

MGMT-GB.3165.W1
Power and Professional Influence

Draft Syllabus, subject to change

January, 2026 over Zoom
Time: 1/20,22,27,29 7-9PM
1/24 11AM-1PM & 2-4PM

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Teaching Fellow: TBD

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed for individuals interested in learning more about the art and science of influence in organizations. Many people are ambivalent, if not disdainful, of those who seek to wield power and influence at work, but power and influence are key mechanisms by which *things get done*.

For those considering careers in management, it is important to be able to diagnose situations as opportunities to exercise power and influence in order to form and implement new strategies. In addition, managers are usually on the receiving end of these processes. An astute manager knows how to anticipate moves that others will make, how to block or avoid them when they have undesirable consequences, and how to help these moves succeed when their consequences are beneficial.

The course aims to provide you with “political intelligence” in a sense. After taking this course, you will be able to: (1) diagnose the true distribution of power in organizations, (2) understand your own relationship to power, (3) build your own professional sources of power, and (4) develop influence techniques so that you can resolve conflict more effectively, foster cooperation, and lead change in organizations. These skills will be invaluable throughout your career.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

You will be evaluated on the quality of your contributions to class discussions (25%), one career planning memo (25%), one self-reflective and analytic final paper (35%), completion of one pre-class survey (5%), and one worksheet documenting your own influence network (10%).

Participation (25%)

Much of what you gain from this course will be exposure to the ideas and insights of other students. As such, it is essential that you come to class prepared to share your perspective with others and to test your analyses against the analyses of your classmates.

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. Keep in mind that your goal should be to contribute high quality (rather than high quantity) comments and questions. High quality contributions reflect (a) rigorous analysis or diagnosis, (b) integration across material, and/or (c) thoughtful recommendations for the characters in cases or your peers in the classroom. Balancing airtime is an important feature of a strong contributor; speaking in every class should not be your goal.

Attendance and participation in each class session is expected, and it is graded for each meeting rather than using a summary judgment at the end of the course. If you must miss a class, it is essential that you notify me at least 24 hours in advance so I can make arrangements for any in-class activities. You will receive no class participation credit for any classes missed. If you miss more than two class meetings, you will receive an incomplete. These attendance and class participation policies apply to any and all reasons for missing class.

Career Memo due January 21 at midnight (25%)

Write a memo about your career. It should be brief and is limited to 1 single-spaced page, 1-inch margins, 12-point font. Memos are better when they synthesize your professional experience, plans, and course content. Refer to “Tips for Influential Writing” attached to the assignment on Brightspace.

What are your goals, with respect to power and influence, for the next five years of your career? Be as concrete as possible in describing your goals (e.g., What position(s) would you like to attain? What impact would you like to have? What decisions would you like to have a voice in? What rooms would you like to be in? What autonomy are you seeking?), discuss why they are important to you (e.g., What do you hope to accomplish?), and articulate specific action steps that you plan to take to achieve those goals (e.g., What is something you can do within the next year to make progress toward one of your goals?).

For some, this may be challenging to write because you are not used to adopting a long-term perspective in thinking about your career path or because you are sorting through different potential career moves. This is completely typical and nothing to worry about; however, for now just pick one. Nobody will hold you to a choice you make here. I want this course to be immediately useful to you, so it helps for you to have your specific career background and a possible future available in concrete form. The skills and knowledge you build in the course can then be redeployed to whatever career path you eventually travel.

Final Paper due February 1 at midnight (35%)

You will write a final paper analyzing a current or past situation related to power. It should be brief and is limited to 1½ single-spaced pages, 1-inch margins, 12-point font. Like the memo, papers are better when they synthesize your professional experience and course content. (Again, refer to “Tips for Influential Writing” attached to the Career Memo assignment on Brightspace.)

Analyze a situation you have faced in either your career or a current professional relationship that relates to an idea (or two or three) we discussed in class. Retrospectively, apply the concepts to dissect a particular episode or relationship you now understand in a new light.

The purpose of this paper is to engage in self-reflection and better understand a situation in which you have played a role related to power. Current or recent (last 2 years) situations are best. The criteria for this assignment are similar to the criteria for a good comment in class. That is, your paper should be relevant, concise, and extend the analysis of the class material in a useful way. In writing this paper, you should assume that we share the common ground of the class experience and start from there. Please do not use time or space summarizing any cases, readings, or class discussions.

Pre-class Survey (5%): Due prior to our 1st class meeting. This is very important because I will be feeding back to you in our 3rd class meeting some personally and professionally relevant information from this survey.

“Your Own Influence Network” Worksheet (10%): Due Sunday January 25 at noon. This is very important because I will be feeding back to you in our 5th class meeting some personally and professionally relevant information from this worksheet.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required

- Power and Professional Influence coursepack available online at Harvard Business Publishing. You will need to create an account if you have not purchased any material at this website before. Most of the readings are contained in this coursepack, unless I could provide them for free on Brightspace (denoted as such in the syllabus). **This also grants you access to the in-class simulation. Without it, you will not be able to participate in Session 4.**

Optional

- Pfeffer, Jeffrey. (2010). Power: Why Some People Have It and Others Don't. Harper Business.
- Cialdini, Robert B. (2008). Influence: Science and Practice. (5th edition). Allyn & Bacon.

Other Interesting Books on Power

- Battilana, Julie, & Casciaro, Tiziana. (2021). Power, For All. Simon & Schuster.

- Bohns, Vanessa. (2021). You Have More Influence Than You Think. Norton.
- Chance, Zoe. (2022). Influence is Your Superpower: The Science of Winning Hearts, Sparking Change, and Making Good Things Happen. Random House.
- Fragale, Alison. (2024). Likeable Badass: How Women Get the Success They Deserve. Doubleday.
- Gruenfeld, Deborah. (2020). Acting With Power: Why We Are More Powerful Than We Believe. Currency.

POLICIES & EXPECTATIONS

Use of AI for Written Assignments

AI 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 AI 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.

Regardless of whether you use AI in completing an assignment, you are required to submit an AI usage log—specifying the prompts you used and the tasks where you used AI output—with every assignment.

Use of AI for Preparing for Case Discussions

Please do NOT use AI 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 before you start binging a show. Or having a roommate who spoils movies you're excited to watch. Don't be that roommate's roommate. It ruins the movie.

Student Accessibility

If you have a qualified disability and will require academic accommodation during this course, please first contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980, mosescsa@nyu.edu) and then share the letter with me as soon as possible (ideally before our first class). For more information, visit the [CSA website](#). I am happy to work with you to make sure your goals are met, so please feel free to reach out.

Student Wellness

Life can be stressful. I encourage you to reach out if and when 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 have the ability to include their pronouns and name pronunciation in Albert. I encourage you to share your name pronunciation and pronouns this way. For additional information, go [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.

COURSE OUTLINE AND SCHEDULE OF SESSIONS

Session 1: Naïve Influence: Introduction to The Course

Before class: - Watch "Course Introduction" and "Analyze the Political Terrain" on Brightspace
- Read Jick & Gentile, "Donna Dubinsky and Apple Computer, Inc." *HBS case*

Questions for Donna Dubinsky case:

1. Why was Dubinsky initially successful at Apple Computer? (1981-1984)
2. How and why did things begin to unravel for Dubinsky?
3. How did Dubinsky react and why?
4. What should Dubinsky have done differently?
5. What were Debi Coleman's advantages and weaknesses?

Optional (after class): Pfeffer, "Introduction"
Pfeffer, Ch 1, "It Takes More Than Performance"
Bohns, Ch 1, "Unseen Influence"
Gruenfeld, Ch 1, "The Truth About Power"

*****Career Memo due on Wednesday at midnight*****

Session 2: Paths to Power: Fitting In vs. Standing Out

Before Class: - Read Mayo & Hull "Rosalind Fox at John Deere" *HBS case*
- Read Isaacson "The Reality Distortion Field" Ch. 11 of *Steve Jobs*

Questions for Rosalind Fox case and Steve Jobs reading:

1. What individual attributes did Fox and Jobs possess that were/are sources of power?
2. What did effective performance mean to Fox and Jobs?
3. What would you say "standing out" and "fitting in" mean to Fox based on her experiences?
4. What did Fox do to build her reputation?
5. At your current, or a recent, employer, in what ways do you "stand out" vs. "fit in"?

Optional (after class): Pfeffer, Ch 2, "The Personal Qualities That Bring Influence"
Pfeffer, Ch 8, "Building a Reputation: Perception Is Reality"
Cialdini, Ch 1, "Weapons of Influence"
Cialdini, Ch 6, "Authority: Directed Deference"
Battilana & Casciaro, Ch 3, "What Do People Value"
Bohns, Ch 4, "Why It's So Hard to Say No"
Gruenfeld, Ch 4, "Getting in Character"
Chance, Ch 4, "The Curious Qualities of Charisma"

Session 3: Rise to Power/Seduced by Power

Before class: - Watch “Robert Moses Documentary excerpt” on Brightspace and record observations on Robert Moses Worksheet (available on Brightspace)

Reading (THIS IS LONG): [Brightspace] Dean, “Reaching for the Top, Touching Bottom” Ch. 1 of *Blind Ambition*

Questions for John Dean reading:

1. How did Dean get into this mess? What were the factors outside of his control, and what were attributes of him as a person?
2. How has Dean mismanaged his career with respect to building relationships and his reputation?
3. What specific steps could Dean have taken to avoid this situation?

Optional (after class): Pfeffer, Ch 5, "Making Something Out of Nothing: Creating Resources"
Pfeffer, Ch 11, "How—and Why—People Lose Power"
Chance, Ch 6, “Inner Two Year Olds”
Fragale, Ch 4, “Understanding the Game”
Battilana & Casciaro, Ch 4, “What Controls Access to What We Value”
Bohns, Ch 2, “Your Power of Persuasion”

Session 4: Practicing Professional Influence: Organizational Change Simulation

Before class: - Watch “Science of Change” on Brightspace
- Read three background documents related to Change Management Simulation on Brightspace

Optional (after class): Cialdini, Ch 3, “Commitment & Consistency: Hobgoblins of the Mind”
Cialdini, Ch 4, "Social Proof: Truths are Us"
Cialdini, Ch 7, “Scarcity: The Rule of the Few”
Gruenfeld, Ch 6, “The Show Must Go On”
Battilana & Casciaro, Ch 6, “Agitate, Innovate, Orchestrate”
Chance, Ch 5, “The Life Changing Magic of a Simple Frame”

*****Your Own Influence Network worksheet due Saturday at noon*****

Session 5: Relationships, Reciprocity, & Rapport

In-Class Activity: Analysis of Your Own Network (worksheet due the night before)

Readings: McGinn, "Heidi Roizen" *HBS case*

Case: Heidi Roizen

1. What steps did Roizen take, over various jobs, to develop a network? To maintain it?
2. What are the strengths of Roizen's network as we see it at the end of the case? The weaknesses?
3. What suggestions would you give Roizen for adjusting and maintaining her network as she becomes more involved as a high-tech VC?

Optional (after class): Pfeffer, Ch 6, "Building Efficient and Effective Social Networks"
Cialdini, Ch 2, "Reciprocation: The Old Give and Take...and Take"

Session 6: Managing Power in Your Career

Before class: - Watch "Personal Attributes of Power Seeking" and "The Pitfalls of Power" on Brightspace
- Read Hill & Rennella, "Martha Rinaldi" *HBS case*

Questions for Martha Rinaldi case:

1. Based on what you know before she starts at Potomac Waters, did Martha Rinaldi take the right job?
2. What did Follett (her boss), Vaughan (her co-worker), and Rinaldi all do to contribute to the issues that developed?
3. What else could Rinaldi have done to navigate these relationships more effectively? Think of specific moments when she could have taken specific actions.

Optional (after class): Pfeffer, Ch 3, "Choosing Where to Start"
Pfeffer, Ch 9, "Overcoming Opposition and Setbacks"
Pfeffer, Ch 10, "The Price of Power"
Pfeffer, Ch 12, "Power Dynamics: Good for Organizations, Good for You?"
Battilana & Casciaro, Ch 8, "Power in Check"
Bohns, Ch 3, "Just Because You Asked"
Fragale, all Chs in Part II, "Master the Plays"
Gruenfeld, Ch 7, "When Power Corrupts (and When It Doesn't)"

*****Final Paper due Sunday after final class at midnight*****