Sociology of Organizations

Fall 2012  |  SOC 63820-01
Monday 6-8:30 PM, Flanner 824

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Office Hours: X or by appointment.

The goal of the course is to gain understanding of the origins, structure and dynamics of complex organizations, and their relationship to their environment.

In the first weeks, we’ll cover some of the history of the field, beginning with several foundational research pieces that are touchstones for nearly all of the organizations research that followed. We will place the development and subsequent fracturing of the field in context to understand how these diverse research streams within organizations arose in relation to each other and what came before. Many of the streams of research you are familiar with now arose in a particularly fruitful time in the 1970s and in response to the vision of rational complex organizations. We’ll examine these reactions—especially neoinstitutional theory, population ecology, resource dependence, and networks—as major paradigms for thinking about organizations that are, in different ways, still influential today. As we trace the development of these literatures forward, we will see how they intersected with important questions from other sociology subfields, such as discrimination in the workplace. We will also attempt to understand how those earlier paradigms gave rise to hybrid theoretical work, such as how the density of organizations (pop ecology) affects legitimacy (neoinstitutionalism). I hope that by thinking about the multiple approaches drawn on by these studies you will develop a fuller sense of the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and that it will help you think about how you might use them in your own work.

We will read great works by great thinkers, the proverbial minds that launched a thousand ships. In doing so you will learn not merely how to copy a recipe, but begin to understand how to generate novel and important research of your own that advances what came before. My ultimate goal for this course is that facilitates your professional development as a scholar and intellectual, with the ability to read, write, think, analyze and communicate at the graduate level. There is more to the organizations literature than what we can cover here, but this syllabus is an entry point into some of the major changes that continue to
move the field today. Organizations research is a vast and rich field, filled with
the work of sociology, economics, political science, anthropology and
management scholars, to name a few. As such, no class can be a
comprehensive guide to everything you would need to know to "master" the
field. That said, this syllabus has been carefully designed to include some of the
most canonical readings found on syllabi at top programs across the country;
after finishing you should be able to engage in informed dialogue with anyone
in the subfield without feeling lost. To further your explorations of this field, the
syllabus is constructed in the Chicago style: some topics include suggested
works beyond those required for class. Think of these as mini roadmaps for
deeper exploration of particular topics if they pique your interest.

Though there are a number of important books in the field of organizations,
much of the literature is article-based. The triumvirate of journals for sociologists
of organizations are the American Journal of Sociology (AJS), the American
Sociological Review (ASR) and Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ). AJS and
ASR are sociology generalist journals that also publish sociology of organizations
work; ASQ is an interdisciplinary journal focused on organizational topics. There
are also a number of other good journals in the subfield: Organization,
Organization Science, Academy of Management Journal, Management
Science etc. I also recommend you follow orgtheory.wordpress.com, a great
blog where smart young org theorists (including ND’s own Omar Lizardo) discuss
contemporary issues in organizations in a more casual format.

Course Goals
By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

• Identify, articulate, evaluate, apply, and criticize major theories and
debates in the Sociology of Organizations from the mid-20th Century to the
present.
• Identify and articulate the sequential development of a literature within
the sociology of organizations.
• Identify the framing of some of the field’s most prominent research
projects, and be able to apply those framing practices to their own work.
• Modify and transpose those theoretical tools to generate novel questions
or theoretical contributions to substantive fields—such as education, social
movements, religion, culture and more—that intersect with the Sociology
of Organizations.

Required and Recommended Reading
Required readings appear under the headings for each week. Beneath required
readings you will sometimes see additional “see also” lists, which serve as good
roadmaps if you are interested in learning more about a particular topic.
Discussion of any of those recommended materials would be welcomed in
class, but is not required. All required readings are available online, either
through JSTOR or another online source. Most are linked through the syllabus, but for those that are not you can search on Google Scholar and follow the link.

Likely the best writing guide you’ll ever see:
Williams, Joseph M. Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace

Good Readers to build your library (NOT required):

Grading

30% Participation & Participatory Exercises
(of which 10% may be Leading Class Discussion)
10% Literature timeline
20% Two Mini Research Proposals (10% each)
10% Future of Org Soc Presentation
30% Final Paper

• Assignments must be emailed before the start of class on the due date.
• All emailed files must include your last name and the assignment name in the doc title as well as the paper header.
• Except in cases of serious personal, health, or family emergencies, late assignments will be penalized by a half a grade for every 24 hours they are late. That is, if the quality of the work would have merited a B+, but it was turned in 20 hours late, you would receive a B. If you intend to take a late penalty on a paper, or if you are seeking an extension for a personal emergency, please contact me by email as soon as possible.
• Your participation grade will include the completion of several “participatory assignments” that will feed into classroom activities and help fill your comprehension of the material and the professional practice of organizational research (including but not limited to “Analyzing a Business Decision” and “Sociology Mad Libs”). Because they will be used in class, paper copies must be turned into class on the day they are due, and late P.A.s will receive a zero towards that portion of your participation grade.
• Mini Research Proposals are 3 page thought pieces that summarize and synthesize the readings from one week, and then extend them to think about how you might use those ideas to make a new research contribution, eg by transporting those ideas to a new domain, or testing something etc. They are due the week of the readings you select (eg if you write on week 3 readings, they are due before class week 3), but one must come from the first seven weeks, and one from the last seven weeks.
Final Paper
The final paper is intended to advance what you, as a scholar, most need to work on. As such, it could take several potential formats. I will highlight the three most likely formats, though you are welcome to propose an alternative format in consultation with me.

1. A research proposal. Here the goal is to consider the relevant literature and use it to develop a research project, which should include research questions or hypotheses and identify how you would collect evidence. This is a great way to explore possible dissertation topics. I assume most of the class will write research proposals.

2. A research paper. If you have already begun a research project or have data (qualitative or quantitative) that you would like to use, you may use the final paper as a space to draft an article-style paper. In this case, a relatively smaller part of the paper would focus on literature review, identifying questions and data sources, etc., and more would focus on actual analysis.

3. A Theory Paper. This style of analysis would involve relatively greater attention to the sociology of knowledge, tracing the development and content of a particular stream of organizations theory and adding something novel to our understanding of that literature. This might include, for example, documenting the treatment of Bourdieu in organizational theory and making a corrective to how he has been misunderstood, or intersecting a stream of theory from sociology of organizations with a body of literature from another field to show something novel and useful, etc. In many ways, this is the most difficult option. The model for this is likely an article that could ultimately be published in Theory and Society or Sociological Theory.

Regardless of the option you select, I expect most of the papers to be around 20 pages of text plus bibliography. For example, if you are writing a proposal, the paper should include an introduction (2-4 pp.), a review of the literature (5-12 pp.), a statement of your question that arises logically out of your presentation of the literature (1-5 pp.), a section on proposed research design (5-10 pp.), a conclusion (2-3 pp.), and works cited. If you write a research paper, less of the paper would focus on literature review and relatively more on actual analysis, the section on research design would instead become your methodology section etc. These are just guidelines, not rigid rules.

Remember that the expectation is that the final product will demonstrate a deep engagement with and mastery of the material from this class. Therefore, for example, a three page memo on organizations inserted into the middle of a paper you already wrote for another class is not likely to meet the criteria of substantially engaging the literature on organizations.
Participation Attendance & Preparation Policy

• Reading and thinking will make you a student, but debating ideas in a public forum will make you an intellectual. Therefore, in this course, YOU NEED TO TALK. Expressing your ideas with the others in the class is the ideal way to learn (and it is an integral part of your grade).

• If you struggle to communicate your ideas in front of a group, please arrange to see me privately during office hours and we will discuss strategies for helping you be more actively involved in class.

• It is okay to have questions, to be confused, even to be “wrong.” But it is not okay to blow off preparation for this class. If you are not prepared for class, then you are not ready to be a member of our learning community. It is disrespectful to your colleagues to be an intellectual free-rider.

• Any student with a verified disability requiring special accommodations should speak to me and to the Office of Disability Services (574-631-7157) as early as possible in the semester, preferably within the first two weeks of the course. All discussions will remain confidential.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to know, understand and abide by all the guidelines on academic honesty as described in the University of Notre Dame Academic Code of Honor located at www.nd.edu/~hnrcode. This course will hold you accountable to the strictest standards of academic integrity. Failures of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person, resubmitting your own previously used work without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students.

Plagiarism undermines the entire enterprise of learning. It harms you and your fellow students. It destroys the trust and fellowship between students and the teacher. If you borrow someone else’s words or ideas, whether in print or on the internet, in whole or in part, you must give credit where that credit is due. If you are in doubt, ask someone qualified to help you. This includes your instructor or someone at the writing center. You would always be better off taking a late penalty on a paper than turning in a plagiarized paper for lack of time.
WEEK 1. AUG 27

FOUNDATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS RESEARCH & THEORY

- Framing in Academic Work
- Introduction to Mayo and the Hawthorne Experiments
- Hawthorne vs Weber’s Piece-rates Essay
- Max Weber’s US lineage


- See also:
  Roethlisberger, Fritz J. and William J. Dickson. 1939. *Management and the Worker*
  Taylor, Frederick. 1911. *The Principles of Scientific Management.* (ONLINE)

WEEK 2. SEPT 3

SECOND GENERATION ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES

- Intellectual genealogy of early organizational researchers


- See also:

WEEK 3. SEPT 10

ORGNS AND RATIONALITY

• Key terms: free rider, excludability, externality, rivalry, public goods, private goods, club goods
• Simon went on to win the 1978 Nobel Prize in Economics for his path-breaking work. He’s also wildly readable, especially for an economist.


See also:


DUE: Analyzing a Business Decision

See also:


WEEK 4.  

RESOURCES DEPENDENCE AND TRANSACTION COSTS


In addition, choose one of the following two pieces on Transaction Costs:


• See also:

WEEK 5.  

THE RISE OF NEOINSTITUTIONALISM


• See also:


- See also:

- For more on Symbolic Management, see also:
  Pretty much anything by Westphal and Zajac.

- For a different approach, see Cultural Anthropologists:


• See also:

• See also, Field Theory:
  Zietzma and Lawrence. 2010. “Institutional work in the transformation of an organizational field: The interplay of boundary work and practice work." ASQ

**NOTE: On or before this week, you must have turned in Mini Proposal #1**

**OCT 15: NO CLASS, MIDTERM BREAK**

WEEK 8. OCT 22

CONFLICT and INEQUALITY in ORGANIZATIONS

• Hirschman’s framework has been applied to capitalist firms, unions, marriages, the collapse of East Germany, social movements, higher
education, migrant diasporas and more.

Hirschman, A. O. 1970. [Selection TBD] Exit, voice, and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states: Harvard Univ Pr. (Online Access)
Castilla, Emilio. “Gender, Race, and Meritocracy in Organizational Careers” AJS 113(6): 1479-1526 (JSTOR)

In addition, find one more contemporary application of “exit voice and loyalty” in a journal article or book, and briefly introduce it to the class.

• See also:
  Ely and Thomas “Cultural Diversity at Work: The effects of diversity on work group processes and outcomes” Wharton ed. Soc of orgs
  Frank Dobbin, Inventing Equal Opportunity
  Becker, Penny Edgell. 1999. Congregations in Conflict (ONLINE). p1-20 and
  Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. 1977. Men and Women of the Corporation

• For more on people in organizations generally, see:
  Calvin Morrill, The Executive Way
  Robert Jackall, Moral Mazes.
  Rakesh Khurana, Searching for a Corporate Savior

NOTE: On or before this week, you must have discussed your preliminary final paper idea with the professor

WEEK 9. ____________________________________________________________ OCT 29

ORGANIZATIONS: MAKING DECISIONS

“Evidently, organisms adapt well enough to ‘satisfice’: they do not, in general, ‘optimize.’” –Herbert Simon. 1956

• The “Carnegie School” related hierarchical organizational structures to the limited cognitive abilities of human actors to cope with complexity and uncertainty.


Plus, select one of the following three options:


• See also:


  Cerulo, Karen. 2006. Never Saw It Coming: Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst (ONLINE)

WEEK 10. NOV 5

ECONOMIC AGENCY THEORY


Sociological Theory 17(2):146-70.

- For contrary perspective, see:
  Brehm, John and Scott Gates. 1999. Working, Shirking and Sabotage: Bureaucratic Response to a Democratic Public

- See also:
  Alchian and Demsetz 1972
  Jensen and Meckling 1976

WEEK 11. NOV 12
NETWORKS

As a class we will vote on four of the following options to read together:

Reviews of Networks

Networks as Organization

Networks and Creativity
Problem." AJS 111(2):447-504. (JSTOR) (*note, this is read in Lizardo’s Networks class)

Networks and Competition

• See also:
  Yochai Benkler, The Wealth of Networks
  Clay Shirky, Here Comes Everybody

WEEK 12. NOV 19
AUTONOMY & EMBEDDEDNESS
• What does embeddedness mean in each of these cases?
• How does embeddedness change understanding and analysis of the organization?
• How do these authors conceive of the relationship between autonomy and embeddedness? Under what conditions is organizational autonomy possible and desirable?
• How is this perspective similar and different from resource dependency or network approaches?

ORGANIZATIONS, INSTITUTIONS and CHANGE

- What is an institution? How does it relate to an organization?
- What are the different visions for how institutions change? How is this similar or different from ideas about organizational change?
- How do these theoretical models of institutional and organizational change apply to the historical case of the development of bureaucratic practices, as explained in Lancaster?


- See also:
  - Thelen, Kathleen 2004. *How Institutions Evolve: The Political Economy of Skills in Germany, Britain, the United States and Japan.*

NOTE: On or before this week, you must have turned in Mini Proposal #2

FUTURE DIRECTIONS for ORG SOC?


In addition, choose your own adventure:
Select one article published 2008-2012 in ASQ, AJS or ASR that directly engages organizational sociology (and that was not assigned in class). Present the article to the class in conference presentation format (eg as though you were the author giving an ASA talk or a job talk), presenting the ideas and findings but moreover, making an argument for why it represents a particularly interesting or fruitful direction for future organizational research.

DUE: Presentation

See also:

Monday December 10, 2012: 7:30PM FINAL PAPER DUE