



## VICTORIA MANAGEMENT SCHOOL

### **MMBA 549 SYSTEMS THINKING AND CREATIVE ORGANISATIONAL PROBLEM SOLVING**

Trimester 2 2006

### **COURSE OUTLINE**

#### **Contact Details**

##### **Course Coordinator**

Professor John Brocklesby  
Rm 906 Rutherford House

##### **Class Times and Room Numbers**

7.40pm – 9.30pm, RHGO4

Examination period 16<sup>th</sup> Oct – 10<sup>th</sup> Nov 2006

#### **Course Objectives**

One of the most enduring features of contemporary management is that complex organisational problems are rarely straightforward enough to be resolved through the application of any single theory or method, through expert knowledge of any single academic discipline, or through ‘common-sense’ thinking. Moreover many such problems are comprised of complex interacting elements; as a result they must be ‘structured’ before they can be managed.

This course is prefaced on the assumption that complexity and ambiguity are inherent features of managing. Decision makers have to accept and confront these things, not hide from them. Against this background the course does the following:

- (a) Examines the nature of creative thinking about organizational problems.
- (b) Considers the roots of systemic thinking in disciplines such as biology, control engineering, and the natural sciences
- (c) Details and provides a critique, based upon social theory, of a number of systems and problem structuring approaches, methodologies, models and methods
- (d) Introduces and illustrates several systems methods and tools across three paradigms
- (e) Introduces the concept of ‘multimethodology’ which provides a framework for the creative combination of different approaches.

## **Assessment Requirements**

**Individual Project (50%)** – The nature of this assignment will be discussed during the initial sessions.

**Final Examination (50%)** – This course will have a final examination. Students are required to achieve 50% overall and at least 40% in the examination to pass the course.

## **Workload**

Workload expectations for this course are 10 hours per week for the 12 teaching weeks and 30hrs during the mid-trimester break.

## **Penalties**

In fairness to other students, work submitted after the deadline will be subject to a penalty of 5% of the total marks available per day of lateness. In the event of unusual, unforeseen circumstances (e.g., serious illness, family bereavement), students should discuss waiver of the penalty with the course controller prior to the deadline date.

## **Mandatory Course Requirements**

In order to pass this course, students are required to obtain at least forty percent of the final examination marks available, and obtain at least fifty percent of the overall course marks available.

Victoria MBA Grading Standards are as follows:

Excellent Category

A- (75 – 79%) to A (80 – 84%) to A+ (85% and over): The learning is demonstrated to a very high level of proficiency, i.e. it is at a standard that makes it exceptional at Master's level.

Very Good Category

B+ (70 – 74%): The learning is demonstrated at a high standard. Students have reached a level that clearly exceeds “competency”.

Good Category

B (65 – 69%): The learning is clearly demonstrated without being exceptional in any way. Students can be thought of as fully competent.

Satisfactory Category

B- (60 – 64%): The learning is demonstrated without being exceptional in any way. Students can be thought of as competent.

Marginal Category

C (50 – 54%) to C+ (55 – 59%): The learning is demonstrated to a minimally acceptable level. There may be flaws but these are not serious enough to “fail” the student.

Unsatisfactory / Failure Category

E (0 – 39%) to D (40 – 49%): The learning is absent or performed to a very low level, or the performance is seriously flawed.

## Lecture Schedule – MMBA 549 (n.b. subject to change)

### Session    Topic

- 1    Creative and Systems Thinking in an Organisational Context
- 2    Modelling Organisations
- 3    Viable Systems Modelling I
- 4    Viable Systems Modelling II
- 5    Soft/Interpretive Systems Thinking
- 6    Soft Systems Methodology I
- 7    Soft Systems Methodology II
- 8    Strategic Options Development Analysis / Cognitive Mapping I
- 9    Strategic Options Development and Analysis / Cognitive Mapping II
- 10   Critical Systems Thinking/ Multimethodology I
- 11   Critical Systems Thinking/ Multimethodology II
- 12   Review

### **READING**

There is no set textbook for this course. Readings will be provided.

#### **Sessions 1 and 2:**

M.Jackson (2003) Ch's 1, 2 and 3 Systems Thinking: Creative Holism for Managers, Wiley, London.

R. L. Ackoff (1994) Systems Thinking and Thinking Systems. *System Dynamics Review* 10, 175 - 188.

R. L. Flood and M. C. Jackson (1991) A System of Systems Methodology, in Creative Problem Solving: Total Systems Intervention, London, John Wiley.

H. Mintzberg and L. Van der Heyden (1999) "Organigraphs: Drawing How Companies Really Work." Harvard Business Review Sept 1999.

#### **Sessions 3-4:**

Brocklesby, J., J. Davies, et al. (1995). "Demystifying the Viable Systems Model as a Tool in Organisational Analysis." Asia Pacific Journal of Operational Research 12(1): 65-86.

Brocklesby, J. and S. Cummings (1996). "Designing a Viable Organization Structure." International Journal of Strategic Management: Long Range Planning **29**(1): 49-57.

Brocklesby, J. and S. Cummings (2003). Strategy As Systems, in Images of Strategy. S. Cummings and D. Wilson. London, Blackwell.

### **Sessions 5-7:**

M.C.Jackson (2003). Soft Systems Methodology Systems Thinking: Creative Holism for Managers London, John Wiley.

Checkland, P. (2003). Soft Systems Methodology. Rational Analysis for a Problematic World Revisited. J. Rosenhead and J. Mingers. London, John Wiley

Checkland, P. (2003). Soft Systems Methodology in Action: Participative Creation of an Information Strategy for an Acute Hospital. Rational Analysis for a Problematic World Revisited. J. Rosenhead and J. Mingers, London, John Wiley.

### **Sessions 8 – 9:**

Eden, C. and Ackermann, F. (2001). SODA – The Principles, Rational Analysis for a Problematic World Revisited. J. Rosenhead and J. Mingers, London, John Wiley & Sons.

Eden, C. and Ackermann, F. (2001). SODA – Journey Making and Mapping in Practice, Rational Analysis for a Problematic World Revisited. J. Rosenhead and J. Mingers, London, John Wiley & Sons.

Eden, C. and Ackermann, F. (2001). SODA – The Principles, Rational Analysis for a Problematic World Revisited. J. Rosenhead and J. Mingers, London, John Wiley & Sons.

J. Bryson, F.Ackermann, C.Eden and C.Finn (2004) What Do I Think? A Guide to Cognitive Mapping. Visible Thinking: Unlocking Causal Mapping For Practical Business Results. John Wiley, London.

### **Reading for Session 10-11:**

M.C.Jackson (2003). Critical Systems Practice Systems Thinking: Creative Holism for Managers London, John Wiley.

Mingers, J. and J. Brocklesby (1997). "Multimethodology: Towards A Framework For Mixing Methodologies." Omega - International Journal of Management Science **25**(5): 489-509.

## **Faculty of Commerce and Administration Offices**

### Railway West Wing (RWW) - FCA Student and Academic Services Office

The Faculty's Student and Academic Services Office is located on the ground and first floors of the Railway West Wing. The ground floor counter is the first point of contact for general enquiries and FCA forms. Student Administration Advisers are available to discuss course status and give further advice about FCA qualifications. To check for opening hours call the Student and Academic Services Office on (04) 463 5376.

### Easterfield (EA) - FCA/Education/Law Kelburn Office

The Kelburn Campus Office for the Faculties of Commerce and Administration, Education and Law is situated in the Easterfield Building - it includes the ground floor reception desk (EA005) and offices 125a to 131 (Level 1). The office is available for the following:

- Duty tutors for student contact and advice.
- Information concerning administrative and academic matters.
- Forms for FCA Student and Academic Services (e.g. application for academic transcripts, requests for degree audit, COP requests).
- Examinations-related information during the examination period.

To check for opening hours call the Student and Academic Services Office on (04) 463 5376.

## **General University Policies and Statutes**

Students should familiarise themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly the Assessment Statute, the Personal Courses of Study Statute, the Statute on Student Conduct and any statutes relating to the particular qualifications being studied; see the Victoria University Calendar available in hard copy or under 'About Victoria' on the VUW home page at [www.vuw.ac.nz](http://www.vuw.ac.nz).

## **Student and Staff Conduct**

The Statute on Student Conduct together with the Policy on Staff Conduct ensure that members of the University community are able to work, learn, study and participate in the academic and social aspects of the University's life in an atmosphere of safety and respect. The Statute on Student Conduct contains information on what conduct is prohibited and what steps are to be taken if there is a complaint. For information about complaint procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct, contact the Facilitator and Disputes Advisor or refer to the statute on the VUW policy website at [www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct). The Policy on Staff Conduct can be found on the VUW website at [www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/staffconduct](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/staffconduct).

## **Academic Grievances**

If you have any academic problems with your course you should talk to the tutor or lecturer concerned; class representatives may be able to help you in this. If you are not satisfied with the result of that meeting, see the Head of School or the relevant Associate Dean; VUWSA Education Coordinators are available to assist in this process. If, after trying the above channels, you are still unsatisfied, formal grievance procedures can be invoked. These are set out in the Academic Grievances Policy which is published on the VUW website at [www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/academicgrievances](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/academicgrievances).

## **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

Academic integrity is about honesty – put simply it means **no cheating**. All members of the University community are responsible for upholding academic integrity, which means staff and students are expected to behave honestly, fairly and with respect for others at all times.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating which undermines academic integrity. The University defines plagiarism as follows:

*The presentation of the work of another person or other persons as if it were one's own, whether intended or not. This includes published or unpublished work, material on the Internet and the work of other student or staff.*

It is still plagiarism even if you re-structure the material or present it in your own style or words.

*Note: It is however, perfectly acceptable to include the work of others as long as that is acknowledged by appropriate referencing.*

Plagiarism is prohibited at Victoria and is not worth the risk. Any enrolled student found guilty of plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct and may be penalised severely. Consequences of being found guilty of plagiarism can include:

- an oral or written warning
- cancellation of your mark for an assessment or a fail grade for the course
- suspension from the course or the University.

Find out more about plagiarism, and how to avoid it, on the University's website at [www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html).

### **Students with Impairments**

The University has a policy of reasonable accommodation of the needs of students with disabilities. The policy aims to give students with disabilities the same opportunity as other students to demonstrate their abilities. If you have a disability, impairment or chronic medical condition (temporary, permanent or recurring) that may impact on your ability to participate, learn and/or achieve in lectures and tutorials or in meeting the course requirements, please contact the Course Coordinator as early in the course as possible. Alternatively you may wish to approach a Student Adviser from Disability Support Services (DSS) to discuss your individual needs and the available options and support on a confidential basis. DSS are located on Level 1, Robert Stout Building, telephone (04) 463 6070, email [disability@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:disability@vuw.ac.nz). The name of your School's Disability Liaison Person is in the relevant prospectus or can be obtained from the School Office or DSS.

### **Student Support**

Staff at Victoria want students to have positive learning experiences at the University. Each Faculty has a designated staff member who can either help you directly if your academic progress is causing you concern, or quickly put you in contact with someone who can. Assistance for specific groups is also available from the Kaiwao Māori, Manaaki Pihipihinga or Victoria International.

In addition, the Student Services Group (email [student-services@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:student-services@vuw.ac.nz)) is available to provide a variety of support and services. Find out more at [www.vuw.ac.nz/st\\_services/](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/st_services/).

VUWSA employs Education Coordinators who deal with academic problems and provide support, advice and advocacy services, as well as organising class representatives and Faculty delegates. The Education Office (tel. 04 463 6983 or 04 463 6984, email [education@vuwsa.org.nz](mailto:education@vuwsa.org.nz)) is located on the ground floor, Student Union Building.

### **Manaaki Pihipihinga - Maori and Pacific Mentoring Programme (Faculty of Commerce and Administration)**

This is a mentoring service for Maori and Pacific students studying at all levels. Weekly one hour sessions are held at the Kelburn and Pipitea Campuses in the Mentoring Rooms, 14 Kelburn Parade, and Room 210 and 211, Level 2, Railway West Wing. Sessions cover drafting and discussing assignments, essay writing, and any questions that may arise from tutorials and/or lectures. A computer suite networked to Cyber Commons is available for student use.

To register with Manaaki Pihipihinga, please contact one of the following:

Puawai Wereta  
Room 210, Level 2  
Railway West Wing  
Tel. (04) 463 8997

Fa'aoi Seiuli  
Room 109 B  
14 Kelburn Parade  
Tel. (04) 463 5842