Course Outline

Communicating Positive Deviance
Department of Communication
The University of Texas at El Paso
COMM 4364 CRN 23293
COMM 5347 CRN 23613
MAIS 5360-007 CRN 21081
3 Credit Hours
Spring 2024

Facilitator: Arvind Singhal, Ph.D., Samuel Shirley and Edna Holt Marston Endowed Professor of Communication, Department of Communication, The University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX 79968, U.S.A. E-mail: asinghal@utep.edu. I am happy to share my personal mobile number with you: +1- 740-591-9688. Please do not hesitate to text me (or call me) if there is something you consider as being important and, when texting, do not forget to sign your full name. My twitter account is: asinghalUbuntu.

Class Meeting: This class will meet every Monday in person in Classroom Building 301 (C301), Hawthorne Street, UTEP Campus from 6 to 8:50 PM. Please check the UTEP Campus Map https://www.utep.edu/map/

Office Hours and access: I will be accessible in person from 4:30 PM to 6:00 PM on all Mondays in the lobby of the Hilton Garden Inn (on campus on University Ave) for OFFICE hours. There is a restaurant there and you are welcome to have coffee or a snack with me just before class. If you plan to come to see me, I recommend you text me (at 740-591-9688) by 4 PM on Monday that you will be coming. Also, I am happy to meet with you during the break in our Monday evening class, or after class. Of course, I will also be available to you for a one-on-one appointment (in person or zoom) and that can be scheduled in advance. For routine communication, please use email asinghal@utep.edu, and I typically respond within 24 hours.

Notice: While I will post the syllabus on Blackboard, and the syllabus has links to all readings and videos except the three required books. I intend to communicate directly with you through email on your registered email addresses. So, be sure to check your email every day, especially Monday afternoons.

Course Background: Why do some students -- who are first in their family to go to college, who work full time, who hail from low socio-economic strata, who have familial responsibilities -- find a way to complete their degrees in four years, and with a high GPA, while most others in their situation fail to achieve a similar outcome? What are these students doing, without access to any additional resources and against all odds, which leads to better outcomes? How can some very poor households in rural Vietnam, who
have access to no special resources, keep their children well nourished, while most others in their situation fail to achieve a similar outcome? What are these households doing?

The Positive Deviance (PD) Approach is based on the observation that in every community, there are some individuals or groups, whose uncommon behaviors and strategies allow them to have more successful outcomes than their neighbors, even though they face the same constraints and have access to the same resources.

“A difference, to be a difference, must make a difference” --Gertrude Stein

Course Objectives: Participants will (1) understand—experientially, critically, and analytically—the positive deviance approach to social change, (2) gain hands-on experience in framing a positive deviance inquiry, and work toward the collective implementation of a small-scale pilot PD intervention(s) with other vested partners. Further, the course participants will have opportunities to learn from each other and from past experiences in implementation of the PD approach to address a variety of complex social problems such as combating childhood malnutrition in Vietnam, reducing school dropout rates in Argentina, and preventing and controlling hospital-acquired infections in US health care settings. Participants will be introduced to the essential steps involved in the PD process by acting their way into a new way of PD thinking.

Learning Outcomes: The present course — through its format of readings, discussions, activities, self-reflection, field-based action, and regular journaling seeks to provide

(1) an engaged understanding of the positive deviance approach
(2) an engaged understanding of the BIG role that small (micro) communication acts can make in bringing about social change.
(3) a reflective space for analyzing and critiquing the underlying discourses, frameworks, methods, and approaches in social, organizational, and behavioral change, and how the positive deviance approach represents an alternative.
(4) an actionable space for experimentation and experiential learning on the positive deviance approach.

Course Format: A mix of group discussions and presentations, storytelling, liberating structures, creative activities, guest speakers, case-studies, video viewings, and reflective learner notes. While engaging with relevant literature (both scholarly and general interest), the present course will consciously seek to promote a strategic, applied, orientation.

Readings: Class participants will procure and read three required books during the semester. The books are available in the UTEP bookstore. In addition to the three required books, three monographs that I have authored on positive deviance as applied to child protection and health care are provided at no cost to course participants.
Required Books

#1: The Power of Positive Deviance: How Unlikely Innovators Solve the World’s Toughest Problems  
Authors: Richard Pascale, Jerry Sternin, & Monique Sternin  

#2: How to be a Positive Leader: Small Actions, Big Impact.  
Authors: Jane Dutton and Gretchen Spreitzer.  
2014 Berrett Kohler Publishers

#3: Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard  
Authors: Chip Heath & Dan Heath  

Complementary Positive Deviance Books

In addition to the required books, you can access three of my Positive Deviance books electronically at no cost.

  https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297958038_Inspiring_Change_Saving_Lives_The_Positive_Deviance_Way

  https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297956298_Inviting_Everyone_Healing_Healthcare_through_Positive_Deviance

  https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332183926_Protecting_Children_from_Exploitation_and_Trafficking_Using_the_Positive_Deviance_Approach_in_Uganda_and_Indonesia

As the class unfolds, a set of readings or articles may be provided to you electronically (by email) on relevant topics with the expectation that you will go over them before coming to class. Several readings are provided in this syllabus as clickable links.

Grading and Assignments: The grading system for this course is based on five sets of activities.

Graduate students (those enrolled in COMM 5347 and MAIS 5360) will have the additional task of capping their Weekly Learner Notes/Reflections with a higher order 1,000 word synthesis reflection at the end—that includes a look back, key take-aways, and cumulative learning insights from the entire PD class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<td>Impromptu PD Group Assignments in Class</td>
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<td>In-Class 120-second Power Presentations</td>
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<td>Weekly Learner Notes</td>
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<td>PD Inquiry Term Projects</td>
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<td>Presence, Engagement, and Participation in Class</td>
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Final grades will be calculated based on points scored in each evaluation activity. The following general point scale will be used to compute grades: A=900 or more, B=899 to 800; C=799 to 700; D=699 to 600; F=599 or less.

**Assessment Metrics:** An assessment guide for timely submission of assignments is provided below. When submitting your learner notes, your final PD Inquiry Term Projects, and engaging in in-class work, please know that the following criteria will guide your grade:

- **A** = Exceptional work, demonstrating highest levels of engagement and grasp (does not mean “agreement”) of key course ideas, high quality of thinking, creative expression, and well-organized writing.
- **B** = Good work on criteria listed above. **C** = Poor work, etc.
- **D** = Very poor work, etc. **F** = No work.

**Academic Dishonesty:** Several types of behaviors constitute academic dishonesty and are not acceptable. Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, which involves submitting the works of others as your own and includes improper source citation, no source citation, using materials prepared by another student, and using fictitious sources.

**Special Needs:** Please let me know if you have any special needs with respect to your involvement in this class. If you have or suspect a disability and need accommodations, please contact Disabled Student Services Office (DSSO) at 747-5148 or at dss@utep.edu.

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**CLASS ONE (1/22)**

Introduction to the course and participants

**CLASS TWO (1/29)**

What is PD?

*Vietnam Case Study: Understanding the PD Process Step-by-Step*

Readings: *The Power of Positive Deviance* (First Half of Book) and


**Videos:** TEDx on Positive Deviance https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-NAvN-PLW0

**CLASS THREE (2/5)**

**Case Studies on Positive Deviance**

Readings: The Power of Positive Deviance (Second Half of Book)

Video: Positive Deviance and Malaria Control https://youtu.be/v1mtuFkDkBY

**CLASS FOUR (2/12)**

**Expanding our Understanding of the PD Approach**

*Impromptu In-Class Group Assignment #1 on PD*
Participation is Mandatory in this in-class graded activity


Video: Positive Deviance on ER—Safe Surgical checklist https://youtu.be/41G8IaTTzY

**CLASS FIVE (2/19)**

**In-Class work on PD Pitches**

Getting Started with Project Pitches on PD Inquiry Topics


Video: Complexity and Positive Deviance
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K00MsZcYzZ0&feature=related

Writing one’s name on surgery cap: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FUMWSJSXG0

CLASS SIX (2/26)

PD Inquiry Project – Defining and Determining and Discovery Phases


Videos: CBC Report on Germ Warfare
http://www.cbc.ca/video/#/Shows/The_National/Health/1274854987/ID=2213462958

Positive Deviance in a Brazil Hospital 4’ (Albert Einstein Hospitals)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-X5j1MlY77Y

CLASS SEVEN (3/3)

Positive Deviance through Liberating Structures: Transforming Groupwork with Little Tweaks


Videos:
Unscripted: What are Liberating Structures
https://vimeo.com/51546509

Learn 9 liberating structures in 42 minutes with Arvind Singhal and Henri Lipmanowicz
https://vimeo.com/60843778

3/11 SPRING BREAK: No Class Today

OVER SPRING BREAK Read: How to be a Positive Leader (Book). Complete book

CLASS EIGHT (3/18)

*120-Second Individual Power Presentations on PD Journey
Positive Deviance Leadership and Facilitation

*Bring 2-3 pages of key notes/take-aways (handwritten is fine) from How to be a Positive Leader Book and be prepared to discuss in class. Participation is mandatory.
Readings: begin reading *Switch* (Book)
Monique Sternin on PD [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ad9suSYL6RU] (6”)
Jerry Sternin on Positive Deviance [http://vimeo.com/61509784] (9’30”)

**CLASS NINE (3/25)**

What *Switch* adds to our understanding of implementing PD

*Bring 2-3 pages of key take-aways (handwritten is fine) from *Switch* Book and be prepared to submit them and discuss in class. Participation in this in-class activity is mandatory.

Readings: Finish *Switch* (Book)
Video: *Switch* [https://youtu.be/qmmwWxVz5sw](https://youtu.be/qmmwWxVz5sw)

**CLASS TEN (4/1)**

Designing a PD Intervention: Why Acting One’s Way?


Class ELEVEN (4/8)

In-Class Progress Reports on PD Inquiry Projects
Subtleties and Nuances of Implementing PD

Read: Singhal and Bjurstrom (2023) *Advancing Behavioral Economics Through Positive Deviance* [https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/p5fvacmx5nvwdq88s9mnp/Singhal_Bjurstrom_GAP_Journal_BESS2023_v5_n1-Copy.pdf?rlkey=b80tvec61ougc8ckyc46x509b&dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/p5fvacmx5nvwdq88s9mnp/Singhal_Bjurstrom_GAP_Journal_BESS2023_v5_n1-Copy.pdf?rlkey=b80tvec61ougc8ckyc46x509b&dl=0)

**CLASS TWELVE (4/15)**

In-Class Progress Reports on PD Inquiry Projects
When Not to Implement PD

**CLASS THIRTEEN (4/22)**

Roundtable on Learnings from Class
In-Class Progress Reports on PD Inquiry Projects

**CLASS FOURTEEN (4/29)**

*Presentation of PD Inquiry Projects
*Learner Notes Due electronically at asinghal@utep.edu (with summary sheet)

**FINALS WEEK (5/6)**

*PD Inquiry Term Project Reports Due Electronically at asinghal@utep.edu

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Impromptu In-Class Group Assignment on Positive Deviance
(100 points)
On February 12, 2024 you will be split into break out rooms/groups and implement an in-class impromptu positive deviance inquiry. Before this group assignment, we will take you step-by-step through all the key steps of the PD approach. You do not need to do any special preparation, just be caught up on your readings.

Class attendance is mandatory for you to get this group grade. And, peer-grading and assessment will be employed!

In addition to February 12, please note that participation in 3/18 and 3/25 classes is mandatory for in-class grade activity. You will have your Power presentations on 3/18 on your PD journey (see description below) and we will also discuss your take-aways on both days from required readings/books: *How to be a Positive Leader* and *Switch*.

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**120-Second Power Presentation**

(100 points)

On March 18, right after Spring Break, come prepared with a 120-second power (short for powerful) presentation on what your PD journey has been like. What buckets have been filled for you? What have you learned that matters? What fires have been lit? What inspires and motivates you about the PD approach?

Let your presentation be BIG and POWERFUL and CREATIVE and MEMORABLE but NO PowerPoint. Class attendance is mandatory, and peer grading will be employed.

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**Weekly Learner Notes**

(350 points)

This course includes a substantial grade assessment component based on what you believe you are learning from engaging in our readings, class discussions, reflections, and actions. This is an on-going, week-by-week, self-motivated (and monitored) activity. We will often begin our class sessions by inviting you to share your learner notes with other class participants in a small or big group.

How will you operationalize these learner-centered reflection activities?

Each of you will maintain a notebook that you can title “Learner Notes.” After each class session (starting from the first one on 1/22/24), when you return home, write a 500-word essay (about two-double spaced pages), synthesizing your key learning from that day’s class discussions, activities, and/or readings. Try to focus on the most important/revealing concepts, ideas, approaches, and/or vignettes about the positive deviance approach to social change. We suggest 500 words so that your learning insights are deep, covering the “what”, “why” (it matters), and “how” (to apply)?

You will bring your updated and typed Learner Notes to the next class session in a binder. Each Learner Note should be

(a) numbered (1,2, 3, etc.),
(b) dated (the date of the class session on which it is based), and
(c) should list the word count.

This means your first learner note – which you will bring to class on January 29, 2024 – should be dated January 22, 2024, and so on.
Each person can give themselves a break from the Learner Notes once or twice during the semester; which means we will look for 12 entries (or more) total in grading the final submission. Each day’s learning notes are thus worth roughly 30 points.

You will submit your collated Learner Notes for final review and grading in electronic MS-Word/or PDF form (sent to me at asinghal@utep.edu) by 6 p.m., April 29, 2024. All learner notes should be in one electronic file—a PDF.

**SUMMARY SHEET:** The first page of this Learner Notes doc should be a summary sheet with your name, the total number of learner notes you have, and the dates that you were not present in class.

You will need to keep a running tab of your absences (excused/non-excused).

The file name and subject line should be in the following manner: Full Name_PD Learner Notes_Spring 2024.pdf

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PD Inquiry Term Projects
(350 points)

This group project (to be carried out individually or in pairs) involves a step-by-step implementation and documentation of a Positive Deviance Project on an intractable, complex social problem in the city of El Paso. One can always make the decision to work SOLO on the project, however we encourage working in pairs or groups of three so there is peer-learning.

Regular weekly progress reports will be made by the group members in class to invite inputs from others, and on May 6, 2024 (Final Exam Week) each group (not individual) will submit a 8 to 10 page report (electronically to asinghal@utep.edu) summarizing the process through which the intractable problem was framed/defined, how a determination was made of who represent the positive deviants, and what PD behaviors were discovered that are replicable by all. A reporting template for your PD projects will be provided in class at least two weeks prior to the project being due.

Each group will present the main findings on April 29, 2024 using up to 4 minutes (timed). The presentation should be creative, powerful, awe-inspiring. Again, we encourage you to go beyond PowerPoint and think of it as a Power-presentation.

The report should pay attention to the various decision points, key recommendations for “acting one’s way” into the PD behaviors. A PD report-writing guide will be provided to you at least three weeks before the project report is due.

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Additional Resources on Positive Deviance

www.positivedeviance.org

THIRTEEN PD Films

Positive Deviance Case Studies and Articles

http://utminers.utep.edu/asinghal/PD%20Wisdom%20Series.htm
Singshal teaches and conducts research on the diffusion of innovations, the positive deviance approach, organizing for social change, the entertainment-education strategy, and liberating interactional structures. His outreach spans public health, education, human rights, poverty alleviation, sustainable development, civic participation, democracy and governance, and corporate citizenship.


Singhal won Top Paper Awards from the American Public Health Association (APHA), International Communication Association (ICA), and National Communication Association (NCA) over a dozen times, and Ohio University’s Baker Research Award twice. He was selected as Andrew W. Mellon Scholar at Hendrix College (2018); Distinguished Anna Endowment Lecturer (2017), the Distinguished Carroll Arnold Lecturer at NCA in 2015, and recognized with the Elizabeth Andersch 2014 Award for outstanding contributions to the communication discipline by the Scripps College of Communication, Ohio University. The Social Science Research Council & the International Communication Association recognized him with the Communication Research as Collaborative Practice Award in 2009 and the Communication Researcher as an Agent of Change Award in 2008. The NW Communication Association honored him with the 2007 Human Rights Award for Steadfast Commitment to Social Justice, Social Change, and Freedom, and in 2005, USC’s Norman Lear Center recognized him with the first Everett M. Rogers Award for Outstanding Contributions to Entertainment-Education.

Singhal’s recent academic honors and appointments include Presidential Scholar, Mudra Institute of Communication Arts, India (2015 onwards); President-Appointed Visiting Professor, Kumamoto (National) University, Japan (2011 onwards) Fulbright Hays Scholar, Slovakia (2012); Schomburg Distinguished Scholar, Ramapo College, NJ (2011), Commerzbank Foundation Professor, Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany (2009); Berkitt Williams Distinguished Lecturer, Ouachita Baptist University, Arkansas (2009); and Raushni Memorial Deshpande Distinguished Lecturer, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi, India (2006).

Singhal’s research has been supported by the National Institutes of Health, The National Science Foundation, The Dutch Health Research Council, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the State of Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services. He has served as an advisor to the World Bank, UN-FAO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNAIDS, UNFPA, U.S. Department of State; U.S. A.I.D., Family Health International, PATH, Save the Children, the BBC World Service Trust, International Rice Research Institute, Voice for Humanity, and private corporations such as Procter & Gamble (U.S.A and Thailand), Telenor AS (Norway), SpareBank (Norway), and others.

He has taught previously at Ohio University, University of Southern California, University of California - Los Angeles, and held visiting professorships at the USC Annenberg School; the Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University; Royal Roads University, Canada; Kumamoto (National) University, Japan; Chemnitz University of Technology in Germany; Institut Teknologi (Malaysia), Bangkok University (Thailand); and visited and lectured in some 90 countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America, Australia, Europe, and North America.