IMPACTWHEEL

Universitas Mercatorum

Università telematica delle Camere di Commercio Italiane

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Contamination Lab Program
Third Edition 2026-2027

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Course Overview

This experiential entrepreneurship course is designed to guide participants from idea generation to market validation and final pitching. It combines modern innovation methodologies such as the **Value Creation Wheel (VCW)** and strategic **AI tools** to develop practical and impactful business solutions.

A unique aspect of this course is the integration of a **real entrepreneurs**, who will be introduced in the first session and will act as mentors for participants throughout the course. This mentorship is intended to provide real-world insight, challenge assumptions, and offer guidance during team work and prototype development.

Innovative Entrepreneurship: Intensive with Mentorship and VCW is a dynamic and immersive program designed to equip students with the essential skills and mindset needed to navigate the fast-paced and ever-changing world of entrepreneurial ventures. Combining foundational theories with hands-on application, this course integrates the structured problem-solving framework of the **Value Creation Wheel (VCW)** alongside personalized mentorship to accelerate learning and real-world impact.

Students will delve into the core principles of entrepreneurship, innovation, and business model development. The program emphasizes creativity, critical thinking, and strategic innovation, empowering participants to identify opportunities, craft compelling value propositions, and design viable, scalable business solutions.

Guided by expert mentors, students will engage in experiential exercises, collaborative workshops, and real-world market validation processes, applying tools like storytelling, design thinking, and the business model canvas alongside the five phases of the VCW. This hands-on approach fosters resilience, adaptability, and an experimental mindset essential for successful entrepreneurial leadership. A minimum of **38 hours of personal study** is envisaged along this path.

By embracing iterative development and learning from failure, students will gain the confidence and agility to pivot quickly in response to market feedback and emerging challenges. This program transcends traditional instruction, aiming to cultivate visionary entrepreneurs ready to create meaningful impact within regional startup ecosystems and the broader business landscape.

In summary, this intensive course combines rigorous theory, practical tools, mentorship, and the VCW methodology to prepare students not just to launch startups, but to lead innovation and transformation with resilience and strategic foresight.

Course Objectives

In this intensive, students will engage deeply with the foundational principles and theories of entrepreneurship, exploring key concepts such as opportunity recognition, resource allocation, and value creation through the lens of the **Value Creation Wheel (VCW)** methodology. Guided by experienced mentors, students will learn to apply structured problem-solving and innovation frameworks to real-world challenges.

Throughout the program, students will:

1. **Understand and apply the core principles and theories of entrepreneurship,** supported by mentorship to contextualize learning and foster personal growth.
2. **Explore and leverage innovation as a driver of entrepreneurial ventures,** identifying different types of innovation and using creativity to challenge existing markets and deliver customer value.
3. **Use practical entrepreneurial tools—such as the five phases of the VCW—to develop and refine innovative business concepts,** enhancing their ability to empathize with user needs and articulate compelling value propositions.
4. **Assess the feasibility and viability of business ideas through iterative market testing and validation,** employing lean startup methods and pivot strategies under mentor guidance to adapt effectively to market feedback.
5. **Analyze and strategize for sustainable growth within regional startup ecosystems,** gaining insights into the roles of government, academia, and venture capital in fostering entrepreneurship and navigating these environments successfully.
6. **Cultivate critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential for entrepreneurial leadership,** building analytical rigor, creative confidence, and resilience to thrive in the dynamic entrepreneurial landscape.

By integrating hands-on mentorship and the structured VCW process, this program equips students to rapidly transform ideas into validated, actionable business models ready for real-world impact.

Unit Description

Session 1: Introduction to Entrepreneurship and the Entrepreneurial Mindset (2 hours) Prof.ssa Alessandra Micozzi, Prof. Giulio Marcucci – October 2nd – 11:00-13:00

This session combines the course introduction with the initial development of the entrepreneurial mindset. It highlights the importance of entrepreneurship in innovation and economic growth, while covering key concepts such as opportunity recognition, types of entrepreneurship, and value creation.

A guest entrepreneur shares their personal journey, including challenges and lessons learned, which leads into team formation and mentor assignment for ongoing guidance throughout the course.

The second part of the session focuses on building the entrepreneurial mindset through self-awareness exercises, founder case studies, and the development of a personal profile.

Key Components:

- Course overview: modules, objectives, and expectations
- Role and impact of entrepreneurship today
- Types of entrepreneurs and real-world examples
- Live talk with guest entrepreneur + Q&A
- Team formation

Session 2: Entrepreneurial inspiration: Case study Cisalfa Sport, Dott. Cristian Maffeis (GROUP FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION DIRECTOR) (3 hours), October 12 (14:00-17:00)

This seminar provides a strategic analysis of the Cisalfa Sport case, enabling participants to explore the dynamics of business internationalisation and develop practical knowledge of growth and market-entry strategies. Particular attention will be paid to opportunity identification, strategic decision-making, organisational change, and business management in multicultural environments. The initiative strengthens collaboration between the university and the business community by bringing together professors, doctoral researchers, students, company representatives, and Contamination Lab participants. Through dialogue and case-based learning, the module aims to foster an entrepreneurial and global mindset

while helping participants understand how companies can successfully manage innovation, growth, and change across international markets.

Session 3: Team Building (4 hours) Dott. Salvatore Novaco, Spazio Mercatorum, ROMA, October 16

This session is dedicated to understanding the dynamics of effective teamwork in the entrepreneurial context. Students will explore strategies to build and manage diverse teams, identify roles and responsibilities, and strengthen collaboration skills. Through interactive activities and case discussions, participants will learn how to foster trust, resolve conflicts, and leverage individual strengths to achieve collective goals.

Key Components:

1. The Role of Teams in Entrepreneurship
2. Team Dynamics and Roles
3. Effective Communication and Trust-Building
4. Conflict Management
5. Practical Exercises

Session 4: Design Thinking (3 hours) Dott. Giovanni Lucarelli – October 30 th (15:00-18:00)

This session introduces participants to Design Thinking as a strategic and creative approach to innovation. It begins with a question that comes before the method itself: why do we need models at all, and what does a model actually do for us? Rather than presenting the framework as a sequence of steps to follow, the session examines what each phase is designed to prevent, the specific error that occurs when that phase is skipped. Participants will then work on a single real challenge, carried through the entire process from observation to prototype, using hands-on exercises: gathering evidence without interpreting it, reframing the problem under constraints, generating ideas without conventional brainstorming, selecting among them, and testing an idea before building it

Key components:

1. **Why we use models** — what a framework does, what it costs, and when it is the wrong tool
2. **Divergent and convergent thinking** — the two movements that operate within every phase of the process

3. **The phases of Design Thinking and the errors they prevent** — from framing the problem to implementation
4. **Hands-on application to a real challenge** — observation, reframing, idea generation, selection, prototyping
5. **From idea to evidence** — how to test an assumption before investing in it

Session 5: Human creativity and I.A. (3 hours) Dott. Giovanni Lucarelli – November 6 (15:00-18:00)

This session explores the relationship between artificial intelligence and human creativity from a cognitive and strategic perspective. The starting point is a practical question: what does it mean to be creative today, and how can we strengthen our creative abilities? We will begin with the scientific definition of creativity and examine some of the tools used to assess a quality that seems to escape measurement altogether. Through a hands-on experiment carried out during the session, participants will directly observe the effects of generative AI on the creative process, both individual and collective.

Key components

1. What creativity is, and how it is measured
2. The map of the creative process
3. The impact of generative AI on the creative process
4. From AI as an oracle to AI as a partner
5. Practical guidance for using AI in your own creative and entrepreneurial work

Session 6: Value Creation Wheel (VCW) (5 hours) Dott. Alessandro Augusto Franzoni, November 13 (14:00 – 19:00)

In this session, students are introduced to the **VCW**, a structured decision-making tool for creating value and choosing among solution paths.

Teams apply the five phases of the VCW:

1. Define the challenge
2. Identify ideas and criterias
3. Assess
4. Narrow Down to Create Value.
5. Act & Control

AI tools like ChatGPT or Notion AI can be used to assist in generating, clustering, and refining ideas. Mentors provide input on feasibility and alignment with market needs.

Key Components:

- Introduction to the VCW methodology
- Application of VCW to team projects
- Use of AI tools for ideation and prioritization
- Solution selection and planning next steps

Session 7: Business Plan (4 hours) Prof.ssa Alessandra Micozzi, November 27 (9:00-13:00)

This session introduces the fundamentals of the business plan as a tool for structuring, communicating, and validating entrepreneurial ideas. Students will learn how to transform an idea into a coherent plan that addresses key aspects such as market opportunity, value proposition, business model, and financial projections. Practical exercises and case studies will help participants understand both the strategic and operational roles of the business plan.

Key Components:

1. Purpose of the Business Plan
2. Core Elements of a Business Plan
3. Case Studies and Examples

Session 8: Organizational Design (4 hours) Prof.ssa Maria Zifaro, December 11 (9:00-13:00)

This session explores and delves into the fundamentals of organizational design and human resources management, knowledge management, and multidisciplinarity in startups. Participants will be able to use a tool to structure, communicate, manage, and validate entrepreneurial ideas so they can become a reality. Practical exercises and case studies will help participants understand both the strategic role of organization and human resources and how to properly incorporate them into the business plan to attract investors.

Key Components:

1. Elements of organizational design
2. Mapping organizational processes to make the idea scalable
3. Case Studies and Examples

Session 9: Public Speaking (4 hours) - Dott. Sebastian Caputo, Dott. Enrico Vellante, January (date to be set)

This session focuses on developing communication and presentation skills essential for entrepreneurs. Students will learn techniques to deliver compelling pitches, engage diverse audiences, and communicate ideas with clarity and confidence. Emphasis is placed on body language, storytelling, and the management of stage presence and emotions. Practical exercises and peer feedback will help participants refine their style and strengthen their public speaking abilities.

Key Components:

1. The Role of Public Speaking in Entrepreneurship
2. Techniques for Effective Presentations
3. Managing Emotions and Stage Presence
4. Practical Exercises

Session 10: Mentoring with teams on VCW (20 hours, 2 hours per team) to be defined with teams – Prof. Maria Zifaro, Dott. Alessandro Franzoni,

This session is dedicated to hands-on mentoring, where teams receive personalized guidance to refine their entrepreneurial projects. Mentors will support teams in addressing challenges, validating assumptions, and advancing their business plans. The session focuses on practical problem-solving, constructive feedback, and the application of knowledge gained in previous modules. It is designed to strengthen teamwork, clarify goals, and align strategies for the next stages of the course.

Sessions can involve entrepreneurs and their mentorship.

Session 11: Final Pitch Presentations and Course Wrap-up (6 hours) Prof.ssa Alessandra Micozzi, Prof. Gianpaolo Basile, Prof. Giulio Marcucci, Dott. Alessandro Augusto Franzoni, with 012 Factory, Sala Convegni Universitas Mercatorum, Piazza Mattei 10, ROMA (date to be set)

In the final session, teams present their projects to mentors and invited guests. Pitches should reflect the process followed: problem identification, solution design (via VCW).

Each presentation is followed by a Q&A and mentor feedback. The session closes with personal reflections and future action plans.

Key Components:

- 5-minute pitch presentation per team
- Audience Q&A and mentor response
- Final reflections: “What I learned and what’s next”
- Certificate distribution and closing remarks

Self-Study Hours (Independent learning, assignments, and practice): 38 hours

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the program, participants will:

- Understand and apply the entrepreneurial process from idea to pitch
- Create and validate a solution using VCW (4Ms)
- Use AI to accelerate content, prototyping, and testing
- Receive direct mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs
- Deliver a compelling startup pitch

Teaching Methodology

This course adopts a comprehensive and innovative teaching methodology designed to provide students with a dynamic, immersive, and practical learning experience. It blends traditional academic approaches with experiential learning,

mentorship, and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to enhance learning outcomes and real-world applicability.

At its core, the course includes **lectures** that introduce foundational concepts, theories, and frameworks in entrepreneurship. These are complemented by **interactive discussions**, encouraging active student participation, critical thinking, and peer learning through the exchange of perspectives and real-time problem-solving. In parallel, students will be required to complete a series of practical **tasks applying the VCW**, thereby bridging theory with hands-on experience.

A strong emphasis is placed on **case studies** and **real-world examples**, which connect theory with practice and help students analyze the complexities entrepreneurs face in various contexts. Students engage in **group projects and presentations**, fostering collaboration, communication, and creative problem-solving, while applying course concepts to practical challenges.

An important feature of the methodology is the integration of **mentorship** as a central pillar of the learning journey. Throughout the course, students receive guidance from experienced entrepreneurs and professionals who provide personalized feedback, career insights, and support in the development of their entrepreneurial mindset and ventures. This one-on-one or small-group mentoring strengthens the learning process by offering direct exposure to real-world entrepreneurial thinking and decision-making.

Guest lectures by successful entrepreneurs and industry experts further enrich the course, providing inspiration and firsthand insights into entrepreneurial journeys, emerging trends, and effective strategies.

Additionally, the course leverages **artificial intelligence (AI)** as a powerful tool to support learning and innovation. Students use AI-driven platforms to conduct market research, analyze business models, generate content, and simulate entrepreneurial scenarios, thereby enhancing efficiency, creativity, and data-driven decision-making.

By integrating traditional instruction with interactive techniques, mentoring, and AI-based tools, this course caters to diverse learning styles, nurtures entrepreneurial competencies, and equips students to navigate the complex and fast-evolving entrepreneurial landscape.

Assessment

Final Assessment: Elevator Pitch (100%)

The final project is the capstone of the course, requiring students to synthesize their learning into the design and presentation of an entrepreneurial venture. Each team

will deliver an **elevator pitch** that demonstrates their ability to identify a problem, propose a viable solution, validate market potential, and outline a scalable strategy.

Projects may include the development of a business model and go-to-market strategy.

The evaluation framework ensures a holistic approach, combining knowledge, creativity, analytical thinking, and entrepreneurial mindset.

Recommended Textbooks

In a world defined by rapid technological change, global interconnectivity, and constant disruption, entrepreneurship stands as a key driver of innovation, economic growth, and social transformation. The recommended readings for the *Entrepreneurship* course have been carefully selected to equip students with the strategic frameworks, practical tools, and mindset needed to succeed in this dynamic landscape.

These books cover the entire entrepreneurial journey—from ideation and validation to business modeling and scaling—providing students with both theoretical foundations and real-world application. Additionally, the inclusion of the **VCW (Value Creation Wheel)** framework strengthens the course's emphasis on structured decision-making, innovation strategy, and problem-solving.

Core Readings

- **Ries, E. (2011).** ***The Lean Startup***
  A foundational text advocating for a lean, iterative approach to entrepreneurship, emphasizing continuous innovation, customer feedback, and rapid experimentation.
- **Osterwalder, A., & Pigneur, Y. (2010).** ***Business Model Generation***
  A practical guide to designing and innovating business models using the Business Model Canvas, with visual thinking tools for strategic clarity.
- **Osterwalder, A., Pigneur, Y., Bernarda, G., & Smith, A. (2014).** ***Value Proposition Design***
  A deep dive into crafting compelling value propositions that align with customer needs and market opportunities.
- **Bland, D. J., & Osterwalder, A. (2019).** ***Testing Business Ideas***
  Offers over 40 experiments and a systematic process for validating business concepts, minimizing risk, and maximizing learning.
- **Osann, I., Mayer, L., & Wiele, I. (2020).** ***The Design Thinking Quick Start Guide***
  Provides a clear, six-step approach to applying design thinking, emphasizing empathy, creativity, and iterative prototyping.
- **Rexhepi, G., Hisrich, R. D., & Ramadani, V. (Eds.) (2019).** ***Open Innovation and Entrepreneurship***
  Explores how collaboration, openness, and external partnerships fuel innovation and competitive advantage in entrepreneurial ecosystems.

VCW – Value Creation Wheel Framework

- **Lages, L. F. (2016).** ***The VCW – Value Creation Wheel: Innovation, Technology, and Entrepreneurship Strategy Tool***
  Introduces a powerful and structured methodology for solving complex

problems, identifying innovation opportunities, and creating value systematically. The VCW integrates decision-making, creativity, and strategic alignment, making it highly applicable to entrepreneurial challenges.

- **Lages, L. F. (2023). *VCW in Practice: Solving Real Problems in Innovation and Strategy***
  A practical companion to the VCW framework, offering real case studies and applications across industries. This book complements the entrepreneurial toolkit by guiding students through the full innovation process—from challenge definition to solution implementation.

Together, these resources form a robust and multidisciplinary foundation for aspiring entrepreneurs. They enable students to explore innovation from multiple perspectives—lean startup, design thinking and structured problem-solving through the VCW framework—preparing them to launch, lead, and scale ventures in today's complex and fast-moving business environment.