ODKM 740: Learning Community  
Faculty: Tojo Thatchenkery  
Fall 2017- Spring 2019  
FH 125 & 126  
For Cohort 22¹

Class dates for fall 2017: Saturdays, August 19 & November 11, 2017  
Class date for spring 2018: Saturday, February 17, 2018  
Class dates for fall 2018: Saturdays, August 18 & November 17, 2018  
Class dates for spring 2019: Saturday, February 16, 2019

Professor: Tojo Thatchenkery  
Office: Founders Hall 613; Mail Stop: 3B1  
Schar School of Policy and Government  
3351 North Fairfax Drive, Arlington, VA 22201  
Office hours: Fridays 3:00 - 4:00 P.M.  
Phone: 703 993 3808  
Email: thatchen@gmu.edu  
https://schar.gmu.edu/about/faculty-directory/tojo-thatchenkery  
http://www.appreciativeintelligence.com

**COURSE OVERVIEW AND GOALS**

**ODKM 740** has three overarching and related goals:

1) To envision and build a learning Community of Practice (CoP).

2) To reflect upon and analyze the community building experience using research findings and theories.

3) To explore ideas and practices that support action learning, new ways of organizing work, collaborative work environments, and learning organizations.

The emphasis of the learning community is on reflection, theory building, practice and action learning. The planning group designing each event will provide advance reading and other relevant material to facilitate the learning community session. Students are expected to have assimilated the reading material before coming to the learning community class and be prepared to participate in the discussions.

¹ This is a closed course and open only to students admitted to the MS in ODKM program for the fall 2017 semester. Requirements in this syllabus apply specifically to cohort 22.
Through a consultative and collaborative process each planning group will be put in touch with a subject matter expert (SME) in the field once they have decided upon a theme/topic for the session. They will meet with the SME at least once and learn about the latest offering and design thinking in that thematic area. The SME may also offer feedback for the final design during the dry run meeting with the faculty. Students should not start any planning work before meeting with the SME.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Class Participation

ODKM 740 is a three-credit graduate course. There will be two class sessions in each of the fall terms (2017 & 2018) and one in each of the spring terms (2018 & 2019). Each class session will go from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. Attendance and active participation in all six class sessions are required during the fall-spring-fall-spring (four) semesters you are enrolled in the ODKM program. There will be no learning community class during the summer semester. If you miss a class during the regular sequence, you must attend another one at a later date so that your total attendance will equal to six full class days. In other words, the make-up work for missing a class will be to attend an extra session.

2. Group project report about planning, designing, and delivering a learning community session once during the four semesters

Each student is expected to participate once as a member of a planning group that organizes the LC sessions. The planning group organizes the LC on behalf of the community. Planning group members are required to solicit inputs from the resident cohorts and to organize the LC activities in such a way as to meet the three learning goals stated in the beginning of this syllabus. The planning group will have a minimum of four meetings with the faculty: A design preparation meeting, a status-check meeting, a dry-run meeting, and a debriefing immediately after the LC.

The planning group will submit a group project report of about 20 pages two weeks after their presentation.

3. Personal Reflection and Application Essay (PRAE)

The Personal Reflection and Application Essay should integrate various aspects of your experiences in the learning community. Following the ideas of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and David Kolb, an experiential learning cycle will have four components: concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE).
The assignment should be written based on your experience participating in various learning community sessions, designing and delivering a learning community event, or creating a CoP at work. The PRAE will be due at the end of the fourth semester, fall 2017 (the group planning the spring 2017 session may have a later date mutually decided by them and the faculty).

**Concrete Experience (CE):** You will have three choices in deciding what constitutes the CE for your essay. You may write about all six of your LC sessions and about the experience designing and delivering a LC day during the program. Or, you may pick a few of the LC sessions (1-6) and the experience of designing and conducting the LC day. In this scenario, you may feel that each or some of the learning community sessions were so valuable to you that you would like to write about them (as CE).

The second choice will be to write only about the experience of designing and delivering the LC day. You feel that the experience of planning and delivering the learning community alone was so rich that you want to explore it further by writing a reflective essay about it.

The third choice will be available if you tried to initiate a Community of Practice (CoP) or related activities at your place of work or elsewhere and feel that you have sufficient data to write about them. You might have experienced success or challenges in this effort and feel that writing about it may generate new insights regarding what might have happened. In deciding which of the three options to go for, you should feel the freedom to identify the range of experiences that offer the most potential for further learning as you write the essay.

**Reflective Observation (RO):** In this section, you should make an intentional effort to reflect on the experiences chosen from multiple perspectives. The perspectives that come to your mind first are yours (personal) and will only form the first part of your RO. Next, think about the other ways that you may make sense of the experience. If you were to go to a couple of your trusted friends, what might they say about your experiences and
reflections? In most cases, the multiple perspectives should challenge your personal views.

Another approach to enrich your RO section is to generate reflections by raising questions. For example, was your immediate reaction to the event shaped by your experiences in a previous job? New insights often emerge when you reflect methodically on your experiences. To keep the PRAE to a manageable size, you should identify **three themes or concepts** at the end of this section and build on them further in the next segment, the AC.

**Abstract Conceptualizing (AC):** In this section you should begin to theorize or conceptualize the reflective observations and experiences using readings and concepts. The planning group of each of the learning community will provide you with a reading list of at least three books and three articles related to the topic of the day. This list should be your first source for the AC. If that is not sufficient, you may use readings from the texts of various ODKM courses as well as the books listed with this syllabus². You should clearly show how the theories apply to your experiences (CE) and reflections (RO). Please read the checklist at the end of this syllabus before you start working on the essay.

**Active Experimentation (AE):** This section is your opportunity to suggest what you would do differently based on your new learning generated in AC. In other words, you should not only describe and reflect on the experiences, but must also consider experimenting with new learning and action plans. You should be specific and concrete in what you propose to do.

Please be aware of the distinction between intention statements and AE. Proposing that you will improve your conflict management capabilities is only an intention statement. Specific actions such as meeting with a friend to talk about how you deal with difficult situations, filling out an instrument to recognize your conflict-handling styles, reading a specific book on conflict by a specific date, and signing up for a conflict management workshop are all AEs.

A PRAE will be about 25 pages long with at least ten pages devoted to theories and concepts (AC). Please email your PRAE on or before the due date to thatchen@gmu.edu. Please see the checklist at the end of this syllabus. A paper copy is not needed. Late submissions will be penalized.

**PRAE due dates:**
Friday, December 1, 2017, for cohort 21 (who started in fall 2016)

---

² You cannot repeat a reading used in a previous PRAE or any assignments in the ODKM program unless you state the need to do so and acknowledge the reuse. Given the extensive and rich amount readings available on CoP and the various themes of the sessions, repeating a reading used in a previous PRAE should be avoided.
Friday, November 30, 2018 for cohort 22 (who started in fall 2017)

The planning group designing the spring 2018 & 2019 learning community session may have a different due date based on mutual consultation between that group and the faculty.

In addition to the requirements above which will be graded, you are expected to post a virtual personal profile in a couple of paragraphs that introduces you to the learning community. The purpose of the profile is to share whatever you are comfortable regarding your personal and professional background in such a way that the description allows others to get to know you better. Your profile should include a clear portrait of yourself (like the type used on a driver’s license). Please post your profile on SharePoint by the second week of the fall 2016 semester. You may look at the profiles of cohorts 20 and others that are on SharePoint and learn more about them.

**HOURLY REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING**

One hundred and thirty hours or more of active learning is required to receive a passing grade in this course. Course grade will be assigned at the end of your final semester which will be the spring of 2019 for cohort 22 (and spring 2018 for cohort 21). You will register for the course only in the final semester (spring 2019). Since the grade points are built over five semesters, it is your responsibility to make sure that you have fulfilled the necessary requirements in each semester. If you receive a failing grade (less than 70%) in either the PRAE or the group project report, you cannot receive a pass for the course irrespective of your total score.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Estimated time</th>
<th>Grade Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor evaluation of your attendance &amp; participation (Two sessions in fall 2016, one in spring 2017, two in fall 2017, and one in spring 2018, to a total of six sessions during four semesters).</td>
<td>6 x 8= 48 hours</td>
<td>10 grade points*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and organizing a learning community once during the program and writing a project report about it</td>
<td>62 hours</td>
<td>40 grade points**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidential peer team evaluation of your planning group using the attached evaluation format.</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 grade points***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Application and Reflection Essay (PRAE)</td>
<td>20 hours</td>
<td>40 grade points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130 hours</td>
<td>100 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* Instructor evaluation will be based on attendance and contribution to class discussions and organizational analysis project.

**Your individual score for the group assignment will also be determined by the team evaluation score you will receive. For example, if your group receives 38 of 40 points for the report, and your team evaluation score is 9.00 of 10, your individual score for the group report will be 38 x 0.90 = 34.20.

*** Team evaluation will be based on members’ participation and contribution to all the activities of the planning group.

The following scale will be used to determine your course grade out of a total of 100 points.

- 98-100 = A+
- 93 –97.99 = A
- 90 – 92.99 = A-
- 86 – 89.99 = B+
- 83 – 85.99 = B
- 80 – 82.99 = B-
- 70 – 79.99 = C
- 69.99 and below = F

If you are a student with a disability and need academic accommodations, please see the professor and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703 993 2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC before the start of the class.

**GMU & Schar School policy on plagiarism**
http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of education. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics. Plagiarism is the use of others’ words or ideas presented as one’s own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of others’ work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources are essential while writing your assignments. The faculty of the Schar School of Policy & Government has adopted a zero tolerance policy on plagiarism. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of "F" and may lead to failure for the course.

To help enforce the Schar School policy on plagiarism, your written work may be compared with electronic databases and submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit a student’s work to such services.
without prior permission from the student. The Schar School policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code. It is not intended to replace or substitute the GMU policy.

You must cite each time you reuse any of your own work indicating all previous uses you have made of the same work. Using the same citations (readings) from other assignments written for any other professor should be acknowledged (Please see additional restrictions in the PRAE checklist).

**Suggested Course Readings**


Hara, Noriko. (2008). *Communities of Practice: Fostering Peer-to-Peer Learning and Informal Knowledge Sharing in the Work Place*. New York: Springer


ODKM 740
Learning Community
Personal Reflection and Application Essay (PRAE) checklist

Due dates:
Friday, December 1, 2017, for cohort 21 (who started in fall 2016)
Friday, November 30, 2018 for cohort 22 (who started in fall 2017)

The planning group designing the spring 2018 & 2019 learning community session may have a different due date based on mutual consultation between that group and the faculty.

Late submissions will be penalized.

Your name: _____________________; Date submitted: _____________________

Instructions: Please circle appropriate choices and attach to your assignment. A PRAE submitted without the checklist will not be graded. Please note that once submitted this assignment is final and you cannot ask for a rewrite for any reason.

Concrete Experiences (five-six pages and eight grade-points):

Does the paper contain an objective, thorough description of what happened during the various learning community sessions that you have chosen to write about, and/or designing and delivering learning community, or initiating a CoP at work?

To a great extent  Somewhat  Only minimally

Does the paper contain a subjective description of your feelings and perceptions regarding the experience?

To a great extent  Somewhat  Only minimally

Common oversights:

Not writing about your feelings

Skipping important details about the experiences chosen

Writing too much about others and little about self

Mixing CE with reflections, interpretations, or analysis
Reflective Observations (five-six pages and eight grade points):

Did I look at the experience from multiple perspectives?
To a great extent  Somewhat  Only minimally

Did I write about the role I had played and its impact on the outcomes of the experience?
To a great extent  Somewhat  Only minimally

Do the different perspectives add deeper meaning to my understanding of the situation and will that be evident to the reader?
To a great extent  Somewhat  Only minimally

Have I filtered my reflections to focus on the three themes selected? Yes/No

Please list them here: Theme 1.---------; Theme 2 -------; Theme 3 -----------

Common oversights:
Starting this RO section with three themes instead of allowing them to emerge at the end as an outcome of your reflection using multiple perspectives. Starting the section with the themes implies that you have already made up your mind about them, thereby defeating the purpose of open reflection

Not having multiple perspectives (That is, listing one perspective only which was your original, immediate perception about the event/experience)

Not reflecting on key CE events

Not listing three themes to explore further in AC

Reflecting more on others’ behavior (projection) and less on self

Raising questions or issues without grounding them on data/CE (Examples: Raising questions about power and norms though there is no mention of contributing events in CE)

Not exploring the nature of your involvement in the experience.

Raising many questions but not answering them in AC (applicable in both RO and AC sections)
Asking plenty of question, but they are not leading to multiple perspectives. The questions appear to be merely expanding a single perspective.

**Abstract Conceptualization (10-12 pages and 16 grade points):**

Have I related concepts from the reading list supplied by the planning groups (and various readings from this syllabus and ODKM courses, if relevant) to explicate the three chosen themes? You should have a minimum of five readings per theme (a total of 15 readings, minimum)

To a great extent Somewhat Only minimally

In relating concepts/ readings to CE & RO, have I described what the readings are and what they signify, instead of merely mentioning the concept, author, or a book?

To a great extent Somewhat Only minimally

In making sense of the experiences and reflections, have I used concepts/ readings from several sources (books and articles)?

Used several sources Used a few sources Used none

Have I conceptualized the three themes? Yes/No

Have I devoted equal attention to the three themes? Yes/No

Have I used any readings from my past PRAEs or any other assignments from my graduate courses? Yes/No.

If yes, please remove all such use of previous readings and come up with new themes and readings. You cannot repeat a reading used in a previous PRAE or any assignments in the ODKM program unless you state the need to do so and acknowledge the reuse. Given the extensive and rich amount readings available on CoP and the various themes of the sessions, repeating a reading used in a previous PRAE should be avoided.

**Common oversights:**

Not having enough readings

Just listing readings instead of describing them
Having AC based on themes that were not discussed in RO

Merely elaborating on readings without saying how they apply. For example, writing a whole page on norms (readings) without articulating how they apply to your experience and reflections.

**Active Experimentation (five-six pages and eight grade points):**

If I were to design and deliver another learning community, what would I do differently with respect to the three themes? Or, if I were to design another CoP or related activities at work, what would I do differently with respect to the three themes?

How well have I responded to this question?

To a great extent  Somewhat  Only minimally

What can I apply from my learning/conceptualizing stated in AC to my work environment? How well have I responded to this question?

To a great extent  Somewhat  Only minimally

Are my A.E. plans described specifically, thoroughly, and in detail?

To a great extent  Somewhat  Only minimally

Have I written at least one AE about each of the three themes I have discussed in RO and AC section (one for designing another learning community and one for work)? Yes/No

**Common oversights:**

Not having AE for each theme that was developed in RO and AC.

AE looks more like an intention statement than an action plan. Merely expresses a desire to do something different, but doesn’t state specifically the action component and timeline.

Coming up with AE statements that are not linked to the CE-RO-AC flow

Not mentioning the context of application
Please use the following format to clearly identify your specific themes:
Designing another learning community or CoP at work- AE for theme 1:
Application to work – AE for theme 1
Designing another learning community or CoP at work- AE for theme 2:
Application to work – AE for theme 2
Designing another learning community or CoP at work- AE for theme 3:
Application to work – AE for theme 3

Do not combine all themes into one AE. Each theme should have its own separate action items.
ODKM 740 Fall 2017-Spring 2019

Confidential Team Evaluation Format for Planning Group

Please fill this out and email to thatchen@gmu.edu after your group has written the group report.

Write your name and the names of all teammates (add more columns as necessary). The evaluation is confidential. Only the faculty will see the rating. Please assign participation/evaluation points ranging from 1 to 10 (10 being the highest) for each category in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Self (you) Name:</th>
<th>Person A Name:</th>
<th>Person B Name:</th>
<th>Person C Name:</th>
<th>Person D Name:</th>
<th>Person E Name:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in planning group meetings. You may also list the number of planning group meetings each person attended.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in LC design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in writing the final report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in group presentation/preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to carry out assigned tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to meet deadlines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation with other team members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the individual’s work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall contribution to the LC design and delivery including the group project writing and class presentation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use the other side for confidential comments regarding your or team member participation, if any.