
COURSE DESCRIPTION

MNO2705 LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING UNDER UNCERTAINTY

Semester 2, 2022/2023

Instructors:

CHEE Mew Leng	bizcml@nus.edu.sg	BIZ2 #03-10
Ricky Chi Yeung LEUNG	rleung@nus.edu.sg	BIZ1 #08-37b
Melissa LIM	bizlsfm@nus.edu.sg	BIZ2 #03-49
Dan M ^C ALLISTER	mcallister@nus.edu.sg	BIZ1 #08-58
TAN Xiang Yan Noriko	norikotan@nus.edu.sg	BIZ2 #02-14
WANG Ningxin	nwang@nus.edu.sg	BIZ1 #08-48

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.

2. Module Objectives

The key objectives of this module are:

- Better understand 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.

3. Module Readings

Readings for each module session are indicated Section 7 of this syllabus. They are available through the online NUS library portal, as well as through CANVAS.

Recommended reading: Kahneman, D. (2013). *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

4. Modes of Teaching and Learning

The seminar format of this module gives us ample time for discussion and reflection. In addition to materials presented by the instructor, class activities involve small group dialogue, case discussion, and experiential exercises. You will also learn through your own study of assigned readings and completion of assignments.

The success of this module relies heavily on creating a safe and supportive learning environment for everyone. Your active participation and open sharing is essential, as is the participation of your peers. Therefore, listen carefully to peers and share your views with them in a civil and respectful manner.

We strive for a culture that maximizes collective learning by stimulating participation, creativity, and spontaneity. Be open and use your experiences in class and out of class for learning. Be appreciative, active, and questioning in order to maximize your own and others' learning.

Learner responsibilities

To benefit most from each class session, you should:

- Prepare for class by completing assigned readings and exercises.
- Participate actively in class.
- Dive deep: question, think critically, be open to new perspectives, 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 CANVAS and e-mail. Check your NUS mailbox and CANVAS regularly for announcements, updates and uploaded materials.

Role of the instructor

Instructors play a facilitating role by structuring processes, promoting and guiding discussion, and giving feedback. They will spend little time providing anything that you can read on your own. Class time is reserved for working with ideas, exchanging perspectives, and new learning.

5. Evaluation

Overall course grades are based on evaluations of both individual and collaborative work. Final grades reflect relative performance among peers.

Individual-based coursework

1. Class participation	15%
2. Decision Readiness Assessment	30%
3. Team Process Learning Journal	15%

Collaborative coursework¹

4. Decision Challenge Team Project (5-7 people)	40%
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¹ Although all team members usually receive the same grade for team-based coursework, instructors reserve the right to adjust individual grades on team work based on teamwork contribution.

4.1 Class Participation (Individual, 15%)

Participate actively in all sessions. Ask thoughtful questions, make constructive comments, challenge assumptions, bring in good examples from current events and life experience, and build on others' ideas.

Assessments of class participation will reflect the quality and consistency of your contribution to learning throughout the semester. The following criteria will be used to evaluate class participation:

<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Behavior Anchors</i>
Need Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Absent ▪ Does not respond or participate in discussions and activities ▪ Demonstrates passive or very infrequent involvement
Fair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepares for seminar sessions—understands the topic but does not try to answer or elaborate when called upon ▪ Occasionally comments and participates in discussions and activities ▪ Demonstrates a fair level of involvement
Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepares well for seminar sessions—provides thoughtful comments with relevant points ▪ Frequently participates in discussions and activities ▪ Demonstrates active and consistent involvement
Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepares fully for seminars: asks thoughtful questions, offers insightful perspectives, experiences, or reflections ▪ Always participates in discussions and activities ▪ Contributes in a way that enhances the learning of all who are present

4.2. Decision Making Readiness Assessment, Friday, 24 March, 7-9 pm (Individual, 30%)

The Decision Making Readiness Assessment provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate your understanding of and ability to work with course concepts and frameworks. It covers the subject-matter from class and assigned readings.

4.3. Decision Challenge Team Project (5-person teams, 40%)

For this project, your assigned team will identify and investigate a challenging decision situation or topic that has received attention in the popular press within the last 5 years. This challenge may be one that a specific organization faces at a specific point in time (e.g., A specific Facebook policy decision based on research/experiments with users) or an endemic challenge that organizations face (e.g., ineffective hiring decisions; incorporating AI into executive decision making). The decision situation or topic that your team chooses should be one that:

- is Asia-relevant;
- you are curious and passionate about;
- you believe is important and provides an opportunity for learning;
- involves uncertainty and risk—the sort of situation where you can use the knowledge from this module to gain insight and understanding.

For projects that concern a specific organization, your focus will be on a specific decision challenge, how that situation came about, the stakes and the key players involved. Your analysis will need to be thorough, addressing the essentials for effective decision making.

For projects where the focus is on an endemic challenge for organizations, your focus will be on 1) the aspects of such decision situations that make decision failures all too prevalent, and 2) best practices for avoiding such decision failures. It will be important for you to draw on the experiences of a range of organizations in your analysis.

Additional Information:

- **Elevator Pitch:** Your team will choose its own topic of study, which it will present as an ‘elevator pitch’ during class on Week 5. Elevator pitches cover essential information on your project:
 - The chosen decision challenge and its importance and relevance to the course.
 - An overview of what happened or the central issue.
 - Preliminary thoughts on the course concepts that will be applied.

You will receive comments to help you further develop ideas for your project idea. With the benefit of hearing each team’s proposal, we will also be able to minimize any overlap in project topics.

- **Written Project Proposal:** Your team will submit an agreed upon project proposal document that delineates the project scope and highlights the methods/resources you will use in your analyses. Proposal documents are to be submitted to the designated CANVAS folder before the beginning of class, Week 6. Your team will also meet with your instructor during this week to discuss any outstanding issues.
- **Project Presentation:** Your team presentation will be scheduled for Week 11 or 12. You will have 15 minutes of presentation time, and there will be up to 10 minutes for Q&A. Presentation slides for ALL teams will be submitted to the designated CANVAS folder one day before our Week 11 class session.
- **Assessment:** Team presentations (35%) are evaluated on five equally weighted criteria: understanding of the decision challenge, clarity and depth of the analyses, practical wisdom drawn from the study, overall professionalism of the presentation, and effectiveness in engaging the audience. Instructors will also evaluate team effectiveness over the course of the semester (e.g., Elevator Pitch, Project Proposal, and instructor-team meetings) (5%).

4.4. Team Process Learning Journal (15%)

For this individual assignment you will be preparing and submitting two reports concerning decision processes within your project team. Whereas the Decision Challenge Team Project provides an opportunity through focused learning on a specific topic, this exercise facilitates learning about decision making through reflection on the teamwork experience itself and your role in it.

Part I: Decision Making Live! Your first report will be focused on your teamwork experience through the first six weeks of the semester. It should be submitted to the designated CANVAS folder by Friday, 17 February. Your report will address the following four questions:

1. Briefly describe your team’s approach to decision making and your involvement to this point.
2. Identify and explain two strengths of your team’s approach to decision making.
3. Identify and explain the significance of two salient decision biases or traps that could undermine your team’s effectiveness.
4. Identify two specific steps that you can take to ‘nudge’ your team towards greater decision effectiveness.

Part II: Lessons from Experience. Your second report will focus on decision effectiveness throughout the semester, and especially on what transpired after Week 6. This report should be submitted to the designated CANVAS folder by Wednesday, 12 April. Your report will address the following four questions:

1. Reflecting back on this teamwork experience, identify and explain the role of two key decisions taken by the team and the impact of each on the final teamwork outcome.
2. Describe the steps you took to implement your ‘nudge’ recommendations (Part I).
3. Did these steps prove to be effective? Why or why not.
4. Identify two important lessons that you take with you from this teamwork experience.

Additional Information: In preparing your reports, provide specific and concrete examples to substantiate your claims and draw upon relevant course concepts to support your arguments. Each report should be no longer than 500 words in length. Bear in mind our Criteria for Evaluating Written and Presented Work (Section 5).

5. Criteria for Evaluating Written and Presented Work

Managers and professionals have to communicate in a way that is clear, precise, and informative. They must organize their thoughts 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 to readers and in a clear and 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 justifying general observations/statements. Also, note that accurate use of technical terminology is critical. It is better to use an everyday word you understand than to use a nice-sounding technical term inappropriately.
- **Wisdom:** Think through the implications of your recommendations (well beyond the obvious). Acknowledge and address potential unintended consequences and inherent trade-offs.
- **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 a test or assignment 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 intended to deceive, failure to acknowledge a source, falsification of information, inaccuracy of statements, 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

Week 1 9-13 Jan	Leadership, Uncertainty and Decision Making
Week 2 16-20 Jan	Thinking Fast and Slow: Decision Biases and Heuristics
Week 3 23-27 Jan	Chinese New Year: No Class (Team meetings with instructor in lieu of class.)
Week 4 30 Jan-3 Feb	Navigating the Moral Maze: Ethical Foundations for Decision Making
Week 5 6-10 Feb	Ethical Decision Making in Action
Week 6 13-17 Feb	Group Decisions: Collaborating
18-26 Feb	No Class: Recess Week
Week 7 27 Feb-4 Mar	Negotiated Decisions: Coopetition
Week 8 6-10 Mar	Decision Making in a Complex World
Week 9 13-17 Mar	Design Thinking
Week 10 20-24 Mar	Decision Readiness Assessment (Friday, 24 March, 7-9 pm)
Week 11/12 27 Mar-31 Apr 3-7 Apr	Team Presentations
Week 13 10-14 Apr	Final Session: Decision Making and the Good Life

7. Detailed Session Schedule

<p>Week 1 10-14 Jan</p>	<p>Leadership, Uncertainty and Decision Making</p> <p><u>Reflection:</u> A surprise decision.</p> <p>Taking no more than 20 minutes, recount the story of a decision that you have made that you consider surprising in some respect—it should be a story that you feel comfortable sharing with colleagues in class. Provide rich detail on the context of your decision, the factors that shaped your decision, and your thoughts and feelings in making it. Please upload your reflection to the designated CANVAS folder, and come to class prepared to share your experience with others.</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <p>Watts, D. J. (2011). “Thinking about Thinking.” Chapter 2 in <i>Everything is obvious, once you know the answer: How common sense fails us</i>. New York, NY: Crown Business/Random House (p. 30-53). (CANVAS)</p> <p>Galef, Juia (2021). “Two Types of Thinking” Chapter 1 in <i>The Scout Mindset: Why Some People See Things Clearly and Others Don't</i>. New York, NY: Portfolio. (pp. 3-15).(CANVAS)</p> <p>Luca, M., & Bazerman, M. H. (2020). Want to Make Better Decisions? Start Experimenting. <i>MIT Sloan Management Review</i>, 61(4), 67-73. (LIBRARY)</p>
<p>Week 2 17-21 Jan</p>	<p>Thinking Fast and Slow: Decision Biases and Heuristics</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <p>Kahneman, Daniel. (2013). Bernoulli’s Error & Prospect Theory in <i>Thinking, Fast and Slow</i>. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. (pp. 270-288). (CANVAS)</p> <p>Beshears, J., & Gino, F. (2015, May). Leaders as decision architects: Structure your organization’s work to encourage wise choices. <i>Harvard Business Review</i>, 93, 52–62. (LIBRARY)</p> <p>Keeney, R., Raiffa, H., & Hammond, J. (2006). The hidden traps in decision making. <i>Harvard Business Review</i>, 84(1), 118-126. (LIBRARY)</p>
<p>Week 3 24-28 Jan</p>	<p>Navigating the Moral Maze: Ethical Foundations for Decision Making</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <p>Ferrell, O. C., J. Fraedrich & L. Ferrell (2017) Individual Factors: Moral Philosophies and Values. (Chapter 6) In Ferrell, O. C., J. Fraedrich & L (Eds) <i>Business Ethics: Ethical Decision Making and Cases</i> (p. 154-176). Singapore: Cengage Learning. (CANVAS)</p> <p>Sandel, M. (2009) What matters is the motive / Immanuel Kant. Chapter 5 In M. Sandel, <i>Justice: What’s the right thing to do?</i> (pp. 103- 139) New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. (CANVAS)</p>
<p>Week 4 31 Jan-4 Feb</p>	<p>No Class: Chinese New Year (Team meetings with instructor during Week 6 in lieu of class.)</p>
<p>Week 5 7-11 Feb</p>	<p>Ethical Decision Making in Action</p> <p><u>Readings:</u></p> <p>Bandura, A. (1999). Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities. <i>Personality and social psychology review</i>, 3(3), 193-201. [Note: Only pages 193 to 201 are assigned]. (LIBRARY)</p> <p>Case: Chris and Alison Weston (A) (Harvard Case) (CANVAS)</p>

	Group Decisions: Collaborating
	<u>Readings:</u>
Week 6 14-18 Feb	Garvin, D. A., & Roberto, M. A. (2001). What you don't know about making decisions. <i>Harvard business review</i> , 79(8), 108-119. (LIBRARY)
	Levi, Daniel (2013). "Decision Making" Chapter 9 in <i>Group Dynamics for Teams</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.(pp. 147-164). (CANVAS)
19-27 Feb	No class: Recess week.
	Negotiated Decisions: Coopetition
	<u>Readings:</u>
Week 7 28 Feb-5 Mar	Malhotra, D., & Bazerman, M. H. (2008). "Claiming Value in Negotiation." (Chapter 1) and "Creating Value in Negotiation." (Chapter 2) in <i>Negotiation genius: how to overcome obstacles and achieve brilliant results at the bargaining table and beyond</i> . New York: Bantam Books. (NUS Library eBook collection)
	Decision Making in a Complex World
	<u>Readings:</u>
Week 8 7-11 Mar	Clearfield, C. & Tilcsik, A. (2018) "The Danger Zone." Chapter 1 in <i>Meltdown: Why Our Systems Fail and What We Can Do About It</i> . London: Atlantic Books (pp. 15-33)
	Keith, N., & Frese, M. (2011). Enhancing firm performance and innovativeness through error management culture. Chapter 9 in N. Ashkanasy, C. Wilderom & M. Peterson (Eds.), <i>Handbook of Organizational Culture and Climate</i> (pp. 137-157). (NUS Library eBook collection).
	Case: Mount Everest—1996 (Harvard Case) (CANVAS)
	Design Thinking
	<u>Readings:</u>
Week 9 14-18 Mar	Brown, T. (2008). Design thinking. <i>Harvard business review</i> , 86(6), 84-92. (LIBRARY)
	Liedtka, J. (2018). Why design thinking works. <i>Harvard Business Review</i> , 96(5), 72-79. (LIBRARY)
Week 10 21-25 Mar	Decision Readiness Assessment (Friday, 24 March, 7-9 pm)
Week 11 28 Mar-1 Apr	Team Presentations
Week 12 4-8 Apr	
	Final Session: Decision Making and the Good Life
	<u>Readings:</u>
Week 13 11-15 April	To be announced.