SOFT SKILLS FOR BUSINESS:
Influence and charisma

SYLLABUS

VU Graduate Winter School

8-19 January 2024

Any general questions for the Winter School support team? Contact graduatewinterschool@vu.nl.

Course Details

Title	Soft skills for business: Influence and charisma
Coordinator(s)	Emilia Bunea, Ph.D.
Other lecturers	
Study credits	2 ECTS
Form(s) of tuition	Online
Approximate contact hours	25
Approximate self-study hours	31

Teaching staff

Dr. Emilia Bunea, CFA holds a PhD in Management from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Her research on leadership has been published in Human Resource Management Review, Frontiers in Psychology, Harvard Business Review online and Academy of Management Proceedings, and covered by Wall Street Journal, Forbes, The Business of Home, GQ and others. Dr. Bunea held top executive roles with multinational corporations (most recently as CEO of an organization with 2 million customers) and is currently a board member for an asset management company. She lectures on leadership worldwide at both business schools and corporations and has produced an award-winning film tracing a senior finance executive's leadership journey. Dr. Bunea gave a widely viewed TED talk on leadership at London Business School, and is the author of the Psychology Today blog "To Manage is Human".

Course description

Workplaces are becoming increasingly fluid and interdependent. Now more than ever, business professionals need to hone their influencing, charismatic and social perceptiveness skills, in order to achieve their professional goals.

As a business professional you rely on logic, analysis and the clarity of numbers to achieve what you and your organisation need. But your colleague in another department on whom you depend for vital information does not seem to be motivated by the same goals; the managers to whom you are a business partner do not appreciate the importance, urgency or opportunity presented by your work; or you meet unexpected, fierce opposition from a peer to a perfectly reasonable project that you are championing.

Understanding why people behave as they do, and having the mindset, knowledge and skills needed to influence them, can make the difference between good and great for even the most sophisticated professionals and managers.

This highly interactive course will focus on:

-Understanding the sources of power in organisations;

-Appreciating individuals' different motivational, personality and value profiles;

-Re-evaluating and dealing with "politics";

-Developing social perceptiveness skills, including emotional intelligence;

-Developing influencing skills;

-Developing charisma (yes, charisma can be learned!);

-Managing and maximising psychological capital;

-Self-leadership under stress.

Learning objectives

By the end of this course, participants should be able to:

-Be able to diagnose an individual's world, as informed by motivation, personality, and values, as a first step in the influencing process;

-Understand when "politics" is necessary and have the tools to manage it appropriately;

-Be more self-aware and able to activate their emotional intelligence depending on the social and business context they encounter;

-Apply tools for exercising influence in real-life situations;

-Apply the tools for projecting charisma in real-life situations;

-Manage and optimize their own psychological capital;

-Recognise the early signs of phenomena such as excess stress, burn-out, impostor syndrome, self-handicapping, and use self-management tools to reduce their negative impact.

Assignments

Home work will consist of reviewing material previously learned, studying assigned readings and videos, recording a (short) daily reflection journal, and preparing individual assignments including a presentation to be delivered in a specific business situation.

- Homework assignments will typically consist of short essays (max. 500 words) that should demonstrate that students have considered the knowledge acquired in class and have used it as a background for their own, critical thinking about the essay prompt. Students may sometimes take a surprising position in their analysis, that at first sight goes against common sense; this is entirely accepted and even encouraged, provided it is supported by a coherently built argument using (some of) the theoretical tools provided in class. Equally, challenging the theoretical concepts discussed in class or outlining where they may fall short based on the student's practical experience is an entirely valid approach to these assignments.

- The final in-class presentation will be delivered by students towards the end of the course and should demonstrate students' knowledge and application of the presentation skills, the charismatic leadership techniques, and all other applicable concepts discussed in class.
- In-class simulations. Each student will have the opportunity to act as the central character in a simulation around a work situation/challenge. Information regarding the student's "character" and the challenge they are facing/the situation they will encounter, will be provided in advance. Students are expected to be prepared both in terms of familiarity with the character and the expected situation, and in terms of knowledge of the concepts/tools already introduced that could serve them in the situation. However, like in real-life, these situations will be "messy", with no mechanical "right vs wrong" way of approaching them and often leaving no time to think of theoretical frameworks before reacting. There will still be space to reflect on the simulation once completed and, with a cool head, to discuss what insights/tools could have been used or applied differently.
- The reflection video-journal. Students will be asked to record a 1-minute video of themselves after each day's course session, reflecting on the (in-class) learning. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of what was taught during the day, but rather your own thoughts on one or maximum two concepts that arose in class (whether in teaching, case discussion/debate or simulations) that especially caught your attention and maybe made you see things in a different light. Moreover, your thoughts on the learning process itself (for example, seeing a colleague react in an unexpected way/thinking about your own contribution/performance in class/thinking about the group dynamics/thinking of how well this or that learning method worked for you and maybe how it could be better) would be very valuable. The reflection video-journal is an important tool in consolidating and deepening your learning, as well as good practice for the key skills of reflection and self-reflection. The choice of video as a medium is another way to make your authentic presentation/persuasion skills shine brighter.
- Participation in class discussion and debates. This course relies on active participation in class discussions and on high-quality individual and team preparation. Participation in case discussions should demonstrate a) good preparation by having familiarized oneself with the case materials and having internalized the theoretical basis previously provided during the course that could serve as a lens for analyzing the case and/or performing in the simulations b) the ability to make a persuasive and complete argument; c) the ability to build on other students' contributions, either in order to (thoughtfully and respectfully) disagree, while bringing good arguments for doing so, or in order to develop the prior speaker's contribution further, by adding a complementary perspective.

Grading

Homework assignments:	15%
Final in-class presentation:	20%
In-class simulation:	15%
Reflection video-journal:	30%

Participation in class
discussions and debates   20%

Provisional reading list

Two real-life management cases will be distributed for reading before course starts

Course Schedule

8 January 2024, 6.30pm-8.30pm CET (Central European Time)
Introduction to the "cinematic case method"
Understanding and managing power in organizations
Watch cine-case, case discussion/debate

9 January 2024, 6.30pm-8.30pm CET
Understanding individual motivation
Personality, values, mindsets
Watch cine-case, case discussion/debate

10 January 2024, 6.30pm-8.30pm CET
The "influence currencies". Practice using the currencies.
Watch cine-case, case discussion/debate

11 January 2024, 6.30pm-8.30pm CET
Charismatic leadership and the 12 charismatic leadership tactics
Practice using the "CLT playing cards"
Case discussion/debate

12 January 2024, 6.30pm-8.30pm CET
Presentation skills workshop.

13 January 2024, 4pm-8pm CET
In-class simulations

15 January 2024, 6.30pm-8.30pm CET
Humor as a leadership skill
Humor practice exercises

16 January 2024, 6.30pm-8.30pm CET
Self-leadership under stress. Managing and maximizing psychological capital.

17 January 2024, 6.30pm-8.30pm CET
Bringing it all together. Preparing your business presentation.

18 January 2024, 6.30pm-8.30pm CET
Individual presentations, delivery and feedback.

19 January 2024, 6.30pm-8.30pm CET
Individual presentations, delivery and feedback.
Conclusions and roadmap.