


## International Summer University<sup>WU</sup> 2025

WU (Vienna University of Economics and Business)

### Course Outline

| Course Title                   | Sense and purpose in leading people - the holistic approach   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>Instructors</b>             | <p>Harald POSCH<br/> <a href="mailto:focusonhumans@gmail.com">focusonhumans@gmail.com</a></p> <p>HR / Change Management Expert,<br/> Consultant</p> <p>&amp;</p> <p>Stephan KLINGER (left)<br/> <a href="mailto:stephan.klinger@wu.ac.at">stephan.klinger@wu.ac.at</a></p> <p>WU (Vienna University of Economics and<br/> Business)<br/> Department of Human Resource<br/> Management</p>  |
| <b>Language of instruction</b> | English   |
| <b>Course level</b>            | Graduate  |
| <b>Contact hours</b>           | 35 teaching hours (45 min. each)  |

| Aim of the Course   |
|---|
| <p><b>“Change is the only constant in life.”</b> Since the early days of globalization, managers and consultants have often quoted this timeless wisdom from the Greek philosopher Heraclitus to highlight that change—whether in people, organizations, markets, or the world at large—is an inherent aspect of life. Yet, even amidst constant flux, individuals naturally seek stability and meaning in both their personal and professional lives.</p> <p>Organizations articulate their meanings through mission statements, codes of conduct, or sustainability reports. However, shared meaning is not solely dictated by managerial decisions or written documents; it is socially constructed. To shift the focus from mere decision-making to deeper organizational meaning, we must closely examine the processes of sensemaking and purpose. These processes are often triggered by significant events, new leadership, shifting shareholder demands, threatened identities, or crises that bring ambiguity and uncertainty. Such moments disrupt the flow of daily life, challenge existing understandings, and prompt a need to reimagine how to act. At its core, sensemaking is the idea that reality is an ongoing accomplishment—one that emerges from our efforts to create order and make sense of events in hindsight.</p> <p><b>“From vulnerability to resilience.”</b> In this course, we will delve into the mechanisms and processes of sensemaking in organizations and explore the fundamental purpose of management. We will also investigate how leadership can shape this process of navigating unfamiliarity—the “Negotiation of Strangeness”—through tools like sense-giving or sense-breaking. Ultimately, the</p> |

course aims to provide insights into how leaders can create organizations that are not just resilient but also meaningful and enabling.

### Learning Objectives

- To find out what sense and purpose is or at least could be
- To gain knowledge how to create sense and purpose when leading people
- To have a closer look how sense and purpose can be / is created in various fields
- To know more about change management and cultural aspects
- Holistic thinking and liberating creativity

### Application Requirements and / or Prerequisites

Application requirements for the International Summer University WU can be found [on the ISU WU website](#).

Applicants interested in participating in the International Summer University<sup>WU</sup> need an excellent command of the English language. The English language requirements can be found at [ISU<sup>WU</sup> Language Requirements](#).

### Teaching Methods

Lectures, presentations, discussions, simulations, group works, interventions

### Pre-Course Assignment

For the pre-course assignment students will deal with the course literature, do some research and prepare short presentations (Deadline: July 4th, 2025).

Students will receive the material and appropriate instructions by the end of May 2025.

| Course Contents |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Day 1           | Introduction,<br>Results of PCA   |
| Day 2           | Sense & Purpose,<br>Research Techniques,<br>Group formation                       |
| Day 3           | Sense & Purpose in Leadership I,<br>Simulation                                    |
| Day 4           | Sense & Purpose in Organisations,<br>Change Management                            |
| Day 5           | Sense & Purpose in Leadership II,<br>Sense & Purpose in diverse fields in Vienna  |
| Day 6           | Me & My Sense & Purpose,<br>Sense & Purpose in diverse fields in Vienna           |
| Day 7           | Sense & Purpose in diverse fields in Vienna,<br>Sense & Purpose in Leadership III |
| Day 8           | Conclusions / Evaluation  |

### Comments

This is a tentative course syllabus. All content is subject to change.

| Criteria for successful completion of the course  |
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| <p><b>Grading Scale</b><br/>           100-90% excellent (1)<br/>           89-80% good (2)<br/>           79-70% satisfactory (3)<br/>           69-60% sufficient (4)<br/>           59-0% fail (5)</p> |

| Assessment  |
|---|
| <p>Pre-course assignment: 35%<br/>           Students project: 35%<br/>           Active participation/contribution: 30%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please note: students' attendance and punctuality are mandatory in all classes except in cases of illness.</li> </ul> |

| Course Literature   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is responsible – and for what? An antenarrative perspective on organizational members' crisis sensemaking of responsibility during a corporate scandal. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267231205781">https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267231205781</a></li> <li>Thirty-five years of sensemaking in the business &amp; management research: a bibliometric analysis, review and discussion. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-024-00458-5">https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-024-00458-5</a></li> <li>Purpose in Management Research: Navigating a Complex and Fragmented Area of Study. <a href="https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2022.0186">https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2022.0186</a></li> <li>BlackRock: LARRY FINK'S 2019 LETTER TO CEOS / PURPOSE &amp; PROFIT <a href="https://www.wlrc.com/files/2019/DOCUMENT_FIVE_Lawrence_Fink_2019_letter.pdf">https://www.wlrc.com/files/2019/DOCUMENT_FIVE_Lawrence_Fink_2019_letter.pdf</a></li> <li>Wallace, David Foster (2009). This is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about living a compassionate Life (Commencement speech); YouTube (<a href="https://youtu.be/8CrOL-ydFMI">https://youtu.be/8CrOL-ydFMI</a>)</li> </ul> |

| Further Readings suggested by the Lecturer(s) |
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| n/a   |

| Information on the Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools  |
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| <p>The use of AI tools is permitted and, for certain exercises, even required. These tools are intended to support your learning process by enhancing creativity, improving analytical capabilities, and fostering deeper engagement with the course material. However, students are encouraged to critically assess and reflect on the outputs of AI tools to ensure they align with academic integrity and the objectives of the course. Transparent acknowledgment of AI use in assignments is expected where applicable.</p> |

Please note the following information on the total workload of the respective course:

| Course level | ECTS credits | Pre-course workload | In-class activity   | Outside of class workload during the program |
|--------------|--------------|---------------------|---|--|
| Graduate     | 4            | approx. 20 hours    | 27 hours (= 35 teaching hours) + wrap-up session on day 8 | approx. 33 hours                             |