



**Leadership In Times of Great Uncertainty:
Using Behavioral Science to Create Change**
PubPol 475/750

**Ford School of Public Policy
The University of Michigan
Fall 2023**

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Office: Weill Hall 4125

In-Person Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30-4:00pm and by appointment

Remote Classroom: See Canvas for Zoom log-in

Special Guests from Evidn.: John Pickering, Ph.D., Chief Behavioral Scientist, john@evidn.com

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Feel free to reach out to us via email anytime.

COURSE RATIONALE: There has arguably never been a more important moment in our history for leaders and leadership. Climate change, civil unrest, global conflict, and economic instability are all coming together to create a great collision of uncertainty. Leaders have an unprecedented opening to develop new capabilities in how they interpret and generate meaning and purpose from this collision of uncertainty because, despite our current challenges, our world has been unfrozen from the shackles of routine, habits, and norms. By leveraging this moment to explore, experiment, and learn, leaders and their stakeholders have a unique opportunity to redefine the scope of our priorities and collective actions.

We use the word “unfrozen” deliberately. In 1947, behavioral psychologist Kurt Lewin proposed a process model of change that denoted three stages: unfreezing, change, and refreezing. Lewin built his model from the assumption that individuals view change as undesirable because of its inherent uncertainty, and that organizations are unlikely to change because of the social and financial risks associated with deviating from the status quo. The first requisite step is to create the conditions for change and unfreeze. Only then, espoused Lewin — through increases in pressures that facilitate the need for adjustment or transformation, and by reducing resistance to and tension from the prospect of alteration — will “change” become a viable next stage.

Usually unfreezing is slow and time-consuming, but the great collision of uncertainty has effectively thawed social and professional spheres of life in a matter of months. We are living in a moment rich with opportunities to fundamentally improve how we live, how we relate to society, how we interact with government, and how we do business. We are living in a world that is desperate for leaders who embrace the science of system-level change.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: The objective of this course is to explore how social reform, equity, and a recalibration of health-wealth trade-offs can become driving forces in modern organizations and manifest as core responsibilities for the leaders that shape them. In adopting a behavioral systems approach, we consider how decision-makers can enact positive, radical social change.

GRADING COMPONENTS: This course will provide you with a step-by-step guide to understanding behavioral change. Each week, you will be asked to put course concepts into practice. Specifically, with the coaching of Evidn. Behavioral Scientists, your team will tackle a real-world behavioral problem. The assignments, therefore, are all team-based and will primarily consist of research, original data collection and analyses, as well as comprehensive recommendations to enact change. Final grades will be based on the following components:

Team Report #1: Defining the Problem and Evidence Review	20%
Team Report #2: Stakeholder Mapping and Engagement	20%
Team Report #3: Driving and Restraining Forces	20%
Team Report #4: Theory of Change	20%
Class Attendance	20%

LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY: I know life can get crazy sometimes, especially in these uncertain times! To provide you some flexibility on due dates—instead of grading all late assignments a “zero”—unexcused late assignments will be reduced by 5% for every 24-hours after the due date has passed. If you know in advance of a due date that you will be unable to meet it, please contact me so that we can discuss an extension.

CLASS OVERVIEW: Below is a snapshot of our course structure this term. Please refer to our Canvas page for a full list of assignment due dates, grading rubrics, and session details.

Module #1: Resetting our Understanding and Expectations of What’s Possible	
Session 1: The Psychology of Behavioral Change Why change is hard and how uncertainty is helping us reset our understanding and expectations of what’s possible.	
Module #2: Behavioral Systems Analysis	
Session 2: BSA Framework Overview How to apply a systems approach to analyzing behavior across populations.	
Session 3: System INPUTS How to develop a strong understanding of the focal problem.	Team Report #1 due
Session 4: System OUTPUTS How to derive potential driving and restraining forces from your analysis. These outputs will form the basis for your theory of change.	Team Report #2 due
Module #3: BSA Practicum	
Session 5: Developing a Theory of Change Project review and feedback from Evidn. behavioral scientists.	Team Report #3 due
Session 6: Team Presentations Each team will present their theory of change to the class.	Team Report #4 due

FORD SCHOOL INCLUSIVITY STATEMENT: Members of the Ford School community represent a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives. We are committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. While working together to build this community we ask all members to:

- share their unique experiences, values, and beliefs
- be open to the views of others
- honor the uniqueness of their colleagues
- appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other in this community
- value one another's opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature
- use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in Ford classes and across the UM community

FORD SCHOOL PUBLIC HEALTH PROTECTION POLICY: In order to participate in any in-person aspects of this course--including meeting with other students to study or work on a team project--you must follow all the public health safety measures and policies put in place by the State of Michigan, Washtenaw County, the University of Michigan, and the Ford School. Up to date information on U-M policies can be found [here](#). It is expected that you will protect and enhance the health of everyone in the Ford School community by staying home and following self-isolation guidelines if you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING: The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. We acknowledge that a variety of issues, both those relating to the pandemic and other issues such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, can directly impact students' academic performance and overall wellbeing. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available.

You may access the Ford School's embedded counselor Paige Ziegler (contact information TBD) and/or counselors and urgent services at [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS) and/or [University Health Service](#) (UHS). Students may also use the Crisis Text Line (text '4UMICH' to 741741) to be connected to a trained crisis volunteer. You can find additional resources both on and off campus through the [University Health Service](#) and through [CAPS](#).

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: The University of Michigan recognizes disability as an integral part of diversity and is committed to creating an inclusive and equitable educational environment for students with disabilities. Students who are experiencing a disability-related barrier should contact Services for Students with Disabilities <https://ssd.umich.edu/>; 734-763-3000 or ssdoffice@umich.edu). For students who are connected with SSD, accommodation requests can be made in Accommodate. If you have any questions or concerns please contact your SSD Coordinator or visit SSD's Current Student webpage. SSD considers aspects of the course

design, course learning objects and the individual academic and course barriers experienced by the student. Further conversation with SSD, instructors, and the student may be warranted to ensure an accessible course experience.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: The Ford School academic community, like all communities, functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. We hold all members of our community to high standards of scholarship and integrity. To accomplish its mission of providing an optimal educational environment and developing leaders of society, the Ford School promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct. Academic dishonesty may be understood as any action or attempted action that may result in creating an unfair academic advantage for oneself or an unfair academic advantage or disadvantage for any other member or members of the academic community. Plagiarism involves representing the words, ideas, or work of others as one's own in writing or presentations, and failing to give full and proper credit to the original source. Conduct, without regard to motive, that violates the academic integrity and ethical standards will result in serious consequences and disciplinary action.

The Ford School's policy of academic integrity can be found in the [MPP](#), [BA](#), and [PhD Program](#) handbooks. Additional information regarding academic dishonesty, plagiarism and misconduct and their consequences is available [here](#).

Use of Technology: Students should follow instructions from their instructor as to acceptable use of technology in the classroom, including laptops, in each course. All course materials (including slides, assignments, handouts, pre-recorded lectures or recordings of class) are to be considered confidential material and are not to be shared in full or part with anyone outside of the course participants. Likewise, your own personal recording (audio or video) of your classes or office hour sessions is allowed only with the express written permission of your instructor. If you wish to post course materials or photographs/videos of classmates or your instructor to third-party sites (e.g. social media), you must first have informed consent. ***Without explicit permission from the instructor and in some cases your classmates, the public distribution or posting of any photos, audio/video recordings or pre-recordings from class, discussion section or office hours, even if you have permission to record, is not allowed and could be considered academic misconduct.***

Please review additional information and policies regarding [academic expectations and resources](#) at the Ford School of Public Policy.