

LEADERSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONS (LiO): Fall 2025 (COR1-GB.1302.Z2)**Professor:** Molly Kern**E-mail:** mkern@stern.nyu.edu**Office:** KMC 7-83**Drop-in Hours:** Thursdays from 2-4pm & by appointment**Teaching Fellow:** Michael Seitz**Email:** seitzm02@nyu.edu**Class Meetings:** Thursdays, 6-9pm**Classroom:****WHAT WILL I GET OUT OF THIS COURSE?**

In short, LiO provides:

- Frameworks to examine leadership behavior in group/organizational settings
- Tools and opportunities (and reasons) to ACT on what you learn → to be a leader

Your ability to analyze organizations, and willingness to act skillfully within them, help answer a number of questions: Why do some talented MBAs succeed, while others, equally talented, flounder? Why do some leaders prove effective, while others do not? Why do some organizations thrive while others get in their own way? This course tackles these questions.

The course is based on the premise that, regardless of your position within an organization, leadership opportunities and challenges present themselves every day and that it is to your advantage to recognize and make the most of these opportunities. Leadership is a behavior (verb), NOT a position (noun). You have to ACT in order to learn and grow, and this class and your time as an MBA student is the opportunity to do that – leaders are not made by passive observation! It is also based on the premise that effective leadership requires an in-depth understanding of both yourself and how organizations work, and an in-depth understanding of how to work with and through other people. By the end, I expect that you will be more knowledgeable about how organizations work (or don't work), and will be more conscious of others, yourself, and the impact of your own (in)action.

COURSE MATERIALS

- The coursepack can be accessed at: <https://hbsp.harvard.edu/import/1298152>
(You will need to create an account at Harvard Business School Publishing if you have not purchased any material at this website before.) This coursepack includes “required” readings that cannot be accessed anywhere else, and “optional” readings that are required, but are also available through the NYU library. A full reference list is available on Brightspace.
- Other readings, videos, exercises, etc. will be posted on Brightspace or distributed by email.

GENERAL CLASSROOM POLICIES AND PHILOSOPHY**Key Premise of a Learning Community**

What you get out of this course depends heavily on what you and your classmates put into it.

What your classmates get out of this course depends heavily on what they and you put into it.

I am committed to your and your classmates' learning.

All of my expectations are grounded in this key premise.

Orientation Towards Each Other

If this class is going to be a “success” – defined as you meaningfully learning and growing – then people need to be able to take risks with both their words and actions during class. The only way that is feasible is if we celebrate when people take risks, appreciate their efforts, and build an environment that allows for this. Assume the best in others!

Being Here¹

¹ See pps.3-4 for excused absences due to religious observance.

Do your best to be on time for class. Attendance is expected because our collaborative discussions and exercises are a key source of learning. If you will be absent, regardless of the reason, please let me and your TF know via email as soon as possible so we can plan accordingly for the in-class activities. Typically, students who miss only one class see minimal impact on their grade, but missing more classes will significantly limit your ability to benefit from the course. If an extenuating circumstance arises that will cause you to more than one class, please let me know so that we can work out a mutually agreeable solution.

The thirty second habit that will change your life

At the end of each class, I will ask you to write down two things:

1. your own brief take-home message from the lecture
2. a note linking your experience in class to your “real world experience”.

These memos play two critical roles. First, the research on adult learning is really clear that this kind of reflection, connection, and integration can double your retention and knowledge of the material. That’s an excellent return on experience (ROE). Second, the memos allow me to see where your interests and experiences align with the course topics so that I can customize my teaching to your needs. The whole process takes under three minutes, and students have reported finding it very powerful. The memos are not graded, but I personally read every memo, every week.

Gadgets and Other Tech

Regarding technology in class, let me first say this. This issue is not one of dogma but of pragmatism. *One screen can distract a dozen or more students.* And, it makes everyone in the room (including me!) desperately curious as to what you’re looking at and what we’re missing out on in our own emails, social media, texts, etc. Attending class is like attending a movie -- any one person’s actions can affect the experience of everyone else. Thus, my #1 concern is the distraction that your screen poses for the rest of us in the room.

- As such, laptops are generally discouraged. The use of tablets or other electronic devices that are laid flat on the desk, for the purposes of note-taking only, is permitted; research shows they are far less distracting than laptop screens to other students.
- If you must take a call during class, please quietly step outside the room, and generally try to rely on the mid-class break to deal with pressing matters.

Use of GenAI for Written Assignments

AI is an evolving tool in academia and professional writing; its use is both allowable and encouraged in this course **for the written assignments**. I strongly encourage you to find ways to use it to deepen rather than erase your learning in this course.

This is what that means to me.² GenAI should be like a thoughtful and thought-provoking roommate with whom you might discuss a written assignment, not a hungry professional writer roommate who does it for you in exchange for you covering Seamless tonight. The thoughtful and thought-provoking roommate challenges you so that you emerge wiser from the assignment. The hungry roommate just gets the assignment done so that you can order dinner, leaving you no wiser from the assignment.

More formally, I invite you to use AI responsibly as a learning aid, such as for research, grammar checks, or refining drafts that are written in your own voice. Do not submit the assignment to GenAI as a prompt, have it generate a couple of pages, add a personal anecdote and make the writing less pretty here and there to make it look authentic. That’s the hungry roommate version. And we’ll be running the assignments through ourselves to have samples of what the hungry roommate versions look like.

Regardless of whether you do or don’t use AI in completing the assignment, you are required to submit a GenAI usage log with every assignment, specifying the prompts you used and the tasks where you used GenAI output.

² Metaphor courtesy of Dr. Dolly Chugh.

Use of AI for Preparing for Case Discussions

Please do NOT use GenAI or any other form of external help to prepare for cases before we discuss them in class. That's the equivalent of watching the series finale of before you start binging a show. Or having a roommate who spoils movies you're excited to watch.

Academic Integrity

I think highly of you and your integrity and hope you see yourself the same way. Academic integrity and honesty is central to our mission as an educational institution. The MBA Code of Conduct, which all students sign, therefore places particular emphasis on academic integrity. Notably this includes refraining from any method or means that provides an unfair advantage in exams or papers, and clearly acknowledging the work of others in your own work. As a reminder, the entire Code of Conduct is available [here](#). Please check in with me if you are uncertain about what represents an honor code violation. Here are just a few of the ways in which the honor code applies.

- Individual assignments must reflect your own ideas. You may discuss the facts of cases and readings with your current classmates prior to completing these assignments, but you should not perform the analysis or develop recommendations together. You also should not use any outside resources, including students who have previously taken the course or covered the same material. I reserve the right to submit written work to plagiarism detection software.
- If you are familiar with a case or exercise introduced in class, please do not be a "spoiler" in any way. Quietly let me know in advance, and I will try to find a way for you to glean new insights.
- No recordings of any kind can be made of class without my permission.
- All activities and their "solutions" are confidential and are not to be circulated or shared in any form.

A Comment on Grades

While there are many pragmatic, even admirable, reasons for you to care about your grades, I want to encourage you to recognize the opportunity you have this semester to dig into the messiness of organizational life and leadership within a classroom environment. These opportunities do not come often in a career. Remember this: Two years from now, your grade in this course will pale in importance relative to your takeaways from this course. My view is that grades are an artifact of structuring the learning process but not the goal in and of themselves. Please do remember that Stern policy requires faculty to grade core courses on a forced distribution curve; no more than 35% of students can receive the grades of A or A-. Let the evaluation be my headache, and let us share the engagement, self-reflection, and learning that makes school worthwhile.

Importantly, in order to be fair to all students in the course, please note that your final grade will be based solely on your relative performance in the course. It would be unfair to take individual incentives (e.g., needing a particular GPA to maintain or gain a scholarship) into account when assigning final grades.

Student Accessibility

If you will require academic accommodation of any kind during this course, you must notify me at the beginning of the course (or as soon as your need arises) and provide a letter from the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980, mosescsa@nyu.edu) verifying your registration and outlining the accommodations they recommend. For more information, visit the [CSA website](#).

Student Wellness

Classes can get stressful. I encourage you to reach out if you need help. The NYU Wellness Exchange offers mental health support. You can reach them 24/7 at [212 443 9999](tel:2124439999), or via the "NYU Wellness Exchange" app. There are also drop-in hours and appointments. Find out more [here](#).

Name Pronunciation and Pronouns

NYU Stern students now have the ability to include their pronouns and name pronunciation in Albert. I encourage you to share your name pronunciation and pronouns this way. Additional information can be found [here](#).

Religious Observances and Other Absences

NYU's [Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#) states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. You must notify me in advance of religious holidays or observances that might coincide with exams, assignments, or class times to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives. Students may also contact religiousaccommodations@nyu.edu for assistance.

NYU Stern is committed to ensuring an equitable educational experience for all students regardless of identity or circumstances and strives to recognize the obligations its students have outside of Stern. Please review all class dates at the start of the semester and review all course requirements to identify any foreseeable conflicts with exams, course assignments, projects, or other items required for participation and attendance. If you are aware of a potential conflict, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss any potential conflicts to determine whether/how they can be accommodated.

Inclusion Statement

This course strives to support and cultivate diversity of thought, perspectives, and experiences. The intent is to present materials and activities that will challenge your current perspectives with a goal of understanding how others might see situations differently. By participating in this course, it is the expectation that everyone commits to making this an inclusive learning environment for all.

Acknowledgements

It is rare to create a course without feedback and inspiration from others. This course has evolved over decades, inspired by more people than can be individually named. All have been committed to enhancing the experience and learning of our students, and their commitment to strong pedagogy is deeply appreciated.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Brightspace = available on Brightspace; OCP = available in online HBSP coursepack; NYUL = available at NYU Library. ***Cases are bolded; Articles/chapters are italicized**

Date	Topic	Read and Prepare	Submit <u>before</u> class
Sept. 18	Leader-as-Architect	- This syllabus 😊 <i>Leader-as-architect</i> (OCP) Mount Everest – 1996 (OCP)	Getting to Know You survey
Sept. 25	Leading by Doing	<i>What leaders really do</i> (OCP or NYUL) <i>What makes a leader?</i> (OCP or NYUL)	Leadership Mindset survey
Oct. 2	Leading through Design	- Words in Sentences exercise (Brightspace) <i>Do you have a well-designed organization?</i> (OCP or NYUL)	
Oct. 9	(Re)defining Leadership through Culture	<i>The leaders guide to corporate culture</i> (OCP or NYUL) The Lego Group leadership playground (Part A) (OCP)	Pre-class case discussion board: Organizational culture 1st third of the semester feedback survey
Oct. 16	Leading by Listening	<i>Barriers and gateways to communication</i> (OCP or NYUL) (Re)building a Global Team: Tariq Khan at Tek (OCP)	Case memo #1
Oct. 23	Teaming	<i>Managing your team</i> (OCP) - Leadership Lab #1	
Oct. 30	Motivating Oneself and Others	<i>Do financial incentives drive ...</i> (OCP or NYUL) Carla Harris at Morgan Stanley (OCP)	Leadership Lab Reflection (if you presented in #1) Pre-class case discussion board: Carla Harris
Nov. 6	Feedback (as your “superpower”)	<i>Actionable feedback</i> (Brightspace) Rob Parson at Morgan Stanley (OCP)	Pre-class case discussion board: Rob Parsons
Nov. 13	Navigating Conflict	<i>Don’t forget your boss</i> (OCP) Managing Up – Grace AND Managing Up – Jada (OCP) - Leadership Lab #2	Case memo #2
Nov. 20	Collaborative Decision Making	- A Murder Mystery (check email) <i>Before you make that big decision</i> (OCP or NYUL)	Leadership Lab Reflection (if you presented in #2)
Nov. 27	NO CLASS		
Dec. 4	Leading with Influence	12 Angry Men (watch first 30 minutes before class; link on Brightspace) <i>Necessary Art of Persuasion</i> (OCP or NYUL) Claude Grunitzky (OCP)	Pre-class case discussion board: Claude Grunitzky
Dec.11	Leading Change; Integrating it All	<i>Leading change – Why transformation efforts fail</i> (OCP or NYUL) <i>Manage your energy, not your time</i> (OCP or NYUL) Doing deals and leading teams at XAF Partners (OCP)	Pre-class case discussion board: XAF Partners Course Takeaways (due by 5pm on Dec. 14)

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

	Assignment	Deliverable Date	Weighting
A	Case Memos (2)	October 16 and November 13	40%
B	Leadership Lab Reflection	October 30 or November 20 (depending on when you present)	20%
C	Course Takeaways	December 14 th at 5pm	20%
D	Contribution to the Learning Community	Ongoing	20%

Late submission policy: Given that we discuss the cases in class, I will not accept late case memos or pre-class discussion board posts. For other deliverables, grades will be reduced by 10% for every 24 hours late, and, after three days, they won't be accepted.

Contribution to the Learning Community

Learning in this course is an active, collaborative endeavor. My goal is to facilitate a learning community based on trust, respect, and intellectual curiosity. You will not only learn from the readings, cases, exercises, and me, but it is expected that you will also learn from one another. As a result, a component of your grade is tied to the contribution you make to our learning community.

Verbal participation in class discussion is certainly one key component of our learning community, since this is an essential part of our shared pedagogical experience. The quality of your participation is more important than the quantity (although don't take this too far – making just a couple comments throughout the course of the semester, no matter how well thought out, will only go so far). Given our limited amount of time together, talking without positively contributing to the discussion is not helpful. Offer your ideas, substantiating them with facts from the case and course material, or simply from your prior experience and intuition. Adopt an open-minded stance, entertain new ideas from others and consider how your recommendations might change in light of these new insights. If another student changes your mind because of something they said – say it, and say why!

However, I want to stress that positive contributions are not necessarily “right” answers. I encourage you to experiment and take risks. “Wrong” answers can also be instructive, and debate is often a good way to learn and it's more fun. Positive contributions are those that advance the discussion by presenting new ideas or insights, or by building on others' comments, or by presenting a counterpoint to others' comments in a respectful way. And, for a number of important issues, the key will be to highlight the tradeoffs between two right answers or two wrong answers, and important contributions are made when students help us see this tension. Keep in mind that there is usually more than one right answer. A case is a problem-solving situation, and managerial effectiveness often depends upon seeing different solutions.

Importantly, you must pay attention to what others say. A good case discussion is a guided conversation, and responding to a classmate's comment enhances the conversation. Repeating what others say, or weighing in on a topic we have already left, is not productive and shows that the speaker is not following the discussion. I encourage you to listen to your classmates and to build on what they have to say. And by “build” I do not necessarily mean agree; disagreement is typically even more generative. Resist the impulse to focus so strongly on what you want to say next that you lose track of where the discussion has moved.

All that said, your contribution to our learning environment is more than just your participation in class discussion. Your active engagement in the various exercises we will conduct in class, helping one another with the course material, making suggestions about the course, etc. are all also critical aspects of your contribution to the learning environment.

Two necessary elements of your contribution to the learning community are a) your attendance, since you cannot contribute if you are not present, b) your professionalism during class. With regard to the latter, anything that has potential to distract your classmates and/or me (e.g., technology, arriving late, private conversations during class) or that I view as unprofessional can impact your contribution to the learning community, as far down as zero points.

In addition, this portion of your grade will also incorporate your engagement in our in-class exercises, pre-class case discussions and brief surveys.

- *Engage in small group activities.* During most classes we will break out into dyads or small groups for part of the session to do an activity or have a discussion. When in small groups you will be responsible for managing the discussion/activity on your own, and I will move from group to group to check in and answer questions. Small group activities are most effective when everyone is actively engaged and contributes to the activity. They also allow the opportunity to network with and get to know a large proportion of the class.
- *Other Assignments.* In addition to the graded assignments you submit, there may occasionally be online surveys that you will need to complete before coming to class. I will develop these “real-time” as our course progresses. Completing the surveys will count towards your contribution to the learning community.
- *Pre-class Case Discussions.* To stimulate our in-class case conversations, I will post a discussion board prompt for you to consider and share your thoughts on prior to our class meeting. I encourage you to not only provide your response, but to explore what your classmates are sharing and perhaps engage in a dialogue online. I will review the posts before class so that I may include some of your insights/questions in our class discussion. The teaching fellow will review the posts to evaluate whether your posts demonstrate that you have read the case materials and put some effort into your contributions. The discussion contributions must be submitted no later than the beginning of class on the day of the discussion.

Case Memos

For two cases— Tariq Khan at Tek and Managing Up-Grace & Jada —you will write up a brief memo with analysis and recommendations for a protagonist(s) in the case. Your ability to analyze cases is likely to improve with practice, therefore to reflect this learning curve, Case Memo #1 is worth 15% of your grade, and Case Memo #2 is worth 25% of your grade. Be sure to submit to Brightspace by the beginning of class on the day that particular case will be discussed.

You should use any readings or prior lecture materials for the week and prior weeks to analyze the situation and advise the protagonist(s) to take specific action steps. Write the memo from your perspective as a mentor from outside the protagonist’s organization (but, of course, you are privy to all the details of the case). This means that you do not need to provide a description of the context, as the protagonist knows the same case information that you do. As with any memo, these should be easily read and digested – your objective is to provide a thoughtful analysis with connected and defensible recommendations such that the protagonist might seriously consider your advice. Feel free to use bullet points, bold text, etc. to focus the reader’s attention but make sure your rationale for why you are suggesting what you are suggesting is clear and is supported by course content. I encourage you to review the “Guide to Case Analysis” (located in “Content/Deliverables” before beginning.

Your memo should be 1-2 page(s), formatted as Times New Roman, 12-point font, single-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides. Please be sure to review the grading rubric shared on the assignment on Brightspace before submitting your memo.

Leadership Labs & Reflection

You will have two Leadership Lab meetings in your study groups. The Leadership Lab is intended to serve two important objectives.

1. The lab provides a forum for students to collaborate in applying course concepts to analyze and understand novel organizational challenges. While the cases we read provide one approach to developing this skill, the leadership lab provides an additional and distinct approach to cultivating these skills. By working on these skills in a collaborative environment, you are likely to benefit from your classmates’ perspectives and vantage points. This will enable you to draw connections and reach conclusions that you may not have reached on your own.
2. The lab provides an opportunity to use our course material to generate insights and actionable knowledge that is personally and professionally significant.

At each lab meeting, you will discuss issues that 2-3 of your team members have had, or better yet are having, at work. (By the conclusion of the two meetings, each team member should have had the experience of sharing one of their own issues so that all members have an opportunity to benefit from the collective insights of their fellow lab members.) The dates and topics to be discussed are listed below.

- **Teams (October 23):** Have you led, or been a part of, a poorly performing team, a team that was too slow to make decisions, or a team that was too slow to take action? Have you led, or been a part of, a dysfunctional team—e.g., a team that was clearly less than the sum of its parts, a team plagued by low morale and/or burnout

among its members, etc.? The leadership lab can be an opportunity to analyze a team's processes, performance, norms/culture, and other characteristics to better understand the causes of these issues, and what to do about it.

- **Feedback (November 13):** Have you been frustrated because you weren't getting the feedback you needed to grow? Have you struggled with providing feedback in the face of resistance? The leadership lab can prompt new insight and advice about how to solicit the feedback you want and to share feedback to facilitate change.

You will need to sort out among yourselves who will bring a "Feedback" issue, and who will bring a "Teams" issue, to the lab for discussion. The lab meetings will not be long, so it is very important to distribute any background information pertinent to your issue in advance of the lab meeting, allowing enough time for your group to digest your issue. This way, you all can have some degree of common ground coming into the lab and can efficiently use the time for peer coaching and problem solving.

Following the lab meeting where you present your own issue, you will write an individual reflection (due 1 week later) describing the issue and analyzing your key insights and actionable takeaways generated by the group. These will be graded based on the application of course content to the discussions, level of self-awareness and/or self-reflection, and evidence of collaborative engagement (see the grading rubric posted on the assignments on Brightspace).

Course Takeaways

We do not have a final exam in the course. The Course Takeaways final assignment is a substitute for a final exam, one which I hope is less stressful *and* more useful. It serves the following purposes: (1) to facilitate retention of course content by relating it to your experiences and concerns, (2) to see how all the material works together to yield an integrated understanding of leadership in a variety of organizations, and (3) to use in complicated situations that you face in the future (e.g., after a rough day at work, when contemplating or dealing with a job or career change, when mapping out how to achieve your career goals, or when dealing with a work-related crisis). Your Course Takeaways should display self-reflection and make it clear to the reader how your thinking has been altered by your experience in LiO, and they should be meaningful to you. Essays will be graded for comprehensiveness (addressing all three parts of the assignment), depth of reflection, and clarity (please see the grading rubric on the assignment on Brightspace).

In 1000-1250 words, please address the following questions:

1. What two key ideas or information have you learned about leadership and organizations? (Your ROEs submitted at the end of each class could be useful sources for this.) Connect these learnings as specifically as possible to your work experience or future plans as a leader in organizations.
2. What you have you learned about the *human dimension* of leadership? For example, how have *you* changed in some important way, and have you changed in your ability to interact with *others*?
3. Come up with a metaphor / visual anchor / image/phrase that captures a key learning of the course (your ROE). Describe this. Make it as "sticky" (memorable) as possible.