LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

A compass for change adventurers

Programme pitch

Organizational transformations are adventures where leadership, rather than plans and standard operating procedures, is key to success. We teach the latest scientific knowledge on change management as well as the skills that you will need ‘on the ground’ as a frontrunner (‘leader’) of change, namely intervention/project management, rhetorical, and political skills. This programme’s unique focus on leadership of change will help you discover your compass and social responsibility to navigate yourself and others through uncertainty.

The programme is about

Area of interest

The Leadership & Change Management programme is a traveler’s guide for frontrunners (change agents and change crews) in organizations. In this programme you will acquire evidence-based knowledge about the complexities of (planned) strategic interventions from multiple perspectives and in various settings including private companies, public organizations, and large-scale institutions. All of the courses offered in the Leadership & Change Management programme are taught with both macro (e.g., organizational/institutional) and micro (e.g., individual, behavioral) perspectives on the subject matter. At the same time you will learn about the complexities of implementing change ‘on the ground’, where plans and standard operating procedures usually provide little help and where leaders rise to the occasion. By learning project management and rhetorical skills, and – last but not least – by becoming comfortable with your personal story, growth and vision (as ‘reflective practitioners’), you might learn to become that frontrunner (and, thus, ‘leader’) of change.

Programme relevance

Students of the Leadership & Change Management programme are original and multidisciplinary thinkers and come from a very diverse range of backgrounds that are not necessarily restricted to business studies and economics. As we aim to instill an interdisciplinary mindset in students of change management, students from bachelor programmes in Psychology, Sociology, and the Humanities will find it very useful to deepen their knowledge about our subject matter, given their ability and willingness to get acquainted with sufficient foundational knowledge about macro-organizational (e.g., institutional) and micro-behavioral (organizational behavior) theories.

Target group

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Challenge to distinguish

The Leadership & Change Management program offers multiple possibilities for excellent and ambitious students to distinguish themselves by taking additional courses and participating in tailored activities. We offer the renowned VU Honours Programme that includes advanced courses in a small-class environment, and provide special opportunities to meet with businesses throughout the programme.

Master’s relevance

Aspirational job (far future)

Depending on how you will choose to craft your own career, this Master’s programme can ultimately place you as the Chief Officer of Learning, Restructuring, Human Resources, or in mid- or late career stages as the CEO.

Actual placement (near future)

The Master’s programme will be the kick-off to your career as specialist of both leadership and organizational change that, up to 10 years after graduation, may open doors for you as a project manager, a consultant, or a specialist in organizational transformation or change management, or general management in private, public or large-scale institutions.

Community

The Leadership and Change Management programme features many social and professional activities that you can be part of. We aim to form a strong community that will help you both during your studies and afterwards. In terms of professional activities, we start each academic year with a formal Kick-Off event. We also introduce you to discussions on how to approach your studies, and in finding your first jobs. Throughout the year, we will organize similar meetings, for example in cooperation with Career Services (e.g., CV training, company visits). Our goal is to support you as much as possible in preparing for your transition to the labour market. The programme includes other activities as part of our community as well, such as a LinkedIn group that features alumni and current students, our student organization Avenu that organizes several interesting meetings, and a graduation ceremony at the end of year during which we celebrate your successes.

The programme is unique because

Academic

In the Leadership and Change Management programme you will acquire evidence-based knowledge about the complexities of (planned) strategic interventions from multiple perspectives, including Political Science, Sociology and Psychology. As for theory, we believe in the value of theory from various disciplines as it serves working professionals’ ability to adopt a helicopter view and strengthens their analytical abilities to solve important change cases. Theory and evidence will also inform students about the potential consequences of leadership decisions that will define our workplace of the future.

Professional

A professional is someone who is able to apply specialized knowledge to real-life cases. The Leadership and Change Management programme builds a students’ specialized knowledge of the design, implementation, and leadership of change processes. Too often, however, theories of change stay out of touch with the difficulties of making change happen ‘on the ground’. Our vision is to develop students who will not only become effective change agents, but also ‘reflective practitioners’ who are able to ask bigger questions that transcend the daily hustle and bustle of administration. For instance, we challenge students, as prospective leaders, to look beyond mere efficiency goals in change programs, and to develop visions that protect the both the integrity and the competitive viability of the organization.

Civic

We emphasize not only the value of effective leadership and implementation of change, but also stress the value of responsible, moral leadership with regard to various social issues that an organization may encounter. For instance, we highlight pitfalls and ‘dark sides’ of leadership and organizational change. Our teaching is imbued with core values of being responsive to listeners, responsible, open and personally engaged both as a teacher and as a practitioner. Given our emphasis on self-awareness, personal growth and vision, we emphasize a student’s vision of societal issues and personal development.

Learning goals and how the programme is designed

Learning goals

1. Have the advanced and original academic and research skills to contribute to the body of knowledge
2. Have thorough knowledge of relevant theory and methods
3. Have an academic approach to solving complex (business/economics) problems
4. Have the professional social skills to interact with other professionals
5. Have an horizon beyond the professional area
6. Are self-reflective professionals

How the programme is designed

Throughout the programme students learn to review and analyze critically the current academic debate about leadership and organizational change from various perspectives. Together with research methodology courses (focusing on both quantitative and qualitative approaches) students will be well equipped to make their own original contribution and create knowledge in their master thesis that is not only rigorously conducted but also original, interesting and important.

After two stage-setting core courses on ‘Perspectives on Organizational Change’ and ‘Intervention and project management’ students can opt for two topical modules that each goes deeper into exploring a specific aspect of leading organizational change. To develop their knowledge, students can additionally choose from several electives that are strongly based on fostering student’s ability to act in response to strategic and organizational challenges. To broaden your horizon beyond the core of strategy and organization, you can also choose electives from other Business Administration programmes. Several interdisciplinary electives offer an additional opportunity to deepen your knowledge of a topical issue in business and management beyond the boundaries of the Leadership and Change Management programme.

The courses in the Leadership and Change Management program will consistently search for links between science and practice through on-site visits, guest lectures, and assignments. For instance, we will focus on theoretical and systematic analyses of cases as the foundation for solving practical issues. Finally, to build practical knowledge, it is also possible to do an internship, thereby learning valuable skills.

Our courses have a strong focus on fostering your communicative (e.g., persuasive skills), your ability to speak up and defend your arguments and position in front of stakeholders with diverging interests (political skills). We especially focus on social skills (e.g., sensing a context, responsibility to followers’ needs), rhetorical skills (e.g., effective framing) and political skills (e.g., stakeholder management), and project management skills (e.g., lining up an organization or team to achieve goals). This will be practiced in class, and in simulations (e.g., a serious game).

We put strong emphasis on your ability to think and act critically and be reflective. This means to not take things for granted as they are, but be able to challenge them in particular the increasingly contested impact of business on stakeholders as well as social and environmental conditions. In your thesis, you are encouraged to select topics that deal with the interaction between business and society.

Together with FEWEB Career Services, the Leadership and Change Management programme offers tailor made workshops to provide you the best possible preparation for your entry to the job market. You are given an opportunity to reflect upon the skills and what you want to achieve (a personal vision on society and business). We encourage students to follow students and are introduced to the faculty members that will work with you on their master thesis. This will be tested in a vision portfolio that students can work on during their entire master year. Part of this vision portfolio is a two-minute personal video pitch (a required component of your master thesis), that can also be used to communicate a personal work identity to future employers.