

MGMT 5590: Responsible Leadership

January 2026 (2 Credits, Letter Grade)

LSK 2003 Saturday 9:00 - 12:30 & 14:00 - 17:30

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Leaders frequently face difficult choices with no clear right or wrong answer. How can they make tradeoffs between different beneficiaries (such as shareholders vs. stakeholders)? How do they manage the inevitable conflict when others disagree? And how can they be mindful of their own biases?



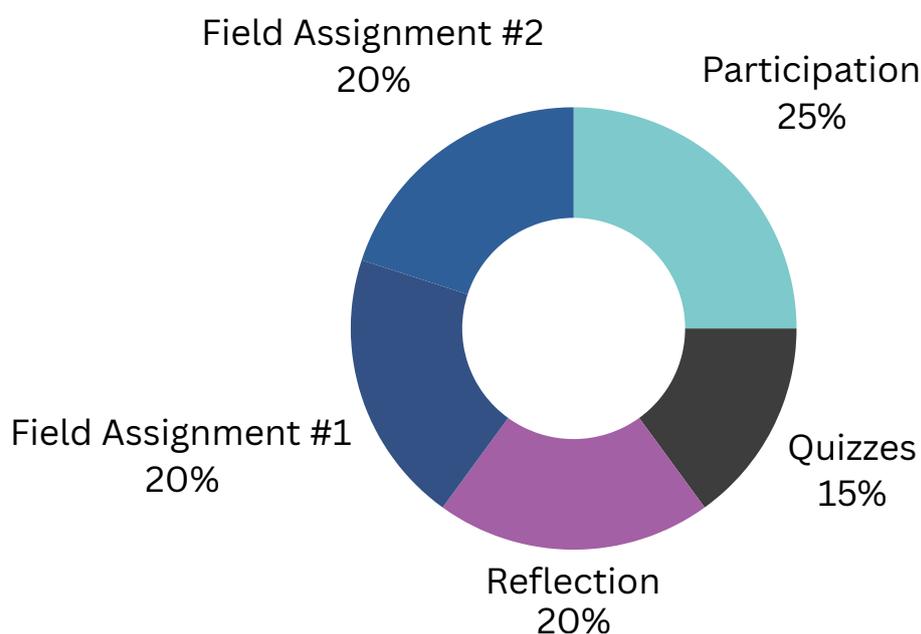
Course Overview

In the first week, we examine the role of the firm in society and the evolving expectations for corporate conduct. Is “doing good” a selfless act, or are there material benefits to the firms that consider their broader impacts? In Week 2, we look at human psychology and what it can teach us about (un)ethical decision making. We see how we naturally interpret unclear information in ways that benefits us, and how this can give rise to conflict. In Week 3, we look at the consequences of conflict and how we can deal with it when it arises. We learn to recognize good conflict, which emerges naturally when working with people, and the kind of disruptive conflict that requires an intervention. Finally, in Week 4, we look at pressing ethical challenges: the widespread adaptation of artificial intelligence and predictive algorithms, and how organizations can reform their organizational culture to meet the public’s changing expectations.

Course Objectives

In this course, you will learn about the expectations of leaders in the 21st century. In addition to profitability, investors, employees, and consumers increasingly demand that firms make a positive contribution to society. But what does that mean, and why would you let that get in the way of maximizing profits? After taking this course, you will have gained an understanding of why responsible leadership is not at odds with profitability, why conflict emerges and how you can navigate it. You will be able to better navigate challenging situations, having experienced them through cases and interactive simulations and having had the chance to reflect on those experiences.

Grading



Academic Integrity

Responsible leadership depends on integrity, and one cannot pass this class while engaging in academic misconduct. The course has a zero-tolerance policy toward plagiarism, cheating on assessments, and any other form of misconduct. Quizzes are closed book and must be completed on your own. Any such act, no matter the weighting of the assignment, will lead to an F for the entire course.

Use of ChatGPT and other generative AI tools is allowed without restrictions, and indeed encouraged to help you clarify your thinking. A good approach is to turn bullet points into a rough draft, then revise for conciseness, clarity, insightfulness, and to express your own voice. Good writing is important, but AI's output is very generic: it may look creative to you if you only read one essay, but 60 essays will follow nearly identical structures. Formulaic writing is boring, and boring writing is bad.

Course Readings

There is no textbook for this class. Short readings are available via Canvas.

Time Commitments

You should expect to spend approximately 2 hours on readings in advance of each Week of classes. In addition, there will be two field assignments (Week 2 and Week 3) that require you to interact with others and that you should anticipate spending six hours on.

Quizzes

In Weeks 2, 3, and 4, we will have short, 5-item multiple choice quizzes. Questions will relate to the course readings for the week, plus the class content (but not the cases) from the previous week. This is a commitment device to help you come to class prepared, which is important to ensure we have productive discussions.

Assignments

First Impressions (Canvas Discussion Board, Not Graded)

January 2, 23:59

Field Assignment #1: Open Ears, Open Minds

January 16, 23:59

Field Assignment #2: Career Compass

January 23, 23:59

Reflection

January 28, 23:59

Course Schedule

Assigned readings for the week are listed below. Please complete these readings prior to the class.

Week 1: The Responsible Leader (January 3, 2026)

Creating “Value?” Responsible Leadership and Why It Matters

- The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits
- Managing for Shareholders and the Purpose of Business

Corporate Social Responsibility

- Merck & Co., Inc: Addressing Third-World Needs (A)

Week 2: (Un)Ethical Decision-Making (January 10, 2026)

Behavioral Ethics

- Sons and Daughters: Guanxi as a Double-Edged Sword

The Dark Side of ESG

- BlackRock: Linking Purpose to Profit
- Turing Pharmaceuticals: The Ethics of Drug Pricing

Week 3: Navigating Conflict (January 17, 2026)

The Cost of Conflict

- Morllex: Leading a Technology Start-Up in a Fast-Changing Environment
- Google LLC: The Diversity Manifesto and Leader Candour
- Google’s Ideological Echo Chamber (read this **after** the Google LLC case)

Dealing with Disagreement

- Bad Blood on the Senior Team

Extra Activity: Spinning Class (January 11 & 18, 2026)

FocusCycle Hong Kong

Week 4: Ethical Challenges (January 24, 2026)

Ethics in the Digital Era

- Facebook: Can Ethics Scale in the Digital Age?
- TraceTogether

Organizational Culture

- Rob Parson at Morgan Stanley (A)