

MLS 5321

Leadership in Complex Organizations (CRN 19454/19455)
Hybrid Course - meets Thursdays: October 22-December 10, 2020
5:00-8:00 p.m., Zoom Classroom

Syllabus

Instructor: Libby Dalton, Ph.D.
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The best way to contact me is via email.
Office Hours: Anytime, by appointment, phone or Zoom session.

Course Description:

This course examines leadership in complex situations and operating environments, e.g., situations with multiple contexts, constituencies, and functions. Organizations of all types and size, government agencies, military organizations, and corporations face complex problems, many of which cross organizational boundaries. These situations may involve responding to unanticipated events (Black Swan events), rapid change in markets or technology, downsizing/rightsizing, or leading collaborative work in a shared-power world.

The course will explore the characteristics of the complex problems that organizations face, examine frameworks that can assist leaders in managing these situations and organizational settings. Principles of organizational learning and collaboration will be applied to the analysis of public and private sector cases.

Learning Objectives/Outcomes

At the end of this course, students will:

- Understand the characteristics of complex problems and complex operating environments faced by organizations and leaders.
- Apply a number of frameworks to complex problems and evaluate their usefulness.
- Analyze the strategies that organizations employ to address complex problems.
- Understand and apply the principles of *learning organizations* to complex problems.
- Identify the habits of mind and behaviors of successful leaders in these situations.
- Develop integrative and collaborative leadership approaches to complex organizational problems.

Course Texts:

Dweck, Carol S. 2006. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success; How We Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Holmes, Jamie. 2015. *Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing*. New York: Broadway Books.

Recommended. Senge, Peter. 2006. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Currency/Doubleday

Other articles and cases will be placed on Blackboard.

Discussion and Participation Expectations:

MLS 5321 is a hybrid course, consisting of classroom instruction and online assignments. Students are expected to be respectful and supportive of fellow students both in class and online. Some of the topics are controversial and all students should feel comfortable expressing their

thoughts in both forums. Please think about how your discussion posts may be interpreted by others and how others' posts may be intended in a different way than you interpret. Guidelines on *netiquette* can be found at <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/>.

This is an academically rigorous course with a considerable amount of reading. Students must come to class prepared to contribute to discussions and exercises. Attendance factors heavily in your final grade. All online submissions have deadlines posted in the syllabus and in the discussion section of Blackboard. Failure to meet the deadlines will result in point reduction.

Grading:

<u>Points for Assignments</u>	<u>Possible Points</u>
Blackboard posts on assigned reading – six posts @ 8 points each	48 points
Class participation (demonstrate knowledge of concepts & frameworks in reading and cases)	17 points
Final paper	30 points
One-page summary of final paper & class briefing	5 points
Total Points	100 points

Course Assignments and Evaluation:

- A. **Reading questions:** six sets of questions designed to focus your reading and build knowledge of concepts and frameworks. The reading questions will also be the basis for class discussion. [There are generally two questions to answer for each post (six points) **plus** the response to a minimum of two students (two points) = total of eight points.]

When you respond to a threaded discussion post from a colleague on Blackboard, you must respond in a meaningful and scholarly manner. Simple agreement is not an acceptable response; however, aim to limit the response to no more than 250 words. Your contributions are welcome and necessary to facilitate the discussions in class. **The posts are due by midnight on the Wednesday before the Zoom class.** It is wise to post your responses well ahead of the deadline so you have time to respond to fellow students.

A late assignment will receive a one point deduction for each twenty-four hour period the assignment is late. If you are unable to submit an assignment when it is due, contact me before the deadline. Generally, I find it unacceptable for students to turn in late assignments, unless there are extreme extenuating circumstances. [I accept one late post without penalty.]

I reserve the right to change the questions on the readings and will post them on Blackboard well in advance of the deadlines.

- B. Participation and discussion. Your participation in this class means that you have completed the assigned readings, posted on Blackboard, and contributed to class discussions. Each student will lead the discussion of at least one of the posted questions. This will be worth five points of your class participation grade. Simple grading rubric: the discussion leader demonstrates full understanding of the reading and is able to engage the class in exploring the key questions and issues. This means that you have created some problem or exercise in which everyone must participate.
- C. **Final paper: analysis of a complex organizational problem.** In this 10 page paper (minimum eight pages of text, not counting the title page and references), you will apply an appropriate set of principles or frameworks from the assigned reading to the analysis of a complex problem. You choose the problem and the sets of principles that are most relevant

to understanding the complex problem you have selected. Guidelines for the final paper are listed below.

The paper must include three parts: 1. a relatively short description of the complex problem, 2. **an analysis of the leadership response (quality, effectiveness, etc.) using appropriate principles from the reading;** and 3. Analysis/comment on the leadership lessons to be learned. The analysis (parts 2 and 3) should constitute the main part of the paper. If you cannot locate enough research material to address parts 2 and 3, choose another topic. It is important to identify and draw upon high-quality academic resources.

The last class session will be devoted to **student briefings** on your analysis of the problem studied and the leadership response. Each student will present a **10 minute briefing** on his/her paper and provide the class with a copy of the one-two page brief or the Power Point slides. The brief should describe the complex problem studied, the frameworks for analysis applied, and the key results of your analysis of the leadership response and lessons learned.

Late final papers will not be accepted. A grade of incomplete will not be given unless there are extreme extenuating circumstances and you have talked with me in advance.

There are many complex problems to choose from; below are a few examples of problems studied by former students. There are many others.

- Flint, Michigan water crisis
- JP Morgan Chase debacle - the loss of \$3 billion+ in hedge fund trading
- European Union refugee crisis or influx to the US of Central American asylum seekers
- Boko Haram in Nigeria and Central Africa
- Some aspect of the response to a natural disaster, disease, pandemic, etc., for example the response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.
- Any social problem that requires a shared leadership response (jail overcrowding, etc.)
- Homelessness in some city or state
- Sexual harassment in the military or the Weinstein Company.

Paper Guidelines:

Title for final paper: The title for your paper should be specific and descriptive. The reader should know what your paper says just by reading the title. **No abstract is required.**

Introduction: Your introduction should catch the reader's attention. It should include a thesis statement (the central argument that you will support and discuss in the paper), and preview what you will say in the rest of the paper, and indicate the principles or frameworks you will use in your analysis.

Transitions and paragraph structure: Use transitions between paragraphs and each major section of your paper. Subheadings can help you effectively move from one major section of the paper to another, so make sure to use them in your final paper.

Paragraph structure for academic papers should be longer than for a journalistic style of writing. Generally, paragraphs should be $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page long. Paragraphs should start with a claim and then use evidence to support that claim. Do not start paragraphs with your evidence or the authors that support your claims. Rather, start with your argument and then use the evidence to support and illustrate your argument. Summarize by argument rather than by author or evidence. Use your own examples to illustrate your point or arguments, but also make sure to use supporting materials.

Organization of paper: Organize your paper by ideas, rather than by author, e.g., you may be tempted to summarize in each paragraph a different author or piece of evidence. A stronger way to organize your papers is to focus on the ideas rather than the authors. Make sure to connect each idea with transitions. Example: Barbara Crosby article on shared/collaborative leadership.

Conclusion for final paper: Your conclusion should recap what you have learned about the problem, the leadership challenge and response, and lessons learned.

Internal citations and evidence: You must cite the texts and other research to support your arguments and appropriately credit the authors. Cite author, year, and page numbers (if it is a direct quote) in the text of the paper (APA citation style). Quotes should not be too long. If you are using more than three words in a row from an author, you should use quotation marks.

References: Include a reference page listing any books or articles cited (including course materials) in the paper. Note: **minimum of six to eight references apart from texts.**

Other guidelines to follow: Use Times New Roman 12 font and one inch margins (and not bold typeface). Double space your paper and number your pages. Provide a title page; there is no need for an abstract.

Grading Criteria: paper is worth **30 points** toward final grade

- Development and support of your analysis of the complex again – 20 points
- Quality of the writing: paper is free of grammatical errors, incomplete sentences, etc. – 5 points
- Organization of the paper: consistent support of arguments, effective introduction (with a clear thesis statement) and transitions between main points; effective conclusion; fluidness in writing – 5 points.

10-minute student briefing in class – 5 points. This is not an outline or agenda alone. It includes the main findings of your analysis.

Session Schedule & Assignments

Session 1 – October 22: Introduction to the course and syllabus. What constitutes a complex organizational problem? How do we distinguish a simple from a complex problem? The books and articles that we will read approach these questions from different perspectives.

Required Reading:

- Dweck, Carol S., *Mindset*, Chapters 1-5 (143 p.). What habits of mind are important for solving problems? What does it mean to have a growth mindset, a fixed mindset? What does this have to do with managing complexity?

Recommended reading:

- Northouse, Peter G. 2016. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7th Edition, chapter 11, Adaptive Leadership. Placing leadership of complexity within the leadership literature.
- **Post # 1 Due Wednesday, October 28 – midnight** (adaptive leadership, mindsets)

Session 2 – October 29: Developing a growth mindset; social complexity/wicked problems and black swan events as frameworks for understanding complex organizational problems.

Required reading:

- Mindset; Chaps. , 6, 7 & 8 (Where do mindsets come from; how do we change them?)
- Conklin, Jeff. 2001-2010. Wicked Problems and Social Complexity. Cog Nexus Institute at <http://www.cognexusgroup.com>

- Brian, Greg. 2008. The Black Swan Theory of Being Unable to Predict Unexpected Events. New York Times Book Review. (Theory of Nassim Nicholas Taleb)
- **Post # 2 – Due November 4 – midnight** (mindsets, wicked problems)

Session 3 –November 5: complex problems that cross organizational boundaries and the collaboration imperative; example of the Boston Marathon bombing; learning organizations and systems thinking in addressing complex problems.

Required reading:

- Crosby, Barbara C. 2010. Leadership in the Shared Power World of 2020. *Public Administration Review* December 2010 Special Issue (9 p.)
- Williamson, Aimee L., and Bond, Brenda J. 2014. Making Boston Strong: Social Capital, Collaboration, and Accountability Lessons from Public Administrators in the Twenty-First Century. *Public Administration Review* 74, 6: 693-695. (3 p.)
- Davis, Edward F. 2014. Decades of Preparation, but Only Moments to Respond: How Authentic Collaboration Saves Lives and Solves Problems. *Public Administration Review* 74, 6:696-697. (2 p.)
- Senge, Peter M. 2006. *The Fifth Discipline* The art and practice of collective learning.
 - Chap.1: Give Me a Lever Long Enough...(3-16)
 - Chap. 2: Does Your Organization Have a Learning Disability (17-27)
 - Chap. 4: The Laws of the Fifth Discipline (57-67)
- **Recommended:** O’Leary, Rosemary, and Gerard, Catherine. 2012. Collaboration across Boundaries: Insights and Tips from Federal Senior Executives. IBM Center for the Business of Government. (Survey of 300 members of the Federal Executive Service).
- **Recommended:** Allan, Thad. 2012. Confronting Complexity and Creating Unity of Effort: The Leadership Challenge for Public Administrators. *Public Administration Review* 72, 3 (May/June 2012). (2 p.)
- **Post # 3 Due Wednesday November 11 – midnight** (collaboration; systems thinking and learning disabilities)

Session 4 – November 12: Systems thinking; challenging mental models; Honda culture and innovation practices.

Required Reading:

- Senge, Peter M. 2006. *The Fifth Discipline*.
 - Chap.9: Mental Models (163-190)
 - **Recommended: Chap. 5: A Shift of Mind (68-91)**
- Rothfeder, Jeffrey. 2014. *Driving Honda: Inside the World’s Most Innovative Car Company*. New York: Penguin Group.
 - Chap. 1, The Honda Difference (1-24); and Chap. 7, Honda’s Innovation Machine. (189-211)

Post # 4 Due Wednesday, November 18 – midnight (mental models, Honda’s innovation strategy)

Session 5 – November 19: the Columbia disaster, a case in organizational & technical complexity; managing uncertainty and ambiguity.

Required reading:

- Langewiesche, William. 2003. Columbia’s Last Flight: The Inside Story of the Investigation and the Catastrophe it Laid Bare. *Atlantic Monthly*, November 2003. (30 p.)

- Holmes, Jaime. 2015. Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing. How to deal with what we don't know.
 - Chaps. 1-4.

Post # 5 Due Tuesday, November 25?? (Columbia disaster; combatting the need for closure and the Waco example of dealing with uncertainty)

Session 6 – November 26, Thanksgiving Holiday: managing uncertainty and ambiguity; the challenge of groupthink. **How to cover this, perhaps a posted PP.**

Required reading:

- Holmes, Jaime. 2015. Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing. How to deal with what we don't know.
 - Chaps. 5-9 and Epilogue
- Janis, Irving L. 1982. *Groupthink, Second Edition*. Chap. 1 Introduction: Why So many Miscalculations? (2-13)
- Chap. 3 In and Out of North Korea: "The Wrong War with the Wrong Enemy" (48-71)

Post # 6 – Due Wednesday December 2 – midnight (embracing uncertainty & groupthink)

Session 7 – December 3: Groupthink: Cuban Missile Crisis: what did President Kennedy learn from the Cuban missile crisis; how did he change the decision making process?

Required Reading:

- Janis, Irving L. 1982. *Groupthink, Second Edition*. Chap. 6, the Cuban Missile Crisis (132-158) In-class discussion and exercise on this last reading.

Session 8 – December 10: Student Briefings on Papers

Post final paper on Blackboard before the class meeting and bring a hard copy to class. Post brief on Discussion Board.

Academic Misconduct

Academic misconduct includes cheating, plagiarizing, collusion, and deliberately interfering with the work of others. Plagiarizing means representing the work of someone (another student, an author of a book, article or internet site) as your own. If you use ideas or words of someone else, **you must cite the source** of the original information in your paper or presentation. For this class, using your papers completed for another class also would be considered plagiarism.

Cheating includes, but is not limited to, copying answers from other students' papers and discussion responses or allowing other students to copy your work. Collusion refers to collaboration with another student to commit any academically dishonest act. If you provide answers to someone or knowingly allow someone to copy your work, you will be held responsible. The official UTEP policy on academic dishonesty and plagiarism was presented to you in the MLS 5300 Essentials of Leadership course and is included in that syllabus.

Disabled Student Statement

In section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, if a student needs an accommodation then the Office of Disabled Student Services located at UTEP needs to be contacted. If you have a condition which may affect your ability to perform successfully in this course, you are encouraged to discuss this in confidence with your instructor and/or director of Disabled Student Services. You may call 925.747.5148 for general information about the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the rights that you have as a UTEP students with a disability. You can also visit the DDSO website at www.utep.edu/dsso or the DSSO office in Room 108 East Union Building.