

## DISCLAIMER:

This syllabus is provided for informational use only. Content and assignments may change before the start of the course and may differ between course sections. Students of this course should not use this document but instead retrieve the official version from the McGill course management site.



**McGill**

School of  
Information Studies

## GLIS 664: Knowledge Networks

### Course Syllabus

[Prof. M. Max Evans](#)

#### Objectives

- Describe the key components of a knowledge network (Community of Practice) and how they are evolving over time
- Explore the fundamental principles of social networks – different structural forms, how they develop, the benefits associated with each, and the social dynamics upon which they are based (e.g. reciprocity, trust, norms, reputation)
- Understand how networks (communities) may be visualized and how their value may be measured
- Examine the various ways in which networks may be leveraged for widespread use within corporations, institutions, and society
- Analyze the tools, workflow techniques, and social factors that enable knowledge sharing
- Discuss how networks (communities) can be built and cultivated to foster organizational learning and innovation
- Demonstrate the different techniques facilitators use to manage Communities of Practice to encourage effective knowledge management practices

**Recommended Readings:** No textbook is required. Recommended readings are available in electronic format on the web or from the McGill Library. Hardcopies will be placed on reserve where available. Additional case studies and readings will be placed on the course site during the term.

**Method:** Based on the course readings, sessions will include instructor-led lectures, seminars, group discussions, in-class activities, case studies, and guest lectures.

Office Hours: Tuesdays from 2:30-3:30PM at SIS (Professor Evans' office is Room 202A at SIS - 3661 Peel St.)

**Contact:** The best way to reach Professor Evans is by e-mail at [max.evans@mcgill.ca](mailto:max.evans@mcgill.ca). He will endeavour to answer your questions within 24 hours. If you wish to see him outside of office hours, please contact him for an appointment (phone: 514-398-3398).

**Grades and Evaluation:**

<u>Deliverable</u>	<u>Proportion of Grade</u>	<u>Due Date</u>
Critical Article Reviews:		
Critique Handouts (2@15% each)	30%	Ongoing
Presentation/Response (2@5% each)	10%	
CoP Group Design Project:		
CoP Group Paper (Business Proposal)	35%	Nov. 3
CoP Mock-up Design and Presentation	25%	Dec. 1

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**Class Participation:**

Participation in class discussions (as opposed to simply attending class) is an essential part of this course. The ability to clearly articulate your own ideas, constructively explore the implications of others' ideas, and present well-reasoned arguments in favour of a position are critical professional and academic skills. This course will provide you with ample opportunity to practice and hone these capabilities. In-class activities, cases, and seminars will provide the impetus for discussions. The expectation is that you come to each class prepared to discuss the assigned readings and are ready to contribute. Keep in mind that a high quality discussion is the goal, not high quantity airtime. It's not how much you talk, but what you say and how you say it that is important.

**Assignments:****Seminar Discussion: Critical Article Review, Presentation, and Response:**

A substantial part of this class is seminar-based, which means that we will jointly share the responsibility for uncovering the key concepts and ideas in the reading materials. For many of the topics (see class schedule below), one or more students will be assigned the role of "seminar discussion leader" and "seminar response leader", which involves laying the groundwork for the article you have selected and guiding the class discussion. Discussion leaders will give a brief (10-12 minute) presentation describing their reading (e.g., identifying the core ideas in the article and relating them to other class material/readings). A different student will be assigned to prepare a critical response, for each seminar article. The response should contain questions and comments, which prompt further discussion on key issues in each article. Typically, this will prompt the class with other questions designed to encourage discussion on key issues in each article, and on the relationships between the articles. A high quality discussion should offer a balanced critique of the article (i.e., surfacing limitations and contributions), but also go beyond the article by integrating other course material and identifying applications of the readings to relevant business examples. Ultimately, the goal is to surface assumptions, contradictions, consistencies, and points of integration.

**Critical Review Handout:** In addition to a presentation, each discussion leader will write a critical review of the article they selected. Think of the readership of this review as your classmates — they may have read the article but are looking for assistance in understanding it better and how it fits within the course material.

The review should be no longer than 3 pages (single-spaced). The first 2 pages should be dedicated primarily to a summary of the article. Some important questions to incorporate in your write up include:

1. What are the main points of the paper?
2. What assumptions or implications are made?
3. Who is quoted and what points of view do they represent?
4. Are sources based on anecdotal evidence, on research studies, on the writer's own experience?
5. Who is the audience for this paper (what kind of language/jargon is used)?

The third page should provide a critical review of the article. Some important questions to think about include:

1. What are the main strengths and shortcomings of the paper?
2. Does the author succeed (through argument or evidence) in achieving his/her purpose?
3. How does this paper relate to other material in this course and how useful (or not) is this paper for the students in this course?

You may use single spacing and are encouraged to include lists, tables, figures, diagrams and pictures. In addition, there should be a title page (including article name, author, and your name). You can also include one extra page for references, if needed. Pay close attention to the clarity, correctness, and succinctness of your writing!

The goal of the critical review handouts is to provide each student with a summary of all the articles covered in the seminars. To make this possible, handouts are due (electronically) no later than 11:59 pm on the Tuesday one week (7 days) before you are scheduled to be the seminar discussion leader (i.e., the day of your presentation). You are welcome and encouraged to submit them earlier. Seminar response leaders need not submit their questions beforehand.

CoP Group Design Project: A local organization is interested in implementing a knowledge management strategy, in which Communities of Practice (CoP) have been identified as an area to be explored through a pilot project. Your role is that of a team of KM professionals, who has been asked to write a business plan for the design of a pilot CoP to support an existing group of individuals within the organization. The CoP must bring some strategic value to the organization, in order for the plan to be accepted. You may choose the field of practice, as well as the domain, and setting of the organization.

The design project consists of two deliverables: a written report, and a mock-up design of an intranet/portal for the CoP that will be presented and discussed in class. The objective of both is to communicate the team's design and CoP support rationale. More detailed information and instructions about the CoP design project can be found on the portal.

**General Information:**

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism, and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information). Instructors who may adopt the use of text-matching software to verify the originality of students' written course work must register for use of the software with Educational Technologies and must inform their students before the add/drop deadline, in writing, of the use of text-matching software in a course.

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. No extension, delay, or late assignments will be accepted. The only acceptable circumstances for an extension or a delay is personal illness and illness of an immediate family member (physician's certificate required). If you have a disability please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation. It would also be helpful if you contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at 398-6009 before you do this. Additional policies governing academic issues which affect students can be found in the McGill Charter of Students' Rights: <http://ww2.mcgill.ca/students-handbook/chapter1.html>

**Weekly Schedule**

<b>Week 1</b> - Introduction and Course Overview; Historical Context; Social Learning
<b>Week 2</b> - Knowledge Networks and Communities of Practice: Intro
<b>Week 3</b> - Communities of Practice: Typology and Evolution
<b>Week 4</b> - Social Capital and Network Fundamentals
<b>Week 5</b> - Building and Cultivating Communities of Practice (Knowledge Networks)
<b>Week 6</b> - Reading Week
<b>Week 7</b> - Managing Knowledge in Communities
<b>Week 8</b> - The Principles of Network Closure and Homophily
<b>Week 9</b> - The Principle of Brokerage
<b>Week 10</b> - The Principle of Six Degrees of Separation
<b>Week 11</b> - Measuring and Visualizing Networks
<b>Week 12</b> - Social Media and Knowledge Media
<b>Week 13</b> - Group Student Presentations