

Duke University Fuqua School of Business
MGMTCOM 573.101: Workshop in Managerial Improvisation
Professor Robert A. Kulhan

Course Syllabus Winter 2024

“Improvisation is probably one of the two or three cardinal skills for businesses to learn in the future, and the process of improvisation must underlie how organizations formulate strategy going forward.”

–J.Kao, (1997)

“Change today happens suddenly, unexpectedly, unpredictably... products and markets are continuously morphing, so organizations that want to prosper over the long term need to practice the art of continuous change.”

–Robert Reich, *Fast Company*, October 2000.

Our world is more complex and uncertain than it has ever been, and we are all forced into change. Although tried and true planning techniques of market research, forecasting, and decision analysis are still useful, today’s most successful managers must rely on tools for adapting to and exploiting change: improvisation.

The course is an intensive week of experiential learning in **laboratory sessions** led by the course instructor and professional improvisation coaches from Chicago, New York, and LA who have worked with such groups as *The Second City*, *Upright Citizens Brigade (UCB)*, *The Annoyance Theatre*, *Baby Wants Candy*, *iO (Improv Olympic)*, and every great improv house in America. **These sessions will run the week before Spring 1 formally begins, January 8-12, 2024.** During these lab sessions you will be guided through a series of exercises designed to help you cultivate skills necessary for successful improvisation: teamwork, dropping inhibitions, commitment to ideas and to your teammates, concentration and listening, thinking creatively on your feet, improvisational leadership, and adaptive problem-solving. Some of these exercises are adapted from theatrical improv games; others have been designed specifically for this course. The skills that you learn in lab sessions will help you to:

- Increase your confidence and reduce your fear of public speaking
- Promote creativity and facilitate effective brainstorming
- Be more open to taking risks and adapting to change
- Take yourself less seriously and use humor as a tool in the workplace
- Improve your concentration and listening skills
- Think on your feet and recognize opportunities as they arise

These experiential workshops will be supplemented with classroom discussions exploring the use of improvisation in professional settings. Topics may include:

- Rapid decision making & dynamic negotiation
- Crisis management & teamwork
- Innovation & creativity
- Fostering an improvisational culture
- Emergent strategy

Though this program will be designed for and taught in-person, the overall skillset we will be working on (People Skills & Human Connection) is immediately applicable in virtual engagements as well and we will work with you to build bridges to virtual and hybrid leadership.

The course will be graded based on participation and attendance, a journal from the workshop, and a reaction paper to be written after completing the weeklong workshop.

My office hours are by appointment. I can be reached at 773-383-3345, bkulhan@businessimprov.com

The course administrative assistant is **Stefanie McAdoo**: stefanie.mcadoo@duke.edu

Managerial Improvisation: Grading Criteria

1) Attendance & active participation in laboratory sessions (60%)

During the experiential phase of the class, we wish to avoid explicit grading of performance on the exercises themselves because this can undermine the “judgment-free” nature of the exercises. However, we will keep detailed records on attendance and participation in the exercises. Based on past experience, I expect that there will be a relatively small number of students who lose points here.

Attendance

In the past, we have permitted students to miss 3 total hours of the 33-hour program without being penalized. This may be one entire class or, several times, students have been resourceful and divided the 3 hours they miss over a couple of days. We have also mandated that, since attendance is crucial for an experiential learning course, if you must miss any class, the Tuesday night JAM is not optional for you. Moreover, **the final performance (Friday, Jan. 12, 2PM - 5PM) is mandatory for all workshop participants & cannot be missed.**

If you are not in class for whatever reason (interviewing, sick, giving birth, alien attack), **you must inform your instructor in writing**, stating the specific date and time you were absent and the reason for your absence.

Participation

Grading is based on attitude, enthusiasm, and attempt and is based on the following scale:

Credit	Enthusiastic participation Takes direction & listens to instructions Positive attitude Brings energy to the class & ensemble
Credit	Participates Sometimes takes direction & listens to instructions Generally, has a positive attitude Brings varying energy to the class & ensemble
No Credit	Has to be coaxed to participate Has trouble taking direction & listening to instructions Attitude changes Much more interested in individual than ensemble
No Credit	Will not participate Does not take direction or listen to instructions Negative attitude Does not bring energy to the class & ensemble

2) STRATEGIC MEMO (40%)

The Strategic Memo should focus on how you will apply improvisational techniques to the field in which you intend to enter on graduation.

- PLEASE STATE THREE (3) SPECIFIC ACTIONS YOU WILL WORK ON AT FUQUA
- PLEASE ADDRESS: *What challenges have you (might you) face in implementing these 3 action items? Did you overcome these challenges (or how will you)? What did you learn (what do you hope to learn) from this?*
- Other things to help you (but not required to specifically answer) with your Strategic Memo:
 - What are the current practices in your intended field of work?
 - What are barriers to the improvisation in this area and how can you overcome them?
 - What are the limitations of improvisation in this setting?

* Paper Length - **It is your choice on how long/short this paper should be. I am looking for thoughtfulness and details pertaining to what you learned from your 3 actions and how you will use the tenets of business improvisation in the future.** The Strategic Memo should be double-spaced. Papers will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Analysis: How well do you understand the key concepts you employ?
- Relevance: How relevant is your analysis to the course? How effectively do you relate your discussion to the topics explored in this course?
- Action Item Review: How well did you articulate what you learned from tackling each of your 3 Action Items (*first referenced in your ELJ and applied as actions for your individual paper*)?
- Exposition: How clearly written is the paper? Is it fun to read?

The Strategic Memo will be due approximately two weeks after the completion of workshop. Please submitted it by **Friday, January 26th at 5pm** in Duke's course management system, Canvas. Within Canvas submit the STRATEGIC MEMO in the assignment area.

Paper

This paper will constitute 50% of your total grade. An automatic 10% deduction off the grade of your paper will be instituted for a tardy paper. An additional 10% will be deducted for every 2 days the paper is late. No paper will be accepted after 7 days past its original due date.

Please number your papers and put your name and improv instructor at the top of each page.

Business Improvisation: Preliminary Class Schedule

PART 1, THE ART OF BUSINESS IMPROV®: LABORATORY SESSIONS

Monday, Jan 8	
10:00 - 11:00	Introductory session — <i>GENEEN!</i>
11:00 - 1:00	<u>Session 1</u> : trust, foundational exercises
1:00 - 2:00	Lunch break
2:00 - 5:00	<u>Session 2</u> : exercises designed to build teamwork, creativity
Tuesday, Jan 9	(read: Johnstone)
10:00 - 1:00	<u>Session 3</u> : dropping inhibitions
1:00 - 2:00	Lunch break
2:00 - 6:00	<u>Session 4</u> : commitment exercises (Discussion: groups 1,2; groups 3,4,5 – 5pm)
Wednesday, Jan 10	
10:00 - 1:00	<u>Session 5</u> : concentration & listening exercises
1:00 - 2:00	Lunch break
2:00 - 5:00	<u>Session 6</u> : exercises on spontaneity & adaptability
8:00 – 10:30	<i>Evening Jam session (Location TBD)</i>
Thursday, Jan 11	
10:00 - 1:00	<u>Session 7</u> : adaptive problem-solving skills
1:00 - 2:00	Lunch break
2:00 - 6:00	<u>Session 8</u> : integrative improvisation (Discussion: groups 3,5; groups 1,2,4 – 5pm)
Friday, Jan 12	
10:00 - 1:00	<u>Session 9</u> : practice for performances
1:00 - 2:00	Lunch break
2:00 - 5:00	<u>Session 10</u> : <i>Group performances — <u>Guests are welcome!</u> – GENEEN!</i>
5:00 – 7:30/8:00	<i>Fun Evening Social (Location TBD)!</i>

For more information, please visit: www.BusinessImprov.com

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Follow us on LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/Business-Improvisations

Course Personnel (TBD)

Bob Kulhan (*course coordinator, senior instructor*) is the creator of the Managerial Improvisation program, an adjunct professor at Fuqua, adjunct professor at Columbia University Business School, and the Founder and CEO of [Business Improv®](#) – a 25-year-old consultancy that links improv to business through the behavioral sciences and real-world application. Bob has created Business Improv courses for 13 of the top 26 business schools in America, as well as the Harvard Kennedy School, the Australian Graduate School of Management, and KOC Business School, in Turkey. BI's clients include a who's who of businesses (from pharma to manufacturing to aerospace), universities, organizations, and government institutions. He has also worked extensively with entrepreneurs and solopreneurs, as well as small and medium size businesses. The first 100% virtual program Bob led was in January 2017, and for the last 7 years Bob has pioneered experiential learning in the virtual space, leading dynamic, high-energy, Virtual (synchronous), Online (asynchronous), Hybrid (multi-location) & Blended Solutions. Kulhan has spent the last 29 years performing improv, and his credits include Chicago's famed Second City (Mainstage, understudy), and most improv houses in Chicago and NYC, as well as a handful of the cool LA improv houses. Kulhan regularly performs comedy shows on YouTube (*The Bon Vivant Gourmet, Gil Kaggis: Business Expert, Osha Safetymen*) and improvises with *Baby Wants Candy* in Chicago, New York, and LA. Oh Yeah, he also wrote a best-selling book: [GETTING TO “YES, AND”: The Art of Business Improv](#) www.BobKulhan.com @kulhan

Molly Erdman (*improv instructor*) is a Los Angeles-based improviser, teacher, actor, and writer and she is currently studying for her Masters in Educational Psychology & Counseling. She got her improv start in Chicago and is an alumna of the Second City Mainstage, where she created and performed in three revues. She has taught improv across the country to five-year-olds, Fortune 500 CEOs, and ESL students and across the board has witnessed the power of improvisation in generating ideas and building a team mentality. Molly has taught for Business Improvisations® at the UCLA Anderson School of Management and many (many) global companies and can currently be seen performing at iO West in Los Angeles and on the YouTube mom comedy channel The BreakWomb (www.YouTube.com/TheBreakWomb). She created the website Catalog Living (www.catalogliving.net) and is the author of the book *Catalog Living at Its Most Absurd*. @erdmanmolly

Cesar Jaime (*improv instructor*) has been studying and performing Improvisation in Chicago for over 25 years. In that time, he has performed with the Second City, the iO Theater, the Playground Theater, The Noble Fool Theater, amongst other places around Chicago. Cesar spent 15 years working in the corporate world which allowed him to understand how using even the most basic tools of the art of improvisation can be very helpful in terms of helping create a more positive and fun work environment. Cesar is core faculty for Business Improv® and has taught BI programs for Columbia Business School, Duke Law School, UCLA Anderson School of Management, Duke Fuqua School of Business, and dozens of Fortune 500 companies. Check him out on CHICAGO MED & CHICAGO PD / FIRE / LAW! (He is an EMT named “Cesar”) www.CesarJaime.com @Cesua

Jessi Realz (*Improv Instructor*) is a Chicago based comedian, actor, writer, director, and producer. Jessi has spent the last 10 years as an active artist in the Chicago theater community and travels the country for exciting projects. Jessi trained at Second City, iO, CSz, and the Annoyance. Jessi has graced the stages of Steppenwolf, Laugh Factory, Impro Theatre, Just the Funny, The Hideout, Su Teatro, Coney Island Amphitheater, and many more. Jessi merges her artistic talent and her 12-year corporate experience to teach artistic and improv workshops at theaters, universities, and corporations across the country. Born and raised in Mexico City, Jessi uses her rich Mexican background as a source for inspiration when creating characters, stories, stand up, and original sketch and web pieces. Jessi has also lead Business Improv® programs at University of Notre Dame Mendoza College of Business Mendoza College of Business, Georgetown University, McDonough School of Business, A+E Networks and many more Fortune 500 clients. You can get all updates on what Jessi is up to on her Instagram @jessirealz

Pat Shay (*improv instructor*) is a 25+ year veteran of improvisation in Chicago and New York, and one of a very few improvisers who has performed on house or touring ensembles for: The Second City, iO Chicago, the UCB, and the Peoples Improv Theater. He has also created original comedy with his wife, Mary Archbold, and together they have toured nationally, including an invited performance at the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts. Along the way, he has worked in Finance, Global Account Management, Education, and Advertising. Having seen the change that improvisation brought about in his own life and work, he's passionate to share improvisation. Pat is a Core Faculty instructor and Solutions Designer for Business Improv®, where he has lead dozens of programs for Columbia Business School, Columbia Senior Executive Program (MBA, EMBA, Exec Ed, AMP), Duke Law School, Duke Fuqua School of Business, AstraZeneca, The New York Red Bulls, Vanguard, the Isenberg School of Business (UMASS), and The Wharton School, to name a few. @Pat_Shay