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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

### MNO2705 LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING UNDER UNCERTAINTY

Semester 1, 2019/2020

#### Faculty:

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## 1. Overview

The decisions you make every day will shape your life. In the workplace, the decisions you make will impact outcomes for you, your team, and cumulatively affect the trajectory of your career. This module will help you navigate the pathways of decision making in organizations. We will adopt an evidence-based approach, tapping several streams of research – including behavioural psychology and economics, error management, and intuitive judgment – to give a rigorous account of what separates good decisions from the rest. These conceptual tools will empower you to make good decisions in an uncertain world, to influence, and to lead.

This module addresses the foundations for decision making in modern organizations, where the requirements of speed, global reach, complexity and change that our organizations face also create conditions for unsafe and unethical business practices to persist. Reports of insider trading, graft and cronyism, unsafe products, unfair employment practices and environmental waste are commonplace in the media. Thus, our concern is with anchors for morally decent or ethical decision making.

The foundations for this module are drawn from established frameworks for decision making from the fields of behavioural economics, social psychology, and management. Working with those concepts, we give focused attention to the challenges of decision making within the context of Singapore and Asia. This aspect of the Asian context is reflected in the readings and cases covered, as well as in class discussion.

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## 2. Module Objectives

The key objectives of this module are:

- Examine how individual and collective decisions are made in organizations.
- Develop an understanding of the effects of cognitive biases, heuristics, emotions and social dynamics on decision processes and outcomes.
- Be able to suggest practical ways for leaders to become more effective in making decisions and implementing them.

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## 3. Course Materials

### Recommended reading:

Kahneman, Daniel. 2013. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

**Additional materials:** Recommended and assigned readings are available through the online NUS library portal, as well as through LUMINUS.

#### 4. Modes of Teaching and Learning

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This class is conducted in a seminar format, and is learner-centered. Our class culture maximizes collective learning by stimulating participation, creativity, and spontaneity. Keywords are high trust, high touch, and high task. Be open and use experiences for learning. Be appreciative, active, and questioning in order to maximize your own and others' learning.

Learning activities include analyses of cases or news, critiques of papers, debates, experiential exercises, and/or talks by invited speakers. You will also learn from a variety of readings and resources throughout the course.

##### Learner responsibilities

To benefit most from each class session, you should:

- Prepare for class by completing assigned readings and exercises. This is especially important given our learning focus.
- Participate actively in class.
- Dive deep: question, think critically and learn from others.

Group exercises are central to the learning process—take your responsibility to your group seriously by being prepared for the exercise and playing your part.

Outside of classes, our main modes of class communication are through LUMINUS and e-mail. Check your NUS mailbox regularly for announcements, updates and materials uploaded to LUMINUS.

##### Role of the instructor

I view myself as a facilitator that structures processes, facilitates discussion, and gives feedback. I am not present to provide answers or cover textbook materials that you can read on your own. Class time is more effectively used for exchanging ideas and new learning.

#### 4. Evaluation

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Overall course grades are based on evaluations of both individual and collaborative work. As for all graded exercises in Singapore schools, final grades reflect relative performance among peers. Foreign students should take note of this and consult your Singaporean colleagues on this issue.

##### *Individual-based coursework*

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|-----------------------|-----|
| ▪ Class participation | 15% |
| ▪ In-class quiz       | 35% |

##### *Collaborative coursework*

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| ▪ Decision Challenge Team Project (5-7 people) | 30% |
| ▪ Decision-Point Reflections (2-people)        | 20% |

#### 4.1 Class Participation (Individual, 15%)

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We expect active participation in all sessions—ask thoughtful questions, make insightful comments, challenge assumptions, provide examples, and build on others' ideas. We use the following anchors to assess class participation:

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Behavior Anchors</i>
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Absent</li> <li>▪ Asleep or inattentive.</li> </ul>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Shows limited evidence of having prepared for class</li> <li>▪ Takes limited initiative to participate in discussions and activities</li> <li>▪ Demonstrates passive or very infrequent involvement</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepares for class—understands the topic but does not try to answer or elaborate when called upon</li> <li>▪ Occasionally contributes comments and participates in discussions and activities</li> <li>▪ Demonstrates a fair level of involvement</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepares well for class—provides thoughtful comments with relevant points</li> <li>▪ Frequently participates in discussions and activities</li> <li>▪ Demonstrates active and consistent involvement</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepares fully for class—offers insightful perspectives, experiences, or reflections</li> <li>▪ Always participates in discussions and activities</li> <li>▪ Asks interesting questions</li> <li>▪ Demonstrates impactful and very active involvement</li> </ul>

#### 4.2. In-class quiz Saturday, 19 October, 10:00-12:00 (Individual, 35%)

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The in-class closed book quiz tests your understanding of and ability to work with course concepts and frameworks. The quiz covers the subject-matter from class and assigned readings.

#### 4.3. Decision-Point Reflections (Two-person team, 20%)

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Decision-point reflections are 600-word essays in which you work with concepts covered in class, either through critique or application. Working with one other person in the class (e.g., two-person teams), you will submit **two** decision-point reflections over the course of the semester. Grading of decision-point reflections will reflect our criteria for evaluating written and presented work (See section 5 below).

In decision-point reflections, you work with one or more of the decision making concepts we have covered in class, either challenging them and their relevance or working with them to demonstrate their practicality in some way. For example, we cover deontology and consequentialism as ethical foundations for decision making in week 3. You may want to challenge the applicability of these Western models to the Asian context, or use one of more of these concepts to make sense of a decision-related issue in the news.

The first reflection is due on Friday, 20 September and will be submitted online through LUMINUS. The second reflection is due on at the beginning of our final class session, Week 13. Each reflection should be no more than 600 words in length. Submission is completed when you have uploaded a soft copy to **the designated LUMINUS folder**.

#### 4.4. Decision Challenge Team Project (5-7 person teams, 30%)

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Your team will identify and investigate a challenging decision situation from the past (at least 50 years ago), a recent event (within the last 12 months), or an ongoing challenge. It should be one that 1) is Asia-relevant, 2) you are curious and passionate about, and 3) involves aspects of uncertainty and risk—the sort of situation where you can use the knowledge from this module to gain insight and understanding. Identify the decision situation and how it came about, explain the key players involved, and analyze the situation from the standpoint of the essentials for effective decision making. You will want to be systematic in covering potential threats to effective decision making, including the role of biases and heuristics, group processes, ethical considerations and such.

Each team will choose its own topic of study. Topic overlap among teams should be minimal, and topic areas are approved on a first-come, first-served basis. Here are some examples:

1. Past: The Japanese government's decision to attack Pearl Harbor?
2. Recent: How the Thai team rescued the soccer players who were trapped in the cave?
3. Ongoing: How the Singapore Government can raise the employment level of senior citizens?

#### Additional Information:

- Elevator Pitch: Your team will present an 'elevator pitch' of your proposal during class on Weeks 4. You will receive comments from the whole class that will help you further develop your ideas for this project. With the benefit of hearing each team's elevator pitch, we will be able to take steps to minimize the degree of overlap in presentation topics.
  - Formal Project Proposal: Your team will submit a formal project proposal document (one page, hard copy) that describes the decision challenge that your team will work on, why it is interesting and important, and the methods you will use to approach the challenge. Proposal documents are to be submitted at the beginning of class, week 5. Your team will then schedule a time during week 6 to further discuss and finalize the parameters for your project.
  - Project Presentation: Your team presentation will be scheduled for week 11 or 12. Each team will have 20 minutes of presentation time, and there will be up to 10 minutes for Q&A. Team presentation slides must be submitted to **the designated LUMINUS folder** one day before the class starts.
  - Final written reports: Your team's final written report must be submitted at the beginning of class, week 13. You should submit a **hard copy** to the instructor and a **soft copy** to the **designated LUMINUS folder**.
  - Assessment: Team presentations are evaluated on five criteria that are weighed equally: depth of understanding of the decision challenge, clarity and depth the analyses, the practical wisdom drawn from the study, overall quality and professionalism of the presentation, and effectiveness in engaging the audience. Criteria for evaluation of final written reports is detailed below (See section 5 below).
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## 5. Criteria for Evaluating Written and Presented Work

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Managers and professionals have to communicate in a way that is clear, precise, and informative. They must organize their thoughts clearly, with logic and supporting rationale. We look for similar elements when evaluating your work:

- **Discipline:** Make sure that written and presented work is organized and easy to follow. Convey your main points clearly to readers and in a logical manner. Don't gloss over the foundations—spell words correctly and adhere to rules for grammar and usage.
- **Justification:** Support your assertions with evidence from relevant sources (e.g., text, reading, interviews). Be sure to acknowledge sources.
- **Specificity and Accuracy:** Make specific rather than vague assertions. You will have greater difficulty in justifying general observations/statements. Also, note that accuracy in the use of technical terminology is critical. It is better to use an everyday word you do understand than to use a nice-sounding technical term inappropriately.
- **Wisdom:** Think through the implications of your recommendations (well beyond the obvious). Recognize potential unintended consequences and inherent trade-offs that must be considered.
- **Originality:** The quality of your ideas is important. Show creative, independent thinking as much as possible. Other things being equal, we reward attempts at creativity and thinking “outside-the-box.”
- **Academic Integrity:** Signing your name to an exam or quiz establishes the work as your own. Academic integrity and honesty is essential for the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge. The University and School expect every student to uphold these values at all times. Academic dishonesty is any misrepresentation with the intent to deceive, or failure to acknowledge the source, or falsification of information, or inaccuracy of statements, or cheating on examinations/tests, or inappropriate use of resources.

Plagiarism is ‘the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own' (The New Oxford Dictionary of English). The University and School do not condone plagiarism - You have the obligation to make clear to the assessor which work is your own, and which is the work of others. Otherwise, your assessor can assume that everything presented for assessment is entirely your own work. This is a minimum standard. In case of any doubts, consult your instructor.

Additional guidance is available at:

<http://www.nus.edu.sg/registrar/administrative-policies/acceptance-record.html#NUSCodeofStudentConduct>

Online Module on Plagiarism:

<http://emodule.nus.edu.sg/ac/>

## 6. Schedule of Topics

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Week 1 (12-16 Aug)	In Search of Excellence: Leadership, Uncertainty and Decision Making
Week 2 (19-23 Aug)	Thinking Fast and Slow: Decisions, Biases and Heuristics
Week 3 (26-30 Aug)	Navigating the Moral Maze: Ethical Foundations for Decision Making
Week 4 (2-6 Sept)	Ethical Decision Making in Action
Week 5 (9-13 Sept)	Group Decisions: Collaborating
Week 6 (16-20 Sept)	Decision Processes Practicum: Team dialogue with instructor
(21- 29 Sept)	No Class: Recess Week
Week 7 (30 Sept - 4 Oct)	Negotiated Decisions: Coopetition in Action
Week 8 (7-11 Oct)	Errors and Organizational Learning
Week 9 (14-18 Oct)	Creativity, Innovation and The Future
Week 10 (21- 25 Oct)	MNO2705 Quiz (Saturday, 19 October, 10:00-12:00 am)
Week 11/12 (28 Oct-8 Nov)	Team Presentations
Week 13 (11-15 Nov)	In Search of Relevance: Final Session