COURSE BASICS

Course overview and objectives

The goal of this doctoral course is to familiarize students with major conceptual frameworks, debates, and developments in contemporary organization theory. This is an inter-disciplinary domain of inquiry drawing primarily from sociology, and secondarily from economics, psychology, anthropology, and political science. It seeks to understand intra- and inter-organizational processes, as well as the relationships between organizations and the cultural context in which they are located.

This is an introduction to a vast and multifaceted domain of inquiry. Due to time limitations, this course will touch lightly on many important topics, and neglect others entirely; its design resembles more a map than an encyclopedia. Also, given the focus on theoretical matters, methodological issues will move to the background. Empirical material will be used to illustrate how knowledge is produced from a particular standpoint and trying to answer particular questions, leaving the bulk of the discussion on quantitative and qualitative procedures to your methods courses. Further, some topics that might be naturally covered in this syllabus will be omitted because they are the subject of other courses (“Strategy and Economics” for organizational economics; “Economic Sociology” for institutional theory, social networks, social capital and embeddedness) you will take during your doctoral training.

Course requirements and evaluation

1. Class participation: 20% of grade. This course is organized as a seminar; thus your co-operation and willingness to participate actively are critical for creating the best learning environment. Come to class prepared to answer the following questions regarding each of the (a) what is the basic argument and what relationships/mechanisms does the argument propose (b) what are its strengths and weaknesses? if you disagree with the argument, what would it take to convince you? (c) under what circumstances and for what kinds of organizations is the argument meant to apply? (d) what are the similarities and differences between this argument and others put forward by readings in the same and in previous weeks? and (e) what, if any, alternative explanations could account for the empirical material? Learning is a collective enterprise, so everybody will benefit from an engaged, intense, and constructive conversation.

2. Brief weekly memos (1-2 pages): 40% of the grade. These will be due by 5 p.m. on Sunday night prior to each class (except for the first class). You will be asked to write concise memos relating to the reading for each week (except for the first memo, due on September 14, which should discuss readings for weeks 1 and 2). Different formats could be used, but it is useful to include items such as (a) ideas and arguments found stimulating, (b) questions, concerns and disagreements with the main claims of each text, and (c) connections, similarities and differences among the various texts. No late assignments accepted.
3. Term paper: 40% of the grade. You will be asked to write a 10-15-page paper. The paper can take any number of formats, including (a) a broader literature review of any of the frameworks or issues discussed in the course, (b) a theoretical piece linking two or more of the frameworks and issues, (c) the conceptual part of a research design (for the second-year paper, dissertation proposal, etc.), and (d) an empirical piece examining new material or re-interpreting already collected data. To help you in the research and writing for this assignment, it will be structured in the following steps.
   a. Before October 31: meet with me to discuss possible topics.
   b. November 17: a 2-page outline of the paper is due.
   c. December 19: the final paper is due (late assignments will be substantially penalized).

Readings


Other readings available online through the library or in the shared dropbox folder for the class. I will add you to the dropbox folder once you are enrolled in the course.

COURSE OUTLINE

Readings with a “*” are assigned readings. The rest are for your reference if you are interested in going deeper on the topic. The starred items are listed in the order in which it may be most useful to read them. Note that these lists of additional readings are highly incomplete. I’m sure to have omitted some readings that others will consider absolutely essential. View these lists as starting points for your own explorations.

INTRODUCTORY SESSIONS

Class 1, September 8: Introduction: historical, conceptual and occupational trends in organization theory

Note: no writing assignment due before class this week.


Class 2, September 15: Three basic approaches to thinking about organizations

Note: writing assignment this week should cover the readings from last week and this week.

Rational system approaches:
Taylor, F.W. 1916. Principles of Scientific Management, especially, pp. 30-49; 58-97; 118-144

Natural system approaches:
Roy, 1952. "Banana Time: Job Satisfaction and Informal Interaction" AJS

Open system approaches:

BASIC APPROACHES

Class 3, September 22: Contingency theory

Aldrich, 1972. "Technology and Organizational Structure: A Reexamination of the findings of the Aston Group" ASQ


Class 4, September 29: Resource dependence


Class 5, October 6: Carnegie School/Behavioral theories


No class on October 13 due to Canadian Thanksgiving

Normally, a course like this would include a session on new institutionalism. However, because this is covered in Economic Sociology, it will be omitted here. I will post a separate set of readings that may be of interest.

Class 7, October 20: Organizational ecology


**TOPIC AREAS**

**Class 8, October 27: Status**


Class 9, November 3: Categories, categorization and social valuation


Kennedy MT. 2005. Behind the one-way mirror: Refraction in the construction of product market categories Poetics 33(3-4): 201-226


Class 10, November 10: Sensemaking, organizational identity and managerial cognition


Strategy and Organizations - RSM 3002 - Kaplan - 10 -


Class 11, November 17: Knowledge coordination across boundaries


Mowery DC, Oxley JE, Silverman BS. 1996. Strategic alliances and interfirm knowledge transfer. Strategic Management Journal 17: 77-91


Vaughan, Diane, 1999, "The Role of the Organization in the Production of Techno-Scientific Knowledge." Social Studies of Science 29

Class 12, November 24: Social movements


Class 12, December 1: Reflections
(no write-up due for this class session)


