

VICTORIA MANAGEMENT SCHOOL

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

Trimester 2 2011

COURSE OUTLINE

Contact Details

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Class Times and Room Numbers

Saturdays 10am-4pm Aug 13, 20, Sept 10, 17
Room: Rutherford House MZ11

Trimester Dates

Teaching Period: Monday 11 July – Friday 14 October

Withdrawal from Courses:

Your fees will be refunded if you withdraw from this course on or before **14 August.**

The last date for withdrawal from this course is **Saturday 10 September.** After that date, permission to withdraw requires the permission of the Associate Dean (Students) as set out in section 8 of the Personal Courses of Study Statute

<http://policy.vuw.ac.nz/Amphora!~~policy.vuw.ac.nz~POLICY~000000001743.pdf>

To apply for permission, fill in the Late Withdrawal form available from either of our Student Customer Service Desks.

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) Introduces and illustrates several systems methods and tools across three paradigms
- (d) Uses the idea of 'multimethodology' to provide a framework for the creative combination of different approaches.

Note: this paper does not use quantitative systems concepts or methods.

Expected Workload

Workload expectations for this course are approximately 150 hours.

Assessment Requirements

Project 1 (50%)

Project 2 (50%)

Details about the assessments will be provided during the first lecture.

Sessions and Topics

- 1. Creative and Systems Thinking in an organizational context; introduction to qualitative modelling of organisations; Viable Systems Modelling 1**
- 2. Viable Systems Modelling II; Soft/Interpretive Systems Thinking. Soft Systems Methodology I**
- 3. Soft Systems Methodology II; Strategic Options Development Analysis / Cognitive Mapping 1**
- 4. Strategic Options Development and Analysis / Cognitive Mapping II; Critical Systems Thinking/ Multimethodology**

Readings

Textbook: Michael C. Jackson 'Systems Thinking: Creative Holism for Managers' Wiley, London, 2003. Readings, in addition to those listed below, may be provided from time to time.

Session 1:

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

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

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

Brocklesby J (2011) "Using the Viable Systems Model to Examine Multi-Agency Arrangements for Dealing with Transnational Organised Crime'. Journal of the Operational Research Society, June 2011

Jackson M (2003) Organisational Cybernetics, Systems Thinking: Creative Holism for Managers, Wiley, London.

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

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

Session 2

Jackson M (2003). Soft Systems Methodology, in 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.

Brocklesby, J (2007). The Theoretical Underpinnings of Soft Systems Methodology – Comparing the Work of Humberto Maturana and Geoffrey Vickers. System Research and Behavioral Science 24(2): 157-168

Session 3

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.

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

Session 4

Jackson M (2003). Total Systems Intervention, in Systems Thinking: Creative Holism for Managers London, John Wiley.

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

Brocklesby J (2009) "Ethics Beyond the Model: How Social Dynamics Can Interfere with Ethical Practice in Management Science", OMEGA: International Journal of Management Science, **37**(6): 1073-1082.

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

Quality Assurance Note

Your assessed work may also be used for quality assurance purposes, such as to assess the level of achievement of learning objectives as required for accreditation and audit purposes. The findings may be used to inform changes aimed at improving the quality of FCA programmes. All material used for such processes will be treated as confidential, and the outcome will not affect your grade for the course.

Individual Work

While the Victoria MBA programme has a tradition of study group collaboration, there are important elements in the assessment process that are strictly individual. Collaboration on individual assignments is not allowed beyond general discussion as to how one might interpret the nature of the assignment question. Please do not work together to formulate a response and do not loan out your completed individual assignments.

Handing in assignments

Assignments should be handed in at the lectures in hard copy form by the due time on the due date. If the student cannot deliver an assignment by the due lecture, it is their responsibility to make alternative arrangements in advance.

All completed assignments must have a cover sheet (Annex B). Assignments received after the due time will be deemed to be **late**, and must be handed to the Administrator for this course in in RH1003 where your assignment will have the **time, date and signature** noted on the front cover by the person receiving it.

Students must also keep an electronic copy of their work archived in case the original assignment goes missing. Failure to do so will jeopardise any claim by you that your work was submitted in the rare cases where your work goes astray.

Mandatory Course Requirements

To meet Mandatory Course Requirements, students are required to:

- Submit all assignments within the allowable timeframe (see Penalties section) below..

Students who fail to satisfy the mandatory requirements for this course but who obtain 50% or more overall, will be awarded a "K" grade. Standard fail grades (D or E) will be awarded when the student's overall course mark falls below the minimum pass mark, regardless of whether the mandatory course requirements have been satisfied or not.

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.

Victoria MBA Grading Standards are as follows:

Excellent Category

A- (75 – 79%) to A (80 – 84%) to A+ (85% and above): 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.

Referencing

There are many different styles of referencing and the Faculty of Commerce & Administration at VUW has decided to make APA (American Psychological Association) referencing style the common standard across the Faculty. The Commerce and Central Libraries hold the APA Style Guide. You can also access the information from the online VUW library site:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/library/research/reference/referencingguides.aspx>

Class Representative

A class representative will be elected in the first class, and that person's name and contact details will be available to VUWSA, the Course Coordinator and the class. The class representative provides a communication channel to liaise with the Course Coordinator on behalf of students.

Communication of Additional Information

Additional information and information on any changes will be conveyed to students via class announcements and in written form on the university blackboard server for MMBA 549.

General University Policies and Statutes

For the following important information follow the links provided:

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/plagiarism.aspx>

General University Policies and Statutes

Find key dates, explanations of grades and other useful information at

www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study

Find out about academic progress and restricted enrolment at

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/academic-progress.aspx>

The University's statutes and policies are available at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/policy, except qualification statutes, which are available via the Calendar webpage at

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/calendar.aspx> (See Section C).

Further information about the University's academic processes can be found on the website of the Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at

www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about_victoria/avcacademic/default.aspx

AVC (Academic) Website: information including: Conduct, Academic Grievances, Students with Impairments, Student Support

http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about_victoria/avcacademic/Publications.aspx

Faculty of Commerce and Administration Offices

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/fca/studenthelp/>

Manaaki Pihipihinga Programme

http://www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/mentoring/