

MNO2707 Business Ethics

AY2026/2027 Semester 1

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Time: Biweekly

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We will adopt a psychological approach to understanding ethical judgments and behaviour. We will try to provide some answers to a fundamental problem in ethics: Why do good people who want to do good nevertheless do bad things? Answering this question requires an understanding of the fundamental psychological processes that govern human thought and behaviour in the ethical domain. These psychological processes can lure anyone – including you and me – into the ethical lapses that ruin careers, destroy businesses, harm people, and bring shame to individuals and organizations. Understanding these processes will give you insights into how you would design your life, your organization, and your teams. The course will also cover discussions on the ethical usage of AI at workplace. Class sessions will consist of lectures and in-class activities.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Recognise ethical issues at work.
- Exercise ethical judgments and decisions.
- Understand and manage ethical conduct and social responsibility in business and organizational settings.
- Recognise ethical concerns for AI driven tasks as workplace and recommend appropriate measures to ensure ethical usage of AI.

READINGS AND LESSON PREPARATION

Articles and book chapters to be announced for each week.

Book: Bazerman, M.H., & Tenbrunsel, A.E. (2011). Blind spots: Why we fail to do what's right and what to do about it. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ.

You can access the e-book through the NUS library

ASSESSMENTS

Component	Weightage
Class contribution (individual)	40
Final essay (individual)	35
Team project (group)	25
Total	100%

1. Class Contribution:

- a. Attendance and Participation in Class Discussions (25%)
- b. Mini writeups (15%)

To be prepared for class, you must read and think about the week's topic before the class. Evaluation of your **participation** will be based on your ability to contribute comments that are insightful, relevant and progressive (i.e., comments that add on to what is being said and move the discussion forward, rather than restate what has already been said). I will be looking for quality in your participation and you will not need significant "airtime" to earn a high participation grade (if you put forth a single, key insight and that is all you contribute to a session, you will receive the maximum class participation grade for that session).

As a significant proportion of the grade is tied to class participation, it is important that you attend all class sessions. Missing a class will affect your own and your classmates' experience in the class. If you miss a class, you are encouraged to arrange a make-up session with another section of the same instructor.

There will be **3 Mini writeups**, to be submitted before classes 2, 3, and 4. Each submission has a weightage of 5%. These mini writeups should be 200 to 300 words long. The purpose of these mini writeups is to ensure that you have:

- Read the assigned material carefully
- Thought about the ideas in an active, critical way
- Begun to connect ethical concepts to real business contexts

Mini writeups will be evaluated based on:

- **Engagement:** Clear evidence that you completed and understood the readings
- **Insight:** Thoughtful interpretation, application, or questioning of the ideas
- **Specificity:** Use of concrete examples rather than vague generalities
- **Clarity:** Ideas are clearly expressed and logically connected

2. Final Essay

Final Individual Essay: Ethical Audit (1300 - 1500 words)

For your final assignment, you will conduct an ethical audit of an organization of your choice. Your paper is due at the end of semester (date to be confirmed).

For this assignment, you will choose **one** of the three major course themes and analyze your organization *through that single lens*:

- **Moral Courage and Whistleblowing**
- **Conflicts of Interest**
- **Incentives**

Your paper should include the following:

Part 1: Organizational Background

Briefly describe key details about the organization (industry, size, structure, relevant history). Keep this concise.

Part 2: Ethical Problems or Points of Risk

Identify and explain actual ethical issues or likely areas of ethical risk in the organization *specifically related to the course theme you selected*. Use concepts, frameworks, and evidence from class lectures and assigned readings.

Part 3: Design Solutions

- Propose concrete, realistic design interventions that could reduce the ethical risks you identified.
- Include a forward-looking section which discusses the potential design interventions needed when some of the related tasks are automated (or done by AI agents). Highlight the potential ethical risks and the appropriate measure to mitigate those risks.

This is the **most important** part of the paper. Your solutions must explicitly draw on course ideas, theories, and research and demonstrate clear understanding and application.

Expectations and Evaluation

Strong work will:

- Systematically analyze the organization using relevant course concepts
- Show clear, critical reasoning
- Apply course ideas accurately and creatively
- Reflect on why these issues matter for you as a future business professional

Confidentiality

All essays are confidential and will be read only by the instructor and TA. You may change the organization's name and the names of individuals if doing so helps protect privacy, especially if discussing sensitive or illegal behavior.

You are welcome to discuss your chosen organization and theme with the instructor during the semester.

3. Team Project

In the final class period, you will complete a team project in class. However, you must prepare for it before class. The team project will involve an in-depth analysis of a company using core concepts from readings and lectures in classes 1-4. This in-class group assignment will involve answering questions about ethical problems and offering solutions to those problems by applying course concepts and ideas. To do well on this project, you must keep up with course readings and lectures and read the material assigned for this final class. No AI tools are permitted when completing this assignment in class.

SCHEDULE

This outline is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class.

Class 1: Introduction to Ethics

Readings:

- Chapters 1 - 3 of **Blind Spots**, by Bazerman & Tenbrunsel (NUS E BOOK)

Class 2: Conflicts of Interest

Readings:

- Chapters 4 - 5 of **Blind Spots**, by Bazerman & Tenbrunsel (NUS E BOOK)
- See Red Flags, Hear Red Flags, by Greenstone. **New York Times**. Dec 6, 2013 (NUS Library content type: Newspaper Article)

Class 3: Whistleblowing and Moral Courage

Readings:

- The Whistleblower's Quandary, by Waytz, Dungan, & Young. **New York Times**. Aug 2, 2013. (NUS Library content type: Newspaper Article)
- GM Recalls: How General Motors Silenced a Whistle Blower, by Higgins & Summers. **Bloomberg**. Jun 19, 2014. (NUS Library)
- Research: Whistleblowers Are a Sign of Healthy Companies, by Stubben & Welch. **HBR**. Nov 14, 2018 (NUS Library – follow special guideline if required)

Class 4: Incentives

Readings:

- How Customers Can Rally Your Troops, by Grant. **HBR**. June 2011. (NUS Library – follow special guideline if required)
- How Markets Crowd Out Morals, by Sandel (reading the responses to Sandel is optional). Boston Review. Jun 20, 2012. (<https://www.bostonreview.net/forum/forum-sandel-markets-morals/>)

Classes 5 & 6: Team Project Task

- Details to be announced during the semester

ACADEMIC HONESTY & PLAGIARISM

Academic integrity and honesty is essential for the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge. The University and School expect every student to uphold academic integrity & honesty 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 at 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 will not condone plagiarism.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT do not require specialist knowledge to use. Many of these AI tools are commonly used in social media, for example, to create content and disguise and refine content created from programmes like ChatGPT. We understand that students will be drawn to using these AI Tools, as they would for any other electronic aid.

However, to be clear, normal academic rules still apply. As noted in the Code of Student Conduct:

"The University takes a strict view of cheating in any form, deceptive fabrication, plagiarism and violation of intellectual property and copyright laws. Any student who is found to have engaged in such misconduct is subject to disciplinary action by the University."

With respect to AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT and image generation tools), your instructor will clarify whether the use of these tools as inputs into your assignment development process is acceptable. AI is a technology that requires skill to use, and knowledge about when and how to use it. If you use ChatGPT or any other such AI tool in your work, you must provide a proper representation of how you used the tool and what prompts you used to generate output. Failure to cite its use constitutes academic misconduct.

Further, as with any information source, be aware that minimal efforts yield low quality results. You will need to refine your work and fact check the output, as you would double-check information from any source. Further, you should be selective in how and when you use such tools instead of using it for each and every assignment you create.

To summarise:

1. Always check with your instructors on what are the permitted uses of AI tools.
2. Have a discussion at the start of a course about the use of AI.
3. Where permitted, acknowledge your use of AI.
4. You remain responsible for the quality of your work and its appropriate representation.
5. Failure to follow the above steps can lead to a concern about plagiarism (academic dishonesty).

As always, you have the obligation to make clear to the assessor which is your own work, and which is the work of others. Otherwise, your assessor is entitled to assume that everything being presented for assessment is entirely your own work. This is a minimum standard.

Additional guidance can be found at:

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

NUS Code of Student Conduct: <http://nus.edu.sg/osa/resources/code-of-student-conduct>

Academic Integrity Essentials: <https://libguides.nus.edu.sg/new2nus/acadintegrity#s-lib-ctab-22144949-4>

Guidelines on the Use of AI Tools For Academic Work: <https://libguides.nus.edu.sg/new2nus/acadintegrity#s-lib-ctab-22144949-3>