

MGMT 772 — POWER AND POLITICS IN ORGANIZATIONS (Spring 2021)

Professor Samir Nurmohamed (www.profnurmo.com), Tu-Th 12:00-1:30 pm, Room: ZOOM TBD

E-Mail: nurmo@wharton.upenn.edu

Office: SHDH 2106 (215-898-6386)

Office Hours: TBA on Canvas



COURSE OBJECTIVES

“If you want to test a [person’s] character, give [him/her] power.”

These famous words articulate one of the many tensions of holding and exercising power in organizations. Regardless of whether you have an appetite or disdain for it, power and politics play an important role in your career. Power and politics enable people accomplish their goals, and pursue what they care about. At the same time, it can be exercised in ways that hurt others, either directly or indirectly.

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to concepts that are useful for understanding, analyzing, and navigating power dynamics in organizations. But beyond discovering ways to extend your own power in organizations, we will also uncover lessons about ways in which it can blind you, and how to navigate situations in which you are up against powerful people. Using a range of scholarly articles, cases, exercises, assessments and simulations, we will extract a variety of lessons about power and politics in organizations. Topics include diagnosing power and politics in organizations, building coalitions and networks, managing conflict, speaking up for yourself and others you care about, responding to status loss and low expectations, and leading change (e.g., issue selling, change management and downsizing). Students will be expected to engage in field research for their some of their coursework and final paper, and the course requires that students submit assignments for almost every class session.

This course is designed for students aiming to develop their leadership, general management and career skills through a better understanding of power and politics. It also relates to other courses on these topics in the Management department. Thematically, this course highlights how your relationships with organizational stakeholders and an understanding of the organizational context are crucial to successfully navigating the political terrain of organizations. Organizations are inherently political arenas that require social astuteness, and an understanding of the “rules of the game.” Students who are interested in the topic of influence from a judgment and decision-making lens rather than from a leadership and organizational perspective may wish to consider OID 693.

TEXT AND READINGS

I have personally curated the materials for this course (accessible via Canvas). Some of the readings and exercises are not in the coursepack (e.g., they will be posted online), but you will be told about them throughout the semester. It is crucial that you complete the assigned readings and exercises thoroughly *before* class on the day shown in the schedule (listed at the end of the syllabus). You will get more out of the course having done the readings ahead of each class. Please note that the readings and preparation questions are subject to change at my discretion.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND EVALUATION

Course Expectations

All classes will be held virtually. A critical component of the success of this course depends on *you*. This class relies on informed engagement for learning, and we reinforce this in several ways:

- For each class session, you are expected to be on time and ready to participate with your camera “on” using your computer at all times. You are expected to focus on the class (i.e., off your phone and not to toggle between the class and other windows or devices).
- To register for the course, you are expected to attend the first week of classes. If you are unable to attend the first week of classes or registered late for the course, you should request my authorization to enroll. It is your responsibility to get up to speed with any missed coursework, including assignments.
- If you will be absent, late or need to leave class early, you are expected to inform me via email prior to class. Also, any unexcused/excused absences should be reported to the undergrad/MBA academic office and/or course absence report system (e.g., Penn InTouch).
- Because course engagement is critical to the success of the course, absences, a lack of preparation, or the misuse of an electronic device can seriously affect your grade (i.e., it can result in D/F/LT grades in the course even if you pass other parts of the course), and I reserve the right to drop you from the course. If you do not expect to attend every class, I urge you to reconsider whether this course is appropriate for you.

Course Evaluation

Your overall grade is based on the following components (more detail is provided below):

<u>Components</u>	<u>Grade Value</u>	<u>Due Dates</u>
1) Class Contribution		
A. Preparation Assignments	35%	---
B. Participation	20%	---
2) Personal Development Plan		
A. Progress Slide Deck	5%	April 8 and 13
B. Final Paper	40%	April 22

1) Class Contribution

There are two components to your class contribution grade: (A) preparation assignments, and (B) participation.

A) Preparation Assignments

Preparation assignments are designed to help you acquire a deeper understanding of course concepts and prepare for classroom discussion using the material assigned for the day. These preparation assignments will usually require you to log into Canvas before 8 am prior to every class session, and respond to one of the questions listed on Canvas for the class session. Similar to the business world, work must be delivered on time. Therefore, you will only be eligible to receive credit for a

preparation assignment if it is submitted by the deadline (i.e., submissions submitted after the deadline will receive zero credit—no exceptions will be made).

B) Participation

High quality class contribution involves knowing when to speak and when to listen or allow others to speak in classroom discussion. Quality is more important than the quantity of comments. You are expected to attend every class session having read and thought about the assigned material. A contribution to class discussion is a comment that features one or more of the following properties:

- i) Uses logic, evidence, and related material (e.g., readings, data) to support conclusions, and is more than an expression of an opinion or feeling;
- ii) Shows curiosity, creativity, and the willingness to experiment;
- iii) Takes into consideration the ideas already offered by others, and moves the analysis forward to generate new insights; and/or
- iv) Helps others feel safe about participating.

Comments that are vague, repetitive, unrelated, disrespectful of others, or without sufficient foundation are discouraged and will be evaluated negatively. I will undertake “supportive cold calling” to encourage balanced involvement, to ensure appropriate preparation and attention, and to elevate the quality of in-class discussions. Please consult the Class Contribution rubric on Canvas for further information on how it is assessed.

2) Personal Development Plan (PDP)

The purpose of the PDP is to help you develop and chart your political strategy as you enter your career. Furthermore, it serves as a mechanism for understanding how people currently working in sectors and organizations you are interested in have built power via concepts related to the course and navigated social/moral dilemmas when exercising power in their careers.

This can be a challenging assignment because it forces you to project yourself into the future. However, even if you change your goals or your interests change over time, creating a PDP enables you to set a range of short and long-term goals, and contemplate how power and politics are likely to impact your career objectives.

As part of your PDP, you must conduct AT LEAST three informational interviews with professionals who are currently in careers that you are interested in pursuing. From these interviews, you will learn about their strategies for dealing with issues pertinent to power and politics and integrate these insights with course concepts, case examples, and class exercises to chart your own strategy.

A) Progress Slide Deck and Feedback Session

To help guide your PDP, you will sign up for one of the two assigned class sessions to share your progress on the PDP. You must sign up for the session in advance on Canvas. In this session, I will share some insights from research on power and politics in organizations that may be worth considering as you develop your PDP, as well as give you additional details on how best to develop your PDP.

In preparation for this feedback session, you should create a progress slide deck that conveys your progress on the PDP. Submit your progress slide deck in advance on Canvas and plan to present for a maximum of five minutes in class. Your progress slide deck should include the following information: a brief summary of your short and long-term goals (slide 1), a description of 2-3 topics from the course you are applying to your PDP (slide 2), a rationale for the 3 people you are planning to interview (slide 3), and what you have learned from your interviews thus far (slide 4). For feedback purposes, you should end with an “ask”: what would you like your classmates’ help on/thoughts on/reactions to (slide 5)? You are also welcome to include sample questions you are planning to use for your interviews as an “appendix slide” at the end of your slide deck. Based on this, you will receive in-person feedback from your peers as you continue to develop your PDP.

B) Final Paper

Based on what you have learned in the course and in your informational interviews, you will submit your PDP, which should include the following:

1. Overview of your career goals;
2. Description of the people you interviewed;
3. Exposition of your strategic plan for developing power (e.g., choosing where to start, building networks, etc.) as you start your career (i.e., before taking your job and in your first year on the job) and transition into your future goals. You should develop, detail, and analyze a strategy that fits the political environment in which you will be working. Your goal should be to have a coherent strategy that is supported from topics discussed in the course and what you heard from your interviewees;
4. Ethical and social dilemmas (i.e., 2-3 potential dilemmas) that you might encounter as you implement your strategic plan and the concrete steps you will take to handle these dilemmas; and
5. A “top 10 list” of notes to yourself about power and politics that you want to remember a year from now (on your cover page).
6. Appendix: Semi-structured interview protocol that you used to guide your conversations with each interviewee.

These six areas should be covered in your PDP. Papers must be double-spaced and a maximum of 10 pages (Time New Roman, 12-point font; your cover page and interview protocol does not count towards this limit). Your grade will reflect the quality of your analysis, appropriate use of course concepts, logic, use of interview data, substantiation of conclusions, clarity, and interest. You should draw on material covered in the course to chart your political strategy, and you will want to use data (e.g., quotes) from your interviews to support your analysis throughout your paper.

More details will be provided in class and online, including an annotated outline for your plan and the rubric used for evaluation. Papers must be submitted on Canvas in time for the deadline (i.e., the start of class; 10:30 am for MGMT 272 or 12:00 pm for MGMT 772). Unless an exception is made, final paper submissions after the deadline will drop your grade by a full letter grade (e.g., a B+ would be converted into a C+). For each additional day it is late, it will be dropped additional letter grades. If your final paper is late by more than three days, you will receive a zero on the paper.

Please note: for all components of your grade, any grading inquiries must be raised within 5 days of the grade being posted.

CODE OF CONDUCT, ETHICS AND WELLNESS

1. You should be prepared and on time for all class sessions (see class contribution section).
2. You are encouraged to collaborate and obtain feedback from classmates during the course, but all submissions (e.g., preparation assignments, PDP) must be completed independently unless otherwise specified.
3. Class discussion should stay in class to ensure that we maintain a safe and open learning environment. I am a proponent of viewpoint diversity, but debates must also be conducted respectfully. I encourage students to visit www.openmindplatform.org to discover ways to cultivate their intellectual humility and openness.

Personal integrity and professionalism are fundamental values of Wharton and the University of Pennsylvania community. To help ensure that these values are upheld and to maintain equitability in the evaluation of your work, this course will be conducted in strict conformity with the Academic Honor Code. Please be aware that violation of the honor code is a serious violation. You are required to do original work, all assignments in this class must be completed independently unless otherwise specified. If you have any questions about any of the policies listed in this syllabus, please let me know. The University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity can be examined at the following website: www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai_codeofacademicintegrity.html

Lastly, the University of Pennsylvania offers numerous services and initiatives for wellness. Any member of the Penn community can use these services. More information can be found by calling 215-898-HELP.

Please note that this syllabus and the course outline are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

COURSE OUTLINE

#	Date & Topics	Materials	Preparation for Class and Assignments
1	March 16 #poweritup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-semester survey on Canvas Nurmohamed, “What Behavioral Science Tells Us About Power” McGinn & Lingo, “Power and Influence” (focus on p. 1-15) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete the pre-semester survey AT LEAST 2 days prior to the first class. If you register for the course at a later date, it is your responsibility to complete the survey.
2	March 18 Diagnosing Power: Where to Start?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Khazan, “Finding Your Passion’ is Awful Advice” Pfeffer, “Choosing Where to Start” Case: Martha Rinaldi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did Rinaldi make a mistake by choosing Potomac over Deep Dive? Apply principles from Pfeffer’s reading to inform what she should have done and/or could have done differently when making her decision.
3	March 23 Power Play(ed): Alliances and Coalitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pfeffer, “Power Play” Stern & Westphal “Flattery Will Get You Everywhere” In class: Galbraith and Company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on what we learned last class and from today’s readings, please detail two ways in which you plan on changing your strategies for building power and/or improving your job performance in your future career. Why are these strategies valuable to you?
4	March 25 Status Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greer and Case, “The Essential Tension Between Leadership and Power” Bendersky, “How to Get Ideological Opponents to Work With You” Case: WWF vs. Bret Hart 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on the readings for today, what could Bret Hart have done differently when managing his relationship with Vince McMahon?
	March 30		WELLNESS DAY (No Class)
5	April 1 Networks & Change Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross, Nohria, & Parker, “Six Myths about Informal Networks” Simulation Overview (to be posted on Canvas) In class: Change Management Simulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please register for the change management simulation prior to class. Using the readings and simulation overview, discuss two lessons on networks that you will try to implement in the simulation.
6	April 6 Views from the C-Suite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> #poweritup Zoomside Chat with Guest Speaker (TBA), 4:30-6:00pm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please write a reflection on your experience in the Change Management Simulation. In this reflection, you should use course concepts to discuss what seemed to be effective versus ineffective in the simulation. Based on what you learned in the

			simulation, what would you do differently when leading change in the future in your organization as a “mid-level” manager or director?
7	April 8		PDP Progress Slide Deck – Feedback Sessions (see syllabus, 2A)
8	April 13		PDP Progress Slide Deck – Feedback Sessions (see syllabus, 2A)
9	April 15 Underdogs: Losing Power and Redemption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Vozza, “Why Embarrassment Can Be A Good Thing” – Nurmohamed, “The Upside of Being an Underdog” – Case: Jeffrey Sonnenfeld (A) 	What did Sonnenfeld do or not do to put his reputation at risk in terms of his relational power. In hindsight, what would you have done differently if you were him?
10	April 20 Life Transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Case: Zarina Lalji (Part A) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Imagine you are a trusted friend or family member of Zarina, and she calls you for advice on what to do next. Develop a plan for next steps that she should take based on the choices she is considering.
11	April 22 With Great Power I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mishra, Spreitzer, & Mishra, “Preserving Employee Morale During Downsizing” – In class: OMGW 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No preparation assignment due—it is recommended that you use this time to finalize your Personal Development Plan and have a classmate give you feedback on your paper. <p style="text-align: right;">DEADLINE: Personal Development Plan (see syllabus, 2B)</p>
12	April 27 With Great Power II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – In class: OMGW Exercise (continued) – #poweritup Zoomside Chat with Guest Speaker (TBA), 4:30-6:00pm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How has your understanding of downsizing changed? Provide 2-3 takeaways that you want to remember for moving forward.
13	April 29 #poweritup Capstone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – TBA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – TBA

Note: My materials are curated from numerous sources (e.g., academic and practitioner journals, books, magazines, blogs, cases) because I want to reflect the breadth and depth of perspectives on power and politics. For students who are interested in reading beyond this course or who are unable to register for this course, you can find additional materials below, as well as on [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#) by searching for #poweritup:

- Power: Why Some People Have It—and Others Don’t (Pfeffer)
- Give and Take (Grant)
- The Small Big (Martin, Goldstein, and Cialdini)
- Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader (Ibarra)