

People strategy in startups
3rd semester elective
Open to all BSS students

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Decisions about managing people must be carefully thought out with regard to the organisation's strategy, culture, and goals. But how do founders manage people in fast-growing organisations without a formal human resources (HR) department? And how do joiners and employees navigate such environments? This course will discuss these issues from the perspective of both the manager and the employee by applying theories from the field of entrepreneurship and strategic human capital. The course's main learning objective is to empower future managers and employees alike to think strategically and analytically about people strategy in new and fast-growing organisations and the implications of such strategies on their individual careers.

During this course, we will treat startup environments as the key site of managerial action. Students learn about the key metrics based on which startups differ from traditional workplaces, how traditional HR topics take on different meanings in fast-growing environments, and what managers and employees can do to avoid some of the pitfalls that could jeopardize the wellbeing of the employees and the performance of the organisation. It is important to note that this course is not specifically geared towards those interested in specializing in human resource management. Its primary focus is not on the technical or operational details of personnel administration, but rather on modifying the concerns of human resource management to organisational environments without an HR department.

Throughout the course, we will engage with three overarching themes:

1. How do startups differ from traditional workplaces? Who are the managers and the employees of such organisations?
2. How does the absence of a formal HR department change people management in fast-growing organisations?
3. What are the long-term career implications of working in such environments?

Competences

After finishing this course, students will be able to:

- outline the consequences of working for a startup versus a traditional organisation and evaluate the implications on their career trajectory
- identify organisational talent-related challenges specific to startup environments
- understand common roadblocks to implementing effective people strategy systems in fast-growing environments
- navigate people strategy both as a manager and as an employee

Course structure

Classes combine lectures, discussions, and in-class group work to facilitate active learning. We will spend class time making connections between the assigned readings and empirical problems

through various exercises. As are constantly changing, we will use an array of readings from popular press, scientific articles, and book chapters. During the course, we will work toward a small take home assignment in which students will choose from a few hypothetical scenarios and apply the concepts/ideas from one of the sessions to improve organisational dynamics in a hypothetical startup.

Topics

This course will cover the following topics:

- the scaling experience from the employee's perspective
- organisational hierarchies and the myth of the flat startup
- startup recruitment
- on-the-fly problem solving and performance evaluations
- long-term reward systems in short-term goal-setting environments
- behavioral nudges and startup field experiments
- managing through social networks
- managing diversity in the growing organisation
- managing remote workers and teams
- work-life policies

Similar offerings at BSS

Current courses that are tangentially related all have a different focus. Managing innovation (INNO track) focuses on how to manage organizational level outcomes and innovation. Staffing organizations (SOL track) introduces students to the formal human resource management tools, applicable only in the presence of a human resource department. The department also offers several entrepreneurship classes (INNO track), but they all take the perspective of the entrepreneur, not the employees who end up working for the entrepreneur.

Courses around the world that served as inspiration

University of California, Davis – Managing people in high-performance organizations (Greta Hsu)

University of Amsterdam – Experiencing organizational scaling (Yuval Engel)