UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Organization of International Business

2526-2-F5701R030

Course title

International Business Organization and Management

Topics and course structure

Before addressing the course content specifically, I want to emphasize that this program is designed with a distinctly experiential approach. More than sixty percent of educational activities are conducted in active and interactive formats. The explicit intention of this pedagogical proposal is to utilize the classroom as a "temporary organization," making it an object of research, study and discovery, with the purpose of making concrete the course content within the constraints permitted by the classroom environment itself. Particular emphasis is placed on the collaborative and "community" dimension of learning, with the temporary classroom organization serving as its vehicle. From this perspective, students will be given special space for self-organization of the course and evaluation methods, while respecting the criteria indicated by the academic nature of the program, and specific use will be made of flipped classroom pedagogy. I encourage interested students, if they deem it appropriate and have the opportunity, not to hesitate to discuss with colleagues from previous years to obtain more information about the course and the proposed learning experience. For anyone who considers it desirable, please do not hesitate to contact me for further questions, doubts or curiosities, in order to make a participation choice that is both free and informed. I teach with passion and it is with passion that I engage with people and organizations. It is this same passion that I would like to share with each of you through the pedagogy of the program I propose.

A growing number of organizations already operate, or intend to operate, beyond national borders. The management of internationalization, the process of understanding cultures, and the application of managerial concepts and techniques in a multinational environment is assuming ever greater importance. The course aims to provide the necessary tools to address the complexity of coordination, management and development of people and organizations, focusing particularly on decision-making processes connected to international management, for building paths of satisfaction and success at the corporate, team and individual levels.

The topics addressed concern the consequences for people, teams and socio-organizational systems resulting from strategic choices that initiate internationalization processes. With consideration for the configurations of architectural arrangements, coordination processes and operational human resource management systems in international companies, the program intends to examine themes related to the interaction between different identities and cultures, their intersections, and the consequent reflections on the construction of professional identities. The focus will be on leadership models, team dynamics in light of identity differences, intersections between identities and interactions within work groups, as well as motivation management and communication from an intercultural perspective. Building from understanding these aforementioned dynamics, there will also be reflection on specific methods of action and intervention in contexts where the intention is to value as well as respect the diversity and variety of individual and interpersonal characteristics that characterize both ways of being and ways of interacting, according to the organization development tradition.

Experts in training and human resource management will increasingly be required to apply their competencies and knowledge within contexts where people of different nationalities are present and where pressures to operate homogeneously and equitably across different countries must be balanced with attention to local specificities. Furthermore, the complexity of contexts combined with the richness of opportunities will require a more pronounced component in thinking about growth paths for oneself and others.

From this perspective, examining strategic and organizational themes related to internationalization processes, the course intends to dedicate particular attention to exploring the dynamics that emerge from interaction between identities, cultures and belongings; different perceptions and the value of managerial ethics; the importance of understanding the connection between cultures, structures and local organizational practices, and how appropriate leadership, motivation and communication can become key factors for an organization’s success in the global competitive arena. These same factors simultaneously represent key elements for the effective functioning of transnational and intercultural work teams, as well as individual careers, in international paths that can be characterized by satisfaction and success.

The pedagogical intention is therefore to foster the ability to describe the ways in which identities and cultures constitute themselves at social, organizational and individual levels, varying and systematically influencing organizations, work groups and individuals. Such awareness and capacity for observation, reading and analysis represents an essential enabler for recognizing cultural variety in a work environment and for knowing how to adapt human resource management practices. Additionally, the course aims to examine the complexity of managing people across boundaries in distributed arrangements, according to a wide variety of ways in which such boundaries can be defined, observed or configured, focusing particularly on decision-making processes connected to international management in support of success both for the organization as a whole and for individual people within the organization. From this perspective, also in light of recent developments regarding equitable and inclusive management of a diversified and plural organizational population, the course intends to explore active methods for developing the company as a community, that is, as a context characterized by an active and positive sense of belonging, while respecting identities and their intersections and interactions, in order to appreciate and value their unique and positive contribution in a climate of appreciation and respect.

The course is therefore addressed to all those who are curious to understand the logic and strategies of business internationalization and more generally the strategies of multinationals; interested in analyzing and designing organizational arrangements for internationalization in coherence and connection with, and in support of, business strategies; seeking to better understand the underlying logic of international human resource management practices and knowing how to evaluate how to adapt human resource management and training practices according to organizational arrangements and cultural specificities; desirous of promoting and facilitating growth and development processes for people and organizations in international and intercultural perspectives and contexts; curious to understand the complexity of managing people from different cultures within the same workplace both in geographically distributed work groups; stimulated by the prospect of identifying causes and addressing organizational conflicts in different and heterogeneous cultural contexts; motivated to focus on critical success factors at corporate, team and individual levels in international contexts; and finally attracted by the idea of fostering an actively inclusive culture that nourishes a sense of belonging and develops organizational community attentive to respectfully valuing the unique contribution of all identities in their multiple intersections and interactions.

Objectives

Through this course, with consistent and participatory attendance at lessons and activities connected to the program, students will be enabled and able to:

1. Better understand the intersection between organizational dynamics in internationalization and the human processes underlying them. Acquire the ability to analyze and manage the complexity of coordination and development of people and organizations in multinational contexts, with particular attention to the impact on the social and human system of organizations as it is configured in relation to strategic decision-making processes that initiate international expansion.

2. Develop intercultural reading and management competencies. Develop the ability to observe, read and interpret how identities and cultures are constituted at social, organizational and individual levels, systematically recognizing their influence on organizations, work groups and individual persons.

3. Apply intercultural leadership and team management models. Acquire practical tools for managing team dynamics characterized by identity and cultural differences, developing effective leadership models for multinational contexts and competencies in motivation management from an intercultural perspective.

4. Identify foundational criteria for effective design of international human resource management systems. Develop the ability to adapt human resource management practices to different cultural contexts, balancing the need for operational homogeneity with attention to local specificities.

5. Implement intercultural communication strategies. Acquire advanced competencies in cross-cultural communication and management of communication processes in geographically distributed organizations, with particular focus on communication effectiveness in teams characterized by high diversification and variety of identities.

6. Build inclusive organizations oriented toward belonging. Develop methodologies for creating organizational contexts characterized by an active and positive sense of belonging, valuing identities, their intersections and the unique contribution of each individual in a climate of mutual respect and appreciation.

These objectives reflect the experiential methodological approach of the course and its emphasis on the collaborative and community dimension of organizational learning.

More specifically, the program intends to enable the following learning outcomes:

Knowledge and Understanding
Upon completion of the program, students will have acquired in-depth knowledge of theoretical frameworks and conceptual models related to international management of organizations. They will understand the dynamics of interaction between different cultural identities, business internationalization processes and multinational organizational configurations. They will also demonstrate solid understanding of organization development principles applied to intercultural contexts.

Applying Knowledge and Understanding
Students will be able to apply acquired theoretical models to design and implement human resource management strategies in multinational contexts. They will know how to adapt managerial practices to local cultural specificities, balancing global standardization and local personalization. They will demonstrate competence in using coordination and control tools for geographically distributed organizations.

Making Judgments

Students will develop the ability to critically evaluate complex organizational situations characterized by cultural diversity, formulating autonomous judgments on the sustainability and appropriateness of internationalization strategic choices. They will be able to identify and analyze relevant ethical factors in international managerial decisions, demonstrating discernment in balancing global organizational needs and local cultural sensitivities.

Communication Skills
Students will acquire advanced competencies in intercultural communication, demonstrating ability to adapt communication styles to different cultural and organizational contexts. They will be able to facilitate effective communication processes in multinational teams, using appropriate methodologies for managing conflicts and cross-cultural negotiations. They will also demonstrate competence in presenting strategic analyses and proposals to diversified stakeholders.

Learning Skills
Students will develop autonomy in continuous updating of their competencies related to international management, demonstrating capacity for self-reflection on their own cultural biases and adaptation to evolving organizational contexts. They will acquire methodologies for collaborative learning and for developing inclusive communities of practice, preparing to address emerging challenges in global organizational management.

Methodologies

The course is predominantly experience-based, in the belief that this can promote real learning and effective acquisition of the proposed content.

The teaching uses lectures, but above all active experiments, group work, individual reflections, short cases, and testimonials that allow exploring in real and simulated organizational contexts the issues related to international human resources.

In particular, the classroom itself gradually becomes a laboratory for experimentation, discovery, and construction of knowledge and meanings, always from the perspective of the proposed content. Respecting the needs of everyone, if and when possible, participation in person is encouraged, as it represents a collective learning opportunity, not reproducible solely through individual study of texts and content.

Specifically, 20 hours will be dedicated to the expository mode of content delivery. The remaining 36 hours will be carried out in an interactive and experiential manner. Of these, 16 hours will be dedicated to group work, their presentation, and learning in a flipped classroom setting. 8 hours will be dedicated to the study and discussion of cases, also through the presence of company witnesses. The remaining 12 hours will be managed through active teaching methods, with guided exercises and space for reflection on the experience and its sharing, using the classroom as a proxy for its object of study as a temporary organization. Hence about 36% of the didactic activity will be provided in a traditional expository mode of contents, whilst the remaining 64% will be predominantly provided in an active/interactive fashion, with a deep focus on learner-led pedagogy, participatory/dialogic didactics, experiential learning and democratic values, according to the tradition of Organization Development.

Online and offline teaching materials

Upon participants' request, additional supplementary articles (also in English) can be made available. If needed, these texts can be requested from the teacher, but they will not represent additional and mandatory educational material for the exam.

Programme and references

Required texts:
• Block Peter, Community, la struttura dell'appartenenza, Ayros, Milano, 2021, pp.256 ISBN: 979-12-80359-10-0
• Budak Alex, Changemakers, Ayros, Milano, 2025, pp.304 ISBN: 979-12-80359-92-6
• Ibarra Herminia, Working Identity, Ayros, Milano, 2025, in corso di pubblicazione
• Nevis Edwin, Gestalt Consulting, Ayros, Milano, 2024, pp. 240 ISBN: 979-12-80359-73-5

Recommended texts:
• Meyer Erin, La mappa delle Culture, Roi Edizioni, Milano, 2021, pp. 224 ISBN: 978-88-36200-41-2
• Tim Brown, Change By Design, come il Design Thinking trasforma le organizzazioni e ispira innovazione, Ayros, Milano, 2024, pp.240 ISBN: 979-12-80359-80-3
• Jeffrey Pfeffer, Power, perché alcuni hanno potere e altri no, Ayros, Milano, 2021, pp.256 ISBN: 979-12-80359-02-5
• Francesca Cardona, Work Matters, fare consulenza ai Leader e alle Organizzazioni secondo la tradizione Tavistock, Ayros, Milano, 2024, pp.192 ISBN: 979-12-80359-68-1

Assessment methods

Type of Assessment and Alignment with Educational Objectives

The assessment structure of the course reflects the experiential methodological approach that characterizes the entire educational program. The choice to combine group assessments, individual assignments, and oral examination responds to the need to verify not only the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, but above all the development of those collaborative, reflective, and communicative competencies essential for operating effectively in international and intercultural organizational contexts.

The oral examination, lasting approximately 25-40 minutes, is particularly aligned with the course objectives as it allows, through a dialogic communicative situation, to evaluate the student's ability to navigate the complexity of intercultural dynamics, demonstrate adaptive communication competencies, and articulate critical reflections on organizational internationalization processes. This modality also enables appreciation of the personalization of learning and its integration with the particular experience and identity of each individual learner.

Program for Students Participating in Classroom Teaching Dynamics

The assessment is structured in three integrated components:

1. Individual and Group Intermediate Assignments (70% of final grade)
Four assignments, two individual and two collaborative, distributed throughout the course, designed to develop and evaluate the articulation of learning, together with multicultural teamwork competencies, collaborative problem solving, and group dynamics management. Each assignment requires practical application of theoretical models to concrete organizational cases, fostering the experiential learning that characterizes the course. Intermediate assignments follow predetermined deadlines communicated at the beginning of the course. In case of documented inability to meet a deadline, it is possible to arrange alternative recovery methods with the instructor within the course completion period, while maintaining consistency with the overall educational program.

2. Two Final Individual Works (30% of final grade)
Critical reflection papers that allow evaluation of personal synthesis capacity, autonomy of judgment, and competence in articulating connections between theory, practice, and personal experience. These works represent a moment of individual consolidation of the collaborative learning developed during the course.

3. Optional Final Oral Examination (for potential grade enhancement)

Interview lasting 25-30 minutes on course content, with particular attention to the ability to connect different themes addressed and apply them to complex organizational situations. During the interview, personal reflection on what most interested the student and what they consider most useful for their professional path will be valued.

The final grade for students participating in classroom teaching dynamics consists of the weighted sum of intermediate assignments (70%) and final individual works (30%), for a maximum of 30 points. The optional oral examination allows for increasing the final grade by up to 3 additional points, enabling achievement of honors for excellence. Participation in the oral examination is recommended for those who wish to deepen discussion of their learning journey or improve their overall evaluation.

Alternative Program for Students Not Participating in Classroom Teaching Dynamics

For those not participating in classroom activities, an alternative program is provided that maintains evaluative rigor through different modalities:

1. Individual Project Work (40% of final grade)
An in-depth analytical paper applying course concepts to a specific international organizational context. The work must integrate the Organization Development perspective (Cheung-Judge/Holbeche), cultural analysis (Meyer), and strategies for developing sense of belonging (Block). The project work must be submitted at least three days before the chosen examination session.

The format is open (presentation, written report of 15-20 pages, or 15-20 minute video) and must include:

- Analysis of the organizational context from an international perspective
- Application of studied theoretical models
- Critical evaluation of intercultural dynamics
- Intervention proposals to foster inclusion and belonging

Please note that for this program, the examination bibliography includes the texts by Block, Budak, Ibarra, Meyer, and Cheung-Judge/Holbeche (replacing Nevis), all essential elements for constructing the project work and preparing for the oral examination.

2. Oral Examination (60% of final grade)
Interview lasting 30-35 minutes verifying mastery of the alternative bibliography and ability to connect theoretical content with the completed project work.

Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation will follow these parameters, in alignment with the Dublin Descriptors:

Knowledge and Understanding: Mastery of theoretical models of organizational internationalization, intercultural frameworks, and Organization Development principles.

Application Ability: Competence in translating theoretical models into analysis of concrete situations and in designing culturally sensitive organizational interventions.

Autonomy of Judgment: Capacity for critical evaluation of intercultural organizational dynamics and formulation of autonomous judgments balancing global requirements and local sensitivities.

Communication Skills: Effectiveness in adaptive communication, ability to articulate complex analyses and facilitate dialogic processes in contexts of diversity.

Learning Capacity: Reflexivity on one’s own educational journey, awareness of one’s cultural biases, and capacity for continuous and collaborative learning.

Grading Scale

Insufficient (0-17/30): Inadequate understanding of theoretical models, difficulty in practical application, poor capacity for critical analysis of intercultural dynamics.

Sufficient (18-23/30): General knowledge of content with some uncertainties, basic ability in applying models, limited personal elaboration.

Good (24-27/30): Secure mastery of content, good capacity for application and analysis, reasonable autonomy in connecting theory and practice.

Excellent (28-30/30): Complete and thorough mastery, excellent capacity for critical analysis and creative application, full autonomy of judgment.

Honors: Excellence in all evaluative dimensions with original contributions and capacity for innovation in model application.

Supplementary Evaluation Factors

For students actively participating in classroom teaching dynamics, positive elements in the final evaluation will include:

- Active, curious, and critical participation in classroom activities
- Constructive contribution to creating an inclusive learning community
- Ability to use the classroom as a laboratory for organizational experimentation
- Willingness to engage in experiential activities

Grade Registration

Evaluation results will be communicated through the e-learning platform. For the classroom dynamics program, grade registration will occur after completion of all evaluative components. Students in the alternative program will receive the comprehensive result at the conclusion of the oral examination.

Personal Note from the Instructor

As anticipated in my initial communication, during the examination I will be particularly interested in understanding what struck you most about the program and what you consider most useful for your professional future. This question is not ancillary but central to my conception of evaluation: I believe that personalization of learning and its integration with the particular experience and identity of each individual represent essential elements for ensuring long-term retention of acquired competencies and maximizing their effective use in the professional contexts you will face.

Office hours

The student reception is usually held on a weekly basis. The details of the schedule will be available on the e-learning platform after the start of the lectures.
The reception time and day may undergo changes (in exceptional situations) even close to the scheduled date. Therefore, students are advised to always recheck the notices published by the teacher before showing up.
With the aim of fostering an open and active dialogue and discussion to support learning, the teacher remains available to the students of the course even outside office hours, inviting them not to hesitate to contact him if necessary.

Programme validity

The programs are valid for two academic years.

Course tutors and assistants

Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION | GENDER EQUALITY | DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH | INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION