RSM 3065H.1 Fall 2018
Meso Organizational Behavior

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Classroom: Rotman 6024
Schedule: Tuesdays, 1-4pm

Course overview

The term organizational behavior is meant to reflect both a macro emphasis on organizations and a micro emphasis on individual behavior. Yet, OB research has fulfilled the promise of a multilevel approach to organization studies unevenly. As Lyman Porter (1996) noted in the fortieth-anniversary issue of Administrative Science Quarterly, “A continuing and frequently stated challenge that we ought to keep trying to meet is to forge a stronger link between the macro and micro parts of the field. This argues for giving more attention to what have been labeled meso phenomena and also to research attempts to show how individual and group actions can affect organizational actions, as well as vice versa. A focus on only the macro side or only the micro side of the organizational studies coin, as it were, will keep giving us an incomplete and ultimately unsatisfying picture.” Encouragingly, since 1996, the number of multilevel studies in organizational journals has sensibly increased, providing organizational scholars with a more solid theoretical and empirical foundation to conduct multilevel OB research.

Leveraging this foundation, this course introduces you to the study of meso OB, defined as the simultaneous study of multiple levels of organizational behavior. The intent of this class is to build your scholarly “toolbox” by exposing you to a wide range of topics related to meso research. Regardless of your field of study or focus of research, your ability to understand, develop, and extend theory will be enhanced by an enriched understanding of the mechanisms that connect variables, particularly mechanisms that bridge levels of analysis. By design, this class surveys many different types of mechanisms, collective constructs, and areas of cross-level research. The class topics have been selected to first introduce you to mechanisms and meso-level theorizing and then begin to explore these in the context of basic mechanisms related to meaning making, emotion, and action. Sociomateriality and temporality are topics that are receiving increasing attention as key mechanisms. We end the class by exploring a set of meso or multi-level topics,
including teams, identity, culture and climate, and learning in organizations. This is a theoretical class, so our focus will be primarily on theoretical issues; however, I encourage you to pay attention to the range of methods that scholars use to study meso-level topics. As the course progresses, you will develop your own meso research proposal and present it to the class at the end of the semester.

This course aims to help you:

- To gain an understanding of some of the central concepts and tools in meso organizational behavior research.
- To gain exposure to a number of areas of meso OB research and begin a process of becoming familiar with multilevel theory and empirical strategies.
- To begin to identify areas of particular interest to you and to start thinking about how a meso OB perspective might be suitable to your research questions.
- To begin to develop your own point of view on the field of OB through a meso lens.

The readings have been selected to give you an introduction to each of the topics we cover, with additional supplementary readings, should you wish to explore a specific topic in more depth. There is a set of assigned readings for each class – marked with an asterisk (*) in your syllabus – that you are responsible for reading and summarizing prior to class. We will discuss these readings in detail during our seminar. You are expected to be familiar with the assigned readings and actively participate in the class discussion. All the readings are available online through the university library system (use EBSCO Business Source Premier database).

**Course requirements and evaluation**

There will be three components of your final grade:

1. Class participation: 20% of grade
2. Weekly reaction memos (1-2) pages: 40% of grade.
3. Term paper: 40% of grade.

*Class participation* (20% of grade): This is a seminar class and, therefore, your active and engaged participation is essential to the success of the class. Prior to each class, you must have thoroughly studied and be prepared to critically evaluate the assigned readings. My expectation of thorough preparation is high. The weekly written memos (see below) will help you to prepare for class and I also encourage you to discuss the readings with classmates prior to class. For each article, I will ask a student (randomly selected) to introduce the article and provide a brief summary.

We will strive to identify common themes and concepts in each week’s readings. As we discuss the readings, you should also consider how the ideas in the readings apply to your own area of research. Because this class is explicitly focused on mechanisms and multi-level research, you
should come to class ready to discuss the following questions for each paper: (a) what is the core argument the authors are putting forth? (b) what variables are they considering (at which levels of analysis)? (c) what mechanisms connect these variables? (d) if reading an empirical article, are there alternate mechanisms that should be considered to explain the relationship between variables (and, if so, what data would you collect to rule these mechanisms in or out?)? (e) what are the boundary conditions of the theory? and (f) what are the similarities and differences between this article and other articles from the same class? from the previous classes?

*Weekly reaction memos* (40% of grade): One way to engage with the readings prior to class is to write a memo about the key themes, particularly themes that resonate across readings. The memos will be due at 5pm on Monday prior to class (with the exception of the first class; no memo is due for the first class, the memo for the second class will summarize the first and second week’s readings). Your memo should be no longer than 2 pages (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt font, 1” margins). The memo is a chance for you to synthesize and integrate your thinking about and reaction to the readings. Although the memos can take various forms, it may be helpful to include a concise summary of the articles, what you agreed with or disagreed with (and why), how these articles are related to each other (key similarities and differences), and possible connections to your own research or previous week’s readings.

*Research proposal* (40% of grade): Each student is responsible for writing a research proposal. A two-page synopsis is due on Session 7, and full draft is due on the day you give your class presentation (Session 12), and the final version is due one week after the last session. The proposal should be based on one of the topics covered in the course and present a framework for executing an original study. Think of a proposal as a shortened version of one of the empirical papers we read, without the results section.

To develop your research proposal throughout the term, you should identify a content domain that is of interest to you. You will then develop a meso model for your content area. Each week you will add complexity to your model as we discuss additional concepts. The proposal should therefore draw on some of the readings from the class, but also incorporate additional work from the relevant literatures. Feel free to talk to me at any time about potential paper ideas, and additional literature.
### Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session #</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Deliverable due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>Sept 11</td>
<td>Mechanisms and theory building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>Sept 18</td>
<td>Meso paradigm and multi-level research</td>
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<td>Session 3</td>
<td>Sept 25</td>
<td>Collective meaning making</td>
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<td>Session 4</td>
<td>Oct 2</td>
<td>Collective emotions</td>
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<td>Session 5</td>
<td>Oct 9</td>
<td>Collective action</td>
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<td>Session 6</td>
<td>Oct 16</td>
<td>Sociomateriality and practice theory</td>
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**Note:** there is no class on Oct 23

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<tr>
<th>Session 7</th>
<th>Oct 30</th>
<th>Temporality and process theory</th>
<th>2 pg synopsis due</th>
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<tr>
<td>Session 8</td>
<td>Nov 6</td>
<td>Teams in organizations</td>
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<td>Session 9</td>
<td>Nov 13</td>
<td>Identity in organizations</td>
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<td>Session 10</td>
<td>Nov 20</td>
<td>Culture and climate in organizations</td>
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<td>Session 11</td>
<td>Nov 27</td>
<td>Learning in organizations</td>
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<td>Session 12</td>
<td>Dec 4</td>
<td>Student presentations</td>
<td>Full draft of research proposal due</td>
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| Dec 11    | Final research proposal due    |

### ASSIGNED READINGS

**Session 1: Mechanisms and theory building**

*No writing assignment due before class this week, but you are expected to do the readings.*


**Supplementary readings**


Special issues on theory building:
- 1989 AMR special issue on theory building (14:4)
- 1995 ASQ forum (40:3)

AMJ editor series on various aspects of publishing

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**Session 2: Meso paradigm and multi-level research**


**Supplementary readings**


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**Session 3: Collective meaning making**


**Supplementary readings**


Cross-level cognition research


Session 4: Collective emotion


Supplementary readings


Session 5: Collective action


Supplementary readings:


May/June 2016 *Organization Science*, 27(3) special issue on routine dynamics


Session 6: Sociomateriality and practice theory


Supplementary readings:


Session 7: Temporality and process theory


**Supplementary readings**


Session 8: Teams in organizations


*Supplementary reading:*


**Session 9: Identity in organizations**


Supplementary reading:


Session 10: Climate and culture in organizations


**Supplementary readings**


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**Session 11: Learning in organizations**


**Supplementary readings**

*Organizational Science* 1991 special issue on organizational learning


**Session 12. Student Presentations**