Course Overview

General Management: Processes and Action (GMPA) focuses on implementation and the way that general managers get things done. Typically, they work through processes—sequences of tasks and activities that unfold over time, like strategic planning, business development, and budgeting—to move their organizations forward and achieve results. Skill at influencing the design, direction, and functioning of processes is therefore essential to effective general management, and the aim of GMPA is to develop in students a deeper understanding of these activities and their links to performance. It does so by describing a number of critical organizational and managerial processes, outlining their basic elements and operating characteristics, and exploring how they are best influenced and led. Throughout, the focus is on high-level processes that are of interest to general managers; for this reason, case protagonists are typically division presidents or higher.

After a brief introduction to the process perspective, the course is divided into five parts. Each corresponds to an essential task of general management and the associated processes for carrying it out. Module II focuses on strategic processes—those recurrent tasks, activities, and systems that general managers use to set broad direction and goals. These processes help determine organizational purpose; establish targets; ensure alignment across divisions, functions, and hierarchical levels; and provide ways for capabilities and competitive positioning to evolve over time. Cases in this section explore a range of issues, including new business creation, product and technological choices, alternative modes of strategy development, scenario planning, and strategic planning systems.

Module III focuses on decision-making processes. These processes help determine how individuals and organizations choose among alternatives, overcome conflicts, and reach agreement. Typically, they lead to patterns of behavior that become accepted as “the way we do things around here.” A variety of approaches are possible, and the cases in this section compare the strengths and weaknesses of data-driven and intuitive approaches, consensus-based and conflict-based methods, as well as the general manager's role in guiding them. Topics include high-stakes decision making, decision making by task forces and problem-solving teams, operational decision making, and the role and functioning of senior management groups such as executive committees.
Module IV focuses on learning processes. These processes help determine how individuals and organizations create, acquire, interpret, transfer, and retain knowledge; they too take a variety of forms. The approaches examined in this module include intelligence gathering, benchmarking, knowledge management systems, communities of practice, and after action reviews.

The last two modules shift attention from the organization to the individual. Module V focuses on coordination and control processes – the forms of behavior, influence, and direction that general managers use to oversee the work of subordinates and ensure that goals are met. Effective implementation is the goal, and leaders use a variety of approaches to mobilize employees, monitor activities, and deliver results. Cases in this module examine the general manager’s role and responsibilities; the distinctive challenges of managing other managers, creating alignment, and stimulating employee involvement and commitment; culture building; and the shift from informal to formal management.

Finally, Module VI focuses on change processes. The tasks of initiating and leading change are described in a number of settings, including rapid growth, maturity, and turnarounds. All require new behaviors and ways of working, and all place extraordinary demands on general managers. Cases in this section describe successful managers unfreezing past practices, setting purpose and direction, integrating isolated fiefdoms, and crafting new systems and processes. A concluding class then assesses the implications of adopting a process perspective for the role and performance of general managers.

Course Outline

I. **Introduction: The Process Perspective**

1. **Americhem**
   organizational and managerial processes, resource allocation

II. **Strategic Processes**

2. **R. R. Donnelley**
   new business creation, organic vs. mechanistic processes

3. **IBM**
   new business creation, corporate entrepreneurship

4. **Time Life**
   setting direction, strategy-making under uncertainty, corporate and divisional perspectives
5. National Geographic, setting direction, strategy-making under uncertainty, corporate and divisional perspective

6. United Parcel Service, strategic planning systems, scenario planning

III. Decision-Making Processes

7. Visitor, leadership and decision making

8. Mount Everest, high-stakes decision making

9. Decision-Making Exercise, consensus and conflict-based decision processes

10. A Thousand Days, Thirteen Days, task forces, decision-making in a crisis

11. Columbia, problem-solving teams, decision-making under uncertainty

12. Mann Gulch, Storm King, operational teams, decision-making under uncertainty

13. Ctrip, data-driven decision making

14. Decision-Making at the Top, senior management teams, leading decision-making processes

IV. Learning Processes

15. Learning Organizations, organizational learning, improvement processes

16. L.L. Bean, U.S. Army, intelligence gathering, learning from experience

17. MindTree, knowledge management systems, communities of practice

18. Children’s Hospital, supportive learning environments, medical errors
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Electronic Arts</td>
<td>codifying and transferring best practices, intuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td><strong>Coordination and Control Processes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Zensar</td>
<td>organizational culture, employee involvement and commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>TopCoder</td>
<td>crowdsourcing, managing a virtual community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Transition to General Management</td>
<td>the general manager’s job, transitioning from functional roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Staples</td>
<td>multiple levels of management, multiunit organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Stroz Friedberg</td>
<td>managing rapid growth, growing pains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td><strong>Change Processes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Paul Levy</td>
<td>taking charge, leading turnarounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Paul Levy</td>
<td>taking charge, leading turnarounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Harvey Golub</td>
<td>transformational change, principles-driven leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Leveraging Processes, The Processes of Organization and Management</td>
<td>general managers in action, the contributions of process thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course Grading and Administration

Grading: The course grade will be based on class participation (50%) and a final exam (50%). Participation will be evaluated on both frequency and quality. With respect to frequency, students are expected to participate regularly and actively in class discussions. With respect to quality, good contributions are those which contain clear, rigorous analysis, present detailed substantive recommendations, describe a thoughtful perspective or point of view, move the discussion forward by posing questions or drawing links between others’ comments, present relevant examples from personal experience, or constructively critique positions, sharpen issues, or deepen an ongoing debate. Effectiveness will also be judged on relevance and fit with the flow of discussion (i.e. substantively strong comments that are out of place or are digressions will not be highly valued).

Attendance: Excused absences are only for those reasons authorized by HBS policies. Unexcused absences and lack of preparation will count heavily in your final grade. If you must miss a class for any reason, please notify me in advance by email.

Office Hours: I welcome the opportunity to meet with students outside class. Although I do not have set office hours, I am usually available on the days that classes are held. Please contact my assistant, Sean Curran (scurran@hbs.edu), to arrange a meeting.