INSEAD
The Business School
for the World®

Ethics: Value-based leadership for cosmopolitans

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Course Purpose

The purpose of this course is to help us consider what it means, and develop what it takes, to be responsible leaders as we move through different and diverse environments. The course aspires to deepen our consciousness about the values that inform our working lives; refine our capacity to deal with value conflicts, and; strengthen our connections to people and ideas that might help us lead and live more wisely.

Learning Goals

If we all do our jobs well enough, this course will help us:

1. Acquire conceptual knowledge about leadership as a functional and cultural enterprise;
2. Reflect upon the sources and influence of the values that inform everyday choices;
3. Practice recognizing, and working with, value multiplicity and the tension it provokes;
4. Suspend the relentless focus on functional performance that often impedes acknowledging, engaging with, and learning from, cultural performances—our own and others';
5. Examine what values shape our experiences and trajectories at INSEAD and beyond.

Course Overview

This course will examine the nature of leadership and the experience of leading, with a particular focus on the following question: What does it *mean* to lead responsibly?

It builds on the assumption that leadership is neither an abstraction nor a toolbox. Those ways of treating leadership, I believe, diminish leadership and dehumanize leaders. We will treat leadership instead as the expression and pursuit of human ideals in a certain context. And since ideals and contexts are complicated—we are always of two minds and changing our minds, at least when we are open minded—leading responsibly requires engaging with conflicts and contradictions within and around us.

This course aspires to help you engage with such conflicts, and if that work gets a bit confusing, at times, so be it. We don't need to be fanatics to be good leaders—and we need not be fanatics to be responsible ones.

We will review what leading responsibly has meant historically, in different epochs and cultures. We will then consider if and how those meanings of leadership suit the context of the globally mobile lives and diverse organizations that INSEAD students, alumni, and faculty tend to portray as ideals of goodness and beauty.

It is all well and good to say that we aspire to be responsible, wise, and value-based leaders. But what if your classroom and your workplace include people whose values are contradictory? What if the tension tears us apart? What are we to do then? How can we tell when respect becomes a cover story for 'everything goes?' Or when principled resolve becomes a closed mind? Who gets to make those judgments, and how?

While we will survey a fair amount of research, this course won't be mainly theoretical. And while I will share my perspective—in fact, I already have—the course is not an opportunity to peddle my 3- or 5-step model of responsible leadership, celebrate the great CEOs *du jour*, or point you towards the good life. There will be few 'tools,' and any 'framework' I offer won't be one-size-fit-all. Don't say I didn't warn you. This stuff is hard.

The course intends to make room for us to wrestle with somewhat nebulous and often overloaded terms such as "leadership," "wisdom," "values," and "responsibility." Hopefully the reflection and conversations will leave you with good questions that may inform your ongoing development. Curiosity is not a guarantee of wise leadership, of course. But in a diverse environment, lack of curiosity is a guarantee of lousy leadership.

During the course, you will have opportunities to reflect upon, discuss, and learn from your experience of leading at home, work and in the MBA. You will have a chance to consider the sources and influence of the values that inform your work; to practice working with fundamental value differences among people, and; consider the implications these differences may have for your own experience at and after INSEAD.

Course Sessions, Readings, Assignments, Deliverables

General Course Preparation:

I try to keep preparation at a minimum. However, since I will ask you for your point of view throughout the course, it is fair that I should share mine. These short essays concern the function and impact of business schools, especially in relation to "wisdom," "leadership," and "diversity." Altogether, they will take about 30 minutes to read and will give you a sense of how I relate to the themes that we will explore in the course.

Petriglieri, G. 2012. Moving around without losing your roots. *Harvard Business Review*

Petriglieri, G. 2012. Are business schools clueless or evil? *Harvard Business Review*

Petriglieri, G. 2012. Who can teach leadership? *Harvard Business Review*

Petriglieri, G. 2018. Business does not need the humanities—but humans do. *Harvard Business Review*

Petriglieri, G. 2020. Are our management theories outdated? *Harvard Business Review*

If you want to know more, this academic article reviews the course philosophy and pedagogy in finer detail:

Petriglieri, G. & Petriglieri, J.L. 2015. Can business schools humanize leadership? *Academy of Management Learning and Education*

If, as I hope, you want to read much more about the course themes, please refer to the bibliography in *Appendix 1* for additional articles, books, and resources. Perusing these resources is optional, albeit encouraged.

Session 1: What is "Good?" The Ethics of Everyday Life

After a brief course overview, we will begin with an exploration of what counts as an "ethical" decision, and what counts as a "business" decision, and whether it is even possible to tell "business" and "society" apart. We will use the case study of a controversial decision that led employees at a major tech company to defy its leaders, requesting them that they cancel a contract to put the company's Artificial Intelligence on C.I.A. drones. We will also begin to consider the relationship between global business and national governments.

Required reading: Google and Project Maven

Study Questions: In Laure's position, would YOU sign the memo? How should Sundar Pichai respond?

Background reading: Nonaka, I. & Hirotaka T. 2012. The wise leader. *Harvard Business Review*

Session 2: What is a "Good leader?" I – The battle dance between tradition and innovation.

In this session we will challenge the cult of disruption, and of leadership styles. We will to explore when disruption and social progress coincide and when they collide. We will use the case of a visionary leader's tenure at one of the longest standing artistic institutions in the world to consider how we might tell when the disrupted is a tradition worth preserving, when it is not, and who gets to make that call. We will also examine the implication of introducing "entrepreneurial management" principles in a traditional cultural institution.

Required reading: Benjamin Millepied at the Paris Opera Ballet.

Study Questions: How would you rate Millepied's leadership of the P.O.B.? What should he do next?

Background reading: Petriglieri, G. 2017. When every leader promises to change the world, how can we tell who will leave us better off? *Harvard Business Review*

Session 2: What is a "Good leader?" II – Value-based Leadership Through the Ages

Continuing on the theme of who gets to tell what makes a good leader, and what good leaders make, this session will be a conversation on leadership across times and places, through the lens of different disciplines and cultures. We will discuss whether there are 'leadership universals,' so to speak, and if so, what they are. We will also critique the reduction of leadership to a position or a possession, examining its ties to social space and historical time. Finally, we will highlight the interplay between "vision" and "holding" in leadership.

No advance reading required

Background readings: Reicher, S.D., Platow, M.J., & Haslam S.A. 2007. The new psychology of leadership. Scientific American; Petriglieri, G. 2020. The psychology behind effective crisis leadership. *Harvard Business Review*

Session 4 & 5: What is a "Good team?" Working with Value Conflicts

This double session will include an exercise to practice and learn about working, and leading, in groups where people espouse conflicting values. This session will not be an intellectual exercise. Instead of discussing some business or social organization "out there," we will try to surface the conflicting values that animate our existence here, in and around the classroom, and now. We will examine how we deal with those values, and what the implications are for the individuals who live in this society of ours.

Exercise will be distributed in class

Background reading: Smith, W.K., Lewis, M.W., Tushman, M.L. 2016. "Both/And" Leadership. *Harvard Business Review*

Session 6 & 7: What is a "Good Career?" Values that Inform Career Trajectories

In this final double session, we will consider the multiple ways in which we people assess the value of their careers. We will also do an exercise that surfaces the values that infuse your career and lifestyle aspirations. The aim is to understand how to manage our selves and others in light of the good(s) each of us is pursuing. We will end with a course recap and wrap up, and then we will say good-bye, or as I prefer, arrivederci.

Exercise and readings will be distributed in class

Evaluation

Participation	50 %
Reflection Paper	50 %

The topic of, and additional details about, the reflection paper will be distributed in Session 1.

Classroom Norms and Course Policies

Presence, Preparation, Participation: Leadership is about showing up, they say, and we shall use that principle for the course too. Each session is designed to be engaging and interactive. In order to maximize your own and others' learning, a commitment to full attendance and active participation is necessary.

In each session, you will be invited to articulate your experience, perceptions, and opinions; to share them with others, and; to explore diverging points of view. You will be encouraged to present and test thoughts and feelings that are not fully formed, and to assist others in refining or revisiting their ideas.

Students who are willing to take some risks in the classroom, challenge and support others, and who are open to be challenged and supported in return, are likely to get the most out of this course. Curiosity, openness, willingness to take risks, and forgiveness are particularly fruitful in INSEAD's diverse environment.

Punctuality & Absences: Please be prepared for class and arrive on time. In accordance with school policy if you arrive after class has started, please do not enter the classroom.

Should you have to exceptionally leave the class before the break or end, for planned or unplanned reasons, please do not re-enter until the next break. Partial session attendance will count as an absence. Please note that if you are absent for more than one session, you will receive a failing grade.

The general policies outlined in the MBA Code of Conduct (Academic norms) apply.

Section swapping will be possible for exceptional reasons, and for no more than five slots allocated on a first come, first serve basis. Prior approval is necessary.

Appendix 1: Annotated Bibliography

Academic articles:

For a deeper dive into the debate about responsibility and wisdom in business you might enjoy consulting the following articles from leading scholars on the topic.

Schwartz, B. 2011. Practical wisdom and organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior*

Donaldson, T., & Walsh, J. P. 2015. Toward a theory of business. *Research in Organizational Behavior*

Shotter, J., & Tsoukas, H. 2014. In search of *phronesis*: Leadership and the art of judgment. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*

Sternberg, R.J. 2007. A systems model of leadership. *American Psychologist*

Weick, K. E. 2004. Searching for wisdom in organization studies. *Organization Studies*

Besharov, M., Smith, W.K., & Tushman, M.L. 2019. How companies can balance social impact and financial goals. *Harvard Business Review*

Kreps, B.A. & Monin, B. 2011. "Doing well by doing good"? Ambivalent moral framing in organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior*

Pfeffer, J. 2016. Why the assholes are winning: Money trumps all. *Journal of Management Studies*

Books:

If you want to dig into the course topics and ideas further, Yuval Harari's "Sapiens," gets into the biological and historical underpinnings of human's reliance on culture for its survival and existence. Michael Tomasello's "Becoming Human" digs further into the socio-cultural influences that make us who we are. Rutger Bregman's "Humankind" reviews the evidence for our innate sociality, and how only on occasion that turns us against each other. Conversely, Jon Haidt's "The Righteous Mind" contends that our brains and psychology condemn us to be divided, especially when it comes to ideologies and religions. In "Justice," Michael Sandel writes about the challenges that often emerge when we consider the right thing to do. In "What money can't buy" he explores, more specifically, the moral limits of markets. There are, of course, the philosophers. Check out Amartya Sen's classic exploration of the "Idea of justice," and Martha Nussbaum's "Political emotions," arguing that doing the right thing requires strong heart as well as good ideas. Sebastian Junger, in "Tribes," makes the argument for the value of our tribal instinct and warns about the risks of ignoring it. Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers," explores ethics beyond the confines of one culture and tribe instead. Later, in "The lies that bind," the same philosopher turns around and looks at the appeal and danger of the identities that define us and shape the way we are and relate in the world. On a similar theme, "Identity: the demands for dignity and the politics of resentment" by Francis Fukuyama, is also interesting.

If you want to stay closer to the workplace, Barry Schwartz's "Practical Wisdom" provides an accessible overview of different perspectives on wisdom in business and the professions, with a heavy dose of psychological research. David White is a poet and a consultant, yes both, and "Crossing the unknown sea: Work as a pilgrimage of identity," is a meditation about how work, and learning about work, makes us who we are. In "Narrative and numbers," Aswath Damodaran examines how stories affect company's valuations. Jeffrey Pfeffer's "Leadership BS" and Andre Spicer's "Business Bullshit" cover similar territory but more critically, exploring why we don't use "evidence" as much as we could in making judgments in business, and business schools. "Reimagining capitalism for a world on fire," by Rebecca Henderson, and "Prosperity," by Colin Meyer, make the argument for a broadening of our understanding of business as (positive) social actors. "Winners Take All", by Anand Giridharadas, argues instead that this broader view of business is a charade that does more harm than good. "The Age of Heretics" is a classic history of the tension between instrumentality and humanism in business, and a story of leaders who have tried to do justice to both poles. Ron Heifetz's "Leadership without easy answers" is also worth reading. He makes a sound argument for the ability to work with conflicting values as a core feature of good leadership.

Online resources, videos, and more of my essays:

Some additional links to material that relates to the course themes. On the power of stories to make leaders and move people, check out the work of Marshall Ganz, and before him, Joseph Campbell. The ability of staying "in the middle" of things, to learn and grow is as useful lead wisely as it is to write compellingly. The Aspen Institute has an interesting newsletter of "Ideas worth teaching" that often involve the role of business (and business schools) in society. They are worth learning, too. You can subscribe here.

If you have not had enough of my writing, these are examples of how I have used some of the course ideas to look at learning in the workplace; the challenges leaders face to earn legitimacy and trust; overwork; picking leaders; whether technology is eroding our humanity; the 2016 Paris attacks; students' experiences in MBAs; the importance of open tribes for nomadic professionals; insecurity, sacrifice, and endings at work, and; the fate of cosmopolitanism. There are more academic articles and essays where these came from, on my website.