

EMBODIED LEADERSHIP

Course code

Level of studies

Graduate

Number of credits

6 ECTS; 28 (60 min.) class hours, 132 hours of self-study,
2 hours of consultation

Course coordinators (title and name)

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Prerequisites

Undergraduate diploma

Language of instruction

English

THE AIM OF THE COURSE

What is a body to a leader? In an age when an increasing amount of calculating, analysing, predicting and organizing can be performed by AI, the quality of a leader's physical presence becomes ever more significant. The body is not merely a means of carrying the "talking head," nor only a source of wellbeing and productivity. In leadership, it is a primary means of communication, a source of tacit and situated knowledge, and a gateway to attentive and timely action.

In this course, personal movement exploration and movement within a group become practical methods for investigating the leadership challenges of our time: rapid change, increasing complexity, interdependence and a high degree of uncertainty. Through embodied experience, participants develop three interconnected capacities: sensing and regulating themselves; communicating and relating through the quality of their presence; and sensing the wider social systems in which they participate.

Self-sensing enables leaders to recognize their embodied states, habitual responses, limits and possibilities. It supports adaptive stability: the capacity to remain grounded and responsive without becoming rigid, and to find possibility—even joy—within conditions of continuous change.

Embodied relational communication begins with the recognition that a leader's presence is not a private inner state. Before a leader speaks, the quality of their attention, tension, openness, rhythm and orientation is already perceived by others and influences what becomes possible in the group. Communication and sense-making are therefore fundamentally embodied and reciprocal processes: people do not merely exchange information, but continuously affect, regulate and interpret one another through their presence. Developing embodied awareness enables leaders to communicate with greater congruence, perceive how they participate in relational dynamics and intentionally cultivate conditions for trust, openness and collective intelligence.

Systems sensing extends embodied awareness beyond the individual and interpersonal levels. Leaders are always participating in larger relational and organizational systems, and their presence influences what those systems can perceive, express and do. The body can therefore become an instrument for sensing relationships, social fields and emerging possibilities. This complements traditional systems thinking with the capacity to perceive a living system from within, recognize patterns that are not yet fully articulated and help the system see and transform itself.

Through Social Presencing Theater, mindfulness and MOVI movement practice, participants will explore how individual, relational and collective knowing arise through embodied experience. They will learn to access tacit knowledge, question habitual interpretations, listen beyond the already known and translate deeper sensing into authentic and responsible action. The course invites leaders to move more gracefully from knowing to acting—and from acting upon a system to participating consciously within it.

PARTICIPATION

This course emphasizes practical engagement and physical participation to the best of each student's abilities. It involves movement, stillness, moments of discomfort and high concentration, however no previous training is required. Physical contact and partnering with others will be part of the process.

For each session, students are expected to wear movement-appropriate clothing, preferably loose long-sleeve clothes. Sports shoes are not allowed in the venue; bare feet or light socks are recommended.

LOCATION

The course will be held at Movement Vilnius (MOVI), J.Jasinskio g. 10, second floor. www.movi.lt and ISM University of management and economics, Gedimino pr. 7, as indicated in the Course Outline

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Course learning outcomes (CLO)	Study methods	Assessment methods
CLO1. Navigate Complexity and Cultivate Adaptive Learning: Students will develop the ability to navigate and move within complex environments, honing their skills in adapting to new and unpredictable situations. They will learn how to learn, embracing a growth mindset and acquiring strategies to continually adapt their leadership approach. By cultivating adaptive learning, students will be better equipped to thrive in dynamic and ever-changing contexts.	Introductory lecture, participation in practical group work, guided reflections and discussions	Practical engagement evaluation, Essay
CLO2. Gain Deeper Body Knowledge: Students will acquire in-depth knowledge about their bodies, including understanding how they function in response to diverse tasks. They will develop a heightened awareness of their personal limits and potential, enabling them to make informed decisions and take appropriate action. By gaining a deeper understanding of their bodies, students will maximize their personal effectiveness and harness their full potential as embodied leaders.	Introductory lecture, participation in practical group work, guided reflections and discussions	Practical engagement evaluation, Essay
CLO3. Utilize Self-Regulation Strategies in Crisis Situations: Students will employ self-regulation strategies to manage stress, maintain focus, and build resilience during times of crisis, enabling them to lead effectively and make sound decisions under pressure.	Lecture, reflections, individual study, home assignment	Practical engagement evaluation, Essay
CLO4. Communicate through embodied presence: Students will recognize that communication extends beyond verbal content and will develop awareness of how attention, posture, spatial orientation, rhythm, emotional tone and bodily responsiveness influence others. They will learn to perceive and regulate their participation in relational dynamics and to cultivate conditions for trust, openness and collective sense-making.	Lecture, reflections, individual study, home assignment	Practical engagement evaluation, Essay
CLO5. Build capacity to sense and act from a deeper source – the tacit knowledge. Students will cultivate a capacity for deeper social field awareness. Through individual and group practice, which is rooted in embodiment, mindfulness and systems thinking participants will learn to engage their physical and spatial intelligence for deeper understanding of complex social relations and will be invited to pursue more sincere and impactful action.	Lectures, practical exercises, group work, discussions	Practical engagement evaluation, Essay
CLO6. Gain tools for embodied sense and decision making. Students will use tools which are effective means for helping system sense and see themselves thus contributing to the more traditional <i>systems thinking</i> approach with that of a <i>systems sensing</i> . Students will be guided to access the wisdom present in the groups for a more engaging and informed complex problem solving.	Lectures, participation in practical group work, team presentations	Practical engagement evaluation, Essay
CLO7. Engage in Self-Reflection and Navigate Group Dynamics: Students will engage in self-reflection activities to deepen their self-awareness as embodied leaders, fostering an understanding of their strengths, limitations, and leadership style. They will also actively participate in group exercises, collaborating with partners and navigating different group dynamics by taking turns leading and following, providing constructive feedback, and adapting their approach to foster effective teamwork and synergy.	Engagement in practical group work, giving and receiving feedback, group reflections	Practical engagement evaluation, Essay

COURSE OUTLINE

Topic	In-class hours	Recommended literature on the topic
Theme: "What is a body to a leader? Embodied mind" Practice: - "Seeing" check-in - Coming back to embodied "self": "20-minute dance" - Group rhythm: tuning in and out / 5 speeds - Creative composition: "25 gestures" - Standing practice	January 14th 18.00 – 21.00 At MOVI	Embodied Cognition by Karl Friston https://youtu.be/HW0JnjgCO3o?si=4_khMdupw-hKm9at George Lakoff and Mark Johnson on Embodied Metaphors https://youtu.be/IYcQcwUfo8c?si=mO68WPa11Ymm2s-n Varela, Francisco. "The Embodied Mind." Publisher: The MIT Press, Year: 2017. Johnson, Mark. "The Aesthetics of Meaning and Thought: The Bodily Roots of Philosophy, Science, Morality, and Art." Publisher: Northwestern University Press, Year: 2008. Johnson, Mark. "Embodied Mind, Meaning, and Reason: How Our Bodies Give Rise to Understanding." Publisher: University of Chicago Press, Year: 2017. Damasio, Antonio. <i>Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain</i>. Penguin Books, 1994. Justas Kučinskas on Standing Practice https://medium.com/@justas_8227/standing-as-practice-85519aad7ac9 Hamilton, Pete. "Embodied Leadership." Publisher: Columbia University Press, Year: 2019.
Theme: Moving in complexity: constrained approach to human development. Repeating without repetition. Practice: - Exploring human movement territory - Figure 8 object manipulation and creative composition - Self-regulation through 5 fundamental movement qualities	January 15th 17.00-20.00 At MOVI	Bernstein, M.D. "On Dexterity and Its Development." Publisher: Routledge, Year: 1996. Gray, Rob. "How We Learn to Move." Publisher: Routledge, Year: 2018. https://youtu.be/5udt94Ry7lc?si=vQrDSyaEGnrHU90t Gibson, J.J. <i>The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception</i>. Houghton Mifflin, 1979. Feldenkrais, Moshe. "Awareness Through Movement." Publisher: HarperOne, Year: 2009. van der Kolk, Bessel. "The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain, and Body in the Transformation of Trauma." Publisher: Penguin Books, Year: 2015.
Theme: Theory U and "4 levels of listening" Practice: - Embodied listening practice - Embodied dialogues	January 18th 18.00-21.00 At ISM	Otto Scharmer on 4 levels of listening https://youtu.be/eLfXpRkVZal?si=aHYHzhVv0U5tIO3a Scharmer, Otto. "Theory U." Publisher: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Year: 2007. Tolle, Eckhart. "The Power of Now." Publisher: New World Library, Year: 1999

Theme: Embodied communication: space, time, motion Practice: - Sensing "the field": "Dance of 5s"	January 20th 18.00-21.00 At MOVI	Senge, Peter. "Presence." Publisher: Currency, Year: 2005.
Theme: Social Presencing Theater – the Art of Making a True Move Practice: - "Village" - "Field dance"	January 22nd 17.00-20.00 At MOVI	Hayashi, Arawana. "Social Presencing Theater: The Art of Making a True Move." Publisher: Presencing Institute, Year: 2014.
Theme: From crisis to a possibility: working with the seeds of the future Practice: - "Stuck"	January 25th 18.00-21.00 At ISM	https://www.u-school.org/stuck
Theme: Engaging and leading complex living systems, personal and collective sense making through embodied experience Practice: - "4D Systems Mapping"	January 27th 18.00-21.00 At ISM	Senge, Peter. "The Fifth Discipline." Publisher: Currency, Year: 2006. https://www.u-school.org/4d-mapping
Theme: Embodied peer coaching for innovative solutions Practice: - "Case clinic"	January 29th 17.00 – 20.00 At ISM	
Theme: Envisioning an emerging future Practice: - "Field of the future exploration"	January 30th 10.00 – 14.00 At MOVI	
	Total: 28 astronomical hours	

FINAL GRADE COMPOSITION

The final score for the class will be determined by adding up the scores from each of the assignments.

Type of assignment	Maximum score	Percentage
Attendance and physical participation in tasks	10	40
Participation in reflections and group discussions	10	30
Essay	10	30
Total:	10	100

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria (1-10):

- Attendance and physical participation in tasks:** Students are expected to attend the class and actively participate in the physical tasks to the best of their abilities. The level of commitment and participation will be evaluated as follows:
 - 1: Not attending
 - 5: Poorly attending or not fully participating or committing to the task
 - 6-8: Attending, but moderately engaging in the tasks
 - 9-10: Always present and fully committed to the task, actively trying and seeking solutions when facing challenges

2. **Participation in reflections and group discussions:** After each practical task, there will be guided reflections and group discussions. Students are expected to actively participate by sharing their insights and experiences. The level of participation will be evaluated as follows:
 - 1: Not attending
 - 5: Attending but not sharing insights
 - 6-8: Rarely sharing insights
 - 9-10: Actively listening and actively participating by sharing quality insights
3. **Essay (Approx. 1500 words):** Students are required to write a 1500-word essay on one of the course topics, discussing the related reading material and reflecting on their own experiences. The essays will be evaluated based on the following criteria:
 - 1: No essay submitted
 - 5: Essay is submitted but lacks coherence between theoretical ideas and personal experience
 - 6-8: Essay is written in a clear academic language, creatively elaborating on the reading material in relation to personal experience
 - 9-10: Essay is written in a clear academic language, creatively elaborating on the reading material in relation to personal experience, proposing novel ideas and asking thought-provoking questions

Note: The essay should be submitted electronically before the assigned due date.

RETAKE POLICY. Final assessment can be retaken in a form of an essay and personal interview if agreed in advance with the course lecturer.

AI USE POLICY

This is a practice-based course. The primary material being assessed is your own participation, embodied experience, observation, and reflective judgment. AI tools may be used as a dialogue partner to help you make sense of your experiences, explore connections with course concepts and readings, generate questions, consider alternative interpretations, organize notes, and improve the clarity or language of your essay.

The underlying reflection must remain genuinely yours. AI may not be used to fabricate or embellish experiences, observations, class participation, quotations, or engagement with the readings. It must not replace your first-person account or your own interpretive judgment. Any AI-generated ideas or formulations used in the submitted work must be critically evaluated, adapted, and meaningfully integrated into your own reflection.

Any use of AI in preparing the essay must be disclosed briefly at the end of the submission by naming the tool and explaining how it was used (for example: sense-making dialogue, exploring links to theory, structuring, or language editing). Students remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of their work. Do not share identifiable or private information about classmates or group processes with an AI tool without their consent.

Academic Honesty and Integrity: The ISM University of Management and Economics Code of Ethics regarding cheating and plagiarism applies to this course. Any academic dishonesty or cheating will be strictly dealt with and may result in reporting to the ISM Committee of Ethics.

Class Conduct/Professional Behavior: Students are expected to behave professionally and in a manner suitable for an educational setting. It is important to prioritize personal safety as well as the safety of others. Inappropriate behavior may lead to the student being asked to leave the class. The use of smartphones, including video or audio recording, during class time is not allowed without permission from the instructors of the course.

Recommended Readings:

- Bernstein, M. D. (1996). *On dexterity and its development*. Routledge.
- Damasio, A. R. (1994). *Descartes' error: Emotion, reason, and the human brain*. Penguin Books.
- Feldenkrais, M. (2009). *Awareness through movement*. HarperOne.
- Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Gray, R. (2018). *How we learn to move*. Routledge.
- Hamilton, P. (2019). *Embodied leadership*. Columbia University Press.
- Hayashi, A. (2014). *Social presencing theater: The art of making a true move*. Presencing Institute.
- Johnson, M. (2008). *The aesthetics of meaning and thought: The bodily roots of philosophy, science, morality, and art*. Northwestern University Press.
- Johnson, M. (2017). *Embodied mind, meaning, and reason: How our bodies give rise to understanding*. University of Chicago Press.
- Scharmer, O. (2007). *Theory U*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Scharmer, O., & Pomeroy, E. (2024). Fourth person: The knowing of the field. *Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change*, 4(1), 19–48. <https://doi.org/10.47061/jasc.v4i1.7909>
- Scharmer, O. (2025). *Seven-step presencing practice 2025-26*. Presencing Institute. <https://medium.com/presencing-institute-blog/seven-step-presencing-practice-2025-26-45d8b871b468>
- Scharmer, O. (2026). *Holding the gaze steady: Nine observations on civilizational rupture and the emerging future*. Presencing Institute. <https://medium.com/presencing-institute-blog/holding-the-gaze-steady-87b5a5aa9513>
- Shepherd, P. (2010). *New self, new world: Recovering our senses in the twenty-first century*. North Atlantic Books.
- Shepherd, P. (2017). *Radical wholeness: The embodied present and the ordinary grace of being*. North Atlantic Books.
- Senge, P. (2005). *Presence*. Currency.
- Senge, P. (2006). *The fifth discipline*. Currency.
- Tolle, E. (1999). *The power of now*. New World Library.
- Varela, F. J., Thompson, E., & Rosch, E. (1991). *The embodied mind: Cognitive science and human experience*. MIT Press.
- Van der Kolk, B. (2015). *The body keeps the score: Mind, brain, and body in the transformation of trauma*. Penguin Books.

ANNEX

DEGREE LEVEL LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Competency goals and learning objectives for Master of Business Management

Programmes:

Global Leadership and Strategy

Innovation and Technology Management

International Marketing and Management

Competency Goal	Learning Objectives
Students will demonstrate advanced disciplinary knowledge.	LO1.1. Students will demonstrate advanced discipline knowledge through the independent development of a Master's thesis, showing a deep understanding and appropriate application of theories, concepts, and methods relevant to their field of study.
Students will be digitally competent.	LO 2.1. Students will demonstrate digital agility competencies by selecting and applying appropriate tools, platforms or technologies, integrating digital insights into business decision-making, and adapting digital approaches in response to evolving project requirements and contextual changes.
Students will be critical thinkers	LO3.1. Students will be able to define the business problem and develop innovative solutions
	LO3.2. Students will be able to demonstrate critical thinking in problem solving
Students will be independent learners	LO4.1. Students will become independent learners and develop their own comprehension of scientific theories, models, and concepts.
Students will be socially responsible leaders	LO5.1. Students will be able to evaluate past and current practices in their discipline from an ethical perspective.
Students will be effective communicators	LO6.1. Students will develop and deliver a coherent oral presentation
	LO6.2. Students will develop and deliver a coherent written research paper

Competency goals and learning objectives for the Master of Social Science

Programmes:

Financial Economics

Competency Goal	Learning Objective
Students will demonstrate advanced disciplinary knowledge.	LO1.1. Students will demonstrate advanced discipline knowledge through the independent development of a Master's thesis, showing a deep understanding and appropriate application of theories, concepts, and methods relevant to their field of study.
Students will be digitally competent.	LO 2.1. Students will demonstrate digital agility competencies by selecting and applying appropriate tools, platforms or technologies, integrating digital insights into business decision-making, and adapting digital approaches in response to evolving project requirements and contextual changes.
Students will be critical thinkers	LO3.1. Students will be able to identify underlying assumptions, limitations of previous research; evaluate managerial solution alternatives.
Students will be independent learners	LO4.1. Students will become independent learners and develop their own comprehension of scientific theories, models, and concepts
Students will be socially responsible leaders	LO5.1. Students will be able to evaluate past and current practices in their discipline from an ethical perspective .
Students will be effective communicators	LO6.1. Students will develop and deliver a coherent oral presentation
	LO6.2. Students will develop and deliver a coherent written research paper