



15.337 Teams Lab: Leading Effective Teams - Fall 2023

Thursdays, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

Location: E51: 335

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Course Purpose: Competitive advantage is usually built on the quality of teamwork that happens within an organization. Great teams stimulate creativity and innovation, enable rapid adaptation to market changes, and produce breakthrough results. However, building, developing, and leveraging of effective teams is a complex process and success is far from guaranteed. The increasingly global and virtual environment only exacerbates these longstanding challenges. Effective teams start with individuals who can objectively analyze and understand the inherently subjective experience of each other's experiences on the team. Teams Lab is designed to help you develop the skills and frameworks necessary to diagnose the key barriers and strengths that determine team performance and to intervene in ways that improve effectiveness.

This course is designed for second year Sloan MBAs. Space permitting, we may be able to accommodate students from other programs.

The course's primary objective is to make its participants the team members and leaders of choice in whatever organization that they might work in.

Teams Lab fulfills the MBA Leadership Elective requirement.

The course is organized around the following topics and questions:

- Building Teams Intentionally
 - How can I create climates of psychological safety that maximizes contributions?
 - What are the essential building blocks of an effective team?
 - What are the different levers for shaping the effectiveness of a team?
- Self-Awareness and Emotional Regulation:
 - What are the core human aspects of participating on a team?
 - How do I experience being on a team? What emotional responses does it catalyze? How do I react?
 - Do my reactions contribute negatively or positively to the team's performance?
- Perspective Taking and Perspective Getting:
 - Do I understand the motivations and emotions of my teammates?
 - What can I do to develop an accurate sense of how they are experiencing the team?
 - How can I leverage the diverse experiences, skills, and perspectives on a team?
- Conflict Construction:
 - Do team members speak up and feel free to voice contrary opinions?
 - Does the team take active steps to both ensure psychological safety and prevent "group think"?
 - How can I promote a climate on the team that views conflict as positive and necessary?
- Conflict Management:
 - What is the necessary journey through conflict that a team must travel?
 - Does the team have an effective method for resolving differences of opinion?



- How do we promote disagreement and dissent and still want to come back and work together again?
- Flexing My Teambuilding Skills
 - What are my teambuilding superpowers and how do I leverage them?
 - What are my teambuilding weaknesses and blind spots and how do I mitigate them?
 - How can I bring out the best in individuals and support effective team dynamics?

Teams Lab meets in-person and will integrate weekly class sessions, facilitated experiential exercises, professional executive coaching (at the individual) personal reflection, and assessments.

Course Design and Requirements

The course is divided into three parts. Each part encompasses four of the 12 classes.

- **Part 1: The Team Essentials:** We will create the “container” (e.g., goals, rules, and norms) for the class that is necessary for candor and vulnerability and explore the foundational elements of high performing teams.
- **Part 2: The Hard Work of Becoming a Real Team:** We will unpack the intense interpersonal work necessary to forge and sustain a high performing team.
- **Part 3: Becoming a Teammate/Team Leader of Choice:** We will apply our team knowledge and skills to some of the complicated realities of leading teams in today’s work world and the work world of the future.

Over the course of the semester, you will contribute to a class “playbook” for high performance teams. The playbook will be a unique artifact from the class that you will be able to take with you to the future teams you either participate in or lead.

Teaming is not a spectator sport and learning to do it effectively requires iterative cycles of planning, action, and reflection. Developing as a team member and team leader of choice is not for the faint of heart and often requires confronting the less savory aspects of one’s own history, tendencies, biases, and priorities. To facilitate this experience, the course is organized around four major elements. Your active engagement and contribution to each of them is essential for both your own and the class’s experience.

1. **Team of Teams:** we are creating an experience in the class which we call a “team of teams.” Over the course of the semester, you will be placed into three distinct teams. Each team will work together for one of the three parts of the course (4 classes.). Each of these teams represents a unique opportunity to dialogue and work together, helping each other get the most out of the class. Within this structure, you will work closely with a significant number of your classmates, practicing important team skills, testing your openness and vulnerability, completing team assignments, and gaining valuable insights from your peers on your teaming strengths and areas for development.
2. **Executive Coaching:** To maximize the opportunity for a positive, developmental experience, throughout the semester you will work with a professional executive coach. Coaching is often critical to the process of translating the knowledge learned in the classroom into accessible skills. Work. As part of the coaching, you will delve deep into your teaming strengths and weaknesses and identify multiple skills you will actively work on related to your teaming skillset. You will also be communicating with your coach at the end of each class to share key reflections-in-the-moment, which will help fuel your coaching sessions. The cadence for your coaching sessions is outlined below:
 - a. 1st Coaching Session: Occurs between September 8 and September 20 (Ideally the week of September 11th). Recommended Timing: 60 minutes



- b. Next 2 to 3 Coaching Sessions: Occur between September 25 and October 20 (This could occur in two 45-minute sessions or three 30 minute sessions.)
 - c. No coaching meetings during SIP week (Oct 23-27).
 - d. Next Coaching Meeting Occurs between October 30 and November 8. Recommended Timing: 45 minutes
 - e. Next Coaching Meeting: Occurs between November 13 and November 22. Recommended Timing: 45 minutes
 - f. Final Coaching Meeting: Occurs between November 27 and December 6. Recommended Timing: 60 minutes
3. **Your Current and Past Team Experiences:** Teams Lab capitalizes on the developmental opportunities associated with both recent and current team experiences (summer internships, co-curricular activities, project teams, etc.) that Sloan students typically do outside of their for-credit classes. The more a Teams Lab student is willing to bring these experiences into the class, the better the overall learning outcomes.
4. **Reflection and Feedback:** Throughout the course you will be completing a set of reflections in a journal format. Each reflection is an opportunity to think carefully about your strengths, weaknesses, and contributions, both as a team member and team leader. Throughout the course you will also be giving and receiving peer feedback as part of each of your three team experiences. This feedback process provides a unique lens on how people experience you as well as fostering our climate for candor and vulnerability.

Grading

This class revolves around your engagement, contributions, reflections, and willingness to stretch for growth. Your grade will be based on a mixture of individual and team deliverables.

Attendance and Participation: Preparation, engagement, and attendance, both in class and in the coaching.	40%
Team Assignments: Submission of three distinct team deliverables. For these assignments, all students on a given team will receive the same grade.	30%
Reflection Assignments: Submission of three 2-page personal reflections/assessments..	30%

Academic Support Student Disability Services

If you need a disability accommodation to access this course, please communicate with the faculty for this course as soon as possible. If you have already been approved for accommodations, please contact your program office so we can implement your approved accommodations. If you have not yet been approved for accommodations, please contact Student Disability Services at uaap-sds@mit.edu to learn about their procedures. For more information, please see the [MIT Student Disabilities Services site](#).

Sloan Values

We expect you to abide by [Sloan Values](#). As part of the course experience, we will be creating a set of norms that we will expect all of us to abide by. In addition, due to the nature of this class, we trust and expect that each of you will respect the confidentiality of any conversations, stories, and experiences shared in our class. This allows us to build a psychologically safe learning community.



Using AI Tools in This Course

Machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI) represents a set of tools (e.g., ChatGPT) that can be used in conjunction with humans to enhance outcomes and impact. For teams, ML and AI represents another way to ensure that the sum is greater than the parts. The true power of ML/AI for teams is yet to be determined and we are excited to actively use them in this course to help drive high performing teams.

There are better and lesser uses for ML/AI in an academic setting. We should aim to use these tools for brainstorming, inspiration, editing work, and creating outlines. ML/AI must have a human supervisor and that supervisor must operate with a code of ethics, not just to fact check but to ensure that the tools are enhancing some aspect of the work and not diminishing the human's learning and development (Particularly in our academic context).

Implications for Using ML and AI:

1. Class participation becomes even more important for assessing learning and growth. One of our aims in class is to create opportunities to articulate and demonstrate your learning and application of out-of-class assignments;
2. We aim to create a climate in the class where we can dialogue with transparency about when and how we have used AI tools;
3. There may be times when we explicitly work with ML/AI and there may be times when we explicitly do not work with ML/AI. When in doubt, have a candid discussion with your faculty and classmates to determine the best path forward;
4. If you do use ML/AI, acknowledge its use in your work;
5. The use of AI in the classroom is rapidly evolving. Therefore, we all must utilize a "gut check" in relation to our Sloan values and learning aspirations: "Am I using ML/AI in the service of deepening my learning and growth or am I taking an easy way out?"

Introduction to the Class-x-Class Descriptions

For the syllabus below:

- 1) Preparation for Class: Describes the activities you must complete to participate fully and contribute in class. These articles, podcasts, videos, and other prep work will be brought into the class experience. In addition, for the three Team Assignments, you will be required to bring into your team deliverables.
- 2) Assignments: Describes the date for specific deliverables are due. These assignments may have an in-class component, as well as a due date for completion. As noted above, assignments primarily include:
 - a. Three Reflection Papers (2 pages)
 - b. Three Team Assignments
- 3) Optional Journal Entries: In addition to the course requirements, we encourage self-directed learning. To that end, there are prompts for you to reflect and write. These are optional and are intended to enhance your learning as well as your contribution in class.



PART 1: The Team Essentials

Class 1: September 7

Theme: Launching Into Teams Lab

Key Concepts: Course overview, launching into our first team experience, setting up our laboratory for the practice of teaming; psychological safety

Preparation For Class 1: **Read:** [“What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team,” C.Duhigg \(NYT, 2016\)](#)
Watch: [“Introduction to Executive Coaching”](#)

Assignment(s): **Sign and Upload** to Canvas: The Coaching Agreement

Complete and Upload to Canvas: Coaching Pre-Work

Schedule your first meeting with your coach (This meeting must happen between September 8 and 20).

Complete Part 1 of the survey for the Leadership Center

Class 2: September 14

Theme: Building Blocks of Effective Teams

Key Concepts: Team vs. work group, optimal team size, core elements of an effective team, phases of team development, reflections on psychological safety

Preparation for Class 2: **Read:** [“Why Teams Don’t Work,” Diane Coutu \(HBR, 2009\)](#)

Assignment(s): **Write (2 pages single-spaced):** Describe a time when you have experienced the most psychological safety. What made it so? What were you able to do/accomplish in this climate that otherwise might not have been possible? Why is psychological safety challenging for many teams to build and sustain? **(Upload to Canvas by Tuesday, September 12 at 11:59 pm).**

Work on your Practice Team 2 assignment for Class 4.

Class 3: September 21

Theme: Teams Are Humans Connecting

Key Concepts: Collaboration and connection are core to our evolution, personization, examining how strong connection is fostered in team settings

Preparation **Read:** [“The New Science of Building Great Teams,” Pentland \(HBR, 2012\)](#)



for Class 3: ***Optional Journal Entry:** In what settings/contexts are you most comfortable and confident building relationships? Where has this happened naturally for you? Have you tried to intentionally put yourself in these settings/contexts and what were the outcomes? When you consider a traditional team setting and the ways that teams tend to interact, how can you work to ensure that you build strong relationships with your teammates?

Assignment(s): **Work** on Your Practice Team 1 assignment for Class 4

Prepare: For your first coaching session. Specific instructions will be provided by your coach.

Class 4: September 28

Theme: "Teams Well" With Others

Key Concepts: What we can learn from people we know who team best, receiving peer feedback in a team setting, consolidating learnings from Part 1 of the course

Preparation for Class 4: **Bring** your team's poster to class. Each team member must be **ready to speak** to your poster in detail (What is on the poster and why you selected the content on it.).

Assignment(s): **Practice Team 1 Assignment Due:** Learning From Those Who Team Well With Others

- 1) Each team member conducts one interview with someone (outside of MIT) that they admire and respect as a team member/leader of choice.
- 2) Each team member synthesizes their findings from their interview to share with their team.
- 3) The team meets to a) generate an AI response to the question of what makes a team member/leader of choice, and b) integrate these inputs with their findings from their interviews.
- 4) The team then takes the entire synthesis and creates a 1-page poster to present in Class 4.
- 5) Each team member comes to class ready to present their poster.

Upload to Canvas a clear photograph of your team's final poster for Practice Team Assignment 1 by Tuesday, September 26, at 11:59 pm.

PART 2: The Hard Work of Becoming a Real Team

Class 5: October 5

Theme: We Are Our Differences

Key Concepts: Mental models, the double-edged sword of diversity, perspective-taking and perspective-getting, building a team through the examination of our differences

Preparation for Class 5: **Read or Listen:** The Perks of Being a Weirdo," Olga Khanzan (2020) [Article](#) [Podcast](#)

***Optional Journal Entry:** Reflect on an example of someone on a team for whom you did not have a positive/strong dynamic and then by working through your differences, the dynamic improved to the point where you team very well together and potentially respect and appreciate each other more. As you examine differences, consider the many forms that this can



take, including but not limited to: gender, culture, race, background, experience, values, priorities, etc.

Assignment(s): **Work** on Your Practice Team 2 assignment for Class 8.

Class 6: October 12

Theme: The Emotional Side of Teams

Key Concepts: The neuroscience of emotions, how emotions impact our thinking/choices, emotional dysregulation, handling emotional heat on teams

Preparation For Class 6: **Read:** [“Teaching Smart People How to Learn,” Chris Argyris \(HBR 1991\)](#)

Assignment(s): **Write (2 pages single-spaced):** Reflect on a recent instance when your emotions were very high and as a result you were diminished in your capabilities. Map that experience. Consider what the circumstance was, how your emotions were triggered, how you saw the situation when your emotions were high, and then how you saw the situation when you were emotionally regulated. Then, examine what helped you regulate your emotions (**Upload to Canvas by Tuesday, October 10 at 11:59 pm**).

Work on Your Practice Team 2 assignment for Class 8.

Class 7: October 19

Theme: Constructing Conflict

Key Concepts: The upside of conflict on teams, tools for mapping conflict, understanding my own conflict tendencies; tools and techniques for navigating conflict on teams

Preparation for Class 7: **Read:** TBA
***Optional Journal Entry:** Consider when/if you have worked on a team or been in a dynamic where conflict was managed well and lead to a better outcome. This could be in a specific situation or as part of an ongoing experience with that team/dynamic. What made it so? How was it maintained? How were relationships tended to in this setting?

Assignment(s): **Work** on your Practice Team 2 assignment for Class 8.

Class 8: November 2

Theme: Real Teams are Hard Work

Key Concepts: Deepening our knowledge on emotions and conflict, developing techniques to manage the emotional climate on teams



Preparation for Class 8: **Bring** your team's 1-page handout to class. Make sure each team member has a hard copy of the handout. Each team member must be **ready to speak** to your handout in detail (What is on the handout and why you selected the content on it)

Assignment(s): **Practice Team 2 Assignment Due:** Sharpening Our Critical Eye For What Builds a Real Team

- 1) Select a concept/framework/idea about teams that has been widely popularized, yet not necessarily supported by research.
- 2) Conduct research using AI and traditionally generated search with the aim of discerning: what is already known wisdom, what is just wrong, and what is novel and useful.
- 3) Come together as a team to synthesize your findings and develop a 3-slide presentation on your research question, what you found, and the guidance for how to apply it at the team level in an organization.
- 4) Each team member comes to class prepared to present the team's findings to their classmates.

Upload your team's 3-slide presentation for Practice Team Assignment to Canvas by Monday, October 30, at 11:59 pm.

PART 3: Becoming a Team Member/Leader of Choice

Class 9: November 9

Theme: Moving a Team Forward. Together.

Key Concepts: Feedback and measured progress are essential parts of a team's DNA, helping teams take a collective step forward, the emotional elements of feedback must be accounted for, teams can create unique climates for feedback

Preparation for Class 9: **Read:** ["Using Neuroscience to Make Feedback Work and Feel Better," David Rock, Beth Jones, and Chris Weller \(strategy+business, 2018\)](#)

***Optional Journal Entry:** Reflect on your first two Practice Teams for this course. What has been helpful about the way we are doing feedback at the end of each team's four classes together? What is contributing to and inhibiting a climate for feedback on these teams? If you were to design a team that was able to provide feedback that had both a performance and development focus, what would you do?

Assignment(s): **Work** on Your Practice Team 3 assignment for Class 12.

Class 10: November 16

Theme: Intervening When Teams Need You the Most

Key Concepts: The why, what, and how of team norms, facilitating teams, finding your voice on a team regardless of position/hierarchy, revisiting psychological safety

Preparation for Class 10: **Watch:** ["What Do We Risk If We Don't Speak Up," Clint Smith \(NPR, 2017\)](#)
Watch: TBA



Assignment(s): **Write (2 pages single-spaced):** Write a review of yourself on your role in your Core Team from last Fall. Bring a critical eye to what you did and did not contribute, how you handled the ups and downs of the team, and any behavioral patterns or tendencies you observe that have shown up in other team experiences (for better and for worse.). What did your team need? Create a set of actions and attributes for the team member of choice for your Core Team **(Upload to Canvas by Tuesday, November 14 at 11:59 pm).**

Work on Your Practice Team 3 Assignment for Class 12.

Class 11: November 30

Theme: Turning Up the Team Heat

Key Concepts: An immersive team experience testing skills and techniques learned throughout the course

Preparation for Class 11: **Mark Your Calendar:** This class will be held offsite which will require travel to a different venue offsite from MIT. Plan to be available from 12 pm to 5:15 pm. The class itself will run at its regular time (1 to 4). There will be a short social event immediately after class. Additional preparation for Class 11 will be announced as the class date approaches.

***Optional Journal Entry:** Assess your individual role(s) in this exercise. Where did you make the most significant contribution? Where were you most intentional in what you were doing for the team and what were the outcomes? Were you fully engaged? Why/why not?

Assignment(s): **Work** on Your Practice Team 3 assignment for Class 12.

Class 12: December 7

Theme: Our Recipe Book for Effective Teams

Key Concepts: Collective reflection, consolidating key learnings from the course, creating our recipe book for effective teams, celebration and recognition of individual and collective growth

Preparation for Class 12: **Prepare** to speak to your team's book chapter and your findings.

Assignment(s): **Practice Team 3 Assignment Due:** Exploring the Future of Teams

- 1) Select the topic and research question(s) you want to address in your Future of Teams assignment
- 2) Conduct research on your chosen topic on the future of teams. This research can be a mixture of AI-generated and traditionally generated search.
- 3) Come together as a team to synthesize that research and define the critical elements you want to.
- 4) Create a 2.5-3 minute video summarizing your findings, insights, and vision of the future of teams (filmed and submitted in advance of the final class).



Upload your video for Practice Team Assignment 3 to Canvas by Tuesday, December 5, at 11:59 pm