**Leadership Theory and Practice**

**Fall  2025**

**Instructor Name:** Meredith Doherty, PhD, LCSW

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**Course Description/Purpose**

This course will present the evolution of leadership theory beginning with classical trait theories and ultimately focusing on more modern perspectives such as adaptive, authentic, and shared leadership models that engage more critical understanding of traditional leadership theory. Ultimately, we frame leadership as a social-constructed, collective experience that is generated by complex group dynamics. We will examine leadership in non-profit organizations, government, and social movements. Readings will include a formal overview of leadership theory as well as contemporary feminist and futurist perspectives. The practice focus is on developing new relational capabilities that include deep listening, self-reflection, and adaptive problem interpretation.

*"There is nothing so practical as good theory"* – Kurt Lewin, Organizational Psychologist

*"All models are wrong, but some are useful"* – George Box, Statistician

*"To learn which questions are unanswerable, and not to answer them: this skill is most needful in times of stress and darkness."* – Ursula K. Le Guin, Author

Leadership is *"a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal"* – Peter Northouse, Author

**Educational Objectives**

1. To think through issues relevant to social change leadership using multiple theoretical orientations.
2. To see the group processes, organizational dynamics and community dimensions active in everything that human systems undertake.
3. To understand the theories of change under-girding leadership acts.
4. To formulate leadership as a tool for liberation and social justice.
5. To evaluate one's own leadership strengths and identify opportunities for growth.

**Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Competencies**

The School of Social Policy & Practice's MSW Program is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The curriculum ensures students master the nine required social work competencies specified in the CSWE 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards 2022-EPAS.pdf&clen=539839&chunk=true&pdffilename=2022-EPAS.pdf ). This course prepares students for developing the following competencies:

- Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior;
- Advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice;
- Engage anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice;
- Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice;
- Engage in policy practice;
- Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities;
- Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities;
- Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities;
- Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

## Course Requirements and Expectations

## Attendance and Punctuality

Attendance is required in this course. Students are permitted to miss class for legitimate medical reasons only (sickness on the day of class). Excessive or unexplained absences may result in a reduction in your course participation grade. There are no "excused absences": if you miss class, you are responsible for making up any work and for knowing the material covered.

Students are to advise the instructor in advance of any anticipated absences via email. Absences and lateness will be considered in establishing the final grade.

## Class Participation and Hybrid Discussions

This course is a conducted seminar-style, and everyone is expected to participate in class discussions. Grades for participation will not only reflect how often you contributed to our class discussions, but the degree to which your contributions were constructive and generative of further response(s) from your fellow classmates. Stated positively, classroom participation should reflect a spirit of respectful, collaborative discussion and learning. Please see the instructor early in the semester outside of class to discuss ways to effectively participate in our seminar if you might be concerned about your performance in this regard. Students are encouraged to share information gleaned from outside reading and practice experience. Students should demonstrate a familiarity with the assigned reading material as evidenced by initiative in raising issues for exploration and learning and an ability to be thoughtful in discussions with fellow students.

## Course Grading

The instructor follows all applicable guidelines provided through SP2 Student Handbook. The assigned grades will reflect the extent to which each student has incorporated the knowledge from this class along with the values and skills of the profession into their written assignments and class participation, thereby meeting course objectives.

The final course grade will be based on the following weighted schedule:

1. Assignment 1 (30%)
2. Assignment 2 (30%)
3. Class Participation (40%)

## Email Communication Policy

The instructor will respond to email or texts within 48 hours of receiving it.

Students can expect me to respond to between 9 AM and 5 PM Monday through Friday at minimum. I am happy to use email to respond to brief queries but will not discuss assignment grades through email. Please see me before class or make an appointment for this more important conversation. When you email, please be specific about the subject of the email.

From time to time, the instructor will need to make announcements about the course outside of class time using Canvas. These notifications will be kept to a minimum but please check at least once every two days and be sure to read any emails from the instructor.

## Feedback and Evaluations

Student feedback and comments about content, methods, pace and clarity are welcome at any time throughout the semester as they help to ensure that the student's learning needs and expectations are achieved.

## Grading Policy: Written Course Work

Assignments must (a) Use solid writing skills, (b) be double-spaced in 12 pt. font and (c) follow the *American Psychological Association (APA)* format for citations and references.

Papers that are poorly organized and written, use improper grammar, contain misspellings, and otherwise are not completed at a graduate level will be graded accordingly.

Students should consider the writing resources are available resources through the *University of Pennsylvania.*

Written assignments are due by 11:59pm on the due date. **Papers should be submitted via Canvas as scheduled on the due date**. The grade will decrease for any assignments past this due date and time unless an extension is provided by the instructor.

The following will be used to evaluate written work:

A = outstanding, nearly flawless work; assignment(s) completed thoroughly; technically excellent; evidence of creativity and/or inspiration, deep contextual grasp of issues and connections among issues; and ability to synthesize individual elements into broader narratives or analyses.

B = good work; all aspects of assignment(s) completed thoroughly and competently; technically competent (though perhaps not perfect) in spelling, grammar, format, citations; presentation adequate; does not consistently show inspiration, creativity, deeper grasp of connections, interpretations, and/or synthesis among elements.

C = less than fully satisfactory work; assignment(s) not completed thoroughly or according to instructions; basic grasp of issues not always evident; more than occasional technical flaws.

D = basic work of course (or assignment) not done, little effort evident.

## Late Papers and Assignments

Students may request an extension for one paper/assignment during the course of the semester, for any reason. The instructor will grant one extension as long requested in writing (email is fine) with a suggested completion date that must be mutually agreed upon. Once granted this extension, no further extensions will be allowed.

Papers turned in late (after due date or extension date) will lose one grade "step" for every 24 hours the assignments is late (e.g. a paper that would have merited an "A-" will received a "B+" if submitted within 24 hours after the due date, a "B" if submitted within 48 hours after the due date, and so on).

## Office Hours

Zoom or phone meetings with the instructor can be arranged by appointment. Meetings are encouraged to foster a deeper understanding of the course, the readings, and the assignments.

## Re-grade Policy

Students must wait 24 hours after receiving the grade to request a re-grade. In addition, students may not request a regrade more than one week (seven days) after receiving the grade. All re-grade requests must be submitted in writing with a full explanation of why you think the work was incorrectly graded. Papers that appear to have been altered will not be accepted. Please understand that once you submit your work for regarding, the grade can go either up or down.

## Students with Disabilities

In order to adhere to the PENN Policy compliance and equal access laws, the instructor is available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. Requests for academic accommodations need to be made during the first two weeks of the semester, except under unusual circumstances, to arrange reasonable

accommodations. Students must register with Student Disabilities Services (SDS) for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations.

## Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the University's Code of Academic Integrity, available at https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/.  Care should be taken to avoid academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, fabrication of information, and multiple submissions (see descriptions below).**   Students who engage in any of these actions will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct, which investigates and decides on sanctions in cases of academic dishonesty.

1. Plagiarism: using the ideas, data, or language of another person or source without specific or proper acknowledgment.  Example: copying, in part or in its entirety, another person's paper, article, or web-based material and submitting it for an assignment; using someone else's ideas without attribution; not using quotation marks where appropriate; etc.

2. Fabrication: submitting contrived or altered information in any academic exercise. Example: making up data or statistics, citing nonexistent articles, contriving sources, etc.

3. Multiple submissions: submitting, without prior permission, any work submitted to fulfill another academic requirement.

**It is students' responsibility to consult the instructor if they are unsure about whether something constitutes a violation of the Code of Academic Integrity.

## Prohibited Uses of AI

The following are examples of inappropriate use of AI in academic work:
- **Plagiarism:**
  - Submitting AI-generated text or work as your own without proper acknowledgment.
  - Copying and pasting AI responses directly into assignments without verification or revision.
- **Bypassing Learning Objectives:**
  - Using AI to generate entire essays, responses, or solutions to assignment prompts.
  - Relying on AI tools to analyze or critique readings without engaging with the material yourself.
- **Misinformation or Lack of Verification:**
  - Trusting AI-generated content without verifying its accuracy or appropriateness for academic purposes.
  - Failing to check citations or references provided by AI, as they may be fabricated or inaccurate.

## COURSE OVERVIEW

| Module | Theme | Readings |
|---|---|---|
| **Module 1:**<br>**Leading in Complexity**<br>**Classes 1 - 4** | Systems thinking<br>Adaptive leadership | Emergent Strategy<br>Practice of Adaptive Leadership<br>Other assigned readings |
| **Module 2:**<br>**Power, Trust, and**<br>**Influence**<br>**Classes 5 - 8** | Relational leadership<br>Ethical power navigation<br>Building cultures of trust | Emergent Strategy<br>Practice of Adaptive Leadership<br>Dare to Lead<br>Other assigned readings |
| **Module 3:**<br>**Narrative leadership**<br>**and Collective Vision**<br>**Classes 9 - 12** | Meaning-making<br>Storytelling for action | Practice of Adaptive Leadership<br>Dare to Lead<br>Other assigned readings |
| **Module 4:**<br>**Self-Awareness and**<br>**Wisdom**<br>**Classes 13 - 14** | Inner leadership work<br>Wise leadership | Practice of Adaptive Leadership<br>Dare to Lead<br>Other assigned readings |

## COURSE TEXTS

Required texts:

- brown, a.m. (2017). *Emergent Strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*. AK Press.
- Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Harvard Business Press.
- Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead*. Vermilion.

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

### Class Participation (40% of the final grade)

This course is an interactive, dynamic experience in your own leadership development. I will assign small, ungraded assignments each week that may require you to write, read, listen/watch, reflect on, or discuss a variety of topics. Your overall participation will count for 40% of your total grade.

***In addition to your participation in class discussions you will be required to:***

- Lead one group facilitation activity for the class
- Select one book that *you see* as a leadership book (fiction or non-fiction) and present to the class in weeks 13 and 14.

## Group Facilitation Activity

Each student will prepare and facilitate one team building exercise for the class (e.g., icebreaker, class activity, or facilitated discussion). The exercise is aimed at building trust, cohesion and honest communication among our group. At the start of each class one student will lead the exercise they prepared for the group.

Every student will lead the class in a group activity once per semester. Each class will begin with theses 15 – 20 minute activities. A sign-up sheet will be provided for scheduling.

## Leadership Book Presentation

Select one book that you consider a "leadership book." This can be either fiction or non-fiction, as long as you can draw out meaningful insights about leadership from it. In weeks 13 and 14, you will give a brief presentation to the class in which you summarize the book's central ideas, explain its relevance to leadership, and highlight at least two lessons that connect to the theories or practices we have studied. Be prepared to lead a short discussion by posing one or two thoughtful questions to your classmates.

## Assignments 1 & 2: Building Your Leadership portfolio (60% of the final grade)

This portfolio is your opportunity to synthesize and reflect on what you've learned about leadership across the semester.
It is not just a summary of course content — your will apply and reference concepts from the course to develop a **portrait of yourself as a developing leader**: your values, strategies, challenges, vision, and inner resilience.

You will demonstrate your knowledge and personal growth across four dimensions:

1. Systems Thinking & Adaptive Leadership
2. Power, Trust, and Influence
3. Narrative and Vision Building
4. Presence, Self-Awareness, and Wisdom

## Assignment 1: Leadership Portfolio Part 1 (30% of final grade) *DUE: 10/2*

### 1. Systems Map & Complexity Analysis *(~3 - 4 pages + diagram)*

- Map a real system you are part of (organization, community, institution, coalition, etc.).
- Identify its formal structures, informal norms, power flows, and adaptive challenges.
- Identify one adaptive challenge and distinguish it from any associated technical problems
- Propose a possible intervention for this adaptive challenge and highlight leverage points where leadership could host emergence or support change.
- Apply and reference **concepts from the course readings and discussions**

**Optional:** Include a visual diagram of your system with key nodes, actors, and dynamics.

### 2. Power & Trust Reflection *(~1 page)*

- Reflect on how your understanding of power, trust and vulnerability has evolved.
- Where in your life do you have informal or relational power?
- When have you built or broken trust as a leader? How have past leaders built or broken your trust? What did you learn?
- Apply and reference concepts from the **course readings and discussions** to support your observations and interpretations.

### 3. Public Narrative Statement *(~2 pages with optional 2–3 minute video posted to the discussion board)*

Craft your "Story of Self, Story of Us, Story of Now," using Marshall Ganz's framework:

- **Story of Self:** What events shaped your values and leadership call?
- **Story of Us:** How do your values connect to a broader community or struggle?
- **Story of Now:** What urgent challenge are you committed to? Why does it matter today?

### Assignment 2: Leadership Portfolio Part 2 (30% of final grade) *DUE: 11/25*

You will revise Assignment 1 based on instructor's feedback and learnings from the second half of the course and then add the following sections to complete your leadership portfolio.

### 5. Learning from Feedback (~2 pages)

- Interview 3 people who know you well from different areas in your life whom you trust and admire, share your public narrative statement and leadership goals with them and gather their feedback. You may ask them the following questions:

   a. What do you think is my impact on the world?
   b. What are my three greatest gifts?
   c. Where do you think I can grow to become a better leader?

   Record their responses as if you were collecting data in a study (maybe even record the interview and transcribe them)

- Describe your experience hearing this feedback. What did they say? Was anything surprising, why?
- Integrate their feedback and your reactions to create your personal leadership practice plan (see the next section).

### 4. Personal Leadership Practice Plan *(~1 page)*

- In the next 3 years, what skills/outlook/mindset would you like to practice? What resources/experiences do you think you will need to develop these assets

- What concrete practices will you commit to in order to lead with presence, wisdom, and resilience?
- How will you stay grounded when leadership becomes emotionally or politically challenging?
- Apply and reference concepts from **the course readings and discussions** to support the choices you made in developing your practice plan.

**5. Final Integrative Reflection Essay** *(~2 – 3 pages)*

- What kind of leader are you becoming — and what challenges remain ahead?
- Connect ideas from across modules and readings: complexity, trust, narrative, presence to summarize your leadership development process throughout the course and into the future.

**<u>Readings by Week</u>**

*The required readings for each week are listed below. As this is an evolving, dynamic and co-created class experience – I may post new readings that I feel are relevant in the week's module on our Canvas page. Stay tuned!

**<u>*8/28 (Class 1)*</u>**

Benmira, S., & Agboola, M. (2021). Evolution of leadership theory. *BMJ Leader*, leader-2020.

**<u>*9/4 (Class 2)*</u>**

brown, a.m. (2017). *Emergent Strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*: <u>Pages 1 – 20</u>

Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*: <u>Chapter 1</u>

Snowden & Boone (2007), *A Leader's Framework for Decision Making*

**<u>*9/11  (Class 3)*</u>**

brown, a.m. (2017). *Emergent Strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*: <u>Pages 21 –- 40</u>

Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*: <u>Chapter 2</u>

**<u>9/18 (Class 4)</u>**

brown, a.m. (2017). *Emergent Strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*: <u>Pages 41 – 60</u>

Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*: <u>Chapter 3-4</u>

Caulfield, J. L., & Brenner, E. F. (2020). Resolving complex community problems: Applying collective leadership and Kotter's change model to wicked problems within social system networks. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, *30*(3), 509-524.

### 9/25 (Class 5)

brown, a.m. (2017). *Emergent Strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*: Pages 61 – 80

Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead*: Pages 1 - 44

Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*: Chapter 4

### 10/2 (Class 6)  *CLASS ONLINE*  *ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE*

brown, a.m. (2017). *Emergent Strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*: Pages 81 - 100

Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*: Chapter 5

Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead*: Pages 45 – 70

Randel, A. E., Galvin, B. M., Shore, L. M., Ehrhart, K. H., Chung, B. G., Dean, M. A., & Kedharnath, U. (2018). Inclusive leadership: Realizing positive outcomes through belongingness and being valued for uniqueness. *Human Resource Management Review*, *28*(2), 190-203.

### 10/9 FALL BREAK  *NO CLASS*

### 10/16 (Class 7)

brown, a.m. (2017). *Emergent Strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*: Pages 100 - end

Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*: Chapter 6

Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead*: Pages 71 - 118

### 10/23 (Class 8)

Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead*: Pages 119 – 182

Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Chapter 7

### 10/30 (Class 9)

Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead*: Pages 183 – 218

Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Chapter 8

Lim, S., Brower, R. S., & Berlan, D. G. (2021). Interpretive leadership skill in meaning-making by nonprofit leaders. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*

de Waal-Andrews, W., & van Vugt, M. (2020). The triad model of follower needs: theory and review. *Current opinion in psychology*, *33*, 142-147.

## 11/6 (Class 10)

Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead*: Pages 219 – end of book

Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Chapter 9

## 11/13 (Class 11)

Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Chapter 10

## 11/20 (Class 12)

Heifetz, R. A., Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Chapter 11

## 11/25 (Class 13)   *TUESDAY* *ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE*

Reading catch-up & presentations

## 11/27 THANKSGIVING BREAK   *NO CLASS*

## 12/4 (Class 14)

Reading catch-up & presentations