

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

### MNO2705 LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING UNDER UNCERTAINTY

Semester 2, 2025/2026

#### Instructor:

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## 1. Overview

The decisions you make every day are shaping your life. In the workplace, they will impact outcomes for you, your team, and your career trajectory. This course will help you navigate the pathways of decision making in organizations. We adopt an evidence-based approach, drawing on research from social psychology, behavioural economics, and management to identify key anchors for effective decision making. These tools will help you to make sound decisions in an uncertain world and lead effectively.

This course addresses the foundations for decision making in modern organizations, where the requirements of speed, global reach, complexity and change often foster unsafe and unethical business practices. Reports of insider trading, graft and cronyism, unsafe products, unfair employment practices, and environmental waste frequently dominate headlines. Against this backdrop, our concern is with anchors for ethical and morally sound decision making.

## 2. Course Objectives

The key objectives of this course 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.
- Understand practical ways for leaders to become more effective in making decisions and implementing them.

## 3. Evaluation Components

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

#### *Individual coursework*

1. Class participation	20%
2. Decision Readiness Assessment	30%

*Collaborative coursework (5-7 people)<sup>1</sup>* 50%

3. RE:Think
Decision Bias Deep Dive (5%)
Final Report (20%)
Decision Insight Video (15%)
Live Q&A (10%)

<sup>1</sup> Although all team members usually receive the same grade for team-based coursework, instructors reserve the right to adjust individual grades where there is clear evidence of insufficient teamwork contribution.

## 4. Course Readings

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Preparatory materials (e.g., articles, book chapters, cases, videos) are assigned for each class session. Please refer to Section 8 of this syllabus for full information on these. Readings are available through the online NUS library portal, as well as through CANVAS.

## 5. Modes of Teaching and Learning

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The seminar format of this course gives us ample time for discussion and reflection. In addition to instructor-led sessions, class activities involve small group dialogues, case discussions, and hands-on exercises. Your understanding will deepen as you complete assigned readings and individual/group assignments.

The course's success depends on a safe and supportive learning environment. Your active participation and open sharing are essential, as is mutual respect among peers. Listen carefully, share your views respectfully, and engage thoughtfully in discussions.

We aim to create a vibrant learning culture by encouraging participation, creativity, and critical thinking. Maximize your learning by being active, questioning, and open to new ideas.

**Learner responsibilities:** To benefit most from each class session, you should:

- Prepare for class by completing assigned readings and cases.
- Participate actively in class.
- Plunge (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.

**Communication:** Outside of class, CANVAS and email are our primary communication platforms. Check your NUS mailbox and CANVAS regularly for updates, announcements, and course materials.

**Role of the instructor:** Instructors facilitate learning by structuring activities, guiding discussion, and providing feedback. I spend little time elaborating on anything that you can read on your own. Class time is reserved for discussion and activities.

### 6.1 Class Participation (Individual, 20%)

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Participate actively in class—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 engagement and contribution to learning throughout the semester. The following criteria will be used to:

<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Behavior Anchors</i>
Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Demonstrates outstanding engagement and enthusiasm throughout class.</li> <li>▪ Offers insightful and thought-provoking ideas and feedback.</li> <li>▪ Demonstrates excellent listening skills and shows respect for others' perspectives.</li> </ul>
Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participates in most class discussions and activities.</li> <li>▪ Offers relevant ideas and feedback.</li> <li>▪ Listens attentively to others and responds appropriately to their input.</li> </ul>
Fair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participates inconsistently in class discussions and activities.</li> <li>▪ Contributes minimally and demonstrates limited engagement.</li> <li>▪ Shows some difficulty in actively listening to others' contributions.</li> </ul>
Need Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Absent</li> <li>▪ Does not respond or participate in discussions and activities</li> <li>▪ Demonstrates passive or very infrequent involvement</li> </ul>

## 6.2. Decision Readiness Assessment, Wednesday, 25 March, 7-9 pm (Individual, 30%)

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

### Additional Information:

- NUS provides for students who, on medical grounds, require alternative arrangements for assessments. Please inform your instructor if you will be requesting such arrangements.

## 6.3. Decision Bias Deep Dive (Team, 5%, Due Week 3)

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This team exercise involves researching a specific decision bias (one bias per team) and presenting it to the class. The overview will address the nature of this bias, how it can impair decision making and steps to contain it. Successful completion of this exercise will require some good research, creativity, and preparation. Share your learning in a way that brings life to the concept and its effects. Be creative, bold, and have fun with the topic.

### Additional Information:

- Presentations take place in Week 3.
- Each presentation is 6-8 minutes long.
- All team members must participate.
- Prepare (and upload to Canvas) informing summary slides to share with the class (max 5 slides).
- Assessment criteria: Insight (50%), engagement & creativity (25%), and delivery (25%)

## 6.4. Re:Think Team Project (Team, 45%, Due Week 11)

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Your team will analyze a decision situation involving uncertainty and risk that an organization faces, using concepts and approaches covered in this course as the basis for an informed recommendation for the decision maker(s). Based on your thorough analysis of the case, you will report your analyses and findings in both written and visual formations, and defend your thinking in a live Q&A session.

Your team will select a decision challenge that meets the following criteria:

- **Real**—The decision situation must be one that an organization currently faces or has recently faced.
- **Local**—You should have ready access to local sources of information (e.g., decision makers, stakeholders, industry experts). This should enable you to use original research methods (e.g., observation, interviews, data collection/analysis) as well as secondary data (e.g., news coverage, web-based information).

You will draw on your learning in this course to 1) clearly define the decision challenge, 2) analyze and understand aspects of the situation, 3) appraise the strengths and weaknesses of alternative courses of action, 4) provide specific and concrete recommendations for the decision situation, and 5) report on your work and learning.

### Deliverables and deadlines:

- **Project proposal (0%)**: Prepare a one-page written proposal (single-spaced, 12-pt font, Times New Roman, 1-inch margin all sides). The proposal should: (a) summarize the decision situation, and (b) explain how this topic meets the requirements for the project. The page limit does not include references. Due on Canvas: 8 February 11:59pm (Week 5).
- **Final Report (20%)**: Prepare a final written report (not exceeding 4 pages, single-spaced, 12-pt font, Times New Roman, 1-inch margin all sides). The report should include (a) a comprehensive analysis of the decision situation, supported by your research findings, and (b) a clear explanation of the proposed solution and why it is preferred among alternative solutions considered. The page limit does not include references. Due on Canvas: 3 April 11:59pm (Week 11).
- **Decision Insight Video (15%)**: Create an engaging short video (5-8 minutes) that presents the case you studied, together with your analyses and findings. Your goal is to help your fellow students learn from this case by clearly highlighting the key takeaways and lessons. The video should clearly draw on the core ideas and findings of the team's analysis of the chosen decision, but it doesn't need to mirror your written report. Instead, feel free to reimagine the content and design your message in a way that best engages your audience. You can tell a story, simulate

interviews, act out a scenario, use animations, skits, or other creative tools that can help you communicate the key lessons clearly and memorably. Due on Canvas: 3 April 11:59pm (Week 11). All videos will be played during class in Weeks 12 and 13.

- **Live Q&A (10%):** After your team's decision insight video is presented, your team will participate in a 10-minute live Q&A session. All team members are expected to contribute. You will respond to your peers' and instructor's questions about your project and respond to critiques.

## 7. Criteria for Evaluating Written and Presented Work

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For managers and professionals, effective communication requires clarity/precision, logic and supporting rationale. We look for similar elements in your work:

- **Clarity:** Structure your writing and presentations logically to ensure they are easy to follow. Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation to convey your points effectively.
- **Creativity:** The quality of *your* ideas is important. Show creative, independent thinking. Other things being equal, we reward thinking "outside-the-box."
- **Support & Justification:** Support your assertions with credible evidence, such as course readings, interviews or other research evidence. Be sure to acknowledge sources.
- **Specificity:** Avoid vague statements. Focus on specific, well-justified observations and arguments.
- **Wisdom:** Consider the broader implications of your recommendations (well beyond the obvious). Address trade-offs and unintended consequences thoughtfully.
- **Academic Integrity:** Signing your name to an assignment establishes the work as yours. This is true both for individual and team work. Academic integrity and honesty are 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 inform 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.

- **NUS Policy on AI**

The following are always improper uses of AI tools:

- ✗ Generating an output and presenting it as your own work or idea.
- ✗ Generating an output, paraphrasing it, and then presenting the output as your own work or idea.
- ✗ Processing an original source not created by yourself to plagiarize it (e.g., using an AI paraphrasing tool to disguise someone else's original work, or even the output of an AI tool, and then presenting the final output as your own work or idea).

All of the above violate NUS policies on academic honesty and anyone found to have done any of them will be dealt with accordingly. Keep in mind that even though AI tools are not authors and thus cannot be harmed by someone stealing an idea from them, it is still wrong to represent yourself as having produced something when you did not do so.

If you completed any work with the aid of an AI tool, assuming a setting in which the instructor gave permission for such tools to be used, you should always acknowledge the use. **Using the outputs of an AI tool without proper acknowledgement is equivalent to lifting or paraphrasing a paragraph from a source without citation and attracts the same sanctions.**

**8. Schedule of Topics**

Week 1 12-16 Jan	Leadership, Uncertainty and Decision Making
Week 2 19-23 Jan	Scenario Planning: Decision Analysis in Uncertain Futures
Week 3 26-30 Jan	Thinking Fast and Slow: Decision Biases and Heuristics I
Week 4 2-6 Feb	Thinking Fast and Slow: Decision Biases and Heuristics II
Week 5 9-13 Feb	Experimentation and Design Thinking
Week 6 16-20 Feb	Decision Process Practicum: Team meetings with Instructor CNY—17-18 February
23-27 Feb	No Class: Recess/Reading Week
Week 7 2-7 Mar	Group Decisions: Collaborating
Week 8 9-13 Mar	Negotiated Decisions: Coopetition
Week 9 16-20 Mar	Decision Making in a Complex World
Week 10 23-27 Mar	Decision Readiness Assessment (Wednesday, 25 March, 7-9 pm)
Week 11 30 Mar - 3 Apr	Decision Making in Work and Life WELLNESS DAY / GOOD FRIDAY—2-3 April
Week 12 6-10 Apr	Team Presentations
Week 13 13-17 Apr	Team Presentations

## 9. Detailed Session Schedule

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Week 1 12-16 Jan	<p>Leadership, Uncertainty and Decision Making</p> <p><u>Reflection:</u> A surprise decision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Taking no more than 20 minutes, tell the story of a recent decision you made and consider surprising in some way—it should be a story you feel comfortable sharing with the class. Provide rich detail on the situation, the factors shaping 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 discuss with others.</li> </ul> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Grant, A. (2021). “A Preacher, a Prosecutor, a Politician, and a Scientist Walk Into Your Mind. Ch. 2 in <i>Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don’t Know</i>. London, UK: Penguin Books (p. 15-32).</p>
Week 2 19-23 Jan	<p>Scenario Planning: Decision Analysis in Uncertain Futures</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Ramirez, R., Churchhouse, S., Hoffman, J., &amp; Palermo, A. (2017). Using Scenario Planning to Reshape Strategy. <i>MIT Sloan Management Review</i>, 58(4), 31-37.</p> <p>Rhydderch, A. (2017). Scenario Building: The 2x2 Matrix. <i>Futuribles International</i>.</p>
Week 3 26-30 Jan	<p>Thinking Fast and Slow: Decision Biases and Heuristics I</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Kahneman, Daniel. (2013). Bernoulli’s Error &amp; Prospect Theory in <i>Thinking, Fast and Slow</i>. New York: Farrar, Straus &amp; Giroux. (pp. 270-288).</p> <p>Beshears, J., &amp; 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.</p>
Week 4 2-6 Feb	<p>Thinking Fast and Slow: Decision Biases and Heuristics II</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Keeney, R., Raiffa, H., &amp; Hammond, J. (2006). The hidden traps in decision making. <i>Harvard Business Review</i>, 84(1), 118-126.</p>
Week 5 9-13 Feb	<p>Experimentation and Design Thinking</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Luca, M., &amp; Bazerman, M. H. (2020). Want to Make Better Decisions? Start Experimenting. <i>MIT Sloan Management Review</i>, 61(4), 67-73.</p> <p>Brown, T. (2008). Design thinking. <i>Harvard Business Review</i>, 86(6), 84-92.</p> <p><a href="#">IDEO Shopping Cart Project (Recommended)</a></p>
Week 6 16-20 Feb	<p>Decision Process Practicum: Team Meetings with Instructor</p> <p>CNY—17-18 February</p>
23-27 Feb	<p>No class: Recess/Reading week.</p>
Week 7 2-7 Mar	<p>Group Decisions: Collaborating</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Garvin, D. A., &amp; Roberto, M. A. (2001). What you don't know about making decisions. <i>Harvard Business Review</i>, 79(8), 108-119.</p> <p>Russo, J. &amp; P. Schoemaker (2002) Managing Group Decisions. Chapter 7 in <i>Winning Decisions: Getting it right the first time</i>. New York: Doubleday. (pp. 159-186).</p>

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<p>Week 8 9-13 Mar</p>	<p>Negotiated Decisions: Coopetition</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Malhotra, D., &amp; 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)</p>
<p>Week 9 16-20 Mar</p>	<p>Decision Making in a Complex World</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Clearfield, C. &amp; 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)</p> <p>Weick, K. E., &amp; Sutcliffe, K. M. (2015) Mismanaging the Unexpected. Chapter 1 in <i>Managing the unexpected: Sustained performance in a complex world</i>. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley &amp; Sons (pp. 1-20). (NUS Library eBook collection)</p> <p>Case: Mount Everest—1996 (Harvard Case)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did this tragedy occur? What is the root cause of this disaster?</li> <li>• Are tragedies such as this simply inevitable in a place like Everest?</li> <li>• What is your evaluation of Scott Fischer and Rob Hall as leaders? Did they make some poor decisions? If so, why?</li> </ul> <p><u>Recommended reading:</u></p> <p>Keith, N., &amp; Frese, M. (2011). Enhancing firm performance and innovativeness through error management culture. Chapter 9 in N. Ashkanasy, C. Wilderom &amp; M. Peterson (Eds.), <i>Handbook of Organizational Culture and Climate</i> (pp. 137-157). (NUS Library eBook collection).</p>
<p>Week 10 23-27 Mar</p>	<p>Decision Readiness Assessment (Wednesday, 25 March, 7-9 pm)</p> <p>Reminders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NUS provides for students who, on medical grounds, require alternative arrangements. Inform your instructor if you will be requesting such support.</li> <li>• We will arrange a separate venue for those students who wish to break their fast prior to the assessment. The assessment in this alternate venue will take place from 7:30-9:30pm. Inform your instructor if you require this arrangement.</li> </ul>
<p>Week 11 31 Mar - 4 Apr</p>	<p>Decision Making in Work and Life</p> <p><u>Reading:</u></p> <p>Baker, W. (2020). "The law of giving and receiving." Chapter 3 in <i>All you have to do is ask</i>. New York, NY: Currency.</p> <p>Torbert, W. R. (1994). The good life: good money, good work, good friends, good questions. <i>Journal of Management Inquiry</i>, 3(1), 58-66.</p>
<p>Week 12-13 7-11 Apr 14-18 April</p>	<p>Team Presentations</p>