COURSE SYLLABUS – Spring 2014

MPAG 8574  |  Systems thinking and practice for effective management of social change organizations | 1 Credit

Alfredo Ortiz, Visiting Professor in Nonprofit Management and Social Change

aortiz@miis.edu | Skype: alfredo.ortiz | Office: McCone 119

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date, day and time</th>
<th>Room</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7-Feb-14 Fri 12-3 pm, TBD†</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7-Feb-14 Fri 6-9 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8-Feb-14 Sat 9am-5pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9-Feb-14 Sun 9am-2pm</td>
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Office Hours: February 3-7 and April 7-11 from 10:15 to 11:15, or by appointment

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This workshop focuses on the importance of complexity and systemic thinking for social change, with an emphasis on methodological use and management implications of systems thinking and practice for social change organizations (SCOs) in complex environments. We will explore core complexity and systems thinking concepts such as self-organization, emergence, coordination and communication, feedback, worldviews / system philosophies, complexity and chaos, and relational thinking to help answer the core question:

“How might systems thinking and practice (i.e. use of systems methodology) help practitioners and organizations contribute to social change in complex development environments?”

The workshop, readings and exercises are designed to provide an introductory background on the history, schools of thought, and key principles of systems thinking; a practical understanding of the implications of systems theory on systems practice, and vice versa; and a particular in-depth look at two sometimes contradictory traditions—Complex Responsive Processes Theory (CRP), and ‘Soft Systems’ thinking and methodology (SST & SSM), both seen from a critical lens (there are non-critical practices as well). This will include critically analyzing the boundaries that organizations draw for their development projects and related systems, as well as systemically analyzing issues of power and culture that enable and constrain how change actually emerges in complex environments.

†This DLC skills session on the water challenge (sent as a separate pdf), has yet to be defined. It will likely go from 12-2:30, but I will send you a confirmation on that session by January 31*. The water challenge will play a central role in our systems analyses in the course.

*Syllabi are subject to change by the instructor with advance notice to students

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II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students successfully completing this workshop will be able to:

– Distinguish between different systems thinking and practice traditions
– Understand the relationships between complexity and systems thinking
– Carry out relational analyses of complex social change issues
– Apply soft systems methodology to particular problematic organizational management situations
– Explain your own systems (or anti-systems) world-view

III. TEXTBOOKS AND OTHER MATERIALS

Required Readings & videos:
There are several videos to be watched and articles required to be read before the workshop. The required videos and readings are numbered in suggesting viewing and reading order from a-g (videos) and 1-15 (articles—some are quite short). I have also provided additional articles for those that are interested. **Note:** Although we will discuss some readings in class, we will not spend a lot of time on them, so if you do not read them, you will miss out on key course content. Please make sure to have read all the indicated readings before class time.

I. Video and audio (intended to be watched/listened to in order)

   – *Note: It will make you watch some commercials but the video quality is worth it compared to lower resolution version that you can find online.*


d) Watch the following Regina Spector videos (she uses principles of self-organization in many of her videos)
   – “Man Of A Thousand Faces”: [http://youtu.be/80U5YdGrt9g](http://youtu.be/80U5YdGrt9g)
   – “Laughing With”: [http://youtu.be/-pxRXp3w-sQ](http://youtu.be/-pxRXp3w-sQ)

e) TED talk 1: Devdutt Pattanaik: East vs. West -- the myths that mystify: [http://www.ted.com/talks/devdutt_pattanaik.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/devdutt_pattanaik.html)

   – Optional: also listen to the NPR podcast: [http://www.npr.org/2013/12/13/248195238/does-the-subjunctive-have-a-dark-side](http://www.npr.org/2013/12/13/248195238/does-the-subjunctive-have-a-dark-side)

g) TED talk 3: Amy Cuddy, 2012, Your body language shapes who you are: [http://on.ted.com/Cuddy](http://on.ted.com/Cuddy)
   – Optional: also listen to the NPR podcast with interviews: [http://www.npr.org/2013/12/13/248198314/does-body-language-shape-who-you-are](http://www.npr.org/2013/12/13/248198314/does-body-language-shape-who-you-are)

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II. Required readings before class (can be downloaded at https://app.box.com/shared/2xsy88s2cx unless otherwise noted)

2) CAPRA, F. 1996. The Web of Life, Anchor Books, Ch1-3
5) Chapters 1 (intro) and 7 (Cannon, 2006, The experience of strategic planning and performance management in the education sector) in “Stacey and Griffin, 2006, Complexity and the Experience of Managing in Public Sector Organizations
8) Ortiz, 2013, Some thoughts on complexity
9) REYNOLDS, M. & HOLWELL, S. 2010. Introducing systems approaches
11) Rodgers, 2008, Leading Change Through Informal Coalitions
13) Burns, 2012, Participatory Systemic Inquiry
14) Harvey, Burns, Oswald, 2012, Community, Radio & AR for CC
15) Sgorbati, 2008, Order For Free

III. Additional required readings (can be read before or after class)

17) MOWLES, C. et al. 2008. What contribution can insights from the complexity sciences make to the theory and practice of development management?
18) BELL, S. & MORSE, S. How People Use Rich Pictures to Help Them Think and Act
19) Rodgers, 2013, Taking Organizational Complexity seriously
22) Hummelbrunner & Jones, 2013, Planning in the face of complexity
23) Sgorbati & Weber, 2008, How deep are the laws of emergence
25) JONES, 2011, Taking responsibility for complexity: How implementation can achieve results in the face of complex problems
26) Bar-Yam, 1997, Complexity Rising—From Human Beings to Human Civilization

IV. Additional optional resources
   – The Space Between Spoken and Unspoken: Dr. Siraya Chuenkamrai: http://youtu.be/ujoDKKvRaRw
– ANCONA et al, 2007. IN PRAISE OF THE INCOMPLETE LEADER.
– MIDGLEY, G. 2003. Science as Systemic Intervention:
– WILLIAMS, B. Bucking the system. The Broker, Issue: 11 December 2008
– SENGE, P. The Leader’s New Work: Building Learning Organizations
– de Guerre et al, 2013, IDEA

V. Optional Texts:
In addition to the articles listed I am recommending, but not requiring you read the entire book “The Web of Life” by Fritjof Capra, 1996. Additionally, the book “Systems Concepts in Action: A Practitioner’s Toolkit” by Bob Williams & Richard Hummelbrunner, (Stanford Business Books) [Paperback], Stanford Business Books (October 25, 2010) is a good resource. This book is particularly good for those wishing to understand more about applying systems concepts through methodology.

All articles can be downloaded at https://app.box.com/shared/2xsy88s2cx, in the folder “Readings”. Class slides can be downloaded from the same site before each class. In addition to these readings you may find the following blogs interesting:
– http://complexityandmanagement.wordpress.com/
– http://aidontheedge.info/blog/
– http://reflexivepractice.wordpress.com/
– http://organizational-capacity.blogspot.com/

IV. METHODOLOGY AND POLICIES

In this workshop we will mix group exercises, cases and readings to generate looks at systems thinking and practice from multiple angles. In order to cover all of the content with sufficient depth I complement the in-class sessions with a significant amount of readings. Full attendance, participation and completion of a small group project after the workshop are required to pass this workshop.

V. ACADEMIC CONDUCT

All students will be held to all policies and procedures listed in the most current Policies and Standards Manual (PSM). This includes but is not limited to our Student Honor Code and regulations on plagiarism. A complete copy of the Policies and Standards Manual (PSM) can be found here: (http://www.miis.edu/media/view/23925/original/policy_and_standards_manual_update.pdf).

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VI. REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

This class is pass/fail. You will receive a pass if you attend all classes and complete your group project. Except for grades of “I” and “IP,” (see sections 5.3 and 5.4 in Policies and Standards Manual) all grades are considered final when reported by a faculty member at the end of a semester or marking period. A change of grade may be requested only when a calculation, clerical, administrative, or recording error is discovered in the original assignment of a course grade or when a decision is made by a faculty member to change the grade as a result of the disputed academic evaluation procedure (see section 5.2 in Policies and Standard Manual). Grade changes necessitated by a calculation, clerical, administrative, or recording error must be reported within a period of six months from the time the grade is awarded. No grade may be changed as the result of a reevaluation of a student’s work or the submission of supplemental work following the close of a semester or marking period. The Records Office shall only accept permissible changes of grade upon written approval of the faculty member’s dean, who shall first verify that the Change of Grade request satisfies legitimate criteria.

VII. SCHEDULE AND WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS

The specific class times and readings are as follows (approximately):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Friday, Feb 7</td>
<td>6-9pm</td>
<td>Grappling with complexities—from individual subjectivities to complex adaptive systems</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Understanding systems “out there” and in our minds</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Saturday, Feb 8</td>
<td>9-5pm</td>
<td>Soft systems thinking and practice applied to a real life case</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Sunday, Feb 9</td>
<td>9-2pm</td>
<td>Real-life case continued</td>
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<td>Systemic theories of change from AO research</td>
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At the end of the workshop I will assign a short group project to be completed within 2 weeks after the workshop finishes (due on February 23rd). The specific final assignment will be given in class.

Assignment due for the first class:

For the first class, please bring with you the following two items:

1. An example of a system that you find meaningful/interesting. You can draw the system, bring in a real-life system or a model of one. Along with the system, note on an index card:
   a. What makes this a system?
   b. How does this system “see” the world (if applicable)
   c. How could this system (or its underlying ideas) help you address a current problem you are facing?

   Bring the system and index card to the first class.

2. A personal identity collage
   a. Taking images from magazines, the internet, Pinterest, or anything else you’d like to use, develop a collage that gives us an idea of how you see the world. Bring the collage to class on a poster board.

   I suggest you do this exercise (2) right after watching the videos and before you get too deep into the readings

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