Course Goals and Objectives

The goal of Managing Public Service Organizations (MPSO) is to enhance your leadership skills in delivering programs and services for the public benefit. The course provides students with the tools needed to diagnose and solve organizational problems, enhance performance and productivity, write effective memos, manage teams, personnel, and organizational structure, anticipate and explore the future, and make a difference for your communities, countries, and the world through social change.

The course is divided into five sections: (1) introduction, (2) assuring organizational alignment, (3) creating agility, (4) ensuring alertness, and (5) pursuing adaptability. These categories of leadership/management are built around action verbs and come from my ongoing work on high performance organizations. I am particularly concerned about teaching students how to operate effectively under conditions of uncertainty, which is a nearly constant variable in making choices, managing people, establishing purpose, measuring performance, and creating innovation.
There are three required books for this course, both of which are available in soft cover through NYU’s professional bookstore.


All other readings are on Blackboard or available online through ProQuest Direct using its advanced search option or by selecting the journal through the alphabetical list of e-journals provided by the library.


**Course Format**

The course begins with a brief discussion of evidence-based management and an exploration of the four frames for understanding organizations; the rest of the course will focus on a particular set of leadership skills. The class goal will be to distinguish between effective and ineffective strategies for assuring high performance. The class will do so by discussing key theoretical concepts, analyzing related cases, engaging in exercises, and completing team projects.

This course reflects a dual focus on practice and conceptual training. The course packet readings introduce key concepts and useful ways of thinking about common situations in complex organizations. Case studies and class exercises provide opportunities to apply theories, concepts, and research findings to particular situations, sectors, and fields of interest to Wagner students and to hone their skills in problem definition and problem solving. The written assignments, including the team project, ask students to consolidate their insights and to practice their analytic skills.

Many of the principles and issues involved in MPSO are relatively timeless and not limited only to organizations of a public service nature. Consequently, students should not rely on the copyright dates or specific organizational applications of either the readings or the cases in evaluating their usefulness. “Classic” readings and cases are included because they speak to important issues in useful, interesting, and time-tested ways.

The cases provide concrete situations to which you should apply the concepts introduced in articles. They provide an opportunity for you to practice diagnosing the nature and
causes of organizational performance and to practice thinking through the potential consequences of action strategies.

A class like this requires careful attention to fairness and mutual respect for one another. It is especially important that students who have unavoidable conflicts make the professor or teaching colleague aware of the absence in advance, and that you arrive in class on time and prepared for discussion. This means making sure all cases are carefully read and outlined ahead of time.

**THERE WILL BE ABSOLUTELY NO EXCUSES ACCEPTED FOR FAILURE TO COMPLETE THE READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS.**

**Blackboard**

You must have access to the class Blackboard site.

- Many announcements, class related documents (extra readings, discussion questions, class handouts, etc.), and surveys/exercises will be posted here. If you have not activated your NYU net account or have forgotten your password, you can activate or change your password at http://start.nyu.edu. Your account must be activated to access Blackboard.
- Some class announcements will also be distributed via e-mail. Thus, it is important that you actively use your NYU e-mail account, or have appropriate forwarding set up on NYUHome.
- You will need Adobe Acrobat Reader in order to view and print the materials on Blackboard. If you do not already have this (free) software installed on your computer, go to http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html and follow the download instructions.

**Grading**

Your grade for the course will be based on the following five elements:

- 40% Team project
- 25% Individual memos (5 points each on the 5 best of your 8 graded memos)
- 35% In-class final exam

For general information about the quality of work related to letter grades, see the section “Final Grading Criteria” at the end of the syllabus.

**Class Participation:** All class sessions will involve active discussion based on the readings and cases, with an emphasis both on theoretical questions and practical implications. You should be prepared to share your ideas and to listen to and interpret the issues presented by others.
Please carefully read the readings and cases before class sessions. Most participation will be voluntary; however, to insure that everyone has the opportunity to be involved, individuals will occasionally be called upon at my discretion.

Team Paper

Each three-person team will write a 5,000-word paper assessing the organizational capacity and recommended capacity-building intervention for a single organization selected by the team. Students will assess the organization through at least three face-to-face interviews, review of all available objective materials (including strategic plans, evaluations, form 990s, etc.). Students will draw conclusions about the need for capacity building, the target of work, and the evidence regarding the value of the recommended action.

Students should note that there are literally hundreds of recommendations for improving organizational performance to choose from, including new personnel systems, pay-for-performance, reorganization, strategic planning, mission and vision statements, total quality management, benchmarking, teams, and so forth. Each team will pick one discrete intervention, examine the research (including business literatures) that support the idea, assess its real-world relevance to public service organizations, and summarize its actual value (cost/benefit, social return on investment, etc.) for actual implementation.

I WILL BE THE PRIMARY COACH FOR EACH TEAM AND WILL BE ITS DE FACTO LEADER. EACH TEAM REPRESENTS THE WAGNER SCHOOL IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD AND IS EXPECTED TO BEHAVE IN THE MOST PROFESSIONAL MANNER ACHIEVABLE, INCLUDING EVERYTHING FROM DRESS, APPROPRIATE CONTACT, RESPECTFUL INTERACTION, AND THANK-YOU LETTERS.

Individual Memos

The individual memos should address the question asked regarding each case. The memos should be no longer than ONE PAGE. These memos will be discussed in class. The first page of each memo will be the only page read—any additional pages will be jettisoned with a 1 point deduction per page.

Final Exam

The final exam will be an in-class exam based on the readings in the course. It will take place at normal class time on the first Thursday in the grading period.

Writing Resources

The school provides a writing consultant (free) and a writing workshop (not free) for assistance with written work. More information is available at the URL below: http://www.nyu.edu/wagner/current/services/writing.php
Statement of Academic Integrity

As members of the NYU Wagner community, all students are all expected to adhere to high standards of intellectual and academic integrity. A useful description of integrity can be found at [http://www.nyu.edu/cas/expository.writing/EWPpolicies.html#anchor762894](http://www.nyu.edu/cas/expository.writing/EWPpolicies.html#anchor762894). This is a good resource for issues of academic honesty, especially regarding writing. For this particular course, there are some specific behaviors required to meet our standards of academic integrity:

*Team Projects:* Team projects should be completed by teams working together.  
*Individual Projects:* Individual written assignments should be the sole work of the individual student, and will be checked for plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity.  
*Exams:* All exams must be the sole work of the individual student.

Violations of these standards will automatically result in all participating students failing the course and being remanded to the discipline committee for further action.
# COURSE OUTLINE AND SESSION SCHEDULE

## Session 1  

**An Introduction to Evidence Based Management**

### Objectives
- Learn the basics of evidence based management
- Understand the purpose and goals of different organizations

### Read

## Session 2  

**Assessing Organizational Capacity**

### Objectives
- Understand how you see yourself
- Think about why you care about public service

### Read

### In Class
- Discuss Myers-Briggs typology related to team behavior with David Schachter

### Due
- Write a one-page memo to me describing your past experience working on teams (NOT GRADED)
- Complete personal team assessment

## Session 3  

**Organizational Alignment: Structure**

### Objectives
- Understand the basic structure of contemporary public service organizations
- Understand the sources of structure

### Read
- Locke, 22
- CASE: Mercy Corps

### In Class
• Discuss Mercy Corps

Due
• You are a current country director of Mercy Corps. Assume that you will be reporting to Steve Zimmerman through a RPD.) Write a memo to Zimmerman arguing for or against the proposed change. (GRADED)

| Session 4 | Organizational Alignment: Selecting and Motivating People |

Objectives

Read
3. Locke, 1-3, 8
4. For team projects, Light, Sustaining Nonprofit Performance, 4-5
5. CASE: Rose Washington [BB]

In Class
• Discuss Rose Washington

Due
• Write a “flash” memo as the chief of staff to Rose Washington on three options for removing her deputy from her office (GRADED)

| Session 5 | Organizational Alignment: Driving Performance |

Objectives
• Understand how to design effective measures of performance
• Learn the risks of measurement

Read
1. Light, Four Pillars, 4 (section on alignment only)
3. Locke, 5, 9-14
4. CASE: Express Maintenance

In Class
• Express Maintenance discussion

Due
• You are the management analyst who designed the pay for performance system at Express Transit. Martin Jiles wants a one-page memo on (1) what went wrong and (2) two bullets on what he should say to the press on Monday morning. (GRADED)

| Session 6 | Organizational Alertness: Thinking in Futures Tense |

Objectives
• Learn the key features of exploratory analysis
Read
- Light, *The Four Pillars*, 3 (section on alertness)
- Light, *Driving Social Change*, 3 (pay particular attention to the section on social exploring)
- CASE: Minerals Management Service and Gulf Oil Spill [BB]

In Class
- Discuss crisis

Due
- Write a memo as the senior adviser to the Senate Energy and Commerce Committee on reorganizing the MMS to be more effective in monitoring underwater drilling. Feel free to talk about policy changes as well as organizational challenges. (GRADED)

Session 7  
Organizational Alertness: Thinking Strategically

Objectives
- Learn the key features of an organizational strategy
- Understand the impact of the institutional environment on organizations

Read

In Class
- Discuss the load bearing assumptions of your career

Due
- You are a student at the Wagner School of Public Service. Write a memo describing three outcomes that you think should measure Wagner’s success. (GRADED)

Session 8  
Organizational Agility: Working in Teams

Objectives
- Learn how to identify important political players and their sources of power
- Develop strategies for influencing up and down the hierarchy

Read
2. Locke, 15, 17-19
4. CASE: Glaspell, “Trifles.” [BB]

In Class
- Read “Trifles” in groups
• Presentation of the team charter parameters and group assignments by the teaching colleagues.

Due
• You are an FBI agent who has arrived in town en route to another assignment. The sheriff has asked you to review the case notes and the crime scene. Write a memo to the sheriff on whether a crime was committed, and, if so, what the crime was. (GRADED)

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<th>Session 9</th>
<th>Organizational Agility: Communicating, Negotiating</th>
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Objectives
• Learn the basics of effective communication
• Address conflict and information distortion

Readings
• Locke, 23-24, 27-28, 33
• CASE: Hartland Hospital

In Class
• Team exercise
• Discuss the Hartland priorities

Due
• You are the executive assistant to Parsons. Give her a list of five calls that she must make immediately—give her the reasons for the list (GRADED)

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<th>Session 10</th>
<th>Organizational Agility: Deciding</th>
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Objectives
• Learn how to check your own biases in processing information

Read
2. Locke, 18-19, 25
3. CASE: Ellen Schall and the Department of Juvenile Justice. [BB]

In Class
• Discuss Ellen Schall

Due
• Write a memo to Schall regarding the two most promising interventions for managing and changing DJJ’s operations. (GRADED)

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<th>Session 12</th>
<th>Organizational Adaptability: Creating An Entrepreneurial Culture</th>
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Objectives
• Understand the culture of organizations and its contributors

Read
• Locke, 26, 30, 32

| Session 13 | Organizational Adaptability: Creating New Combinations of Ideas |

Objectives
• Understand the basics of social entrepreneurship
• Examine your own commitment to change

Read
• Light, *Driving Social Change*, 1
• Light, *The Search for Social Entrepreneurship*, 4 [BB]

In Class
• Discuss capacity building assessment

| Session 14 (ON A TUESDAY) | Organizational Adaptability: Managing Change |

Objectives
• Learn about changing organizations

Read
• Light, *Four Pillars*, 5

In Class
• Course summary, review, and wrap up