might you have done differently as CEO?

Sessions 3&4: Framing Decisions

Readings: News Clippings on Airline Start-Ups. P. M. Senge: "The Fifth Discipline" (Doubleday, 1990), Chapter 5, A Shift of Mind.

Class discussion preparation questions:

1. How attractive is the market for low price airlines?
2. What does it take to succeed in this sector?
3. What competitive threats might you face and how would you address them?

Session 5: Inculcating Work Processes

Case: Harvey Golub: Recharging American Express

Reading: Abraham Zaleznik: "Managers and Leaders: Are they different?" (Harvard Business Review, March-April 1992)

Class discussion preparation questions:

1. What was Harvey Golub's inheritance in late 1991?
2. What was Golub trying to accomplish through American Express' process re-engineering?
3. What challenges would Harvey Golub's successor have to face?

Session 6: Engendering and Imposing Values

Case: The Body Shop International

Class discussion preparation questions:

1. How did the Body Shop become such an outstanding success?
2. What is your evaluation of Anita Roddick's management philosophy and style?
3. How suitable is Anita Roddick's philosophy for businesses other than the Body Shop?