
COURSE SYLLABUS

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Professor: Nicholas Epley
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Office hours by appointment

Teaching Assistants:

- Elizabeth Clark-Polner (clarkpolner@uchicago.edu), Postdoctoral Scholar, Chicago Booth and Department of Psychology
- Juliana Schroeder (jschroeder@chicagobooth.edu), Ph.D. Student in Managerial and Organizational Behavior / Psychology, Chicago Booth / Department of Psychology

Meeting Times and Locations:

Section 01: Tuesdays, 1:30 P.M. - 4:30 P.M., Harper Center C01
Section 02: Wednesdays, 8:30 A.M. - 11:30 A.M., Harper Center C01
Section 81: Wednesdays, 6:00 P.M. - 9:00 P.M., Gleacher Center 200

—Please note that you may attend another section if an extenuating circumstance arises. Due to the course format and class sizes, I cannot allow you to register in one section and routinely attend another section.

Auditing: See me after the first class if you would like to audit the course.

PREREQUISITES:

None.

PROVISIONAL GRADES:

I will submit provisional grades for students graduating in the winter quarter based on performance at the time these grades are due.

COURSE CONTENT:

Successfully managing other people—be they competitors, customers, or co-workers—requires an understanding of their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, motivations, and determinants of behavior. An accurate understanding of these factors, however, can be difficult to come by, and intuitions are often misguided. This course is intended to provide the scientific knowledge of human thought and behavior that is critical for successfully managing others, and also for successfully managing yourself.

This course will utilize lectures, discussions, and group interactions to provide an introduction to theory and research in the behavioral and psychological sciences. The primary goal is to provide

conceptual knowledge that helps you understand and manage your own unique and complicated work settings, and to help you think like a psychological scientist in those settings.

The course is organized into two main sections: (1) managerial thought, and (2) managerial action. The first section of the course investigates human thought and judgment in a managerial context, and how these thoughts and judgments can impede or improve your ability to manage yourself and others. We will discuss in this section how biases in the information you seek and receive can lead to systematic biases in the impressions you are likely to form of others (Week 2), how your beliefs can create reality (Week 3), how psychological biases lead to systematic misunderstanding about the minds of others (Week 4), and how to get beyond these psychological biases to think creatively about other people (Week 5). The second section of the course investigates human behavior in a managerial context, using some of the insights gained from the first section of the course and examining some new topic areas as well. We will discuss how to manage change (Week 6), increase motivation (Week 7), improve group decision-making (Week 8), create helpful organizational cultures (Week 9), and persuade other people (Week 10). Along the way you will become very familiar with the experimental methods of psychological science that will give you the tools you will need to identify solutions to problems that arise in your workplace.

MATERIALS:

—**Course website:** The course syllabus, discussion groups, and all relevant course information can be accessed here: <https://chalk.uchicago.edu/>

—**Readings:** All readings are available online, through the Chalk website. I will also distribute one or two additional readings after some of the classes that discuss course material in greater detail, and will also make them available online. All are required readings. You are responsible to know the material in these readings even if they are not discussed in class. As a general rule, I assume you have read and fully understand the readings assigned each week, and will not use the lectures to summarize or review the reading material. I will use the lectures to go beyond those readings and focus on new material.

—**Books:** There are three books assigned for the course:

1. Gilovich, Tom (1991). *How we know what isn't so: The fallibility of human reason in everyday life*. The Free Press: New York. ISBN 0-02-911706-2.
2. Heath, Chip, & Heath, Dan (2007). *Made to stick: Why some ideas survive and others die*. Random House: New York. ISBN 978-1-4000-6428-1.
3. Terkel, Studs (1974, with foreword from 2004). *Working*. The New Press: New York. ISBN 1-56584-342-8.

We will read sections from each of these books, but I encourage you to read each in its entirety when you have the chance. Gilovich's *How we know what isn't so* is both an introduction and in-depth discussion of basic features of human judgment, and we will be applying these insights directly to managerial contexts. Heath and Heath's *Made to Stick* describes why some ideas succeed in the marketplace of ideas and others fail. This book

will be used twice in the course. In the second week, we will apply content from the book to understand what ideas about other people are sticky and what ideas are not, as a way of understanding how social filters influence and distort the kind of information managers are likely to receive about their employees and the mistaken impressions that are likely to result. At the end of the course, we will discuss the book again as part of the session on persuasion. Terkel's *Working* is a classic in business publications, is written by a Chicago icon, is enjoyable to read, gives valuable insight into people's working lives, and provides an opportunity to consider similarities and differences in people's underlying motivations and work in the 30 years since this book was originally published.

—**Lecture notes:** I will post .pdf versions of the lecture slides on the course website as quickly as possible **after** the classroom session, in the Labs/Lectures link on the Chalk website. I will **not** distribute them before class for two reasons. First, I try to keep lectures as up-to-date as possible, which means that I am often revising material right up to the beginning of my first section. I want to make sure you get the slides I actually present in class. Second, although having my slides during the lecture seems like a good way for you to learn the material, the experimental evidence suggests that it actually impairs learning because students tend to take fewer notes of their own during class. Taking notes in class is a terrific way to encode the course material (or any material, for that matter), and passively watching the lectures because you have the notes is a terrible way to encode the course material. I want to facilitate learning in this course, not impair learning. All of my lecture slides will be numbered in the lower-left corner. My advice is to keep notes during the lecture tagged with these slide numbers, and then match them up with the slides when you download them after class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

Midterm Exam (30% of course grade): There will be a midterm exam for this course, comprised of essay-type questions. The 90-minute midterm will be held in class during Week 6. It is a checkpoint for your progress in the course up to this point. I will give more information about the content and format of this exam in Week 5.

Final Group Paper or Final Exam (40% of course grade): I am going to allow you to vote on the final project for this class. In the past, I have had a final exam in some quarters and a final paper in others. I think both projects have merit. I am indifferent between the two. I will therefore let you vote on what seems most valuable to you, and will go with whichever option receives the most votes. After the first week of class, you will be asked to complete a short background survey that allows me to get some information from you that is useful for the course. During this survey, you will also vote on whether you would prefer to have a final group paper or a final exam. I will give more information about both options on the background survey, and will go with whatever the majority of the class prefers.

Thought papers (30% of course grade): This class is a group effort, and I expect you to have read, understood, and thought about the readings for each class so that you can discuss them intelligently. To facilitate this discussion, you will write weekly one-page thought papers. I will provide some guidance each week for things you should consider when writing your papers, but will also give you sufficient latitude to write about your own interests.

These thought papers serve three purposes. First, writing these papers will help you learn and remember the course material so that you are better able to participate in class discussions. They will require you to process the class readings more deeply than you might otherwise. Second, writing these papers will enable you to learn from your peers' insights—insights that might not come up in class discussion. Third, writing these papers will engage you in discussions with other members of the class. You will likely learn a lot from their experiences that will help you to remember the course content.

To facilitate all of these goals, you will be assigned to a virtual discussion group before the second week of class (with roughly 10-12 people in each group, based on random assignment). Your weekly thought papers are **to be posted by 5:00 P.M. on the day before class (i.e., Monday for Section 01, Tuesday for Sections 02 and 81)** on the course website for your particular discussion group, so that others in your group have an opportunity to read what you have written, and to enable you to read what others in your group have written as well. Papers posted after 5:00 according to the time tag on the course website—no matter how shortly after—will be considered late and will not be awarded credit for that week. **There are no exceptions to this rule.** Before class, I would like you to read what others in your group have written about the week's readings and topic. **Others' thought papers are required reading for each week.**

Each week, at least one person from each discussion group will be designated as the discussion leader. The only additional job for the discussion leader is to start what amounts to a discussion thread for that week by adding a question at the end of his/her thought paper for others to consider and respond to. **Discussion leaders will be required to post their papers by Sunday at 5:00 P.M. for Section 01, and Monday at 5:00 P.M. for Sections 02 and 81,** so that others in the group can read and respond to the thread starter.

Each of these thought papers will include 3 separate parts: Response to Readings, Real Life, and Thread Response. In the "Response to Readings" section I will ask you to consider some questions I will send out over e-mail related to the readings for that week. These questions will require you to think carefully about the readings and apply them to contexts beyond those discussed in the text. The course readings and lectures will cover basic core knowledge from psychology and other related fields that are widely applicable in your work and professional life. These questions will be posted each week in the "assignments" folder on the course's Chalk website. The "Real Life" section will ask you to identify an example from everyday life that is relevant to this basic knowledge from the lectures and readings. These examples can come from almost anywhere—from popular news stories to historic examples to experiences in your everyday work (or personal) life. You may apply material from the class to analyze these examples, suggest solutions to a problem from everyday life based on the course lectures or readings, or describe an example that clearly exemplifies a topic we have discussed in the course or covered in the readings. The best Real Life examples are likely to be those from current events that everyone in the course can relate to and understand. You may describe examples that are relevant to a prior week's lecture or to the readings on a given week. You may post links to news stories, YouTube videos, or anything else that will clarify your example. The final "Thread Response" will require you to respond to your discussion leader's discussion question. Because there will be more students in your group than weeks in the course, you will have two discussion leaders on some of the weeks, in which case you are required to respond to the discussion questions posed by BOTH discussion leaders.

These thought papers will comprise 30% of your final course grade. Fifteen percent of this grade will come from the teaching assistants for the course who will read each of the thought papers posted. We will use a check-plus, check, check-minus grading system. You will receive a “check” on a given week if you have thought carefully and written cogently about the readings and topic for the week. The vast majority of grades on any given week will be a check. You will receive a check-plus if you do a particularly outstanding job that week, but these will be fairly rare (e.g., given to top 10% of class on a given week). You will be given a check-minus if you do less than what we expect from a Booth MBA, and could have done better if you spent more time, put in more effort, or understood the readings for a given week more clearly. My expectation is that you will write a solid paper each week, one that will receive a check. Your grades will be entered into the gradebook on the Chalk website.

And additional 10% of this grade will come from other students’ evaluations of your contribution to your virtual discussion group. At the midterm and again at the end of the quarter, you will rate each person’s contribution to your virtual study group and identify the three people (excluding yourself) whom you believe contributed most to the discussion group over the course of the quarter. I will say more about these student evaluations on the first day of class.

The final 5% of this grade will come from providing conscientious evaluations of your other group members. If you evaluate the contributions of your other students thoughtfully and honestly, then you will earn full credit. If you do not do these evaluations, or do them thoughtlessly (such as giving everyone exactly the same ratings, or giving random ratings), then you will not earn full credit.

Please note that we will be unable to give you detailed feedback about these thought papers each week. You will receive an e-mail from a course TA or myself if you have submitted an unsatisfactory paper that receives a check-minus, but will not receive an e-mail if you have submitted a satisfactory paper that receives a check or check-plus. These papers are meant for you and for your classmates as part of the learning experience in class.

Class Participation: Much of the knowledge you will gain in this class will come from other students—from hearing, evaluating, and discussing ideas presented in the thought papers or during class discussion. Participation in class is therefore a key component of the learning experience in class, and I expect you to contribute to class discussion whenever you have something interesting and constructive to say. I will not, however, grade your class participation explicitly each week. My assessment of your overall class participation in the weekly thought papers and the lecture discussions may be used as a deciding factor if you are on the bubble between grades at the end of the course.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:

Classroom sessions need to be structured so that you and the other students in the course have as ideal a learning environment as possible. We will therefore establish the following ground rules for classroom sessions:

1. **Be constructive.** Comments directed at other students need to be constructive rather than destructive. Do not attempt to deliberately disparage or humiliate another student for a comment made in class, no matter how subtle your attempt may be. It is a virtual certainty that disagreements raised in the course are produced by differences in perspective or the context of discussion, rather than another person's profound stupidity or fundamental lack of understanding.
2. **No laptops.** Laptop computers and tablets are to be turned off and put away during the class period. I am not in any way opposed to technology, but I have simply found that the temptation to surf the web, read email, and watch funny cat videos is just too tempting to ignore for many in class. I want to create the best classroom environment that I can to help you learn the class material. I believe the best way to do that is to reduce outside distractions. If you'd prefer to take notes on your computer, you will learn the material better if you take notes on paper during class and quickly transcribe them later. Exceptions to this general rule will be made only in very unique circumstances.
3. **No cell phones.** Turn off and tuck away all cell phones. That's why you have voice mail, and your e-mail can wait. If you have someone who may need you urgently on a particular day, then please set your phone on vibrate and sit in the back of class so you can excuse yourself quietly. Although you may feel that it is indiscrete to check your email on your phone under the desk, remember that I am looking right at you and wondering why you have such an intense fascination with your thighs. It's distracting for you and puzzling for me.
4. **Arrive on time.** We will start promptly. In return, I will promise to let you out early if that week allows, and will do my absolute best to end the class precisely 3 hours after I have started.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

PART ONE — MANAGERIAL THOUGHT

Week 1: January 6, 7 — The Power of the Situation

Readings:

“The Talent Myth” by Gladwell.

“Chapter 6: Keller: A Tale of Two Plants: NUMMI Teamwork Versus GM Bureaucracy” by Keller.

Week 2: January 13, 14 — Mistaken Impressions: Biases in Receiving and Seeking Information

Readings:

“Why CEOs Fail” by Charan and Colvin.

“How We Know What Isn’t So: Chapters 4 and 5” by Gilovich.

Selected readings from “Made to Stick” by Heath and Heath: Introduction, Chapter 1, and two other chapters of your choosing.

In-class Exercise (materials distributed in class): Carter Racing

Week 3: January 20, 21 — Sense-making: How Beliefs Create Reality

Readings:

“Pygmalion in Management” by Livingston.

“Self-fulfilling Stereotypes” by Snyder.

“The Set-Up-to-Fail Syndrome” by Manzoni and Barsoux.

Case (included in reading packet): “Ann Hopkins (A)” by Badaracco and Barkan.

“Brief for Amicus Curiae American Psychological Association in Support of Respondent.”

Week 4: January 27, 28 — Mind-reading: Knowing Others’ Thoughts (About Us)

Readings:

“Managing your boss” by Gabarro and Kotter.

“The Better Boss” by MacFarquhar.

In-class Exercise (materials distributed in class): Performance Appraisal

Week 5: February 3, 4 — Thinking Creatively (About Others)

Readings:

“Creativity under the gun” by Amabile, Hadley, & Kramer.

“Creativity in the outcomes of conflict” by Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus.

“Principled problem solving” by Nalebuff & Ayres.

In-class Exercise (materials distributed in class): Creativity Exercises

PART TWO — MANAGERIAL ACTION

Week 6: February 10, 11 — Mid-term exam/ Managing Change

No thoughts paper or readings for this week. Study for the exam.

Week 7: February 17, 18 — Motivation

Readings:

“On the folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B” by Kerr.

“Motivation: A Diagnostic Approach” by Nadler and Lawler.

Selected Readings from “Working” by Terkel.

Week 8: February 24, 25 — Group Decision Making

Readings:

“Groupthink” by Janis.

“The Abilene Paradox: The Management of Agreement” by Harvey.

In-class Exercise (materials distributed in class): Stock Picking

Week 9: March 3, 4 — Passive Influence: Culture, Commitment, and Norms

Readings:

“Applying (and Resisting) Peer Influence” by Griskevicius, Cialdini, & Goldstein.

“The paradox of corporate culture” by Pascale.

“Cult-like cultures” by Collins & Porras.

“Is Yours a Learning organization?” by Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino.

Week 10: March 10, 11 — Active Influence: Managerial Persuasion

Readings:

“The necessary art of persuasion” by Conger.

“Harnessing the science of persuasion” by Cialdini.